

Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2022-12-21

Deposited version:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Søyland, H. S. & Moriconi, M. (2022). Qatar's multi-actors sports strategy: Diplomacy, critics and legitimisation. *International Area Studies Review*. 25 (4), 354-374

Further information on publisher's website:

[10.1177/22338659221120065](https://doi.org/10.1177/22338659221120065)

Publisher's copyright statement:

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Søyland, H. S. & Moriconi, M. (2022). Qatar's multi-actors sports strategy: Diplomacy, critics and legitimisation. *International Area Studies Review*. 25 (4), 354-374, which has been published in final form at <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/22338659221120065>. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with the Publisher's Terms and Conditions for self-archiving.

Use policy

Creative Commons CC BY 4.0

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in the Repository
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Qatar's Multi-actors Sports Strategy: diplomacy, critics, and legitimization

Håvard Stamnes Søyland

havard_soyland@iscte-iul.pt

ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL),

Marcelo Moriconi (corresponding author)

marcelo.moriconi@iscte-iul.pt

ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Centro de Estudos Internacionais,

Avenida das Forças Armadas, 1649-026, Lisbon, Portugal.

ORCID: 0000-0002-9220-7062

Abstract

Drawing on official documents and empirical examples, this article analyses Qatar's sports strategy to gain attraction and generate soft power globally. The paper shows how the country based has efficiently used sport as a mean for modernization, diplomacy, and soft power, through a strategy based in the participation of national and foreign actors and institutions. While Qatar's sports diplomacy has been very ambitious, the newfound global attention has led to an increased scrutiny regarding national internal policies. This has resulted in massive criticism regarding corruption allegations and several reports of labour abuses towards the migrant workers in the country. In consequence, critics consider Qatar as an example of sportswashing, which is understood as a deliberate use of sports soft power in seeking to alter a tarnished global reputation. We claim that the Qatari strategy, even having a bit of both, can be used to generate a positive context for social development and we describe how the county has managed to engage foreign actors and institutions to counter external denounces. The context created by successful sports diplomacy strategies and evidence-based external critics might generates an adequate ecosystem to promote substantial cultural and political changes, respect for human rights and individual freedoms. In this context, western countries, sport institutions and external actors play (or not) a crucial legitimator role. And so does money.

Key words: Qatar, soft power, sports diplomacy, sportswashing, legitimation.

Introduction

When Qatar won the bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup in December 2010, it sent shockwaves through the entire sporting world. Until then, Qatar had been a largely unknown entity in world affairs. Many concerns were raised about Qatar's suitability as a host nation. One of the biggest cultural events in the world was going to be hosted in a microstate situated in the Arabian Peninsula with little to no football history to its name where the temperature in the summer reaches well above forty degrees Celsius. For the Qatari government, however, this embodied their grand strategy to become a major force in the world of global sports.

Qatar's engagement in global sports follows a recent trend where resource rich autocratic states increasingly and heavily invest in international sports as a part of their public diplomacy policy (Krzyzaniak, 2016). The goal is to re-brand or alter their image as modern, liberal, and western-friendly, and gain attraction through their association with global sports (Lenskyj, 2020). This development is most visible through the hosting of sporting mega events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup, along with the investments in global sports, where football has been the preferred target with multimillion sponsorship deals of both football clubs and tournaments, and the acquisition of elite European football clubs (Ronay, 2019).

This article describes the way Qatar has efficiently utilised sports and highlights the four pillars on which their strategy to gain attraction and soft power is based: a) hosting international sporting events and building state-of-the-art sporting facilities; b) investing in global sports and acquiring global sporting broadcasting rights along with the promotion of sports initiatives such as sports integrity; c) promoting Qatari success at the elite sporting level; d) engaging famous sport stars who publicly talk in favour of Qatar's political regime and society. Despite the success of its sport strategy, the country has not been able to silence international criticism regarding corruption scandals and human rights abuses. In fact, critics has described Qatar as an example of *sportswashing*, which is understood as a deliberate use of sports soft power in seeking to alter a tarnished global reputation. However, Qatar has learnt how to deal with external denouncement and how to succeed in achieving legitimation and support of sports governing bodies, international political organizations, and foreign celebrities.

The paper is structured along five sections. After the introduction, there is the conceptual framework and the presentation of Qatar's sports strategy. Next follows the methodological explanation. Then, the four pillars of Qatar's sports strategy are analysed using the concepts of sports diplomacy and soft power. The critics and denouncement of

sportswashing strategies are included in the discussion of each pillar. In the final section, the paper discusses how the context created by successful sports diplomacy strategies and evidence-based external critics generates an adequate ecosystem to promote substantial cultural and political changes, respect for human rights and individual freedoms.

Sports diplomacy: soft power and sportswashing

Levermore (2003) has warned that the political use of sports by states is an area that has largely been neglected by academics in International Relations. Most of the literature on the relationship between sports and the international society have been done by experts in the fields of history, sociology, sports, economics, and law. Murray (2012) argues that the practice of sports diplomacy has a bright future but is still a mostly underexplored area of theory and practice in diplomatic studies (Murray, 2012). In an increasingly globalised world, where states compete with several different actors for attention and credibility, sports diplomacy can be an asset in a state's arsenal of foreign policy tools.

The rapid advancements of information and communication technology has resulted in a shift in international affairs, where actors such as NGOs, intergovernmental organisations, multinational corporations, and the mass media play an increasingly influential role (Nye, 2008). These new realities offer new ways to conduct diplomacy and there has been a re-emergence in the use of public diplomacy (Murray, 2012). Public diplomacy utilises a much larger cast of players both inside the government but also outside of it. Everyone from celebrities, athletes, researchers, scientists, teachers, travellers, and students can be public diplomats alongside the more traditional diplomatic apparatus (Potter, 2003). The push towards public diplomacy has created new avenues to conduct diplomacy and new hybrid forms of it have developed. One of these hybrids is sports diplomacy. Murray (2012) defines sports diplomacy as “the use of sports people and events to engage, inform and create a favourable image amongst foreign publics and organisations to shape their perceptions in a way that is more conducive to achieving a government's foreign policy goal” (Murray, 2012:581). Therefore, sports diplomacy is one of many ways for a state to achieve their foreign policy ends.

The organization of the Olympic Games, since ancient Greece, has been an efficient diplomatic tool to improve the image and reputation of countries, and even consolidate relations between them (Pigman, 2010). As Trunkos and Heere (2017) pointed out, “during the Cold War, bilateral sporting events were used repeatedly to increase communication among hostile countries”. For example, in 1972, Ping-pong diplomacy between China and the United States “allowed two nations in the middle of the Cold War to restart dialogue in a politically divided

environment". In 1988, South Korea used the Summer Olympics in Seoul to "improve their relationships with the (then) USSR and Eastern European nations and were successfully able to prevent these nations from boycotting the Olympics in support of North Korea" (Trunkos and Heere 2017: 15).

Sports diplomacy offers original and proactive ways to engage the public and demonstrates that a government's diplomacy is no longer out of date and out of touch. Sporting institutions and athletes are increasing both in appeal, magnitude, and power. States want to utilise the universal appeal of sporting demi-gods such as Cristiano Ronaldo and LeBron James or invest in world renowned football clubs such as Manchester City and Paris St. Germain because sports have a truly global appeal. Furthermore, no one is against sports, and there appears to be somewhat of a moral myopia when it comes to it (Redeker, 2008).

On the other hand, the hosting of sporting mega-events (such as the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup) gives countries the opportunity to showcase their cultural, social, and political values and to create favourable impressions amongst foreign publics. With this attention they can showcase their attractiveness through the shared cultural values of sports (Grix & Lee, 2013). This is a form of public diplomacy where a country seeks to create a favourable impression and increase understanding among foreign audiences (Sharp, 2009).

Sports represent honourable values which appeal to diplomats and governments and have similarities to the noble practices of diplomacy where values such as truth, accuracy, patience, loyalty, and good temper all are important. Therefore, sports can be used as a medium to create relationships across ethnic and cultural divides, and to foster a common understanding and respect through shared values (Murray, 2012).

But sports diplomacy, or in this case diplomacy through sports, is not limited to mere sport, nor does its effectiveness simply depend on sports activity. Abdi et al (2018) suggest that a competent sports diplomacy project must be based on the promotion of two types of values: universal and national. Universal values are those that theoretically have global validity, such as human rights, respect for the environment, fair play, professionalism and the fight against manipulation and doping. Meanwhile, national values differ from country to country, and are related to specific national and local traditions, customs, and cultures that can earn the respect of other nations.

In short, sports are effective soft power tools. The term soft power was first coined by Joseph Nye (1990), who has defined it as the "ability for one country to get other countries to want what it wants" (Nye, 1990). He argues that the old reliance on military strength and economic wealth is not sufficient to achieve a country's foreign policy goal. Nye argues that

countries need to adapt to the new challenges that the information age poses. Instead of merely coerce other countries to do things that they otherwise would not, either through military threats or economic sanctions, countries should seek power through attraction. Soft power co-opts people to want the same as you, instead of coercing them. The goal is to attain admiration, and therefore attraction for one's values, culture, and policies. A state exercises soft power by implementing agendas to form the behaviour of others, through the lens of their own interests in the international arena. This can be done, for example, through educational performance, cultural achievements, or sporting success (Nye, 2008).

But these resources are only viable if the culture truly is attractive to others, where the political values are lived up to both at home and abroad, and where the foreign policy is seen as legitimate with moral authority (Nye, 2008). If a country lacks credibility, their message to the rest of the world will be nothing else than mere propaganda. Credibility becomes a crucial asset and is an important aspect of soft power. Politics have transformed into a contest of "competitive credibility", not only between governments but also among the news media, corporations, NGOs and intergovernmental organisations (Nye, 2008).

Rather than "winning the war", it becomes more important to be "winning the story" in international politics in the information age. Therefore, in the "war" for the story and the credibility, while a country has sports diplomacy at its disposal to seduce the world, other countries have the discursive possibility of discrediting the achievements. The tug-of-war between Qatar and their Gulf detractors Saudi-Arabia and the UAE, who were involved in a four year long diplomatic crisis from 2017-2021, illustrates this point in the Qatari context where the battle of the story and credibility was at the centre stage of the conflict (Dorsey, 2018).

The credibility of Qatar's sports strategy has also been damaged by heavy criticism from Human rights organizations such as Amnesty International (2020) and Human Rights Watch, and newspapers such as The Guardian. Several reports and investigations about the working conditions of migrant workers in Qatar have explored grave issues of unpaid workers, forced labour, human trafficking, modern slavery, and labour deaths (Amnesty International, 2018; Pattinson & McIntyre, 2021). The term sportswashing has been coined to describe how authoritarian states try to launder or whitewash their global reputation and cover up their abysmal human rights record through the glamour of sports (Lenskyj 2020).

Hosting mega sporting events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World cup provides authoritarian states the opportunity to showcase their state-of-the-art venues where global sport stars are competing at the highest level (Grix, & Lee, 2013). While hosting mega

sporting events can be a soft power strategy to enhance global reputation, to attract investment and to promote the tourism sector, it can also work as a tool to repress and smother critical views of the government (Lenskyj, 2020).

Controversies related with corruption, human rights or labour rights tend to be newsworthy before the events take place, but when the competition starts it suddenly disappears in the wake of sporting excellence and what happens on the field takes centre stage. This shows the power of mega sporting events, and how they can set the news agenda on their own (Lenskyj, 2020).

Authoritarian and autocratic states do not only host sporting events as a part of their sportswashing strategy: they also invest billions of dollars in global sports, either through sponsorship deals or through direct ownership. This is most clearly seen in the world of football. The beautiful game has proven to be ideal for repressive regimes who wish to alter their image in a positive manner through sports (Krzyzaniak, 2016). By being associated with famous world renown football clubs, these states seek to alter their image by using the glamour of the game to cover up for their human rights abuses at home (The Guardian, 2018).

This way, they deliberately use the sport's status as the great shared global spectacle as a way to launder their image (Ronay, 2019).

Sports as a developmental tool

Qatar is located on the Arabic peninsula of the Persian Gulf. It has been ruled by the Al Thani family since the mid-1800s and is an absolute monarchy. The current Emir of Qatar is Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

Qatar gained full independence from the UK in 1971 and is a small country with a total area of only 11,586 square kilometres. The revenue from its fossil fuel reserves have transformed it from a poor desert country to one of the wealthiest countries in the world. According to numbers from the World Bank, Qatar has the highest annual GDP per capita in the world at \$128,378¹ (World Bank, 2017) and has virtually no unemployment amongst its citizens. Because of their enormous wealth and the small size of their population, Qatar has developed the most extensive welfare state in the Middle East with free medical care, education, and low-cost housing for Qatari citizens (Dargin, 2007). The Emir of Qatar is the head of state. He holds all legislative and executive power and ultimately controls the judiciary as well (Freedom House, 2020). Political parties are forbidden, and the only elections are for an

¹ All \$ amounts in the text refers to American dollars.

advisory municipal council. Although the citizens of Qatar are the wealthiest in the world, the vast majority of the population (migrant workers) are non-citizens who have no political rights, few civil liberties, and few economic opportunities (Freedom House, 2020).

In the last decades, the Qatari government has seen the need to diversify its economy to become less dependent on fossil fuels. By diversifying the economy, Qatar will become less vulnerable to fluctuations in the energy market and will also gain revenue from new sectors. In line with this objective, the Qatari General Secretariat for Development Planning launched the Qatar 2030 vision, which:

Aims at transforming Qatar into an advanced country by 2030, capable of sustaining its own development and of providing a high standard of living for all of its people for generations to come (General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2008: 2).

Qatar recognizes that it must modernize their society and diversify their economy to be able to maintain a high standard of living for future generations. By investing in infrastructure, public services and advanced technology, Qatar seeks to continue its economic growth and increase the standard of living while becoming more environmentally friendly along the way.

One sector that is paramount in Qatar's quest to become an advanced society by 2030 is their sports sector. To achieve the objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV2030), Qatar launched its first National Development Strategy in 2011 (Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2011). The Sports Sector Strategy 2011-2016 (SSS 2011-2016) is included as one of 14 key sectors that is integrated to the QNV2030.

According to the Sports Sector Strategy, Qatar sees sports as an important tool to achieve their goals both domestically and internationally. Domestically, sports bring people together and creates stronger social cohesion. A more active population where more people partake in sporting activities creates a healthier society both physically and mentally and is beneficial for the society as a whole with reduced healthcare costs and increased labour productivity (Qatar Olympic Committee, 2011).

At the international level, Qatar sees sports as a source of national pride an increased prestige with Qatari athletes winning sporting competitions and by hosting international events, which can raise Qatar's status both regionally and globally. They also see sports as a means to conduct diplomacy, improve and forge relations globally, and attract tourists, investments and trade (Qatar Olympic Committee, 2011).

It is evident that Qatar sees sports not only as a source of national pride and as a cultural identity builder, but also as a diplomatic instrument to forge new relations with countries worldwide and to increase its reputation and status in the world. Hosting sporting events that engage hundreds of millions of viewers worldwide gives Qatar a unique possibility to showcase their country to the global audience and to alter stereotypes of the country and the region, which ultimately gains them soft power in the international system. This way, Qatar is strategically utilising sports as an important part of their public diplomacy apparatus where they create favourable impressions amongst foreign publics through the shared values of sports (Murray, 2012).

The Sports Sector Strategy points out six main priorities within the sports sector which include: 1) Sports and leisure facilities, 2) Promotion and publicity, 3) Sports education and awareness, 4) Athlete pathway development, 5) Sports management, 6) Hosting International events (Qatar Olympic Committee, 2011).

Some notable studies have been conducted on the topic of Qatar's sports diplomacy. Amara's (2005) study of the 2006 Asian games hosted in Doha provided the first academic article on Qatar's sports diplomacy and gave valuable insights into Qatar's motives to host sporting tournaments. Campbell (2011) and Reiche and Tinaz (2018) have researched Qatar's policy of naturalisation of foreign athletes, while Rolim Silva (2014) has looked at the establishment of the Qatar National Olympic Committee. Brannagan and Giulianotti (2014; 2018) have provided insightful studies on Qatar's soft power motives through their investment in global sports with a focus on the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Dorsey (2014: 18) has contributed with analyses of Qatar's public diplomacy and soft power pursuit at both the regional and international level. This article seeks to extend the knowledge on Qatar's sports diplomacy by looking at Qatar's sports strategy and its involvement in the sporting world through various channels. It also offers new insights and a critical view on how autocratic regimes attempts to launder or whitewash their global reputation and to cover up their human rights record and internal polices by being associated with the shared values of global sports.

Methodology

The article presents a descriptive case study of Qatar's sports strategy conducted by analysing key governmental documents and aggregated data. According to Gerring (2004: 1) a case study is defined as an "intensive study of a single unit with an aim to generalize across a larger set of units". One of the main strengths of a case study is the level of depth it offers. While a cross-unit study can be satisfied by explaining the occurrence of an event, the case study can offer an

in-depth analysis that explains why, when, and how the event happened. The criteria of the selection of data have been that they offer accounts or highlight areas where Qatar uses sports people and events to engage, inform and create a favourable image amongst foreign publics and organisations to shape their perceptions in a way that is more conducive to achieving Qatar's foreign policy goal.

The Qatari governmental documents that have been analysed include the Qatar 2030 vision, the first and second Qatar National Development Strategies, the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainable Stadiums report, and the Sports Sector Strategy 2011-2016. This body of literature is supplemented by reviews of FIFA reports along with articles and information from sporting entities within the sporting community in Qatar such as the Qatar Football Federation, the Aspire Academy, and the International Centre for Sport Security. Furthermore, a collection and analysis of media articles from international media actors which refer to Qatar's sports diplomacy have been collected, as well as academic literature concerning the topic. Interviews of global footballers who have connections to Qatar have been collected from articles in the news media and have been reviewed and analysed. This section includes interviews with 10 world-stars that have connections to Qatar.

According to Bowen (2009), a document analysis is the systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents which is examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. It is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies, where it is necessary to produce rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organisation, or program (Stake, 1995). By utilising a case study with the analysis of documents as a method of data collection, it is possible to gain an in-depth knowledge of Qatar's sporting strategy and diplomacy and to extend the understanding of how sports are used as part of a country's arsenal of foreign policy tools. The documents have a high level of representativeness, and the meaning of the content is clear and comprehensible. However, it is still important to be aware of the biases that the different documents present. For example, one can expect that the Qatari state documents will have a certain degree of bias because it is unlikely that it will highlight controversies surrounding the country's sporting diplomacy, such as corruption allegations and labour rights. Therefore, it is important to take a cautious approach in attempting to treat them as deceptions of reality (Bryman, 2012).

Pillars of the Qatari sports diplomacy... and its critics.

Qatar's sports strategy is based on four pillars. Firstly, it consists of the hosting of international sporting events and the creation of state-of-the-art sporting facilities. Secondly, the investment

in global sports, the promotion of sports initiatives, and the acquiring of global sporting broadcasting rights. Thirdly, it emphasizes Qatari success at the elite sporting level. The fourth pillar can be seen in Qatar's promotion through public discourses of several world-famous footballers who either have played in the Qatari football league or have served as an ambassador for the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Given the transformation of politics into a contest of competitive credibility (Nye, 2008), where "winning the story" has become more important in international politics than "winning the war", Qatar's Sports Strategy has also faced widespread criticism from rival countries, the international news media, and human rights groups.

a) Hosting sporting events and state-of-the-art sporting facilities

Qatar's FIFA World Cup will be the first World cup staged in the Middle East, and Qatar will also be the smallest nation to ever host the tournament both by size and population. Although this may have come as a surprise for the rest of the world, for Qatar this was a major step in its strategic plan to become an advanced country by 2030. As stated in the SSS 2011-2016, the "hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup will accelerate the development of the objectives of QNV 2030, which aim at transforming Qatar into an advanced country by 2030" (Olympic Committee, 2011:4). Qatar has had a long-term strategy to become a globally recognised hub for international sporting events and the awarding of the 2022 FIFA World Cup is the final manifestation of this strategy (Amara, 2005; Olympic Committee, 2011).

The first major Asian sporting event which was held in Qatar was the Asian Football Cup in 1988. Later, Qatar hosted the FIFA U-20 World Cup in 1995 and several Asian championships during the mid-2000s, including Handball and Basketball championships. The 2006 Asian Games were a landmark tournament for Qatar, where it could showcase its unique culture and stadiums to the entire Asian continent and alter people's image of Qatar and of the Gulf region (Amara, 2005). In more recent years, Qatar has hosted several major global sporting events such as the Handball World Championships in 2015, the UCI Road Cycling World Championships in 2016, and the World Athletics Championships in 2019. Qatar hosted the FIFA Club World Cup both in 2019 and 2021. Qatar is the host of several annual international sporting events such as the ATP tennis tournament in Doha, the Qatar Masters golf tournament, the IAAF Diamond League, and the FIM Moto Racing World Championships. According to Qatar's Government Communications Office (2020), Qatar has hosted over 450 international tournaments since 1993 and 58 international sport events only in 2019.

The 2022 FIFA World Cup will be the most prestigious event to be hosted by Qatar. The hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup has drastically accelerated Qatar's modernisation project. According to Qatar's finance minister, Ali Shareef Al-Emadi, over €200 billion will be spent in total on infrastructure, including a new metro system in Doha, roads, a new airport, hospitals, hotels, an entirely new city named Lusail, and seven new state-of-the-art stadiums which will be used during the World Cup in 2022 (ESPN, 2017). Qatar is going to spend an estimated \$7 billion on stadiums for the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

The country has been committed to creating stadiums and the surrounding infrastructure that are environmentally friendly and sustainable for future use, to avoid the prospect of world cup stadiums becoming white elephants after 2022 (Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, 2020). The FIFA World Cup demands increased capacity compared to the Qatari local needs. Therefore, many of the stadiums have a modular design where redundant seats will be removed from venues after the tournament. These will be donated to countries that lack sporting infrastructure and facilities. New energy-efficient cooling technology and removable roofs mean that the stadiums will be in use for the whole year. After the World Cup, some of the stadiums will be repurposed into community facilities such as hospitals, schools, and hotels. By doing this Qatar wants to demonstrate how sporting mega events can become more environmentally friendly and have positive outcomes for both their own society and other countries in the world (Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, 2020).

Table 1 shows a list of international sporting events hosted by Qatar. Table 2 shows a list of annual sporting events hosted in Qatar.

The success of this pillar has created abundant negative reactions. A first line of criticism was concerning Qatar's suitability to host the World Cup. Qatar won the bid when competing with the United States, Australia and a joint bid from Japan and South Korea (Jackson, 2010). These countries would already have the necessary infrastructure and stadiums in place to host the tournament, while Qatar had to build seven brand new stadiums, a metro system and an entire new city named Lusail (Buret, 2019).

While Qatar has the financial muscle to build the required infrastructure, they cannot change their climate. Traditionally, the tournament has been played in the summer months which are blistering hot in Qatar. In 2015, it was decided by FIFA's executive committee that the 2022 World Cup would be played in November and December (Borden, 2015).

Table 1: List of international sporting events in Qatar

Year	Events
1988	Asian Football Cup
1995	FIFA U-20 World Cup
2004	Asian Handball Championships; Asian Basketball Championships
2005	World Weightlifting Championships
2006	Asian Games
2009	ISF World Gymnasiade
2010	IAAF World Indoor Championships
2011	Asian Football Cup
2012-2017	FINA/ARENA Swimming World Cup
2014	FINA Short Course World Championships
2015	IHF Handball World Championships; IPC Athletics World Championships
2016	World Amateur Boxing Championships; UCI Road Cycling World Championships
2018	FIG Artistic World Gymnastics Championships
2019	IAAF World Championships
2019-2020	FIFA Club World Cup
2022	FIFA World Cup
2023	FINA World Championships
2024	FINA Masters
2030	Asian Games

Sources: Qatar National Olympic Committee 2011; Elsborg 2018.

Table 2: List of annual sporting events in Qatar

Event	Since
ATP Tennis Tournament Doha	1993
Qatar Masters Golf Tournament	1998
FIM Moto Racing World Championships	2004
FEI Equestrian Global Champion Tour	2008
WTA Tour Tennis Championships	2001
IAAF Diamond League	2010
UCI World Tour, Tour of Qatar	2002-2016
Formula 1 Qatar Grand Prix	2021 – 2023 to 2033

Source: Qatar Olympic Committee, 2011; Elsborg, 2018.

The second wave of criticism was related to the methods used to win the bid to host the championship. Several reports have stated that numerous members of the FIFA executive

committee were bribed by the Qatari delegation (Laughland, 2017). Despite Qatar denying all accusations of wrongdoing (Al Jazeera, 2020), former FIFA executive members have recognised the corrupted strategies used to obtain the tournament. However, several authors (see Jennings, 2011; Panja & Draper, 2020) and the recent scandals involving FIFA have exposed the culture of corruption within the institution. More than an exception, bribing and wrongdoing have been the norm for decades when doing business with world football's governing body. FIFA's own investigation of the bidding processes surrounding the 2018 and 2022 World Cups did not find any evidence of voter fraud.

An alleged agreement between the French and Qatari authorities, UEFA President (Frenchman Michel Platini), and a representative of PSG club was also denounced. In a three-way deal, Platini would vote for the Qatari bid at the FIFA congress, while Qatar would buy PSG and create a new television sports channel in France that would compete with Canal plus. Ten days later, Platini voted for Qatar, while Qatar Sports Investment bought PSG in 2011. Meanwhile, the Qatari based channel beIN Sports currently held the broadcasting rights for French football alongside Canal plus (Lichfield, 2013). Michel Platini was banned from football for four years in 2015 because of ethics violations. In 2019, he was detained by France's Office of the Financial Crimes Prosecutor in relation to the awarding of the 2022 World cup to Qatar, but was released without charge (Picheta & Wojazer, 2019).

Despite those critics, Qatar successfully continues to invest in this strategy and to receive the support of several sports institutions and international federations that chose the country as a destination for their competences. But, while the country gained influence in the sports world, Qatar's international reputation is under increased scrutiny with regards to the human rights situation in the country. The focus has been centred around the situation of the foreign workers in the country and the Kafala labour system. According to Amnesty International (2018), the Kafala system is a sponsorship-based employment in the Gulf region which legally binds foreign workers to their employees restricting all workers ability to change jobs and still preventing many from leaving the country without their employers' permission. International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have denounced large scale labour abuses in the construction sector (The International Trade Union Confederation, 2014; Amnesty International, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Migrant workers represent 88% of the total population of Qatar. Since Qatar was awarded the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the population has grown from 1.6 million in 2010 to 2.6 million in 2018, mainly driven by the construction boom in the country. During the same time, around 6,500 migrant workers have died due to the conditions in which the World Cup

infrastructures are built. Government sources from India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka revealed that there were 5,927 worker deaths in the period between 2011 and 2020. For its part, the Pakistani embassy in Qatar reported another 824 deaths of Pakistani workers in the last decade (The Guardian, 2021).

The country has been put under severe pressure from the international news media, human rights organisations, and the UN to reform and ultimately abolish the Kafala system. As a response, Qatar has taken crucial steps to reform its labour system. In 2020, parts of the Kafala system were abolished, including restrictions on migrant workers changing jobs without their employer's permission and the introduction of a monthly minimum wage of 1,000 Qatari riyal, plus basic living allowances for some workers (Amnesty International, 2020). While these laws signal a willingness from the Qatari government to create better conditions for the foreign workers in the country, human rights movements have alerted that these measures have little effect if they are not actually implemented.

The Qatari government has said that the number of deaths, which is not disputed, is proportional to the large number of migrant workers involved in the project and has emphasized that all workers have access to free, first-rate medical care and that there has been a steady decline in the death rate among "guest workers" over the last decade (The Guardian, 2021).

Because of these problems, Qatar has been considered by its critics as a case of sportswashing.

b) Investing in global sports and broadcasting rights

Another key aspect of Qatar's sports strategy is their focus on sponsorships and marketing in global sports (Olympic Committee, 2011). Through the sponsorships of elite sporting tournaments and sports clubs and the direct investments in global sporting clubs, Qatar utilises sports as a way to forge positive images of their country globally and to brand itself as a modern, friendly, and legitimate nation by being associated with global sports (Olympic Committee, 2011; Ginesta & San Eugenio, 2014).

One central actor in Qatar's investments in global sports is Qatar Sports Investments (QSI). QSI is a branch of Qatar's sovereign wealth fund, the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) (Zawya, 2019). In May 2011, QSI bought 70 per cent of the shares in the French Ligue 1 club Paris St-Germain (PSG) (Connolly, 2011). In 2012 QSI bought the remaining shares of the club, thus completing the takeover (Emmet, 2012). Under QSI's reign, PSG have dominated the top tier French national football league, Ligue 1, by winning the league 7 out of 9 times since 2012. Prior to the Qatari takeover, PSG had only won 2 league titles in their history.

With the financial backing of the Qatari state, PSG have purchased several global superstars such as Zlatan Ibrahimović, Edinson Cavani and David Beckham. In 2017 they broke the transfer record for a footballer with the purchase of the Brazilian megastar Neymar Da Silva Santos Junior for an astonishing fee of €222 million (Laurens, 2017). One year later, PSG paid a reported €180 million for the French World Cup winner Kyllian Mbappé who then became the second most expensive footballer ever (Romano & Christenson, 2017). According to numbers from the German based football transfer data site Transfermarkt, PSG have purchased players for over €1.17 billion since QSI became the owners in 2011 (Transfermarkt, 2011). PSG have signed huge sponsorship deals with several Qatari sponsors, the most notable of which is the deal with the Qatar Tourism Authority, which has paid the football club a reported €120 million annually since 2012 (Conn, 2018).

Several of those investments have been consolidated while Qatar is in an ongoing diplomatic dispute with fellow GCC countries Saudi-Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, as well as Egypt. The countries cut diplomatic ties with Qatar in 2017 and imposed trade and transportation sanctions on the country, accusing them of supporting terrorist groups (Dorsey, 2018). This ongoing dispute also had repercussions on Qatar's sporting affiliations. As a direct result of the diplomatic crisis, Saudi-Arabia blocked the Qatari based channel beIN Sports in the country (Farge & Blenkinsop, 2020).

In the summer of 2017, PSG bought Neymar for a transfer record fee as well as Mbappe. Not only did this add to the power of PSGs brand which promotes Qatar internationally, but it could also be seen as a part of the diplomatic dispute where Qatar shows its Gulf detractors that they are unaffected by the boycott by displaying economic muscle when acquiring these global superstars.

Moreover, since a diplomatic crisis erupted between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, French authorities have tried to build bridges between Doha and Riyadh with shuttle diplomacy between its two anchors in the Gulf. This illustrates the interconnections between international politics and sports, and how diplomatic disputes transcend onto the football pitch.

The Qatar Foundation became FC Barcelona's first ever paid-for shirt sponsor in 2011 when the Qatari non-profit organisation signed a record-breaking deal worth €150 million over a five-year period with the Catalan super club (The Guardian, 2010). Two years later, the Qatari state-owned national airliner Qatar Airways became FC Barcelona's first ever commercial kit sponsor in a deal worth €96 million over a three-year period (Martin, 2016). Qatar Airways is another key actor in Qatar's engagement in global sports. The airliner is currently the primary shirt sponsor of the Italian Serie A Club AS Roma and of the Argentinian club Boca Juniors, as

well as shirt a sponsor for the Belgium second division side KAS Eupen. Qatar Airlines is a FIFA partner and the main sponsor of the Philippines Football League, as well as the official sponsor of both the 2019 and 2020 Football Club World Cups and the 2022 FIFA World Cup. They are also the official airline partner of PSG, German giants Bayern Munich, the UEFA Euro 2020, and the Australian rules football club Sydney Swans (McCullagh, 2019).

Table 3 shows a list of Qatar’s engagements in global sports through various sponsor agreements with global football clubs.

Table 3: List of Qatar’s sponsorships with global football clubs

Organisation	Football Club, length of sponsorship deal	Estimated value (in €)
Qatar Foundation	FC Barcelona, 2011-2013	€150.00m over 5 years
Qatar Airways	FC Barcelona, 2013-2017	€96.00m over 3 years
Qatar Tourism Authority	Paris Saint Germain, 2012-	€120.00m per year
Qatar Airways	AS Roma, 2018-2021	€40.00m over 3 years
Qatar Airways	Club Atletico Boca Juniors, 2018-2023	€5.00m per year
Qatar Airways	FC Bayern München, 2018-2023	€10.00m per year

Source: Qatar Airways, 2020; McCullagh, 2019; The Guardian, 2010; Martin, 2016

Because of the denouncements against Qatar’s internal politics, Bayern Munich’s sponsorship agreement with Qatar Airways struck in 2018 was met with strong protests from their own fans, who believe that Qatar’s human rights issues and the controversies surrounding the World Cup bid collides with the moral values of the club (Smith, 2018). Similarly, FC Barcelona faced criticism because of their sponsorship deals with Qatar, which saw them playing with the Qatar Foundation and Qatar Airways as shirt sponsor from 2011 to 2017. Many felt that their business deals with Qatar was hypocritical for a club with the famous slogan of “mes que un club”-more than a club, who played without a shirt sponsor for more than a century (Schaerlaeckens, 2015). The club president, Joseph Bartomeu noted that the social and political situation in Qatar merits a reassessment of the club's partnership with the Gulf state's national

airline, which ended in 2017 partly because of Qatar's poor global image after years of heavy criticism.

The Doha based Aspire Academy's football dreams program is an extraordinary talent-spotting programme that assesses over 400,000 young footballers every year in developing countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America since its establishment in 2007. According to the Aspire academy, the football dreams program is an "unique humanitarian project whose goal is to empower the youth of the world by identifying, nurturing and providing life skills and an education to football talent scouted throughout the globe" (Aspire Academy, 2020). The facilities of the Aspire academy are of an impressive quality and world renowned football clubs such as Manchester United, Liverpool FC, Bayern Munich and Everton FC have utilised it for warm weather training during the winter (Aspire Academy, 2020; Conn, 2013).

The Qatari government has also provided funds to create a non-governmental organisation who works with sport integrity. Sport Integrity has become one of the main topics in political and sporting agendas all around the World (Moriconi 2020; Interpol & IOC 2015; Council of Europe 2014): due to the massive global online sport-betting market, organized crime syndicates have infiltrated sports to fix matches and launder money (Moriconi & Almeida 2019). Doha is the base of the international non-profit organisation International Centre for Sport Security (ICSS). The ICSS's mission is to safeguard the values of sports by working to ensure good governance, integrity, safety, and security (ICSS, 2020). The Qatari government and the ICSS led the efforts to create the Sport Integrity Global Alliance (SIGA). SIGA (2020) includes more than 100 members of international organisations, sport federations, civil society organisations and major sponsors of global sports, and its aim is to achieve greater transparency and integrity within global sports.

Using evidence from the Football Leaks, some journalists have criticized the ICSS for alleged unreported match-fixing cases and concealment of alleged abuses within the Aspire Academy (Rouget, Martiniere & Robert Schmidt, 2018). Despite the denunciations, the ICSS has become one of the most influential institutions in the sports integrity industry, and its work has been legitimized through partnerships and joint work by international agencies (such as UNESCO, UNICEF, UNODC) and sport governing bodies worldwide².

Qatar has also become a major actor in the world of sports television rights, with the birth of the beIN sports media channel in 2012. beIN sports has acquired the broadcast rights for several top tier European leagues in several countries. In the MENA region alone (Middle

² <http://theicss.org/international-and-multisectoral-cooperation/>

East and North Africa), beIN sports holds the broadcasting rights for the FIFA World Cup, UEFA Champions League, Europa League, English Premier League, Spanish La Liga, Italian Serie A, French Ligue 1, German Bundesliga and several other football leagues and cups. beIN sports also holds major football and sports rights in both France the USA, and Canada. For the joint tv rights of the French Ligue 1, beIN sports paid €607 million a year from 2012 to 2016 and €726m a season from 2016-2020 (Conn, 2017). The Qatari Nasser al-Khelaifi is both the chairman of PSG and QSI as well as the chief executive of beIN sports. Furthermore, he is a member of UEFA's executive committee.

c) Sporting success and naturalisation of athletes

According to the SSS 11-16, one of the key challenges for Qatar's sports sector is to improve the performance of Qatari athletes at the regional and international level. The Qatar Olympic committee was founded in 1979, and the Gulf state participated in its first Olympics in the Los Angeles summer games in 1984. The Qatar Football Association was established in 1960 and became a FIFA member in 1972. At the Olympic level, before Tokyo 2020, Qatar had had relatively modest success, with 4 bronze medals and 1 silver to its name, all won during the summer Olympiad. In Tokyo, the country won 2 golds and 1 bronze. Qatar did not send any female athletes to the Olympics until 2012, being one of the last countries to do so. In Tokyo, three women represented Qatar in athletics, rowing, and swimming.

In the Asian games, Qatar has been considerably more successful with a total of 120 medals, including 43 gold medals, 31 silver medals, and 46 bronze medals. This makes them the most successful of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries at the Asian Games. The Qatari national football team won its first ever title with the victory in the Asian cup in 2019 and has risen in the FIFA ranking from 112th in 2010 to 55th place in 2020.

Qatar has pulled a lot of resources into its sports talent development programs. The Aspire Academy is at the forefront of Qatar's sports talent identification and development. The academy, founded in 2004, has state-of-the-art facilities, leading expertise in sports science, as well as highly qualified international scouts and coaches who seek to develop elite Qatari Athletes. The total cost of the multi-sport facility named the Aspire Zone, where the Aspire Academy is located, was \$1.3 billion (Gillis, Oliver & Briggs, 2007).

Although Qatar has had some success developing elite athletes through the Aspire Academy, most of their success at the elite level is due to the Qatari policy of naturalisation (Campbell, 2010). Because of Qatar's small population, their talent pool is naturally of a modest size. To achieve greater sporting success and gain international prestige, Qatar has put forth a

policy of naturalisation of foreign athletes (Campbell, 2010; Reich & Tinaz, 2018). Qatar's first medallist in the Olympics, Mohamed Ahmed Suleiman was born in Somalia, while their second medallist, heavyweight lifter Angel Popov, was given the name Said Saif Asaad when he became a naturalised Qatari citizen prior to the Olympic games in Sydney in 2000. Another well-known example is the world record holder in the 3000-metre steeplechase Saif Saaeed Shaheen, formerly known as Stephen Cherono and born in Kenya. He made headlines when he declared that he had become a Qatari citizen in 2003, in exchange for a reported \$1 million in addition to \$1000 per month for life (Longman, 2003).

The subject of the naturalisation of athletes is controversial and Qatar has been criticised by both international media and states alike. Qatar is accused of giving passports in exchange for money to foreign athletes who compete under the Qatari colours at the elite sporting level. This creates an uneven playing field with unfair conditions, especially for developing countries, while it also goes against the "values" of sports (Kelner, 2017).

As a response to the trend of the naturalisation of athletes, the IOC introduced in 2018 a three-year waiting period before an athlete can represent a new country. In a similar vein, FIFA forbid the selection of players on national teams who had not been living in the territory of the football association for two consecutive years (Poli, 2007). Other sports federations have much more lenient rules. In the Qatari handball squad that won silver at the 2015 World's Men Handball Championship staged in Qatar, only two of the sixteen man-squad were born in Qatar. (Handball World, 2013; Nygård, 2015).

Global football stars in Qatar

Since the early 2000's, the Qatari football league has attracted several high-profile footballers. More than €40 million were injected into the league during the start of the 21st century, which attracted international football stars such as Gabriel Batistuta, Josep Guardiola, Stefan Effenberger, Claudio Caniggia and Frank De Boer, albeit they were in the twilight of their careers. Each of these players received between €100 and €200 thousand a month in salaries (Amara, 2005).

The influx of world class international players to the Qatari football league has continued in recent years with the introduction of players such as Barcelona legend Xavi Hernandez, the former Dutch international Wesley Sneijder, and the Cameroonian Samuel Eto'o. Many of these players also serve as official FIFA World Cup 2022 ambassadors, by promoting the Qatari bid and the event itself.

In short, Qatar promotion through sport is a multilevel and multi-actor strategy that use not only national actors and state institutions, but also foreign institutions, mainly clubs and sport institutions that promote Qatari companies and even Qatar as a touristic destination or site to invest in, and foreign people, in this case, sport stars that publicly speak in favourable terms of the local culture and society and of Qatar's ability to host a successful World Cup and sport events. For instance:

Xavi Hernandez (World Champion with Spain):

“It will be an historic Cup, without a doubt. People are going to be surprised at what the country is like. In general, there are a lot of prejudices and a lot of unfounded criticism. Qatar has everything; it is a small, hospitable and generous country” (The Peninsula, 2020).

Wesley Sneijder (Former Dutch international):

“From the moment I arrived here I was really impressed. I'd already been told all the stories from the people that I know who have lived here or still play here (...). They told me a lot about Qatar, but since day one I have been impressed”. (Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, 2018).

Josep Guardiola (Former Spanish international and current coach of Manchester City):

“I have had incredible memories at Al Ahli and with people there in Qatar. I spent two nice years and I have good memories from this country. I am looking forward to seeing it (Qatar) in the FIFA World Cup, how well they are going to organize it” (Albawaba, 2020).

Other players that have also spoken in favour of the country and its organization of the World Cup are Gabriel Batistuta (World Soccer, 2010); Frank de Boer (Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, 2015); Ronald de Boer (Goal, 2018); Cafu (Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, 2019), Samuel Eto'o (Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, 2019), Zinedine Zidane (FIFA, 2010), and former Australian international Tim Cahill (FIFA, 2020).

Many of them who have served as ambassadors for the 2022 FIFA World Cup have been met with heavy criticism in their home country. Xavi Hernandez has been criticised in Spain for his defence of the Qatari society on multiple occasions. The Spanish waterpolo star, Víctor Gutiérrez, accused Xavi of defending an “an absolutist country where homosexuality,

for example, is punishable by prison” (Dario AS, 2019). Pep Guardiola, who has been a strong advocate for an independent Catalonia, has been accused of hypocrisy because of his connections with Qatar. In 2010, he stated that the country was a friendly and open country, while a few years later in 2017 he accused Spain of being an authoritarian state (ABC España, 2017).

Discussion and Conclusion

Qatar has shown that sports is an effective tool to promote and improve the public image of a country abroad and to generate a favourable political ecosystem to achieve policy goals. The case also demonstrates the potency of sports as an engine of modernization and development. Despite its importance, the political use of sports continues to be understudied by scholars of international relations and political science.

The sport strategy of this small country goes beyond the sport diplomacy. Such strategy not only use national human, institutional and economic resources, but also involve the active participation of foreign institutions, such as clubs, and actors, such as sport stars, that have a crucial role as legitimators of Qataris plan and values.

Qatar has effectively used sports as a source of development and soft power, learnt how to deal with the critics, and based on the legitimacy provided by the legitimation and support of both sport governing bodies and international political organizations, consolidate its action plan. However, it cannot be said that this success is only related to the use of sports, but rather to the use of money as a means of penetrating sports structures and generating from them channels of publicity and political influence. Considering that soft power co-opts people to want the same as you and generate attraction for one’s values, culture, and policies, it is not sports themselves that is the engine of Qatari soft power, but money. In other words, Qatar’s successful sports strategy does not lie strictly in the matter of sports, but in abundant economic resources efficiently invested in sports (and related areas).

This case shows the limitations of the concept of sportswashing and the need to understand the dynamics of the diplomatic use of sports in a complex and recursive way (Morin 1992), that is, as a process that demands both internal and external legitimation. The effectiveness of Qatar's sports strategy depends on the positive reception of foreign actors. Western clubs and institutions, and especially sports federations and sport governing bodies, have tolerated and expanded some of the practices on which the Qatar’s multi-actor sport strategy is based on. The payment of bribes to win a bid to host international competitions has

been historically widespread. The state clubs (and even multi club ownerships³) continue to grow and even the fans celebrate the news of the arrival of millions of euros, without ethical evaluations of their origin (see the case of Newcastle, for example⁴). On the other hand, the financial fair play has so many loopholes that it is easy to go beyond when it comes to clubs that have sponsors that, in practice, come from the same place as the owner. Finally, although the Kafala Labour System was not new, the construction of infrastructure for the organization of the World Cup was promoted by companies from Western countries that accepted (and took advantage of) the local regulations.

Logically, greater international exposure achieved through the successes of sports leads to greater external scrutiny and increased criticism from those countries that may be threatened or harmed. Given the transformation of politics into a contest of competitive credibility (Nye, 2008) where “winning the story” has become more important in international politics than “winning the war”, the analysis of opposing narratives that emerge from that political struggle gives abundant information on how a successful strategy is legitimated and through which channels.

The success of sports as soft power in countries with autocratic features or totalitarian regimes has generated widespread criticism in western societies, synthesized in the concept of sportswashing. The criticisms are encompassed in issues related to institutional quality, the integrity of the leaders, the protection of human rights, and the guarantees and respect for individual freedoms. But, in this sense, it is important to highlight the power of sport as a promoter of external scrutiny and a way to externally influence the quality of the internal politics of a country. Qatar's political successes put this tiny country and its domestic politics on foreign agendas and, in consequence, critics have stuck with the Asian country, listing a set of political conflicts, sources of corruption and internal abuses. The abuses of the Kafala labour system are not new, but they only entered the international agenda when they were related to infrastructures being built for the World Cup. The tournament has created a political framework in which the Qatari government itself had to accept the criticism and bring about modifications to its labour policies⁵. In fact, other countries, in which the Kafala systems continues, have promoted reforms as well⁶.

³³ <https://offthepitch.com/a/growth-almost-700-cent-number-clubs-being-part-multi-club-ownership-2017>

⁴ <https://www.skysports.com/football/news/11678/12531148/notebook-newcastle-fans-happy-but-big-spend-brings-no-survival-guarantee>

⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/24/qatar-significant-labor-and-kafala-reforms>

⁶ <https://www.roedl.com/insights/saudi-arabia-reform-of-kafala-system-comes-into-force>

Although the situation is far from ideal, it is true that the international scrutiny for the new regulations to be fulfilled will be much greater due to the strategic importance that the country has gained through sports. In this sense, it is good that the autocracies resort to sports diplomacy, even if it is for sportswashing, because they enter the world's radar and this brings a constant external evaluation that accounts for abuses or political processes that, otherwise, would go unnoticed.

Following Abdi et al. (2018), while the use of sport as a diplomatic tool should promote the recognition of diverse national values (such as cultural, ethnic, religious and political differences), external scrutiny, and the necessary legitimation from sports governing bodies, should demand the guarantee of universally recognized positive values (from the protection of the environment and human rights to those related to sports integrity and economic fair play).

On the other hand, due to the economic, political, and social benefits that sports have given to Qatar, it is logical that the country should have accepted internal cultural changes to please the world and maintain the support of international organizations, sport governing bodies and federations, and strategic partners in this ecosystem. The effectiveness of sports diplomacy is not a one-way road. Without the support, recognition and legitimacy granted by sports federations and political institutions (that agree to continue being linked to the country) either through the organization of events such as sports broadcasting rights or sponsoring, it is impossible to develop a sustainable political agenda related with sports.

This multi-lateral framework of political legitimation transforms sports diplomacy into an area not only for development and modernization, but also into a political conjuncture where new channels for the defence of human rights and individual freedoms are naturalized and consolidated. Whether human rights and inclusive values are as important, or even more important than economic interests will depend on the framework of action of international sports and political actors. They will be the key to success for any national attempt at using sports as diplomatic tool.

Funding

This publication was also supported with funding from the strategic programme of the Centro de Estudos Internacionais Iscte-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (with the reference UID/CPO/03122/2019 and UIDB/03122/2020).

Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Research involving Human Participants and/or Animals and Informed consent

Authors have conducted their research in accordance with principles detailed by professional associations and treaties other than the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki such as the International Sociological Association's (ISA) Code of Ethics.

References

- ABC España. (2017, 12. June). Para Guardiola Qatar es un «país abierto» y España un «Estado autoritario». Retrieved from https://www.abc.es/espana/abci-para-guardiola-qatar-pais-abierto-y-espana-estado-autoritario-201706112013_noticia.html?ref=http:%2F%2F europeanpost.co%2F according-to-pep-guardiola-spain-is-an-authoritarian-state-while-qatar-is-an-open-and-western-country%2F
- Abdi, K., Talebpour, M., Fullerton, J., Ranjkesh, M. J., & Jabbari Nooghabi, H. (2018). Converting sports diplomacy to diplomatic outcomes: Introducing a sports diplomacy model. *International area studies review*, 21(4), 365-381.
- Amara, M (2005). 2006 Qatar Asian Games: A 'Modernization' Project from Above? *Sport in Society*, 8(3), 493-514. DOI: 10.1080/17430430500249217
- Amnesty International. (2018) Migrant Workers Rights with Four Years to the Qatar 2022 World Cup. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/02/reality-check-migrant-workers-rights-with-four-years-to-qatar-2022-world-cup/>
- Aspire Academy (2020). Who we are. Retrieved from <https://www.aspire.qa/about/who-we-are>
- beIN Media Group (2020). beIN MENA (Middle East North Africa). Retrieved from <https://www.beinmediagroup.com/subsidiary/bein-mena/>
- beIN Media Group (2020). beIN SPORTS France. Retrieved from <https://www.beinmediagroup.com/subsidiary/bein-sports-france/>
- Bowen, G. (2009). *Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method*. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2) 27-40. DOI: [10.3316/QRJ0902027](https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027)

- Brannagan, P. M., & Giulianotti, R. (2018). The soft power–soft disempowerment nexus: the case of Qatar. *International Affairs*, 94(5) 1139–1157. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy125>
- Brannagan P.M., & Giulianotti, R. (2014) Soft power and soft disempowerment: Qatar, global sport and football's 2022 World Cup finals. *Leisure Studies*, 34(6) 703-719. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2014.964291>
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Campbell, R. (2010). Staging globalization for national projects: Global sport markets and elite athletic transnational labour in Qatar. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 46(1), 45–60. DOI:10.1177/1012690210368887
- Conn, D. (2013, 18. November) How Qatar became a football force: from Barcelona to PSG and World Cup. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2013/nov/18/qatar-barcelona-psg-world-cup-2022>
- Conn, D. (2017). *The Fall of The House of FIFA*. London: Yellow Jersey Press.
- Conn, D. (2018, 11. April). Paris Saint-Germain may face Uefa sanctions for over-valued Qatari deals. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2018/apr/11/psg-may-face-uefa-sanctions-overvalued-qatari-deal>
- Dario AS. (2019, 13. December). Xavi "stop making a fool of yourself". Retrieved from https://en.as.com/en/2019/12/13/football/1576242708_837846.html
- Dorsey, J.M. (2015). How Qatar is Its Own Worst Enemy. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 32(3), 422-439. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2015.1008212>
- Dorsey, J.M. (2018). Trouble in Sport Paradise: Can Qatar Overcome the Diplomatic Crisis? *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 116, 179-196. DOI: 10.4000/rccs.7479
- Elsborg, S. (2018, 4. September). Sport as a driving factor in Qatar's National Development Strategy 2018-2022. *Play the game*. Retrieved from https://www.playthegame.org/news/comments/2018/073_sport-as-a-driving-factor-in-qatars-national-development-strategy-2018-2022/

- Emmet, James. (2012, 7. March). Qatar Sports Investment (QSI), headed by Al Jazeera Sport chief Nasser Al-Khelaifi, has completed its purchase of Paris Saint Germain (PSG). *Sports Pro*. Retrieved from https://www.sportspromedia.com/news/qsi_completes_psg_buyout
- Esherick, C.; Baker, R.; Jackson, S. & Sam, M. (eds.) (2017): *Case studies in sport diplomacy*. West Virginia: FiT Publishing.
- FIFA. (2020, 10. February). Tim Cahill joins Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy as an official ambassador. Retrieved from <https://www.fifa.com/worldcup/news/tim-cahill-joins-supreme-committee-for-delivery-legacy-as-an-official-ambassador>
- FIFA. (2010, 2. December). Zidane: A victory for the Arab world. Retrieved from <https://www.fifa.com/worldcup/news/zidane-victory-for-the-arab-world-1345137>FIFA
- Freedom House. (2020) Qatar. Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/qatar/freedom-world/2020>
- General Secretariat for Development Planning (2008). *The Qatar 2030 vision*. Retrieved from <https://www.gco.gov.qa/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/GCO-QNV-English.pdf>
- Gerring, J. (2004). What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for? *American Political Science Review*, 98(2), 341-354.
- Gills, R., Oliver, B., & Briggs, N. (2007, 11. November 2007). Spoil sports Are the petrodollars of the spend, spend sheikhs distorting world sport? *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2007/nov/11/spoilports>
- Goal. (2018, 16. December). Ronald de Boer - 'I don't see any problem with weather during 2022 World Cup in Qatar'. Retrieved from <https://www.goal.com/en-us/news/ronald-de-boer-no-problem-weather-qatar-world-cup-2022/n7y1sokz900q1kto3s9zklotq>
- Grix, J. & Lee, D. (2013). Soft Power, Sports Mega-Events and Emerging States: The Lure of the Politics of Attraction. *Global Society*. 27(4), 521-536. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2013.827632>
- Handball World. (2013, 13. July) Qatar to stop citizenships - except for keepers. Retrieved from <https://www.handball-world.news/o.red.r/news-2-1-25-49324.html>

- International Centre for Sport Security. (2020) About the ICSS. Retrieved from <http://theicss.org/about-us/>
- Jackson, S. J. (2013). The contested terrain of sport diplomacy in a globalizing world. *International Area Studies Review*, 16(3), 274-284.
- Jiménez-Martínez, C. & Skey, M. (2018, 25. July). How repressive states and governments use ‘sportswashing’ to remove stains on their reputation. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/how-repressive-states-and-governments-use-sportswashing-to-remove-stains-on-their-reputation-100395>
- Kelner, M. (2017, 3. August). ‘We are treated like sporting slaves’: Ethiopian lifts lid on trade in athletes. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2017/aug/03/sporting-slaves-ethiopian-trade-athletes-lily-abdullayeva-azerbaijan>
- Krzyzaniak, J. S. (2016). The soft power strategy of soccer sponsorships. *Soccer & Society*, 19(4), 498–515. DOI :10.1080/14660970.2016.1199426
- Laurens, J. (2017, 4. August). Neymar: how the record-breaking €222m move to PSG unfolded. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2017/aug/04/neymar-how-record-breaking-move-to-psg-unfolded>
- Lenskyj, J. H. (2020). *The Olympic Games: A Critical Approach*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing.
- Levermore, R., & Budd, A. (2003). *Sport and International Relations: An Emerging Relationship*. London: Routledge.
- Longman, Jere (2003, 23. August). TRACK AND FIELD; A Runner Changes His Flag For Cash. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/08/23/sports/track-and-field-a-runner-changes-his-flag-for-cash.html>
- Mackay, D. (2010, 1. July) Qatar decision to send female athletes to London 2012 increases pressure on Saudi Arabia. *Inside the game*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/9939/qatar-set-to-bow-to-ioc-pressure-and-send-women-to-london-2012>

- Martin, R. (2016, 19. July). Barcelona extend Qatar Airways sponsorship deal to 2017. Reuters. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-soccer-spain-fcb/barcelona-extend-qatar-airways-sponsorship-deal-to-2017-idUKKCN0ZZ1N2>
- McCullagh, K. (2019, 27. November) Qatar Airways agrees to sponsor Philippines Football League. *Sport Business*. Retrieved from <https://www.sportbusiness.com/news/qatar-airways-agrees-to-sponsor-philippines-football-league/>
- Moriconi, M. (2020). Deconstructing match-fixing: a holistic framework for sport integrity policies. *Crime, Law and Social Change* 74(1), 1-12.
- Moriconi, M., & Almeida, J. P. (2019). Portuguese fight against match-fixing: Which policies and what ethic? *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 4(1), 79-96.
- Morin, E. (1992). From the concept of system to the paradigm of complexity. *Journal of social and evolutionary systems*, 15(4), 371-385.
- Murray, S. (2012). The Two Halves of Sports-Diplomacy. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 23(3), 576-592. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2012.706544>
- Nye, S. J. (1990) *Bound To Lead: The Changing Nature Of American Power*. New York: Basic Books.
- Nye, S.J. (2008). Public Diplomacy and Soft Power. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 616(1), 94–109. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311699>
- Nygård, S. (2015, 14. January). VM-vertene har kjøpt seg landslag for fantasisommer [The world cup host have bought a national team for fantasy sums]. *Tv2*. Retrieved from <https://www.tv2.no/a/6423544/>
- Pattison, P., & McIntyre, N. (2021, 23. February). Revealed: 6,500 migrant workers have died in Qatar as it gears up for World Cup. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/23/revealed-migrant-worker-deaths-qatar-fifa-world-cup-2022>
- Pigman, G. A. (2010). *Contemporary diplomacy. Representation and communication in a globalized world*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

- Poli, R. (2007) The denationalization of sport: De-ethnicization of the nation and identity deterritorialization. *Sport in Society* 10(4): 646–661.
- Potter, E. (2003). Canada and the New Public Diplomacy. *International Journal*. 58(1), 43-64. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430430802019482>
- Qatar Airways. (2020) Sponsorship, Retrieved from <https://www.qatarairways.com/en-pt/sponsorship.html>
- Qatar Olympic Committee (2011). *Sports Sector Strategy 2011-2016*. Retrieved from http://blogs.napier.ac.uk/qatar2022/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2015/06/sports_sector_strategy_final-English.pdf
- Redeker, R. (2008). Sport as an opiate of international relations: The myth and illusion of sport as a tool of foreign diplomacy. *Sport in Society*. 11(4). 494-500. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430430802019482>
- Reiche, D. & Tinaz, (2018). Policies for naturalisation of foreign-born athletes: Qatar and Turkey in comparison. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 11(1) 153-171. DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2018.1528994
- Rolim S, L.H. (2014) The Establishment of the Qatar National Olympic Committee: Building the National Sport Identity. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 31(3). 306-319. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2013.878136>
- Romano, F. & Christenson, M. (2017, 27 August). Kylian Mbappé set to join PSG on loan with option to buy for €155m. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2017/aug/27/paris-saint-germain-agree-deal-kylian-mbappe-monaco>
- Ronay, B. (2019, 15. February). Sportswashing and the tangled web of Europe's biggest clubs. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2019/feb/15/sportswashing-europes-biggest-clubs-champions-league-owners-sponsors-uefa>
- Rouget, A, Martiniere, M, & Schmidt, R. (2018, 25. November). How Qatar used an anti-corruption organisation to spy on its rivals. *Mediapart*. Retrieved from https://www.mediapart.fr/en/journal/international/251118/how-qatar-used-anti-corruption-organisation-spy-its-rivals?page_article=1

- Scott, J. (1990). *A Matter of Record*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Sharp, P. (2009). *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sports Integrity Global Alliance. (2020). Vision and Mission. Retrieved from <https://sigasport.com/vision-and-mission/>
- Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy. (2020) FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainable Stadiums. Retrieved from <https://img.fifa.com/image/upload/re9qlxkomvg0vzjtoaf1.pdf>
- Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy. (2018, 5. March). Wesley Sneijder says it's Qatar's time to host the World Cup. Retrieved from <https://www.qatar2022.qa/en/news/wesley-sneijder-says-it-s-qatars-time-to-host-the-world-cup>
- Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy. (2019, 15. March). Samuel Eto'o: Qatar's 'beautiful' World Cup will be unique. Retrieved from <https://www.qatar2022.qa/en/news/samuel-etoo-qatars-beautiful-world-cup-will-be-unique>
- Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy. (2019, 7. October). Cafu says Qatar 2022 will be an 'incredible' experience for all. Retrieved from <https://www.qatar2022.qa/en/news/cafu-says-2022-will-be-an-incredible-experience-for-all>
- Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (2015, 19. January). Frank De Boer: 'Qatar will host a fantastic World Cup'. Retrieved from <https://www.qatar2022.qa/en/news/frank-de-boer-qatar-2022>
- The Peninsula (2020, 28. July). Xavi says Qatar would host historic World Cup; coaching Barca remains his primary goal. Retrieved by <https://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/28/07/2020/Xavi-says-Qatar-would-host-historic-World-Cup-coaching-Barca-remains-his-primary-goal>
- The Guardian (2021, 23. February). Revealed: 6,500 migrant workers have died in Qatar since World Cup awarded. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/23/revealed-migrant-worker-deaths-qatar-fifa-world-cup-2022>

The Guardian. (2010, 10. December). Barcelona agree €150m shirt sponsor deal with Qatar Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2010/dec/10/barcelona-shirt-sponsor-qatar-foundation>

Transfermarkt (2020) Paris Saint-Germain. Retrieved from <https://www.transfermarkt.com/fc-paris-saint-germain/transferrekorde/verein/583>

Trunkos, J., & Heere, B. (2017). Sport diplomacy: A review of how sports can be used to improve international relationships. In Esherick, C.; Baker, R.; Jackson, S. & Sam, M. (eds.) *Case studies in sport diplomacy*. West Virginia: FiT Publishing, 1-18.