Soft Power and The Olympics: The Case of 2018 Winter Olympics

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Despite of recent arguments that Olympics is not worth it in creating the positive economic impact, Olympics still has been considered as a powerful tool for enhancing the overall positive image of the hosting country and city. The concept of soft power (Nye, 1990) offers a lens for a justification for investing in hosting such a mega sport event as Olympics. Indeed, successful hosting of the Olympic Games provides invaluable opportunities for governments who seek to attract others with their values, culture, national brand and most importantly, in a soft power context, universal friendship and peace-building (Han, 2018; Manzenreiter, 2010). In case of the 2018 Winter Olympics, mobilizing the roles of friendship and peace-building as the part of soft power was most significant since the Korean Peninsula was divided into North and South after the Korean War. The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games as nation’s soft power strategy. Through content analysis this study empirically investigates South Korea’s strategic use of the Olympics as a practice of soft power. The findings show South Korea developed a generally positive global image through the 2018 Games in terms of a soft power context. Specifically, the 2018 Olympics not only played a significant role in leading the effective and successful dialogue between South Korea and North Korea, but also contributed to reduce the tension and fear of war in the Korean Peninsula.