Pursuing Identity as a Global Power: Sport as a Nexus for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication in the Century of Türkiye 🔶

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Abstract

The dichotomy between great powers and weak states has long dominated international politics. The rise of middle powers has challenged this power-centered structure, and some middle powers have attempted to position themselves as pivotal players in global politics. Türkiye's two mottos, "The World is bigger than five" and "The Century of Türkiye," epitomize this challenge. Nevertheless, being recognized as a global player requires solid political cohesion at home and the projection of that identity to the international community, along with its acknowledgment by the recipients. Achieving this internal and external recognition can be facilitated through public diplomacy and strategic communication, and this paper explores the potential use of sports as a tool for public diplomacy and strategic communication. The focal point of this study is how Türkiye positions sport within the context of its public diplomacy and strategic communication endeavors. In

this regard, a comprehensive discussion is undertaken on Türkiye's utilization of sports diplomacy, with the objective of examining the study's theoretical frameworks. To this end, a mixed research method was employed, encompassing a literature review and content analysis. The literature review section is based on international academic publications relevant to public diplomacy, strategic communication, and the intersection of sport and diplomacy. The content analysis section involves analyzing news reflected in the international press and the reports and announcements channels of institutions that are effective in Türkiye's foreign policy.

Keywords: Sport, Public Diplomacy, Strategic Communication, Great Powers, Weak States.

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Introduction

For a considerable period, global politics has revolved around two leading players: great powers and small states. However, the post-Cold War era witnessed the rise of a new category of states that sought to carve out their own distinct position. These so-called middle-power countries, with their unique and often overlooked diplomatic strategies, have not just made a meaningful impact on the world stage but have significantly enriched the landscape of international relations. Positioned between major powers and smaller states, these emerging nations are actively working to assert their influence on the global stage through diplomatic channels, challenging the prevalent great-power-focused narrative and reshaping the global political landscape.

In the dynamic landscape of contemporary global politics, middle powers are no longer passive observers but influential actors. They have the potential to shape various aspects of international relations, including the establishment of platforms such as the G20[1] and MIKTA[2] . These serve as clear evidence of the increasingly vital role of middle powers in influencing global affairs and setting international standards. The growing significance of soft power and the focus on public diplomacy further underscore the invaluable contributions of countries aspiring to achieve middle-power status.

Understanding the shifting dynamics of state relations in the ever-changing global landscape is of utmost importance. A prime example is Türkiye, a nation that has transcended the boundaries of traditional middle power and is actively striving for a more influential and dynamic role on the world stage. While Türkiye was seen previously as a significant player in middle-power diplomacy within the MIKTA group, its approach has undergone noticeable changes since the mid-2010s. Prior to 2013, Türkiye had initiated its initiatives in middle-power diplomacy; however, after 2014, it adopted a completely new approach (Karakuş & Ayhan, 2024: 6-7). This shift in Türkiye's middle-power diplomacy during this time exhibited significant variability that existing theories fail to explain, making it a compelling case study for middle-power discourses.

This transformation is not just a vision but a tangible reality in Türkiye's visionary pursuit of a "Century of Türkiye" and the gradual evolution of its foreign policy declarations. Until the early 2010s, Türkiye was positioned and perceived as a typical middle power. However, its position has shifted, and it is now seeking a more active and influential role in global affairs. Türkiye's active role in global politics is a testament to its ambition and strategic approach, which should not be underestimated. The research questions of this study are designed as follows:

1. What is the reason(s) for the change in Türkiye's middle power position, especially after the 2010s?

2. What are Türkiye's objectives in implementing this shift in its power position?

In addressing the first question, the study puts forward the hypothesis that Türkiye, as a compassionate nation, adopts a conciliatory stance in regional and global disputes or conflict areas. As a stabilizing power, Türkiye (Altun, 2022: 26) is a strong ally, a decisive actor, and a pivotal figure in resolving regional and global issues. Commenting on these changes, political analyst and freelance journalist Klaus Jurgens (2023, p. 27) notes, "Analyzing the foreign policy of modern Türkiye is a perfect case study of how a nation-state can completely reshape its approach to relations with the outside world over time."

With the second question, the study hypothesizes that Türkiye maintains an independent and national foreign policy approach, seeking to strengthen regional peace and security. Indeed, Türkiye, as a European, Middle Eastern and Asian nation at the heart of three continents, deploys all the means and capabilities of public diplomacy and strategic communication in its foreign policy. Consequently, Türkiye aims to create a more liveable world in its region and globally.

Given this, this article dissects Türkiye's ambitious aspiration for "the Century of Türkiye," its evolving international identity, and its potential for transformative global leadership, with a focused lens on the possibility of public diplomacy through sports for the profound impact of strategic communication in realizing its goal. The exploration of Türkiye's national status and goals will delve into the middle power discourse and the underlying factors shaping Türkiye's national identity while advocating for strategic communication and sports as a nexus for that. Rooted in an external perspective as academic observers, this analysis aims to provide guidance and suggestions to Türkiye as it navigates its path toward a more impactful global role.

Changes of Discourses on Middle Power Diplomacy

The concept and conduct of middle powers have been closely associated with international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), since the aftermath of World War II, with a notable amplification

[1]The G20 countries are Germany, the United States of America, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, Indonesia, France, South Africa, South Korea, India, the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, Canada, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and the European Commission.

[2]A grouping of Mexico, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Türkiye and Australia - brings together five countries from diverse cultures and regions. For more info: http://mikta.org/about/what-is-mikta/?ckattempt=1

of focus on their behaviors in the 1980s, which has gradually evolved. The discourses on middle powers can be categorized into three primary approaches. The first approach to understanding middle powers can be categorized as the positioning approach, which is aligned with realism and emphasizes quantitative factors such as the economy, military capabilities, defense spending, and population size (Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth, 2014). This approach gained prominence as the concept of middle powers gained traction. Based on their perception of their status, middle powers sought recognition (Murray, 2019) within the international community through tangible actions and roles, ultimately achieving a recognized status (Cooper & Dal, 2017).

Their standing is not solely defined by their position in the global hierarchy based on material factors, nor are they merely a collection of countries that exhibit a standardized set of behaviors. Instead, middle powers aim to establish a socially recognized status through interactions with other states, engaging in roles beyond their subjective self-identity. In the international system, status refers to the relative position of states within a hierarchical community. It encompasses collective beliefs about ranking particular states according to attributes such as wealth, military power, culture, population, governance, and diplomatic influence (Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth, 2014: 7). Recognition within the international community, as described by Murray (2019), constitutes a set of intersubjective meanings that differ from how a state defines its own identity and from its material standing. Thus, the status of a middle power is understood as a recognized identity and a social construct that reflects the complexities of international relations.

The second approach is the behavioral approach, tied to liberalism, which categorizes middle powers based on their conduct in international affairs, such as engaging in multilateral solutions, international activism, and coalition-building with like-minded countries. They argue that middle powers exhibit unique diplomatic behaviors that differentiate them from major and weaker states. Referred to as the intrinsic impulse of the middle power, this approach suggests that middle powers can effectively pursue altruistic diplomacy in ways that differ from traditional diplomatic behaviors (Cooper, 2011: 317-318). This includes anti-hegemony, multilateralism, mediation, coalition building, niche diplomacy, and normative diplomacy, often called "good international citizenship diplomacy" (Gilley & O'Neil, 2014: 12-13; Şehitoğlu, 2024: 317-318).

Lastly, the identity approach, linked with constructivism (Cha, 2019), seeks to forecast and explain a country's behavior based on its self-perception and definition of its middle power identity, particularly highlighting the role of values, ideas, and norms in

foreign policy and international politics. This approach is closely related to the behavioral approach, as both emphasize the impact of values, ideas, and norms on foreign policy and international politics. While it focuses on discursive behaviors, such as policymakers' speeches, it is important to note that simply identifying as a middle power does not automatically confer that status. In some instances, the claim to being a middle power may be nothing more than political rhetoric.

Regardless of the abovementioned approach, the authors argue that the concept of middle-power diplomacy encompasses several vital aspects. Firstly, middle powers are typically opposed to hegemonic influence, often due to having experienced interference from more powerful neighboring countries. As a result, they tend to support a multipolar world order. Additionally, middle powers often serve as mediators and facilitators, resolving conflicts between major powers and promoting peaceful resolutions. They also engage in specialized diplomacy beyond the traditional realms dominated by significant powers through coalition-building. Lastly, middle powers are seen as essential in promoting and upholding values such as human rights, environmental protection, and development assistance.

The global landscape of international relations has experienced significant shifts, prompting a reevaluation of the roles and behaviors of middle powers. This transformation can be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, there has been a notable reconfiguration of power dynamics and norms in the international order, primarily influenced by the escalating rivalry between the United States (USA) and China, as well as the evolving global values. Secondly, the emergence of "emerging middle powers", such as Türkiye, Indonesia, Mexico, and Korea, alongside the more established "traditional middle powers" like Canada and Australia, has defied prior assumptions about the characteristics and conduct of middle powers that were primarily established in the late 1980s (Kim, 2020: 3-4).

The traditional classification of middle powers in international relations highlights the influence of values, ideas, and norms on foreign policy while acknowledging that it is not inherently biased toward liberal perspectives. However, since the 1990s, this conventional classification has been disrupted by the ascent of "non-Western emerging middle powers", including Korea, Indonesia, Türkiye, and Mexico, alongside the "traditional" middle powers, such as Australia, Canada, and the Nordic countries (Ungerer, 2007; Lee, et al 2015). This paradigm shift in middle-power diplomacy diverges from past approaches in several significant ways.

Middle powers now exhibit significant diversity in their shared values, norms, and behaviors, resulting in a less homogeneous grouping. Some emerging

middle powers aspire to a status beyond that of a traditional middle power, seeking regional or even global influence. While traditional middle powers seek to legitimize and maintain the liberal international order, some emerging middle powers are critical of this order and the hegemonic position of the USA, advocating for reforms in global governance. Türkiye is a stunning example of an emerging middle power that falls into this category, as evidenced by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's statements such as "The World is bigger than five" and "The Century of Türkiye".

In the case of Türkiye, it is crucial to consider a "status as a recognized identity approach" to national identity formation and the country's positioning. This approach emphasizes the concept of "status as a recognized identity" (Murray, 2019: 29-52), where a middle power seeks recognition in the international community through specific actions and roles based on its perception of its own status, ultimately realizing its objective status. In essence, middle power status is not solely determined by a country's position in the hierarchy of the international community on a material level or by a shared set of "standardized rules of behavior". It is somewhat influenced by subjective self-image and how countries seek recognition through their roles and interactions with others, ultimately establishing a socially recognized status in the international community (Larson et al., 2014: 7).

As a result, middle power status is both a recognized identity and a social construct. At this point, a middle-power country may no longer be considered a middle power but instead a global power. Status identity is an integral part of national identity, as political elites and citizens believe their country has a rightful international status, along with the associated prestige, rights, respect, roles, responsibilities, and obligations. Therefore, the "Century of Türkiye" claim is a national identity declaration and outlines the envisioned path for the country. President Erdoğan has articulated that the Century of Türkiye represents "a comprehensive roadmap that will raise Türkiye above the level of contemporary civilizations" (Directorate of Communications, 2023).

To maintain and champion a national identity and realize the envisioned future, it is imperative for the government to consistently articulate the country's ethos, define its ambitions and aspirations, and communicate these both domestically and internationally through public diplomacy and strategic communications.

Changing Identities: Capability and Willingness

In international relations, "status" denotes the relative position of states within a hierarchical global community. This status represents a collective perception of a state's ranking, encompassing attributes such as wealth, coercive power, culture, population, socio-political organization, and diplomatic influence. It is essential to recognize that material capabilities are not the only factors that determine status; soft power, which includes a state's cultural influence, values, and norms, also plays a significant role. This soft power related to civilization is evident in the global influence of certain cultures, the spread of democracy, the acceptance of human rights principles, and the care for the vulnerable.

A state's recognized identity within the international community is not just a matter of subjective self-definition and material factors. It is a complex interplay of shared meanings and recognition from other states. Since a state can only achieve a certain status by recognizing others, it becomes essential to seek the legitimacy and authority that other states acknowledge in order to attain specific statuses, such as that of a great power. As a result, the pursuit of status is not a passive process but one that requires states to adopt specific roles and behaviors. For example, a state may seek recognition of its status by acting as a great power or a middle power within the international community. From this perspective, middle-power foreign policy and public diplomacy can be seen as both material and discursive activities aimed at attaining recognition for status identities. States actively attempt to change their status by deliberately modifying their behaviors and roles. In terms of discourse, practical support is crucial in moving beyond mere rhetoric.

The Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1982; Taijfel & Turner, 1986) supports the aforementioned statement. It states that social groups and their members strive to maintain and reinforce their distinct identities by comparing themselves with others based on specific attributes and characteristics. In this context, status is determined by comparisons between different groups rather than being a limited resource like wealth or power, and it represents a group's relative position on a specific dimension of comparison. The Social Identity Theory identifies three main approaches social groups use to maintain and strengthen a positive status identity: social mobility, social competition, and social creativity.

First, social mobility (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Jackson et al., 1996; Wright, 2001) occurs when group boundaries are flexible, allowing members to move between groups through choice or effort. In this case, they aim for upward status mobility by imitating the values or behaviors of a superior group. For example, a country may seek to join a group of superior nations in the international community.

Second, social competition (Lenski, 1954; McNamara, 1997; Wright & Taylor, 1999) reverses relative positions by directly challenging and competing

with another group being compared. This typically occurs when movement between groups is highly restricted; however, if capabilities exist, it is feasible to outperform the other group. In international politics, this concept is applied in the context of great power competition in international relations, such as the competitive dynamic between countries like the United States and China. This concept can also be illustrated in Türkiye's efforts to establish itself as a global power.

Third, social creativity (Lenski, 1966; Bezouw, Toorn, and Becker, 2020) comes into play when a group is inferior to another group in a particular area. The inferior group can attempt to find a new dimension of comparison that favors it (e.g., focusing on soft power instead of hard power). Alternatively, the group can redefine the value assigned to an existing dimension of comparison (e.g., promoting the notion that "Smaller is stronger" or "Black is beautiful") or select new comparators that are favorable to them. Examples of social creativity include Canada's efforts to ban anti-personnel landmines and the Nordic countries' diplomatic efforts in niche areas such as human security and the environment (Kim, 2020).

Today's Türkiye aims to portray itself as a responsible and constructive regional force, particularly in the Balkans, the Middle East, and North Africa, while simultaneously positioning itself as a global power by becoming a central player on the world stage. Türkiye actively seeks to establish new cooperation with its neighbors and the international community, supported by the government's official declaration. However, in order to solidify this identity, recognition from both internal and external sources is crucial. The will of the people and its leaders plays a significant role in this process. Besides the categorization that defines a country's identity and status, willingness is essential in shaping its identity. The perceptions of other countries and the country's self-perception are crucial. Therefore, it is necessary to communicate this identity both internally and externally. Public diplomacy and strategic communication are in high demand.

This paper suggests that the diplomatic behavior of states on the international and domestic political levels can be explained by their capability and willingness (Schweller, 2006: 46-47; You, 2020: 99-153). The core causal mechanism of the capability-willingness model has two aspects. First, a state's ability is enhanced when it expands its material capabilities and attains diplomatic independence from the existing hegemon or neighboring great powers. Second, even with these capabilities, the role of mature domestic political cohesion is paramount. It is this cohesion that provides leaders with the "will" to strive for status as a global power consistently.

How has Türkiye Evolved? From a Middle Power to a Global Power

Türkiye has historically employed various approaches to status promotion since the establishment of the republic in 1923. Türkiye aspired to align with the West in the early years, emphasizing pro-Western, anti-communist ideals. Following the Cold War, Türkiye shifted its focus to its ties with Central Asia and the Balkans while also pursuing membership in the European Union (EU). By the 2010s, Türkiye, alongside countries like Indonesia, had underscored the harmony between Islam and democracy and the necessity of bridging the East and West. Furthermore, from 2002 to 2010, under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (AK Parti), Türkiye assumed a conventional middle-power diplomatic role, engaging in conflict mediation, development assistance, and niche diplomacy. With its rapid economic growth since the early 2000s, it has actively leveraged the opportunity presented by the U.S. anti-terrorism focus and the resulting "Transatlantic Rift" to pursue middle power capability diplomacy (Kardaş, 2011: 32).

As Türkiye's attempts to join the EU were effectively blocked, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan shifted the country's focus towards emphasizing Islam and the historical and cultural elements of the Ottoman Empire as central to Turkish identity. This, paired with aspirations for regional power, has led to tensions with the West. This represents a shift from seeking status through assimilation to pursuing a competitive approach. In the 2010s, the discourse around Turkish identity centered on the concept of a "civilizational state" within the framework of "A New Türkiye," as emphasized by Erdoğan after his election in 2014. This vision combines the historical and cultural legacy of the Ottoman Empire with a modernized Türkiye, aiming to establish the country as a central player in the Islamic world.

Ahmet Davutoğlu, who served as Prime Minister from 2014 to 2016 and as Foreign Minister from 2009 to 2014, developed the concept of "Strategic Depth," which reinterprets Türkiye's international positioning and role based on its civilizational identity. According to this concept, Türkiye, the center state of the Ottoman-Islamic civilization, has significant historical, cultural, and religious links to the region's countries. Therefore, it should assume a leadership role in promoting unity and integration within the Islamic world. This concept marks a departure from the "Zero Problems with Neighbors" policy pursued in the 2000s. It signifies a shift towards a more assertive policy aimed at expanding Türkiye's pan-regional sphere of influence based on a civilizational-centered attitude.

In the 2010s, there was an increased emphasis on

Turkish Islam and Ottoman traditions, values, and norms, as opposed to Western engagement and the promotion of democracy. Rather than presenting a theological or ideological model like Saudi Arabia or Iran, Turkish Islam has focused on rejuvenating a uniquely Turkish "civilizational Islam," which combines Türkiye's economic and geopolitical power with its Muslim identity.

Following the 2011 elections, a noticeable shift towards domestic consolidation and a redefinition of identity occurred. Since 2013, there has been a move towards a more assertive foreign policy. Türkiye has adopted a competitive approach towards the West and its neighbors and has criticized the current international order. A clear desire is to enhance Türkiye's standing as a regional power by building solidarity rather than competition and excluding others.

As a result of this shift, Turkish diplomacy has refocused from the West to the East, particularly to the Middle East and North Africa. Its role has evolved from being a mediator and bridge-builder to that of a regional power and "center of gravity" seeking to expand its influence in the region. Türkiye's foreign policy is predicated on the non-exertion of hegemony over other states whilst concomitantly seeking to expand the reach of its own influence. In its dealings with weaker states, Türkiye prioritizes meeting the most pressing needs of the recipient state and endeavors to foster cooperation that will yield mutual benefits. The Türkiye-Somalia relationship exemplifies this approach. Following a significant famine in 2011, Türkiye provided considerable aid and assistance, including in the areas of security, social welfare, and economic development, and has since become one of Somalia's most important partners in Africa. In addition to its material support, Türkiye has cultivated a positive image in Somalia and among the Somali people (Balcı, 2024: 8-12).

Türkiye is firmly positioning itself as a formidable global force, ready to challenge the prevailing world order dominated by major powers. This determination is reflected in its two powerful mottos: "The world is bigger than five" (Aral, 2019: 71-95) and "The Century of Türkiye" (Fidan, 2023: 11-25). These mottos serve as a powerful vision, driving the steady implementation of practical policies to support this ambitious goal.

What is to be Done to Solidify Identity as a Global Power?

What steps should Türkiye take to establish and strengthen its identity as a global power and make "The Century of Türkiye" a reality? There are various ways to showcase a country's image to the world, and public diplomacy has been given significant importance in modern times. Several Turkish institutions play a crucial role in implementing Türkiye's public

diplomacy. The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), Yunus Emre Enstitüsü (YEE), Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Presidency of Religious Affairs, Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, Anadolu Agency (AA), the Republic of Türkiye Investment Office, Turkish Maarif Foundation, are at the core of Turkish public diplomacy. Other institutions include Türk Kızılay (The Turkish Red Crescent), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), and Turkish Airlines (THY). They engage in political, diplomatic, economic, and cultural activities to advance public diplomacy. In order to enhance the effectiveness of these efforts, these institutions must have a well-coordinated relationship among themselves (Kalın, 2011: 21). Currently, the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye's Directorate of Communications (DoC) appears to be responsible for this coordination and drives national and international public relations efforts.

On the other hand, Türkiye is strategically advancing its policies through digital public diplomacy by harnessing the influence of social media to amplify crucial messages from President Erdoğan and government diplomats. The online discussions on platforms like Twitter reflect a purposeful redefinition of Türkiye's identity, values, and global influence. A recent study (Uysal & Schroeder, 2019) emphasizes the importance of prioritizing foreign policy and political values as essential soft power assets over cultural aspects, highlighting Türkiye's humanitarian aid and social responsibility efforts in the Islamic world. While Türkiye has excelled in public diplomacy through initiatives such as dramas, language, scholarships, and cuisine diplomacy, it is crucial to consider integrating sports into Turkish public diplomacy to achieve an even more significant impact.

The Instrumental Utility of Sports

It is undeniable that throughout history, sports have strived to remain neutral and apolitical. However, paradoxically, this apparent neutrality has led to the maximization of its instrumental utility. As a result, sport has been shaped and used by those in power for specific purposes (Houlihan, 2000: 215-217). Modern sport, in particular, has been structured to meet the needs of industrial societies and nation-states, serving internally as a means of political symbolism and externally as a tool that can be used for various diplomatic purposes. It is regarded as an effective tool for promoting social cohesion, shaping national identity, and enhancing a country's image abroad (Nygård & Gates, 2013: 238-241). Suppose one acknowledges the practical usefulness of sports and embraces the idea of soft power; viewing sports as an effective tool for promoting soft power and delivering public diplomacy is reasonable. From this

standpoint, it can be posited that sport has evolved into a potent instrument within the ambit of professional domains, such as diplomacy, and even more so within the purview of political science and international relations (Güzelipek, 2023: 38-39; Şehitoğlu, Tekin, and Güner, 2023: 404).

In the 1970s, sociologists widely employed two general theories to analyze the role of sport in society: functionalist theory and conflict theory. These theories offer different perspectives on the significance and impact of sports based on distinct assumptions about social order. According to functionalist theory, sports contribute to societal integration by promoting shared values and norms. Conversely, conflict theory argues that sports function as a tool to perpetuate dominant-dominated relationships. Both perspectives underscore the instrumental role of sports in meeting the needs of industrial societies and states (Coakley, 2020: 24-49).

Furthermore, sports, organized to meet the requirements of industrial societies and states, are seen as a powerful political tool serving multiple purposes. They can be leveraged internally to manipulate political symbols, used externally for diplomatic purposes, and exploited economically as a new arena for capital accumulation in industrial societies (Jung, 2010: 243; Nygård & Gates, 2013: 238-241). Sports are not only used as a political tool, but they also carry various diplomatic and symbolic significance (Hoberman, 1984: 20). While modern sports emphasize values such as sportsmanship, fair play, peace, and friendship, the symbols associated with sporting events often include national elements, including flags, anthems, torches, and award ceremonies (Houlihan, 2007: 215-217). These elements make sports a useful diplomatic tool.

Suppose we define diplomacy as a means to achieve national goals and interests. In that case, sports diplomacy can be viewed as a subset of diplomacy that utilizes sports to advance national interests. In other words, sports are used to achieve national interests, such as survival, prosperity, and national prestige. Sports diplomacy is often seen as a form of low-politics diplomacy, in contrast to the high-politics diplomacy associated with traditional diplomatic relations (Allison, 2005; Boniface, 1998; Caffrey, 2008; Murray, 2013; Tomlinson & Young, 2006). The authors argue that there are three key distinctions between low-politics sports diplomacy and high-politics diplomacy. First, sports diplomacy focuses on functional areas, such as organizing international sporting events, exchanging athletes, and hosting visits by key sports figures. Second, sports diplomacy engages with civil society, whereas high politics diplomacy mainly targets policymakers and bureaucrats. Third, sports diplomacy involves transnational and non-governmental actors, with international sports organizations, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), playing a dominant role in decisions related to events, broadcasting rights and official sponsors.

The sport as low politics has been used by states in diplomatic relations in three main ways. One is in terms of "image expansion," in which states sell themselves through sporting activities to enhance their image; another is through (non)participation in certain events to express their opposition to international actions they (dis)agree with; and a third is using sporting events with other countries as a tool to establish national identity or improve relations with other countries (Jung, 2009: 242).

The "image-expansion" effect can be viewed as a dual phenomenon, one of success and the other of acceptance (Allison, 2005: 5-6). The former involves success in a particular sport, often equating outstanding performance with national superiority. The latter, acceptance, has a broader international significance. Many nations have utilized sports to signify their acceptance as part of the global community, particularly in divided countries such as the two Koreas and Germany before the Unification. In 1969, only 13 countries acknowledged East Germany. Even well-established nations use sports to reinforce their standing. It is widely believed that China's fervor for the mega sports events primarily stems from a desire to affirm and showcase its status as a mature member of the international system.

One of the most well-known examples of using sports to improve international relations is the "ping-pong diplomacy" between the USA and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the early 1970s. This involved exchanging sports teams to enhance relations. The USA sent a table tennis team to the PRC one year, and in return, the PRC sent a basketball team to the USA the following year. The choice of sports was highly political, as the USA was not strong in table tennis, and the PRC was not a powerhouse in basketball at the time. Neither side was expected to win, creating a friendly atmosphere for the game. This ping-pong diplomacy ultimately led to President Nixon's visit to the PRC in 1972, marking a significant step in the improvement of the relationship between the two countries (Kropke, 1976: 317-326; Nafziger, 1971: 180-212).

Using Sports as a Tool for Public Diplomacy

In modern sports, competition is at the heart of the game. Winning and being the first are the ultimate goals, naturally involving competing against opponents. However, opponents are essential, as no game would exist without them. Therefore, modern sports can be seen as a form of "friendly competition" (Dunning, 2001: 94). This concept of friendly competition assumes the presence of others. Our understanding of ourselves is shaped in relation to

others, and it is most evident in competitive situations. In sports, the "sense of us" comes to the forefront through direct competition, where winners and losers are clearly defined. While international sporting events may not be as extreme as war, they can be seen as a form of competition that mirrors the dynamics of conflict (Jung, 2018: 67-87).

In today's globalized world, the relationship between international and domestic politics is becoming increasingly interconnected, blurring the lines between them. While the intertwining of international relations and domestic politics has always existed, it has become even deeper with the erosion of the ideological and systemic barriers that once hindered interdependence between states. This has led to a more significant role for public diplomacy aimed at civil society in other countries as a critical component of foreign policy. Through active public diplomacy, it is possible to transform competition with others into a more cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship. This is where the potential for sports to serve as an effective tool for public diplomacy emerges (Murray, 2016: 617-627; Jackson, 2013: 274-284). The potential for convergence between sport and public diplomacy stems from several sources; however, the authors will focus on three main ones.

Firstly, sports and politics have long been intertwined, from ancient times to the present day. It is unrealistic to expect them to be separated entirely. Instead, the goal should be to acknowledge and moderate their interconnectedness so that it does not become extreme in either direction.

Secondly, in today's globalized world, where war is less likely to be used as a means to resolve conflicts between nations, and economic values are considered paramount, sports can serve as a non-combative platform for nations to display their hierarchy and pride. This demonstrates the effectiveness of sports as a diplomatic tool in advancing national interests. For example, the eagerness of great powers, including China, Russia, France, and the UK, to host the Olympic Games again illustrates why sports and public diplomacy can converge.

Lastly, both sport and public diplomacy aim for long-term and gradual effects. While the outcomes of sports and public diplomacy may be immediate, their impact will likely be observed gradually over time. A single victory in an international game or a singular act of support for another country does not immediately improve a country's image. However, repeated victories and consistent support will undoubtedly have a positive impact on a country's policy performance.

Avoiding the Pitfalls of One-sided Sending: Attraction and Acceptance

Power always depends on the context of the relationship (Baldwin, 1979: 161-194). Soft power is based on how others perceive a country's image, ideology, and policies and is closely related to identity issues. The communication and relationships between a country and others influence it. Soft power is exerted when a country's self-identity aligns with the identity of others. However, identity politics tends to be egocentric, as people often project their own constructed reality as the truth, assuming that what is attractive to them will also be attractive to others. When states ignore this relational nature, they may fall into the trap of unilateral projection. An example of this can be seen in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, as described in Richard Mandell's[3] book "The Nazi Olympics." Similarly, the 2008 Beijing Olympics also reflected this concept, as discussed by Caffrey[4] and Lovell[5].

The elaborate display of nationalism at major sporting events, such as the Olympics,T serves as a stark reminder of the potential pitfalls of one-sided projection by countries. This risk is further accentuated when coupled with an instrumental and strategic approach to soft power. Some define power as the possession of resources that can influence performance. When a group or individual possesses a stable supply of resources, they are deemed to hold power. While this definition may make power appear tangible and quantifiable, it necessitates revision due to its conflation of the results of power dynamics with the means to an end. This can be called the "fallacy of means" or "fallacy of concreteness". People often equate power with resources but face the paradox that those possessing power-yielding resources only occasionally achieve their intended objectives.

In this vein, the key to addressing the issue of spreading soft power is understanding when the projection or expression of one's charm is perceived as attractive by the other party and when it is seen as unattractive. Establishing the rules of interaction between projecting and receiving attraction is a complex task that requires subtle coordination. It is crucial to expect the recipient to avoid embracing an appeal based on a one-sided projection. Türkiye's pursuit of global power should consider this, stressing the need for a balanced approach. It is imperative to recognize that there are no guarantees that others will accept unilateral projections of identity. Therefore, Türkiye's efforts to establish a global power identity must proceed carefully in its relations with others.

[3]Mandell, Richard. The Nazi Olympics. Macmillan, 1971.

[4]Caffrey, Kevin. "Olympian Politics in Beijing: Games but not Just Games." The International Journal of the History of Sport, vol. 25, no. 7, 2008, ss. 807-825.

[5]Lovell, Julia. "Prologue: Beijing 2008 - The Mixed Messages of Contemporary Chinese Nationalism." The International Journal of the History of Sport, vol. 25, no. 7, 2008, ss. 758-778.

Pursuing Identity as a Global Power: Sport as a Nexus for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication in the Century of Türkiye

Conclusion

Human beings now live in a time of rapidly evolving geopolitical dynamics, increasing global challenges, and the return of great power competition. While traditional great powers have yet to adequately address the problems, some countries not traditionally considered great powers are seeking to establish their position in the global arena. They aim to be pivotal actors contributing to a fair and inclusive international system, capable of addressing growing global challenges through supranational cooperation and building solidarity rather than fostering polarity. Türkiye is at the forefront of this movement with its declaration of the Century of Türkiye.

This article discusses Türkiye's efforts to transition from a middle-power country to a global power. It emphasizes the importance of strengthening Türkiye's identity and the significance of public diplomacy. Additionally, it explores the potential of using sports to enhance public diplomacy, which Türkiye can capitalize on. Türkiye was the first country in the world to establish a National Sports Day. May 19 initially marked the date of Atatürk's landing at Samsun, which marked the beginning of the War of Independence. It was declared a national holiday in 1935 as "Atatürk Day" and was later renamed "Youth and Sports Day" in 1938. Finally, in 1981, it was renamed the "Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth and Sports Day." Despite Türkiye's rich history and the popularity of sports, there is still room for growth in utilizing sports as a diplomatic tool.

Türkiye's experience with Armenia in 2008 and 2009 exemplifies successful sports diplomacy (Polo, 2015: 5-11). During the 2010 World Cup qualifiers in South Africa, Türkiye and Armenia were drawn into the same group, leading to home and away exchanges. With the Turkish government aiming to improve relations with its neighbors, the soccer match provided a platform for dialogue and exchange with Armenia, ultimately leading to official visits between the presidents of the two countries. The article emphasizes the need for a more proactive approach. While sporting events and hosting international competitions contribute positively to Türkiye's image, the extent to which a country can develop its soft power through sports is limited. A balanced and relative message is essential, as a one-sided approach can have a negative impact.

Türkiye's rich values, historical significance, and cultural depth have significantly impacted regional dynamics, creating new spheres of influence. Turkish foreign policy's primary objective is to establish the Türkiye Axis based on the principles of justice, stability, inclusiveness, multilateralism, and the rule of international law (Ataman, 2023: 91). Türkiye's remarkable dynamism and emergence as a leading force regionally and globally must be effectively communicated with precision and credibility to domestic and international audiences (Kalın, 2011: 17) through strategic communication.

Two suggestions are being proposed as conclusions. The first suggestion is to organize national sports competitions, which could be named "The Turkish Sports Festival," annually for internal communication and national unity. It could coincide with May 19. The second suggestion is to continue pursuing the goal of hosting the Olympics through outreach and strategic communication despite previous unsuccessful bids. By expanding sports diplomacy, Türkiye can strengthen internal and external communication and move closer to achieving its goals.

In 2023, on Sunday, October 29, Türkiye celebrated its 100th anniversary with great pride. "The Century of Türkiye" is more than a motto. As Türkiye reaches 100 years, it faces the challenge of realizing its domestic and foreign ambitions. Establishing identity as a global power requires mobilizing public diplomacy, which sports can help support. It is vital to acknowledge the prevailing spirit of the age (zeitgeist), which is characterized by the principles of public diplomacy and strategic communication. In this context, sport emerges as a pivotal and fruitful domain. Indeed, states that employ this diplomatic practice, which is of paramount importance in winning the hearts and minds of foreign societies, will reap considerable benefits.

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