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**Sports Diplomacy and International Relations: A case study for the  
Winter Olympic Games of Pyeongchang 2018 and the Public relations  
between North Korea and South Korea**

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## **Abstract**

Sports diplomacy as a tool for soft diplomacy within the international scenario has shown to be able to enhance relations between States by using sports events as non-official venues for political and international leaders.

Within the Olympic Games, some cases of sports diplomacy can be found and as the best example is the well-known Ping-Pong diplomacy.

This thesis reviews the use of sports diplomacy during the Winter Olympic Games of Pyeongchang 2018, and how the sports event was a tool that contributed to the forthcoming talks between South Korea and North Korea after years of zero relation.

**Keywords: diplomacy, international relations, sports, Olympic Games, Korean peninsula.**

## **Introduction**

For the past 70 years, the International Relations have been subject of studies that have created different theories, such as realism, liberalism, and constructivism. Nation States were first introduced as the main and unique actors, but years after, new theories challenged what was written and showed us new roles within the international scenario. The creation of the Non-State actor as a figure with power and influence developed new theories and strategies, which together with the Nation States, rule the world we currently habit. The importance of these Non-State actors relies on the influence these may have in the worldwide decisions, Non-state actors need to be taken into account just as and when they influence what goes on between states, and not otherwise (Baylis & Smith, 2001).

According to the existent theories, the relevant players that can be found in the international arena are divided in two: Nation States actors and Non-State actors. The first ones are represented by governments while the second ones can be represented either by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) or Transnational Companies (TC). The latest can also impact the Nation State economies or political matters.

The Olympic Charter (International Olympic Committee, 2020, p.31) defines the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as “an international Non-Governmental not-for-profit organization...” however; the IOC has a privileged position within the United Nations (UN), which is held mainly by Nation States. Additionally, in the year of 2009 the IOC was awarded with a permanent observer status within the UN General Assembly. This status allows participating, influencing and deciding over the international arena and thus it converts the Olympic Movement into a *sui-generis* actor that can participate in many of the global decisions.

The authority and power the IOC has as an international actor is worth studying in order to demonstrate its role within the international scenario, specifically on how it takes part as an actor and intermediary for diplomacy relations between Nation States.

This thesis will analyze through its main objective the relation between the Winter Olympic Games of Pyeongchang 2018, and the new dialogue established between South Korea and North Korea after years of hard relations. This aims to confirm that the Olympic event was used as a tool for diplomacy, reuniting two of the most important and relevant political leaders at that time.

Previous bibliography will be studied to set the theoretical background related to the international relations; while an analysis of digital published news will serve as evidence of the meetings held after the approach between both countries during the Games. Data analysis for Google searches related to the Olympic Games in 2018 will be used as proof of the impact and relevance the mega-event has and the reason it was the best scenario for a diplomatic first approach.

The Olympic Games are often referred to as a mega-event due to its huge approach and impact. These type of sporting events have many advantages: they give their sponsors and national hosts prestige and international reputation. These events also help to the host's economic development and branding through cultural activities, connections, and collaboration between political leaders (Feizabadi, 2015). On this study case, it is proved that the Pyeongchang Olympics Games also helped to the reconciliation between both Koreas after years of no talks due to the well-known Korean war, decreasing political tensions and improving their diplomatic conversations.

The relevance of this study relays on the role the IOC currently poses as a Non-State actor. The influence and power the Olympic Movement has in the international

sphere is worth to be studied and analyzed to find new techniques and approaches of diplomacy and how these can be best used within the ongoing international relations.

## II. Objective

The objective for this thesis will be to develop and to prove the presented hypothesis. This will be achieved by studying the published bibliography concerning international relations, nation states and diplomacy, and then comparing digital news published during the Winter Olympic Games of Pyeongchang 2018 and the months after the Games. This is meant to prove that the leaders from South Korea and North Korea had an initial approach during the Games because it represented the best international scenario in terms of legitimacy, acceptance, and broadcasting. And this set the future meetings where historic measures were taken.

The hypothesis in this thesis is to evidence the role of the Winter 2018 Olympic Games as a key tool used for sports diplomacy in the political relations between North Korea and South Korea. To prove the proposed hypothesis, the following objective will be developed and carefully studied.

Objective: To situate at least five out of the seven characteristics of sports diplomacy within the Winter Olympic Games of Pyeongchang 2018, and the involvement of North Korea and South Korea at the time of the Games. According to Trunkos (2017), seven main characteristics of sports diplomacy are:

1. Using the event as an unofficial reason. This gives an also unofficial location where the international actors can meet and solve tensions.
2. Creating a cultural boost with regards of the host country, this includes international awareness of the host's culture, traditions, etc.
3. Use sports as a common factor to reduce cultural and linguistic differences between the international actors.
4. Serve as an unofficial stage for talks that lead to new economic and political agreements.

5. Use athletes, —or relevant sports individuals— to improve the relationship between both parts

6. Improve the host's country recognition. This can be achieved through venues, infrastructure or even through cultural awareness. Legacy plays an important role here.

7. Sport is used as a tool to give legitimacy to its country.

Result: The 2018 Winter Olympic Games proved to be the ideal scenario to start an initial approach and further conversations between international actors suffering from political tensions, disputes, or conflicts. Following the characteristics that define the sports diplomacy, it was proved that during the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games both, North Korea and South Korea, used the sports diplomacy card.

### **III. Methodology**

The methodology used to prove the hypothesis of this thesis includes qualitative and quantitative research methods.

The qualitative method was used to identify and review the relevant, official, and historical documents and bibliography that support the main terms and key words included in this hypothesis. Since this thesis is focus and extremely linked to the international relations which is a social science subject, a qualitative research and a bibliography review are the best approaches to use.

A quantitative research was used to show how the data related to the Olympic Games was studied. As reported by Google Trends, it should be taken into account that the final result is a proportion of the total of searches made in an specific location and period of time and should not be considered as the total volume of searches.

Sports diplomacy main characteristics are based on international relations' studies published within scientific and approved magazines cited in this thesis' bibliography.

Information regarding the after meetings between North and South Korea was taken from digital newspapers with international recognition

The finder selected for this study was Google and the digital tool was Google Trends. There were two main searches, one for the words "Olympic Games" and one for the words "North Korea and South Korea".

The first search was made in Google Trends and included a specific date interval of 1 year from August 2017 to August 2018<sup>1</sup>. This search had a worldwide scope to prove that the Olympic Games were an event that attracted sufficient attention to hold a political meeting of this magnitude.

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<sup>1</sup> This interval marks six months before and six months after the 2018 Winter Olympic Games.



The second search was made in Google and was divided in two intervals. The first interval filtered the news shown when the words “North Korea and South Korea” were searched between the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2017 and the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 2018. This interval of time is just before the 2018 Winter Olympic Games.

The second interval filtered the news shown when the words “North Korea and South Korea” were searched between the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2018 and the 31<sup>st</sup> July 2018. The second period starts with the Pyeongchang 2018 Opening Ceremony and goes for the six following months. Results shown were organized by relevance and the first 25 news were selected to analyse its title and relevance to the presented hypothesis. Searches were made in private mode by using an incognito tab to avoid personalized searches. This was needed to ensure that the browser did not save the searches, cookies, site data, or information previously entered in forms.

## **IV. Bibliography review**

The purpose of this bibliography review is to briefly locate the relevant terms and events within the international relations scope and to relate them with the hypothesis proposed to prove its veracity and importance.

The international actors are studied at first; these include the Nation States, and the Non-State actors represented by NOGs for this thesis. Each of these terms present a relevant example related to the international relations and the Olympic Movement, such as the creation of North Korea as Nation-State and its following conflict with South Korea, and the UN and IOC as examples of NGOs for the Non-State actors.

After this, the term diplomacy is studied under the international relations umbrella to then include its new forms presented as public diplomacy and the sports diplomacy. Once these concepts are introduced, the reader will find some examples of past events which have involved both, sports diplomacy and international actors.

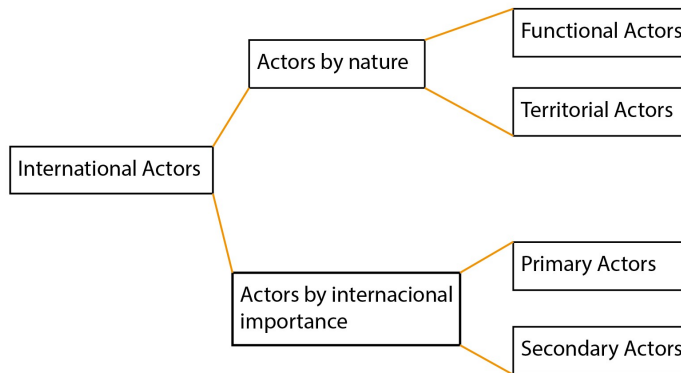
### **International actors**

Although some theories state that only relations between States comprise the international relations, it has been proven that the current globalization promote interactions between governments and NGOs or TCs, the latest being representatives of Non-State actors. Subsequently, the international actors can be seen as those who take part within the international relations, being States or not. For this thesis, the main international actors are South Korea and North Korea represented as Nation States and the IOC represented as a Non-State actor.

Within an international society, some actors communicate between each other; they align to create laws and institutions (Mingst, 2006). These international actors also identify common interests and usually share a common identity, sometimes even a group

identity. Calduch (1991) mentions that international actors are those groups that enjoy an effective capacity to generate and participate in international relations with other groups that belong to the same international society.

Under these beliefs, Calduch divides the international actors in two groups. These show with detail how can actors participate within the international relations.



Source: Own elaboration with data from Calduch, R., (1991).

Based on the chart elaborated with Calduch's data, both, South Korea and North Korea act as international actors within the Olympic scenario. First, we can find how South Korea acts as a territorial actor by hosting the Pyeongchang Olympic Games but also as a primary actor because of its relevance. On the other hand, we have North Korea which also acts as a primary actor due to its statements and actions before the 2018 Winter Olympic Games. Our third actor, the IOC, acts as secondary actor because it does not take part directly in the Korean conflict but sets the environment where these countries can meet without an specific nor political reason, just to enjoy sports.

### **Nation States**

Actors represented by States, act always with a specific purpose. Most of the times guided by the new forms of power (Keohane & Nye, 2001). These States determine their

own laws and create structures and models that will guarantee its national security. These governments have the power to declare war and at the same time they provide a channel for diplomatic communication and a stage that will serve determine the terms for trade and monetary policies (Taylor, 2019). It can be stated that we can not speak of diplomacy and further sports diplomacy, if there are not any Nation State involved.

But of course, a Nation State cannot be created on its own. It needs a territory and above all, population. Nation States should also share legitimacy with the population it pretends to rule to maintain a peaceful scenario (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020). The process involving the creation of new Nation States can increase the likelihood of wars, as happened with the formation of North Korea and South Korea back in the 1950s. This conflict lasted for decades and left a broken peninsula with a divided culture and population.

The use of sports as a political instrument is mainly related to diplomacy. It can be a valuable tool in easing international tensions (Bairner, 2008) when used by Nation States in sporting competitions or events. But also, the importance of sports within the Nations relies on its capability of linking cultural roots, language and customs to a national sport or event that at the same time legitimates its relevance. Examples such as the expansion of taekwondo, pelota vasca and kabaddi, show how Nation States can decrease cultural differences between international actors. Always looking for the common ground or linkage.

### **Korean conflict**

Knowing the historical conflict between the Koreas, will help us to understand the war between both countries and its future political and economic tensions.

From 1910 to 1945, Korea was a Japanese colony which then became the territory on dispute between the United States and the Soviet Union. At the end of World War II Korea was divided to keep the US and the URSS happy. This way both countries also kept their influence on the peninsula. After Korea was divided, tensions started emerging between the North and the South. Finally, the war began on June 1950, when the north sent troops into the south. This invasion lasted for three years and ended in 1953 (Stack, 2018).

In 1948, the south part of the Korean peninsula, the one with the US presence, declared itself as the Republic of Korea and established Seoul as its capital. Syngman Rhee, who had been living in the US, led this political movement. It is important to mention that the role of Rhee as the new political leader was highly influenced by the Office of Strategic Services, which then became the Central Intelligence Agency, better known as the CIA (Stack, 2018) and which help him became the country's new president (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020). After the south declared itself as an independent country, the north followed the lead and declared as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with its capital based in Pyongyang. This communist territory was led by Kim Il-sung, a well-known fighter from Chinese civil war (Stack, 2018).

For many years and under the influence and interests from China, the Soviet Union, and United States; North Korea and South Korea lost a lot of lives in combat. No country wanted to give up and surrender against the opposite.

Finally, in 1953, the UN delegate William Harrison —representing South Korea— and the Gen. Nam I —on behalf of North Korea— signed the Korean War armistice agreement at Panmunjom, Korea. However, this was not the end of the conflict. Both countries suffered years after from the opposite interests of the Cold War countries

and never really solved the tensions between them until they make a first effort in 2018, after the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games.

It was not until April 2018, that the leaders from these two countries reunited for the first time in over ten years of hard relations. At the meeting, Kim, from North Korea and Moon from South Korea, took part in a symbolic tree-planting ceremony in the DMZ (Korean Demilitarized Zone). The Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification on the Korean Peninsula became the highlight of the encounter since it committed both countries to a nuclear-free peninsula and also to start a dialogue to formally end the Korean War (Berlinger, 2018), something unexpected and almost unbelievable to be happening after so many years of hard tensions.

### **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

The relevance of the Non-Governmental Organizations resides on how they can influence governments no matter its size or international importance. The richness of the NGOs activities, which can extend and surpass their traditional forms of actions, relies on its ability to influence populations and resources within the international agenda (Lencucha et al, 2010)

The chart below presents how the NGOs are understood by three of the main theories within the international relations:

	<b>Liberalism/ Neoliberal Institutionalism</b>	<b>Realism/ Neorealism</b>	<b>Radicalism/ Dependency Theory</b>
<b>NGO</b>	They represent different interests and their presence facilitates collective action. Its importance is increasing.	They are not independent actors; power can only be held by the state. Any power that an NGO could have emanates from the State.	They represent dominant economic interests. Unlikely to influence the generation of political or economic change.

Source: Own elaboration with data from (2006).

Mingst (2006), studies the role of the NOGs and how they are interpreted by the different theories in the international relations. They can be seen as instruments which depend on States, and also as organisms that facilitates collective action. These NGOs can also create platforms for new trade agreements or legislation between States and Non-State entities.

As Holzscheiter (2005) maintains, the NGOs have ended with the belief that the global governance is only made by and for Nation States. NGOs are now active participants in the international relations and play a key role for dialogue and worldwide power (Raustiala, 1997). These Non-State actors can influence the State's political, cultural, and economic decisions.

Lencucha et al (2010) assert that even if the NGOs still function as an independent branch from any government, they still can influence governments and the global governance.

We have now studied that some NGOs have the resources and legitimacy to approach Nation-States and cause significative effects on their decisions. However, the importance of the NGOs and its capabilities within the international scenario are often underestimated. Even if their main role is finding new opportunities on the global stage, the NGOs often contribute to the political, economic, and social dialogue. And this shows how important an NGO can become. By extending beyond its traditional activism, these Non-State actors can mobilize populations and material resources to influence the international agenda. These characteristics related to the NGOs can be easily found within the IOC and it is one of the main reasons why the Olympic Games have the ability and legitimization to influence Nation States.

## **United Nations and the International Olympic Committee**

Apart from the NGOs, there is another group of important actors in the international scenario: The Intergovernmental Organizations (IGO). States establish these organizations, most times through a treaty. The international organization acts as an organization formed by representatives of national governments and relies on those governments for most of its decisions. This type of organization is vital for collective decisions that involve political and economic matters.

The most well-known Intergovernmental Organization is the United Nations (UN). The UN was founded after World War II to keep peace between countries while also creating international cooperation.

The IOC, on the other hand, is a “non-profit and international non-governmental organization, which holds supreme authority over the Olympic Movement” (International Olympic Committee, 2020). The International Olympic Committee is regulated by its Executive Board, which undertakes the legislative functions of the organization and guarantees that the Olympic ideals are implemented. Founded by Pierre de Coubertin more than a hundred years ago, the Olympic Games turned from what it was supposed to be the revival of the ancient Greek Olympic Games to the largest sporting event in the world.

It is important to mention the legal status of the IOC, which is mentioned in the Olympic Charter ( International Olympic Committee, 2020, p.31): “International Non-governmental, not-for-profit organization, of unlimited duration, in the form of an association with the status of a legal person, recognized by the Swiss Federal Council in accordance with an agreement entered into on 1 November 2000”. However, the IOC in its role of NGO was invited by the Un General Assembly to be a permanent observer.



Permanent observers, with the exception of the IOC and the Red Cross, are Nation States or representatives of national governments.

The relation between the IOC and the UN began to have more relevance and weight during the decades of 1980 and 1990. The years before, the IOC under President Brundage wanted to remain independent from international governing bodies and was not looking for a closer relation with the UN. However, his successor, Michael Killanin understood the importance of an international cooperation and decided to take a step.

It was not until the last decade of the XX century when the UN and the IOC decided to take part in the international peace efforts together. Since then and every two years, with the Olympic Truce being the main subject, the General Assembly reunites before the Olympic Games and signs a resolution that seeks to bring peace to the international competition. The peace period includes seven days before, the duration of the Games and seven days after.

The first UN resolution that included the Olympic Truce was signed in 1993 and it aimed to solve or prevent conflicts that could affect the Games. On the previous years, the Olympic Games were the scenario for international boycotts that were related to racial discrimination and the constant fight between the Eastern and Western blocs.

Back in 1976, the Montreal Olympic Games were boycotted by twenty-nine countries following the decision of the IOC to refuse to ban New Zealand's National Olympic Committee. The veto was requested after New Zealand's rugby team toured South Africa that same year after a sports embargo was called by the UN (Van Luijk, 2013).

After Montreal, United States started a campaign against the Soviets invading Afghanistan calling all the Western bloc to boycott the Moscow 1980 Olympic Games.

This behavior was replicated by the Eastern Bloc at Los Angeles 1984 Olympic Games with a total of fourteen countries missing the Games.

After the first UN Olympic Truce resolution, in 1993, no boycotts have occurred at the Olympic Games.

## **Diplomacy**

What we know as modern diplomacy started around the 5<sup>th</sup> century in the famous Italian city-states. Its objective was to create communication channels between the monarch and the city-states that he ruled (Trunkos, 2017). Nicolson (Nicolson, 1964, p.4) defines diplomacy as “the management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted by ambassadors and envoys; the business or art of the diplomatist” which is accurate but at the same time becomes obsolete as it does not include the new forms and expressions of diplomacy.

Diplomacy can be seen as the main tool to implement foreign policies which main objective is to achieve peace. It can also be a tool to communicate between Nation-States when conflict arises.

Over the past years, new forms of diplomacy have emerged to help and solve tensions between States in the new political, cultural, and economic scenarios. One of this forms being the public diplomacy.

## **Public Diplomacy**

Over the last century, diplomacy has changed how it performs and the actors that are involved. Public diplomacy is now considered a fundamental part of the international relations and its main objective is to achieve a satisfactory public opinion. Some of the objectives of this new diplomacy include projecting values beyond a country's border

following the necessity of new tools that allow Nation-States to keep relations with a high number of international stakeholders. Because of public diplomacy, a Nation-State position in relation to an international topic reaches a higher audience than conventional methods (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

To better understand public diplomacy, a comparison with the traditional diplomacy can be made. Within the traditional diplomacy, an international actor attempts to cope with an international scenario by communicating with another actor, whereas by using public diplomacy the same international actor tries to manage its international business by engaging with a foreign audience (Cull, 2009). And what a better audience that those who assist to a sports competition.

The intersecting phenomenon of international sporting events with public diplomacy influence the mass and digital media related to sport. This gives an important role to the mega sports events as they now act as a tool for the international diplomatic encounters (Feizabadi, 2015).

According to the European Commission (2018), international sports projects showed evidence of a positive outcome between the relationships of those actors involved.

Although the case studies are limited, some diplomatic characteristics can be found on the ones that have been analyzed:

1. Elevated engagement between the Nation-State and the third parties can be used to create interest for projects held at a local level.

2. Projects that align with the country's international development objectives, create broader international growth and diplomacy efforts achieving greater funding.

3. Projects can support the development of viable venues that achieve long-term objectives. These projects are usually focused on creating relations with high-level stakeholders.

With evidence proving the positive effect of international sports projects and its relation to engagement and relationship between States, the academia started giving more attention to the new term of Sports Diplomacy, and although this has not been studied much, can be already seen in the international scenario.

### **Sports Diplomacy**

Sport is an important tool withing the numerous international agendas. These may include peace-building treaties, cultural exchange, and efforts to achieve community development (Baker et al, 2018).

The current relevance of the “soft power” and the increase of public diplomacy within the global arena makes worth studying the new sports diplomacy. Soft power has been persuading and influencing the international relations since the Cold War ended. Joseph Nye was the one presenting for the first time this concept and since then it has developed and adjusted to the current globalization. Diplomacy can be seen as one of the most relevant parts of soft power since it presents new techniques linked to public diplomacy, branding and location awareness (Pigman, 2014).

International sports events are perceived as one of the best tools for Nation-States when looking to share their identity and culture with the world. It is also the best international scenario to find the characteristics that define the new form of sports diplomacy. Most of the features that distinguish the sports diplomacy translate in what we all know as the Olympic Games.

After the Cold War, as mentioned in the past paragraphs, the soft power and soft diplomacy started gaining importance. The diplomacy got stronger and moved from only solving tensions between Nation-States to also exchange cultural and social backgrounds in an effort to broaden the scope of the international actors (Zhang, 2013).

Within this new diplomatic scope, sport plays a key role. It can create public interest and call the public audience to set a beneficial location for a country to handle its international relations. One of the most relevant characteristics of sports diplomacy is that it is able to provide an unofficial reason to meet, this way, international actor can start talks and reduce tensions. A good example of this is the Ping Pong diplomacy, where United States tried to improve its relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) by establishing contact through its table tennis team.

### **The Ping Pong diplomacy**

The famous Ping-Pong diplomacy took place in 1971 starring China and the United States. China used sport as a tool within their international relations. The role of sport in China's foreign relations served as one of the first examples of sports diplomacy (Zhang, 2013).

Through the last years of the Cold War, the PRC sponsored sport venues for countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The country also provided coaches and through sport expanded its political ideology beyond its borders.

A perfect example of this type of diplomatic exchange can be found within the case of the Ping Pong Diplomacy. It was 1971 and the World Table Tennis Championships meeting was being held in Nagoya, Japan. Mao Zedong's was attending the meeting and invited the American table tennis team to visit China after the sports competition. This was a huge step in the relations between China and the US after many

years of hard relations. The next year, the Chinese table tennis team had an —unofficial visit— and became the first group from the PRC to have a public coverage in twenty-three years (Eckstein, 1993).

The reconciliation between the People's Republic of China and United States was achieved that same year and the Ping-Pong diplomacy was the one smoothing the tensions and giving the first approach. After the reconciliation, Nixon announced new policies applying to the PRC. These included the exclusion of trade restrictions and allowing the Chinese to travel to America.

As Zhang (2013) asserts, this was a political breakthrough in the international relations and mostly for the PRC. This new international scenario achieved thanks to the Ping Pong diplomacy gave the PRC the opportunity to be part of organizations such as the UN and afterwards join the IOC and other sports organizations.

### **Pyeongchang 2018**

In January 2018, the IOC publicly shared that twenty two athletes the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) have been invited to compete in the Winter Olympic Games to be held in Pyeongchang, marking its ninth participation at the Winter Olympic Games. The North Korean athletes competed in three sports and five disciplines.

But this was not easy at all. The Winter Olympic Games were about to start when the Democratic People's Republic of Korea confirmed its participation to the sports event to be held in its counterpart territory. Both Koreas have not held a formal summit or political for ten years before reuniting after the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympic Games.

The decision of having North Korea and South Korea marching together at the Opening Ceremony was reached in January 2018 after some meetings between both countries' sport representatives and encouraged by the IOC. Thomas Bach —president of

the IOC— confirmed that the Korean athletes would participate at the Pyeongchang Olympics and that this has been agreed through the “Olympic Korean Peninsula Declaration”.

By marching together at the Opening Ceremony, South Korea and North Korea, proved one of the most important characteristics of sports diplomacy which states that seeking common ground through sports will help bridging grounds between States in conflict.

Two athletes carried the unification flag, one from each National Olympic Committee (NOC). The man and woman carrying the flag wore a dedicated uniform designed for the Korean Unification Flag and which used the acronym “COR”. Some scholars argue that this team unification was only setting the field of legitimacy and acceptance before a political meeting was held between their leaders.

Just one month before the Games, North Korea decided to send athletes and cheerleaders to the upcoming Winter Olympic Games in South Korea after the two countries ended what was their first official talks in a long time (McCurry, 2018).

The talks —mainly concerning about Pyongyang’s ballistic missile and nuclear programmes— were held at the Peace House located at Panmunjom (South Korea). At the beginning they focused on North Korea’s potential participation in the Winter Olympics as a way to start an unofficial dialogue.

In its role of international and secondary actor, the IOC got in talks with both countries and finally signed the 'Olympic Korean Peninsula Declaration', which ruled with regards to the unified women's ice hockey. The coach from South Korean was selected as head coach and it was stated that at least three players from North Korea should play in the team on each match.

This was the first time that the IOC allowed two NOCs to compete on one team. While they were preparing to compete together, the IOC together with its partner the Olympic Channel, filmed the documentary “We Are One”. The film details the inclusion of the DPRK with the Republic of Korea at Pyeongchang 2018 and how they were able to achieve a successful public diplomacy through their team at the Opening Ceremony.

This documentary also follows the journey of the women’s ice hockey team which is full of emotions and presents to the international audience as an example of unity and teamwork (IOC, 2018). The production, although emotional, is also considered to be a tool for good publicity and to start solving the existent tensions. Just as it happened with the Ping Pong diplomacy and the tennis players that served as good publicity.

Exceptions were made by the IOC to let some athletes from the DPRK compete at Pyeongchang 2018 knowing that if the Olympic scenario served as a peaceful arena for both countries, its legitimization as the largest sports event will increase. And the best of all, public diplomacy is for free.

During the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games, South Korean President Moon Jae-in received a handwritten invitation from North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un inviting him to visit the North. This was delivered by Kim’s sister who was attending the Olympics on behalf of Kim Jong-un. This was the first unofficial approach between both countries and was possible thanks to the Winter Olympic Games giving an unofficial location.

This first approach led to the future summit between North Korea and South Korea. It was the first time in more than a decade that both leaders reunited.

Two months after the Pyeongchang Olympics, Kim and Moon met and started a political dialogue. Kim Jong-un North crossed into South Korea after more than sixty



years of not visiting the south. The last time had been back in 1953 together with the Korean war.

Two more summits were held that same year (2018) and Moon become the first South Korean president since 2007 to travel North. The Pyeongchang Olympic Games were a valuable tool used as sports diplomacy to achieve future meetings between the Korean leaders. This not only marked the beginning of an historic summit, but also signified broad implications for the world and the international relations.

## V. Results

The following results aim to prove that the Olympic Games have enough relevance within the global scenario to become international actors. The importance of the public perception with regards to the Olympic Games and to both Koreas relies on its capability to achieve a favorable public and sports diplomacy. As Chatzigianni (2017) asserts, the IOC has enough expertise to become an international authority. This authority and worldwide influence gives the International Olympic Committee sufficient legitimacy to perform as an expert, not only at the Olympics but also in other sport events and diplomacy issues.

After analyzing the first 25 most relevant news that include the words “North Korea” and “South Korea”, within the specific interval times, the following results were found.

The first search included the words: North Korea and South Korea and its interval of time was from the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2017 to the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 2018.

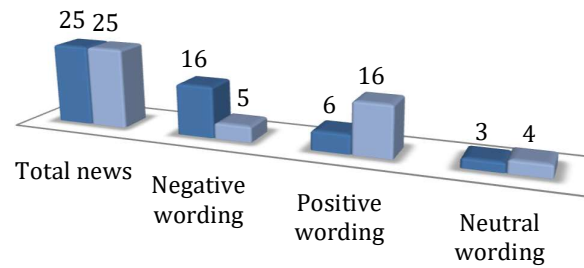
Findings: From the analysed articles, 16 out of 25 news had negative wording in their titles, being the word “war” the most repeated. The word “war” appeared 4 times which represents the 16%.

Although 5 articles spoke about the Olympic Games to be held in Pyeongchang, only 2 referred to the event on their title. One had negative wording and one positive wording.

The second search included the words: North Korea and South Korea and its interval of time was from the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2018 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 2018. Findings: The analysed articles included mostly positive titles with the word “peace” appearing 4 times in the total of 16 titles with positive wording. The titles include the Olympic event 5 times,

## News' titles

■ FIRST SEARCH (Before the Games) ■ SECOND SEARCH (During and after the Games)

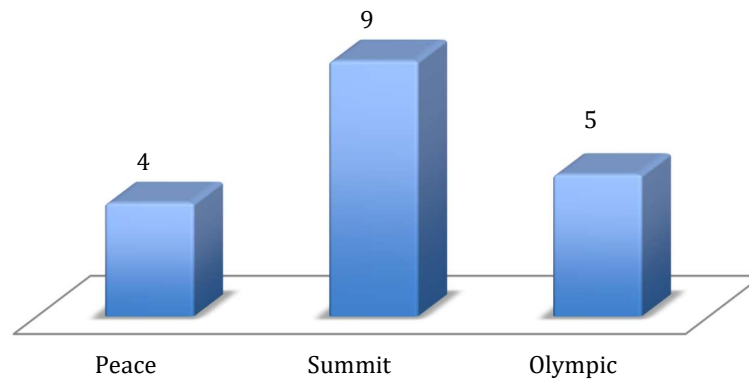


meaning that the sports event was at least being referred to in 20% of the most relevant news related to North Korea and South Korea.

Additionally, 9 articles from the total of 25 referred to the after meeting and summit celebrated between North Korea and South Korea. Overall, the one held in April, where the leaders of each country signed a declaration committing to denuclearization and formally bringing to end the 65-year-old conflict.

## Topics within the titles

■ SECOND SEARCH (During and after the Games)



To prove the Olympic Games approach in a quantitative scale, the term “Olympic Games” was searched when the competition time was on. The graphics and searches from Google Trends show that every Olympic year, and even more in the Olympic Games

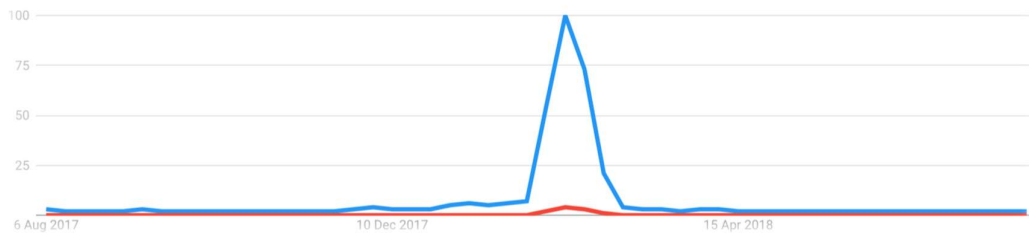
weeks', the searches increase in a significantly manner, whereas in years that are not Olympic, the searches have a steady search.

Google explains that the “interest over time” exposed on these searches explains that the numbers represent relative number of searches for a specific location and time. The relation to the highest point of value can be set with 100 as the peak popularity for the term.

The first search the words: Olympics (blue) and Olympic Games (red) within the interval of time from the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2017 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 2018.

Findings: There is a peak of searches related to both terms while the Winter Olympic Games in 2018. Meaning there is a public interested on the event on specific dates.

#### Olympics VS Olympic Games



Source: Google Trends, 2020

#### Related queries for Olympics



1	olympics 2018	100
2	winter olympics	93
3	the olympics	53
4	2018 winter olympics	33
5	olympics schedule	20

Source: Google Trends, 2020

## Related queries for Olympic Games

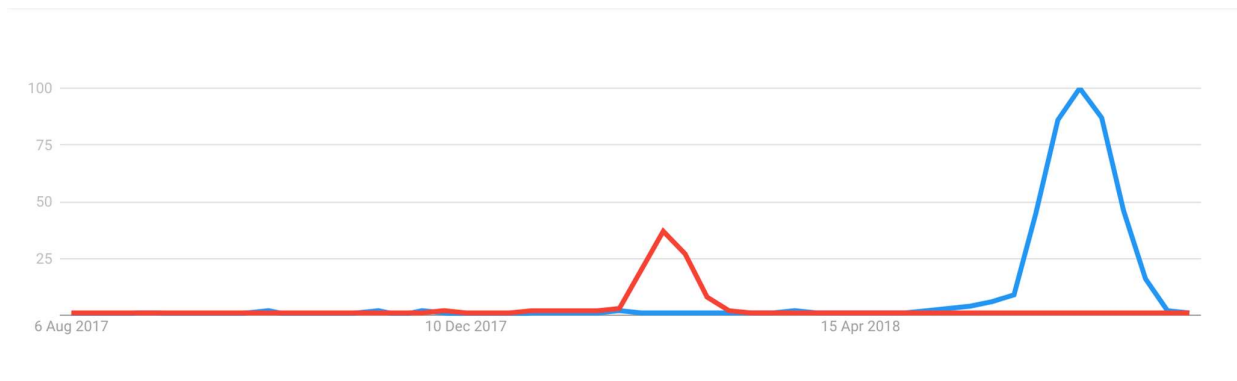


Source: Google Trends, 2020

The second search includes the most searched topic within the time range selected and considering as “Rising” (which are related topics with the biggest increase in search frequency since the last time period) was the 2018 World Cup. Since the World Cup is also a sports event, it was decided to compare the search with the Olympics.

Blue represents the searches for the 2018 World Cup and red the searches for the term Olympics.

## 2018 World Cup VS Olympics (shows increase against last year's searches)



Source: Google Trends, 2020

At this point is important to mention that although for the year of 2018 the FIFA World Cup had far more searches than the Winter Olympic Games, since 1970, North

Korea has only participated in World Cup celebrated in South Africa and ended last of its Group with a 32<sup>nd</sup> position. Not participating in the sports event makes it impossible to reunite the leaders in an “unofficial” way.

Sports events where both, North Korea and South Korea took place in the 24 months before Pyeongchang 2018 are limited. The only one that can be mentioned is the Ice Hockey Women's World Championship (second division) from 2017 in South Korea, but it clearly had less audience than the Olympic Games and it cannot be considered an ideal scenario for sports diplomacy.

## **VI. Discussion and conclusion**

The aim for this thesis was to prove that the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games were used as a tool for sports diplomacy and ended up with the successful reunion of the leaders from North Korea and South Korea.

Through the pages presented in this thesis, evidence has been provided in order to show the compliance between the characteristics of sports diplomacy and the 2018 Winter Olympics.

Through the bibliography review it was mentioned how the Winter Olympic Games provided an unofficial motivation —support the Korean team— and also an unofficial scenario —South Korea was seen as the Olympics venue— for the Korean leaders to meet and start solving tensions. Kim and Moon started the conversations by addressing their Olympic teams and not the denuclearization, which was the true and final purpose.

The documentary “We Are One” starring the women’s hockey team show how this team helped to create awareness for the international relationship in their role of sport ambassadors and complying with another characteristic of the sports diplomacy.

Although this team only got to score one goal in the whole Ice Hockey Olympic Tournament, they filled the screens, news articles and highlights with stories full of emotion and perseverance improving the image of both Koreas in the world.

Characteristics that define the sports diplomacy are easy found through the months before the Games, during and most of all, after the Winter Olympics ended.

The event served as a perfect example of how sports diplomacy can be used in today’s world and through the current political and economic tensions between Nation States.

Sport can be understood as a universal language which helps to create individual and collective boundaries. Sport has also the legitimacy to act as a social institution and influence the international actors and the international relations.

Nelson Mandela noted that, “Sport has the power to change the world” and nowadays the international community knows that these changes are not only peace objectives but also involve political and economic resources and decisions.

Sports diplomacy is an effective strategy to reunite countries, public or private sectors and even individuals to solve tensions or improve relations.

Further steps recommended by the author are to start developing sports diplomacy social research to be applied in the international scenario. Sports diplomacy can be used not only to solve disputes but also to maintain existent good relations. Scholars of the international community are invited to start studying how the sports events are involving characteristics of sports diplomacy and how could this sustain a more efficient way of negotiating.

Finally, it can be said that the Koreans won the best of all medals: gold in diplomacy.



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