

Nov 04, 2016 by **R.S. Zaharna**

Culture Posts: Domestic Stakeholders in Public Diplomacy, Lessons from Brazil ^[1]

What happens when the domestic public seemingly overtakes a country's public diplomacy agenda?

Brazil looked like it had scored a double goal when it secured the bid to host the 2014 World Cup *and* 2016 Olympics. A massive promotional campaign to garner world attention was well underway. And then came the massive protests by the Brazilian public.

Initial protests in early June were tied to an R\$.20 hike in bus fare. On June 20, a million people took to the streets more than 80 Brazilian cities. The fare increase was revoked in an effort to calm the streets. However, protests continued.

Increasingly the people began linking their complaints for better public services with the money being spent on preparations for the game. Stunned government and FIFA officials pleaded with the public not to blame the games. The situation is still fluid but already there are several insights and valuable lessons for Brazil and indeed all countries about publics and their roles in public diplomacy.

Nation Branding & Mega Events

The protests reinforce the critical role of the domestic publics in national image campaigns. Image campaigns are designed with foreign publics upper most in mind. Yet, the domestic public often determines the success or failure of the campaign, even those tied to mega events.

Traditionally, mega events have represented a public diplomacy coup for host countries. Jarol Manheim, a pioneer in strategic public diplomacy who studied the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, was among the first to document the image benefits for a country. Post 9/11 PD scholarship has largely reinforced this positive image-building opportunity of mega events.

When Brazil secured the bid to host the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics, the government embarked on the traditional PD route of targeting foreign audiences. It had to reassure the world it was capable and ready to host the world, and that the world should ready itself to come to Brazil.

Former Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva officially launched Brazil's promotional campaign at the close of the World Cup games in Johannesburg in July 2010. The massive campaign includes TV commercials, newspaper advertising, airport and city panels, a book, YouTube channel, and mobile features. The campaign developed by the Brazil Ministry of Tourism through Embratur (Brazilian Tourism Institute) is part of a larger strategy to increase

tourism by 300% by 2020. The focus on foreign publics is clear from the title of the campaign and signature video, “Brazil is Calling You.”

Video

The video features idyllic images of a foreign couple enjoying the wonders of Brazil – beaches, mountains, waterfalls. High end sports activities at exclusive resorts and restaurants. No bus rides.

Balancing Publics & Mega Events

The protests underscore the importance of the engaging and maintaining domestic support when hosting mega events. Public diplomacy may focus on wooing foreign visitors, but it is the domestic public who bears the burdens. They need to be constantly reminded that the sacrifices are worth it and motivated when the going gets tough.

The logistical challenges Brazil faced are particularly daunting. The only other country to host the World Cup and the Olympics back-to-back was the United States. However, as commentators have noted that was a pre-9/11 era when security concerns and technical costs dwarf what they are today.

The Brazilian protests are raising serious questions about the monetary costs of the games in light of Brazil’s own domestic needs – education, health, transportation. Also coming to light are the social and political costs of forced eviction and police brutality against poor and marginalized residents of areas surrounding the events’ locations. The income disparity highlighted by the tourism video and the protesters basic demands are grating.

From Publics to Strategic Stakeholders

The protests underscore the importance of developing a nuanced view of publics based on their roles. Public diplomacy has taken a leap in moving from passive *audiences* of the mass media era to the participatory *publics* of social media. States now seek to “engage” publics. That’s a good thing, but “engagement” still presumes the state is in control of the initiative and managing that public engagement.

A next critical step is to move PD thinking from publics to *stakeholders* and ultimately *strategic stakeholders*.

Stakeholders have a vested interest or stake in issues related to the PD initiative. Looking at Brazil, the generalized “public” is a “stakeholder.” The Brazilian public has a stake in how their country is being promoted. They also have a stake in the cost being spent on the games. En masse, the response of the Brazilian public as stakeholders can impact national PD efforts.

Strategic stakeholders move the communication dynamics up another notch from responding to a government initiative to proactively challenging a government’s PD strategy. Strategic stakeholders have a broader strategic vision and the motivation and means to pursue that strategic vision.

In Brazil, signs of strategic stakeholders are abundant. The rapid escalation in size, geographic spread and sustained duration of the protests suggests this is more than a purely spontaneous or isolated response to a bus fare hike. Additionally, long before the current protests domestic groups created horizontal network structures.

One organization that has received attention for orchestrating the protests is O Movimento Passe Livre (MPL). MPL, known in English as the Free Fare Movement, has been protesting since 2003 for free bus and subway transportation for the public and is known for its horizontal structure. It described itself as such in a June 24 letter to Brazilian president: “We are autonomous, horizontal and non-partisan social movement.”

MPL is mostly comprised of young university students. When the police violently attacked their protest in early June, they had the social media skills to select and circulate media content. The Portuguese hashtag #mudaBrazil jumped the language barrier with #changeBrazil.

People are being mobilized outside the traditional “organization” framework. The Comitê Popular da Copa e Olimpíadas (popular committees of the World Cup and Olympics), for example, is comprised of social movements, NGOs, academics, labor movements, and representatives from civil society. These people’s committees established back in 2011 have reached out horizontally to discuss social issues and human rights violations including forcible evictions related to the games. They have branches in the 12 host cities of the World Cup matches as well as online portal. As a counter protest, they have developed their own games and copyleft mascot, Saci.

Investigative journalists have also emerged as domestic strategic stakeholder. Information is the life blood of the advocacy networks.

“Media NINJA,” a collective of independent journalists, has been very active in documenting police abuse against the protesters, including live broadcasts from different cities. NINJA has posted calls for volunteers help translate materials in response to requests by international media requests. The hope is to allow a “grassroots message” to reach international audiences.

Pública, founded by a team of women journalists as the first nonprofit investigative journalism center in Brazil, has also been active. It has developed special investigative arm for the World Cup, #CopaPública. In December 2011, a coalition of the popular committees and Pública released a 112-page report entitled “Mega-eventos e violações de Direitos Humanos no Brasil” (Mega-Events and Human Rights Violations in Brazil). Pública’s 2011 story was cross-posted in the Huffington Post.

Digital Domestic-Diaspora Link

The Brazilian experience has exposed the vital link between domestic and diaspora publics. In reality and theory, the tendency may be to see the two publics as separate. Digital communication is dissolving that separation.

Diaspora publics are able to share with their families and friends events on the ground and in real time. Not surprisingly, the protests in Brazil were followed with solidarity protests by Brazilian expatriates in Berlin, Dublin, Montreal, New York, Washington, San Diego, and

Melbourne. The diaspora physically brings the message from home to their host countries.

Protest of U.K. based Brazilians outside Parliament in London June 18th, 2013 photo Guy Corbishley

In cyberspace, the digital diaspora are using their experience and knowledge to bridge cultural and linguistic differences for their domestic compatriots. A video developed by Carla Toledo Dauden, about a young Brazilian who went to California to study film has gone viral on YouTube, with over 3 million views in less than two weeks. From a PD perspective, that's more views than any government-produced video.

Yet, more important is the meta-message, or strategic PD significance of her video format. Her fluency in visual techniques is evident as is her command of English. However, by dubbing the video in Portuguese, and speaking in English, she is not only speaking to global publics but for the Brazilian domestic public. Her video has become a tool for them to augment their voice.

From State-Initiated PD to State-Responsive PD

Perhaps the most important insight from the Brazil's experience is what a changing view of the public means for public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is still presented as a state-based, state-initiated activity. States are still focused on other states as their primary PD rivals.

Publics are rapidly emerging potential PD rivals for states. Strategic public stakeholders have the communication strategies and tools to challenge governments – and compete with them in the PD arena. Publics have turned the tables from state-initiated public diplomacy to state-responsive public diplomacy. States must respond, and that response will have strategic value in the international arena.

The challenges to the state from strategic stakeholders represent a second wake up call for public diplomacy. States need to move quickly in developing effective response strategies as part of their PD repertoire. The benign, relationship-building approach to public diplomacy was the new public diplomacy. The future of public diplomacy takes the relational and networking strategies to the next level of navigating non-cooperative, rival PD networks.

*** Many thanks to Paula Silveira Orlando, a native of São Paulo, and Ph.D. student in the School of Communication, American University for her assistance.*
