

Potential Diplomatic Risks at International Sport Events

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to emphasize the diplomatic risks that host countries may face at major sports events such as the Olympics, Mediterranean Games, Universiade, Asian Games, Martial Arts, World and Continental Championships, and raise awareness related to this matter. In this study, events of sports organizations such as the opening-closing ceremonies and medal ceremonies were analyzed and evaluated. Factors that can cause diplomatic problems such as national flags, national anthems, official country names, delegation corteges, accreditation, accommodation, and welcoming-hospitality were highlighted and some recommendations were presented to minimize such risks.

Keywords: sports organizations, opening-closing ceremonies, medal ceremonies, diplomatic risks

1. Introduction

In today's world, sports activities are seen as an opportunity for effective advertising and promotion. All sports activities focus on an impeccable organization and completion of the event from the beginning to the end. Hence, failure within this process will affect the overall activity and cause loss of brand and image (Demirci, 1986), because the dynamic and variable structured management of sports organizations may have negative impacts on the delegations of the visiting countries when any potential disruptions during the organization process occur (Sunay, 2010). In this context, sports organizations should be considered as a concept with a rational structure and operating system acting as a social personality or organization within relatively clear boundaries of the sports industry and according to the framework of specific objectives (Slack, 1997).

The history of sporting events goes back to sports, music and poetry competitions organized for Gods in the Aegean and especially on the island of Crete. It is also known that car races, boxing, wrestling, and running games were exhibited even at funerary ceremonies in the first centuries of the middle ages. Sports organizations have a wide range from the most basic activities such as physical education classes to the most comprehensive activities such as the International Olympic Committee. Although some of these organizations are voluntary and some are mandatory, they were all established for certain purposes. There are a few fundamental differences that distinguish sports organizations from other events. These can be listed as the area covered and the density, participation, aesthetics, and excitement displayed simultaneously (Sunay, 2010).

Sports organizations have specific objectives as well as general objectives. The general objectives of sports organizations determined by international sports organizations are; the organization of sports in different countries with the principles of peace, friendship and brotherhood in mind, the training of successful athletes and sports officials, the competitiveness of country and club athletes under equal conditions, the introduction and dissemination of various sports to the masses. The aims and expectations of the countries hosting the sports organizations are to contribute to the friendship and peace, to make the country's propaganda through political superiority (Ayan, 2009) and to gain financial benefits (Tascioglu, 2016). Therefore, sports organizations are an important means for the promotion of the host country to the world public (Doğar, 1997). Moreover, the success of the countries in sports organizations is seen equivalent to their success in diplomacy or political fields. Briefly, the prestige of the organizing country or the city organizing the event is the main issue in an international sports organization.

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In sporting events organized at the national level, it is an important goal to offer the best to the public and attract more people to the sports fields by encouraging sports (Cankalp, 2002). The aim of sports organizations as a public service has general purposes such as the contribution to the development of a healthy society (Balci, 1999), providing equal opportunities for all citizens through sports (Demirci, 1986), promoting sports branches throughout the country, ensuring the spread of sports, training successful athletes and special purposes such as creating images through advertising (Sunay, 2010).

It is observed that the opening-closing ceremonies have become a very significant show in major sports events held in recent years. The basis of all international multi-branch sports games such as the Olympics, Mediterranean Games, Universidad, Asian Games and Martial Games is the Olympic Charter. In other words, great sports games are being organized by taking the model of the Olympics. In addition to the central body for the sports events, each field has its own regulations. These regulations include the general provisions concerning the preparation, beginning, ending of the sports events, as well as the provisions and rules on what could be the cultural content during the events (IOC, 2018). The most important elements in these games are opening-closing ceremonies and medal ceremonies. Thanks to live broadcasting, these ceremonies are followed by the entire world with curiosity, are of great importance for the image, advertising, and prestige of the hosting country. A small mistake could cast a shadow on the image and prestige of the country and create a diplomatic crisis between countries. In this regard, ceremonies carry a kind of diplomatic importance. The display of the South Korean flag on the stadium screens instead of the North Korean flag at the beginning of the football match in London 2012 Olympics (AA, 2018) or the inability of the London Philharmonic Orchestra to play the Hungarian national anthem with the appropriate synchronism created small-scale crises, and cast a shadow over the success of the host organization (Eurosport, 2018-a).

In this study, the logos and mascot of the games, presentation of country names, country flags, athletic courts, seating arrangement of the delegations, national anthems of the countries, game village and accommodation, accreditation, VIP and sitting arrangements and cultural programs were highlighted, and recommendations were developed. This study is deemed important for increasing the quality of future international sports organizations by noting diplomatic crises of the past and predicting possible future crises.

1. Methods:

This study included mega sport organizations such as the Olympics, Mediterranean Games, Universidad, Asian Games, Martial Games, World and Continental Championships.

In this study, the country names presented during these sport events, national flags, national anthems of the countries, logos and mascots, the athletic cortege, the seating arrangement of the delegations, the athlete village, accommodation, accreditation, VIP services and cultural show programs were observed and described with the case analysis method.

2. Risks and Evaluations:

3.1 Games Logo and Mascot:

Each sports organization must have a symbolic logo and a mascot. This logo and mascot having attractive, memorable, and guiding characteristics regarding their marketing capabilities is determined by the host country and submitted to the approval of the international committee. The logo and mascot may be determined by a referendum in the host country or by the proposal of the local organizing committee. However, presenting to the public vote in the context of public relations before the organization is a more effective method. The local organizing committee should predict factors that symbolize the semantic that may occur during the design and selection of the logo and mascot. A shape, a symbol or a color can be a symbol with negative connotation for the visiting countries. Gathering information through a research is essential in order to avoid such cases. The best method is to use symbols, colors, and fables that bring global values to the forefront. It is possible to prevent semantic risks accordingly. After the logo and mascot are determined, it is presented to the approval of the international committee and announced to the participating countries and broadcasters. The use of the correct logo is essential during the broadcasting. As a matter of fact, during the 2014 Sochi Olympics, a TV channel received an international reaction by accidentally using a logo that protested the Sochi Olympics (Eurosport, 2018-b).

3.1 Presentation of Country Names:

The names of the participating countries are repeatedly announced during the opening-closing ceremonies or medal ceremonies. The names of the participating countries must be accurately announced in accordance with the international diplomatic recognition format. Otherwise, the mistake of the host country due to a wrong presentation may be deemed incontrovertible, or it can be touted as a deliberate act of humiliation against the said country. In this case, there may be a diplomatic crisis between the organizing committee, the host country state and the states of the visiting countries. For example; errors such as announcing “Russian Federation” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018) as Russia, “Czechia” (UN, 2018) as the Czech Republic, or the presentation of “Cyprus” as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus carries diplomatic risks.

The local organizing committee should be aware of the fact that the official names of the countries according to the international diplomatic recognition criteria may be different from the generally known names. To prevent the possibility of facing such a situation and crises the host organizing committee may receive information from its foreign departments or through consultancy by appointing a staff member. However, in case of any change in official names due to rapidly changing global conjuncture, receiving confirmation from the visiting country may eliminate these risks completely. The country, with the official name "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (UN, 2018) since 1993, requested to change its name to "Republika Severna Makedonija" (EU, 2018) in 2018, is a good example of a rapid change.

2.1. Official Flags of The Countries:

Country flags are used both in flagpoles and in online/offline broadcasts for the opening-closing ceremony, medal ceremonies, and other ceremonies. Country flags consist of different colors, scales, directions, and meanings. There are also flags in several different versions of countries. For example, the UK, Austria, Hungary, Serbia flags are available on or without a royal symbol (United Falgs, 2018).

Hanging the Switzerland and Vatican flags (EU, 2018) being in a square form on the poles with the standard sizes and the presentations made by the organizing committee was observed as some of the common mistakes. Although they are of the same color and pattern (United Falgs, 2018), the flags of Monaco and Indonesia are also examples of other flags with different scales. Due to the fact that the different visuals on the front and back of the country flag of Paraguay, it is a critical detail to decide on which side should come forward. In this respect, the approval of the relevant authorities will prevent the potential problems. Although the flags of Romania and Chad are identical, the fact that there is only a minor color difference is another example for the organizing committee to be careful. The flags of Ireland and the Ivory Coast are two flags that are the same color but the opposite of each other. During the presentation, the utmost attention should be paid to the detail in which way the flag should be hanged. When hanged on the green edge, the flag represents Ireland. If hanged from its red edge, the flag represents the Ivory Coast (United Falgs, 2018). North Koreans reacted when they saw the flag of South Korea instead of their own flag on the stadium screens at the start of the football match in the London 2012 Olympics (AA, 2018). Then the British Prime Minister apologized to North Korea and hampered the growth of the diplomatic crisis (DW, 2018). If the local organizing committee makes a plan based on the wrong information, it may cause a diplomatic crisis because of the wrong flag use. The committee may prevent the possible crisis by keeping in contact with the National Olympic Committee of each participating country during the preparation stage and by checking the official flag image and scales.

2.2. National Anthems of The Countries:

The national anthem is a march reflecting the love of a nation to their homeland and flag, to freedom, independence, and their passion for modernity (Türkçe Bilgi, 2018). The anthems are the most important sound and music effects that represent the countries during both opening-closing ceremonies, and medal ceremonies. Konrad Lorenz described the Olympics as the only place where a country's anthem was played and the feelings of hostility towards other nations were not awakened (Konrad, 1967). The countries' marches have different versions such as symphonic or acoustic, short or long and fast or slow. Special short versions (e.g. 24 sec or 30 sec) may be requested from countries to be used in medal ceremonies as required by the charter. The host organizing committee has no authority to edit these versions. For instance, the Bulgarian delegation sent an official protest letter to the Greek authorities for the wrong arrangement of the organizing committee at the 2004 Athens Olympics and the misuse of the Bulgarian anthem (Haber Vitriini, 2018).

A similar example took place in the 2012 London Olympics. The failure of the London Philharmonic Orchestra to play the Hungarian national anthem properly led to the reaction of the Hungarian delegation and caused a small crisis between the two countries (Eurosport, 2018-a). The presentation of an anthem received from wrong or informal channels may create a diplomatic problem between the host country and the represented country. In order not to end up in similar mistakes, local committees should keep in continuous contact with the National Olympic Committees (NOC) of the countries during the organization preparations to ensure which version of the official national anthems is required to avoid such potential problems. If necessary they may ask for the correct version in written and certified form.

2.3. *Delegation Cortege:*

Athletes, technical and administrative delegations representing the countries in the games, must walk in the form of a cortege in the opening-closing ceremonies. They march in turns and according to a specific order, passing in front of the spectators and live-broadcasting cameras. The clothing to be worn by the athletes at the cortege depends on the initiative of the related country. However, these clothes should not use the symbols of religion, language, and race to harm the philosophy of the games (IOC, 2018). Although the host organizing committee has no duties defined in the charter, it is important to pay attention to every situation to avoid overshadowing the success of the organization. The order of the walk at the cortege is clearly stated in the charter of the games. This order can usually be performed in an alphabetical order of country names as well as in other specific orders. For example, the cortege is performed in an alphabetical order in the Olympics, where the Greece (Hellas) delegation is in front of the cortege (IOC, 2018). Country names are also important. When a country name is presented incorrectly in the alphabetical order, it will cause a crisis. It is important to provide information to the participants and viewers about the cortege layout. In addition, some country delegations may not want to walk side by side with delegations of some other countries in the cortege due to some special reasons. The host organizing committee may not be aware of such a sensitive situation. The organizers should be ready for such possible crisis, and the plans should be in a modular changeable structure.

2.4. *Delegation's Seating Areas at The Ceremonies:*

Delegations are directed to the tribunes reserved for them to watch the cortege in the opening ceremony and the cultural program after the official program. The organizing committee should reserve sections for delegations. Even though fair play actions are encouraged without discriminations of religion, language, and race in the Olympic philosophy, there may be special and ongoing problems among some countries (IOC, 2018). The local organizing committee may ignore such situations. In this case, it may be objectionable for the delegations of the relevant country to sit close to each other. These risks will be minimized if the organizing committee creates a mixed and voluntary seating arrangement with the idea of friendship-fraternity by being aware of these risks and with the approval of the international committee.

According to the Olympic charter, a sufficient number of seats should be reserved in the sports facilities for the delegations and accredited protocol (IOC, 2018). The organizing committee may also apply the above-mentioned method for these seats.

2.5. *Olympic Village:*

At all Olympic events, athletes and delegation members must stay in rooms assigned to them in the game village (IOC, 2018). The game village is a private, intimate area reserved for athletes and administrators isolated from the external environment. Therefore, a special accreditation and security protocol should be applied in this field. The host organizing committee shall announce at which block and rooms the delegations will be accommodated. Despite being isolated from the outside, there may be problems between athletes or delegations staying. A German athlete who participated in the 2012 London Olympics had a connection with an extreme right-wing political party; therefore he was excluded from the game village. A Swiss sportsman and a Greek athlete who shared threatening and racist messages via social networks were also excluded from the Olympic village (DW, 2018-b). The organizing committee should make room layout plans by evaluating the possibility of problems between delegations since some countries may not want to stay on the same floor with some other country delegations.

2.6. Accreditation:

Accreditation is a security module that classifies all the authorities in sports organizations according to their responsibilities and determines which facilities and which departments they can enter (IOC, 2018). The accreditation protocol for delegations, officials and important persons (VIPs) should be planned in a sensitive manner. The entry-exit of the guests and staff who can use the VIP areas should be considered in accordance with the principles of welcome-hospitality and security. If the local organizing committee authorizes uncontrolled access to unrelated people, it may cause unpleasant situations. The freedom can turn into a troubled state. The possibility of encountering such situations should be considered in advance. The rules of accreditation should be carried out in a determined manner, and initiatives should not be used.

2.7. VIP Zones & Services:

The number of seats to be allocated to the international committee in the VIP stands in sports organizations is determined by the relevant unit of the committee, approved and cannot be changed later (IOC, 2018). Even though the games are hosted by a country, it is the international committee that is the real host of the organization. The local hosting committee should be aware of this fact and apply the rules of the international protocol determined by the games charter rather than the rules of the local protocol. The seats reserved for VIP guests should be determined according to their status. It will be useful to get help from an experienced protocol specialist to minimize the risks in this regard. However, there may be people who will try to disrupt or bypass the protocol implemented. Therefore, it is important to include official and private security personnel in planning. In this way, the problems will be prevented in advance.

On the other hand, international sports organizations can have guests such as commercial, political, artistic or sports people who will be invited from abroad for both opening and closing ceremonies and other events. Precise planning should be carried out to meet and accommodate these guests and provide all necessary services. Hosting non-governmental organizations should also be included in the planning according to the interests of the guests. For example, the support of the local businessmen associations and the chambers of industry can be obtained to establish positive dialogues among guests in the field of commerce. Similarly, the support of local art associations can be obtained for artist guests. The cooperation of the local organizing committee with the protocol departments of the state, non-governmental organizations and universities can increase the quality and success of the games and may also contribute to the realization of the objectives of the games.

2.8. Cultural Show Programs:

The hosting country exhibits a cultural show to be watched by many people during the opening-closing ceremonies through TV broadcasting (Draper & Maheshwari, 2018). The opening ceremony of the 2016 Rio Olympics is reported to have been watched by nearly 3 billion people (Eurosport, 2018-c). Cultural music, plays, dances, and theatrical shows are exhibited in this section with the aim to make cultural marketing to the whole world. On the other hand, these shows cannot contain political messages, actions, music or rhetoric to offend other countries, and cannot include any national political message (IOC, 2018). These sensitivities should be shared with the art director of the show and the possibility of making mistakes should be eliminated during the rehearsals of the show. Otherwise, it may lead to a diplomatic crisis that cannot be repaired. During the opening ceremonies of the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the inclusion of many racist and unethical political messages and actions gave rise to the problems that are still debated today (UN, 2018).

3. Conclusion and Recommendations:

Diplomacy is a set of agreements covering all kinds of international relations. International sports organizations include competitions between countries, establishing superiority, promotions, interactions and political relationships. Sports games are important organizations in which countries represent national values. National values are sensitive values and possess important social and cultural elements as the pride of a nation. Sports games are important organizations where countries represent national values. Therefore, it is very acceptable for countries to try to uphold these values and be defensive against abuse. In this context, countries and organizing committees hosting sports organizations should be aware of the sensitivities and take maximum care. Diplomatic crises can be experienced during the advertising, public relations, and marketing activities prior to the games, during and after the games. Since these organizations reach millions of people around the world through broadcasting channels, the impact will also be in a broad-scale. A small negativity can create a disastrous effect in the world.

With the power of internet-based social networking sites, the impact can be exponentially incurable. Planning should be made carefully for sports organizations to eliminate such risky cases at the points where diplomatic sensitivity is required. A simple method should be used to obtain approval from countries about the country flags, national anthems, clothes, and visual and audio elements. For example; there is a computer software program called Game Management System (GMS) where the countries participating in the organizations can upload registration, accreditation, accommodation, volunteer and delegation lists, rosters and transportation information (GMS, 2018). In addition to standard information, a module must be developed and added to the system in which the countries can upload and approve data regarding national flags, national anthems, clothes and their special requests and sensitivities that may be of particular importance from the diplomatic point of view.

As a conclusion, the country-city and organization committees that host sports organizations should not consider games as a sporting event but rather as a broad diplomacy display. It will be possible to establish and develop good international relations and contribute to the promotion and recognition of the host country by leaving a good image for the visiting countries.

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