

## Research Article

# Soft Power and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar: Learning from Experiences of Past Mega-Sporting Event Hosts

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## Abstract

The experiences of past hosts to mega sporting events like the Olympics, or FIFA World Cup games show that there are numerous ways in which countries can be both empowered or disempowered through their pursuit of soft power. Through a selective literature review, this paper uses the relevant soft power experiences of six countries who have hosted either the World Cup or Olympic Games from 2008. The cases include China (Beijing 2008 Olympics), South Africa (2010 World Cup), United Kingdom (London 2012 Olympics), Brazil (2014 World Cup and Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympics), Russia (Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics, and 2018 World Cup), and Japan (Tokyo 2020 Olympics). The paper then considers Qatar's 2022 World Cup with an angle on applying and adapting the experiences of past hosts to understand the soft empowerment or disempowerment that Qatar will likely face as a result of hosting the games. The numerous international concerns over the situation with migrant workers in Qatar, and the Islamic and cultural norms that are alien to Western audiences, will continue to challenge Qatar's image management and branding measures. Nevertheless, the commitment to holding the most eco-friendly event, continuous presence on international soccer fields through sponsorships, ownerships, and winning championships, in addition to actively seeking to enhance and alleviate the status of the country on the global stage will help Doha in its soft empowerment endeavors in the period before and during the event. Its pledge and dedication to keeping a long-lasting legacy after December 2022 will also help the State in the post-event phase of soft empowerment.

**Keywords:** Soft Power; Mega-Sporting Events; World Cup; Olympic Games; Qatar; Sports Diplomacy

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## مقالة بحثية

# القوة الناعمة وكأس العالم 2022: الاستفادة من التجارب السابقة في استضافة الفعاليات الرياضية الضخمة

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## ملخص

تُظهر التجارب السابقة لاستضافة الفعاليات الرياضية الضخمة مثل الألعاب الأولمبية وكأس العالم أن هناك عديد الطرق التي يمكن أن تسهم فيها هذه الاستضافة في تمكين القوة الناعمة للدول المستضيفة من عدمه. بالاعتماد على طيف من الأدبيات السابقة، تستخدم هذه الورقة تجارب القوى الناعمة لستة دول قامت بتنظيم كأس العالم أو الألعاب الأولمبية منذ 2008. وتتضمن هذه التجارب كلاً من الصين (الألعاب الأولمبية بيجين 2008)، وجنوب أفريقيا (كأس العالم 2010)، والمملكة المتحدة (الألعاب الأولمبية بلندن 2012)، والبرازيل (كأس العالم سنة 2014 والألعاب الأولمبية سنة 2016 في ريو دي جانيرو)، وروسيا (الألعاب الأولمبية في سوشي 2014 وكأس العالم سنة 2018)، واليابان (الألعاب الأولمبية 2020 في طوكيو). تعتمد هذه الورقة مقارنة لكأس العالم 2022 الذي تنظمه قطر من خلال تطبيق وتكييف تجارب الاستضافات السابقة لفهم أوجه تمكين القوة الناعمة للدولة المستضيفة من عدمه. التحديات الدولية حول وضعية العمالة المهاجرة في قطر، ونوعية القيم الإسلامية والثقافية السائدة في قطر والمختلفة عن الجمهور الغربي، سوف تستمر في تحدي الإدارة والسمعة الدولية لتنظيم قطر للمونديال. ومع ذلك، فإن استمرار قطر في التزامها بتنظيم هذه الفعاليات بالمعايير الأكثر صداقة للبيئة، والحضور الدائم في حفل كرة القدم الدولية من خلال الرعاية، والتملك، والفوز في البطولات الرياضية العالمية، بالإضافة إلى البحث الدائم عن تعزيز وتحسين وضعية الدولة، سيساعد البلد في تحقيق مساعي التمكين في مرحلة ما قبل تنظيم الفعاليات. وتعد البلد وتفانيه في خلق إرث دائم بعد ديسمبر 2022 سيعين على تمكين البلد في مرحلة ما بعد تنظيم الفعاليات.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** القوة الناعمة، الفعاليات الرياضية الضخمة، كأس العالم، الألعاب الأولمبية، قطر، الدبلوماسية الرياضية

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© 2021، مهران، روبلس-جل، الجهة المرخص لها: دار نشر جامعة قطر. تم نشر هذه المقالة البحثية وفقاً لشروط Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). تسمح هذه الرخصة بالاستخدام غير التجاري، وينبغي نسبة العمل إلى صاحبه، مع بيان أي تعديلات عليه. كما تتيح حرية نسخ، وتوزيع، ونقل العمل بأي شكل من الأشكال، أو بأية وسيلة، ومزجه وتحويله والبناء عليه، طالما يُنسب العمل الأصلي إلى المؤلف.

## 1. Introduction

Hosting a major international sporting event such as the World Cup or the Olympic Games has a profound impact on the international image of the host country. This paper looks at the concept of soft power to understand the ways in which mega-sporting events contribute to a state's empowerment or disempowerment on the global stage. It observes Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup with an angle on applying, and adapting the experiences of past hosts and their own (soft) power resources, capabilities, and reach. Through a selective literature review, the relevant soft power experiences of six countries who have hosted either the World Cup or Olympic Games are considered to shine light on the numerous soft power examples around the world. The cases include China (Beijing 2008 Olympics), South Africa (2010 World Cup), United Kingdom (London 2012 Olympics), Brazil (2014 World Cup and Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympics), Russia (Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics and 2018 World Cup), and Japan (Tokyo 2020 Olympics).

Looking at experiences of hosts to mega-sporting events, this paper attempts to ask whether it is feasible and applicable for Qatar to learn from the experiences of other countries, or if the upcoming 2022 mega-event has unique features that make it exceptional, unpredictable, and unique. In this vein, the data collection is to assess Qatar's preparedness for the event and its strategic calculations for the post-event legacy. Hence, this paper seeks to answer whether the multiple state-branding efforts, and image management strategies can actually result in soft-empowerment for Qatar. In trying to resolve these inquiries, a more nuanced balance between the great opportunity outcomes, and the potentially huge reputational risks to the host country are presented.

In order to more adequately obtain and present the data, and then to provide a pertinent and timely discussion, this paper relies on a combined method of selected literature review applied to a collective of multiple case study, using Qatar as both the intrinsic (highlighting particularities that are illustrative and/or deviant from other cases) and instrumental (providing inputs that contribute to the wider phenomenon and may be subject of generalization) case study. The paper intended to utilize the experiences of countries that are in some ways relevant or comparable with the State of Qatar. As the 2008 Beijing Olympics can be viewed as a starting point for more non-Western (and non-democratic) states coming to the fore in hosting international events, this paper uses China as the first case, and considers every Olympic and World Cup games from then onwards.

Therefore, the literature review acts as a relevant data collection tool as it not only identifies, selects, and decants information, but it also transmits it in a comprehensive and comparative way, creating meaning and sense within a set of meta-ideas. The review and collection phases were consciously linked to a critical phase where methodological quality and factual reliability were put in place when presenting the analyses. The materials, mostly academic papers, official documents, and other types of discourses, along with historic facts in each of the reviewed cases, were chosen for their relevance and applicability to the central topic, and by no means as a mere recapitulation of similar past events. Indeed, the engagement with each of them is critically related to the intrinsic case study aiming to present not only a general analysis, but a comprehensive synthesis. In sum, the literature review clearly introduces a set of interconnected logics and rationales, which in turn support the intended objectives of the research.

## 2. Soft Power and Mega-Sporting Events

Joseph Nye first wrote in 1990 that the kind of power “which occurs when one country gets other countries to want what it wants” could be called “co-optive or soft power”<sup>1</sup>. This was “in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants”<sup>2</sup>. He argued that this sort of power and “the ability to affect what other countries want” tend to be “associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions”<sup>3</sup>. In other words, he writes that co-optive power is getting other countries to “want what you want” and to “develop preferences or define their interests in ways consistent with its own,” rather than through hard-power resources<sup>4</sup>.

In the traditional understanding of international relations, countries prioritize their security, military advancements, and, above all, their survival. Today, however, states “must consider new dimensions of security,” as threats have shifted from the military, to the economic and ecological<sup>5</sup>. Today’s great powers are not able to project and utilize their traditional power resources to achieve their goals, most important and visible of which is their military might. Nye attributes at least five trends that he considers as contributing factors to this diffusion of power; he says that: “economic interdependence, transnational actors, nationalism in weak states, the spread of technology, and changing political issues,” are the causes<sup>6</sup>. As a result of these trends, that initiated in the late 1980s, and have exponentially grown in the four decades since, soft co-optive power has gained a significant value in international relations, both in theoretical and practical realms. On his side, Roberts argues that core to the strengthening of such type of power is the enrollment in a state-branding race, which enables a country to demonstrate its *difference* or uniqueness to attract investment, seize opportunities, and gain a better position and leverage on the global stage<sup>7</sup>.

Sports diplomacy, as it has been commonly referred to, is identified as “the use of sports as an instrument to further foreign policy goals causes or interests” and as “a significant and rising source of soft power”<sup>8</sup>. The use of sports in diplomatic practices increased with the initiation of the Olympic Games in 1896, and more so after the inaugural World Cup in 1930, and countless other regional and international events that have been established since. These events are, by and in large part, a representation of the host country’s culture, as this element is key to successfully gaining soft empowerment through the hosting of mega-sporting events. As such, the term cultural diplomacy is also used to characterize the diplomatic practices of states seeking alternatives to traditional hard power and military actions. Thus, hosting mega-sporting events has been one of the most used and sought-after privileges by countries around the

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1 - Joseph Nye, Soft Power, *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (Autumn 1990): p. 166.

2 - Ibid.

3 - Ibid, p. 167.

4 - Ibid, p. 168.

5 - Ibid, p. 157.

6 - Nye, p. 160.

7 - Roberts, David, Qatar. Securing the Global Ambitions of a City-State. *London: Hurts Publishers (2017)*.

8 - Andreia Soares e Castro, “The 2018 FIFA World Cup: The Gains and Constraints of Russia’s Soft Power of Attraction Through Football and Sports, *Rising Powers Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (2018): p. 23.

world with the hopes of gaining (soft) empowerment on the global stage. In fact, as Ohnesorge claims, “such events are frequently counted among the most popular soft power instruments”<sup>9</sup>.

Developing countries and emerging powers have much to gain from hosting mega-sporting events and have, often, viewed the bidding for the title as a benchmark in their country’s strategic calculations. For example, two of the last three hosts of the Olympics, and all of the last three hosts of the World Cup were part of the BRICS- Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa- group of countries. In the past decades, these countries have all climbed several positions in key categories such as military budget, domestic economic growth, and technological development, which has allowed them to gain “a continuous projection as global players”<sup>10</sup>. Hence, Pulleiro argues, their “improved international position [...] allowed them to develop new sport policies”<sup>11</sup>.

To exemplify, Brazil had the privilege of hosting both the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympics within just two years, Russia hosted the 2014 Winter Olympics before hosting the 2018 World Cup, and China is hosting the Winter Olympics in 2022, fourteen years after Beijing hosted the Summer Olympics in 2008. De Almeida suggests that the selection of hosts is not limited to economic factors, but “indicative of diversification, democracy or equality”<sup>12</sup>. In a similar vein, Swart and Bob’s state that “the hosting of major events [...] implies that a country’s ability to succeed in the arena of hosting mega-events depends on international recognition in relation to its economic, social, and political capacity”<sup>13</sup>.

In this sense, the organizations behind the sports mega-events (the International Olympic Committee and Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)) have aimed to reach ‘new lands’ in the pursuit of the ‘development of football’. That could explain why non-Western and non-democratic countries such as China and Russia were chosen, and it is, in part, that decision which led to the selection of Qatar to host the 2022 World Cup<sup>14</sup>. For developing countries, de Almeida et al. introduce the idea of peripheral mega events, which is not something “new or exclusive to peripheral countries”<sup>15</sup>. This idea represents the fact that the opportunity to host a mega-event “enables these countries to symbolically challenge the traditional global order and identify themselves as representatives of wider emerging territories or cultures”<sup>16</sup>.

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9 - Hendrik Ohnesorge, *Soft Power: The Forces of Attraction in International Relations*, Cham Switzerland: Springer Nature (2020): p. 176.

10 - D. E. Morales, D. E., Inside the BRIC: Analysis of the Semiperipheral Character of Brazil, Russia, India and China. *Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations*, 2, no. 4, (2013), p. 141.

11 - Carlos Pulleiro, The International Legacy of Sports Mega-events in Brazil: Political and Economic Lessons for the Semi-peripheral Countries, in *Papel Politico* 25, (June 2020).

12 - Bárbara Schaustek de Almeida et al, The 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games and Brazil’s soft power, *Contemporary Social Science* 9, no. 2 (2014): p. 272.

13 - Swart, K., & Bob, U. (2004). The seductive discourse of development: The Cape Town 2004 Olympic bid. *Third World Quarterly*, 25, no. 7, (2004): p. 1311.

14 - Ibid.

15 - Ibid.

16 - Ibid.

For countries that are “consistently represented within international news settings in a negative manner,” successfully hosting such events offers many opportunities<sup>17</sup>. Particularly, as Burchell et al. write, there is an opportunity for “image management” which “can be used to contest false, stereotypical or outdated national identities”<sup>18</sup>. This is mainly because there is a conflict and a wide gap between the concepts of identity and image, where the former refers to “the essence of something” while the latter refers to “how it is perceived”. The identity–image gap, according to Buarque, can be interpreted as “a negative factor that frustrates nations that do not feel they are perceived by the rest of the world for what they truly are and that leads to stereotypes and clichés”<sup>19</sup>. Hosting mega-sporting events with a global audience gives states the chance to lessen this identity-image gap by taking advantage of the opportunity for image-management. Hence, the privilege of hosting such events can be described as a country’s “arrival on the world stage,” which has bestowed on the host “the world’s full attention for many days”<sup>20</sup>.

However, success is key, and as Grix and Houlihan argue, “a disastrous” sports mega-event, which is “by definition scrutinized closely by a global audience,” could have a very negative impact on the host country<sup>21</sup>. Moreover, because mega-events serve as “a magnifying glass”<sup>22</sup> and host countries are under “close surveillance” during the events, the media coverage “may at times even be particularly critical and grievances within the country may be highlighted to a global audience more intensively than usual”<sup>23</sup>. Thus, if careful attention is not paid to the organizational aspects of the events before and during the event, the “country’s soft power instrument may ultimately fail to succeed and may even rebound in what might be called a boomerang effect”<sup>24</sup>.

In other words, rather than empower the country through soft power tools, the failure will lead to loss of reputation. In this sense, Brannagan and Giulianotti introduce the concept of *soft disempowerment* “to refer to those occasions in which you may upset, offend or alienate others, leading to a loss of attractiveness or influence”<sup>25</sup>. In doing so, it locates the other side of soft power, creating a dichotomy with Nye’s concept. In sum, they suggest the reader to “move beyond thinking only of how soft power is positively accumulated”<sup>26</sup>. The argument holds that the ambition and power to attract and influence are

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17 - Kenzie Burchell et al., Soft power and its audiences: Tweeting the Olympics from London 2012 to Sochi 2014, *Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 12, no. 1 (May 2015): p. 421.

18 - Ibid.

19 - Daniel Buarque, One Country, Two Cups- The International Image of Brazil in 1950 and in 2014: A Study of the Reputation and the Identity of Brazil as Projected by the International Media During the Two FIFA World Cups in the Country, *International Journal of Communication* 9 (2015): p. 1305.

20 - Ohnesorge, p. 176.

21 - Jonathan Grix and Barrie Houlihan, Sports Mega-Events as Part of a Nation’s Soft Power Strategy: The Cases of Germany (2006) and the UK (2012), *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 16 (2014): p. 590.

22 - Jonathan Grix and Nina Kramareva. The Sochi Winter Olympics and Russia’s unique soft power strategy. *Sport in Society* (2015): p. 3.

23 - Ohnesorge, p. 176.

24 - Ibid, p. 177.

25 - P.M. Brannagan, P.M. and R. Giulianotti, R. (2014) Soft Power and Soft Disempowerment: Qatar, Global Sport and football’s 2022 World Cup finals, *Leisure Studies*, 34:6, (2015): p. 707.

26 - Ibid.

not a guarantee of success, instead, unintended consequences may appear that will alienate others leading to loss of influence. Moreover, Henderson suggests that there is a big chance of significant disempowerment if a host-country is not adequately prepared for the stresses of such a global event<sup>27</sup>.

As Grix and Kramareva argue, there are two established traditional approaches to the framing of mega-sporting events hosted by non-Western states. The hosting of mega-sporting events is either “characterized as a coming-out party of an emerging state and appraised in terms of a ‘graduation into the community of civilized nations’ or ‘assessed as the final rehabilitation benchmark of nations that have done their penance for breaking away from the norms shared by core states’”<sup>28</sup>. Developing countries “often fail to receive universal acclaim for their alternative modernities”<sup>29</sup>. These types of modernities only apply to non-Western, peripheral, and developing countries, as they intend to present an alternative to the globalized Western ones. Challenging the hegemonic assumption that argues the European-crafted ‘Western modernity’ would end up imposing itself as an uncontested path for all developing nations, Eisenstadt states that there are other cultural programs of modernity being successfully mobilized (both in the East and within the West) which ultimately coexist in what he has coined as “multiple modernities”<sup>30</sup>. In this vein, non-Western hosting nations can either repeat an existing path or establish one independently.

The Opening and Closing Ceremonies are often the most important parts of the event in which the host country showcases its culture and projects its power. With the global significance of the ceremonies worldwide, they are the most watched parts of the mega-events. Moreover, in the context of “global mediatized political performances,” Burchell et al. write, “the narrative of a nation, is spelled out through representations of shared experiences” and “sets of stories, historical events, national symbols and rituals”<sup>31</sup>. Thus, the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of mega-sporting events “are replete with, and extensions of, such representations of events, symbols and rituals” of the host country<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, in Leheny’s words, the ceremonies are “an element of a country’s public diplomacy” by way of presenting “itself in an appealing way globally that may help to enhance its soft power”<sup>33</sup>.

Thus, it is important to look at the experiences of past hosts to understand the soft power challenges and opportunities for future hosts to mega-sporting events. To prepare for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, the emirate could look at the relevant soft power experiences of recent hosts of the Olympic Games and World Cup tournaments. From the six cases under consideration, there are examples of small states, developing countries, and hosts with non-Western cultural characterizations. The relevant experiences of these past hosts to mega-sporting events provides a treasure trove of examples relating to the pursuit of soft power, as well as the soft disempowerment that accompanies the failure in such pursuits.

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27 - Henderson, J.C, Hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup: opportunities and challenges for Qatar. *Journal of Sport and Tourism*, 19 (3-4) (2014): p. 281.

28 - Ibid, p. 5.

29 - Grix and Kramareva, p. 3.

30 - Eisenstadt, S. N. Multiple Modernities. *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): p. 1.

31 - Burchell et al., p. 414.

32 - Ibid.

33 - Leheny, p. 9.

### 3. Soft Power Experiences of Past Mega-Sporting Events

This section looks at the relevant soft power experiences of China (Beijing 2008 Olympics), South Africa (2010 World Cup), United Kingdom (London 2012 Olympics), Brazil (2014 World Cup and Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympics), Russia (Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics and 2018 World Cup), Japan (Tokyo 2020 Olympics), in order to envision the soft empowerment and disempowerment that Qatar will likely face as a result of hosting the 2022 World Cup.

#### 3.1. China- Beijing 2008 Olympics

For China, the 2008 Beijing Olympics was a turning point in its interactions with the global community of nations. As Giulianotti writes, China portrayed an “image and appeal as a highly modern, efficient and increasingly prosperous nation,” and as the “home to a sophisticated ancient culture and civilization”<sup>34</sup>. Seen from a different angle, Burchell et al. argue that the Beijing games can be “interpreted as the global mediated consecration of China as a great power,” and 2008 can be “understood as a vehicle for a particular rehabilitation to ‘supplant images from 1989’, displacing one icon, Tiananmen Square, with a more celebratory one of the Games”<sup>35</sup>. However, China faces a deficit in its political soft power. As Nye argues, China suffers from corruption, inequality, and a lack of democracy, human rights and the rule of law,” which “undercuts China’s soft power in the West”<sup>36</sup>. In line with this argument, Zhongying claims that “the development of the nation’s soft power has been regarded as a pressing task and is near the top of China’s list of priorities”<sup>37</sup>. This realization and newfound importance to augmenting soft power capabilities has interestingly forced China to adopt policies and approaches similar to those in the West, particularly the United States.

Chinese scholars argue that while globalization is taking place, the impact of “Sinicization” of the world should not be underestimated. Zhongying argues that “by definition, globalization should be more comprehensive than ‘Americanization’ or ‘Westernization’, and the addition of a “Chinese element” is very appropriate”. As such, he argues, “the Beijing Olympics have made the country more global, and thus have increased the “Chinese element” in the world”<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, the fact that many Chinese had an unprecedented interaction with the global community during the Olympic Games marked a “starting point” and it pushed “China’s progress and transformation forward”<sup>39</sup>.

Following the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Joseph Nye claimed that by the successful staging of the games, “soft power has now entered China’s official language”<sup>40</sup>. What contributed to China’s soft power success,

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34 - Richard Giulianotti, The Beijing 2008 Olympics: Examining the Interrelations of China, Globalization, and Soft Power, *European Review* 23, no. 2 (May 2015): p. 289.

35 - Burchell et al., p. 422.

36 - Joseph Nye, Soft Power and Beijing Olympics, *Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center*, August 24, (2008).

37 - Pang Zhongying, The Beijing Olympics and China’s Soft Power, *The Brookings Institution*, September 4, (2008).

38 - Ibid.

39 - Ibid.

40 - Nye.

according to Nye, was other Chinese actions that gained recognition globally around the same time. These include Chinese novelist Gao Xingjian winning China's first Nobel prize for literature, the Chinese film "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" which became the highest grossing non-English-language film, and a Chinese player, Yao Ming, joining the National Basketball Association's Houston Rockets<sup>41</sup>.

In economic terms, international mega-events such as the Olympics and the World Cup games require multi-billion-dollar investments, and involve a multitude of corporate sponsors, which "enable host cities and nations to 'sell themselves' before potential investors, customers and tourists"<sup>42</sup>. Furthermore, such events, as Zhongying argues, "are not only a soft power opportunity for the host country, but also for other countries"<sup>43</sup>. Specifically, member states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, as well as many developing countries and China's neighbors benefited immensely from the Beijing Games, which boosted China's bilateral and multilateral relations regionally and beyond.

China continues to take advantage of the soft power gains it made through the 2008 Olympics. In the time since, Beijing was selected as the host of the 2022 Winter Olympics as well. However, this time, the road has been much bumpier for China, and there is a strong international campaign to boycott the Olympics because of China's treatment of the Uyghur minority. Such campaigns and, indeed, the actions taken by China in contravention of international human rights norms have and will continue to negatively affect China's international image, and its soft empowerment may very well turn to disempowerment by the time the games take place in Winter 2022.

### 3.2. South Africa- 2010 FIFA World Cup

The 2010 World Cup in South Africa was celebrated across Africa as it was the first time that these games were taking place in the continent. For South Africa, it was an even more important milestone. It was "apartheid South Africa's reaffiliation to FIFA in the 1950s that united African nations in calling for its exclusion"<sup>44</sup>. In 2010, it was a modern South Africa that is uniting the continent through the games in its post-apartheid era. As the government had framed it, the successful hosting of the World Cup "would spread confidence and prosperity across the entire continent," and that South Africa "stands not as a country alone," but rather "as a representative of Africa and as part of an African family of nations."<sup>45</sup>

South Africa, similar to others hosts, aimed to utilize the hosting of the World Cup to turn a new page on the country's image worldwide as well as its integration into regional and international economic interdependencies. The prestige of having hosted the World Cup as the first African nation bestowed South Africa a significant role in regional and international political and economic affairs. As another

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41 - Ibid.

42 - Giulianotti, p. 289.

43 - Zhongying.

44 - Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed. World Cup 2010: Africa's turn or the turn on Africa? *Soccer & Society* 11, no. 1 (January-March 2010): p. 154.

45 - Ibid, p. 155.

member of the BRICS group of countries to host the mega event in the 21st century, South Africa was bound to boost its presence on the international stage. However, aside from claiming the title of the first African host of the World Cup, South Africa largely failed to sustain the advances it had made in most fronts before, during, and immediately after the event. Arguably, thus, South Africa failed to capitalize on the political, and to a lesser extent economic, gains of hosting the World Cup.

Similar to Beijing 2008 Olympics, South Africa faced a deficit in political power at the time, and was facing major domestic upheavals. For example, Desaia and Vahed observe that with regard to infrastructure projects, the billions being spent “for a rich minority” should have rather been spent on “upgrading the existing public transport system, which is used by the poor majority”<sup>46</sup>. Aside from financial issues relating to development, South Africa continued to face racial and prejudicial conflicts within its borders. For instance, in May 2008, there were a “series of xenophobic attacks aimed at African immigrants and refugees” which left 62 people dead, hundreds injured, and thousands displaced. These attacks were a “prelude to the sustained attacks on Africans” that quickly spiraled across the country”<sup>47</sup>. Such a failure in image management once again brought the internal instability in South Africa back under the international spotlight. Thus, it could be argued that South Africa faced disempowerment in the period soon after the World Cup. However, the country utilized some minimal gains to sustain a long-term soft empowerment through building a legacy from the games as the first, and until now the only, African country to hosting the games.

### 3.3. United Kingdom- London 2012 Olympics

For the United Kingdom, a Western, developed, democratic, and veto-holding member state of the United Nations Security Council, the objective to host the Olympics was different than most other hosts under consideration in this paper. As a review of evidence relating to the international reputation of the UK by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) concluded, “the UK’s overall reputation worldwide was strong ... the UK was seen as *fair, innovative, diverse, confident and stylish* [but also] arrogant, stuffy, old-fashioned and cold”<sup>48</sup>. The new image of the UK that the FCO wanted to project through the 2012 Olympics was now of a “modern Britain ... open (welcoming, diverse, tolerant), connected (through our involvement in the UN and G20, politically, geographically, in terms of trade and travel), creative and dynamic”<sup>49</sup>. As Grix and Houlihan argue, the London Olympic Games “was adopted by the FCO as a key opportunity to promote this refinement of the UK’s image”<sup>50</sup>.

While clearly the foreign ministries of all host countries are involved in the decision-making and execution processes of mega-events, it is interesting to see the direct role of the UK’s FCO in all preparation stages. For example, an eighteen-month engagement strategy was designed with four objectives, which

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46 - Ibid, p. 156.

47 - Ibid. p. 160.

48 - Grix and Houlihan, p. 583; (House of Commons 2005–06, FCO written evidence, para. 20, 2011).

49 - Ibid.

50 - Ibid.

included: 1) “using the Olympics to promote British culture at home and abroad,” and “to cement Britain’s reputation as a ... vibrant, open and modern society, a global hub in a networked world”, 2) “To bolster the UK economy, increase commercial opportunities for British business in target countries and secure high value inward investment”, and 3) “To enhance our security by harnessing the global appeal of the Olympics, particularly among the young, to reinforce values of tolerance, moderation and openness”<sup>51</sup>.

The UK utilized many institutions that had been in place for decades to its advantage in preparing for the Olympics. The BBC World Service and the British Council are amongst the top public diplomacy and soft power tools that UK has been utilizing for decades, especially in the runoff to the Olympics. The British Council, as Burchell et al. put it, is the “UK’s pre-eminent international cultural relations organization” and is a good example of “the cultivation of attitudinal and behavioral dispositions favorable to the UK over the long term”<sup>52</sup>. The overall objective, as they argue, is to “attract and influence foreign publics” and “get ‘them’ to learn ‘our’ language, like our culture, prefer our news, and so in time become more receptive to our values and even our interests”<sup>53</sup>. The BBC World Service works somewhat inline to this approach as well.

The London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics was watched by more than half of the world’s population, and, as Dubber argues, “generated a substantial boost in international interest in the UK through the impressive medal haul and Danny Boyle’s dazzling Opening Ceremony”<sup>54</sup>. More importantly, the results from research in eleven strategically important countries for British foreign policy and trade showed that “on average 36% of people stated that the Games had made the UK more attractive as a place to study or do business, and 35% were more likely to visit the UK.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, as de Almeida et al. claim, “the development of soft power was a direct legacy aim for London 2012, with plans to build influential relationships with other countries by way of a global public diplomacy campaign” which worked to the UK’s advantage, at least until Britain withdrew from the European Union<sup>56</sup>. The soft power legacy may very well come to the aid of the UK in its post-Brexit international relations as well.

### 3.4. Brazil- 2014 World Cup and Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympics

In contrast to the World Cup selection of Brazil as the only candidate of Latin America which technically earned the hosting rights as a result of FIFA’s principle of continent rotation, Brazil’s selection to host the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games was much more competitive. Rio’s bid succeeded by defeating seven other candidate cities in the first phase and four in the final stage. Moreover, while Brazil viewed the World Cup as an opportunity to show the world the Brazilian “growing and stable economy”, the President of Brazil changed its discourse with regard to the 2016 Olympic Games as “not only national

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51 - Ibid, p. 585.

52 - Ibid, p. 416.

53 - Ibid.

54 - John Dubber, *Playing the Game: The soft power of sport*, *British Council*, October 2015.

55 - Ibid.

56 - Bárbara Schaustek de Almeida et al., *The 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games and Brazil’s soft power*, *Contemporary Social Science* 9, no. 2 (2014): p. 274.

but regional,” as it was the first time a South American city was hosting the Games<sup>57</sup>.

For Brazil, de Almeida et al. introduce the idea of peripheral mega events, which is not something “new or exclusive to ‘peripheral’ countries,” but, rather, the opportunity to host a mega-event “enables these countries to symbolically challenge the traditional global order and identify themselves as representatives of wider emerging territories or cultures”<sup>58</sup>. In the same vein, Buarque writes that hosting the World Cup and Olympics “would work as part of a long-term public diplomacy strategy to enhance the international visibility of Brazil and to improve and consolidate the image of the country abroad as an emerging nation with a great deal of soft power”<sup>59</sup>. Moreover, he argues, hosting the events was an opportunity for Brazil “to be seen not only as a decorative country but also as an emergent economic and political power”<sup>60</sup>.

Hosting these mega-events can be seen as part of the Brazilian government’s foreign policy strategy to “make the country appear with more prominence in global affairs,” in line with the “strategy of public diplomacy and nation branding”<sup>61</sup>. In this sense, Brazil’s hosting of these events “can be considered a success, as it is possible to see that there was an increase in the country’s visibility in the international media during the mega-event”<sup>62</sup>. However, the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and the Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympics are examples of how a host can have a successful bid and advance in the planning stages, nevertheless, fail when success is needed most. Mounting economic issues in the background came to light just months before the Rio Opening Ceremony and the Zika virus had attacked the already dire health situation in Brazil. While the situation was better during the World Cup, the country was not doing well politically and there were continuous strikes and protests, even during the Olympic Games. In addition, the president was in the midst of a scandal and an impeachment process<sup>63</sup>.

Perhaps, one of the most visible effects of both mega-events in Brazil, as Gaffney writes was at the urban-territorial level, as the wealthier more developed neighborhoods were given far more precedence over the impoverished and marginalized ones; consequently, real estate and housing prices experienced a dramatic increase in tandem with inflation<sup>64</sup>. As Buarque complements, “Brazilians were dissatisfied with the national state of things”, and “the fact that millions of people went onto the streets to demonstrate created the stereotype on which the international media based many of the articles published in 2014”<sup>65</sup>. Thus, Brazil was not successful in changing the global stereotypes about the country and, in addition, it even added new ones as a result of the domestic chaos in the early 2010s. Moreover, if one of Brazil’s

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57 - Ibid, p. 272.

58 - Ibid.

59 - Buarque, p. 1300.

60 - Ibid, p. 1304.

61 - Ibid, p. 1309.

62 - Ibid.

63 - Marcela Aguirre, Brazil’s Soft Power Dwindles during Rio Olympics, *Charged Affairs - Young Professionals in Foreign Policy*, September 5, 2016.

64 - C. Gaffney, C. Gentrifications in pre-Olympic Rio de Janeiro. *Urban Geography*, 37, N. 8, (2016), pp. 1132-1153.

65 - Buarque, p. 1312.

objectives was to increase its visibility, it did; however, it failed to take advantage of the opportunity to rebrand the country's image.

### 3.5. Russia- Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics and 2018 World Cup

For Russia, similar to China, as a global power, member of BRICS, and permanent member of the UNSC, enhancing the country's image was of utmost importance. However, equal attention was given to augmenting the national image inside the country. As Grix and Kramareva put it, hosting the mega events, "were designed above all as a source of domestic soft power rather than simply as an external 'signaling' exercise"<sup>66</sup>. This follows the 'two level games' concept that refers to the "intertwined nature of both international and domestic politics and leads to a more nuanced understanding of soft power rather than seeing it simply as an instrumental status marker in the same vein"<sup>67</sup>. In other words, the mega events were used by President Vladimir Putin to "impress through sports with the objective of presenting a gentler, competent and modern Russia to the world, targeting both international and domestic audiences, and especially showing that the country was back on its role of a global power"<sup>68</sup>.

Russia's other aim for exploiting its soft power, according to Soares de Castro, was economic; "to attract international investment in order to modernize the country"<sup>69</sup>. The Russians framed it "as a need to improve its negative image abroad and establish stronger ties with Russian compatriots in other countries"<sup>70</sup>. However, Russia has limited abilities to "project its influence and win hearts and minds on a global scale" as they have been constrained by "serious domestic problems and challenges" and "Russia's hard power image"<sup>71</sup>. In that light, Russia under Putin promoted the events as "an ongoing war between the West and Russia, which was only strengthened by the belligerent media framing assumed in the West"<sup>72</sup>.

Nye suggested that Putin "failed to capitalize on the soft-power boost afforded to Russia by hosting the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi"<sup>73</sup>. However, for Putin, as mentioned earlier, the primary objective was to boost Russian nationalism and pride inside the country. In that sense, not only Putin benefitted personally by hosting the Olympics and the World Cup, but Russia also benefitted, in a national interest perspective, by gaining territory through the annexation of Crimea just days before the Sochi closing ceremonies in 2014, as well as economically, by boosting trade ties with regional countries. Moreover, the fact that Russia had a second chance to host the 2018 World Cup less than four years later served as a vehicle to further augment and secure those established gains and objectives.

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66 - Grix and Kramareva, p. 3.

67 - Ibid.

68 - Andreia Soares e Castro, "The 2018 FIFA World Cup: The Gains and Constraints of Russia's Soft Power of Attraction Through Football and Sports, *Rising Powers Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (2018): p. 25.

69 - Ibid, p. 19.

70 - Ibid.

71 - Ibid, p. 18.

72 - Grix and Kramareva, p. 4.

73 - Grix and Kramareva, p. 2.

### 3.6. Japan- Tokyo 2020 Olympics

Tokyo's hosting of the 1964 Olympics was a critical moment in Japan's post-war history, and the event arguably cemented Tokyo as a "first-world metropolis" and "signified Japan's return to the global stage as a peaceful, economically confident nation"<sup>74</sup>. Fourteen Olympic Games later, Tokyo is once again hosting the (postponed) 2020 Olympics. As the organizer of the most recent Olympic Games, Japan is preparing for 339 events featuring 33 Olympic and 22 Paralympic sports, without spectators. Japan also co-hosted the 2002 World Cup with South Korea, as another sign of its economic achievements, as well as its good neighborly and peaceful strategic policies. That World Cup was the first to take place in Asia, and the first to have been co-hosted by two countries. Japan and South Korea have had tensions for decades, if not longer, and the 2002 World Cup was a watershed moment in the region's history for peace and cooperation.

As Pellitteri observes, the awarding of the 2020 Olympics to Tokyo "was a highly symbolic decision, given the aftermath of the devastating tsunami in the Tohoku region and the breakdown at Fukushima nuclear power plants" in 2011<sup>75</sup>. Japan's reputation in terms of public safety, he writes, "was certainly not immaculate in the wake of those tragedies"<sup>76</sup>. As such, the Olympics can then be seen as a means not only to rebuild Japan's international image" but also, "as a way to assist the country in accomplishing that very task"<sup>77</sup>.

Similar and even more successful than China, the Japanese soft cultural power gained worldwide attention and attractiveness in the same period as the 2002 World Cup games, which has continued until today, in aid of the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020(+1). Douglas McGray, for example, examined the creative scene in Japan, and argued that "anime, manga, and J-Pop, combined with robotics, high-tech, and postmodern design, were together likely to make it a new kind of cultural mecca"<sup>78</sup>. Moreover, Japan won its first Academy Award in 2003 with Miyazaki Hayao's *Spirited Away* in the Best Animated Film category, and as Leheny eloquently writes, it "seemed to put an exclamation point on Japan's emergence on the global cultural stage"<sup>79</sup>. Japan had, in this view, become attractive globally.

To conceptualize Japan's unique soft power capabilities, McGray coined the term 'Gross National Cool' which was officially adopted by the Japanese government and media. 'Cool Japan' emerged as a theme which spawned across government reports, television programs, and conferences. What was behind 'Cool Japan', in essence, was what Iwabuchi Koichi conceptualized as being related to the fact that "Japan's popular cultural products were sometimes distinguished by their very of a distinctive national imprint," which he referred to as "their *mukokuseki* quality"<sup>80</sup>.

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74 - Alex Martin, Can Tokyo's soft power push ensure a positive Olympic legacy? *The Japan Times*, January 2, 2020.

75 - Marco Pellitteri, Japan's Soft Power and "Grand Fictions" in *Global Venues, Kritika Kultura* 32 (2019): p. 464

76 - Ibid.

77 - Ibid.

78 - Leheny, p. 3.

79 - Ibid.

80 - Ibid, p. 4.

On the other hand, Japan also faced some soft disempowerment in its preparation phase. A major scandal became known in Japan when the chairman of the Japanese Olympic Committee resigned “amid allegations of corruption over Tokyo’s bid to host the 2020 Games”<sup>81</sup>. Another scandal took over the headlines in early 2021 when Yoshiro Mori, former Prime Minister of Japan and the president of the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee, resigned after his distasteful and sexist comments surfaced online. Soon after, however, Japan replaced him with Seiko Hashimoto, a former Olympian, key member of Japan’s Olympic committee, and the Prime Minister’s now former aide for women’s empowerment and gender equality<sup>82</sup>.

In addition, Tokyo’s experience facing the global Covid-19 pandemic is also of significant research value. Japan had to postpone the games for a year, and just weeks before the Opening Ceremony had to make the difficult and financially challenging decision to not allow spectators to watch the games. The fact that for the first time the games were postponed in the post-World War II period has set a new precedent on how host countries can and will react to unpredictable events. From 2020 onwards, a global pandemic can no longer be viewed as unpredictable, and it could occur again in the future. Moreover, the numerous new regulations, guidelines, and precautionary measures that will have to be put in place for the foreseeable future will also impact how mega-sporting events are held in the future.

#### **4. Soft Power and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar**

While each country faces different challenges and opportunities with hosting mega-sporting events, the past soft power experiences of other states provide an outlook on what to expect and how to prepare for the games. Qatar will be the first Arab country to host the World Cup and it will be the first time such a mega-sporting event will take place in the Middle East or in an Islamic country. As such, there is a significant pressure riding on Qatar in its preparations for the World Cup. Brazil’s experience as the first Latin American host of the Olympics and South Africa’s legacy of being the first African country to host the World Cup illustrate the enormous (extra) pressure such a title bestows on the host, but it also shows the many regional opportunities that comes with it, in both political and economic terms.

As mentioned earlier, Qatar’s successful bid was in line with FIFA’s commitment to give the opportunity to ‘new lands’, however, the bid itself has been a cause of controversy which initiated Qatar’s soft disempowerment in December 2010. The primary reason behind the international scrutiny of Qatar’s successful bid relates to the fact that Qatar had never even qualified for the World Cup before. Moreover, Qatar is a small country with, in effect, only one major city. As such, and even though the games are planned to take place in three different cities, it will be the first World Cup where the stadiums are so close in proximity. In line with its size, Qatar’s geography was also an issue when it was chosen as the host of the 2022 games. Because of the extreme heat during the summer, when all past World Cup games have taken place, FIFA and Qatar announced their decision to hold the games in November-December instead. This will be the first time the games are not taking place in the summer (in the north

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81 - Martin.

82 - Sakura Murakami, Hashimoto resigns from cabinet to become head of Tokyo Olympic committee, *Japan Today*, Feb. 18, 2021.

hemisphere). As such, it has created even further international disappointment and anger towards Doha. The primary reason behind this is the fact that many European and other regional club tournaments take place during that time, and such a change in scheduling has caused major annoyance for football clubs around the world, as well as their fans.

Giulianotti uses the scandals and bribery allegations tied to the selection of Qatar as the host of the 2022 World Cup to explain the concept of soft disempowerment before the event. Not only are the positive outcomes of actions relating to soft power assessed through this concept, the negative social actions that disempower the state are also considered. The bribery allegations continue to take headlines more than a decade after the bid. In 2020, the U.S. Department of Justice indicted individuals and companies in relation to the scandal and officially said that Qatar (and Russia) bribed FIFA officials to secure the hosting rights<sup>83</sup>.

Another issue relates to the state religion and culture and the limitations they impose on Western, non-Muslim, spectators. Sale and consumption of alcohol is a case in point. In addition, there have been international outcries over alleged human rights violations in Qatar, particularly with regard to the migrant workers. As a result of the initial backlash in 2010, there is now “substantial critical focus on Qatar’s treatment of migrant workers, particularly construction workers from south Asia”<sup>84</sup> Moreover, Qatar’s record “on the social rights of women and gay and lesbian groups”, which have been amplified through “Western media and human rights groups”, has been a source of international concern<sup>85</sup>. From campaigns by small student groups, to detailed reports by international human rights institutions, there is a spotlight on Qatar and there have been calls to boycott the 2022 World Cup because of these reasons<sup>86</sup>.

The Qatar National Vision 2030 document<sup>87</sup> emphasizes that the biggest challenge is to balance between rapid modernization and preservation of the cultural and traditional values of an Arab and Islamic nation. This paper argues that, in hosting the FIFA 2022 World Cup, Qatar is not only seizing an opportunity to showcase its world-class capacities as an advanced Middle Eastern country, but also one to become an ‘Ambassador of the Muslim World’ and assertively prove the compatibility of Islam and modernity. Dale Eickelman’s study holds that a ‘tolerant’ Islam is key to maintaining social and cultural

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83 - Tariq Panja and Kevin Draper, U.S. Says FIFA Officials Were Bribed to Award World Cups to Russia and Qatar, *The New York Times*, April 6, 2020.

84 - Giulianotti, p. 291.

85 - Giulianotti, p. 291.

86 - See Amnesty International’s “Qatar World Cup of Shame” Report. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/03/qatar-world-cup-of-shame/>

Exchange Students Blog, Europe should boycott the World Cup 2022 in Qatar, January 17, 2020. <https://sites.ifkw.lmu.de/internationals/2020/01/17/europe-should-boycott-the-world-cup-2022-in-qatar/>

Change.org, Boycott Qatar’s 2022 World Cup of Slavery, with three thousand signatures from circa 2017. <https://www.change.org/p/boycott-qatar-s-2022-fifa-world-cup-of-slavery>

A call for action created with a website “boycott-qatar.de” by two individuals. <https://www.boycott-qatar.de/english/call-for-action/>

Nick Miller, 6 Reasons Why the World Cup Should Be Taken Away from Qatar, *Bleacher Report*, February 18, 2014. <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1964708-six-reasons-why-the-world-cup-should-be-taken-away-from-qatar>

87 - Qatar National Vision 2030, General Secretariat for Development Planning, July 2008.

adherence, while inviting global forces without undermining the state<sup>88</sup>.

The China case is an example of a country whose bidding success in a first mega-event becomes a seed for future events; it has not only been tested as a capable host, but it has continued to bid for major sports events. Qatar has also been doing the same. However, both the 2022 China Winter Olympics and Qatar World Cup are facing boycott campaigns calling for their cancellation if their respective human rights situation is not significantly improved. In the former case, the Uyghur systemic discrimination and marginalization has caused alarm in many international fora; in the latter, it is the construction workers' harsh conditions which has awakened activism and concern. The ways each country deals with these matters are crucial to the empowerment – disempowerment balance.

The embodiment of the 'Africa brand' was key to embracing South Africa's 2010 World Cup. In a similar vein, Qatar has aimed to represent the entire Arab World, and even gain special sympathy across non-Arab Muslim majority countries. When the first attacks against the selection of Qatar began, both the OIC (Organization for Islamic Cooperation) and the Arab League sent a strong message calling their members to fully support Qatar and its right to host the World Cup<sup>89</sup>. Therefore, from the beginning, the discussions on the 2022 project are more about politics than about sports. The wider transnational identity accompanying Qatar 2022 was deeply affected by the 42 months-long Gulf crisis - Qatar blockade - which upset the regional balances and had a strong impact on Doha's ambition to use the World Cup as a consolidation of its rising role in the region.

As for the domestic aspects, just like Putin gained sympathy from Russian citizens and consolidated his legitimacy, the Al Thani ruling family sought and continues to seek to increase its popularity and secure its base of support through the World Cup, particularly during and after the end of the blockade. The massive urban changes and visible fast pace of modernization have, to an extent, challenged traditional lifestyles and public values almost on a daily basis. "Some of the Qatari community is deeply worried about the external impact burdening the Qatari cultural identity and hosting the World Cup may eventually oblige Qatar to change its social fabric"<sup>90</sup>.

Debates among the Muslim scholars have also increased; some target the World Cup as unnecessarily upsetting of the country's religious milieu and public morals, while others look at the past Islamic Civilization and how it managed to accommodate all human and religious diversities. Citizens and residents who find Qatar as a peaceful Islamic oriented ambient, with the family at its core, have shared their dissatisfaction, not only about the event but of its consequences. Younger generations who will be exposed to the month-long event of such magnitude are perhaps inclined to question specific patterns of their local status quo, and the desire for change or reform could appear – or grow. Moreover, as in all studied cases – and Qatar is not an exception – external criticism and pressure has pointed out to the

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88 - Eickelman, D. "Mainstreaming Islam: Taking Charge of the Faith", in Reyes-Ruiz, R. (2010). 21st century globalization. *Abu Dhabi: Zayed University Press*.

89 - World Muslim body lends support to Qatar over 2022 World Cup. *Reuters*. June 18, 2015.

90 - Scharfenort, N. (2012). Urban development and Social Change in Qatar: The Qatar National Vision 2030 and the 2022 FIFA World Cup. *Journal of Arabian Studies* 2 (2).

democratic deficit, lack of proper accountability, and standard social and political rights in the host country. Nevertheless, as Pulleiro warns, “without a political and social pressure from within the country, it would be practically impossible to force a change in the government’s policies, at least in the short-term”<sup>91</sup>.

Aside from political, cultural, and economic issues, environmental concerns must also be factored in. Kwang-Hoon Lee and Jean-Loup Chappelet conducted an extensive study on the impact of soft power on the choice of Olympic host cities between 1990 and 2011. Their findings concluded that success in sports, higher transparency, lower CO2 and particle emissions, and faster economic growth are the likely factors that increases the chances of becoming a host city. Arguably, the same applies for the FIFA World Cup host cities. They too need to illustrate the country’s interest in football, in addition to having the infrastructure to contribute to the “Green Games ecological legacy”<sup>92</sup>. In this sense, Qatar has been actively branding its image as an emerging team in football, evidenced by its victory in the Asian Games, and as a Green hub in the region, proven by its myriad of ecological and eco-friendly projects. The 2022 World Cup is promised to be the most sustainable tournament in terms of environmental considerations ever, and Qatar has been doing better than the benchmarks set forth by international organizations<sup>93</sup>. Moreover, with regard to sustainability, the organizing committee has declared that it has been at the “the heart of the FIFA World Cup 2022 from the start, with planning and delivery premised on the idea that generations to come should find our shared planet a greener, more equitable place, free from discrimination and full of opportunities”<sup>94</sup>. Such statements and actions have aided Qatar to overcome the aspects of the challenges posed by the disempowerment in other areas.

Moreover, some direct sport-related legacies might include “better sports facilities that are widely used, better sports performances at elite level, a stronger sport system at elite level, the future hosting of mega-events, and greater public participation in sport and physical activity, leading to better health”<sup>95</sup>. These goals are undoubtedly part of Qatar’s, and any other host country’s, strategy in preparing for, during, and after the games. However, not all are successful and, often, many countries fail to keep these legacies intact. For instance, “in the sports mega-events of China, Russia, or South Africa there were also evictions, gentrification processes, unfinished works, cost overruns, and “white elephants” that were ultimately financed with public money”<sup>96</sup>. It is yet to be seen whether Qatar’s huge investments will experience a better fate.

Qatar, nevertheless, has been investing on the legacy of the games ever since it initiated its preparations. Interestingly, the group responsible for preparing for the tournament is called the Supreme Committee for

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91 - Pulleiro, p. 14.

92 - Kwang-Hoon Lee and Jean-Loup Chappelet. Faster, Higher, “Softly” Stronger: The Impact of Soft Power on the Choice of Olympic Host Cities, *The Korean Journal of Policy Studies* 27, no. 3 (2012): pp. 47-71.

93 - The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy. See: [https://www.qatar2022.qa/sites/default/files/docs/FWC-2022-Executive-Summary\\_EN.pdf](https://www.qatar2022.qa/sites/default/files/docs/FWC-2022-Executive-Summary_EN.pdf)

94 - Ibid.

95 - Giulianotti, p. 292.

96 - Pulleiro, p. 14.

Delivery and Legacy, illustrating the outright importance given to the post-games' legacy. To further cement the legacy of the 2022 games, Qatar has been actively seeking new opportunities on the global stage. In addition, Qatar has submitted a bid for the 2032 Olympics as well as the 2030 Asian Games.

Qatari soft power resources include its media empires that have a profound viewing in the region and beyond. Aside from Al Jazeera, which serves as a leading news agency in the region, Qatar has a significant stake in the region's sports viewing with its beIN network and satellite channels including Al Kass. Additionally, the sponsorship and ownership of various European football clubs is of significant soft power value to Doha. Qatar Airways' sponsorship of Bayern Munich (and FC Barcelona previously), and Qatar Sports Investments' ownership of Paris Saint-Germain are the most significant of Qatar's soft empowerment tools.

On the political front, Qatar has been facing many obstacles. The most important of which was the imposition of the blockade on Qatar in 2017 by three of its neighbors- Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain- plus Egypt. The blockade, which lasted more than three years and (partially, but officially) ended in January 2021, brought to light a number of regional issues that could have impacted the games if it had continued. Even though the blockade has ended, the political ramifications, including the far-reaching media and social media campaigns against Qatar and its hosting of the 2022 World Cup have already made significant and long-term effects. It can be assumed that there will some portrayal of the blockade during the ceremonies in which the three-year-long situation is embedded in the history of the country as, especially; it took place at a time when the preparations for the games were at their height.

Arguably, the fortification of Qatar's independence and independent approach in foreign policy after the end of the blockade has bestowed Doha a more enhanced role as a stable country on the international stage. Moreover, its actions with regard to mediating and facilitating regional and international conflicts and its hosting of high-level delegations from different countries with the objective of providing a platform for dialogue and negotiations has undoubtedly enhanced Doha's image globally. Additionally, its successful foreign policy approach was the reason it was able to continue its successful streak in completing World Cup related projects during the blockade, as well as during the global Covid-19 pandemic. In any case, the hosting of the global tournament can even be counterproductive; as Pulleiro points out: "there is a chance for the host country to expose its weaknesses, questioning even the key political and economic strengths that served to convince the FIFA or the IOC to grant the organization of the mega-event to that country"<sup>97</sup>, hence it may question the credibility of both host country and global sport's governing bodies.

## **5. Avenues to Empowerment – Preventing Disempowerment**

The 2022 World Cup in Qatar will be the first mega event in which tens of thousands of people from all over the globe will visit an Arab and Islamic country at the same time. Their impressions and experiences will be disseminated and multiplied back in their home countries, and are likely to become

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97 - Pulleiro, p. 7.

inherited stories and narratives for the next generation. Doha faces an unprecedented challenge, as it certainly carries a representativity; which goes far beyond the boundaries of its small territory. The fact that the blockade against Qatar technically ended in January 2021 is an opportunity to be seized in favor of an inclusive World Cup. Besides promoting the Qatari brand, Doha may actually benefit from effectively incorporating its neighbors into the big picture. Without undermining the uniqueness and specificities of Qatar, the Local Organizing Committee and the Supreme Committee may well converse with the multiple stakeholders in order to mobilize a Khaleeji, Arab, or Middle Eastern-wide profile to the World Cup, which may translate, for instance, into versatile travel packages including destinations in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Iran, and others. Fans coming from thousands of kilometers away will want to diversify their World Cup experience across the region; however, a Qatar led initiative could be a rewarding public diplomacy endeavor with positive and lasting geopolitical effects.

When it comes to Islam and its portrayal, it may seem much more sensitive. Besides the oft-discussed matters of alcohol consumption, dress codes, public display of affection among fans – all of which are being addressed through accommodative policies for the tournament- a tolerant and welcoming Islamic profile rather than a strict one could actually be a win-win formula for the Islamic world. That is, without nullifying the Islamic elements and features of the country and region to give way to secular whims, and without alienating the Muslim voices that are critical to the potential moral risks of the mega-event, a wise initiative could be to summon *majales* with local religious leaders, Muslim scholars and conservative figures to discuss viable ways to positively absorb the impact of the 2022 games. It might be crucial to make these voices and perspectives part of the wider conversation and take their insights and proposals into serious consideration.

The opposed models of Beijing and London ‘chauvinistic ethnonationalism’ vs ‘multicultural pluralism’ have been discussed earlier. It is well known that in building the nation, Doha has resorted to a homogeneous narrative where Arabness and Islam are at the core, excluding rich elements that make up today’s Qatar. Since the World Cup is the ‘opening-up’ of the country on the global stage, it is also an opportunity to shift the narrative towards a more inclusive and multicultural one. The opening and closing ceremonies should showcase Qatar’s social and cultural diversity, and in doing so, pay homage to the multiple nationalities that have made possible Qatar’s insertion to modernity. Moreover, a tribute to the thousands of migrant workers that built the venues and that for years are directly responsible for the tournament’s infrastructure, would be highly welcomed by the international community. Hence, residents – both expats and migrant workers- are to become the ideal soft power tools, provided they are part of the conversation and feel as part of the organizers and hosts of the 2022 World Cup.

Finally, while the political aspects of globalization do not resonate in Qatar’s endemic state-society structure, Doha might explore cultural and economic globalization to convey a decisive message of its willingness to be amongst leading states on the global stage. Beyond boosting the local arts and cultural manifestations, Qatar may widely benefit from enabling an international legacy in its own territory, by inviting participating countries to work on artistic proposals that can remain as a public footprint in various venues and locations in Qatar. For this purpose, the diplomatic missions in Doha can be key

strategic partners in coordinating such international contribution and heritage for the World Cup.

## 6. Conclusion

The experiences of past hosts show that there are numerous ways in which countries can be empowered or disempowered through the hosting of mega sporting events. The six cases under consideration provide valuable lessons for future hosts of mega-sporting events. More importantly, the experiences illustrate how differently soft power is used by developed and developing countries, by small states and major powers, and by rich or poor nations. What they all have in common, however, is that they all had the opportunity for soft empowerment, however, their actions before, during, or after the event are what distinguishes their success from one another.

Based on the experiences of past hosts in addition to Qatar's own experience ten years after it won the bid to host the 2022 World Cup, the emirate has been facing numerous bumps on the road in the pre-event phase. The numerous international concerns over the situation with migrant workers in Qatar, as well as the Islamic and cultural norms that are alien to Western audiences, will continue to challenge Qatar's image management and branding measures. Nevertheless, the commitment to holding the most eco-friendly event, continuous presence on international soccer fields through sponsorships, ownerships, and winning championships, in addition to actively seeking to enhance and alleviate the status of the country on the global stage will help Doha in its soft empowerment endeavors in the period before and during the event. Its pledge and dedication to keeping a long-lasting legacy after December 2022 will also help it in the post-event phase of soft empowerment.

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