



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

When sport diplomacy backfires: A Comparative Analysis of how sports mega-event host countries react to foreign criticism

Krämer, Niklas

Citation

Krämer, N. (2022). *When sport diplomacy backfires: A Comparative Analysis of how sports mega-event host countries react to foreign criticism.*

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master thesis in the Leiden University Student Repository](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3487235>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Universiteit Leiden

Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs

Advanced MSc. in International Relations and Diplomacy



When sport diplomacy backfires

A Comparative Analysis of how sports mega-event host countries react to foreign criticism

Niklas Krämer Master Thesis

First Reader: Dr. Paul Meerts

Second Reader: Prof. Dr. M. O. Hosli

Word Count: 20.089

Acknowledgements

This thesis is the result of many years of studying on my part, but it would have not been possible without the support of many people. First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents Frank and Antje Krämer. I will forever be grateful that you decided to send me to the Birklehof, marking the beginning of this journey. Together with my sister Hanna and my two grandparents, you are my backbone which has allowed me to walk this path in the first place.

Thank you to my supervisor Dr. Paul Meerts, who guided me in this process with his special calmness. Thanks to David Kutscher and Lucas Vöstel who, despite the great distance, have been loyal friends for many years. Thanks to my friends TJ Werner, Marc Grau, Daniel Pranajaya, Abdul-Fatahi Osman with whom I had the pleasure to share this adventure in Den Haag. Finally, thank you to Phuong Pham for being on my side and supporting me all through.

Without all of you I would not be where I am today.

Table of Content

Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Chapter 1: Literature Review.....	8
<i>Traditional Sport Diplomacy</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>New Sports Diplomacy</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Sport Mega-Events.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Sport Diplomacy Limitations</i>	<i>17</i>
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework	20
<i>Soft Power.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Qatar's Soft Power</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Chinas Soft Power</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Soft Disempowerment</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Qatar's soft disempowerment</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>China's soft disempowerment</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Gap in the Literature.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Hypotheses and Expectations</i>	<i>29</i>
Chapter 3: Methodology	31
<i>Case study selection</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Data collection and method of analysis.....</i>	<i>32</i>
Chapter 4: Qatar Case Study Analysis	34
<i>Inaction</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Acting proactively</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Discrepancy between theory and practice.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Fighting back.....</i>	<i>40</i>
Chapter 5: China Case Study Analysis	43
<i>Suppressing criticism.....</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Rejecting any wrongdoing</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Displaying China's power and strength</i>	<i>48</i>
Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendation.....	51
Bibliography.....	54
Appendix	59
Appendix 1: Interview Transcripts	60

Abstract

Research on sport diplomacy has revealed that host countries of sporting mega events such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games are increasingly coming under criticism. Hosting sports mega-events as a means of public diplomacy risks failing. This thesis explores how host countries of sport mega-events react to foreign criticism. Applying thematic analysis on a series of semi-structured interviews with leading sports journalists and academic experts' sheds light on the reactions of the two case-studies Qatar and China's to foreign criticism. Both countries are facing foreign criticism as a result of being the host countries of the most important sporting event in 2022. The results indicate that a significantly greater willingness to social, political, and economic changes in response to foreign criticism can be expected from smaller autocratic states like Qatar than from autocratic superpowers like China.

Introduction

“It’s ridiculous that we are going to play in a country – how does FIFA say it? To develop the football there. That is bullshit. But it doesn’t matter – it’s about money, commercial interests. That’s the main motive of FIFA” (The Athletic 2022). Those are the words of the Dutch national football coach Louis van Gaal from March 22, 2022. His statement reflects a general attitude of Western countries towards hosting the FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Since FIFA announced in December of 2010 that Qatar would be the host country, the desert state has faced massive criticism and controversy from abroad. Corruption in the awarding process, the lack of sports infrastructure in the country, and the problematic climatic conditions are arguments used to underline that Qatar was the wrong choice to organize one of the most significant sporting events. However, not only matters directly connected with the staging of the World Cup are critically analyzed. The human rights situation regarding the handling of migrant workers, minorities such as homosexuals, or environmental pollution are topics that make Qatar appear highly controversial in the public eye. This poses a problem for the ruling family of the Gulf state, as the hosting of the World Cup is closely linked to political purposes.

A comprehensive body of sports diplomacy literature has taken on to research the interplay between politics and sports. Various studies have shown how states and their political leaders use sport as a diplomatic tool to achieve a variety of political goals (Grix 2013, Black and Peacock 2013, Murray and Pigman 2014, Rofe 2014, Murray 2016, Chat 2016, Trunkos & Heere 2017). Among other things, sport is used to revive troubled relations between states, as a form of protest and punishment, as a platform for political elites to meet informally, and as a mean for propaganda and prestige-seeking activity. While actors and methods have evolved since the turn of the millennium, sports mega-events continue to play a central role in sports diplomacy. Thanks to technological advances, the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup reach a number of spectators that few other events can match. For the host country, this offers tremendous public diplomacy opportunities in which they can present themselves to the world and impress with their culture, sporting achievements, and organizational talent. Consequently, in the 21st century, particularly emerging countries such as Brazil, Russia, China, and Qatar have applied to host sports mega-events. However, as the previous statement by Louis van Gaal shows, this development is accompanied with great skepticism and foreign criticism.

Recent host countries of sports mega-events find themselves in a situation, on the one hand, with a sports diplomacy strategy that looks to paint the picture of an attractive and modern

nation-state; and, on the other hand, being criticized as a corrupt country that commits human rights violations and is responsible for severe environmental pollution. Current sports diplomacy literature lacks insights into how host countries behave in such a situation or how they should best respond to foreign criticism.

This study addresses this research gap in sport diplomacy literature by answering the following research question: How do sports mega-event host countries react to foreign criticism? To that end, I will conduct a comparative case study analysis of Qatar, the host country of the FIFA World Cup 2022, and China, the host country of the Winter Olympic Games 2022.

Shedding light on how host countries of sports mega-events react to international criticism serves multiple relevant purposes. On the one hand, it ensures that future host countries are aware of the potential disadvantages of hosting sports mega-events, understand what options there are to react to foreign criticism and thus maximize the long-term benefits in their sports diplomacy strategies. Besides, it can help sports mega-events to fulfill their core diplomatic purpose again, to overcome separation between disparate peoples, nations and states and to reduce misunderstandings between ‘them’ and ‘us’ by demonstrating that strangers speak a shared, universal language of sport. Furthermore, it contributes to understand the conditions under which foreign criticism can trigger substantial change, thus leading to a social, political, and economically legacy for the population of the host country. Finally, from an academic point of view, it helps scholars of sport diplomacy better predict how host countries of future sports mega-events will behave if they inevitably find themselves in a similar situation.

This paper is divided into six chapters. Chapter one comprises the Literature Review, presenting existing literature on sports diplomacy and discussing recent trends. Chapter two sets out the Theoretical Framework, drawing on the concepts of soft power and soft disempowerment, and discuss previous finding regarding case studies of Qatar and China. Furthermore, in this chapter, I indicate gaps in the academic literature which this paper will seek to contribute and expand. Chapter three presents the methodology, justifying the case study selection and explaining the data collection and method of analysis used. Fourth, I uncover and discuss my interview data with reference to the emerging themes of how they reacted to foreign criticism amid their sports diplomacy strategy. In Chapter six, I conclude by providing a final summation of all findings. I argue that in the future, we can expect a significantly greater willingness to social, political

and economic changes in response to foreign criticism from smaller autocratic states like Qatar than from an autocratic superpower like China.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Sport has long been neglected by scholars of international relations and political science. As Levermore and Budd have pointed out, IR (and political science) has barely had an impact on the study of sport in general and on the political use of sport by states (Levermore and Budd 2004, found in Grix 2013, 16). Nevertheless, thanks to sport's rising popularity as well as its ongoing politicization; today, a comprehensive literature on the subject of sport diplomacy has developed which is dealt with in the following Literature Review. The chapter is organized by recurring central themes: Traditional Sport Diplomacy, New Sports Diplomacy, Sport Mega-Events, and Sport Diplomacy Limitations.

Traditional Sport Diplomacy

Various scholars describe a shift that has taken place in the relationship between sport and diplomacy. While Murray calls this traditional versus version 2.0 of sport diplomacy, Black and Peacock describe this evolution as a club to network Diplomacy. Although the terminology is different, many similarities can be observed.

At its core, traditional sports diplomacy is a tool used by governments to achieve foreign policy goals. In the words of Stuart Murray: “Sport, (...), is a diplomatic means to foreign policy ends” (2016, 2). Governments from all types of the political spectrum have embraced the power of sports and took advantage of it: German Nazis, Italian Fascists, Soviet and Cuban Communists, Chinese Maoists, Latin American juntas, or western capitalist.

Traditional sport diplomacy is characterized by using sport for propaganda and prestige-seeking activities. This is particularly the case when it comes to sports mega-events (SME) such as the Olympic Games or the FIFA Football World Cup. Due to their enormous popularity and the resulting number of spectators, such competitions offer an ideal stage on which countries can present themselves. Especially, the host country can engage and influence foreign publics through its athletic prowess, organizational capacities, culture, values, or ideology (Murray 2016, 3). Black and Peacock note that the effects of using SMEs as a mean of propaganda and prestige seeking are not limited to the international audience, but also address the domestic population (2013, 4). The so-called 'Nazi Olympics' of 1936 in Berlin are probably the most apparent instance. The German Nazi regime used the Olympic Games to demonstrate the superiority of the German Aryan race to both the world and its own citizens (Chat 2016, 141).

Sport diplomacy as a mean to spread propaganda and prestige seeking has given rise to another form of traditional sport diplomacy that Black and Peacock describe as “relatively low-cost, high-visibility forms of protest and punishment” (2013, 4). Disdain for a host country can be expressed through a diplomatic boycott, the absence of political representatives, or a sporting boycott by simply refusing to participate under the given circumstances. In more extreme cases a nation may decide to withdraw from the tournament altogether (Murray 2016, 3). A particularly notable example of this manifestation of sporting animosity were the tit-for-tat boycotts during the Cold War. In response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the United States boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics. Four years later, the Soviet Union reciprocated the gesture by also staying away from the Games in Los Angeles (ibid.). A positive example of the use of sport sanctions was isolating apartheid South Africa from international sporting competitions. As Black and Peacock assert, although the role of the sporting boycott remains contested, this case provides an early example of the potential of transnational social movements to affect international diplomatic outcomes (2013, 5-6).

Furthermore, traditional sport diplomacy is also a versatile tool within bilateral relationships (Murray 2016, 3). Because of its myth of autonomy, “sport was often viewed as a relatively benign precursor and precedent for improved relations” (Black and Peacock 2013, 6). Ping-Pong diplomacy, between the U.S. and China allowed the two nations to revive their diplomatic relations in a politically divided environment during the 1970s (Trunkos and Heere 2017, 5-6). At the World Table Tennis Championships in Nagoya, Japan, American table tennis player Glenn Cowan and Chinese world champion Zhuang Zedong became friends. Thereupon the proposal was made that the American table tennis team should tour in China. This was seen as a test to see if the public in both countries would accept normalization of diplomatic relations (ibid.). After the tour was a success, National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger’s visited China in July 1971 and later U.S. President Nixon.

Fourth, sporting contests provide an unofficial reason and location for high profile politicians and leaders to meet informally. While the official reason for their visit is to enjoy and support the performances of the elite athletes, including the ones from their own nations, many heads of state often take advantage of the opportunity to engage with other parties in informal discussions about issues and news (Trunkos and Heere 2017, 7). Multiple scholars point to Cricket for example as a shared passion of otherwise rival India and Pakistan. Many leaders of

the two countries have met and exchanged informally at the sideline of cricket matches. Murray observed that “these cricket diplomacy meetings have occurred since the early 1980s as a way of decreasing tensions over nuclear ambitions, Kashmir, terrorism or any number of other disputes” (2016, 3).

Another form of traditional sport diplomacy is the occasional use of sport ambassadors to create awareness for the international relationship and amplify a state’s diplomatic message (Trunkos and Heere 2017, 10). Sports teams, events, and even individual athletes can become sports ambassadors and provide a face to the nation. Black and Peacock argue that using sport athletes over politicians or professional diplomats has the advantage “that the negotiations can be seen less as government directed and more as free and spontaneous” (2013, 10). Furthermore, they note that sports athletes are generally well-liked and admired compared to politicians which many people distrust (ibid.). Murray provides two examples of elite athletes acting as sport ambassadors. First the famous American sprinter Jesse Owens who has acted as a goodwill ambassador to nations with a questionable attitude towards racial integration in the 1960s. And secondly, the Chinese basketball player Yao Ming who has been playing for the Houston Rockets (2002–2011). Murray states that prior to the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, Yao Ming was able to attract millions of Chinese fans to the American National Basketball Association and, vice-versa, expose millions of Americans to the ‘new’ China (2016, 6). Trunkos and Heere argue that athletes such as Yao Ming (China), Vlade Divac (Yugoslavia/Serbia), George Weah (Liberia), and Kathy Freeman (Aboriginal population Australia) represented a nation or an ethnic group that people knew little about, thereby providing knowledge and understanding to those outside their particular culture (2017, 11).

Finally, Chat claims that sport plays an important role in nation-building and establishing a national identity (Chat 2016, 139). It has served as a mean through which nations and people assert political independence and express a distinctive identity: “In all of these functions, sport becomes a means of contextualizing the renewal or rebirth of the nation.” (2016, 140). Irish sport, for example, has long provided a means of resisting English rule and promoting Irish independence. The Gaelic Athletic Association was established in 1884 and specifically promoted traditional Irish sports such as hurling and Gaelic football. English sports like rugby, soccer, and cricket, on the other hand, have been consciously excluded (Chat 2016, 143). This way, sport became a potent symbol of Ireland’s political independence and resistance through the 20th century. Another example is Taiwan that has been fighting for political independence

from China for many years. After a lengthy political fight, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced in 1980 that Taiwanese athletes could compete in the Games under the Chinese Taipei flag. A symbolic victory for Taiwan's independence aspirations which has also been accepted at other sporting events such as the World Baseball Classic and the FIFA World Cup (Trunkos and Heere 2017, 14). Besides, Black and Peacock claim that having a recognized National Olympic Committee (NOC) or other national sports body can legitimize the very existence of a state or a state-like entity (2013, 6). Having the national sports federation recognized as independent by the IOC can assist in claiming diplomatic recognition. Especially during the Cold War, sporting independence was widespread as a harbinger of diplomatic independence (ibid.).

Besides using sport to assert independence from another nation, Chat argues that sport is a critical instrument for constructing national identity and nation-building of an otherwise divided population (2016, 141). North and South Korea for example have utilized sport to create a sense of unity in numerous occasions. In the run-up to the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, the two Presidents Kim Dae Jung from the South and Kim Jong II from the North arranged a meeting. The result of this summit was that the 180 athletes from both countries attended the Games as a joint delegation, arriving at the opening ceremony under a white "unification" flag with the UN blue colored Korean peninsula (Chat 2016, 142). Two years later, the two delegations once again paraded together at the opening ceremony of the Asian Games in Busan. This was the first time North Korea participated in an international sports event held in South Korea. North Korea sent a delegation of 600 athletes, officials and cheerleaders who were warmly welcomed by the host country (ibid.).

Having described its characteristics Murray conclude that traditional sport diplomacy is somewhat limited. For one, compared to its extent, only a small number of sports, sport people and sporting events serve as a diplomatic mean for achieving foreign policy goals. Most of sports is taking place without any connection to the realms of diplomacy. Furthermore, the practice of traditional sport diplomacy is rather inconsistent and elitist. High profile leaders are occasionally taking advantage of high-profile tournaments, matches or sports people (Murray 2016, 4).

While some aspects of traditional sport diplomacy endured other features have complemented or even replaced them. From the end of the 20th century, a version 2.0 of sport diplomacy or network diplomacy has evolved. Murray claims that this development is best understood by the changing nature of diplomacy after the end of the Cold War. The Westphalian notion of a state monopoly on diplomacy in international relations has been replaced by a flattered pluralistic diplomatic environment (Murray 2016, 4). Large CSOs, multinational corporations, inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), and influential celebrities have emerged as significant diplomatic actors taking over task that were previously only performed by the state. Hence, the modern diplomatic environment is characterized by a multitude of different actors with ambassadors and diplomates acting as managers of such plural networks (Murray 2016, 4). Likewise, the world of international sport has seen the rise of many NGOs that pursue issue-specific or country-specific mandates (Black and Peacock 2013, 11). In this context, CSOs, IGOs, sportspeople and corporations work alongside traditional diplomats in sports diplomacy 2.0. Murray and Pigman claim that these networks use sport “to engage, inform and create a favorable image among foreign publics and organizations, to shape their perceptions in a way that is (more) conducive to the sending government’s foreign policy goals” (2013, 1102-1103).

Murray points to the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) as an early and rich example of sport diplomacy 2.0. Bringing together a unique coalition of partners, UK Sport, the British Council, UNICEF, Comic Relief, Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, the Youth Sport Trust, and individual donors, the FCO designed and implemented the International Inspiration program (II), the first ever international legacy initiative linked to an Olympic and Paralympic Games (London 2012). According to their own statement the original aim of the program was to “enrich the lives of 12 million children and young people of all abilities in 20 countries around the world through high quality and inclusive sport, physical activity and play”. The program ran for seven years (2005-2014) and exceeded initial expectations. As a result, over 25 million children and young people have been inspired. 250,000 practitioners (teacher, coaches, and leaders) have been trained in over 21 countries and 55 national policies, strategies and legislative changes have been influenced. According to Ecorys an external consultancy firm hired to evaluate the success of the initiative, the FCO successfully managed and coordinated a network of actors, created a favorable impression amongst millions of people overseas and learned “important lessons for the future of other sport and development programmers” (Ecorys, 2014, 11 found in Murray 2016, 5)

Using the FCO example, some key characteristics of the new form of sport diplomacy can be identified. On the one hand, version 2.0 of sport diplomacy moves away from the elite-to elite theater, the mega-events and superstars and instead embraces the amateur level. Rather than well-known politicians and professional athletes, the International Inspiration program relied on amateurs such as teachers, coaches, and children. Additionally, version 2.0 is no longer sporadic, inconsistent, elite and reactive but proactive, regular and inclusive. By engaging with new methods, Ramsey argues that the culture of a state's diplomacy can be less aloof, hermetic and “dead” and more innovative, effective, public and even fun (Ramsay 2006). Murray notes that the most significant lesson drawn from the FCO example is that traditional diplomatic institutions are one among a multitude of actors. While the FCO participated, coordinated and facilitated, it did not lead.

New actors have begun to play a significant role in version 2.0 of sport diplomacy. These actors have been briefly studied by scholars.

Murray and Pigman (2013) argue that powerful sport administrative institutions such as the International Olympic Committee and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) can be said to practice a distinct type of diplomacy (2013, 1099). In many ways, they resemble other multilateral institutions as diplomatic actors. They have charters or constitutions which include a mission statement that defines their goals. They have institutional structures, rules and norms, as well as flags and other symbols, which they use in “a highly self-conscious effort to brand themselves and their sport” (Murray and Pigman 2013, 1110-1111). Furthermore, to achieve their interests and pursue their objectives they engage in core diplomatic functions such as negotiation, communication and representation with governments, multinational cooperation, global media firms and CSOs (ibid.).

Due to the commercialization of sport, multinational cooperation's (MNC) from the private sector have gained great influence on ISOs and international sport. At the end of the 1980s, then IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch invited commercial sponsors to bid for the right to associate themselves with the Olympic movement in order to save the IOC from bankruptcy. Other ISOs and NOCs followed the IOC's example. Consequently, MNCs are now an integral part of the Olympic Movement, FIFA and other smaller ISOs. They often influence or challenge sport bodies, for example by insisting that popular events be broadcast at prime times for their viewers and potential customers. At the same time, MNCs have enabled the IOC and FIFA to

unprecedented power and wealth. Black and Peacock would even go so far as to say that the IOC's decision to commercialize its brand transformed it into an MNC itself (2013, 12).

The role of superstar athletes in international relations has also increased noticeably. With reference to Cooper's work on celebrity diplomacy, Murray notes that Roger Federer, Usain Bolt or Lionel Messi can be considered as celebrity sporting diplomats, people who “(use) the attention they receive to focus the cameras on international issues” (Cooper 2008, 7 found in Murray 2016, 6). For example, through his engagement as a goodwill sports ambassador at Team UNICEF, Lionel Messi brings attention to children's rights, health, education (ibid.). Furthermore, Rofe (2014, 1137) argues that certain sport clubs like Football club Manchester United, Baseball's New York Yankees, or NFL's Dallas Cowboys are in a position that enables them to influence the diplomatic process in contemporary diplomacy.

Black and Peacock (2013) claim that non-sporting NGOs and social movements have begun to play an increasingly significant role for ISO diplomacy (2013, 12). Human rights organizations regularly protest the impact of hosting the Olympic Games on the local population. The protests during the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008 were so enormous that they prompted then IOC President Jacques Rogge to announce that human rights considerations would play a role in future hosting decisions. Likewise, environmental organizations denounce the serious environmental destruction caused by SMEs. Ultimately, the IOC declared "environment" as the third pillar of Olympism and demand future host countries to conduct environmental studies (ibid.).

Finally, intergovernmental organizations (IGO) are relatively new actors in international sport diplomacy. While in the past organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) were perceived as rivals and potential threats to the IOC and other ISOs, today UN institutions and other IGOs are vocal supporters of, and active partners with, sports organizations (Black and Peacock 2013, 12). Especially the IOC collaborates with multiple UN agencies, funds and programs on areas of mutual interests. That way the two entities can support each other and draw on their respective specific skillsets (ibid.).

The dramatic increase in actors involved in version 2.0 of sport diplomacy is being fueled by the growing scope of tasks ISOs need to address. In addition to human rights and environmental protection, Black and Peacock claim that the IOC and FIFA must also address issues such as

women's rights, commercialization, corruption, bribery, and racism (2013, 13). Furthermore, due to the enormously high international interest in the events organized by FIFA and the IOC, security and counterterrorism is of great concern for ISOs and the respective host countries (ibid.). In summary, once focused on the limited task of running sporting events, ISOs are now faced with increasingly diverse and onerous demands.

Sport Mega-Events

Sport mega-events (SME) play a central role in both traditional and version 2.0 of sport diplomacy. While a consensus for a definition of a (sports) mega-event has yet to emerge there is substantial support (Grix and Houlihan 2014, Horne 2007, 2015) for Roche's definition claiming that mega-events are best understood as "large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events, which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance" (Roche 2000, 1, found in Horne 2015). Horne adds that two central features of contemporary SMEs are, first, that they are deemed to have significant social, political, economic and ideological consequences for the host city, region or nation in which they occur and second, that they will attract considerable media attention (2015, 329). Additionally, he considers the existence of first, second, third and even lower tiers of SMEs depending on their reach and range, cost, and size. According to Horne, tier 1 includes the Summer Olympic Games and FIFA Men's Football World Cup, tier 2 the Winter Olympic Games and UEFA Men's EURO Football championship, and tier 3 the Commonwealth Games and Pan American Games (ibid.). For cities wishing to apply to host a Tier 1 mega-event, successfully organizing a tier 2 or lower mega-event can act as a "springboard" (Horne 2015, 331).

The last three decades have seen a precipitous increase in the scope as well as the enthusiasm to host and participate in SMEs. Horne (2007, 83) attributes this trend to three reasons: First, technological advances of mass telecommunications, particularly the introduction of satellite television, have made SMEs accessible to an unprecedented global audience. This in turn has resulted in exponentially growth of television revenue for host cities since the 1970's. Second, since the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, private corporates have been invited as sponsors and partners of ISOs and their mega-events. In addition to television revenue, sponsorships have become second important source of income for host cities. Consequently, the economic attractiveness of holding an SME has improved noticeably. With reference to the commercial nature of sports, Trunkos and Heere (2017, 10) argue that SMEs are associated with a strong

increase in trade agreements between the host and the rest of the world. Hosting a mega-event signal that the host nation is “open for business”, and often they report increases in export and import thanks to the trade agreements that are concluded before, during and directly after the event (Rose and Spiegel 2011, found in Trunkos and Heere 2017, 10). Finally, a third reason why interest in hosting SMEs has grown is that just as they are useful to sell commercial products they offer a platform for the host city, region, and country to showcase their appeal to a global audience in hopes of attracting tourists and foreign investment (Horne 2007, 83). In this regard, Murray and Pigman note that SMEs offer tremendous public diplomacy opportunities. Approximately 3.9 billion people watched the 2004 Athens Olympics, while 1 billion people, 15% of the global population, tuned in for the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony (Jackson and Haigh 2008 found in Murray and Pigman 2013, 1102-1103). If the diplomatic posture, image, and message are carefully crafted and well linked with the positive values of sport, perceptions of foreign populations about the host nation can be positively influenced in a sustainable manner. Furthermore, Murray and Pigman argue that hosting a prestigious SME such as the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup is in itself confirmation that the host nation is a good international citizen (2013, 1102-1103).

Whether economic or diplomatic opportunities prevail as the prime motivation for staging an SME is up to debate. A mixture of both is most likely. Rofo argues that sport as an avenue for the “pursuit of status or prestige [and] is an under-appreciated objective of much international diplomatic activity” (2016, 224). At the same time, he acknowledges that financial imperatives drive much of the motivation to bid for SMEs (ibid.). Grix and Houlihan are also of the opinion that “the potential positive impact on a nation’s image has moved from being a welcome consequence to a significant justification for investing in hosting sports mega-events” (2014, 572).

Given their economic and diplomatic appeal the world's greatest and aspiring cities, supported by their regional and national governments, compete to host the Olympic Games and similar SMEs (Black and Peacock 2013, 10). Shuttle diplomacy at the highest political level (presidents, prime ministers, royals, and others) regularly takes place at the conferences of the IOC and FIFA where decisions are made about the awarding of the Games. However, the active support and commitment of political leaders is no guarantee for winning the right to host a SME. Although Prince William and Prime Minister David Cameron backed the 2018 World Cup in England, ultimately, Russia won the bidding contest (ibid.). Black and Peacock note that

lobbying at the highest political level proves that in the post-Cold War era SMEs have become coveted prizes in the quest for global visibility and "marketing power" (2013, 10). Rofe agrees, claiming that the first half of the 21st century was riddled by negotiations to host SMEs in cities around the planet. Various stakeholders were represented at these negotiations, and the outcome was often open until the end (2016, 224).

Finally, Grix and Rofe observed that the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup are increasingly turning to developing countries. Grix describes this development as a shift from what can be termed developed democratic states to "emerging" democratic and non-democratic states (2013, 16). Between the Beijing summer Olympics (2008) and Qatar FIFA World Cup (2022), eight major sports events have taken place in "emerging" states. These include the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, 2014 in Brazil, and 2018 in Russia, as well as the Olympic Games 2014 in Russia, 2016 in Brazil, and 2022 in China again. Black and Peacock argue that this trend is in line with ISO's ongoing pursuit of universalism and the apparent consensus to host an SME on the path to "emerging power" status (2013, 14).

Sport Diplomacy Limitations

Despite its increasing application as a diplomatic tool, scholars agree that sport diplomacy is not a magical remedy and has its limitations (Murray 2016, 7). Several challenges for sport diplomacy have been identified and discussed by scholars.

First, mixing sport and politics can be met with rejection. Idealists perceive sport as a spiritual force, as an ideal that hovers above all earthy realms and may not be mixed with the corrupt and divisive elements of politics (Allison 1993, 5-6, found in Murray 2016, 7). Therefore, when governments or diplomats take advantage of sport, it can be perceived as boorish and disrespectful. Positive examples like Nelson Mandela's appearance at the final of the 1995 Rugby World Cup represent rather the exception than the norm. On the other hand, when visiting Pakistan in 2008 former Australian Prime Minister John Howard embarrassed his country and its proud sporting history. During his trip he was invited to join a game of cricket with local children. He failed to bowl three balls with none of them making it to the batsman and bouncing several times (Murray and Pigman 2013, 1106).

Furthermore, sport can drive people further apart and worsen relationships between nations (Murray and Pigman 2013, Trunkos and Heere 2017). Sporting events are emotionally charged. Flaunting one's nationality by singing the national anthem, waving flags and similar symbolic acts all heighten feelings of nationalism. Murray and Pigman therefore argue that the idea that sport brings nations together is far-fetched (2013, 1104). An extreme but common example of how sports can heighten national tensions and exacerbate troubled relationships is El Salvador and Honduras. The two nations shared a poor relationship prior three football World Cup qualifying matches they had to play against each other in 1969. Fan conflicts that erupted alongside the bitterly contested games were used as pretext for war between the two nations. The same day that the third and final game was played, El Salvador started bombing its neighbor. This war went down in history as La Guerra del Futbol - the Football War (Trunkos and Heere 2017, 6).

Third, Sport can also be abused as a means of spreading undiplomatic messages. This is the case when sports teams and athletes serve national propaganda. During the cold war, the U.S. used the two victories of chess grandmaster Bobby Fischer over Boris Spassky in 1972 as well as the U.S. hockey team victory over the Soviet Union in 1980 to demonstrate their superiority over the Soviet Union (Trunkos and Heere 2017, 12). Also, non-state actors have hijacked sport mega-events „to publicize their grievances, to spread fear or to distribute a message to a vast global audience“ (Murray and Pigman 2013, 1104). Jackson and Haigh note that, between 1972 and 2005, 171 sport-related terrorist attacks have been recorded (2008, 351). The most well-known case is the kidnapping and murder of 11 Israeli athletes during the Munich Olympics in 1972 by the radical Palestinian organization Black Panther.

Another limitation of sport diplomacy is the temporary reality of SMEs. Sporting events provide a unique platform that brings together States, CSOs, MNCs, the global public and media. However, political, and diplomatic opportunities only arise before the start of the competition. Once the games have started, sport takes over and political issues recede into the background (Murray 2016, 7). This problem has given rise to a new body of literature dealing with the legacies of SME. Horne (2015) suggests making two distinctions with respect to legacies when considering the political implications. They can be tangible and intangible, and universal and selective. Furthermore, he argues that SMEs have the problem that they largely generate tangible legacies that are selective and intangible legacies that are universal (Horne 2015, 334). This means that a selective group of individuals enjoy tangible benefits like material

infrastructure or increased economic performance of the city while the wider community only benefit from intangible assets like the emotional responses to a mega-event. At the same time, he notes that “‘legacies’ – whether social, cultural, environmental, political, economic or sporting – are the ‘known unknowns’ of sports mega-events” (Horne 2007, 86), pointing to the fact that they remain unpredictable for any host country staging a SME.

Fifth, costs of staging SME often exceed the benefits. Chat (2016) notes that generally speaking the Olympics and similar SMEs are expensive, logistics nightmares, and potential terrorist targets. Up until 1984, Cities that hosted the Olympic Games had to struggle with the enormous costs for years afterwards. Once the games are over, sports facilities usually remain empty-seated or are only rarely used. Citizens of Montreal, for example, had to pay off a billion-dollar debt until 1996 for their Olympic Games that took place in 1976 (Chat 2016, 140). Multiple scholars have observed that the reason for the high costs is that the vast majority of megaprojects are not delivered anywhere nearly on time or within their estimated cost (Chat 2016, Horne 2007, 2015). Horne (2007, 86) argues that it seems evident that forecasts are nearly always wrong. At the same time, monetary and social costs involved are usually downplayed while the benefits are highly overstated (Black and Peacock 2013, 10, Horne 2007, 86). For developing countries in particular, this creates an 'allure of global games', as Black and van der Westhuizen (2004) call it.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Borrowing from Brannagan and Giulianotti (2015) work on the critical role of global sport within Qatar's international strategy, my theoretical framework will rely on the concept of soft power and soft disempowerment.

Soft Power

Coined by the American political scientist Joseph Nye in the late 1980s, Soft Power offers a lens through which we can make sense of the underlying motives why states invest in sports and hosting sports mega-events and what they expect in return from such an investment. For Nye, power means the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes you want. To reach such a goal, he sets up three different ways: Firstly, threats and coercion, secondly, inducements and payments, and lastly, the attraction that makes others want what you want (Nye 2008, 94). It is the third approach that Nye refers to as soft power. He defines the concept as "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment" (ibid.) He puts forward three main sources of soft power: a state's culture, its political values, and its foreign policy (Nye 2008, 96). While the concept seems to be in contrast to hard power, such as economic and military strength, soft power is not supposed to replace hard power but rather complement it. Nye describes such combination with the term smart power. The concept has been developed regarding the fall of the Soviet Union and a resulting reorientation of American foreign policy. In Nye's opinion, due to the new world order, conventional means of exercising power (mainly through hard power) were no longer suitable.

Qatar's Soft Power

Qatar has adopted a soft power strategy in which sport plays a central role. Its means and objectives have captured researcher's attention (Reiche 2014, Ginesta and Eugenio 2014, Grix & Brannagan 2016, Brannagan and Giulianotti 2014).

Although Qatar's population stands at just 250,000 Qatari citizens, plus 1.5 million migrant workers, purposeful investments have made the small desert country a big player in the world of sports. A key component of Qatar's soft power strategy is hosting sport events. Thanks to securing numerous hosting right in recent years "Qatar has successfully developed into a hub for sporting events" (Reiche 2014, 4). The list of such tournaments is long and diverse. Among others, tennis (ATP Tennis Tournament Doha), golf (Qatar Masters Golf Tournament),

motorsport (FIM Moto Moto Racing World C'ships), and handball (IHF Handball Super Globe) tournaments are held in Qatar on an annual basis. In 2014, Qatar hosted a record number of 57 international sporting events (ibid.). Those previous tournaments can be described as second or lower tier SMEs, the FIFA Football World Cup 2022 will be Qatar's first first-tier SME that Qatar is hosting. The World Cup will also be the most prestigious and significant sport mega-event that Qatar has organized so far.

In addition to hosting sport events, Qatar also promotes its own elite sport success. A systematic policy of talent-recognition for the promotion of male elite athletes has been implemented at all Qatari schools and the Aspire Academy of Sport Excellence's (Reiche 2014, 6). Qatar's Aspire academy is one of the most advanced sports academies in the world and aims to develop young talents into world-class athletes. In its endeavor, the academy also seeks to identify young talents abroad. The Aspire Football Dreams Initiative assesses about 600,000 young football players in 16 countries over three continents every year. Those who convince in the trials are invited back to Doha for expert training (Grix and Brannagan 2016, 265). Besides that, Qatar has supported its sporting success through naturalization of foreign athletes. As the coach of the Qatar national football team admits: "Without naturalization it is impossible that Qatar will have a competitive team for the 2022 World Cup" (Reiche 2014, 6). Another example of sporting success thanks to naturalization are the two Olympic bronze medalist's winner Mohamed Suleiman, originally from Somalia and Said Saif Asaad, from Bulgaria (ibid.).

The third pillar of Qatar's soft power strategy concerns investments into international sports. The key actor of Qatar's international sport acquisitions is Qatar Sports Investment (QSI), a branch for sport investment of the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), the country's Sovereign Wealth Funds (Reiche 2014, 7). In 2011, QSI bought the French first division football club Paris Saint Germain (PSG) and since then invested enormous sums to attract the best players to the French capital (ibid.). In 2017, PSG transferred 222 million euros to Barcelona to secure the services of the Brazilian Neymar. The highest transfer fee in football history to date. Simultaneously to the acquisition of PSG, QSI also purchased the French Ligue 1 television rights. Under the name beIN Sports, the network broadcasts live sport in Hong Kong, the US, Canada, Australia, and Indonesia (Grix and Brannagan 2016, 266). Besides that, thanks to a 150-million-euro sponsorship deal with FC Barcelona, the logo of the Qatar Foundation (now Qatar Airways) appears on the front of the blue and red jersey. Qatar is the first ever commercial sponsor of the FC Barcelona shirt (Ginesta and Eugenio 2014, 228)

Qatar's objectives for investing in sport as part of its overarching soft power strategy can be divided into domestic and foreign policy goals. While national unity, identity, and nation-building are common objectives, Reiche argues that this is not the case in Qatar (2014, 7). His justification claims that the Qatari population is a relatively homogeneous group that is satisfied with their high standard of living and therefore shows little potential to revolt against their ruling elite (*ibid.*). Much more significant, however, is the diversification of the economy. Qatar's extraordinary prosperity is due in large part to its natural resources. Qatar holds the largest natural gas reserves among all members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and has the third largest proven natural gas supply in the world. Its technological advances, particularly in liquefied natural gas (LNG), make it the largest exporter of natural fuels (Reiche 2014, 8). Developing into a regional, continental, and international sports hub plays a major role in diversifying Qatar's economy and become less dependent on export of natural resources (*ibid.*). SMEs are a major driver for advancing domestic infrastructure. Attracting tourists stimulates investments into hotels, restaurants, and shopping malls. In addition, sport-events offer excellent entertainment value for white-collar employees who are to be lured into the country. According to Qatari authorities, the reason for the current absence of white-collar employees and longer-term holidaymakers is the continued inaccurate media portrayal of the Middle East as a homogeneous region plagued by conflicts and civil wars (Grix and Brannagan 2016, 265). Therefore, the aim of Qatar's soft power strategy is to debunk oriental stereotypes and create a better understanding between East and West. The hope is that international publics will perceive Qatar as a safe, peaceful and modern country, leading to an influx of tourists and white-collar workers who will provide the state with a source of income once its oil and gas reserves dwindle (Brannagan and Giulianotti 2015, 708, Grix and Brannagan 2016, 265). Aside from economic motives, there is also a societal dimension to Qatar's investment in sport. The Qatari state is committed to tackling the national health crises related to obesity and diabetes. Chronic diseases brought on by inactivity and sedentary lifestyles are a leading cause of death in Qatar. Holding SME and strong performances at elite sporting level are intended to motivate the population to a sportier, more active, and healthier lifestyle (Brannagan and Giulianotti 2015, 712).

However, the key to understand Qatar's sport investments lies in its foreign policy goals. Qatar is surrounded by regional superpowers: Iran to the north and Saudi Arabia to the south. Due to its small population, Qatar will never have the military strength to defend itself no matter how many weaponries it purchases or foreigners it recruits to populate its army. While the Saudi Arabian Army has about 150,000 and the Iranian army about 700,000 servicemen, Qatar's armed forces only counts 11,800 personnel, the second smallest force in the Middle East

(Congressional Research Service 2014, p. 5). In the past, Qatar has been occupied by several rulers, Bahrain (1783–1868), the Ottoman- (1871–1916), and the British-Empire (1916–1971). Kuwait, a similarly small-populated country in the Gulf, is a warning example of a nation that has been attacked and annexed by Iran in 1990-1991. To avoid a similar fate, Qatar has integrated soft power as a core component of its defense and security strategy. Sport as potent soft power tool attracts foreign public's attention and puts the small country on the world map. Besides tourists, SMEs also attract political elites and businesspeople, who usually meet with the host country government in advance of the event. In case Qatar finds itself one day in a similar dangerous situation as Kuwait during the Gulf War, it might be easier to appeal to the international community for assistance based on the relationships and networks Qatar has established through the mean of sport. Hence, Qatar's engagement with sport need to be understood as a matter of national security, rather than establishing oneself as a regional superpower, a role that is already occupied by Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Chinas Soft Power

Chinas relationship toward international sports as a mean of soft power seems much less straight forward than that of Qatar. In the 1950s, the newly established communist regime did not attempt to obtain any hosting rights for international sport events and instead, cut ties with the IOC and other ISO over dispute about Taiwan's independence. In the 1960s China supported the GANEFO (Games of the New Emerging Forces), a SME created by Indonesian President Sukarno to provide an alternative to the Olympic Games (Chu 2016). After the end of the Cultural Revolution, China not only launched economic reforms but also revoked its former stand by re-joining the IOC and other organizations it had previously left. Its return to international sporting competitions was marked by success. Chinese athletes won numerous medals at both the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles and the Asian Games in Seoul in 1986. Mid 1980s was therefore the time Chinese leader recognized the possibilities of shaping a desirable international image through sports. As a result, a real obsession developed over Olympic victories and hosting SME itself again (ibid.). In 1990. Beijing hosted the Asian Games, followed by Shanghai that organized the 1993 East Asian Games. China's attempts to use sport events and sports victories in order to promote its international image reached its peak at the successful application for the Olympic Summer Games 2008 in Beijing.

Beijing's 'coming out' party marked China's arrival on the international world stage and consolidated its image as a rising, modern, economic powerhouse. In order to discard its image as the sick man of Asia, it was of great importance that China would win the most medals and, above all, more than the sole superpower at the time, the USA. Chat argues that besides the Olympics 2008 "there was arguably no single event in post-World War II era that played a bigger role in shaping the nation's narrative of where it had come from and what it aspired to be in the future" (Chat 2016, 146-147). Instead of presenting itself as a changed nation though, Grix and Lee argue that Beijing 2008 was supposed to demonstrate China's shift from a regional superpower to a global one (Grix and Lee 2013, 532). Consequently, China was not attempting to join the ranks of advanced democratic capitalist states but rather present an alternative power to the West. As a mean of soft power, the successful hosting of the games and China's good sporting performance enabled China to positively influence its nation-brand. In Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brand Index, China climbed several spots after the Beijing Olympics and was ranked 22 out of 50 in 2009 (GfK Roper, 2009). In contrast, in 2007 China was ranked 23 out of 38 countries (Anholt, 2007). Besides its external impact, several scholars argue that the Beijing Games were about propping up domestic support. It remains debatable whether it was more important for the Chinese leadership to host and win in the Beijing Olympics in order to improve the self-image and national pride of its people, or to impress the world. Grix notes that China was equally interested in the Olympics as an internal, domestic tool for its own credibility as to enhance its image on the world stage. Cha advocates that the Olympics helped to legitimize China's political rule as sports victories were providing people with the sense of national dignity.

In the post-Beijing Era, China's relationship with international sports cooled down noticeably again. Although other Chinese cities such as Guangzhou (2010) and Shenzhen (2011) also organized SMEs, these were overshadowed by corruption scandals. When Xi Jinping chaired the Chinese Communist Party in 2012, he ordered the budgets to host such events to be cut drastically. As a result, the Nanjing 2013 Asian Youth Games, the 2013 Tianjin East Asian Games and the 2014 Nanjing Summer Youth Olympics were not only under budget but also significantly less costly than previous events. China's obsession with winning Olympic medals also decreased. Instead of champion niche sports, China began to embrace more globally recognizable sports like football in the mid 2010s. Seeking for sports dominance in football, it was assumed would bring additional publicity and branding opportunities. Also, because Xi Jinping was said to be a big football enthusiast Chinese football clubs channeled enormous

sums of money for the salary of football players, thus attracting international football stars. However, early in 2017 Chinese government criticized ‘irrational’ expenditure of Chinese football clubs and claimed it would ‘regulate and restrain high-priced signings and make reasonable restrictions on players’ high incomes’. Frugality was and is therefore the new paradigm which should show China as a "normal" state that no longer compulsively fights for gold medals but is internationally respected as a normal member of the global community (Chu 2016).

Under these circumstances, the Winter Olympics took place in February 2022, giving Beijing the privilege of being the first city in the world to host both the Summer Olympics and Winter Games. The games were overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which already caused the Summer Olympics a year earlier in Tokyo to be held without spectators. Because China suffered from the impression of being the birthplace of the virus, it was particularly important to show the world population that, two years after the outbreak, the virus was under control. In addition, China, with its strict zero Covid policy, took a different, much more radical way to get the pandemic under control than the democratic states of the West, which relied more on people's personal responsibility. Hence, COVID-19 outbreaks had to be avoided at all costs during the games in order to show the world and the domestic audience that the Chinese approach was the more effective and better one.

Soft Disempowerment

Soft power is not a one-way street. Efforts like nation branding and image building also run the danger of heightening reputational risks. Just as SMEs are a great opportunity to inform the world about a country's positive and attractive trait, they can also shed light on its negative and unattractive features. In the age of the internet and global satellite news, it is almost impossible to control the entire media exposure around a mega-event. Countries hosting SMEs to gain soft power must therefore be aware that their nation will be “known as it is, not as it wishes to be”. As a result, they need to think carefully about how to present themselves through the international media and understand that these events spotlight a nation in ways that can be both negative and positive. As much as SMEs can be an opportunity to attract, they become events that repel (Grix and Lee 2013)

Academia has identified multiple examples where a soft power strategy had the opposite to its intended effect. In addition to Poland, Ukraine hosted the Euro 2012 UEFA football

championships. The former communist dictatorship hoped its status as co-host would aid its efforts to join the European Union. Instead, global media attention focused on the countries poor record of racism, corruption, and political intrigue. Another example is Brazil that faced a wave of protests from its own people about spending priorities during preparations for the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. According to the 2014 Anholt-GfK survey of national image, rather than boost Brazil's reputation in the world, hosting the 2014 World Cup Finals saw the country lose ground in the rankings, (Anholt-GfK Roper 2014; Garcia 2014 in Horn 2015). Even London, host of the 2012 Summer Olympics, had to deal with negative press in the run-up to the event. The private security firm, G4S, tasked with securing the Games, admitted it could not provide enough staff in time. The army was then mobilized to secure the event. Furthermore, the M4 motorway, the main artery from Heathrow Airport to the park, was closed due to deterioration.

With references to the described risks when attempting to accumulate soft power Brannagan and Giulianotti (2015) coined the theory of soft disempowerment. Soft disempowerments refer to those occasions in which the host nation upsets, offends, or alienates others, leading to a loss of attractiveness or influence. Hence, soft disempowerment is the natural extension of the concept of soft power, pointing out that such endeavors can also generate a negative outcome. As the described example illustrate, hosting a SME carries inevitable reputational risks and thus may be accompanied by forms of soft disempowerment. Host nations might be unprepared for the high level of media attention and critical scrutiny. Eventually the potential for negative publicity and loss of attraction can result in host nations “to lose more than they can gain in terms of destination image” (Brannagan and Giulianotti 2015, 716).

Qatar's soft disempowerment

Qatar's soft power strategy runs serious risk of soft disempowering the desert state in the long term. First scholars have begun to investigate the reasons for this. Since the decision to award the 2022 FIFA World Cup to Qatar in 2010, human rights concern related to the Kafala system have been the focus of international criticism. Grix and Brannagan note that Qatar "has had an avalanche of poor media coverage around its dealings with foreign construction workers and the extraordinary employer-employee relations that exist". The kafala system requires migrant workers to surrender their passport to their sponsor. Consequently, the sponsor decides whether or not they can leave employment. In September 2013, a Guardian report revealed that thousands of Nepalese workers in Qatar had died as a result of forced labor related to the construction of stadiums for the 2022 World Cup.

Besides human rights concern, Brannagan and Giulianotti (2014) identified four more sport-related issues which have been most damaging to Qatar's soft power. On the one hand, these are allegations of corruption. Shortly after the announcement of Qatar's 2022 World Cup bid, undercover reports surfaced claiming that the winner had paid African FIFA Executive Committee members 1 million Dollar in exchange for their votes. A few months later, Qatari FIFA Executive Committee member Mohamed bin Hamman was given a lifetime ban from football for allegedly handing over \$1 millions in bribes personally. On the other hand, these are discriminatory laws in Qatar against homosexuality. Numerous sexual-minority activist groups have called for FIFA to halt any sport-related tournament in Qatar. Furthermore, there is a consensus among the 54 UEFA member countries that Qatar is unsuitable to host a World Cup due to its climatic conditions. Traditionally, the football World Cup takes place during the northern hemisphere's summer. At this time, however, temperatures are reaching more than 50 degrees in Qatar, which make outdoor sports activities almost impossible. Furthermore, at the time the World Cup was awarded, Qatar had hardly any suitable spot infrastructure. Stadiums and training facilities would first have to be built at high monetary and environmental costs which raises the question of how sustainable such investments are. And the last sport-related issue most damaging to Qatar's soft power relates to public perceptions regarding Qatar's commitment to Paris-Saint Germain. the Qatar Tourism Authority's involvement in PSG has raised serious questions from the European community as to whether such a relationship looks to find a loophole in UEFA's financial fair play regulations.

China's soft disempowerment

The 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing are also a sport-diplomatic tool of soft power that seems to contribute little to win "hearts and minds" of foreign publics. So far, hardly any scholars have examined this example, although the diplomatic boycott of 10 states is a clear indication for the dislike toward the host country. Led by the US, the UK, Canada, India, Australia, Lithuania, Kosovo, Belgium, Denmark, and Estonia sent athletes to Beijing, but political representatives stayed away from the Games. Other countries like Germany, Austria and the Netherlands followed suit but justified their absence with the COVID19 pandemic. Human rights violations by the Chinese regime were cited as the reason for the diplomatic boycott. Particular reference was given to the Uyghurs, a Muslim minority, in the Chinese region of Xinjiang that is exposed to systematic human rights violations. More than a million people are

said to be in detention camps, to be systematically monitored and assimilated. But the situation in Tibet, the Chinese crackdown on the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong, and the disappearance of Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai following her allegations of sexual assault against a Chinese official were repeatedly mentioned in the discourse on human rights in China. In addition to the human rights debate, another source of criticism for Beijing concerned climatic conditions. The north of China around Beijing is very dry, and it hardly snows in winter. Beijing's Olympic planners assured the IOC early on that this would not be a problem as artificial snow would simply be used. However, this solution is met with criticism from critics who complain about the high-water consumption for artificial snow. Furthermore, China was not a winter sports nation and therefore only had a low winter sports infrastructure. The enormous investments in winter sports facilities continued to fuel an environmental debate that criticized the sustainable purpose of these facilities and the high environmental impact.

Unlike Qatar, China has faced foreign criticism with regards to hosting an SME before. In the run-up to the Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics, activists focused on human rights abuses in China in an unprecedented manner, prompting a constant stream of bad press. Incidents of activists disrupting the torch relay in Paris, London, and San Francisco to draw attention to China's human rights abuses were projected around the world. At the time, the images provoked a nationalist response from China. While Western media tended to portray the incidents as peaceful protests against a repressive regime, Chinese media responded by considering the events as an acts of violence against innocent people that require restoring order and stability. Susan Brownell explains China's hostile attitude to foreign criticism with cultural differences:

In accord with the Confucian tradition, hosting the Olympic Games was said to be similar to inviting a guest to one's home: the host's hospitality should help forge a relationship of trust that facilitates an honest exchange of opinions afterwards ... Only an uncivilized guest would start criticizing the host before he even arrived, and this was how many Chinese people viewed the Western criticism of China during the lead-up to the games (Brownell 2012, 310, found in Grix 2013, 18)

Gap in the Literature

Brannagan and Giulianotti conclude their work by claiming that Qatar finds itself in a position, on the one hand, with a soft power strategy that aims to demonstrate an attractive and well-

managed, modern nation-state, and on the other hand, “the international reputation of a citizenry that lacks integrity, honesty, friendliness and compassion towards citizens of other nations - even those working within Qatari borders” (Brannagan and Giulianotti 2015, 716). They argue that Qatar’s soft disempowerment elements need to be addressed swiftly to remain its international credibility. Achieving this could contribute to Qatar’s soft power via the state proving to the international community that it is capable of (1) owning up to its limitations and (2) committed to overcome these weaknesses. Diese wissenschaftliche Arbeit seit an dieser Stelle an der Brannagan and Giulianotti Arbeit endet, indem sie sich anschaut, wie weit Katar in den vergangenen sieben Jahren gegangen ist, um seinen Kritiker zufrieden zu stellen. Durch das hinzufügen der zweiten Fallstudien China, leistet diese Arbeit einen Beitrag zum besseren Verständnis Sport als diplomatisches Mittel der Soft Power einzusetzen. As Grix note: “little is discussed about any universal mechanisms or tactics that states can use to maximise the long-term benefits in their soft power strategies. Hosting an Olympics is clearly one such tactic; however, how the event is managed, ‘signalled’ to the international stage (...) needs further research (2013, 20)

Hypotheses and Expectations

Qatar and China use sport as a soft power tool by hosting the FIFA Football World Cup and the Winter Olympics. Their aspirations, international standing, and past experiences in international sport are different, though. This allows us to put forward several hypotheses on how the two countries react to foreign criticism.

In order to realize its domestic but above all foreign policy goals, Qatar depends to a large extent on winning over hearts and minds abroad. If the Gulf state is perceived as an attractive, modern, and safe country, tourists and white-color workers will come and settle in Qatar for the long term. However, if the international perception is that of a corrupt state that violates human rights and pollutes the environment, tourists and white-color workers will stay away from Qatar. Furthermore, political leaders will also have few incentives to side with Qatar on security policy issues. Besides, the FIFA World Cup 2022 will be the first major sports mega-event that Qatar is hosting and where the attention of the world community will be on Qatar for three weeks. From this situation arises three hypotheses to be tested:

1. Qatar closely monitors foreign criticism and shows willingness to respond positively

2. Qatar translates its positive response into action in order to please its critics
3. Qatar takes actions to protect its soft power strategy despite domestic opposition

The People's Republic of China, on the other hand, is in a different situation than Qatar. After celebrated its “coming out” party in 2008, China is an undisputed world power in 2022. Additional displays of China's power are not necessary. Instead, the Communist Party has an interest in pleasing China's COVID-19-plagued population and rally people behind its back. This is of great importance, especially in the systemic and ideological competition with the USA. One can therefore assume that the Olympic Games, as a means of soft power, were aimed more at the local population than those abroad. Past experience when foreign criticism has provoked a nationalist reaction from the Chinese population confirms these assumptions. This background allows for further two hypotheses to be tested:

1. China ignores foreign criticism and does not show any willingness to react positively
2. China takes no action to please its critics abroad

Chapter 3: Methodology

Case study selection

This research project will conduct a comparative case study including the two cases of Qatar and China.

Analyzing Qatar is especially prudent because the country has made large-scale investments in sports in the past years. Football in particular has benefited from those investments. In November of 2022, Qatar will host the FIFA Football World Cup. Domestic and foreign policy goals inform Qatar's investments into sports and its hosting of sport mega-events (Reiche 2014). It's extensive commitment to sport has put the small Arab country in the spotlight of the international media. However, more than any host country before, Qatar faces a wave of international criticism surrounding the tournament's hosting (Robinson 2022). To not jeopardize its sports diplomacy strategy, the country has been forced to face and react to criticism since 2010, the year Qatar received FIFA endorsement.

China was chosen according to the Most Similar System Design (MSSD). MSSD means to "choose as objects of research systems that are as similar as possible (...)" (Anckar 2008, 389). By choosing two most similar cases, I hope to keep as many extraneous variables constant as possible. However, I am aware that there are only a limited number of countries I can choose from. Therefore, it will never be possible to keep constant all potential explanatory factors (Anckar 2008). In fact, Qatar and China seem more like two different cases due to China's much larger populations. Nevertheless, the two countries share certain similarities that are crucial to this research study and hence they apply for a MSSD. First of all, the two countries do not belong to the democratic West that dominated the realms of Sports and hosted SMEs in the past. Both political regimes are autocracies, on the one hand a monarchy and on the other hand a one-party system, and thus differ fundamentally from liberal democracies in Europe and North America. Both countries are hosting two of the most significant SMEs in the same year. Qatar is hosting the FIFA Football World Cup and China the Olympic Winter Games. Furthermore, in both cases, the assumption is allowed that the primary motivation for hosting said event is politically driven. This can be seen by the fact that neither Qatar nor China has a vibrant history of football/winter sports affinity (Jansen 2021). Hence, in both countries, politicians, rather than a sports community, push for greater investments into sports (Hu 2015). Besides that, and most importantly, in both cases, the preparations and hosting of the games were accompanied by

enormous criticism and controversy from abroad. That criticism origin from western countries and concerns similar subjects: Corruption, freedom of the press, human rights issues, and environmental pollution.

In summary, these two aspects make Qatar and China suitable for a MSSD and to answer my RQ despite their differences: Firstly, they use(d) sport and SMEs primarily to pursue political goals. And secondly, both countries have received an enormous wave of foreign criticism, origin from the same sources and concerning similar issues.

Data collection and method of analysis

In looking to shed light on Qatar's and China's reaction to foreign criticism amid their sport diplomacy strategy, I conducted six semi-structured interviews with leading sports journalists and academic experts. The interview partners have been chosen as a result of their accessibility, availability, and expertise:

1. Dr. Sebastian Sons, Middle East expert, researcher at Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient (CARPO), and former advisor to the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ)
2. Benjamin Best, investigative journalist, film producer and book author specialized in the topic of fraud in sports
3. Ronny Blaschke, freelance journalist, speaker, moderator and book author with a focus on violence, discrimination and geopolitics in sport
4. Dr. Susan Brownell, professor of Anthropology at University Missouri-St. Louis, and internationally recognized expert on Chinese sports, Olympic Games, and World's Fairs
5. Anonymous, sports journalist specialized in the Olympics for the German Süddeutsche Zeitung

6. Dr. Bob van den Bos, political scientist, former member of the Dutch and European Parliament, and author of the book “Sport and Politics, the struggle for glory, power and money”

In the next step, the data were subjected to a thorough thematic analysis in which themes are identified in an inductive ‘bottom up’ approach: first, reading and re-reading of transcribed interviews; second, constructing “initial codes” that identified parts of the data found most significant; third, creating overarching themes by identifying the various relationships that existed between the initial codes; and fourth, re-working the themes until each was distinctive in its own right. Following this stage, I then re-consulted the literature and concluded the analysis by assigning names to my themes.

Thematic analysis is most suitable for this research project as it facilitates to organize and interpret larger amounts of data like interview transcripts by grouping them into themes. Because the RQ is still relatively unexplored, an inductive approach is more suitable than a deductive approach trying to fit the data into a preexisting coding frame (Braun und Clarke 2006, 83). By applying an inductive approach my themes are strongly linked to the data, which makes sense as my interview partners are purposely selected to answer my RQ. Furthermore, it allows me a high degree of flexibility and self-interpretation. At the same time, I am aware that, as Braun and Clarke put it, “researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum” (Braun und Clarke 2006, 84).

Chapter 4: Qatar Case Study Analysis

Thematic analysis of my interviews indicates that Qatar's reaction to foreign criticism has been characterized by four major themes: Inaction, acting proactively, a discrepancy between theory and practice, and fighting critics.

Inaction

The first major theme emerging from the interviews was Qatar's inaction in response to foreign criticism. After the FIFA Football World Cup was awarded to Qatar in December 2010, international media attention turned to the hitherto inconspicuous country in the Middle East. Several interviewees describe that the ensuing wave and force of adverse reporting and criticism surprised and overwhelmed Qatar. Such a reaction from public reporting was not expected, and Qatar was therefore not prepared to react in any way. Ronny Blaschke speaks of a "Schockstarre", a condition in which one is unable to move. Consequently between 2010-2013 Qatar stood idly by while foreign criticism poured in on them. However, many of the criticized conditions were part of normal life in Qatar. The kafala system, foreign migrant workers, and the employment relationship between sponsor and employee were processes that have been developed over decades and were practiced not only in Qatar but in the entire Arab region. Only after the World Cup was awarded to Qatar, international media examined these issues and assessed them as negative and worthy of criticism. Given that circumstances, initial reactions from Qatar and its head of state Amir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani at the time seemed to try to ignore criticism, hoping it would pass. In this first phase, Qatar's reaction to foreign criticism was characterized by being surprised, puzzled and overwhelmed. With the change of government to his son Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani in 2013, however, the strategy changed and heralded the second phase of Qatar's reactions to foreign criticism.

Acting proactively

Acting proactively emerged as the second major theme in the conducted interviews. With the change of power in 2013 at the latest, the realization came that Qatar must act proactively to protect its sports diplomacy strategy. Dr. Sebastian Sons describes this change with the words: "(Qatar) said 'okay', we face this criticism, and we change something in the way of our argumentation. We approach our critics much more aggressively and proactively (...)" (Appendix 1.1).

To this end, the country turned to numerous public relations (PR) agencies, which advised the Qatari ruling family and the World Cup organizing committee on how to deal with criticism best. Rony Blaschke reports about press releases from PR agencies which were forwarded to journalists in obviously romantic and embellished language. In addition to their advisory roles, the agencies worked on campaigns to lobby for Qatar in Germany, Europe, and the US. A practice that has also caught on in the neighboring Gulf States and has since developed into a billion-dollar industry. One such campaign is the introduction of the Workers Cup in 2013. Teams made up of workers, most of whom from the construction sites of the World Cup stadiums, compete in a football tournament simulating the actual World Cup (Qatar 2022 n.d.). PR campaigns like the Workers Cup are excellent example to present Qatar as a country that cares about the welfare of its workforce, unlike criticism claims.

Having woken up from its initial “Schockstarre”, Qatar began to approach media representatives openly. Qatari officials showed great willingness to give interviews, stayed in regular contact with human rights organizations, and allowed journalists and trade unions to enter the country. Many journalists were given access to migrant workers’ shelters to conduct interviews with them and shoot numerous documentaries. While many of these practices seem normal by European standards, Dr. Sebastian Sons highlight that all this would be unthinkable in most of the other Gulf States. Describing Qatar’s seduction of media representatives, Ronny Blaschke says: “Sometimes it is in such a way, and I notice that with me also, when I travel there, or also at other appointments such as press conferences, they are very friendly to me, there are gifts, or you get invited to dinner with them” (Appendix 1.2). A particularly vivid example occurred during Qatar’s 2015 World Handball Championship. Several hundred foreign journalists were flown to Qatar at the Emir’s expense to report on the tournament (Die Tageszeitung 2015). Ronny Blaschke notes: “So, there is a lot of money available, and the thinking goes like we invite some dozen, some 100 perhaps, and some of them will then eventually write more positively or at least less critical articles. Or they just leave out the negative.” While this proactive embrace of media representatives can be considered professional political communication, he also warns that such practices move on the verge of corruption and bribery.

An example where Qatar's efforts to influence its critics through public relations agencies harmed its reputation instead of helped it is the case of Dr. Theo Zwanziger. The former

president of the German Football Association and executive member of FIFA is a vocal opponent of awarding the World Cup to Qatar and has described Qatar as the "cancer of world football." To neutralize the effectiveness of Zwanziger's criticism, Qatar hired and paid 10 million Dollars to former CIA agent Kevin Chalker and his agency, Global Risk Advisor (GRA). In January 2012, GRA used complex intelligence communications to people in Zwanziger's immediate circle to taint sentiment surrounding the World Cup in Qatar. In mid-2014, the operation called "Riverbed" ended with apparent success. Zwanziger, it was said, would no longer attack Qatar's integrity, but praise the "ongoing social changes" that were taking place in Qatar thanks to the World Cup (Associated Press 2022). In February 2022, the American news agency Associated Press published the story. Revealing Qatar's questionable means of appeasing critics like Zwanziger puts the country again in the spotlight as a corrupt and shady state, further contributing to its soft disempowerment.

Qatar's public relations offensive aimed to regain control over the narrative surrounding the World cup 2022. However, solely PR campaigns are not sufficient for that narrative to appear credible, but substantial change is necessary. Qatar saw the potential for action in the human rights debate regarding its migrant workers and showed willingness to change and thus react positively to its critics. Legislative changes and reforms emerged recurrently in all interviews and were presented as the most common tool used to improve living and working conditions for migrant workers in Qatar. Qatar's Government Communications Office (GCO) provides an overview of a comprehensive reform process to strengthen labor rights and increase protection for workers.

The labor reform process was initiated with the inauguration of a project office for the UN agency International Labor Organization (ILO) in Doha in April 2018. According to the GCO, the office supports implementing a technical cooperation program on working conditions and workers' rights in Qatar (Government Communication Office n.d.). Among the most notable reforms was the introduction of a non-discriminatory minimum wage of 1000 Riyal in March 2021 that applies to all workers regardless of their nationality and occupation. Additionally, workers are entitled to a food allowance of 300 Riyal and an accommodation allowance of 500 Riyal if those services are not provided by their employer. The government introduced the Wage Protection System to protect workers from wage exploitation. It seeks to give Qatari authorities new powers to monitor wage payments and ensure workers are paid in full and on time in accordance with their contracts.

Furthermore, workers have been allowed to change jobs freely without requiring a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from their previous employer. Also, with few exceptions, exit permits have been abolished providing employees the freedom to leave the country at their own will. Aiming to improve access to justice for workers, Qatar established Labor Dispute Resolution Committees in March 2018 that would settle labor disputes within three weeks of filing a complaint. Moreover, Qatar announced the establishment of 20 Qatar Visa Centers in India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Philippines, and Tunisia in order to facilitate the recruitment process and prevent workers getting exploited in their home countries. Further laws regarding reduced working hours, the election of a worker representative and mandatory health insurance are part of the reform process in recent years that has been deployed to react positively to foreign criticism (all data from Government Communication Office).

Around 2020, Qatar's initiated reform process caused positive responses. The ILO spoke of a "historic step" and the "beginning of a new era" for Qatar's job market (International Labour Organization 2020). Amnesty International also acknowledged that the Qatari authorities had taken a significant step towards protecting migrant workers: "If implemented as promised, the removal of restrictions on workers changing jobs should make it easier for workers to escape abuse. This is an encouraging sign that Qatar may finally be heading in the right direction, (...)" (Amnesty International 2020). Hence, by initiating a labor reform process to strengthen labor laws and increase protections for migrant workers, Qatar took a significant step toward rectifying some of its soft disempowering elements and strengthen its pursuit of soft power.

Qatar's climatic conditions and the environmental compatibility of staging the World Cup in a desert state was another often-cited foreign criticism. The Interviews indicate that Qatar's response was to highlight its technological advancement underpinned by an extensive public relations offensive, claiming that the 2022 World Cup will be the most sustainable World Cup ever. In its argumentation, the country benefits from its small geographical size. Instead of long distances between venues like previous tournaments in Brazil or Russia, Qatar promises upcoming fans a World Cup of short distances. Because the stadiums are only a few kilometers away, fans can attend several games in one day. By eliminating long-distance travel, the carbon footprint of the World Cup 2022 is supposed to be dramatically smaller than in previous World Cups (Dr. Sebastian Sons and Ronny Blaschke).

Besides that, the football stadiums play a crucial role in Qatar's narrative as the most sustainable World Cup. Qatar highlights that only eight instead of 12 stadiums will be necessary. A sustainability initiative has been created to avoid being left with so-called white elephants like many of Qatar's predecessors. The initiative provides sustainability and legacy plans for all eight stadiums. The Lusail Stadium, for example, is to be converted into a community hub housing school, shops, cafes, health clinics, and sporting facilities, all within the original exterior of the stadium and under the original roof (Qatar 2022 n.d.). Thanks to its unique construction, using shipping containers and modular seating, stadium 974 will be the first host venue in World Cup history to be fully demountable (ibid.). Furthermore, Qatar has developed cooling systems for the entire stadiums, making professional sports feasible under extreme heat conditions (Ingle 2019). Qatar's sustainability initiatives are guided by a clear pursuit of soft power as Qatar is hoping to set an example in sustainable and legacy-driven stadium construction for future SME host countries.

Qatar employed an extensive public relations offensive to communicate its narrative as the most sustainable World Cup. Benjamin Best notes: "A lot of presentations are made, they work together with universities and try to repeat these things again and again, to provide examples. And that's strategically planned. So, they get journalists on board, experts on board, those who then carry these messages further. They use certain platforms, such as conferences or specially selected listeners, who then pass on the message accordingly. And this is a PR strategy that Qatar is implementing not only on the topic of sustainability, but also on other topics" (Appendix 1.3). However, the concepts and arguments presented do not convince everyone as media reports argue that Qatar is simply attempting to greenwash its image (Kurmayer 2021).

Nevertheless, its public relations offensive, reform process, and sustainable stadium construction plans prove that Qatar takes foreign criticism seriously. Furthermore, Qatar has demonstrated a willingness to work towards satisfying its critics, thus affirming Hypothesis 1.

Discrepancy between theory and practice

The third theme that emerged from the interviews is the discrepancy between theory and practice. All interview partners mentioned that although Qatar initiated a comprehensive reform process, there remains a significant gap between what is being announced and implemented. "What I have learned from my research in recent years, for example, is that the country, the companies in this country, but also influential families are finding it very difficult to actually

implement this reform process, which was initiated” (Benjamin Best Appendix 1.3). Human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have found considerable obstacles and setbacks in putting these reforms into practice.

This discrepancy can be best illustrated using the example of the minimum wage. Although employer have to pay the mandatory minimum wage introduced in March 2021, funds elsewhere are withheld or not pay at all. Benjamin Best reports that bonus payments for overtime or pay for weekend work have been abolished. Often a lower wage is paid to workers due to minor offenses such as showing up late to work. In other cases, no reasons are given at all. There are similar obstacles to implementing other laws. The introduction of Labor Dispute Resolution Committees should enable workers easier access to justice and the opportunity to lodge grievances. However, Dr. Sebastian Sons notes that to take advantage of such initiatives, “you have to know where to complain. For that, you have to have the ability to either go there or pick up your cell phone, to know which website to go to” (Appendix 1.1), indicating that such information is being withheld from the workers. Hence the impact of the initiated reforms is greatly diminished. While Qatar praises the reform process and legal adjustments that have been initiated in the wake of foreign criticism, critics point out that implementing these reforms has only been marginally successful, resulting in marginal improvements for workers’ living and working conditions in Qatar.

To this day, many companies are exploiting loopholes to circumvent new labor laws. The new rules are hardly applied, especially on construction sites that are not directly connected to the World Cup. Interviewees recurrently point to a lack of control and punishment for those who continue to exploit migrant workers under inhumane circumstances. Ronny Blaschke attributes this problem to Qatar’s autocratic state system: “It is a state that is ruled autocratically, where there is no free press, no free trade unions, no separation of powers. So, all the democratic elements are missing. That’s why it’s hard. It is difficult to implement labor law reforms in general when there is no possibility of control or hardly any possibility of control” (Appendix 1.2). However, he also points out that such a reform process usually takes time, and initial problems can be expected: “It’s going to take years. It’s going to take a long time, I think. But that’s an impetus for the region. How long did it take us in Europe for such a labor movement, for trade unions? That has taken generations to develop, and in Qatar, it happens within ten years now” (ibid.).

Dr. Sebastian Sons argues that Qatar's problems in implementing reforms are also related to the fact that the exploitation of migrant workers is an international, cross-border problem that involves many other actors besides the Qatari state. Home countries of migrant workers, such as Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh, depend on the remittances of migrant workers to their families back home. Agencies that bring workers from Southeast Asia to the Gulf States make much money from this business, as do private contractors in the Gulf States. Due to this complex situation, Qatar is still struggling to put its reforms into practice consistently: "it (the kafala system) has not been de facto abolished, even if the Qataris claim otherwise, because simply many people earn money with it. And as long as these people earn money with it, there is no incentive to fundamentally change this migration structure." (Dr. Sebastian Sons, Appendix 1.1)

Consequently, NGOs and international media outlets continue to criticize the work and living conditions of migrant workers living in Qatar. Due to the inconsistent implementation of the labor reforms, Qatar loses some of its interim soft power gain. Consequently, the human rights situation remains a soft disempowerment risk. Furthermore, as comprehensive reforms have been initiated but not consequently implemented Hypotheses 2, Qatar translates its positive response into action in order to please its critics, can neither be confirmed nor denied. It remains to be seen whether newly imposed laws will be better implemented in the future in order to unfold their full impact.

Fighting back

The fourth and final theme emerging from the interview data identifies Qatar's reaction to foreign criticism as fighting back. Lately, state officials and members of the Supreme Council have reacted more aggressively, negatively, and unforgivingly to foreign criticism. Both Ronny Blaschke and Dr. Sebastian Sons attribute this attitude to the fact that Qatar is disappointed that reforms and changes to improve the human rights situation and contribute to an environmentally friendly World Cup are not recognized and honored by their critics abroad. Instead, they are frustrated and increasingly annoyed that the same criticisms are still being repeated even after years. Regardless of Qatar's reaction, they feel like critics do not want to change their opinion toward the Gulf state. From their point of view, Qatar has shown tremendous effort to meet foreign demands by initiating changes and improvements. Because these efforts seem not to have been adequately appreciated, interviewees report a defiant attitude has been established

among Qatari officials: “It is not at all recognized that we have somehow achieved anything positive. Then at some point you are no longer willing to give in to the pressure. And then at some point you say okay, then no more with us and then there will be no human rights. There will be no reforms in the work area, then it will all be rolled back” (Dr. Sebastian Sons, Appendix 1.1).

The disappointment and frustration are also reflected in how Qatar is dealing with its critics. In June 2015, Dr. Theo Zwanziger confirmed he believed that Qatar is “the cancer of world football” on a German radio show, hence refuting operation “Riverbed’s” apparent success. Thereupon the Qatari football association sued Zwanziger and accused him of defamation. According to the court statement, Qatar’s FA said the remark by Zwanziger showed collective disrespect and was slanderous, and he should not be allowed to repeat it (Reuters 2016). However, the case was dismissed by Düsseldorf’s regional court, which ruled Zwanziger was within his right to free speech (ibid.).

Benjamin Best provides another example of Qatar’s increasingly aggressive behavior towards critics. Between 2013 and 2017, a complaints procedure against Qatar’s human and labor rights situation was underway within the framework of the ILO. According to Best, members reported how Qatar tried to put them under pressure. When country representatives called for a process of change and supported punishment for Qatar, their Qatari counterparts apparently reminded them about lucrative business ties between their two countries. It should be kept in mind that the respective heads of state would not be happy about any conflicts. Therefore, Best suggests that Qatar used threats against its critics and even speaks of blackmailing.

Furthermore, the interviews show that Qatar’s disappointment and frustration have led to counteraccusations. Since criticism does not stop despite alleged changes and improvements, there is a feeling in Qatar that criticism is being used to harm Qatar intentionally. Ronny Blaschke reports that some accuse the West of Islamophobia and racism, and accusations of human rights violations are only used as a pretext to cover up western rejection of a football World Cup that will be held in an Arabic-Islamist country. Dr. Sebastian Sons emphasizes that this attitude prevails not only in Qatar but has also spread in other neighboring Arab countries. Furthermore, Ronny Blaschke claims that many of the allegations against Qatar are perceived as hypocritical. The Norwegian Football Association, its players, and fans often had intense discussions about boycotting the World Cup. At the same time, Norwegian companies are

investing billions in Qatar's agriculture and marine technology (Blaschke 2022). Hence, Norwegian journalists and activists evaluate the World Cup in Qatar differently than business and governments officials.

Conservative sections of the population support Qatar's more intransigent stance on foreign criticism. They are critical of the modernization and opening-up process that the ruling house has embarked on. They worry that foreign influences will soften their culture and that the economy will deteriorate due to labor reform. After all, the kafala system is not an unfortunate by-product but a crucial economic factor that has helped many influential families to become wealthy and powerful (Benjamin Best, Appendix 1.3). By giving in too much to foreign critics, the Qatari royal family risks angering this conservative section of the population. However, Qatar's social cohesion, prosperity, and stability are the priority of the ruling family: "So for the Qatari government, it is a balancing act that they have to manage. At the same time, of course, it is also important for the government that there is no unrest in the country, that any currents that exist in the country are satisfied. And that, of course, is the most important thing for Qatar and for the royal family. And the second step is then okay, how can we secure our wealth in the future" (ibid.).

In this phase in which, according to Dr. Sebastian Sons, Qatar currently finds itself, its soft power strategy is reaching its limits. More and more people in their own country question whether the effort to appear attractive to an international audience is worth it, and increasingly more people believe it is not. Consequently, this is also reflected in the reaction of the Qatari authorities, which show a much more aggressively and uncompromisingly towards foreign critics. Therefore, Hypothesis 3, which states that Qatar takes actions to protect its sport diplomacy strategy despite domestic opposition, must be denied.

Chapter 5: China Case Study Analysis

Thematic analysis of my interviews indicates that China's reaction to foreign criticism has been characterized by four major themes: suppressing criticism, rejecting any wrongdoing, and displaying China's power and strength.

Suppressing criticism

China's response to foreign criticism surrounding the hosting of the 2022 Winter Olympics has been characterized primarily by efforts to suppress and avoid criticism in the first place. A crucial part of this approach is to isolate the Chinese population from foreign critical voices. China's media is subject to strict censorship and is centrally controlled with daily directives. Under State and Party leader Xi Jinping, the Communist Party has further expanded its comprehensive control over news and information using advanced technology (Xu and Albert 2017). In the Press Freedom Index, published by Reporters Without Borders, China ranks 175th out of 180 (RSF 2022). Consequently, interview data confirms that only a small elite of Chinese are aware of foreign criticism, while the vast majority are left in the dark. Dr. Susan Brownell notes: "You know, your average Chinese person is not aware of this criticism because it's not covered in Chinese media. Frankly, they probably aren't that interested anyway. So, the people who are aware of it are the more international people, academics and diplomats and people in the realm of communications, like the people in the central propaganda row who specialize in monitoring foreign occasions in China's international image. So, there's really only a small elite, if you will, who are aware of the Western criticism and interacting with them" (Appendix 1.4).

In addition to efforts to isolate its own people from foreign criticism, foreign journalists coming to China are met with conditions that make it difficult for them to report freely and objectively. Annually, the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China (FCCC) publishes the results of its member survey on press conditions in the country. The 2022 report "Locked Down or Kicked Out", released on January 31, finds that an overwhelming 99% of respondents say Chinese media conditions do not meet "international standards". The report sheds light on intimidation tactics by Chinese authorities against foreign journalists, including threatening legal actions, restricting movement under the guise of pandemic measures, and creating a labor shortage for foreign media organizations by refusal to issue new visas (Committee to Protect Journalists 2022). Furthermore, the Committee to Protect Journalists counted at least 50 journalists in jail

in 2021 in its annual census of imprisoned journalists, making China the biggest jailer of journalists in the world for the third year in a row (Hsu 2022).

Against this background, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the host country to impose further extensive measures restricting foreign journalists in pursuing their profession. Due to the fact that the pandemic originated in China, it was particularly important for the organizers to repair the image damage caused by successfully holding the Olympic Games without any further outbreak. While China and the IOC hailed the measures as unconditional and necessary, critics denounced them as a pretext to further hinder journalists to cover the Olympics in a free and objective manner (Farhi 2022). An anonymous sports journalist from the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* assesses the situation as followed: “It's also the case when we talk to people who have been there. There are always two or three people with you, they check what you do, they observe what you do. Journalists are accompanied at every turn. That's not free research, that's clear” (Appendix 1.5). Furthermore, Christine Brennan, a USA Today sports columnist says: “It's naive to think the pandemic hasn't played right into China's hands. They would have wanted to control us, anyway. This just gives them another excuse.” (Farhi 2022).

Measures against the pandemic included foreign athletes, officials, and reporters to remain within a closed bubble known as “the closed loop” during their stay in China. People within the bubble could only move between prescribed hotels and the sporting venues by bus, train and car provided by the organizer. Contact with people outside the bubble and with the spectators at the games was not allowed. All participants were also required to upload personal health information, such as body temperature or possible COVID-19 symptoms, to a special App called My2022. The self-reporting started two weeks before traveling to Beijing and continued throughout the Games until departure (Butler 2022). Ahead of the Games the Canadian cybersecurity research group, Citizen Lab, reported that My2022 has a “devastating flaw where encryption protecting users' voice audio and file transfers can be trivially sidestepped” (Knockel 2022). Besides that, the app supposedly includes functions that allowed users to report “politically sensitive” content. A censorship keyword list, although inactive, was designed to identify domestic issues such as Xinjiang and Tibet. Due to fear of being spied on, many foreign journalists used newly purchased devices when they traveled to China and disposed them again after they left the country: „We had debates before about the fact that you have to secure your computers and your cell phones against malware. We had computers with us that were destroyed shortly after so that malware would not somehow spread in our system” (Anonymous,

Appendix 1.5). In addition to worrying about being spied on by Chinese authorities, foreign reporters could not be sure that critical reporting would not result in legal consequences for them. on January 18, Yang Shu, deputy director general of international relations for the Committee, said in a news conference: “Any behavior or speech that is against the Olympic spirit, especially against the Chinese laws and regulations, are also subject to certain punishment” (Butler 2022)

Evaluating whether the measures taken were necessary due to the pandemic or whether foreign journalists were deliberately hindered in their work is beyond the capabilities of this work. Nevertheless, the circumstances presented make it clear that China has no interest in dealing with foreign criticism and is actively trying to hinder criticism to arise in the first place. Because of that, Hypotheses 1, stating that China ignores foreign criticism and does not show any willingness to react positively, can be confirmed. Furthermore, in particular, the poor treatment of foreign journalists possesses high risks of soft disempowerment because journalists and media representatives through their work significantly affect China's image and perception abroad.

Interview data points to several reasons why China does not consider it necessary to allow and react to foreign criticism despite the soft disempowerment risks. First, human rights, environmental sustainability as well as the freedom of speech are primarily concern and debates that take place in western countries in Europe and North American. Especially on the Asian and African continents, the Olympic Games continue to enjoy enormous significance and are regarded as prestigious events. After the Olympic Games had already been held in Asian in previous years, 2018 in Pyongyang (South Korea) and 2020 in Tokyo (Japan), China followed suit by hosting the 2022 Winter Olympics, thereby demonstrating its claim to power in the immediate vicinity. Second, the Chinese leadership is aware of the temporary nature of foreign criticism surrounding sports mega-events and can afford sit them out until the end of the Games: "As I said, the discussion will be over on the outside at some point. Then come the next games, which people get upset about or deal with. And in this case, of course, the discussion ended particularly quickly because a few days later war broke out in Ukraine or the Russians invaded Ukraine” (Anonymous Appendix 1.5).

Thirdly, China can rely on the support of the IOC. Ahead of the opening ceremony, IOC President Bach said: “And with regard to...the Uyghur population, there the position of the IOC

must be, given the political neutrality, that we're not commenting on political issues" (Brennan 2022). Thomas Bach refers to strictly separating politics and sport and thereby avoids an open discussion about the criticized human rights violations against the Muslim minority Uighurs in China. The IOC sees the authoritarian structures of states such as Russia and China as a means of facilitating the successful implementation of the Olympic Games. Gian Franco Kasper was President of the International Ski Federation from 1998 to 2021 and a member of the International Olympic Committee from 2000 to 2018 before he became an honorary member afterwards. In 2019 Kasper gave an interview to the Swiss "Tages-Anzeiger" in which he commented on the future Olympic host country China: "Dictatorships can hold such events with their left hand, they don't have to ask the people," Kasper says. "From a business point of view" he only wants to go into dictatorships, he doesn't want to have to argue with environmentalists anymore in the future (Hauri and Rindlisbacher 2019).

Finally, interview partners also emphasize that the "magic" of the Olympic Games continues to work despite foreign criticism and despite the ignorance of addressing such: "The pictures still work as before and the ratings this time were not as bad as one would have thought perhaps or would have wished" (Anonymous Appendix 1.5). Nearly 600 million Chinese, or 40% of the population, tuned in to watch the Games which makes Beijing 2022 among the most watched Winter Games in history (CNN Beijing Bureau 2022). The mascot Bing Dwen Dwen, a panda bear wearing an ice shell, also turned out to be a domestic bestseller and was shared countless times on Chinese social media.

What mattered to the Chinese leadership is that they managed to stage a SME amid the COVID-19 pandemic without any major outbreaks. At the opening and closing ceremony, China was able to present its desired image of a functioning, yet generous, cosmopolitan state to the world; And with 15 medals, 9 of which were gold, it finished at the third place ahead of the USA in the medal table. Given those circumstances the Chinese leadership does not feel any need to care about foreign criticism.

Rejecting any wrongdoing

On the rare occasions on taking a stand against foreign criticism, China consistently dismisses any form of accusation as untrue, defamatory, and politically motivated. An admission of any validity of the criticism is strictly rejected. In a statement dated February 4, 2022, the Chinese

ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany responded to allegations in German media coverage of the Winter Olympics. He describes reports of human rights violations in the Xinjiang province and Hong Kong as “refuted rumors and untruths” that “are used as a pretext to discredit the Beijing Winter Olympics and compel athletes to make a statement”. “Athletes should not be subjected to political pressure for invented problems and untruths,” he says. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the issues of Xinjiang and Hong Kong are domestic political affairs that external forces must not interfere. Criticism of unreasonable pandemic measures that restrict the freedom of independent reporting is portrayed as the stigmatization of appropriate measures and good practices. Besides that, the ambassador raises the accusation that the sporting event is used to fuel ideological confrontations, referring to calls for boycotting the Beijing Games. He claims, “All of these insane attempts to politicize the Olympic Games deviate from the principles of objective, fair and balanced reporting” (Ken 2022), pointing to the apparent non-political nature of sporting events like IOC President Bach has done.

The ambassador's statement makes it clear that China's policy of choice is consistently denying and counterarguing foreign criticism. Accordingly, one can also confirm Hypothesis 2, which states that China takes no action to please its critics abroad.

In his statement, the ambassador uses the terminology “so-called” human rights, suggesting that China does not take the concept of human rights seriously. An assumption that Dr. Susan Brownell can confirm: “The result of that is that the concept of human rights has not been taken real seriously as something that is a good concept for China” (Appendix 1.4). Consequently, from a Chinese perspective, allegations of human rights violations are nothing that requires justification or comment. Ms. Brownell goes on to mention that corruption, on the other hand, is a crime that draws much more attention and concern from the general Chinese population: “If you talk to them about human rights, they feel that violations of human rights are generally a product of corruption. They are a product of corrupt leaders who are not held properly accountable for corrupt actions, and they are trying to cover them up or they are violating human rights in the process of corrupt actions” (ibid.). The foreign criticism of human rights violations shows a discrepancy between the West and China’s world view. Ms. Brownell suggests that if the human rights debate were labeled or associated with the concept of corruption, there would have been a better foundation for joint discussion.

Displaying China's power and strength

The third and final theme emerging from the interviews identifies attempts to display China's power and strength as reaction to foreign criticism. Dr. Susan Brownell notes that one of the lessons from the Beijing 2008 was that China had a problem with foreign communication. Chinese authorities believed that "China wasn't able to get its message and its voice across in the international media and that it wasn't able to effectively counter the attacks in the international media. And that was really a problem that needed to be solved. Not violations of human rights, but China's presence in the international media" (Dr. Susan Brownell, Appendix 1.4). Consequently, China used the Games to push its own political messages and hit back at criticism.

One such example occurred during the torch relay shortly before the Games started. A Chinese soldier involved in a deadly border dispute with Indian troops was chosen as one of the torchbearers bringing the Olympic flame to Beijing. The gesture, aimed at India, led to an outrage in New Delhi, after which India joined the US-led diplomatic boycott (CNN Beijing Bureau 2022). During the opening ceremony, another symbolic incident occurred, conveying a clear political message to China's critics abroad. Cross-country skier Dinigeer Yilamujiang, who belongs to the Uighur Muslim minority, was chosen as one of the two people to light the Olympic flame. For many outside China, this was seen as a deliberate attempt to refute the narrative of human rights abuses against the Uyghurs and showcase China's harmony (ibid.).

Another example are the public appearances of Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai during the Olympic Games. In early November 2021, Shuai accused a top Chinese politician of sexual assault on the social network Weibo and was thereafter no longer seen in public. Numerous athletes and federations expressed concern and accused the Chinese regime of trying to silence Shuai. With the help of the IOC, the Chinese leadership attempted to refute this narrative through multiple public appearances of Shuai and downplayed the incident as a harmless misunderstanding. In early December, IOC President Bach spoke to Shuai in a half-hour video conference for the first time since her disappearance. In the conversation, Shuai thanked Bach for the concerns about her well-being, but emphasized that she wanted to spend time with her family and therefore asked for her privacy to be respected (Fuente 2021). Bach and Shuai met two more times in person during the Games, at a joined dinner and at the visit to the Freestyle Big Air finals. Before that, the tennis player gave an interview to the French sports newspaper

L'Equipe in which she claimed that she had never accused anyone of sexual abuse, that she herself deleted her post and that she had never really disappeared (Dorgan and Ventouillac 2022). She also announced her retirement from professional sports due to her age and knee problems. Besides that, she spoke out in favor of a stricter separation of sport and politics in order not to endanger the Olympic spirit. L'Equipe pointed out the special circumstances under which the interview had to take place. First, Chinese Olympic Committee chief of staff Wang Kan was present to translate Peng's responses. Second, all questions had to be submitted in advance, not all of which were answered. And third, L'Equipe had to agree to publish Wang Kan's translation word by word in question-and-answer format.

As the Olympics drew to a close, political messages became bolder. Yan Jiarong, a spokesperson for the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympics Games (BOCOG), was asked at a press conference whether Taiwan's delegation would appear at the closing ceremony. Yan, took the opportunity to assert China sovereignty claims over the self-ruling democracy: "What I want to say is that there is only one China in the world. Taiwan is an indivisible part of China," she said. When asked about reports that the Olympic uniforms were made by forced labor in Xinjiang, she described them as a "lie made up by forces with ulterior motives" (Knuth 2022).

China's displaying of political messages in an attempt to push their own narrative demonstrates it's superpower claim that doesn't allow foreign criticism. Furthermore, it clearly shows that the primary concern of the Olympic Games organizers is the domestic audience instead of foreign spectators. China's dismissive, ignorant and combative attitude towards foreign criticism can only lead to further rejection and misunderstanding between the Asian country and the West, thus further contributing to its soft disempowerment. At the same time, however, it potentially impresses its own population and leads to soft power effects there.

China's response to criticism of a lack of environmental protection and sustainability marks a notable exception and deviates from China's general dismissive and resistant attitude to foreign criticism. In contrast to human rights, China praises environmental protection and sustainability as crucial values of the Olympic Games that also enjoy high priority for Beijing 2022. Dr. Susan Brownell says: "Well, they're very much on board with environmental issues because they know they have severe environmental problems. And environmental NGOs were the first category of the NGOs that were allowed to exist. I think on the whole, it has only been

international NGOs working in the realm of environment that were allowed into China and a lot of work inside China. So, China has been much more open to working with NGOs and much more responsive to protests at the local level because there have been lots of local activist groups taking up solution on that issue” (Appendix 1.4).

In cooperation with the IOC local organizers pledge to have identified measures to avoid and reduce carbon emissions and reach carbon neutrality (IOC 2022). On the one hand, China reuses five venues from the 2008 Summer Games therefore minimizing construction. Furthermore, all facilities are supplied with electricity from 100% renewable energy sources. On the other hand, only fuel efficient and clean-energy vehicles are used for passenger transport within the Olympic Bubble. A high-speed train specially constructed for the Games connects the three competition zones of Beijing, Yanqing and Zhangjiakou, thereby significantly reducing travel time and costs. Four ice sports competition and training venues replace their refrigeration systems formally based on hydrofluorocarbons-, which has been proven to damage the earth’s ozone layer and contribute to global warming, with newly introduced natural carbon dioxide (CO₂). Finally, emissions that are suspended despite the measures presented are offset through forestry carbon sinks and donations of carbon credits from official partners. In Beijing and Zhangjiakou, 47,333 and 33,000 hectares have been planted with trees since 2014, which they say have generated 530,000 and 570,000 tons of forest carbon sequestration, respectively (all data from IOC 2022). Even if critics contradict the depiction of environmentally friendly and sustainable games, (Diaz 2022), when it comes to the environment China proves that cooperation is possible after all.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendation

To answer the question how sport mega-event host countries react to foreign criticism this research conducted a comparative case study analysis between Qatar and China. The results of the two case studies differ significantly.

While Qatar was initially surprised and overwhelmed by the foreign criticism, by 2013 at the latest it began to act proactively to try to please its foreign critics. Public relations agencies that advised the host country and created comprehensive lobbying campaigns in Europe and America played a crucial role. Furthermore, Qatar initiated an extensive labor market reform which sought to improve the living and working conditions of migrant workers in the Gulf country. In order to meet the criticism of environmental protection, Qatar created extensive sustainability and legacy plans for the newly built stadiums. However, due to implementation problems, especially with the introduced labor market reform, there is a clear gap between what Qatar claims to be doing and what is actually being done. Consequently, the wave of foreign criticism has not abated despite extensive measures to satisfy them. Qatar then changed its response to foreign criticism, becoming increasingly hostile, aggressive and frustrated. In this phase, Qatar does not shy away from suing its critics or accusing them of hypocrisy.

The People's Republic of China, on the other hand, pursued a strict strategy which sought to prevent foreign criticism from arising in the first place. It tried to do this by isolating its own population from uncensored critical media reporting and by hindering foreign journalists in their work. Criticism was dismissed as untruth and political propaganda. Instead of responding directly to foreign criticism, the Chinese leadership pushed its own narrative through symbolic acts during the Olympics. China only showed a positive reaction when it came to environmental protection by create and implement extensive sustainability plans for sport venues used during the Olympic.

Due to the different results of the two case studies, no uniform answer can be given to the research question: How do host countries of sport mega-events react to foreign criticism. Nevertheless, the two results inform us about what we can expect as a reaction to foreign criticism by future host countries. I argue that smaller autocratic states like Qatar will show a significantly greater willingness to social, political, and economic changes in response to foreign criticism than an autocratic superpower like China.

Furthermore, analyzing the reactions of host countries of SMEs to foreign criticism from the soft power-soft disempowerment perspective provides further insights into these two theories. On the one hand, Qatar's interim reputation gain through the introduction of extensive labor reforms indicates that reactions to foreign criticism can contribute to the promotion of soft power, as Brannagan and Giulianotti (2015, 716) had suggested. On the other hand, the study also shows the limits of how far states go to appear attractive in the eyes of foreign observers. Results of this research indicate that this limit is reached when the necessary adjustments and changes are not supported by the entire population.

For future academic studies analyzing the reaction of SME host countries to foreign criticism, it would be particularly interesting to analyze established, democratic states from the West rather than autocratic states from the Asian continent. This would be possible in the coming years as the next Olympic Games will be held in France and the USA.

Finally, I would like to make a few recommendations for parties expressing criticism so that they lead to a more positive response which can contribute to the core purpose of sport diplomacy, overcoming separation between disparate peoples, nations and states and to reduce misunderstandings between 'them' and 'us':

1. Adapting criticism to national circumstances can increase the willingness of the host country to cooperate. Both case studies have shown that the potential for substantive change is lost when criticism is miscommunicated. In the case of Qatar, it would have been advisable to place the human rights criticism surrounding the migrant workers in a larger context, including the home countries of the guest workers and the migration route to Qatar. In such an overarching approach, Qatar could have played a pioneering role and would probably be more willing to cooperate. In the case of China, it would have been advisable to link the criticized violations of human rights with the concept of corruption. For the Chinese, corruption is a much more tangible concept than human rights and, as a result, would have had a better chance of increasing the Chinese regime's willingness to act.
2. The temporary nature of criticism surrounding sport mega-events tempts host countries to take only half-hearted actions or not at all. Important topics such as human rights and environmental protection should also stay in the focus of international media after the

event and should continue to be criticized if necessary. That way parties expressing criticism can demonstrate that they really care about these issues and can refute the accusation of being hypocritical.

3. Sports bodies like the IOC and FIFA could play a much more decisive role in turning foreign criticism into social and political change. At the moment, these bodies are used more to protect criticized host countries, while having the political clout to persuade host countries to rectify grievances in their country.
4. Substantial changes and improvements in relation to any criticism should be recognized and honored. If this does not happen, there is a risk of frustrating the host country and initiated changes could potentially be reversed again.

Bibliography

2020. *Amnesty International*. 30. August. Zugriff am 26. March 2022.
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/08/qatar-announcement-kafala-reforms/>.
- Anckar, Carsten. 2008. "On the Applicability of the Most Similar Systems Design and the Most Different Systems Design in Comparative Research." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11, no. 5, 389-401.
2022. *Associated Press*. February 22. Accessed March 10, 2022.
<https://apnews.com/article/soccer-sports-germany-international-soccer-world-cup-b5d21e04200ca43dff0325ee8f8ec37a>.
- Black, David, and Bryon Peacock. 2013. "Sport and Diplomacy." *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, March: 1-19.
- Black, David, and Janis Van Der Westhuizen. 2004. "The allure of global games for 'semi-peripheral' polities and spaces: A research agenda." *Third world quarterly*, 1195–1214.
- Blaschke, Ronny. 2022. *Deutschlandfunk*. January 16. Accessed March 16, 2022.
<https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/deutsch-katarische-wirtschaftsbeziehungen-100.html>.
- Brannagan, Paul Michael , and Richard Giulianotti. 2015. "Soft power and soft disempowerment: Qatar, global sport and football's 2022 World Cup finals." *Leisure Studies* , October: 703-719.
- Braun , Virginia, und Victoria Clarke . 2006. „Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology.“ *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2, 77-101.
- Brennan, Christine. 2022. *USA Today Sports*. February 3. Accessed May 1, 2022.
<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/sports/columnist/brennan/2022/02/03/beijing-olympics-ioc-thomas-bach-deflects-uyghur-issue-china/6647689001/>.
- Butler, Steven. 2022. *Committee to Protect Journalists*. February 2. Accessed April 18, 2022.
<https://cpj.org/2022/02/opinion-the-dilemma-facing-journalists-covering-the-beijing-olympics/>.
- Chat, Victor. 2016. "Role of Sport in International Relations: National Rebirth and Renewal." *Asian Economic Policy Review*, 139–155.
- Chu, Marcus P. 2016. *International Sporting Mega-Events in China since the 1980s*. November 23. Accessed May 4, 2022.
<https://theasiadialogue.com/2016/11/23/international-sporting-mega-events-in-china-since-the-1980s-from-extravagance-to-frugality/>.

- CNN Beijing Bureau. 2022. *CNN*. February 21. Accessed May 5, 2022.
<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/02/20/china/china-winter-olympics-domestic-success-intl-hnk/index.html>.
2022. *Committee to Protect Journalists*. January 31. Accessed March 26, 2022.
<https://cpj.org/2022/01/china-finds-new-ways-to-intimidate-foreign-press-fccc-survey-finds/>.
- Diaz, Jaclyn. 2022. *National Public Radio*. February 19. Accessed April 20, 2022.
<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/19/1081657319/winter-olympics-environmental-impact?t=1652632200512>.
2015. *Die Tageszeitung*. January 21. Accessed March 30, 2022. <https://taz.de/Handball-WM-in-Katar/!5023039/>.
- Dorgan , Sophie , and Marc Ventouillac. 2022. <https://www.lequipe.fr/Tennis/Article/Peng-shuai-my-life-has-been-what-it-s-supposed-to-be-nothing-special/1315638>. February 7. Accessed April 10, 2022. L'Equipe.
- Farhi, Paul. 2022. *The Washington Post* . January 22. Accessed April 2, 2022.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/media/journalists-beijing-olympics-china-covid-restrictions/2022/01/19/35287322-7347-11ec-8b0a-bcfab800c430_story.html.
- Fuente, Homero De la. 2021. *CNN*. November 21. Accessed April 10, 2022.
<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/11/21/sport/peng-shuai-video-call-thomas-bach-spt-intl/index.html>.
- Ginesta, Xavier, and Jordi de San Eugenio. 2014. "The Use of Football as a Country Branding Strategy. Case Study: Qatar and the Catalan Sports Press." *Communication & Sport*, 225-241.
- n.d. *Government Communication Office*. Accessed March 29, 2022.
<https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/focus/labour-reform/>.
- Grix, Johnatan , and Barrie Houlihan. 2014. "Sports mega-events as part of a nation's soft power strategy: The cases of Germany (2006) and the UK (2012)." *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 572-596.
- Grix, Jonathan. 2013. "Sport Politics and the Olympics." *Political Studies Review*, 15–25.
- Grix, Jonathan, and Donna Lee. 2013. "Soft Power, Sports Mega-Events and Emerging States: The Lure of the Politics of Attraction." *Global Society*, September 3: 521-536.
- Grix, Jonathan, and Michael Brannagan. 2016. "Of Mechanisms and Myths: Conceptualising States' "Soft Power" Strategies through Sports Mega- Events." *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 251-272.

- Hauri, Rene, and Phillip Rindlisbacher. 2019. *Der Tagesanzeiger*. February 4. Accessed May 2, 2022. <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/sport/ski-wm/in-diktaturen-ist-es-fuer-uns-einfacher/story/26126306>.
- Horne, John. 2007. „The Four ‘Knowns’ of Sports Mega-Events.“ *Leisure Studies*, 18. 2: 81-96.
- . 2015. "Sports mega-events – three sites of contemporary political contestation." *Sport in Society*, October 12: 328-340.
- Hsu, Iris. 2022. *Committee to Protect Journalists*. May 6. Accessed May 7, 2022. <https://cpj.org/2022/05/how-china-is-stepping-up-harassment-of-foreign-correspondents/>.
- Hu, Richard Xiaoqian. 2015. *Chinese football and its number one fan*. 13. 8. Zugriff am 10. 3 2022. <https://www.policyforum.net/chinese-football-and-its-number-one-fan/>.
- Ingle, Sean. 2019. *The Guardian*. 26. September. Zugriff am 2. April 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2019/sep/26/dr-cool-engineer-qatar-white-elephants>.
2020. *International Labour Organization*. August 30. Accessed March 20, 2022. https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_754391/lang--en/index.htm.
2022. *IOC*. January 31. Accessed April 15, 2022. <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/beijing-2022-sustainability-all-you-need-to-know>.
- Jackson, Steven J., and Stephen Haigh. 2008. "Between and beyond politics: Sport and foreign policy in a globalizing world." *Sport in Society*, July 1: 349-358.
- Jansen, Olaf. 2021. *Deutsche Welle*. 1. 12. Zugriff am 19. 3 2022. <https://www.dw.com/en/arab-cup-2021-no-football-fervor-in-qatar/a-59985700>.
- Ken, Wu. 2022. *Botschaft der Volksrepublik China in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. February 4. Accessed May 2, 2022. http://de.china-embassy.gov.cn/det/sgyw/202202/t20220205_10639093.htm.
- Knockel, Jeffrey. 2022. *CitizenLab*. January 18. Accessed April 12, 2022. <https://citizenlab.ca/2022/01/cross-country-exposure-analysis-my2022-olympics-app/>.
- Knuth, Johannes. 2022. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. February 17. Accessed May 5, 2022. <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/sport/olympia-taiwan-uirgen-xinjiang-menschenrechte-1.5531276>.

- Kurmayer, Nicolaus. 2021. *Euractiv*. December 6. Accessed April 20, 2022.
<https://www.euractiv.de/section/gesundheit/news/kritiker-nachhaltiges-station-fuer-katar-2022-ist-nur-pr/>.
- Murray , Stuart, and Geoffrey Allen Pigman. 2013. "Mapping the relationship between international sport and diplomacy." *Sport in Society*, 11 18: 1098-1118.
- Murray, Stuart. 2016. "Sports Diplomacy." In *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, by Costas M. Constantinius, Pauline Kerr and Paul Sharp, 617-628. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Nye, Joseph. 2008. "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power." *THE ANNALS OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY* 94-109.
- Nygård, Håvard Mogleiv, und Scott Gates. 2013. „Soft power at home and abroad: Sport diplomacy, politics and peace-building.“ *International Area Studies Review*, 18. 9: 235–243.
- n.d. *Qatar 2022*. Accessed March 13, 2022. <https://www.qatar2022.qa/pt/node/2723>.
- n.d. *Qatar 2022*. Accessed March 19, 2022. <https://www.qatar2022.qa/en/stadiums/lusail-stadium>.
- Ramsay, Allan. 2006. „Is Diplomacy Dead?“ *Contemporary Review*, 1. September: 273-289.
- Reiche, Danyel. 2014. "Investing in sporting success as a domestic and foreign policy tool: the case of Qatar." *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, December 10: 1-16.
2016. *Reuters*. January 26. Accessed February 25, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-soccer-world-qatar-zwanziger-idUSKCN0V41DJ>.
- Robinson, Joshua. 2022. *The Wall Street Journal*. 31. 3. Zugriff am 31. 3 2022.
https://www.wsj.com/articles/fifa-2022-world-cup-qatar-11648740082?mod=sports_minor_pos3.
- Rofe, Simon J. 2016. "Sport and Diplomacy: A Global Diplomacy Framework." *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, May 10: 212-230.
- . 2014. „It is a squad game: Manchester United as a diplomatic non-state actor in international affairs.“ *Sport in Society*, 24. 1: 1136-1154.
2022. *RSF*. Accessed April 3, 2022. <https://rsf.org/en/index>.
- Thani, Mohammed Al. 2022. "Channelling Soft Power: The Qatar 2022 World Cup, Migrant Workers, and International Image." *The International Journal of the History of Sport* , January 23: 1-24.

2022. *The Athletic*. April 5. Accessed 3 29, 2022.

<https://theathletic.com/3228882/2022/04/05/louis-van-gaal-always-delivered-direct-unsentimental-honesty/>.

Trunkos , Judit, and Bob Heere. 2017. "Sport Diplomacy: A Review of How Sports Can Be Used to Improve International Relationships." In *Case Studies in Sport Diplomacy*, by Michael Sam, Steven Jackson, Rover E. Backer and Craig Esherick, 1-19. FiT Publishing.

Xu, Beina, and Eleanor Albert. 2017. *Council on Foreign Relations*. January 17. Accessed April 4, 2022. <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/media-censorship-china>.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview Transcripts	60
<i>Appendix 1.1: Interview with Dr. Sebastian Sons</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Appendix 1.2: Interview with Ronny Blaschke</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>Appendix 1.3: Interview with Benjamin Best</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>Appendix 1.4: Interview with Dr. Susan Brownell</i>	<i>96</i>
<i>Appendix 1.5: Interview with Anonymous</i>	<i>110</i>

Appendix 1: Interview Transcripts

Appendix 1.1: Interview with Dr. Sebastian Sons

Interview partner: Dr. Sebastian Sons

Date: 22nd April 2022 at 5pm

Location: Online, Zoom

[Niklas Krämer \(00:03\)](#)

So, to get into the subject of Qatar. Not only since the awarding of the World Cup, Qatar invests in football and in sports in general. Can you explain to me what image would Qatar like to show of itself to the world?

[Dr. Sebastian Sons \(00:37\)](#)

Qatar wants to be perceived as a player that talks to everyone, that offers a platform to be taken seriously and noticed internationally in geopolitics, in economics, in sports policy, in development policy, despite its small size. And as a small state, you try to make yourself irreplaceable by networking in multilateral forums, by investing abroad, by hosting major sporting events. And they would like to build up or shape this image. And in different areas. One would like to produce itself on the one hand as clearly with the host of the host role for the soccer world championship one would like as professional Event manager. As someone who is able to accommodate millions of people, who is able to host the best World Cup of all time, in order to show simply also from marketing aspects how professional, how modern Qatar is and to set itself apart a bit, so to speak. The second important aspect is the situation in the Gulf, which for centuries has been characterized by rivalries and conflicts.

The Arabian Peninsula is traditionally dominated by Saudi Arabia, the largest and most important country in terms of population, but also from a religious point of view as a religious player and guardian of the two holy sites. The smaller Gulf states of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain are always somewhat in the shadow of Saudi Arabia and have to assert themselves accordingly. And Qatar has developed a business model for itself as a model for success, to talk to everyone, to lead everyone, to be a host for everyone, to host state of the art events in the sports sector, in the cultural sector, in the entertainment sector, and thus to make itself irreplaceable. And I think that's what the World Cup is, one example, but

also, for example, the Americans. And it is also a very, very essential, very, very essential element of this nation branding strategy and this strategy of making oneself unassailable because one knows that these are the Americans on site and that one can therefore also rely in a certain way on the protection of the Americans.

At the same time, they have a common gas field with the Iranians. That's why they have conciliatory and pragmatic relations with Iran. This leads to the fact that one actually has no interest in the escalation between Saudi Arabia and Iran building up further. You saw during the Gulf crisis between 2017 and January of last year, that that became much closer ties with Turkey. You've seen now, after the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, how important Qatar has been in transporting Afghan refugees, how important Qatar is in keeping in touch with the Taliban, and you see what close ties there are with China. And so on and so forth. All of that is part of this Qatari model of success, and it's also aimed at protecting itself from external threats, whether it's from Saudi Arabia, whether it's from the United Arab Emirates. And if you look at how Qatar does politics and how Qatar tries to exert influence, then in many areas it is very much in line with what the Emirates have been doing for years.

The Emirates have bought into Manchester City, Qatar has bought into PSG. Similar strategies and Saudi Arabia is now following suit. And just in sports takeover of Newcastle United plays a role. We're hearing now Bahrain is buying into AC Milan. So that's a blueprint, the one that Qatar has developed there, to influence through sports. And you mentioned that soft power also has negative sides, and you'll probably get something that also means disempowerment, so to speak. But, of course, Qatar is also a role model for many, for many players, for Saudi Arabia, for the Emirates, in order to realize and learn okay, we have to deal with such criticism. One sees this now also very massively in the Saudi case, in the alignment of the formula one in Dschidda and that beside the attack in the proximity also on the racing course. There was massive criticism again, as always actually Saudi Arabia. And you have to be able to deal with that.

You can't just ignore it, or you can't just somehow put billions into PR campaigns, but you have to work on it substantially. And I think Qatar is a good example of the fact that you can work on this substantially. Twelve years to prepare for this World Cup. That's also an important factor, that you could also learn from the mistakes that you may have made at the beginning and that you are credible. I think that's exactly what Qatar has over its neighbors. Qatar has the

image of being credible, and that is something that I think is worth a great deal and that cannot be bought with money, but on the other hand you also have to do a lot of public diplomacy work and where it's not just about cosmetic changes, but where it's also about really improving things on the ground. And that's what happened in Qatar, whether you like it or not. Things have happened there that have not happened in neighboring states. And I think that's something that Qatar can also take credit for.

[Niklas Krämer \(06:22\)](#)

Generally speaking, before we get specific now on the points that are criticized. How did Qatar react to that?

[Dr. Sebastian Sons \(07:03\)](#)

I would say there were three phases. The first phase was something like from 2010 after the award to 2013, so under the time of the then Emir Hamad, the father of the current Emir. During that time, it was rather surprised and ignorant. People were simply overwhelmed by the fact that all of a sudden this small country was so much in the focus of world attention. And not in a positive sense, but that actually the whole discussion was about human rights, about a winter like summer World Cup, so that you can play soccer under inhumane temperatures, so to speak. The whole argument that it's not a traditional football country. And so on and so forth. Qatar was overwhelmed with that at the time. They didn't know that. And with the change of government, with the change from Hamid to Tamim, that changed and they dealt with it more proactively. They made their own narrative out of it. They said okay, we're going to face this criticism and we're going to change something in the way of our argumentation. We approach our critics much more aggressively and proactively by conducting public diplomacy campaigns, by commissioning media campaigns on our behalf, and so on.

But we have to cushion the migration debate by changing things, by introducing changes, by changing laws, by making improvements, by carrying out reforms. And that is what has happened in recent years, at least on paper. Really revolutionary for the Gulf states, the ILO has been allowed to open an office. There is regular exchange with human rights organizations, and trade unionists are allowed to enter the country. There are numerous documentaries and reports by journalists who have entered and conducted interviews in the camps, and so on. All of that would be unthinkable in most other Gulf states. And that's, I think, the second phase, which I'll say lasts from 2013 to 2018 or so. And one also has wished that then the criticism stops and one

then also perceives. Finally, that something would change for the better in Qatar. And that didn't happen. And that's sort of the third phase that we're in now, and that it's defiant, that's in a way also wounded vanity.

And that is, above all, the accusation against us in the West, that we think that there is no respect for the fact that we do not honor what is happening in Qatar. So I think it was in October, I really heard that very intensified, that one feels unfairly treated, that one has the feeling, simply that, that the changes simply do not want to be perceived, because the human rights discussion was actually always fronted. It was. In the West, it's never really about the human rights situation in Qatar changing; it's just a cover for an Islamophobic and traditionalist discussion.

[Niklas Krämer \(09:57\)](#)

That's what the Qataris say?

[Dr. Sebastian Sons \(09:59\)](#)

Yes, that's exactly what I hear very often. And not only from Qataris, but also from people who are enthusiastic about football in the region. The World Cup in Qatar does not only stand for Qatar, but it actually stands for the entire Arab Islamic world. And that is also what Qatar emphasized again and again at the beginning. We are only organizing this because other countries cannot. But we are organizing it on behalf of the entire Arab Islamic world, because this is a region of the world that is unbelievably large and enthusiastic about football. So I don't know if you have ever been to an Arab country, whether it was Egypt, Jordan, Syria, wherever Egypt. So you have Salah, he is I think the greatest national hero ever, the enthusiasm, it's incredible. And then? Then I can also understand that people who are accused of having no football culture or no football tradition because they haven't been in the final of a World Cup ten times, that they find that unfair.

And this is exactly the phase we are in now, because in Qatar they realize that we have actually done everything that the West wanted us to do. Okay, not everything is going perfectly, but we have actually met most of their demands, and yet they don't love us. And that leads to the fact that one says Okay, now “wir haben die Schnauze voll” to say it in German. And if there is no criticism, the rhetoric is much, much more aggressive than it was two or three years ago. If you look at how state officials or Supreme Council and others those who are now commenting on attacks from the Guardian or from other newspapers, then that's, that's much more aggressive

and much more dismissive and much, much more unforgiving than that was the case a few years ago. And that's because people thought that they had actually met all the demands. Or at least one has been ready to fulfill all the demands. But the arrogant West is still treating us like a little child.

And this is not limited to Qatar, by the way. This attitude exists in Saudi Arabia, in the Emirates. And it shows a disappointment, a deep frustration about this paternalistic attitude that we have in the West towards the Islamic world. And it has nothing to do with the World Cup either. The discussion about the World Cup shows pretty well how we see the Orient as well. And that is something that has broken a lot of trust, on the part of Qatar. And that's why I think you go through these three phases, Qatar in particular, and I think we've reached a point where we say, well, we don't really care what the West thinks of us. And that is just dangerous. This situation is dangerous when pressure no longer. But if at some point you think, okay, we've given in to this pressure, but the pressure doesn't let up at all, but they just keep going, keep going.

It is not recognized at all that we have somehow achieved something positive. Then, at some point, people are no longer willing to give in to the pressure. And then at some point they say okay, then with us no more and then there will be no human rights. Then there will be no reforms in the labor sector, then there will be a roll backwards again. And that's why, I think, in a way, you have to honor what's happening in Qatar. And that's why, for me, such discussions about the World Cup, boycotts and so on are counterproductive from an absolutely politically analytical point of view, not from a football fan perspective.

[Niklas Krämer \(13:35\)](#)

There's probably some lack of sensitivity there between the two cultures to recognize what all has changed in Qatar. Now maybe if we go to that first phase, so one of the first criticisms when it came to Qatar, when you got the World Cup as a direct award there, it was about corruption. It's all about money in Qatar, no football culture. This is all about money. The World Cup is bought anyway. Can you maybe elaborate a little bit on how Qatar behaved there?

[Dr. Sebastian Sons \(14:17\)](#)

Um, well, I don't want to generalize, but what you heard was that we didn't do anything different than the others. And I think that was what irritated me a bit about the discussion at the time. Let's put it this way. I don't know who said it, but I think at some point. I don't know if it was

in the newspaper or somewhere I read it. Since 1998, most likely, no World Cup tournament has been awarded without corruption and even before that. We know by now how the summer fairy tale came about. We now know what happened in South Africa, what happened in Brazil, what happened in Russia and Qatar. So I don't want to sugarcoat it. But there is nothing else that can be done. The problem is not Qatar. The problem, of course Fifa. The discussions we're having here have It's against a highly corrupt, against a highly corrupt institution like Fifa, which over decades has just built itself such a monopoly for such an epidemic that corruption has become part of its DNA.

And I think this discussion was much too undifferentiated at the beginning. Of course, Qatar has to be accused of being corrupt and that there was most likely corruption. Mohamed Bin Hammad is the personification of that. And if you look at which Arab officials play an enormous role in world football, whether that's Nasser al-Khalifa or now Yasir Al-Rumayyan at Newcastle. These are all people who are in cahoots with the local rulers, who of course somehow have very close ties to the kings and emirs in the Gulf. And of course, corruption plays a role. But to make Qatar solely responsible for this has been met with great incomprehension, because one has mixed that up again with these issues that we've just talked about. They don't begrudge us Qataris that because we are Arabs or because we are Muslims. Or because we are a small country. Or because its too hot or because we're not allowed to host the World Cup. Or because we're not a football fan. You have all this corruption, so to speak, as well as the human rights debate. Actually, it's perceived as a pretext for the real issues that are at stake, but that no one wants to say. Because we in the West are such do-gooders, who of course don't say that they don't really like the fact that we can't drink beer properly during a World Cup. And it is a Eurocentric, image. And this image is criticized. And that is reflected in corruption. Why are we Qataris accused of being corrupt when the whole FIFA is corrupt, it is a Western institution? Why don't you change something in the structures and then we won't do it. But if everybody does it, we do it and they just did it better. They just did it smarter and smarter and that's why they won the World Cup and not Australia. And yes, at the end of the day, this discussion is of course justified, but to carry it out exclusively on the back of Qatar is just double standards.

[Niklas Krämer \(17:39\)](#)

Just a sad truth that Qatar is addressing there. You mentioned it earlier and I think so the main criticism, the controversy is the human rights situation in Qatar of migrant workers, the kafala

system. Can you give me some insight there on what has changed in Qatar specifically in response to that criticism?

[Dr. Sebastian Sons \(18:04\)](#)

So I think the first essential point is that the World Cup has put a grievance in the public focus that has been there for decades, actually for centuries. So that's nothing new at all. We have slavery in this region of the world. We had the labor system of the British there. So forced jobs and labor relations. We had Kafala. We had slavery abolished only in 1962 in Saudi Arabia as an example. So this dependence of foreign migrant workers on their sponsors is a historically grown phenomenon, not only by the way in the Gulf States, but also in many other areas of the world. Only the World Cup has brought this to the surface for the first time, that first time made clear to a broad public what is important as structural exploitation, immigration, process. Millions of people suffer from this. And the migration corridor from South Asia to the Gulf States is the most important in the world. 10% of all migrants live in the Gulf States and work in the Gulf States worldwide.

If you look at the remittances, without the remittances of the migrants to their families in the home countries, most of the countries Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan would have been broke long ago. That's, that's living wage, and and this criticism that's being directed at Qatar is directed far too much only at the conditions in Qatar itself. That's that's true though, that needs to be discussed as well. I'll say something about how Qatar responds to that in a moment. But migration is and that is is a no brainer. Immigration is is a global, transnational, cross-border phenomenon. That's the epitome of migration, that you go from A to B. That means you have to look not only at what's happening in B, you have to look at what's happening in A. And you have to look at what is happening on the way between A and B. And too little is being done. And that, in order to really achieve sustainable improvements in migration management that reduce the exploitation of people, you have to start in the original states and you have to do much, much more, in my opinion, together with the individual states and also together with countries like Qatar, to protect the migrants even before they emigrate, to prepare them better, to protect them from falling into the clutches of criminal agencies, from being abused as drug smugglers without knowing it and then being arrested because of that.

There is so much criminality, so much lobbying, so much and so many actors who profit from this criminal migration regime that it is just not enough to introduce a minimum wage in Qatar.

It's a drop in the bucket at the end of the day. It is an important drop, no question about it. And it brings me to your real question. Qatar has responded to this criticism by changing laws. I don't need to go through them all in detail now, you can read all that. But minimum wage, above all also the possibility that the guarantor is no longer allowed to withhold the passport without further ado, that you are allowed to change your employer. And so on. All of this has happened in the last few years - not from the beginning, but in the last few years due to international pressure - and has led to improvements that have also been confirmed by international human rights organizations. It's not as if it's a factual, a factual improvement, that this doesn't correspond to what we like to imagine.

Yes, without question. That's not going to happen easily. And that also has something to do with the fact that in countries like Qatar, where 90 or 80 85% of the people are not Qataris, there is a very, very, very large social hierarchy. You have to think about that. What is the stability of such countries based on? It is based on the fact that the few nationals in Qatar 300,000 people. That's nothing. That's Kreuzberg. That these 300,000 people rule a country. And with that, the remaining 2.5 million people who are not Qatari citizens, and of course, somehow you have to give privileges to these people in the first place. Because if you don't give these people the privileges, then the political system will also fall. Because the emir, the ruling family makes policy for, for their own nationals in the first place. And you can do that because you are very rich. You can give them a lot of money from the gas revenues. And so on and so forth. And very many amenities.

But you do it just because you treat these people better than others. And if you treat people better, you have to treat other people badly. But that's what logic dictates, and that's what social hierarchy dictates. And I'm not talking about tribalism and nonsense, I'm simply saying that power is always based on the fact that certain people have more power than others. And in the Gulf States, it is the low-wage workers who are at the very bottom of the social hierarchy. And you don't want to change that. That must not be changed, because then social cohesion is put at risk, because then all of a sudden the traditional domination. The system of domination between the ruled and the rulers is called into question. And there are examples from Saudi history. And also in other Gulf states. That Arab emigrants who came in the 1950s and 1960s to build up the ministries there, to work as teachers.

And so on. In a way also brought democratic ideas to the Gulf states and at some point became too political and because they also got more influence, because they got more power, because they participated more, became more integrated. And that at some point became a power political security challenge, a danger for the rulers. So you had to change it if you didn't want to lose yourself, if you didn't want to lose the throne, if you wanted to ensure your own survival. And they relied primarily on recruiting Asian migrant workers, who are not so political. And this social hierarchy will not change. You can't fool yourself. That's not what we want either. However, the realities of life have changed for the better. And that has just been stimulated by all these reforms, although there are still extremely many abuses in the implementation, etc. and continue to benefit incredibly many people from a system. Of course, no one wants to abolish it and it has not been de facto abolished, even if the Qataris claim otherwise, because simply many people earn money with it.

And as long as these people earn money with it, there is no incentive to fundamentally change this migration structure. This is not only true for Qatar, but also for all the other countries around it. But above all, it also applies to the states. And it applies to the entire lobby of the agencies, which earn a golden nose with the exploitation of migrants. And that is, you have to just a lot. That's my main argument, what I keep trying to do. Take a closer look at what is happening not only in Qatar, but all around. Because only then can you really help the migrants, the people. And that's why I believe that the changes in Qatar are certainly a step in the right direction, but only a very, very small step. And there must be much more international efforts to actually help migrants on their way to the Gulf States from their way home from the Gulf States and so on. And I think that's a point that should be emphasized after the World Cup, that the Gulf states should be persuaded to participate in this kind of support for migrants.

Because that's how they can really gain an international reputation. They can actually present themselves as the good guys, because then the accusation is refuted that they are only doing this for themselves, so that they themselves look good. And for a long time, I worked in the field of development policy in the Gulf states. And this is an area of development policy that actually has enormous potential, where we, as Germany, should and could do much more, which has not happened so far. And that's what I'm criticizing, and I think there's simply potential there that's also lying fallow.

[Niklas Krämer \(27:04\)](#)

Well, one would hope that this would really happen after the World Cup. Could you perhaps elaborate on this more specifically? This discrepancy between We are deforming, we have abolished the system, and the reality. In reality, the system is still intact. Could you perhaps elaborate on this a bit more? How does this discrepancy come about?

[Dr. Sebastian Sons \(27:28\)](#)

I think the discrepancy is in the implementation. I mean, on paper it is possible for migrants to complain. But in order to do that, you have to know where to complain. For that, you have to have the ability to either go there or pick up your cell phone, to know which website to go to. That's one thing. The other is, of course, that pressure continues to be exerted by the, by the sponsors themselves, that they don't show their employees all the options. So the discrepancy is most obvious between what is on paper and how it is implemented in reality. And that is also what the human rights organizations criticize the most. And this is not only a problem of the Qatari authorities as well, but it is also a problem of international companies. Those who are not necessarily active in the World Cup infrastructure but from other construction sites where they are not looked at so closely. Of course, this is also the problem of sponsors who are active in the domestic sector, because then even less is looked at, although in the meantime, after all, domestic employees have also been integrated into these regulations, but for long, long decades not the case.

And from there, I think that's the biggest discrepancy, that the lack of knowledge and the lack of implementation.

[Niklas Krämer \(28:54\)](#)

And another aspect is the environmental aspect certainly obviously. Qatar is not a climate-friendly country to play sports and football. I think everyone knows this and it must have occurred to the Qataris relatively early on. How has Qatar tried to position itself there, in order to spread as positive an image as possible.

[Dr. Sebastian Sons \(29:22\)](#)

Qatar claims that it will be the first CO₂ neutral World Cup in history. I'm only marginally involved in environmental issues, so I can't be so explicit about that now. That's part of the narrative, part of the public diplomacy strategy, to keep referring to the fact that, compared to

previous tournaments, they are trying to hold the tournament in a much more sustainable way. So clearly, if you've only built eight stadiums instead of twelve, and the question is whether a country like Qatar needs 8 stadiums. In an area of 50 kilometers, that is on the one hand an advantage, of course, if you also, I will be at the World Cup, watching games. Of course, it's much easier to get from A to B somehow if you need half an hour than if you have to fly four hours first, as in Brazil. That is, of course, a logistical advantage in a way. But that's not an achievement, it's because the country is simply too small.

Every big event is harmful to the environment. I don't think we need to discuss that. You don't need to be an expert to do that. And the question that comes to my mind is that the Qataris have just tried to answer your question. The Qataris are trying to use these arguments and a few others to distinguish themselves from the other tournaments before them, which were without question more harmful to the environment. Qatar is still of course one of the biggest CO2 emitters in the world, because they have incredibly high electricity bills for air conditioning and one of the biggest water consumers in the world. And so on and so forth. So that's all, of course. How can I say? It's greenwashing, of course, no question about it. And. You have to ask yourself the question simply as a consumer Can such a tournament even be CO2 neutral? How is that supposed to work? It can't work if you fly in 1.2 million people from all over the world. The CO2 emissions are already exorbitant due to the air travel. This means that the solution to actually doing something for the environment is to stop hosting such tournaments.

But at the end of the day, Qatar can't enforce anything. I can only judge to a limited extent how serious and how sustainable Qatar's efforts actually are to be more environmentally friendly here as well. I think at the end of the day for them it's more from a PR point of view that plays a big role and less in the implementation. Because that would mean that you don't just change the technologies, but also the use of the technologies, that it's about changing mentalities. How difficult is it for us to do that at the present time, and how difficult is it to heat less and perhaps drive less? In societies that have had oil coming out of the pipeline for free for generations, I think it is much more difficult to achieve such a change in thinking with regard to energy efficiency. And that has certainly not been achieved in Qatar in the last ten years. That's what the figures say, and that's why it won't play a major role at the World Cup. Energy efficiency or environmental awareness.

[Niklas Krämer \(32:53\)](#)

To go back a bit in general terms to Qatar's reactions and handling of this foreign criticism. How would you say that affected its image? Was it beneficial? If you say, did it actually hurt it more? Or are you saying there may not have been any impact at all, regardless of how it would have been reacted to?

[Dr. Sebastian Sons \(33:25\)](#)

Of course, it has had a tremendous impact. And so, I think if you were to do a survey around the world now, how many people in the world knew Qatar before December 2010 and how many countries know Qatar now? Now I think you have the answer. Of course, Qatar has gained something because everyone is talking about it now. Everybody knows this country. And bad press is press. And at the end of the day, I think it is a matter of what's left hanging economically. How has Qatar positioned itself in a very volatile geopolitical situation in recent years? How respected is Qatar on the international stage? And Qatar has certainly made progress on all three of these points: economy, geopolitics and international reputation. Also, and perhaps precisely because of the criticism and because they have faced it. And I think, for example, a situation like between 2017 and 2021, where Qatar was isolated from Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt. Perhaps things would have been different without the World Cup.

And as I said at the beginning, a World Cup like this makes you unassailable in a certain way. Of course, it also makes for envy. Logical. And without question, the blockade wanted to take away the World Cup from Qatar. That was obviously out of interest. But nevertheless, they didn't succeed, because Qatar became too important for sponsors, for investors, for politics, for governments, for the military. And so on. And so on. And so on. I think it's very difficult to measure. So how much, how much negative results did this criticism bring and how much positive or what outweighed it in the end? I think for those for Qatar, it's, it's in economic terms or in financial terms, perhaps, it's a grant business? It may be. We don't know how, how many people actually end up going to Qatar. Maybe we have the 20th wave of covid at that point. Nobody knows. But in terms of prestige, prestige and in terms of reputation and in terms of Qatar's role in the region has the country proven to be so powerful and so resilient that it actually benefits enormously from this. In other political areas as well. Geostrategically, yes.

[Niklas Krämer \(36:09\)](#)

Too big to fail, you could practically say.

[Dr. Sebastian Sons \(36:14\)](#)

It is now too big to fail. And the neighbors had to understand that, too. And that, of course, was an incredible triumph for Qatar. And for the others, of course, a humiliation and defeat. And if you look at how Qatar has positioned itself within the Gulf states, then it has been the clear winner of this conflict in recent years and has emerged as the clear winner of this rivalry. That's, that's pretty clear.

[Niklas Krämer \(36:42\)](#)

And yes, if you now let them pass and summarize, you can already say that Qatar has also accepted this criticism somewhere and has also at least initiated changes. With other things now with the corruption, one reacted evenly, as you meant, in this first phase rather on ignorance or on repulsion repulsively. What are the reasons why people reacted in this way and not perhaps in a different way?

[Dr. Sebastian Sons \(37:29\)](#)

Difficult question, in fact, I can't answer one hundred percent either. I think we've already talked about the human rights discussion. It was probably the easiest to do something, at least on paper. It was the easiest to show at some point that we were willing to make progress, to introduce reforms. To make progress, to introduce reforms, to make changes in the law. Corruption is a completely different field. An elite that is very closely connected to the ruling house profits from it. And some of them are the same people. In other words, fighting corruption in a country like Qatar would mean fighting the ruling elites and thus abolishing themselves. That is contradictory. By the way, this is not only the case in Qatar, it is also the case in many other countries. If you say to FIFA, "Please fight your own corruption," then FIFA can do a lot of great things and can perhaps also impose penalties. But in the end the system will not abolish itself and it is simply against every player again, every logic. And that's why, of course, it's very problematic to seriously fight corruption, especially in the football business, because of course people are all protecting themselves.

As long as no neutral and independent institution from the outside is given the opportunity to intervene and regulate and punish and impose restrictions, this corruption will continue. And that's what happened in Qatar. There have been pawns sacrifice. But nothing has changed in the structures themselves. And if you look at how state contracts are awarded, which companies

profited from the lucrative World Cup construction sites. Then, of course, if you look at it in detail, there are extremely close ties to the ruling house. If you look at what close relationships Qatar has established with FIFA. Gianni Infantino now lives there. That's the thing, that says it all. If you look at how the Saudi crown prince has tried to ensnare FIFA in recent years. When you look at how important the Arab monarchies have become in the international football business. And if you look at how many football clubs that are actually in the top ten financially strong clubs in the world are from Arab monarchies financed. Then, of course, you realize again how extremely the balance of power has changed, and I think that's something you can't change so easily.

Unless there is an impulse from outside. And I mean, we also see the discussion at Bayern Munich that the sponsor of Qatar Airways also that brings great challenges, but also a lot of money. And at the end of the day when is it crude? When is it business? When does one allow oneself to be bought around? When do you continue to be independent? Is extremely narrow, I think, because that's how the whole business works. And I think that's always been Qatar's attitude, where everybody else is the same way. Where do you guys have that? What are your problems with that? That's not why anything happened there. You can't expect that from a country like Qatar.

There have to be completely different forces. You have to start here with us first. We first have to come to terms with our 2006 World Cup, and so on, before we point the finger at others. I think FIFA has to be abolished in the structures it has had up to now and completely reformed. The same applies to the Olympic Games. The same applies, of course, to the IOC, to Formula1, etc...The power, the soccer or the power of the sport federations it grew exorbitantly. And monarchies in the Gulf are taking advantage of this because they have the money.

[Niklas Krämer \(41:35\)](#)

It is this attitude that you are describing right now, when you say that Qatar is obviously partly doing this opinion, you are reflecting that publicly as well, or is that then behind closed doors?

[Dr. Sebastian Sons \(41:52\)](#)

So I'll have to think for myself whether anyone like him has made any statements about this in the last ten years. But I don't think you'll find any public statements saying that everyone else is corrupt and so are we. You're not going to hear anything like that, of course. But of course

they will continue to say, this is interference in internal affairs, as always. FIFA is responsible for that. So far, nothing can be proven against Qatar. There is no evidence that Qatar bought the World Cup on a massive scale. It is very likely. And the circumstantial evidence speaks for itself. But the same is true for the US, for Australia and. So, we are not aware of any public statements from high-ranking Qatari officials at the moment. You may have to look for yourself. If you find something, I would actually be interested in it? Could we send a link or something? But, for example, the emir or something like that, I don't think he has commented on it. So never gave the impression.

Of course, Qatar has not given the public the impression that they are corrupt. That would be suicide, political suicide. So, of course, this is done behind closed doors, but there is no talk of corruption, but then, of course, there is talk of the fact that one has tried, like the other competitors, to make an impression on the members of the Executive Committee with the concept, with the location with the professionalism, with the marketing, etc. and that the system is such that you then also invite people to dinner and talk about it well. I mean that's how it is. From the 48 members of the Executive Committee and 22 have been convicted of corruption. So, what are we talking about here? This is, of course a massive problem for FIFA and all the other major sports federations that too few people have too much power to make just an extreme amount of money from the most beautiful incidental in the world.

[Niklas Krämer \(43:58\)](#)

Last question, Does Qatar perhaps have any individuals, companies, clubs, associations that are particularly on their side when it comes to resisting this criticism?

[Dr. Sebastian Sons \(44:18\)](#)

So first of all, Giovanni Infantino. I think that's the biggest supporter there can be. If you listen to the statements he makes. It's biased already. So you really have to say It's grotesque how he glosses over certain situations. So as a person with certainty rather what, which concerns football clubs. Of course always quite in front is I think, the brand that has used Qatar the most, in addition to the World Cup, to get into the public eye, to assert themselves even against the other rivals. As an example the Neymar transfer a few weeks after the Gulf crisis broke out was a clear sign of strength to stare at the blockade. "We can do whatever we want. We buy us even the most expensive footballer of the world and you can do nothing at all." Bayern Munich

certainly the same. FC Barcelona for a while. These are, I think, so the big figureheads in the Qatari sports business. Those who are of course also supporters of the World Cup in Qatar.

And in addition, one has, one has invested very strongly in recent years global companies Volkswagen, Deutsche Bank, Porsche, to name just a few Germans. And of course, they are also rather pro-Qatari. So that catches, of course. And that, that then also has an effect. One has, one has paid many, many sides and PR agencies to make around naturally much advertisement and to carry out much lobbying. In Germany, in the USA, in Europe. In the meantime, the other Gulf states have also become their own business, their own line of business, in which billions are turned over. And accordingly, I believe that Qatar has of course made a strategic move in recent years to show with its sports investment that it is also interested in sports in the long term. That's not just the World Cup, but that it's really about promoting sports. And in addition to the sports investments abroad, it has to be said that there are many pictures. So what happened was the Aspire Academy, all the projects that were introduced to get young people interested in sport, to bring sport and development together, the promotion of women, youth development, empowerment - all these things have of course increased in the wake of the World Cup.

And that, of course, is another tool of Qatar to give itself respectability and, and credibility and not only towards foreign countries, but also towards its own population. And that's, that's something that also towards the migrants, for example. There's been since 2013, if I'm not mistaken, so-called Workers Cup, where migrant workers compete against each other in Qatar. These are just things that don't exist in any other country, any other Gulf state. And of course, this is all public diplomacy and it is also sports washing, but not only. And it's too easy to just hit it with the moral club, but you also have to see that through the World Cup and through all these measures in Qatar, more people get excited about sports, especially women find other and new fields of activity, where they can simply present themselves differently in public. You can see this extremely in Saudi Arabia at the moment. It's an incredibly fascinating example of the social role of sports. And that is part of the social transformation that is taking place in the Gulf, and that is something that you have to remind yourself a little bit that it is not just lobbying and that it is not just about printing nice, glossy brochures.

And everyone applauds when you sign Messi or something. That's part of the whole business. But beyond that, it's also about first and foremost working internally and convincing your own people that this is the right thing to do. What does the population gain from it? What would the

Qatari emir gain from buying a football club in France and knowing the entire population think its stupid? He would have gained nothing. By now, a kind of nationalism has actually developed through sports, so that PSG is perceived as a Qatar club. I talked with a scientists about it recently, that the success of PSG equals with the success of Qatar and with the success of the Qatari emir. They watch the games in Qatar and have formed fan clubs, and so on, not because they love Paris as a football club, but because what this football club stands for. Namely for the success of Qatar.

That is, I think, something that then also creates a much, much greater impact than PSG as a brand in Europe. But it has this dimension, that it is always power politics in the Gulf, is always domestic politics. It's first and foremost about ensuring one's own political survival. And what contributes to that is right and good. And what does not contribute to that is not done. And if investments in Paris or in Bayern Munich didn't help the reputation of the royal family, they wouldn't do it. And so you can actually explain every decision in some way that happens in the Gulf. Does it benefit the ruler? Does it benefit the population, then it gets done. And once, for example, at some point PCG is perceived as a burden because it's too unsuccessful or for whatever reason, then Qatar would probably abandon that project and then try to explain it smartly and cleverly. But it's not there yet, because you can still see what a radiance it has also internally.

And that's a perspective that we're not really talking about. The same thing the Saudis want to achieve with United, the same thing we want to achieve with Manchester City. It's not just about showing the world that you're great and that you can get a lot done. It's first and foremost about showing your own people what you can do.

[Niklas Krämer \(50:45\)](#)

Yes, I still remember when PCG was eliminated in the Champions League, I thought to myself, the Qataris will be incredibly annoyed that they have won it this year, the year in which the World Cup is held in Qatar.

[Dr. Sebastian Sons \(51:09\)](#)

One sentence on that. I mean, of course this failure in the Champions League is a disaster for Paris. But, you have to look at Manchester City, which hasn't been able to get its act together and was beaten by Paris in the semifinals a year or two ago, I think. That, of course, was a much

bigger humiliation for the Emiratis. And if you look at what has flowed into these two clubs, about 1 billion each since the takeover, that is of course madness. But you also have to remember that Bayern Munich's Champions League title is also partly a title for Qatar, because we have a sponsor from Qatar Airways, who also pay 27 million a year, if I'm not mistaken, something like that. And that is then also partly discussed. But you just don't see it that far, because then it's just one sponsor of the many with Audi and all the others. And clearly, I mean Chelsea or Abramovich, where is the difference?

The difference is not there either. But I think if you look at how success in football works at the moment, it's with big investors from outside, and some of them are states or sovereign wealth funds. And that's not a problem for the Emiratis or the Qataris, but of course more a problem for UEFA in this case or the Premier League or FIFA.

[Niklas Krämer \(52:32\)](#)

Exactly, otherwise I'm at the end of my interview questions before I stop recording. Is there anything else you'd like to comment on? And anything that I may not have addressed that is important?

[Dr. Sebastian Sons \(52:47\)](#)

No I don't think so. Sorry if I talked a little too long.

[Niklas Krämer \(52:53\)](#)

No, not at all. All good. Then I'll stop recording now.

Appendix 1.2: Interview with Ronny Blaschke

Interview partner: Ronny Blaschke

Date: 22nd April 2022 at 1pm

Location: Online, Zoom

[Niklas Krämer \(00:04\)](#)

Qatar has been investing heavily in sports and football, and not just since it was awarded the World. I'd like to know what image of itself is Qatar trying to project to the world?

[Ronny Blaschke \(00:34\)](#)

Qatar has long been dependent on raw materials, such as gas, natural gas and oil in particular. Qatar needs an image that is inviting for investors, for startups, for tourists, for professionals. And that's why it wants to put them on the world map in the first place. And not only that. It's not just about financial things, it's also about security, as it is in a very tense region in the Persian Gulf. As a small country with a small military it wants to make as many networks and connections with the West as possible so that an invasion of Saudi Arabia or other larger states in the neighborhood is unlikely.

[Niklas Krämer \(01:21\)](#)

The hosting of the 2022 World Cup is accompanied by a high degree of skepticism, controversy, and criticism from Europe, Germany, and generally the world. From the perspective of the Qataris in general, before we talk specifically about the criticism, how would you say this controversy was received there? How was it understood?

[Ronny Blaschke \(01:57\)](#)

Well, there are not even 3 million inhabitants and only 10% of them are Qatari citizens. Therefore, one can perhaps speak primarily of the citizens. At the beginning, they were surprised by the criticism, because although they already had networks with the West, through culture, through science, through other things, it never really reached the Western public. That came only with the awarding of the World Cup in 2010. Then they were very surprised at the beginning by this force of criticism. It was almost a kind of “Schockstarre” that lasted for a few years. They blocked that criticism and the possibility that international organizations would come to Qatar, so it took a few years until they opened up, until they allowed progress to be made, until reforms were adopted. And then, at least in my opinion, leading people already had the impression that something is happening. Something is also happening compared to what was going on in Qatar ten, 15, 20 years ago. But the criticism continues, and now I have the impression that many are withdrawing so defiantly and saying that no matter what we do, it is not really appreciated, at least in the West, in Germany, in Great Britain. And some people are already talking about racism, about Eurocentrism. And it also leads to the fact that some people don't even want this World Cup anymore or are looking forward to the time when the tournament is over. That they will then be left alone again.

[Niklas Krämer \(03:38\)](#)

Could you perhaps be a little more specific on that point? How do you come to this assumption that such an attitude of defiance has developed?

[Ronny Blaschke \(03:51\)](#)

We always think this is a unified country. It is so conservative as they practice Sunni Islam. We think it's a relatively conservative country. With such terms you have to be very careful, because who are we to say what is conservative and what is not? But Qatar is a Wahhabi influenced country, and there is a government the emir who has to modernize this country, just like it is the case in Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states. They have to modernize their country if they don't want to be broke at some point, because they have to diversify an economy beyond just gas and oil. And they understand that. But it's not like Brazil, South Africa or Russia in previous World Cups, that Qatar needs a World Cup to create national unity. They don't need that from GDP. One of the wealthiest countries in the world with a lot of football fans. But there is also not this fanatical fan culture as in other countries and that's why they all see it very pragmatically.

So why do we need this World Cup? That's how it's seen. And there have always been conservative circles in the economy and those who are doing well. Yes, they have now said that we don't really need a World Cup, because what will come of it? There might come people who want to drink alcohol with us, there might even come gay fans. Our culture is softened, and everything is quite well. And now, in their wildest dreams, they have now been partially confirmed that there is very much observed. The map, the economic blockade that came via Qatar then, between 2017, 2021 from Saudi Arabia. There you can also say, maybe this is a side effect of the World Cup, because Saudi Arabia was suddenly jealous of the attention of Qatar. So at some point after the World Cup, people will look back and say, "What did it actually bring us?" And the narrative is now turning again. Because of the war in Ukraine, that now Robert Habeck and other Western heads of state are coming, it may be that the whole discussion that we had for ten years becomes a completely different one within a few months.

But I do believe that. The elite in Qatar, and that's the ruling house and that's the CEOs and the families, which are often one and the same. In the Gulf, it's not unusual for those at the top to have different positions. There are some currents that are not oppositional. I wouldn't go that

far, but they say it's all quite a lot, quite a lot of effort and quite a lot of stress. And why do we do that actually.

[Niklas Krämer \(06:45\)](#)

Well, it's not entirely incomprehensible when you think about all the stadiums that are being built now, huge amounts of money are spend.

[Ronny Blaschke \(06:53\)](#)

Now there is a little problem of accommodation for football fans. There are so some, they will leave the country during the time as they want nothing to do with it. Everything there is very clearly arranged. And if then suddenly 1000000 people enter. Not only from Europe, but also especially from the region, from Saudi Arabia, from Bahrain, from the Emirates, there has always been tension, then they have now perhaps I do not want to generalize, some may have, no desire for that.

[Niklas Krämer \(07:32\)](#)

Let's take a step back. After the award of the rights to Qatar, there has been corruption allegations. This is all about money. Qatar is corrupt and so on. How would you say Qatar defended itself against such criticism at that time?

[Ronny Blaschke \(07:58\)](#)

I'm not much of an expert on the subject of corruption. I'm more concerned with these geopolitical things and what's happening there. That's what interested me and that's what interested me in the election. In general, you can say that Qatar. Of course, as a journalist, because I was there, I noticed that Qatar spends a lot of money on PR, on agencies, on spin doctors, who of course influence journalists and critics. You can see that as part of corruption, but you can also see that as professional political communication. So that's what we have to do now others just as well. And which sporting event in the past 20 or 30 years has not been overshadowed by allegations of corruption? Yes, but of course you always think that you're only doing it for us, for the West. You have to think a little bit about the region.

And Saudi Arabia, in particular. But it has gone in both directions, there were smear campaigns and defamation things. And then there was this pirate radio station from Saudi Arabia. So that's mainly in the region. And Qatar is no world power, it wants to be a regional power and wants

to be more powerful in the Gulf and the Middle East. And has become so. And would you like in the Arab Spring in Libya, in Lebanon? They already want a political Islam, and they also work with groups that we often classify blanketly as terror groups like that. It's not just about getting a favor from Europe. You have to look at this region first. It's not so important whether Germany now criticizes the accusations of corruption.

[Niklas Krämer \(10:01\)](#)

Then let's move away from corruption to the real main issue when it comes to Qatar and points of criticism. The human rights situation in particular on migrant workers there and the Kafala system. Can you explain to me a what has been done in Qatar? How has that been? What has been the response to that?

[Ronny Blaschke \(10:27\)](#)

Yes, it has taken years to initiate reforms there. I can only report what I hear from people. Amnesty and human rights organizations regularly report that these reforms are not really being implemented. There are still weak points. Others say that a lot of good things have happened. When I'm on the ground there, I don't have the possibilities in the field to examine things the way Amnesty or Human Rights Watch does. Basically, I would say that Qatar should not be compared with European standards, and it was very unusual there, or it is actually something new, that international organizations are allowed to go in at all. Nevertheless, there is competition between the ministries. It is a state that is ruled autocratically, where there is no free press, no free trade unions, no separation of powers. So, all the democratic elements are missing. That's why it's hard. It is difficult to implement labor law reforms in general when there is no possibility of control or hardly any possibility of control.

It's going to take years. It's going to take a long time, I think. But that's an impetus for the region. And yes, how long did it take us in Europe for such a labor movement, for unions? That has taken generations to develop and. In Qatar, it's happened in ten years now. But it's also possible that this will be reversed after the World Cup, because for some people it's already gone too far, because they're not used to having checks and balances. That is the area of tension. But if you ask the ILO, the international labor organization, or people on the ground, they will tell you that something has happened at a remarkable level. Something has happened at a considerable level, but of course it is still nowhere near as satisfactory as we know it here.

[Niklas Krämer \(12:31\)](#)

I'd like to follow up on the reforms. What were they? How were they implemented? Were they implemented?

[Ronny Blaschke \(12:44\)](#)

So there is the first minimum wage in the region, which at the beginning was two Dollar. Very little it has then increased. There are ways to file a complaint. There are ways to network. There are plain committees. There are supposed to be opportunities for anonymity. People are supposed to be able to change their employers. And there are also many examples where this happened, the so-called wage robbery? Yes, there were many cases of non-payment of wages. That should also there should be possibilities to file a complaint and to take USA and the employers in liability. But again, if there employers are just parts of the rule of the ruling house with proximity and so, that is difficult to check. Important is however, and it comes also too briefly to extend the picture. The states, from which the people come mainly India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, so some states of Southeast Asia, are massively dependent on the migrant workers to send money back.

And there are very many people, agencies, traffickers, earning money with migration. And you also hear again and again that you should take Nepal and India into consideration and take on obligation. But that happens too little, and it is interesting, if I talked so with people there, with migrant workers, I would say, were the people usually rather satisfied or have said that here in Qatar I finally have the chance to work at a low level. Here I'm not afraid, here it's safe, no bombs flying. It is cynical and sad that they are better off at a very low level there than in their home countries. That's why we need this bigger picture of migration, integration, dependence. You have to focus on that and also on the origins of the system. As Qatar, as I said, there is also a fear that this minority 10% of the inhabitants of the inhabitants are only citizens, they are always actually worried about being overrun by the workers.

And when the whole thing started with labor migration in the 1960s and 1970s, it was mainly workers from the Arab world, from Egypt, but also from countries that were not blessed by oil. Jordan, Lebanon as one above all to the monarchical workers, who then at some point also said, so it does not go. And then Qatar said, that could be tricky for us, they speak the same language. But with mainly workers from Southeast Asia, you can isolate them easier culturally, linguistically. And that didn't interest the world for a long time, until then the World Cup was

awarded. And this is a common practice, also in many other countries and the Middle East and they are now been triggered at least a little bit that we talk about it.

[Niklas Krämer \(15:59\)](#)

You mentioned that you talked with people on the ground, and they said they are actually relatively satisfied. Have they noticed a change there on the ground? Because of the World Cup for the better perhaps?

[Ronny Blaschke \(16:18\)](#)

I am, as I said, as an individual journalist. It is always hard? And of course I don't get into the camps that really tell stories, or I don't have that either. I'm not an investigative journalist who somehow goes into the camps, who then doesn't, um. There are certainly still bad, bad and inhumane conditions. That's why you can, there I can then always only reflect my non-representative picture. And it's often the case that people don't even notice these debates that we're having. They work day and night and then maybe they have Friday morning or Saturday morning off, they play a little bit of cricket and relax. But yes, it is hard work and then that is. More than 2 million people who do it differently and who want to earn so much money in a few years that they can then go back without being able to support their family a little bit. Because then they often come for just a few months or for a few years and can't compare how it was ten 15 years ago.

[Niklas Krämer \(17:50\)](#)

I see a conflict on the one hand that one now finally addresses these grievances, on the other hand they are still there and also quite bad. Another topic perhaps. What is also being discussed in Europe is the environmental aspect. Qatar is in the middle of the desert. It's certainly climatically not a place to play sports or football. How has Qatar reacted in order to present itself in the most positive light possible?

[Ronny Blaschke \(18:47\)](#)

This time, the original plan to make this World Cup in June, July. It was absurd from the start, because that would not have been climatically possible. And nowadays to cool down the stadiums with air conditioning is absurd. The fact is that Qatar now wants to lay this narrative or FIFA wants to lay this narrative that it will be the most sustainable World Cup ever. Since small country, short journey, some stadium are even to be completely demolished, others will

be deconstructed. So the plan is quite nice, but also all these details with climate neutrality, that you compensate for the emissions that you emit elsewhere with donations or with reforestation. So the most sustainable thing would be, of course not to hold a World Cup and not to build eight stadiums in such a small country, where they are not needed afterwards. And it's also the case that a country that is so blessed with raw materials. And I was there, it is really everywhere. Everything is operated with it everything again with air conditioning even in December and the locals pay no money for or as good as nothing for electricity, water, energy.

Per capita energy consumption is one of the highest in the world. That's where you have to initiate a debate. Of course, you can basically think about how rational it still is to let 1 million or 2 million people to fly around the world for a football tournament. But these are debates, we may have them in a few years. But this is a narrative with power, with, with which Fifa and the IOC wants to cover the negative headlines of this, with this supposedly so climate-friendly World Cup.

[Niklas Krämer \(20:48\)](#)

Can you perhaps say a little bit more about that narrative and also go into a little bit more detail about what exactly is being done there in Qatar to manifest that.

[Ronny Blaschke \(20:59\)](#)

This narrative, promotes a World Cup of short distances. Qatar is small, so theoretically you could watch three games a day. Of course, it is also advertised with electric buses and with the fact that, as I said, these stadiums, one stadium is built with containers, should be completely dismantled. Others are deconstructed. One advertises that one donates or sells the containers, the elements perhaps to African states or elsewhere. Then there is of course, that is often so, so nothing is climate neutral. The term is already to be seen very critically, but that there are then different projects, that one can donate, that one gives, because that make certain, but I don't know, they so in detail, that is yes everything in the concept, that one participates there, where in the Amazon, Amazon or in Canada, that one participates in certain afforestation projects, so that one gives for it money or donates, that somewhere again forest is built up, those elements, which can absorb emissions.

And there's a whole package there. So that all reads wonderful, but there is a lot of criticism. Even from the climate protection activists that is not really completely thought through, there

is also the sustainability chief of the IOC met there. Yes, so. There you have to wait and see. But it is at least my approach. I don't want to be so critical of it, because at least they're thinking about it. And because they. You can talk about it for a long time. How big do such stadiums have to be? Because they are bigger stadiums. The more people fit in, the more people move around, the more people travel to the stadium, and there are supposed to be bigger ships for overnight accommodations. You can analyze all that in detail. That's what I'm doing for my work, too, but that as a start.

[Niklas Krämer \(23:14\)](#)

On the next question, how would you say the Qatar image has already suffered in some ways and has taken a lot of this criticism. And now it's a little bit until the World Cup. How would you say Qatar has reacted to this criticism and what impact has that had on Qatar's image in Europe? Was that somehow a positive impact or maybe even a negative impact?

[Ronny Blaschke \(23:58\)](#)

Now Europe.

[Niklas Krämer \(24:01\)](#)

Europe, maybe America or worldwide.

[Ronny Blaschke \(24:07\)](#)

Of these nearly 200 UN member states, I don't even know how many countries are having this debate. Even in Europe, it is not as critical as in the UK or in Germany. Many people are happy to participate in this World Cup. I think it is always hypocritical, because take Norway as an example. The president of the federation has made a critical speech. The players discussed boycott, the fans too. But Norway and Qatar have been working together for a long time. Norwegian companies have invested billions in Qatari agriculture. There is a free trade agreement there. The money that FC Bayern receives from Qatar is peanuts compared to what Qatar has invested in Germany, in Volkswagen, in Deutsche Bank. Qatar is one of the most important foreign investors in many Western countries. That's why it's hypocritical to use the example of football to create this image.

That is an interesting question to what extent, whether Qatar feels that. Also, when I was in Qatar, I spoke to the Qatari ambassador. Whether they measure this criticism whether the

people turn away from Qatar? He says that it is not so but due to Corona everything now is quiet and tourism sector that was just built up is then the oil price has risen. A lot of things you can't relate back so easily now, but I think that these networks before the World Cup has been so stable already since the late 90s through investment. Qatar owns a lot of real estate in the UK, in the US, in France. That is so connected, with the World Cup... Maybe, I don't know. I can't back that up with numbers. But the politicians, the millions of football fans know too little about what's going on in the background. And you see at the evacuation of Afghanistan, in there Qatar has played an important role, 70,000 people were evacuated because there were simply those networks. The Emir was in Germany in 2018 and was received by the Chancellor. There was a German-Qatari economic summit and billions of contracts were signed. And that was at the height of the economic blockade. It was at the height of criticism. Maybe the sport is all about itself and the business is done in the background.

[Niklas Krämer \(27:00\)](#)

Well, to conclude We are almost at the end of the interview, if we now look back at Qatar, behaved so far to this criticism, at some point Qatari seemed to show a positive response and tried to open up while at others it was rather aggressive and pushed back. Why would you say, has Qatar behaved like that?

[Ronny Blaschke \(27:43\)](#)

I don't know, also different people, how they react. Yes, there are more and more examples where journalists were also briefly kept in custody. But a few years ago they realized that a halfway balanced article is better than bashing from their point of view. So now they approach the journalists, open their gates, offer interviews, When I have conducted interviews, for example, made possible by the organizers there was often the rhetoric and the narrative and it all seemed very coordinated. But again, that's not that's not unusual. That's their job. With white I call slick, good PR to do. My job as a journalist is there to have lots of sources and to question that.

I wouldn't accuse a state or a blog of that per se. The USA will also do that at the next World Cup. Every state wants to show the best of itself at the sporting event. And our job as journalists is just to question and criticize. But I do believe that a lot of money is being spent in Qatar to analyze potential critics. There are also some examples that show how influence was exerted to

change the minds of critics. Um, that's, that's all well documented by now. And whether that's different from what other countries do, I don't know.

[Niklas Krämer \(29:42\)](#)

Last question maybe What people, associations or companies are there to help Qatar create a positive image in Europe?

[Ronny Blaschke \(30:22\)](#)

Well, first of all, I look at different press releases from PR agencies. Sometimes I wonder why it's so clumsy and romanticized and so obvious. It's such a PR language, which you can assume that no one prints it so literally. A smart PR should also always be a bit self-critical I think. But it's what they do. So, there are various ambassadors, football ambassadors but also other, who are flown in who then also say nice things about Qatar also during the draws. Or if one says now that these death numbers on the building sites are exaggerated. There I do not know however, who has a contract with Qatar or is dependent in another way. And it must also not always a direct sum be transferred. Sometimes it is in such a way, and I notice that with me also, when I travel there or also at other appointments such as press conferences, they are very friendly to me, there are gifts, or you get invited to dinner with them.

You always must keep in mind there are interests behind that, motivation. And they want you, even if they are so independent, they want that something positive stick with me or with other journalists. Therefore, I always reject such things. Polite and friendly. But we know at the Handball World Cup 2015, there, many journalists were invited at the expense of Qatar and they say of course all, they write independently and write critically, but it always leaves an impression if you are a guest if you got invited by them. So, there is a lot of money available and the thinking goes like we invite some dozen, some 100 perhaps and some of them will then eventually write more positively or at least less critical articles. Or they just leave out the negative. And in the mass, it influences you.

[Niklas Krämer \(32:41\)](#)

Thank you very much. Before I stop the recording. Perhaps there is anything else you would like to address? What you didn't get rid of.

Ronny Blaschke (32:59)

No. I am okay.

Appendix 1.3: Interview with Benjamin Best

Interview partner: Benjamin Best

Date: 23rd April 2022 at 2pm

Location: Online, Zoom

Niklas Krämer (00:02)

To start with, I would like to know what image this small desert state would like to convey to the world in its countless investments in sports, in football?

Benjamin Best (00:35)

In my opinion, Qatar wants to convey to the World that in Qatar anything is possible. Qatar naturally pursues different strategies, in terms of sport, but also in terms of politics. In my opinion, Qatar wants to present itself as a kind of Switzerland, which is somewhere neutral, but somewhere also with all parties, especially in terms of politics. Through sports, Qatar naturally wants to draw attention to itself and wants to show what it can do and what kind of country it is and how cosmopolitan it is. And these two points naturally also lead to or have the reason in the fact that the region in the Gulf in which Qatar is embedded between two very large and powerful countries. On one side to the north is Iran and to the south is Saudi Arabia. Iraq is also not far and in this politically explosive regions Qatar would like to play at least a role, so that it does not get attacked. It is yes again and again this this scenario also mentioned by many experts, when Iraq invaded Kuwait.

And this, this fate Qatar would like to avert, of course. And for that reason, they are trying to take on a political mediator role through various possibilities on the one hand the sport, but on the other hand also to draw attention to themselves and of course then also to create corresponding alliances. With other important countries, be it now the USA, be it China, be it France, be it, be it Germany. So that's the role and the strategy that I think Qatar has pursued in recent years or has pursued since its independence in 1971.

Niklas Krämer (03:21)

Well, I would say that since 2010, since they the World Cup, Qatar can certainly be sure of the attention. But this attention, at least in Europe, in the Western countries, has been accompanied by a very high degree of skepticism, controversy and also criticism. Before we get into the specific points of criticism, in general, how would you say Qatar, the government, the political government in Qatar, has taken these controversies, this criticism?

Benjamin Best (04:05)

Well, first of all, Qatar is an autocratically run country. There is a ruling family, the Al Thani family, which runs this country and has great, great influence. But of course there are other influential families in Qatar. So in my opinion, the Qatari government has taken this criticism to the effect that they are aware of this criticism. It's about people and labor rights, first and foremost. But of course it is also about rights for gays and lesbians, for example. It is about women's rights. Qatar is aware of this criticism from the West. But it must also be said that there are still important conservative forces in this country that are critical of this modernization or this cosmopolitan world opening, and would rather uphold and further promote the traditional aspects of Islam. So for the Qatari government, it is a balancing act that they have to manage. At the same time, of course, it is also important for the government that there is no unrest in the country, that any currents that exist in the country are satisfied.

And that, of course, is the most important thing for Qatar and for the royal family. And the second step is then okay, how can we secure our wealth in the future? There are these incredible oil and gas reserves that this country has, which has also brought the country this wealth. But again, the government and also in the country itself, the population, the ruling or the influential families are very aware of this criticism from the western world. The question is only where it comes from? Who is criticizing in the end? Because if we look at history, many European countries have repeatedly entered business relations with Qatar, with the ruling family. So I think we have to make a distinction there. From whom does the criticism come? Well, there are economic ties with France that have grown over the years, also with England, also with Germany. So who is actually criticizing.

Niklas Krämer (07:40)

You brought it up, of course, the human rights situation in Qatar, that's at the center of this criticism. When we think about the, about migrant workers from Asia and the Kafala system,

can you tell me a little bit about that? How has Qatar positioned itself in this human rights debate and how has it responded to that?

Benjamin Best (08:10)

The human rights debate finally came into the public eye with the awarding of the World Cup. This system that exists in Qatar also exists in all other countries in the Gulf region. But of course, the World Cup brought a lot of attention to Qatar and the situation there. And when there were the first reports from colleagues of mine, but also from human rights organizations. Then Qatar had to deal with this criticism somehow and had to or has also noticed how persistent it is and what it means to have freedom of the press, that there are journalists who travel to the country and research there and report from there and report on the abuses. And Qatar has taken a lot of advice into the country. There are various PR companies that advise the Qatari ruling family, but also, for example, the World Cup organizing committee on the question of how to deal with this criticism. There is the agreement with the International Labor Organization ILO, which has operated an office there since 2018.

But what I have learned from my research in recent years, for example, is that the country, the companies in this country, but also influential families are finding it very difficult to actually implement this reform process, which was initiated. In recent years, there have always been new laws that have been introduced, that have been proclaimed, that are supposed to improve the situation of the millions of guest workers. But I and also other colleagues have reported in the past years, however, again and again about abuses, about exploitation. And yes, ultimately, even to this day, it is the case. In my opinion, this reform process has been very, very slow to get going and there are still many guest workers who live in inhumane conditions in Qatar, where these laws simply do not take effect or are simply not applied.

Niklas Krämer (11:19)

Could you maybe give me a little bit of detail about this reform process that's been kicked off in Qatar to improve the circumstances of the migrant workers?

Benjamin Best (11:34)

There have been in recent years. I can't tell you exactly when, but there is actually a very good timeline of when, which law or provision was introduced. For example, since 2009 it has been officially illegal in Qatar to withhold passports from migrant workers so that they cannot

leave the country. In the meantime, there is a minimum wage, which has been increased once again. It is so that this so-called NOC, that is the consent of the employer, when workers want to change jobs, that it has now been abolished. And these are all points that have taken place in recent years, which are partially applied, but for the vast majority of workers, yes, for their situation has little influence. I myself, for example, have spoken with workers who have told me on the one hand Yes, we now receive the legal minimum wage of 1000 Riyal.

But at the same time, bonuses for overtime, for weekend work were abolished. So, companies can say, we pay the minimum wage but on the other hand, wage payments were then cancelled without replacement. There are various examples where from the wage money was simply deducted. Officially because for example workers came too late. But in many cases, workers are not given any reason at all for why money is being deducted from them. And it is so that many companies still find loopholes in the reform process and that the companies simply do not adhere to these new laws and at the same time are not consistently punished by the ruling family. And so the circle closes to what I said at the beginning. It is very, very important for the ruling family that there is peace in the country and no unrest. And if you punish influential companies or large companies, you run the risk of creating an uprising or, for example, a bad mood.

And, of course, that is something they would like to avoid as much as possible in this small country. It must also be said that this Kafala system is not only a slave-like working relationship, but it is also an economic system. People earn from it, companies earn from it when they bring workers into the country and then, for example, rent them out to other companies. This is also a major economic factor, which is partly supported and kept alive by members of the royal family. And that leads to the fact that, in my opinion, as I said, I can only repeat myself, the reform process is not being carried through consistently.

Niklas Krämer (15:55)

Another aspect that somewhat influences the political discourse here around Qatar is the environmental aspect. For many people, Qatar is simply climatically unsuitable for hosting such a World Cup. How would you say Qatar has positioned itself in this debate?

Benjamin Best (16:30)

Qatar always holds up the issue of sustainability. You just have to look at the, at the situation there on the ground. There are, I think, eight stadiums that are cooled down by air conditioning. So how that is supposed to lead to sustainability is beyond me. That's a desert environment, where of course the heat is intense. Just like how this World Cup can now be a great model for sustainability, and that's just what the Qataris keep upholding, doesn't make sense to me, when at the same time you have to cool down these football stadiums with air conditioning. And there were many, many actions. Trees were planted and so on and so forth. But in my opinion, these are always just PR measures. They are supposed to put the Qatar in a good light. But at the end of the day, you can't talk about a high level of sustainability with these conditions.

Niklas Krämer (17:57)

Yes, I understand. Can you give me some insight into this PR action that Qatar has practically done there to lift its sustainability?

Benjamin Best (18:15)

Well, it is. There will be various summits. Qatar does not only hold conferences on the topic of sustainability, but also very, very many conferences. A lot of presentations are made, they work together with universities and try to repeat these things again and again, to provide examples. And that's strategically planned. So they get journalists on board, experts on board, those who then carry these messages further. They use certain platforms, such as conferences or specially selected listeners, who then pass on the message accordingly. And this is a PR strategy that Carta is implementing not only on the topic of sustainability, but also on other topics.

Niklas Krämer (19:20)

And yes, one final point of criticism that I would like to address is corruption. Just at the beginning of 2010, when the award to Qatar became public, the allegations of corruption came up. Can you give me some insight there into how Qatar positioned itself and behaved there?

Benjamin Best (19:45)

Yes. In the end, Qatar has always denied any allegations of corruption. That Qatar has nothing to do with it. But ultimately, there are many, many indications that money has flowed from

Qatar to, for example, members of the Executive Committee. There is the public prosecutor's office in New York, for which it has been established that three South American FIFA executive members have received money for their votes. There is also FIFA's own investigation, the so-called Garcia Report. And if you read through it, you will find there again and again indications that, for example, the Qatari government, i.e. the ruling family, has given an official message to all institutions in the country that everything should be done to ensure that Qatar gets this World Cup. And this means that even if the Qatari World Cup Organizing Committee cannot be proven to have received any payments, there are various indications not only perhaps monetary, money has flowed, but that even gifts were made, etc. to get the favor of those who ultimately decide who gets a World Cup.

And as I said, there is the public prosecutor's office in New York. But there is also currently the public prosecutor's office in Paris, the financial prosecutor's office, which is further investigating the award to Qatar. It's about a meeting in 2010 between the then French President Sarkozy, Michel Platini and at that time the Crown Prince, who is now the Emir. And there allegedly various packages have been negotiated. It was about that Qatar enters with the French football club PSG. But it was also about television rights sale to the Qatari sports broadcaster Sports, which was then later established. So. Whether we will ever find out or whether it will ever see the light of day or whether we can ever really prove that or prosecution can prove that money has flowed from Qatar funds, I don't know. But the indications and the circumstantial evidence that there is this so far, I think, are already very significant. But Qatar has just again and again rejected any allegations of corruption.

Niklas Krämer (23:36)

Yes, that is important that Qatar practically more or less denies those allegations, if I understand you correctly.

Benjamin Best (23:47)

Exactly. But there are again and again, there are also in the past again indications that the Qatar of course also works with pressure, with money payments. So we had, for example. The complaint, as far as the human rights issue is concerned. There was a complaint procedure between 2013 and 2017 under the International Labor Organization (ILO), a United Nations organization, where member countries have launched a complaint procedure, against Qatar, against the situation of people and labor rights and where members have reported how Qatar

has exerted pressure. How Qatar pointed out that, when country representatives have called for a change, have called for a punishment of Qatar, that there are lucrative business connection between the countries and that one should think about it and that the respective presidents of the countries certainly do not see that positively when it comes to conflicts there. So there were threats and it was pointed out that Qatar is making a lot of investments in these countries and whether they really want to go down this path.

And these are ultimately eyewitness reports, the ones that are in the world, the ones that everyone can read and that show how Qatar ultimately deals with criticism.

Niklas Krämer (26:03)

Yes, quite interesting, a certain confrontational course, you might say. Um, why do you think Qatar or.

Benjamin Best (26:18)

One could almost speak of blackmail.

Niklas Krämer (26:23)

Yes, on the other hand, in the human rights debate, somewhere at least a reform process has been initiated, and in the environment, too, at least the country has positioned itself in such a way that it is particularly environmentally friendly and sustainable in the face of this criticism. Why would you say Qatar has behaved in this way and not differently?

Benjamin Best (27:08)

Because, in my opinion, the public pressure has become too great. They can control their country, their press there, for example. But if the world press keeps talking about human rights violations and inhumane conditions in this country, then Qatar is of course well aware that this is bad for its image, which they also want to convey on the other side. So you can't somehow invite the world to come and hold such major events. And on the other hand commit massive human rights violations. I think that is or was perhaps possible in past decades, but in my opinion that is no longer possible in the case of this World Cup. Of course, if we look at the Olympic Games in China and what the regime has done there in terms of free reporting, then we have to say that it is very much the case there. In the end, China doesn't care at all what the world thinks about the way it deals with the media, with the Uyghurs.

But Qatar is a much, much smaller country. Qatar does not have this position like for example China in the world. And Qatar ultimately has to change or had to respond to this in some way because it's just a much, much smaller country and doesn't have this political power at all, like China, for example. Whether that has hurt you Qatar, I think that this discussion, which will continue until the World Cup. This will harm this tournament and also the host country. I don't think there is any World Cup that has been so criticized as this World Cup. And ultimately, in my opinion, that is the responsibility that Qatar, the ruling family, but also the World Cup organizing committee must take upon themselves. That this World Cup is accompanied with criticism and that it is always the question and always the question come What would teams be? What will the athletes do on the ground to make a statement? And that will, that will not go away in the coming months.

Although I also have the impression that now with the draw that took place and with the FIFA Congress that took place in Qatar, that for FIFA, but also for the World Cup Organizing Committee, the topic of human rights is closed, that they no longer want to talk about it, that everything has been said about it, that there are supposedly changes and that they will no longer react to criticism.

There is also an official communication from the Qatari government that all redundant guest workers in Qatar should leave between September and February. Because one knows of course that the world public will look at Qatar. And one does not want to offer any attack surface. But in my opinion, this is rather a sign that before thousands of journalists and media and television cameras and so on and so forth come into the country, one would rather make sure that the guest workers leave the country, so that there is no critical reporting there and no critical reporting is possible.

Niklas Krämer (32:18)

In your answer, you have already a bit fully excluded my last question. So you think that even this handling, the reaction to this criticism can't put a stop to the damage to the image in the long term?

Benjamin Best (32:37)

No. I believe that these failures that have taken place in recent years. Will fall on their feet. And that, that this World Cup will always suffer from this point, which is dealing with the people who not only built the stadiums there, but who also built all the infrastructure there. And yes as I said, I believe that as well. Even for people who otherwise don't have much to do with football. Who maybe only watch a World Cup, but who otherwise have very little to do with Qatar or with football, that they too have simply noticed this discussion in recent years and will see this tournament with different eyes.

Niklas Krämer (33:49)

Great, thank you, that was my interview. I will stop the recording now.

Appendix 1.4: Interview with Dr. Susan Brownell

Interview partner: Dr. Susan Brownell

Date: 26 April 2022 at 5pm

Location: Online, Zoom

Niklas Krämer (00:00)

So to begin the Winter Olympics this year, they have been in February. And from the perspective of the Chinese government, how successful in general would you say were these Olympics?

Susan Brownell (00:28)

I would say successful in two ways. Unsuccessful in one. I think the diplomatic boycott by Biden administration was a big disappointment. I thought that there were signals when there was a big celebration, the 50th anniversary of Ping Pong diplomacy. I thought the Chinese government was trying to send out signals that hoped that the Beijing winds would be an opportunity for the improvement which had happened in 2008 during Summer Olympics. The then President George Bush had attended with a large entourage. While many other world leaders, particularly in Europe, had boycotted the ceremony, they didn't keep teams away. They had expressed protests by not attending. The opening ceremony was there. And people thought many sort of informed observers thought at the time that it was a high point for US China relations and they had friendly as they were then. I thought China hoped that the same thing would happen. So I think that the administration's boycott was probably made them very angry.

Upset, I can imagine. But the other two is where, first of all, the main goal was to develop winter sports in China. And I do think that unlike most bid promises, they had a plan.

It was related to a bigger picture, which was economic development northeast, particularly in the poor mountains. They stuck to the plan, put money and effort into it. They built hundreds of ski resorts and ice skating rinks across the country. And what they call the winter sports industry, I think largely means the resort business and the equipment suppliers were growing. That looks probably so that was a success. And that did have one soft power goal in it, I think, which is that winter sports in East Asia, ski sports really symbolize an elite leisure, Western lifestyle culture. And the Alps resorts patronized by global celebrities and the wealthy. So it symbolizes prosperity and it symbolizes three is taking part in these sort of global China wanted to build resorts that could participate, you know, in this circuit. And so that's more of an image thing, you know, sort of soft power thing has arrived as a prosperous and cosmopolitan nation. And then the third thing I think wasn't planned originally, but when the COVID happened, of course, it was very important to control damage that had been done to China's reputation by the fact that the pandemics started in China.

So for them to demonstrate to the world that they are a responsible citizen world, they are capable of pulling epidemics and they can do it better than anybody else, and that demonstrates the superiority of their political system. And so that's important for them. And it worked. The rate of COVID infections dropped to almost zero after there had been a major outbreak. Of course, immediately afterwards, a major outbreak started in China as a whole. I haven't heard anybody claiming that it was started by the Olympic games, but one might have to wonder. But in any case. Well, I think I was repeating myself just saying that the control effort was successful and that did support the goals they had for the image and reputation. With respect to the pandemic.

Niklas Krämer (07:40)

Yes. You actually have also already touched on my next question, which would be the reputation or the image and the message that China was trying to send to the world by hosting the winter Olympics this year and you could maybe also go in detail in comparison to the previous Olympics in 2008?

Susan Brownell (08:07)

Sure. By the way, I had written some online essays, So I'll send you the link which also dealt with some of these issues. I wrote two essays for the Georgetown Journal of international Affairs, Which Georgetown University is the most prestigious school of foreign affairs in the US. And they have an online imprint Journal. And I wrote two essays for them And I wrote two for another prominent site which is called the diplomat. So it's a digest for diplomats. So I touched on these issues in, well, not all of those essays. 2,3 out of the four. I'll find the links and send them to you.

Niklas Krämer (08:59)

That would be lovely.

Susan Brownell (09:03)

I don't think that the goal for this games was all that clear when they first bid for the games. So that was in 2015. And they expected that they would have to bid at least twice before they would be successful. So it was a bit of a surprise, the bid at that time. It's not even clear what they were thinking when they initiated it. There had been discussion for years of the city of Harvey Putting forward a bid for Olympic games. Finally, it was decided that Harvey just didn't have the infrastructure. Sometime after the hosting a successful summer games. I think it must have occurred to people. Well, can we use the infrastructure in the city and then combine that with snow

It was a reluctant bid. They wanted to withdraw several things. One of the leading promoter of the bid was Leo Chi, who had been the party Secretary of Beijing and the President of the organizing committee. In 2008, he was retired. So this maybe became sort of a hobby or a little project from him, utilizing the connections that he had made in the international world during the process of organizing Summer Games. But then when let's see, right at the very beginning when they were discussing this, Tokyo won the bid for the Summer Games, and they became a little concerned that the IOC would not take the Games back again to East Asia. But we're persuaded to continue. And then when I've got that reversed when Pyeongchang first won the rights to host the Winter Games, and they were concerned and then Tokyo won the right to host the Summer Games, and then they were really concerned because they really thought the IOC would not take the Olympic Games to East Asia for three consecutive Olympic Games, which, of course, was a historic moment in Olympic history, when for the first time, there was a series of Olympic Games outside the Western powers in one world region, really in some ways in the

west, it was perceived as a sign of the relative decline of the west in the rise East Asia, and probably correctly, it was seen as a symbol of that.

It never had the single minded focus on one goal that had existed in 2008, because the 2008 Olympic Games were called the realization of China's 100 year dream, because for 100 years, the hosting of the Olympic Games had been a symbol of China's arrival as an equal with the powerful nations of the world. Everybody in China was on board with that. That was what those Games would mean because China really believed that. I think they convinced the rest of the world and the rest of the world also saw those Games as China's coming out party. But in 2022, China had already come out, and you can only have one. There wasn't the clarity of purpose in 2022. And as I said, the main point that was argued in the bid was that this would develop winter sports in China. If you think about the attitude of the Chinese government, for example, toward the criticism and attacks on its human rights in 2008, maybe it was a little more conciliatory. But by 2022, I think the attitude was we have arrived, we are strong, the world needs to accept it. So if anything, affirmed China's arrival, which had been symbolically marked in 2008.

Niklas Krämer (13:46)

Right. That's interesting. And once again, you already touched on my next question, which is that this whole event, the Olympics in fishing, there was a lot of skepticism, a lot of controversy. There were a lot of criticism. Now before I would like to go into that criticism. Just generally speaking, how does China perceive that the rest of the world well, arguably, the Western side of the world has all those critical thoughts about them hosting the Olympics.

Susan Brownell (14:29)

You know, your average Chinese person is not aware of this criticism because it's not covered in Chinese media. Frankly, they probably aren't that interested anyway. So the people who are aware of it are the more international people, academics and diplomats and people in the realm of communications, specialize like the people in the central propaganda row who specialize in monitoring foreign occasions in China's international image. So there's really only a small elite, if you will, who are aware of the Western criticism and interacting with them. I have to say, I've never met anybody who took it seriously. They cynical about it. They believe that this is a part of the West's attempt to hinder choice and keep China from taking its rightful place in the world. I don't think that Westerners care that much about the people whose rights they are advocating for. I mean, in particular, in 2008, it was all about Tibet. So Tibet was really the

focus of the protests. And then in 22, Tibet was mentioned, but it was sort of in the background. And now it's Xinjiang, the Uighur in Xinjiang. They just need something to try to smear China's reputation right at the moment when it's taking its place on the world stage.

People were surprised in 2008 by the strength of the attacks. I think probably also the top leadership and the organizing committee probably at that time I was translating the biography of Jin Leon, who was China's member in the International Olympic Committee, and he was the senior statesman of Chinese sports, a senior sports diplomat. So I discussed this with him. And also you can read, which I translated into English. You can see what he wrote about it there. You can see how cynical he was. So I think then and I've written about this too. I don't know if you've found everything written. I'll send you a list and if you haven't found it, I can send it to you. The result of that is that the concept of human rights has not been taken real seriously as something that is a good concept for China. Although, and I've written about this, I do feel that the pressure of bidding for and hosting games did pull China into international rights discourse, if you want to call it that more than it had before, with the result that the phrase human rights was finally written into the national constitution.

So it's there now. And it is something people mobilize around now before that happened. And I forget the exact year 2005 or so. Anyway, before then, the word was taboo. I mean, you really couldn't even the word human rights in publications and interviews with newspapers. It has become a phrase that can be used publicly now and probably increasingly numbers of people, particularly maybe dissidents and active groups, will use the concept and mobilize around it. But the everyday level that Chinese people care about is corruption. And if you talk to them about human rights, they feel that violations of human rights are generally a product of corruption. They're a product of corrupt leaders who are not held properly accountable for corrupt actions, and they're trying to cover them up or they're violating human rights in the process of corrupt actions. So I have felt all along that there was a real disjuncture between all international criticism of human rights and the way Chinese people saw the world and what thought was the fundamental problem. I thought it was kind of a missed opportunity that if groups in the west had latched onto the problem of corruption and use that label, that there might have been more common ground for discussion.

But the result of that was that sort of disconnected organic movement led to the fact that after 2008, the government thought the leadership thought the main problem was one of foreign

communications, that China wasn't able to get its message and its voice across in the international media and that it wasn't able to effectively counter the attacks in the international media. And that was really a problem that needed to be solved. Not violations of human rights, but China's presence in the international media. So the central government launched a huge effort investing billions of dollars initially. And I haven't tallied how many more have happened. So like, what the total has been between 2008 and now? I don't know. It would have been many billions of US dollars we've invested in the reach of Chinese media like China Radio International, China Daily, the web, the internet platform for CCTV was launched, which today is called CGTN. They have digital as well as text based news on the right. So just all of these sort of things. So that was the product of the human rights debates in 2008. And what's interesting is so in 2022, they were just much better prepared to deal with the attacks at the level of communications.

Susan Brownell (22:01)

They also have the emergence of this category spokesperson called Wolf Warriors. I don't know if. Are you aware of that phrase?

Niklas Krämer (22:11)

No, if you could explain it to me.

Susan Brownell (22:16)

Because one of the ways in which they were ineffective was press conferences. Governments weren't used to doing that at all in China. And the central government just had, I mean, if at a spokesperson at all, the person walk out and read a statement and leave, you know, and it would be a very dry statement and, you know, no interaction with the media, which is the custom in the west. So this category of Wolf Warriors is glib commentators who are able to engage in the back and forth. And they're mean and they're humorous, they're sarcastic, which is something you never saw before from government spokespeople. They were always very dry and straightforward. So Zhao Lijian is a spokesperson for the Foreign Affairs Ministry, and he was very much in evidence in responding to the effects during the Vaping Olympics. And he said something just really amused me because I think he was right when someone said what's going to be the effect of the Biden demonstrations, diplomatic boycott, he says no one cares if they are not attending the Olympic Games. I think he was right. I really appreciated that he just said that. I'm not sure those spokespeople were any effective than the old style journalists.

The international media is just hostile to China, generally speaking, and they just don't attribute any credibility to anything they say. There were a few exceptions, maybe signaling that the Chinese government has a little bit more credibility in the past when it expresses opinions, maybe. But considering the billions of dollars invested into this foreign relations effort, the result was not yet effective. But maybe that will change in the future. So since you're interested in soft power, I mean, this is entirely in the realm of fall power. When the initiative was launched in 2008, after the Games, it was stated that this is about promoting China's soft power. That Communication initiative.

Niklas Krämer (25:00)

That's interesting. Yeah, I'm definitely going to look into that also after the interview. Yes. I mean, we have talked about human rights. Another concern is the environmental factor. Beijing is not really known for winter sports. Any facilities or like China in general, it's not very known for winter sports. So there has been this concern that actually China is not very suitable for hosting the Winter Olympics. How would you say has China tried to counteract this opinion and make it appear that, yes, we are very much a Winter Olympic host nation.

Susan Brownell (25:47)

Yeah. And by the way, environment was also a huge issue in 2008. So it's human rights. Environment has been the two big issues all along. Well, for one thing, I did feel that the environment faded into the background a bit more this time compared to 2008. So human rights remained the more central issue. And coven. And I didn't read this, so I don't have all my facts, but they actually had a lot of good technological answers to this question, which just didn't get out there into the general discussion. One of the big things, of course, was the amount of water used to create the artificial snow. I mean, Ironically, it actually snow during the Games in the mountain areas, which is extremely seldom.

Niklas Krämer (26:56)

But I thought it would never snow there. I just heard that. So that's a surprise.

Susan Brownell (27:04)

Yeah, I think it's almost never, but occasionally a sign. The amount of water was an issue, but because they did want these resorts to be sustainable, that was part of the economic development

of the region. So I think they had systems of capturing water, for example, it wasn't all water diverted from supplies that people use to drink and bathe. I don't know what percent was captured rain. But anyway, you could look up the fact that they did have this in mind with respect to the generation of the artificial.

Niklas Krämer (27:56)

Yeah. Would you say that this environmental factor was taken more serious by the Chinese government than the human rights record?

Susan Brownell (28:08)

Well, they're very much on board with environmental issues because they know they have severe environmental problems. And environmental NGOs were the first category of the NGOs that were allowed to exist. I think on the whole, it has only been international NGOs working in the realm of environment that were allowed into China and a lot of work inside China. So China has been much more open to working with NGOs and much more responsive to protests at the local level because there have been lots of local activist groups taking up solution as an issue. I think that's because they not only recognize that pollution is a terrible problem, but they also recognize that it has a cost for economic development. So there's a practical aspect there. And then, you know, with respect to air pollution in the major cities, particularly Beijing, that had become a symbol of a party or the Communist Party that didn't care that much about the quality of life of the people, but just pursued economic development at all costs. So I think the government has been a bit sensitive to this problem, control air pollution in the major cities, especially Beijing, or at least demonstrate that it's trying because that shows cares about the quality of life and to have the people.

Of course, it face tremendous challenges in Beijing because of the in 2008, the Beijing Olympic Games were famous for the fact that with a series of really stringent effort, there were blue skies during the Olympic Games, and it was the first time that Beijingers had seen blue skies in decades. I mean, I was there then, and it was amazing just looking up and thinking, wow, I've never seen that before. And that had some success. And the measure continued and the air pollution was better for a couple of years, and then it got even worse than it had ever been. So they were facing that again in 2022. So I think China's probably world major investor in green technology, and that's part of its soft power image as well. But it is a country that cares about

green technology and controlling pollution and water just they have to because all of those problems are so bad. It's in China.

Niklas Krämer (31:31)

Yeah, that makes sense. Generally speaking, how would you say has China's reaction to all those controversies, human rights, the environment, impact China's perception, China's image on the world stage?

Susan Brownell (32:03)

Well, I research on the effect of the 2008 Games on China's National image. I don't know if you read that book chapter. So it might have been hard for you to find. And I looked at the major national image polls. There are four that look at national images annually, so you can track better or worse. It's BBC, Gallup, Pew, and a private polling service called the Arnholt Nation Branding Index. And if you look at all four of those, they're very general because it's just once a year and the questions are very broad and each one asks a different sort of question. But the question which is asked of international audiences, their opinion of China. And the question is generally something like, do you think China plays a positive role in the world? Do you have a favorable opinion of China? And it looked to me that the Beijing Olympic Games on the whole in 2008 had caused a drop. So they had a negative impact on China's image. That's what it looked like to me. The fact was bigger in the west, and it was whereas in some of the developing world actually improved China's image.

And the negative impact was bigger in Germany, Japan, maybe France, but Germany and Japan stood out. In particular, those two countries just had it because Japan, for obvious reason of rivalry and the mistrust of China. But Germany, because attitudes about human rights are probably stronger there and it owes were active there. And also Netherlands has a particularly active Amnesty International. So those European countries where human rights are a big thing and where Amnesty International is particularly influential, they saw a bigger drop. But on the other hand, what did that drop mean? Because maybe what happened was that China successfully portrayed itself as a strong and powerful nation, and maybe that was threatening to the developed west. So maybe that's why the image dropped. So maybe China accomplished its goal of now having people believe that it's powerful and wealthy and the west isn't happy about it, that it's threatened. I think that's kind of what happened in 2008. So maybe we can

expect the same thing in 2022. I don't think China was portrayed in the Western media in a positive light that would improve its image, at least not here in the US.

On the other hand, we use a lot of attention was given to, there were about 30 Americans and Canadians representing China in the Olympic Games in ice hockey mostly. But there was one figure skater from the US, and there was particular Eileen, the freestyle skier, got a lot of attention. Okay, that got some negative criticism. But in the end, I think coverage of her being pretty positive. And I think that was an eye opener to Americans to realize that China is now in a position where it can offer maybe better conditions and economics support for top athlete like her than she could get in the US. Not to mention the fact that she had 30 sponsors, maybe about half of whom were Chinese and half of whom were based in the US, big multinational companies like Victoria's Secret, which is really kind of an all American company. It's all about American Femininity or Tiffany and company. She might be an indicator of direction that China's soft power is moving and might be there in the near future where there are aspects of China that are viewed positively and sent a positive image. Support and training conditions for athletes might be one of them, because that really varies a lot in the US and in many sports, the situation is not as good as it is in China.

Niklas Krämer (37:38)

Yeah. I mean, 30 athletes. I've been aware of the freestyle skier. I think she won a gold medal as well. But 30 athletes, that's more than I expected. That's a lot. Sorry I interrupted you.

Susan Brownell (37:58)

Well, this was a big moment for China. This was the first and I wrote about that, too. That was one of my Georgetown Journal International Affairs essays. So China never did recruit foreign born athletes before. There had been one in the 2008 Olympic game who was an equestrian, and there was one Tokyo, who was a track and field athlete. And other than that, they never done this before. So this was a symbol and there had been actually big debates in China. So this was an experiment because there was a fear of a nationalist backlash from the public.

This was a big thing. It indicated a new China to me, a new China that was struggling to open up more outside world. And it was actually part of a bigger phenomenon. And again, this is related to soft power, which is there have been rather large numbers of immigrants moving into China over the last two decades, really, since the financial crisis devastated the Western

economies, while China's continue to grow. So there are millions of impact now in China, and they can't become citizens because there's a restrictive dual citizenship isn't allowed. And China doesn't even have a long term residency permit, like what we call a green card work permit. So increasingly large numbers of people actually want to move to China for economic opportunities. And China just hasn't got the administrative or the laws to deal with it. What happened with opening up to 30 athletes was actually part of a bigger share, which is related to soft power. Right. Because soft power means a nation has a power attraction. And when people are choosing to emigrate to a country seeking a better life, that's the option that you're talking about with soft power. I think there were signs that China in the realm of soft power, there were only small signs, but it's moving ahead.

And maybe in the not too distant future, it will have some of the features that maybe the US has an image of a place where you can find a better life, glamorous celebrity athletes that are envy of the world and can attract sponsors. Yeah, maybe that's coming ski resorts that maybe the European elites like to travel to sometimes.

Niklas Krämer (41:10)

I'm actually a passionate skier myself. I never thought about going to China to ski, but hearing about it makes me wonder how it is actually.

Susan Brownell (41:23)

Well, when Pandemic is over and you can go there. Yes, maybe you can give it a try.

Niklas Krämer (41:31)

I would definitely actually my destination were the Rocky Mountains one day. But maybe if it continues, then I'm going east instead of west. One last question, because we are already 45 minutes into the interview. I keep wondering also when it comes to soft power and those Olympics, whether Olympics, would you say rather address to the international audience, or were they more to the domestic people, to the Chinese themselves.

Susan Brownell (42:09)

Really to both. Contrary to the perception of authoritarian governments, the Chinese government is very sensitive to public opinion, and the Chinese public is very willing to protest if they're unhappy. There are official figures as of local protests, and it's nearly 200,000

annually, if I recall, or maybe 100.000. So anyway, the government is very sensitive to public opinion. And my guess is that's part of the reason that they put this huge effort to popularize winter sports side China with the hosting of a mega event. So they accomplished two things at one, as I mentioned, it has become very important for the party to demonstrate that it cares about people's quality of life because of this perception that for too long they pursued economic development at all costs, resulting in pollution and the mantling of the public health system. And just a lot of sacrifices were made. So with this massive effort, which will provide a pretty big recreational industry in the parts that get snow and ice, which is the entire Northern half of China, a large population now will have these middle class leisure opportunities that they didn't have before. So I think that part of it really largely targeted to the domestic audience.

And the other thing is so like in Beijing, the large emerging class of relatively prosperous people who have traveled internationally, and that's the kind of audience who will go to the ski resorts outside of Beijing. And that's also the more sophisticated audience that knows about the criticism of China's human rights and is maybe a little bit more sensitive to the international opinions. So by providing them with this recreation that's easily accessible for a wee trip, also, you're giving them something to improve their quality of life as well.

Niklas Krämer (44:59)

So you would argue that it was more addressed to domestic people than trying to portray a favorable Chinese image to the world?

Susan Brownell (45:11)

Well, there were both. If you want to talk about investment of money and time, much more of the investment of money and time went into the development of the domestic winter sports industry. And this, by the way, struck me also in 2008, I wasn't able to be in China this time around, but in 2008, I was there and I participated in events at the organizing committee, and I sort of felt like I had a little bit of an inside understanding of where their attention was devoted. And I actually felt in 2008 that maybe about two thirds the attention really was on the domestic audience, domestic goals and the domestic situation, and only about one third maybe was devoted to the international audience. The big thing that is devoted to the international audience is the opening and closing ceremonies, because that's the opportunity. In a global broadcast that reaches a large part of the world's population, they can send out simple messages about China and then the winning of gold medals. The pursuit of victories is really targeted towards the

international community, whatever they invest in, making the foreign journalists happy, that's devoted to the international community.

But then the effort to develop the local economies in these mountain areas and the volunteers, because very large numbers of volunteers are recruited, that's a domestic effort. That has been an attempt to develop a volunteer culture in China which can be mobilized in cases of disasters and other areas. It also, of course, gets buy in from the populism to government golden projects. Yeah. I think I've hit upon the key and Olympic education. So educational programs in the schools and the cities, particularly the primary and secondary schools, that was a huge effort in 2008, the main thing I was involved in as a scholar, working with friends, designing programs. So that was, I guess you could call it patriotic education, although it really taught people about China, it was more international than most forms of patriotic education and taught people about China's Olympic history of successes and international history of the Olympic Games. And Olympic education was also huge this time around, a lot of money, a lot of programs in schools. And this time around it was more oriented towards teaching children about winter sports and how to do them and its rules. At the schools, they had dry versions of winter sports, so like floor hockey and skis with rollers on them and pulling on a flat rubberized surface and things like that, skating, ice skating, roller blades. So that was actually a huge effort designed to teach people about winter sports.

Niklas Krämer (49:27)

That's interesting. All right. I've taken much of your time. Is there anything you would like to conclude with any information, any questions I haven't asked that you think I should have asked or any information you would like to give?

Susan Brownell (49:47)

Well, I just think I often told journalists that because there was a feeling in the west like China getting something out of these Games and we don't want that. I felt that the attitude was we don't really want China to benefit from these Games in like a fear or a jealousy or whatever that China was going to increase its power and also that the grip of the Chinese government would be strengthened internally by hosting these games. So that in the end this is a way that the authority and Chinese dictatorship strengthens its control over its people, continues on its pursuit of world.

Niklas Krämer (50:32)

I think the term is sportswashing, right?

Susan Brownell (50:37)

Yeah. And I just argued we don't have good evidence for any of that. So there's no good evidence that hosting a mega event increases the legitimacy of a government and there's no good evidence that it increases a nation's soft power nationally and domestically. The Chinese audience is not that stupid. You can grab any Chinese person off the street and they tell you that what governments do, what they do is to put on big shows. And they're all cynical about that because this is really a much bigger thing in Chinese political culture than in the US. Like the government's always like ceremonies and shows and they know that and they're cynical about it. So they know that hosting a sport mega event is a big show that their central government is putting on because it happens at all levels of government, central government, provincial, municipal, all the way down to county level governments. They all like ceremonies and shows. I mean, there's Chinese phrase for it, which means appearanceism, you know, the emphasis on appearance. So does hosting the Games increase the legitimacy of the government and its control over the people? You know, I just really think it's much more complicated than that.

And then I've mentioned my evidence that in fact, the 2008 Games may have had a negative impact on his image internationally, at least in the developed west. So, you know, that whole idea is just too simple. That doesn't mean that games don't have sort of positive impacts and serve government. They may. But I just think it's more than, you know, and unfortunately not very well studied and don't understand it very well because sports are understudied because they aren't taken seriously as an academic topic. So props to you for writing a master's thesis on this topic. I mean, we need a scholarship on this topic to better understand what the hosting of the event actually accomplishes.

Niklas Krämer (53:10)

Yes, I think those are perfectly concluding words. Thank you for that. And thank you very much for your participation. Last question for me. I would love to cite you also in my text and my thesis. It's like I said, purely academically. Would you think that is something you would open to?

Susan Brownell (53:33)

Sure, that's fine.

Niklas Krämer (53:34)

Perfectly. Thank you. Thank you very much for the interview. I would be happy if you would send me some of the references that you mentioned during the text and that's it from my side then. Thank you very much.

Susan Brownell (53:52)

Will your thesis be written in English?

Niklas Krämer (53:55)

It is, and I would love to send you a copy.

Susan Brownell (53:58)

Yeah, I would love to have a copy as well. I don't know that it would be interesting to you. I helped a student at Belgian University University of Gantt who had written a very master's thesis on it was more about the involvement of NGOs in the Beijing Olympics, the organizations that were making the attacks and all that. I'll take a look at it and I'll see if it looks like it might be useful to you. It was written in English also.

Niklas Krämer (54:42)

Okay. Perfect. Alright then. Thank you very much again and hope you have a good day.

Susan Brownell (54:54)

Okay too. Thanks. Bye.

Niklas Krämer (54:56)

Thank you. Bye.

Appendix 1.5: Interview with Anonymous

Interview partner: Anonymous

Date: 23rd April 2022 at 5pm

Location: Online, Zoom

Niklas

Krämer

(00:04)

Yes, the Winter Olympics. I looked it up again earlier, you weren't on site then, you were reporting from

Munich. Is that right?

Anonymous (00:14) Right? That is exactly right.

Niklas

Krämer

(00:17)

My first question, in general, the Winter Olympics in Beijing, and they were now in February. How would

you say the Games were successful for the for the Chinese government?

Anonymous (00:33)

So, as I said, I was limited by the fact that I wasn't there, but I also heard a bit about the media. I think that if we look at the results, then it is of course the case that they have managed it quite well. That is, there was no outbreak of COVID, which one feared, this whole Omicron story has not manifested itself there. They didn't have to stop the games now. That was for example a big fear, where one says For God's sake, what will happen in this bubble? That has been brought over the stage quite well. The vast majority of athletes were able to participate. There were very few cases at the beginning where someone was in quarantine for a very long time. And I believe that against this background it has been a success for the Chinese. We always have to look at, how is it perceived outwardly, and how inwardly.

But if we think about how that affects inwardly, it certainly has been the case that the Games have taken place, that they have taken place smoothly, that China has shown that you can make such Games in the pandemic. And I think that has been a success for the Chinese government.

Niklas Krämer (01:57)

With the Olympic Games one always tries to convey a certain image of the host country or also a message. Now, in the case of the 2022 Winter Olympics, how would you say China has tried to present itself? What image has China tried to communicate to the world?

Anonymous (02:26)

To be able to organize well. I had the feeling, when I saw the opening ceremony, for example, that I think they made an effort to come across as somewhat more liberal than, for example, the opening ceremony in 2008. That was very, very, very pompous. At that time, great care was taken to focus on the drill of the people. But this performance. I think that in 2008 drummers stood at the beginning and drummed, that did not happen at this opening ceremony. So there was already an effort to present the image of a functioning and yet generous, open-minded state. They certainly tried to do that.

Niklas **Krämer** **(03:19)**

The Games have been accompanied with a lot of skepticism, controversy and criticism. How was this

controversy perceived there?

Anonymous (03:44)

I think we have to think about what people in these countries notice about international controversies. The debate that we had here in Europe or in the free part of the world, not only in Europe, also in America was that we thought about that the Olympic Games are held in a country that oppresses minorities. For example, Tibet, but mostly the Uyghurs. Against this background, these games have taken place, and this has of course been very strong in the debate. Of course we always ask ourselves, looking at the example of China, but also in other examples, can games take place in countries to which human rights mean nothing? That is an important point for us, for me it is still an eminently important point. And I don't know whether this has somehow been accepted by the Chinese population. For that, I have to say quite honestly, do I know the possibilities to inform themselves too little. I suspect that they have little possibilities. We don't need to make a swing to Russia but we meanwhile in Russia, these people know relatively little about it. So, it is a discussion that has been held outside, which is important. But I don't think that's an issue for the Chinese.

Niklas **Krämer** **(05:17)**

But do you think that was an issue with the political leadership, that that was perceived?

Anonymous (05:25)

Certainly, that was certainly noticed. That's why, at the beginning, for example, an Uyghurs women was entrusted with the task of lighting the flag, if I remember correctly. That is all a symbolism that was put into action there. And I think it is with those regimes that they want to carry out these games, that it should succeed, that it should be a message internally "we can do this, we are doing this. We're doing it even in the pandemic. The whole world is there. We are hosting the whole world. We can even compete athletically; we've won some medals. And when it's over, this event, then it's over, then it's through, then it's over, then the international excitement dies down, and that's what happened again in this case. Logically, no one talked about the topic of Uyghurs and Tibet afterwards.

This time there was another reason for it. We have a war in Europe that broke out after that and meanwhile no one is thinking about the Olympics outside China anymore. I think inside China it is appreciated as a special moment. China has arrived, once again arrived. China did it, they did it well. Even under these difficult conditions of the pandemic, the world was a guest at friends, to use an old motto of the 2006 World Cup. And from the Chinese point of view, it all worked out wonderfully. For sure.

Niklas Krämer (07:00)

I'd like to go a little deeper into this symbolism again. One of the big controversies, of course. We've already touched on it, the human rights situation, the focus on that very clearly on the Uyghurs. How would you say China has defended itself against such allegations? How did they use that symbolism?

Anonymous (07:23)

They resisted, saying that it is not true. That is always the case. It always is. That is always the case. It is one possibility for regimes to just say this is all not true. That's fake news. They have that possibility and then the allegations are standing in the room. And this is how they transport it internally. That we have human rights organizations that report on it, that we report on camps, for example, where the Uyghurs have been held, detained, that there is international research on the China Cables, that there are satellite images, that there is all this evidence. All that doesn't matter in that moment. You say it is not true that it is Western propaganda. There is an example. You will know that. Ulf Rössler has brought this up in a ZDF reporting. Immediately after the

opening ceremony, there was a protest note from the association, from the Chinese embassy, I think, where it was clearly stated that this reporting about it is hyper-moral or whatever.

I would have to look up the term. But what are you going to do? This is simply the position that says there is nothing taking place. That is a malicious, that are malicious accusations, that is propaganda by the West. So, and with that, you certainly get away with that inside the country, I would say, without knowing the exact circumstances. But we know it's an autocracy, China, an authoritarian system. Let's put it this way, they have no problem with that, I think. Outside, of course, it's a different situation, very clearer. We say it is scandalous that this is taking place in China. But these are really two worlds that run side by side there, you must not forget that either. Asking does the soft power work or how do these images work? You always have to think about how do they work outwardly to us for example, and how do they work inwardly? And I believe that the inward effect was also very important for China.

Niklas Krämer (09:27)

Yes, Is the reaction similar when it comes to debate about the press and freedom of speech when it comes to censorship and also espionage. When you say, there the reaction is actually similar, that the Chinese say everything is Western propaganda, we have done nothing wrong here, have nothing to blame ourselves for.

Anonymous (09:51)

Yes. Yes, of course. That is. It's part of the system that you don't admit anything. Nothing is admitted. Nothing needs to be admitted. After all, it worked. You were given the games. And you were also given this stage. Just one more example, this time I wasn't there but I was there in 2008, and in 2008 there was a debate beforehand about whether the Internet was free in China. The IOC and the Chinese organizers then thought about that the Internet should at least be free in the press center. We then came there in

2008, keep in mind that was 2008 not 22, and the Internet in the press center was not free. So the Amnesty International website was not accessible. So even this smallest concession, this smallest adherence to guidelines, to rules was not followed through by China at that time. They ran the event and they made the rules. That's how it was then. How it was this time, I don't know. I have to be clear about that. After all, I wasn't on site.

Niklas Krämer (11:06)

Away from freedom of expression, away from human rights. The environmental factor is also very important for Western countries. Beijing is not particularly known for winter sports, China in general is not. How would you say China tried to justify itself, that they are a winter sports nation, that they deserve to host the Winter Olympics?

Anonymous (11:40)

Accessing new markets. That's always the case. I mean justification does not mean always only justification of the host country. It is always together with the IOC which markets these and distributes this very, very valuable property Olympia into the world. And of course then it was claimed, it was said, these are the most ecologically clean games, all that. There's enough evidence, there are enough studies that say the opposite. But of course, that also remains in such a gray area. Yes, this is even very much in a gray area because the ecological debate has been very much overshadowed by the human rights debate this time. The ecological debate was stronger, for example in Sochi, and after the elections of Vancouver. People talked about it for a long time. In the free part of the world, people talk about ecology very clearly because. During the Munich application for example because the human rights issue is not there.

But we have talked here more about human rights and the ecology has been a debate on the side. Like, by the way, this is also a problem. And when you think about the monster facilities that have been built into the landscape, such as sports facilities that are obviously only used for a single event, it is of course monstrous and gigantic, pure gigantism to say that everything has become less. Of course, this is partly a mockery, but it is also very difficult to understand in retrospect. And now, against this background, not at all. The Olympic Games have taken place, I think it's eight weeks ago now, and it seems to us all as if it's been two years, because everything after that has shifted, of course. The public interest went to the situation with Russia and the war in Ukraine. So that's, that's always, that's just maybe this discussion. One would have to look there much more intensively, also this leads us now a little bit too far, but with other thoughts, one would have to look much more intensively exactly, not always only the photos, which one sees then.

What happened to rotten sports facilities? What? Yes, you would then have to look again years later What really happened? What about these so-called white elephants? What was used and how was it used afterwards? That would be interesting in China, but it is just as interesting in

other countries, including the football events in South Africa. We have experienced that. So China stands there in a sad

line of other events and I don't think that they, that they have solved that much better, but I'm sure that they haven't solved that better than in the predecessors games. I'm sure they haven't.

Niklas Krämer (14:20)

Yes. What I heard from your answers is that China often just ignores criticism. And as far as foreign criticism is concerned, why do you say is China's reaction like this and not different? Especially in view of the fact that the Olympic Games are supposed to convey a positive image of China.

Anonymous (14:45)

Yes, that is. If you. If you were to react differently, if you were to react with an open mind, then you would have to react to research about the Uyghurs. Then you would have to say, "What about the figures?" Then you might have to let people into the country. Then you would have to allow open research. That is not happening. It's also the case when we talk to people who have been there. There are always two or three people with you, they check what you do, they observe what you do. Journalists are accompanied at every turn. That's not free research, that's clear. That means they are interested in a certain image, and that's what they get. So, again, to be clear, we are talking about the reaction of the West to the Olympic Games. The criticism is essentially a reaction from Europe and America. When you talk to Asians, for example, when you talk to Africans, maybe not so crucial now at the Winter Games, but when you talk to Indians or something.

Tokyo struck me that way. There, the Olympic Games have an enormous standing, they have an enormously high status, and that's enough for them. So both the Chinese as an organizer get away with it, just like the IOC. If you ask about the pictures, the images, that works, the pictures still work as before and the ratings this time were not as bad as one would have thought perhaps or would have wished. By now, this is always a special point, it is not only linear television that is measured, but different means, via cell phone and otherwise in clips and clicks and however else. Ultimately the system still works. And that China does not engage in a debate, in an honest debate, that's obvious, that's obvious, they don't want that. They brush it off, they say it's not

happening, it's propaganda. And they can get away with that. The IOC would have to decide they will pursue these matters more intensively, but that does not happen.

Niklas Krämer (16:59) Well, I see.

Anonymous (17:01)

When you have done everything. Look at the Interview on Deutschlandradio by colleague Rieger. Now, just between us. I have this in my head. I think it was Rieger. There they say that doesn't exist there, it is not proven at all. I don't know anything about it, I'm not sure. So the position is very clear. Gian Franco Kasper, who was an important figure in sports for a long time, once said that they prefer to give them to

dictatorships, because there we don't have these difficult discussions. So that is clearly the direction, also from the IOC, that is gladly taken that there are no difficult discussions at all.

Niklas Krämer (17:50)

This practically deny or do not respond at all to such difficult discussions, what role does that play for the image of China in the Western world or on the world stage in general? So, how does that come about? How do these reactions to these criticisms are perceived?

Anonymous (18:18)

In the in the western world.

Niklas Krämer (18:20)

Yes, or even if you already mentioned the Asian or African countries, maybe on that as well.

Anonymous (18:29)

When you think about China, you realize that with the new government or with the Xi government, which has been established for some time, things have solidified again, that the authoritarian course has increased significantly. One suspected a certain opening before. However, this was only the case when one traveled there oneself. Then you could travel relatively far. Even after 2008, colleagues were there, traveling back and forth, right there. That was not possible this time. We had debates before about the fact that you have to secure your

computers and your cell phones against malware. We had computers with us that were destroyed shortly after so that malware would not somehow spread in our system. Against that background, we are talking. China not openly speaking about human rights issues that fits into an overall picture. It is a hermetic area. They do their things; they follow through with their policies there.

Authoritarian style. You can also say dictatorial. They do not allow any questions. Period. And when questions are asked, the questions are blocked. Period. Like this. We still ask the questions anyway. We still have to deal with those questions. We have to keep raising them, too. We also share them with our audience. But in China, to the audience in China, they certainly don't communicate that. That is would be naive to think that it's a big issue there. It isn't. Human rights debates don't take place there, don't have there.

Niklas Krämer (20:22)

Yes, I'm already at my last question. Often we have the case that political and social grievances are talked about before such events. Afterwards, however, such things often fall into the past. Did China also hope for a similar effect?

Anonymous (20:52)

Yes, absolutely. That's always, the case. Olympic Games are... they are a very multi-layered entity. But they have an effect, of course, in the situation. They have an effect, of course, in the moment when they take place. This time, I also asked myself very clearly: Will this so-called magic of images also work on television? Will it still work in any way at all? And, in a certain sense, it still works. It is an event that takes place, is still a meeting of the the biggest meeting of many people from all over the world. That's what they rely on. By the way, Jacques Rogge has already said that. He has once said as soon as the Games begin, the images unfold their magic, the debates fade in the background silently.

And that's something, that is true. That's why you can say this time again. It took place as an event, that also worked as an event. The pictures looked good, there was no virus outbreak. All the things that were imagined beforehand did not take place. The volunteers were portrayed as being very friendly. They always are, by the way. If you are often at the Olympics, then you recognize there are always very friendly volunteers and certainly because they are also selected

and because every country is somehow inspired anyway when the whole world is a guest. Even the volunteers in Germany are always very nice at major events, where Germans are often not so nice to foreigners. It all works, it all worked, and therefore you can trust that this system will work for the two weeks and that the debates will be over by then. And, of course, they will continue to talk about it themselves.

There are, for example, as a last thought There are a run on this mascot, which is a panda bear, which was sold out, even in China sold out. So it's quite remarkable. That means that all the people will have bought such a mascot and will think back for a long, long time about that happy event for them, which they saw on television. Many people were not able to go to the stadium, which was accompanied by many Chinese successes, by many Chinese victories, with all the things around it, with the whole opening ceremony, which was great, with the closing ceremony, which was great. So in the country itself, it is celebrated as a success, it is celebrated that way, and that's why it worked. This is often the case with these regimes, because they can decide for themselves how they want to stage the event. That is for example also 2014 so as a conclusion thought. Perhaps, because we talk so much about Russia, it was the same in Sochi.

In 2014, I was there in Sochi for two days longer, because I took a flight later, and then I got to see a bit more of what was on TV. Well, we always talk about television, about the media, the media transport of such an event, up and down for two days. Russian Olympic champions, the smallest skating and heaviest bob racer. Again, from morning to night exclusively Russian triumphs, exclusively Russian victories. The other nations did not take place at all. That again two weeks, again two days are then behind it. 123 channels from morning to night. So this is exploited, it works internally and externally. As I said, the discussion will be over on the outside at some point. Then come the next games, which people get upset about or deal with. And in this case, of course, the discussion ended particularly quickly because a few days later war broke out in Ukraine or the Russians invaded Ukraine.

And the discussion about whether this has been discussed in advance with the Chinese government, that Putin is waiting a few more days so that they can continue their very crazy staging, that who else would

go beyond the scope, but talked about the fact that they said in China, watch out, wait again, let's finish this here first and then you do your stuff.

Niklas Krämer (25:24)

Yes, good closing. I mean the next big one is already coming up in Qatar, which is my second case study after the Winter Olympics in Beijing. That's why I can well imagine that the focus will shift directly from China to Ukraine to Qatar. And much will be forgotten. Unfortunately.

Anonymous (25:47)

And it will be interesting for all of us who look at it. For me, too. It is already now that the view of Qatar is changing due to the energy issue. Yes, it's already highly interesting how that's changing right now. Yes, like Qatar just a few weeks ago also that. This issue of the World Cup in Qatar. Incredibly, on which level one will discuss that, because one can borrow very exactly, if then Habeck goes there, in order to get the energy, which we need, so that it continues here our industry Qatar will have naturally all at once an inconceivable importance. And of course they will be there. Oh, but we have now talked about the fact that we actually have to boycott it. Oh, but we do take the oil. How do we deal with it now We always have to be clear about that. Aha, so, there are the villains, and they are but so and that are so people, people, that becomes another. That will still be an interesting debate.

Niklas Krämer (26:38)

Definitely, definitely. Yes, Qatar will also be quite interesting for me, because more than China, I think, they use this sport to reach this foreign public, more than the internal. But that's my work a little bit in advance.

Anonymous (26:59)

That's right. And I think it's also still a look, because when we look at Qatar, talked about openness and stuff, so it's always been like that. There's a difference. So in China, that's a hermetic area, you don't really find out anything, you don't know what's going on in the background. in Qatar it is in such a way that also colleagues of us could still drive or also a colleague of me two years ago still drove, also now again of the ZDF together they drove there and with the workers, with the slaves or however one wants to call them, the workers from Bangladesh could also talk, one could speak with them, those were there in their corrugated iron huts, it looked sat terribly but one has however still had the feeling to be able to speak with these people. There is with Qatar of course you also know that. You will see that if you research

about it, that there are troops that spread a positive attitude about Qatar and highlight that it has also improved very much, very much.

In my opinion, my forecast is that this event will take place and that we will somehow get a grip on this bad feeling that we have. I think they will. In China, I have to say quite honestly, I always asked myself

beforehand, what arguments should there be for China in 2022. In 2008 at the Summer Games, it was still the case that people said this is an opportunity, this is also an opportunity for opening up, and they have to have it. This time, I thought, there was actually no argument at all. But we talked about it. The debate came to a standstill, as it often does.

Niklas Krämer (28:32)

Yes, it was also, that's also a bit of the motivation for my whole research, because I'm actually a sports enthusiast myself. But I had the feeling, especially now after Sochi, after Russia, now Beijing, while shortly after the World Cup in Qatar. There is almost no more euphoria, no interest at all, at least for us.

Anonymous (28:57)

That is absolutely the case, that is. I also deal with this in my research. When is this point reached? You were in Freiburg, you come from Freiburg, I come from Bremen. We experience a bit of the opposite model in football. We also see how enthusiastic we are when we hear Christian Streich, unique. Or Petersen when he says we are all stupid. How beautiful that is, if you have people that know what they do and they still represent something, they have some morals, they're not part of this crazy, insane system. But it still works. And I have to say quite honestly, I've seen Qatar, this presentation, how they do it, now with the draw, then the video up to the mascot. They're going to come up with a lot there and end up being, that's my prediction.

Here we are again on the subject of ecology. What a madness. Stadiums are cooled down, what a madness! There I have again the question about what are we talking about? About human rights? Let's talk about ecology. But we will have that in a country as big as Hessen, that many fans can simply watch three games in one day. How cool is that? And that will then also

contribute in the end to the fact that this is not such a fiasco event, as we actually imagine it and as it is of course from Bavaria. Yes sure, right, it is a country, but that is, that leads us now too far, we are missing now times.

Niklas Krämer (30:30)

I have very, very mixed feelings with the whole thing. I'm very much a football enthusiast. I love football very much, but Qatar, at some point, that's a feeling that comes up where you say, something's just not right there.

Anonymous (30:48) Absolutely the same. Absolutely.

Niklas Krämer (30:51)

thank you very much for the interview. Um, before I stop the recording. I would like to ask you if it would be possible for you to be quoted in my paper. Its only for for academic purposes. Of course, if it were to be published, I would ask you again about that.

Anonymous (31:10)

But anonymous is also possible, you said.

Niklas Krämer (31:12)

But anonymous would also work.

Anonymous (31:14)

Then let's not do it. Anonymous, please.

Niklas Krämer (31:16)

All right, that's fine. I thank you a lot again. I'll say goodbye with this.

Anonymous (31:24)

Let's stay in touch. Maybe we will have to do with each other again.

Niklas Krämer (31:27) Yes, that would be super.

Anonymous (31:29)

Super. Thanks. And have a nice day in.

