

Africa and Sport Mega-events: The Experience of the 2010 FIFA World Cup

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In studying the position of Africa in the international relations theory, scholars have been concerned with questions surrounding the particularity of concepts such as State and sovereignty or the impact of Africa's neo-patrimonial politics on the continent's international relations. The increasing interest in other areas of international relations, including culture and religion, has suggested new research avenues.

Among these areas, sport has emerged as an interesting arena both as a basis for a country's soft power and as a valuable diplomatic resource. Of particular interest, developing countries are increasingly competing for hosting sport mega-events realizing the opportunities these events present in terms of marketing the country as a destination of tourism and investments and promoting its cultural heritage. Few African countries have engaged in this competition culminating in hosting the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, the first on African soil.

Hosting this world class event in South Africa for the first time raises a number of questions about the benefits that the African continent and the hosting African country gain from this experience. How were Africa and South Africa portrayed throughout this event? What are the impacts of hosting this event on the South African economy and society? What did this event mean for other African countries and nations? Was using an African discourse in marketing the event an attempt to make the world cup relevant to the continent as a whole or a South African appropriation of Africa to its own advantage? And to what extent can this event and its likes contribute to changing Africa's position in international relations theory and debates?

The paper discusses these questions. It argues that in the African context although hosting sport mega events has undeniable economic and social benefits, it also raises doubts about the externalization of accountability and the power of international bodies vis-à-vis the hosting country (the FIFA in this case), the paybacks of luxurious government spending on such events to ordinary Africans, and the gap in power bases and benefits between the hosting country and other African countries.