

# The World Cup in South Africa 2010:

Media, audiences and identity in a global event

Karin Becker, Robert Kautsky, Andreas Widholm  
Stockholm University, Sweden

[becker@jmk.su.se](mailto:becker@jmk.su.se), [kautsky@jmk.su.se](mailto:kautsky@jmk.su.se), [widholm@jmk.su.se](mailto:widholm@jmk.su.se)

Address inquiries to:

Karin Becker

Journalism, Media and Communication (JMK)

Stockholm University, Box 27861

11593 Stockholm, Sweden

tel: +46(0)70 5595431 (cell), +46(0) 8161067 (work)

## **Introduction**

With the opening ceremony of the FIFA 2010 World Cup next June, the whole world will be watching as South Africa hosts this global event. Simultaneously a mega-event and a media event, FIFA 2010 offers a unique possibility to examine the complex interrelation between global and local events, between local and transnational audiences, as played out on a massive scale. In this global play, the media are a central nexus where power and identity are discursively formed. At the same time, media are changing rapidly as a consequence of new technologies resulting in changes in people's experiences of themselves and others. Add to this the increase in viewers' activities and participation in contemporary media flows, which pose numerous new questions regarding the complex "play" between media representations, identities and performances that arise in connection to this mega-event.

Mega-events are created by media; through mediation they become more than mere large-scale projects. Over the last century the institutions of media and sport have converged, forming a cultural complex of global proportions that gains particular power during mega-events such as the Olympics or the World Cup (Rowe 2009). Media's capitalization transforms them, as they grow ever larger, both in frequency and in scale. In recent decades a number of factors, not least the digital technologies which give rise to new media platforms and reduce the friction in the worldwide circulation of media content, have made the mediated mega-event the case par excellence for the study of media globalization. In a rapidly shifting media environment, it is highly important to develop analytical tools and theoretical perspectives appropriate to interrogating mega-events and their impact on the world.

This World Cup is the first in Africa, taking place at a time when media reach new levels of convergence. "Twenty-ten" is being heralded as an opportunity for South Africa, and Africa as a whole, to rid itself of stereotypes and to become an equal player on the global stage. At the same time, media are changing rapidly as a consequence of new technologies resulting in changes in people's experiences of themselves and others. Few cultural forms are more effusively tied to collective senses of belonging than the activities we see in connection with sport. Football, the most global game of all, provides the basis for local, national as well as post-national identities.

The project we are presenting here is an initial step in a three-year study investigating how local and transnational events are mediated through public space, focusing on the screen practices that come into play as large format and handheld screens are used in arenas of public life. The research program includes the World Cup in South Africa as promising platform to investigate how cultural identity and citizenship are negotiated in transnational milieus of media consumption. In this paper we are mainly focusing on the audience, and specifically fans' media use and the performance of identity within the public viewing areas (PVAs) established for the World Cup. Together with colleagues and students, we are gathering material on the ways that fans use these media spaces, including their responses to media content and to other fans. Our sample, which we are currently gathering, will include material from cities where the World Cup is being played, and in cities in other countries, including both those whose teams are represented and those who are not. Through our observations, of fans from different places, their appearance, their interactions and the ways they use their own media to convey their experience to others in other locations, we expect to gain insights into new forms of media convergence that increasingly characterize the mega-event. How do football fans from different parts of the world perform, negotiate and mediate their identity in these environments? How do they document and communicate their experiences through the use of new media technologies (mobile phones, computers etc) and through active participation in social Internet networks such as Twitter and on-line sites for posting their pictures and texts?

In this paper we address these questions, first through considering the World Cup as a global mega-event, then through an examination of some theoretical implications this carries for an expanding screen culture, followed by a brief description of the Fan Parks, or public viewing areas where we are carrying out our fieldwork, and finally in some methodological considerations of the planned 2010 World Cup research project.

### **Re-mediating Global Events**

The World Cup of football, returning every four years, can be considered “global” from several points of view. The game initiates global human relocation to a particular place for its duration; it activates patterns of global media production and global media consumption; it attracts a global form of advertisement from a diversity of transnational companies; and last but not least, it constitutes a complex mixture of “senses of belonging”, where the traditional

dynamics of identities and media representations might be challenged. FIFA 2010 is expected to break the 2006 record of 26 billion cumulative TV viewers worldwide. Television is still the dominant medium for distributing the game, with the broadcasts expanding onto complementary platforms such as cell phones. Whether watching the game in a stadium or on TV, on a handset, or in front of a screen in a public viewing area, the fans of 2010 will take a more active part in the mediation of the games than ever before, but the extent to which identities are recast as public spaces are transformed in this process is still a largely unexplored area within social research.

Time is also recast within the mega-event. The World Cup, like other mega-events, becomes “historic” through a media frame that describes it as a moment when history is being made, as the passing of an era, or the dawn of a new one. Like Germany’s hosting of the 2006 World Cup, framed as an opportunity to overcome that country’s past, FIFA 2010 is described as a way for South Africa and, by extension the African continent to enter a new era, establishing itself as an more equal partner on the world stage. The mega-event also stands outside of time, however, as media producers and fans alike interrupt daily routines for the duration. Program tableaux are redrawn and fans stop whatever they are doing to watch a key moment. Time “stops” as fans around the world experience the event simultaneously, even if the experience itself can have very different qualities, depending on the viewer’s location and identity.

The mega-event’s complex time dimensions are central to what both Giddens and Beck have described as the reflexivity of contemporary modern life (Giddens 1990, Beck, 2000). The media’s constituent position in this relationship is evident in the ways media continually turn upon and reflect themselves in their own coverage. Moments are replayed again and again, and the media place themselves at center stage, seen for example in the ongoing series of media “firsts”, in what Swedish media scholar Jan Ekecrantz once described as a *demimonde* of media reflexivity (Ekecrantz 1994). Add to this the increase in viewers’ activities and participation in contemporary media flows, and it is apparent that old concepts of interconnectivity are no longer adequate to explain the complex “play” between media representations, identities and performances that arise in the context of mega-events. The magnitude of the 2010 World Cup is also expected to generate a diversity of images via social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and through tens of thousands of blogging supporters that will produce interpretations of the events that are highly urgent to investigate.

Over the last century the institutions of media and sport have converged, resulting in a multifaceted global complex that gains particular power during mega-events such as the Olympics or the World Cup (Rowe 2009). The media's capacity of capitalizing on such events have reached new proportions, not least as new media platforms have increased the available modes of representation connected to sport. In this quickly changing media environment, it is highly urgent to develop new approaches to the study of audience participation in the mediatisation of mega sport events.

### **“Being there” on Screen**

Every four years, the World Cup of football initiates global human relocation to a particular place, activating patterns of global media production and global media consumption as well as attracting global advertising from transnational companies. Several media scholars have highlighted how the development of global satellite technologies provide the basis of the new global order in television (Volkmer 2008; Chalaby 2003; Rai & Cottle 2007). In fact, the simultaneous consumption of television images can be considered the very basis for the globalization of football. The latest viewing figures from the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA), suggests that the World Cup television audience doubled between 1986 and 2006, and the World Cup Germany was broadcast to 214 countries, with a cumulative audience of all games estimated to reach over 26 billion individuals (FIFA 2009). In an earlier study of representations of the 2006 FIFA World Cup, the researchers found that media framed African countries in regional terms, while European countries were represented in national terms, at the same time as pre-established notions of cultural difference were consistently reproduced (Widholm & Kautsky 2008).

Television plays a crucial role in creating shared experiences of global events, at the same time offering a large variation in the ways people consume and participate in the same events as new screens and screen practices appear. The TV-set, previously tied to domestic media consumption, has migrated out of the home, where it contributes to the site specificity of everyday spaces, such as airports, waiting rooms and shopping malls, through both its material form – the screen – and its content (McCarthy 2001). New forms of media consumption and use arise in these out-of-home settings. These techniques of mediation and representation have become integral to sport, as we seen when major sport stadia are outfitted with large screens, as Rowe and Stevenson note “for the convenience of the co-present

spectator concerned that ‘being there’ may be an inferior experience to screen viewing from home, pub, or town square” (Rowe & Stevenson 2006: 547).

Collectively watching giant outdoor screens is an example of a new form of mass participation, where audiences sometimes number in tens of thousands, all aligning their attention towards the same screen. This is also a practice that differs from older forms of television consumption, as it is massively participatory, where individuals and groups meet in a place and negotiate their understanding of the event, at the same time often producing their own media. In contrast to the pervasive withdrawal into a private sphere noted by analysts of the early 1990s, these various screen practices appear to be reasserting the public culture that characterised an earlier modernism (McQuire 2006, Sennett 1977). The trajectory that moved social life into the private and domestic sphere around media consumption (watching TV at home) is now being confused as new generations of mobile devices and media technologies shift media consumption into the spaces of public life. Public space becomes a mediaspace in the dialectical sense developed by Couldry and McCarthy (2004), a perspective that directs attention both to how media define space and to the spatial arrangements – both social and physical – that frame the media forms that materialize there. Whereas some theorists have argued that the spread of media and communications technologies contribute to a loss of a sense of place, creating uniformity and standardization that obscures any local specificity (Relph 1976, Augé 1995), media practices create spatial relationships that are nevertheless always anchored in a specific time and place. In a recent large scale Swedish study of media consumption in the quasi-public space of a shopping mall, researchers found a mediatized environment where visual display forms identified the mall as a simultaneously public, commercial, local and globalized space, and where even activities associated with the domestic sphere were encouraged, as a campaign urged visitors to “feel at home” there (Becker et al. 2001, Fornäs et al. 2007). Despite ongoing efforts to draw clear distinctions between different kinds of space, by regulating what signs could hang where, and what social activities the space could be used for, this “public” space remained a mixed, if contested, environment for various forms of sociality (Becker 2001, 2002). Today, alongside the architectural and spatial features, signage and other visual attributes that characterize a space as public, we find forms of display and social behavior where media play a central role and that have previously been associated with private and domestic domains. The convergence of public and private screen-based media points to an expanding range of screen practices that suggest a transformation of contemporary screen culture (Friedberg 2003). Like other

manifestations of media convergence, screen culture involves “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences” (Jenkins 2006: 2). The intertwining of local and globalized media forms and experience that occurs during the public screen event includes four dimensions that are relevant to the present study. First, there is the *convergence of media technologies*, as television, computers and digital cameras and telephones become intertwined in reporting and experiencing events. Second, there is the effect that these media displays and practices have on *public space*, both physically and in the forms of sociality that arise among participants (McQuire 2008). Third, there are the ways the ways people in other, distant places become participants in the event, through the *mediatized social practices* that connect them (Morley 2000, Rantanen 2005). The ritual aspects of these media events, expand as ever larger and more distant publics are drawn in to what become globalized forms of ritual experience (Dayan & Katz 1992, Becker 1995b, Couldry 2003). Finally, following recent research on participatory media cultures (Jenkins 2006) we see the problematic distinction between media consumption and production being challenged by *fluid forms of media content* that are continually reformed as they move across platforms and through the social networks that comprise contemporary media space. A specific such media space studied in this project is the so-called “fan park”, a site set up by FIFA and collaborating partners during the World Cup. Entry to the fan parks is free, and open to anyone. For many visitors and fans, the fan park will be the only opportunity for them to see a given match. Questions arise as to what kind of “place” the fan park is, located in a specific setting yet connected through media to other places, including other fan parks, but also through fans’ use of their own media?

The fan parks, initially developed by FIFA for the 2006 World Cup in Germany, gather hundreds of thousands of supporters without tickets to collectively experience the games in front of large screens. In order to control the fan sites, FIFA and the local organization committee (LOC) have developed guidelines to secure uniform standards on everything from security to commercial rights. According to the South African government: “local products in categories other than those of the commercial affiliates to be sold at the official fan park, can be sold. However, these products should be sold "unbranded" to safeguard the exclusive rights of the commercial affiliates.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sa2010.gov.za/node/668>

## **Methodological considerations**

Following historian Lisa Gitelman (2006), a distinction is made between a medium as a delivery technology or platform that enables communication, and the set of protocols associated with the medium, that is the social and cultural practices that grow up around it. The distinction provides a way of looking at media practices as protocols that emerge and flow through different media platforms. Thus, the televised sports event in South Africa that is captured on a mobile phone camera by a Swedish fan and sent to a friend at home is an example of a single protocol shaped by the activities of the participant at the event, even as it crosses different delivery technologies. A telling example of the media discourse around the world cup relating to social media was seen on May 4 on CNN.com where Etan Horowitz wrote:

*“Social media now connects millions around the world -- 50 million tweets are sent daily while Facebook boasts more than 400 million active users -- a development that will allow fans separated by distance to celebrate goals or critique referee decisions together online”*

In the same article, FIFA head of new media, Matt Stone gave a his perspective on social media, stating that: "...there will be so much more media consumed, used and published in 2010 than in 2006. Social media can bring fans closer together and give fans more opportunity to communicate with each other". Evident from the quotes above are that established media outlets such as CNN (and most probably other large transnational actors), but also FIFA, expect social media to be highly influential on the forms of fan participation that will arise in South Africa.

Against a backdrop of recent technological developments and new media formats, the research looks at how these are used in public space. Taking our point of departure in events that capture the attention of publics in different parts of the world we will be exploring how these events are documented and remediated through social and cultural practices that involve screen technologies. In these sites, our questions include; what identities do members of the audience express or perform, in their appearance, in their responses to events (on and off screen) in the area, and in their interactions with others? And secondly, what media do they use, and how do they use these media?

Ethnographic methods, including participant observation, are used to study each of the public screen events. We are drawing upon previous experience with studies where these methods



were used to document dynamic environments of public space (Becker 2000, 2004). Visual documentation using video and photography focuses on the physical space, the location of the screens, and the activities and interactions of participants. Brief interviews are carried out with participants about their presence at the event, whether they came alone or with others, and about their media practices. Participants who are observed using private media during the event are then asked to describe their activity, including what form of communication they are engaged in, with whom, and where the “receiver” is located. Where appropriate, we ask them to send digital copies of the pictures they take to the research team. At the present stage in the project we are developing a methodological toolkit to be used at different sites around the world by ourselves as well as our colleagues and students.

The planned multi-local fieldwork will target a number of events during the World Cup, from the kick-off of the first match, to the finals. By using a network of researcher we will have large amounts of material to analyze from the same events, seen through the lenses of varying screen practices around the world. In addition to interviews and field-notes from participant observation, which will consist the body of data, we will collect media content from mainstream news media as well as news agencies, expected to be especially interesting in relation to questions around media reflexivity. Also, a project blog will be used to exchange ideas between researchers at different sites during the World Cup, and current plans include performing an experimental “Twitterography”, participating in the online flow of tweets between fans around the globe.

While each participating researcher will focus on areas of special interest to them, we have set a number of features that we will have in common. Sharing these common approaches will ensure that the data collected by the different participants will be comparable and contribute to the project aims. Without going into too much detail, the following is a short outline of the kind of information that will be collected to give an overall idea of the project:

Arriving at the PVA site, the area is documented using pictures and sketches of the layout of the area, where people gather, where screen(s) are situated as well as notes of what is shown on the screen. Special notes are made of how barriers are constructed and how they transform the space, security, guards, and gates; to what extent does the place as a commercial place interact with the event as a FIFA world cup as a whole, how are the economic structures of the World Cup expressed in the site, on screens, in surroundings; what vending sites and types of products are sold; what content shown on screen; etc.

Turning the attention to the audience, how do people interact with each other and which language do they speak; how and when is the audience actively engaged with the screen; what media do the audience produce themselves, and how do they combine their participation in the PVA event/screen culture with their use of personal media; what fan signs and symbols – clothing, caps, painted faces – indicating national and/or club identities are displayed; etc. Looking at the screen, we examine what is shown - the game itself or other things; what local connections are made to the screening site, what connections are made to other screens as expressions of media reflexivity, and so on.

In interviews with members of the audience, questions will revolve around their participation – their motivations for coming to the site, their networks and their meetings - as well as their media use and production.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has attempted to provide a framework in preparation for a larger analysis of the mediation of FIFA 2010 as a mega-event that engages media and audiences from across the globe. Our research is exploring the mediated identities that emerge through the complex web of national and transnational coverage of the World Cup and participants' own media use. In the ongoing study, we will continue to examine the ways local, regional, national and transnational media intersect and transverse each other as identities are represented and performed in specific media contexts.

Initial findings of the fieldwork regarding the ways fans and audiences express and perform their identities, in particular through their own media practices, will be presented in a preliminary form at the WEJC conference in Grahamstown, South Africa, July 2010.

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