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Bachelor's Thesis

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"Geopolitical Games: An Analysis of sportswashing and Its Impacts on National Identity, International Status, and Economic Growth"

A case study about Russia and Qatar

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Abstract

The thesis deals with the research question to what extent sports organizations help countries with sportswashing and whether these countries and their rulers then generate positive outcomes for their country through the organization of major sports events. Therefore, a structured focused comparison with a most-similar analysis will be used as a research design to answer this research question. The data will be collected through in-depth interviews and a thorough literature analysis. The relevance of this topic is very high, as it was heavily discussed in the media and academically after the organization of the World Cup in Qatar 2022 and now the next politically explosive events such as the Euro 2024 in Germany and the Summer Olympics 2024 in Paris are just around the corner.

Through an analysis of its social, political, and economic facets, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms that underlie sportswashing. This thesis sheds light on the strategies employed by nations like Russia and Qatar, which are well-known for their sportswashing, to uphold their internal stability and improve their standing abroad. Case studies of these countries will be analysed. The study also examines the extent to which international sports organisations such as FIFA, UEFA and the IOC support or oppose sportswashing activities.

The results of this study contribute to the debate on the ethical and political implications of major international sporting events. By highlighting the impact of sportswashing on national identity, international reputation, and economic growth, it provides important information in this regard. By utilising a deductive, qualitative content analysis, this study ensures a robust methodological approach that captures the significant impact of sportswashing on various stakeholders. The findings highlight the need for more accountability and transparency in international sports policy by demonstrating the impact of sportswashing on national pride, diplomatic relations, and economic development.

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1. Introduction

A darker story is revealed by the eye-catching spectacle of international sports, where countries vie for honour and glory: sportswashing. The world watched in wonder as the tiny Gulf nation of Qatar turned its barren desert terrain into a sporting paradise after it was awarded the right to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup. However, some contend that beneath the glittering stadiums and widespread praise, this enormous event had a different function—it covered up labour exploitation and violations of human rights. This thesis explores the ways how sports organizations, such as FIFA and the IOC, enable these kinds of changes, posing serious concerns about responsibility and morality in the governance of international sports governance. This practice was also evident in Russia, the second case added to Qatar, with the organisation of the two major sporting events, the Winter Olympics 10 years ago in 2014 and the Football World Cup in 2018.

A robust definition of sportswashing has been developed by Jules Boykoff (2022), based on the soft power approach to analysing major events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup. It is a social relationship that encompasses several target groups, both international and domestic. Sportswashing is "a phenomenon in which political leaders use sport to appear important or legitimate on the world stage, while stoking nationalism and distracting from chronic social problems and human rights abuses at home" (Boykoff, 2022, p.342). The term was first used by human rights activist Gulnara Akhundova in 2015 in her report in the Independent on the abuses surrounding the European Games in Baku (cf. Akhundova, 2015). This concept is still quite new. Overall, the relevance of sportswashing is evident, as it highlights the connection between sport, politics and society and emphasizes the need for critical reflection on the power and abuse of sport.

To understand why people talk about washing in this context, it is helpful to look at other washing methods. Sportswashing is descended from 'whitewashing', which itself is a metaphor involving lime or paint that is used to turn a surface white. "'Whitewashing' denotes a general practice of casting something or someone in a favourable light despite the presence of some dubious features, marks against them that are glossed over in the whitewash." (cf. Fruh et. all, 2023, p. 102). Another comparable washing method is greenwashing. As "terrachoice" points out "Greenwash is defined as the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service." (as cited in Parguel et all, 2011, p. 15-16). In contrast, sportswashing is a topic that has captured the attention of the media, stirring a wide-ranging debate over its implications. It is widely used in critical sports literature and was even voted Word of the Year 2021 by the Norwegian Language Council (cf. Andersen, 2022). Critics argue that it grants sports organizations an unwarranted level of political influence, a claim that has yet to be conclusively proven. This gap in our understanding forms the cornerstone of this thesis, which aims to delve into the potential influence wielded by International Sports Organizations in the realm of "sportswashing". Three of the largest sports organizations, FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association), UEFA (Union of European Football Associations), and the IOC (International Olympic Committee) are all located in the Global North.

To be more precise, they are all based in Switzerland. FIFA has its headquarters in Zurich, UEFA in Nyon and the IOC in Lausanne. This means that the traditionally neutral country in the centre of Europe plays a leading role in sports diplomacy. These organizations have significant "soft power", a term coined by Joseph Nye to describe the ability to entice and co-opt rather than coerce through cultural influence, values, and diplomacy (cf. Nye, 1990). In the field of international sport, these organizations exercise their "soft power" by setting rules, organizing global events, and promoting values such as fair play and international cooperation. These activities influence global culture, contribute to international relations, and often lead to indirect control or influence over decisions in sport and related policy areas. It is exactly the extent and nature of this soft power that this thesis aims to investigate.

This paper will therefore aim to answer this question:

How do international sports organizations and the unique geopolitical landscapes of Qatar and Russia influence the practice and outcomes of sportswashing in enhancing national prestige and soft power?

To unpack this complex issue, the research will concentrate on several key questions:

In order to carry out this analysis scientifically, this bachelor's thesis will look at two different countries (Russia and Qatar) and examine the impact that the organization of major sporting events has had on each of these two countries.

Sub-question A: What social and economic benefits did Qatar and Russia hope to gain from sportswashing?

Sub-question B: What are the geopolitical implications of sportswashing for these countries?

Sub-question C: Based on the experience of Qatar and Russia, what is the influence that large sports organizations have due to sportswashing?

In the case of scientific relevance, it should be made clear that this phenomenon is still a very recent and little-researched one. Not like its cousin, greenwashing, for example. However, as this has also been researched more and more over the years due to its emerging relevance, this must also be done with sportswashing to investigate the mechanisms and actions of states around the world (Saudi Arabia, Rwanda, etc.). This is because they are using the new type of soft power to increasingly destabilize the hegemonic dominance of the USA. As it is a much more peaceful way of gaining more influence and power than other more traditional ways of gaining power (e.g. war). And this also closes the circle to societal relevance, as there has been a lot of attention in the western population and in the media about this topic recently, as it is increasingly moving people and has also come onto the political agenda in Germany, for example. The thesis aspires to contribute valuable insights into the intricate dynamics at play between sport, politics, and society, offering a clearer view of the role of International Sports Organizations in the controversial practice of sportswashing. A rationalist, comprehensive analysis involves the systematic evaluation of decisions and their consequences based on a set of rational criteria and aims to optimize outcomes by selecting the most logical and advantageous strategy. This method integrates different dimensions of a problem, including political, economic, and social factors, to ensure a holistic and informed evaluation framework (cf. Lake & Powell, 1999). This methodology will make it possible to explore the multi-layered nature of sportswashing, encompassing its socio-political dimensions and its economic background. By situating the analysis within the broader framework of soft power dynamics and global capitalism, as highlighted by Grix for example (cf. Grix, 2023), it will be possible to examine how sportswashing goes beyond mere political manoeuvring and becomes a central element of geopolitical strategy.

At the current Euro 2024 in Germany, autocratic countries such as Qatar and China are now trying to boost their national profile through perimeter advertising. Of the 13 main sponsors of the European Championships, five are from China (BYD, Alipay+, Ali Express, Hisense and Vivo) (cf. Houben, 2024). In addition, the Qatari state-owned companies Qatar Airways and Visit Qatar will be present on the perimeter boards of the German stadiums (cf. UEFA, 2024). According to the quoted Simon Chadwick, this is an attempt to show internal strength to the Chinese spectators of the European Championship and to conquer the European economic market (Houben, 2024).

The thesis is structured around the hypothesis that these organizations may play a significant role in shaping public opinion, bolstering international status, and opening new avenues for income generation through sportswashing activities. By examining this hypothesis, the thesis will shed light on the mechanisms through which sportswashing operates in these diverse geopolitical landscapes. Furthermore, it will check the responsibilities and actions of international sports bodies like FIFA,

UEFA and IOC. In the same context, will also be looked at the political leaders of these countries and what advantages/disadvantages they gain from sportswashing. The aim is to understand whether their decisions regarding the hosting of events serve to prevent sportswashing or, conversely, whether they may inadvertently support it.

2. Theory

An attempt is now being made to give the idea of sportswashing a useful concept for studying global governance. This is done by linking this term with the theory of soft power and then looking at the origin of the political science methodology of "washing" and defining what other forms exist. Based on Joseph S. Nye Jr.'s theory from his paper "Soft Power", using sport events to generate more power can be categorized as a soft power (cf. Nye, 1990).

The concept of soft power is described as a way of exercising power that is more attractive than traditional means. "It occurs when one country gets other countries to want what it wants, which can be called co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants." (Nye, 1990, p. 166). By hosting major sporting events, a country can present itself more weightily in terms of foreign policy and show the whole world what its country has to offer. An image of the country is generated to show that it is able to create a functioning infrastructure and a welcoming attitude towards the world. Additionally, Soft power is associated "with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions. Soft co-optive power is just as important as hard command power. If a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes." (cf. Nye, 1990, p. 167). This allows the political rulers of these countries to consolidate their power internally, for example to be more popular in election campaigns.

A. The social and economic motivations to host a sport mega event for nation states

For this sub question, the power dynamic between the nation-states and these organizations will be examined. It should also be made clear that sport organizations exercise influence over these nation-states. Does this give them "soft power", or does it also lie with the host countries? To what extent is it divided if it is divided at all?

From a rationalist perspective, the decision to host grand sporting events transcends the mere love of sport, embodying a calculated strategy aimed at reaping benefits such as economic prosperity, enhanced international reputation, and political legitimacy (cf. Waltz, 1979). This theoretical viewpoint suggests that such decisions are the product of a thorough analysis where the potential rewards are meticulously weighed against the anticipated costs and challenges (such as international scrutiny and financial investment). This mechanism must now be divided into two parts: firstly, it is about why the states want to host a major sporting event in their country. This is firstly about the intrinsic motivation of the nation states to aggressively compete for an event. The possible outcomes will be critically analysed later. By relating rationalist theory to the sportswashing phenomenon, the work hereby attempts to shed light on the strategic logic underlying the decisions of nations and sports organizations on the international stage. This approach not only improves the understanding of sportswashing as a calculated political and economic manoeuvre, but also sheds light on the impact of such strategies on global sport politics and international relations.

B. The geopolitical implications of sportswashing

The second sub question now relates to the outcomes of this new geopolitical strategy for the two selected countries. It critically examines the extent to which the goals and the actual achievements in these two countries differ and where they are similar. In addition to the literature and content analysis, experts are asked for their opinions in order to obtain a more differentiated picture.

	<i>Qatar</i>	<i>Russia</i>
<i>Public Opinion</i>	<i>Impact on national pride and attention diversion from domestic issues</i>	<i>Increase in nationalistic feelings and political power consolidation.</i>
<i>International Status</i>	<i>Improvements in diplomatic relations and softening of international criticisms</i>	<i>Enhanced global perception as a sports and geopolitical power</i>
<i>Income Generation</i>	<i>Economic benefits from tourism, infrastructure, and foreign investments</i>	<i>Revenue from tourism, media rights, and local business impacts</i>

Table 1: Geopolitical Implications

The table above illustrates these geopolitical implications more vividly. On the one hand, it is divided into the two cases (Qatar and Russia) and on the other hand into the three sub-factors (Public Opinion, International Status, and Income Generation). This subdivision serves to look at both domestic and foreign audiences and to do justice to the interdisciplinary nature of this geopolitical strategy. Any differences that may arise in the two countries should also be considered.

This more argumentative approach is intended to enrich the analysis in order to get to the bottom of questions such as the one raised by Boykoff about the meaningfulness of this strong influence and power of sports organizations (cf. Boykoff, 2022).

C. The influence and power of large sports organizations

The complicated balancing act between sport and politics, especially in the context of sportswashing, requires an analytical view that can analyse the strategic moves of nations and organizations. This is where rationalism, traditionally rooted in political science and international relations, comes into play as a key theoretical framework. It posits that actor—be they states, international sports organizations, or individuals—are guided by rationality, pursuing strategies designed to maximize their interests in an environment characterized by scarce resources and competing agendas (cf. Keohane, 1984). This approach is particularly apt for unpacking the motivations behind the actions of countries like Qatar and Russia and organizations such as FIFA and UEFA in their quest to leverage sports for broader political and economic objectives.

Moreover, rationalism provides valuable insights into the decision-making processes of international sports bodies when allocating hosting rights. These entities are perceived as rational actors, driven by objectives that include revenue maximization, global influence expansion, and the promotion of their sport worldwide (cf. Snidal, 1985). This perspective facilitates a deeper exploration into the governance of international sports, uncovering the strategic considerations that influence the distribution of event hosting rights. These sports organizations now have so-called soft power through the mechanism of sportswashing in connection with the staging of major sporting events. This is due to their direct influence, e.g. in the allocation process.

The question arises as to whether these sports organizations are democratic in nature or whether they only want to represent this to the outside world through their seemingly elected councils and presidents. Media reports on corruption repeatedly lead to discourse (cf. Jennings, 2011). This makes it at least debatable whether this power of the sports organizations is legitimate. In addition to the possible lack of legitimacy, the possible missing academic background and thus insufficient education of high-ranking officials in these large sports organizations must also be discussed.

3. Methods

In this bachelor thesis a qualitative comparison of two case studies is conducted. The two cases are the autocratic countries of Russia and Qatar, where a similar power structure of elites ruling the country prevails. This is not to detract from the fact that the phenomenon also occurs in democratic systems. But a selection had to be made and these two countries are known to have experienced a strong form of this new washing. They therefore provide a good basis, with accessible and relevant sources that lend themselves to a structured and accurate analysis.

The mixed-method approach with case studies and a supplementary literature analysis is the most appropriate variant for such a new and unexplored phenomenon, as this design can provide new insights and thus gain new knowledge, making it an increasingly relevant research object and thus attracting attention in the academic milieu. This is important, as it is an increasingly relevant soft power that is helping to abolish hegemony in the political world.

a. About the case studies:

In 2018, Russia hosted the FIFA World Cup and in 2014 the Winter Olympics in Sochi and used these events to enhance its global image and strengthen its national pride. The significant infrastructure improvements for both events boosted the local economy and portrayed Russia as a welcoming host country. Despite international criticism over political motives and human rights issues, these events were central to Russia's strategy to enhance its global image and unite its citizens under the banner of sporting success and hospitality.

In 2022, Qatar hosted the FIFA World Cup, becoming the first country in the Middle East to host this prestigious event. The tournament was a monumental undertaking for Qatar, involving massive infrastructure developments, including the construction of state-of-the-art stadiums and extensive improvements to transportation systems. While the event was seen as an opportunity for Qatar to showcase its progress and hospitality, it also attracted global attention regarding labour practices and human rights issues. Nonetheless, the World Cup significantly raised Qatar's international profile and was a key element in the country's strategic efforts to diversify its economy and reduce its dependence on the hydrocarbon industry.

Both Russia and Qatar used the major sporting events to enhance their international status and demonstrate their organizational capabilities on a global scale. Although both countries faced international criticism regarding human rights and labour conditions, they used these events to boost their national pride and spur economic development through significant infrastructure improvements. These similarities highlight how countries use sport as a strategic tool to enhance their global image.

b. Data collection:

The thesis uses a mixed-methods approach for collecting data. To collect data for the subsequent analysis, a data set must be created from which the information can be drawn. This data set consists of primary and/or secondary sources and can be compiled individually. Ideally, both forms are used.

Secondary data is obtained by reading and summarizing existing research on the topic, understanding 15-20 newspaper articles, journal articles and books and seeing how they can provide an academic framework for the thesis.

i. *Academic publications*

To find literature the PRISMA approach was followed (cf. Sarkis-Onofre, 2021). The PRISMA method (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) is an evidence-based guideline intended to provide transparent and comprehensive reporting of systematic reviews and meta-analyses.

Accordingly, using the keywords "sportswashing" and "soft power", Internet searches were done in

Web of Science (<https://www.webofscience.com/wos>) and Scopus (<https://www.scopus.com/>). The fee-paying research interface Web of Science has been in the hands of Clarivate since 2016 and thus continues to be indirectly owned by Thomson Reuters. and Scopus is a mainly pay-for database that is provided by the publisher Elsevier since 2004.

This initial search yielded 12 articles. Then the first layer of inclusion rules was applied. The inclusion rules for this SLR are as follows:

1. The articles were published in English or German language.
2. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters and conference papers were considered.
3. Articles should explicitly address sportswashing or soft power in the context of international sporting events.
4. Articles must demonstrate clear research methodology.

In addition, a reference to the Qatar and Russia case studies would be beneficial. This process resulted in 8 articles suitable for inclusion.

ii. Media publications

Media reports from two major German newspapers were used to build a dataset of public knowledge on the two sporting events which are studied here.

The first newspaper is the "Süddeutsche", which is based in Munich (Bavaria) and is perceived as left-liberal. The second selected newspaper "Die Zeit", located in Hamburg, also has a liberal orientation and claims to constantly contrast opinions to encourage a change of perspective. These two magazines were selected because they are the most widely published and read in Germany and are therefore among the leading media. They stimulate discussion and cannot always be classified in a clear political position. The databases of the two different newspapers were then searched for the terms "sportswashing" in connection with "Qatar" and "Russia" and 3 relevant ones each were found for Russia and Qatar in "Süddeutsche" and 3 about Qatar and 2 about Russia in "Die Zeit".

iii. In-depth interviews

To further enrich the analysis, interviews with experts who have direct experience with the cases of Russia and Qatar were also conducted. The questions and answers are listed below in the appendix. These experts were selected based on their knowledge, experience, and proximity to the events studied, ensuring a comprehensive and informed view of the topic. Interviewees were chosen based on several criteria, including their expertise in sports management, international relations, or economics related to major sports events. Preference was given to those who had conducted extensive research on these countries. The goal was to include experts whose work directly addresses issues of sportswashing, soft power, or the geopolitical impacts of sports events.

In-depth interviews were conducted for the primary data. In this case, an interview is first conducted with a researcher who has already conducted research in this area. This makes the phenomenon even more understandable. For this thesis, this researcher will be X from the University of Stavanger, Norway. To do this, the two cases must be examined in more detail, this topic was also discussed with Y. He is a professor of sports management at the Sporthochschule Köln and shed light on the economic perspective on the topic of sportswashing.

c. Method of data analysis:

A useful methodology must be used for the final analysis of the data and information collected by the researcher. In this thesis, this will be done through content analysis. This should provide an overview of whether this mechanism, such as sportswashing in this case, generates positive effects for the country or whether it is not as effective, so that practicing countries can put themselves in a better position economically and diplomatically.

The text corpus will be analysed using deductive content analysis using a codebook based on the extant literature on sportswashing and soft power. Deductive content analysis is a method in which the structure of the analysis is operationalized based on existing knowledge or theory. This approach is suitable for testing theories in new contexts or for comparing categories in different environments (cf. Elo et al, 2008). This is included in the report on the qualitative content analysis process by Elo & Kyngäs (2008). The program Atlas.TI will be used for the literature analysis so that the relevant data is clearly coded, and it is easy to see where the various data was obtained from. A coding scheme can be found in the appendix. For the transcription of the interviews with the experts, either the transcription tool in Teams will be used to be able to access the new data after the interview has been conducted.

Additionally, will be used Udo Kuckartz's qualitative content analysis methodology to supplement the deductive approach. Kuckartz employs a methodical, rule-based approach that is adaptable to a broad range of situations and research questions. Kuckartz claims that qualitative content analysis involves the methodical creation of categories while making sure that theoretical conclusions are simultaneously taken into consideration and the analysis is retained in the data (cf. Kuckartz, 2014). This entails a cyclical process of classification, theorization, and coding that enables a thorough comprehension of the content. This study will employ Kuckartz's methodology, which is an organized, iterative process for improving categories and codes to make sure they appropriately represent the data gathered. With the use of this technique, sportswashing can be better understood in terms of its effects on diplomatic and economic stances by pointing out trends and themes.

d. Summary

	SQ1	SQ2	SQ3
Academic Literature	X	X	
Media Reports	X	X	X
Interviews	X	X	X

Table 2: Insights of explored sources

The academic literature provides answers to sub-question 1 and sub-question 2. It should be mentioned that the academic literature offers the theory of soft power to answer sub-question 2. This is supported by the media reports, which show the power and influence of sports organisations such as FIFA and the IOC, and by the interviews, which suggest the undemocratic structures and allegations of corruption against these organisations. The media reports and the interviews offer contradictory evidence to the academic literature by revealing instances of human rights abuses and corruption that undermine the positive narrative. For example, the media reports criticise FIFA's empty promises regarding human rights investigations in Qatar and the allegations of corruption in the awarding of the World Cup to Russia and Qatar. The actuality of the academic literature and interviews in contrast to the older media publications should also be mentioned.

In this respect, the academic literature offers very little insight into the answer to sub-question 3. Although there is a critical academic examination of sports organisations as such, it is not directly related to their influence on the topic of sportswashing. The main contribution of this thesis is therefore to expand the state of knowledge by analysing all three sub-questions comprehensively. This is done through the inclusion of media reports and interviews, which provide detailed insights and critical perspectives that have been lacking in the academic literature to date in this context.

4. Results

The results of this study are categorized into three sections: insights from academic literature, reflections from the media, and insights from interviews. Each section highlights different aspects of how sportswashing influences the nation states, the geopolitical landscape, and the sport organizations.

a. The social and economic motivations to host a sport mega event for nation states

i. *Academic insights*

According to academic research, holding these kinds of events gives nations a chance to demonstrate their desire to interact with other countries and attract investment opportunities. As Simon Chadwick (2019) points out, "It permits individual countries from the region an opportunity to signal their desire to engage with other nations and to perhaps acquire preferential access to investment opportunities" (as cited in Taylor, Burdsey, & Jarvis, 2023, p. 371).

Organizing sporting events can have positive effects on the economy, society, and internal development in addition to these benefits. Aiming to become a modern, diversified economy, Qatar has made extensive investments in sports infrastructure as part of its long-term vision (Qatar National Vision 2030) (cf. Dubinsky, 2024). According to Grix, Dinsmore and Brannagan, one of the most prominent motivations for hosting mega-events is the potential for accelerated economic development (cf. Grix et al., 2023). Large-scale infrastructure projects are required for these events, including public works, housing, and transportation, which might not be possible without the strict deadlines set by the event. David Black notes that hosting such events provides uncommon access to public finances, enabling large-scale development projects that can stimulate economic growth (cf. Black, 2008). "Qatar recognises that it must modernise their society and diversify their economy to be able to maintain a high standard of living for future generations. By investing in infrastructure, public services and advanced technology, Qatar seeks to continue its economic growth and increase the standard of living while becoming more environmentally friendly along the way" (Søyland & Moriconi, 2022, p.358).

Hence, hosting events can be used as justification for dealing with these domestic issues. As Boykoff explains, "sportswashing can also emerge in putative democracies where sports mega events distract the public from unjust processes like gentrification, homelessness, and hyper-policing" (Boykoff, 2022, p.343).

Moreover, athletic events have the potential to bring about wider societal changes. Grix contend that holding big events starts a positive cycle that enhances public health, national identity, and athletic performance (cf. Grix et al., 2023). These social benefits extend beyond the event itself, contributing to long-term national development. Hosting major sporting events also allows countries to showcase their capabilities, promoting national pride and unity. Mega-sports events can stimulate social and political change at home, according to Ettinger. Examples include the democratization in South Korea following the Seoul Olympics and the enhanced understanding of people with disabilities after the Tokyo Paralympics (cf. Ettinger, 2023). However, the record of sport-induced democratization is mixed, with outcomes varying based on the host country's specific context. Ettinger notes that "the most grandiose claim – and one of the oldest – is that sports can be a force for peace," (Ettinger, 2023, p.538) although this remains more aspirational than evidenced in practice.

Academic research therefore underscores that hosting major sporting events brings up infrastructure development and strengthening of national identity. The rationalist viewpoint that emerges from the sub-question suggests that the decision to host these events represents a calculated move toward boosting political legitimacy and economic prosperity rather than just being motivated by a simple passion for sports.

ii. *Reflections from the Media on Russian Events*

Like the academic literature, the media reports find that Russia had strong social and economic interests in hosting international athletic events like the FIFA World Cup and the Sochi Winter Olympics. The significant financial investment in these events is justified by the expected long-term advantages of regional transformation and infrastructure development. For instance, the entire region

was transformed for the Winter Olympics in Sochi thanks to investments totalling 15 billion rubles. Roads, accommodation, and sports facilities were built as part of this, transforming Sochi into a contemporary centre that would draw in more investment and travellers in the future. The financial burden was significant, though, with state-controlled banks providing most of the funding, which raised questions about the projects' long-term viability. (cf. Aumüller, 2014).

Similarly, wider societal change is also noted to be an expected benefit of these events. These events were viewed as chances to strengthen social cohesion and national pride despite their high costs. By improving the nation's sporting facilities and building locations that could be utilized for upcoming events, the building of new stadiums and sports complexes aims to bring long-term benefits. The "Süddeutsche", however, also raised questions about whether these pricey venues would be properly utilized after the event and raised concerns about their future utility. The complex socioeconomic landscape of Russia is highlighted by the contrast between the significant investment in sports infrastructure and the increasing poverty in certain areas of the country (cf. Hans, 2018).

The political ripple effects of these investments were also highlighted in the media coverage, which noted that although these kinds of activities can boost infrastructure and spur economic growth, they also help to strengthen the domestic legitimacy of the in-power government. Russia sought to show its citizens that it was a modern, progressive country and that it could handle large-scale projects by organizing successful international events (cf. Aumüller, 2014). This method fits in with the larger plan of using sports as a vehicle for social cohesion and national development.

iii. Reflections from the Media on World Cup in Qatar

There are strong social and economic reasons for Qatar to host the FIFA World Cup in 2022, with an emphasis on expanding its economy and enhancing working conditions. The "Deutsche Presse Agentur" in the "Süddeutsche" highlight the important changes made in advance of the event, including the creation of dispute resolution committees and improved worker heat protection. These changes aim to guarantee that the advantages of hosting the World Cup go beyond the competition and enhance working conditions for the significant migrant workforce. Notwithstanding these initiatives, problems persist, such as persistent problems with wage theft and unlawful recruitment fees, underscoring the challenges in putting such broad reforms into practice (cf. dpa, Süddeutsche Zeitung , 2024).

State-of-the-art sports facilities, roads, and hotels are just a few examples of the substantial infrastructure investments that are part of the World Cup's economic plan. These expenditures are a part of Qatar's larger plan to boost tourism and draw in foreign capital in order to lessen its reliance on hydrocarbon earnings. Building new infrastructure is anticipated to help Qatar achieve its long-term economic diversification objectives by establishing it as a major international sports and tourism destination (cf. Kistner, 2022).

Socially, the "Süddeutsche" draws attention to how these investments affect Qatar's sizable migrant population, which makes up almost 90% of the country's total population (cf. Kistner, 2022). Although implementation is still uneven, the introduction of a minimum wage and the elimination of the kafala system represent important steps towards improving working conditions. While the World Cup has drawn attention to these issues, the "Zeit" coverage notes that much work needs to be done to ensure that reforms are fully realized and benefit all workers (cf. Siemes, 2022).

The media's overall analysis shows that the expected long-term economic and social benefits are the primary drivers behind Russia and Qatar's decision to host major athletic events. In line with larger national development strategies, these events are viewed as chances to improve labour conditions and changing the economic agenda . These ambitious projects have a strong justification in the potential benefits, despite their high costs and obstacles.

iv. Insights from the interviews

As already mentioned in the previous evidences, the main reasons for organising major sporting events such as the Olympic Games or the Football World Cup are social cohesion and economic development. One of the interviewees emphasised that the possibility of faster economic development is one of the main reasons why cities and nations bid for these events. Significant investment in infrastructure is required to prepare for such events, including modernising public transport, transforming airports and launching urban development initiatives. Although these investments are expensive upfront, they benefit the host city in the long term and increase its economic growth potential. According to the interviewee, cities have the rare opportunity to access public funds that would otherwise not be available to them, allowing them to realise important projects that can boost economic growth.

Another important factor is tourism. Major sporting events have a positive impact on tourism because they receive a lot of media attention and international exposure. The host nation is more appealing to tourists because of the surge of travellers during the events and the resulting improvement in its reputation worldwide. In particular, Qatar's plan to host the World Cup was a component of a larger initiative to diversify its economy and lessen its dependency on the hydrocarbon sector by luring in foreign investment and tourists.

Furthermore, these occasions are essential for promoting social cohesiveness and a sense of pride in the country. Big sporting events, which highlight the accomplishments and capabilities of the country, can foster a sense of pride and unity among the populace. This is a crucial component for regimes looking to increase their domestic legitimacy. One interviewee cited the traditional "bread and circuses" strategy, in which governments sponsor entertainment to keep the citizenry occupied and diverted from internal problems, as a major reason for organizing such events.

Major sporting events can also help the nation achieve its internal development objectives. As an illustration, Qatar's large investments in sports infrastructure, which include building cutting-edge stadiums and developing sports facilities, are consistent with its long-term goal of developing into a modern, diversified economy. In addition to meeting the immediate needs of the athletic events, these infrastructure improvements also advance the nation's larger development goals and raise the standard of living for its people.

There are inherent advantages to having the chance to represent the nation's hospitality and culture on a worldwide scale, this is also explicitly mentioned in the academic and journalism community. By welcoming foreign guests and media, the host country can promote its hospitality and cultural legacy, strengthening its sense of national identity. This can improve social cohesion by fortifying ties within the community and encouraging a feeling of belonging among residents. This is also one of the main reasons for organising sporting events in democratic, western countries.

Nation states fight fiercely for the right to host events because they want to demonstrate their capabilities, promote patriotism, and solve internal problems. Sportswashing is a deliberate tactic based on careful analysis that carefully weighs the potential benefits against the expected costs and challenges, as this strategic logic shows. These findings highlight the far-reaching impact of these tactics on international relations and sports policy worldwide. These events support economic diversification and infrastructure development, as noted in academic reports. Media coverage of Qatar highlights labour reforms and economic restructuring, while coverage of Russia also emphasises the enhancement of the political status of politicians in power. The strengthening of social cohesion and tourism are also mentioned in expert interviews. Both Russia and Qatar use sportswashing to achieve these benefits and promote national unity.

b. The geopolitical implications of sportswashing

i. *Academic Insights*

Academic research shows how countries use major international sporting events to further their geopolitical goals and raise their profile internationally. In his paper, Yoav Dubinsky highlights how Qatar used the FIFA World Cup to demonstrate its power in the Middle East (cf. Dubinsky, 2024). Qatar wanted to maintain its national prominence without taking center stage alongside its neighboring Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations, so it branded the celebration as a regional celebration. This strategy highlights Qatar's difficult regional situation, which is characterized by tense relations with Saudi Arabia and the other GCC countries because of its connections to Iran and other radical groups. Expanding upon Dubinsky's analysis, Boykoff discusses the repercussions of sportswashing, contending that it affects domestic and international politics in addition to enhancing one's image (cf. Boykoff, 2022). According to Boykoff, sportswashing can foster an atmosphere in domestic politics that is conducive to taking bold measures, like military interventions. This was demonstrated by the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, which strengthened Russian nationalism and weakened domestic opposition to the country's subsequent annexation of Crimea. This example shows how creating a positive home environment through sportswashing can come before using strong power.

Sportswashing's place in Qatar's foreign policy is further explained by Søyland and Moriconi (cf. Søyland & Moriconi, 2022). They contend that Qatar is trying to reinvent itself as a contemporary, progressive, and powerful player in the world through its massive investments in international sports, which include organizing large-scale events and purchasing European football teams. This tactic is part of a larger trend in which autocratic states with abundant natural resources use sports to boost their international standing and fortify diplomatic ties.

Ettinger, however, adds to this conversation by talking about the advantages of hosting important sporting events in terms of soft power (cf. Ettinger, 2023). He points out that non-Western nations can improve their standing in international politics by effectively hosting such events, which can signal their independence and competence. China's 2008 Beijing Olympics hosting marked its emergence as a global superpower, demonstrating how reputational capital can be translated into diplomatic influence and economic opportunities.

The sub-question can be answered with the help of these scientific findings in terms of the extent to which a country can achieve geopolitical goals and improve its international standing by hosting major international sporting events. During the FIFA World Cup, Qatar sorted out the complicated relations within the Gulf Cooperation Council and improved its regional power. Russia strengthened nationalism with the 2014 Winter Olympics, thereby also legitimising the annexation of Crimea. Both nations used sportswashing to advance their geopolitical goals, strengthen diplomatic relations and improve their international reputation. In addition, this tactic demonstrates the nations' competence and independence on the global stage while strengthening their soft power.

ii. *Reflections from the Media*

Supplementary to the academic literature media analyses shed important light on the geopolitical ramifications of sportswashing by showing how countries use major international sporting events to shape perceptions both at home and abroad. President Vladimir Putin of Russia strategically used the 2018 FIFA World Cup and the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi to boost Russia's reputation internationally and instill a sense of patriotism. The Olympics in Sochi were a crucial component of Putin's plan, according to "Die Zeit," to restore Russia's position as a global powerhouse (cf. Voswinkel, 2014). In addition to serving as a demonstration of organizational skill, the event served as a means of bringing the domestic public together and preparing them for the annexation of Crimea later on. Aggressive geopolitical actions were made possible by the Olympics' promotion of resilience and national pride. The 2018 FIFA World Cup is cited by "Süddeutsche Zeitung" as a further example

of sportswashing in Russia. Despite global censure regarding measures like the seizure of Crimea and engagement in Syria, the World Cup presented a picture of power and competence. The occasion served to dispel unfavourable ideas and show that Russia was capable of organizing a major international gathering, enhancing its reputation abroad and sturdiness (cf. Hans, 2018).

Regarding Qatar, media analyses highlight the country's calculated use of the 2022 FIFA World Cup to increase its geopolitical clout. According to the Deutsche Presse-Agentur in the "Süddeutsche Zeitung", Qatar's World Cup hosting is a component of a larger strategic initiative to solidify its position in a volatile region (cf. dpa, 2022). Qatar hopes to strengthen its security against threats from larger neighbours like Saudi Arabia and Iran by investing in international sports and hosting important events. The tiny country of Qatar, which is situated between the 142- and 185-times larger countries of Iran and Saudi Arabia, has long opposed Saudi hegemony in the area. The German researcher Dr. Daniel Fromm explains in this article that "the more people talk about Qatar, the more it networks, and the more the world becomes aware of its existence, the safer the country becomes." This reduces the likelihood of Saudi Arabia intervening in Qatar. "Die Zeit" goes on to explain how the World Cup has strengthened Arab unanimity, which serves as a deterrent to violence within the region. The occasion has greatly enhanced Qatar's visibility, demonstrating its capacity to impact global politics and athletics despite its tiny size. This triumphant hosting has illustrated Qatar's astute use of sportswashing to raise its stature internationally and expand its diplomatic reach (cf. Blomberg, 2022).

Further geopolitical effects of sportswashing become clear through media analyses. Russia used the 2018 FIFA World Cup and the 2014 Winter Olympics to boost its national pride and reclaim its place as a superpower in the world. Qatar strategically used the 2022 FIFA World Cup to strengthen its geopolitical clout, build alliances and enhance its security against regional threats and raise its international profile. This helped to extend the country's diplomatic reach and ward off potential aggression in its neighbourhood.

iii. Insights from the Interviews

The expert interviews provide a further nuance to the insights we have gained from the academic literature and media publications on the geopolitical impact of sportswashing. These insights show how nations intentionally employ international sporting events to sway both local and foreign audiences.

An interview with a researcher specializing in the socio-political impacts of sportswashing highlighted the strategic success of Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. The interviewee claimed that the event broke all previous records for TV viewership and garnered international attention, making it a noteworthy accomplishment for Qatar. In spite of unfavourable portrayals in certain Western media, especially in Germany, the event was seen beneficial in other regions of the world. The interviewee observed that as the tournament went on, the focus shifted more toward the sports event itself and less toward criticisms related to environmental and human rights issues. With this change in emphasis, Qatar was able to effectively present a favourable image on the global stage.

Additional observations from a different specialist highlighted the advantages of sportswashing on the domestic front in autocratic states such as Qatar. The interviewee made the observation that bringing in elite athletes and planning high-profile sporting events diverts the attention of the local populace from urgent political and social problems. For example, sportswashing in Qatar offers entertainment that deflects attention away from problems like economic inequality, gender inequality, and a lack of democracy. This tactic lessens public discontent while simultaneously boosting national pride and preserving domestic stability.

The interviewee furthermore talked about the wider international consequences of sportswashing, pointing out that these occasions facilitate direct communication with world leaders and open diplomatic channels. This is especially important in less democratic nations where there is little public discussion of these kinds of issues. According to the expert, where public opinion is more easily

shaped by the government as in developing nations or those under autocratic regimes the benefits of sportswashing may be more noticeable. In these situations, sportswashing successfully raises the nation's profile internationally and cultivates diplomatic ties that might otherwise be difficult to forge.

Interviews show that hosting major sporting events helps nations to divert attention from political issues at home and open diplomatic channels among those in power. According to academic evidence, Qatar used the World Cup to assert its regional power and cultivate relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council, while Russia used the 2014 Winter Olympics to boost nationalism and facilitate the annexation of Crimea. Media analyses show that Russia used these events to regain superpower status while Qatar strengthened its own security.

The subquestion can be answered with these approaches.

c. The influence of large sports organizations

i. *Academic insights*

The existing academic literature identifies a significant research gap in understanding the full scope of sports organizations' influence on the sportswashing process. While their role is recognized, more research is required to investigate the mechanisms and consequences of their actions in greater detail. The academic literature on sportswashing emphasizes the important role that large sports organizations like FIFA and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) play in facilitating the process. According to Jonathan Grix, FIFA and the IOC act as "undemocratic and unvoted, guardians" of major global sports events, which they can award to any country regardless of its human rights record or political system (cf. Grix, Dinsmore, & Brannagan, 2023, p. 11). This undemocratic structure enables these organizations to sell prestigious cultural products to the highest bidder, frequently disregarding ethical concerns.

Grix goes on to explain how these sports organizations help to mainstream peripheral states into the global economy by hosting mega-events. This process benefits both the host country and the Western entities involved because it allows the West to maintain its as Wearing (2022) said, "self-serving mythology" of moral superiority while criticizing the host countries' human rights violations. This dynamic allows Western nations to maintain a "narcissistic sense of western innocence." (as cited in Grix, Dinsmore, & Brannagan, 2023, p. 10).

ii. *Media Reports on FIFA and IOC in Russia*

The significant role FIFA plays in the sportswashing process is highlighted by media coverage complementary to the scientific literature from the German newspaper "Süddeutsche Zeitung" regarding Russia's hosting of major sporting events, including the FIFA World Cup. The integrity of the bidding process was a major source of concern. Michael Garcia, a FIFA investigator, found a few irregularities, such as business dealings between Gazprom and Cypriot official Marios Lefkaritis, and Franz Beckenbauer's appointment as a paid sports ambassador after he voted for Russia. Further raising suspicions of corruption was the Russian bidding committee's destruction of computers before investigators could examine data (cf. Hans, 2018).

Besides that, Russia was formally charged by the American legal system with bribing FIFA officials in order to win the World Cup bid. The indictment specifically stated that Caribbean official Jack Warner had allegedly received five million dollars from Russian officials. Russia continuously denied any misconduct in the face of these charges, characterizing them as attempts to sabotage their successful bid. These alleged corrupt practices were made possible by FIFA's lack of accountability and transparency in its operations, which highlights FIFA's major role in allowing sportswashing by nations like Russia to manipulate the hosting process for geopolitical gains (cf. Aumüller & Kistner, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2020).

iii. Media Reports on FIFA and IOC in Qatar

Similar problems with influence and corruption within FIFA are revealed by Aumüller and Kistner, who were visible during Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup hosting. The investigation into Qatar's bid uncovered anomalies, including the 33-million-dollar sale of property by Cypriot FIFA official Marios Lefkaritis to a state fund in Qatar and the significant dinner at the Élysée Palace that brought together Michel Platini, the French president, and the Emir of Qatar. Platini, former president of UEFA, later endorsed Qatar's bid. FIFA's facilitation of such practices is evident in the media scrutiny, which implies that Qatar's actions were part of a larger strategy to secure the World Cup through financial incentives and high-level political influence (cf. Aumüller & Kistner, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2020).

Moreover, the media has admonished FIFA for its ineffective response to human rights concerns in Qatar. Despite FIFA President Gianni Infantino's promises to establish a compensation fund for migrant workers and build a trade union in Doha, these commitments have largely gone unfulfilled. Human Rights Watch Germany Director Wenzel Michalski described these commitments as "empty promises," implying that FIFA officials have little regard for human rights and only act when absolutely necessary. This lack of enforcement and accountability has allowed Qatar to use the World Cup to project a reformed image while continuing to violate labour rights (cf. dpa, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2024).

According to media reports in the "*Süddeutsche Zeitung*", FIFA played a decisive role in enabling the sportswashing of Russia and Qatar by failing to take countermeasures due to corruption and a lack of transparency internally. The investigations uncovered dodgy dealings, bribery, and inadequate responses to human rights abuses, allowing both countries to exploit these events to enhance their international image. FIFA's actions show that it is complicit in helping these countries project a reformed image while flouting ethical standards.

iv. Insights from the interviews

The impact of influential sports organizations such as FIFA and the IOC on the sportswashing process was emphasized by the interviewees, mainly because of their decision-making frameworks and corruption vulnerabilities. This is essential to expand on what has been previously explored in academic literature and media reports. The IOC functions like a private club, with members choosing who gets to join and make decisions regarding the Olympic Games, as one interviewee noted. This undemocratic system gives a select few, unaccountable people tremendous influence over which nations get to host the games. Similar weaknesses exist in FIFA's decision-making procedure, which gives each member nation one vote regardless of size or power. As demonstrated by the case of Qatar, where representatives of smaller countries were allegedly bought off to vote for Qatar over England, this structure makes it easier for smaller, less scrutinized nations to be influenced by corruption.

The same interviewee clarified that FIFA and the IOC frequently assert that they do not combine politics and sports, a position he called "intellectually lazy." He emphasized that sports have always involved politics, pointing out that these organizations have a long history of engaging in geopolitical gamesmanship. FIFA and the IOC's unwillingness to recognize the political implications of their actions has made them vulnerable to abuse for sportswashing, a practice in which countries utilize major international sporting events to tarnish their reputations abroad.

A supplemental interviewee connected FIFA and the IOC to unethical behavior and a dearth of openness. He mentioned seeing a documentary about the multiple scandals involving FIFA, which included strong proof of corruption, especially during the World Cup awarding process for Qatar. The interviewee was appalled to discover that FIFA officials had admitted that autocratic leaders are favoured over democracies in hosting these mega-events because they can make decisions without facing public opposition. In comparison, public referendums in democratic countries frequently reject the hefty expenses of holding such events. For instance, financial and environmental concerns led to the rejection of Hamburg's bid for the Winter Olympics in a referendum.

The interviewee also mentioned the considerable political and economic weight of the organisations resulting from their control over sponsorship, media rights and the allocation of events. This concentration of power allows them to exert considerable influence, often in an opaque manner. The interviewee accused these organisations of hypocrisy, as they claim to support democratic and transparent values, but often ignore them when hosts fail to comply. By ignoring the actions of host countries, FIFA and the IOC enable sportswashing, as evidenced by this inconsistency, which undermines their credibility.

The information gathered from the interviews highlights the crucial role that sports organisations play in the process of sportswashing, this is important in terms of answering the third sub-question about the influence of sports organizations in this process.

Now that the first two sub-questions have been analysed in detail and it is clear that sport can lead to positive national and geopolitical outcomes, the final sub-question will be discussed. This is very closely related to the overarching research question of this thesis.

The interviews show that susceptibility to corruption and the decision-making processes of FIFA and the IOC are key factors in sportswashing. Academic research complements how these organisations enable sportswashing by awarding events to nations regardless of their political structures. This is underpinned by media reports exposing FIFA's corruption and lack of accountability, which enable Qatar and Russia to use sporting events as a political tool.

International sports organisations have an influence on sportswashing because they provide a stage for nations such as Russia and Qatar to demonstrate their soft power and enhance their international standing by using major international sporting events to promote their geopolitical agendas.

5. Discussion

The main conclusions of this study highlight the important part that major sports organizations such as FIFA and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) play in the process of sports deception. These organizations frequently function with little accountability or transparency, which allows nations like Qatar and Russia to use major international sporting events to boost their international standing and divert attention from internal problems. According to the research, these organizations' undemocratic nature and considerable economic cachet enable them to support sportswashing by giving important events to nations with dubious human rights records (Grix, 2022). Therefore, the answer to the overarching research question is how do international sports organizations and the unique geopolitical landscapes of Qatar and Russia influence the practice and outcomes of sportswashing in enhancing national prestige and soft power?

The way that sports organizations are portrayed as creating an effect on the sportswashing process is generally consistent across the sources. The lack of transparency and potential for corruption within FIFA and the IOC are regularly brought up in both academic literature and media reports. The convergence of scholarly research and media reports highlights the wider agreement regarding the detrimental role that sports organizations play in encouraging sportswashing. Interviews conducted during this research echoed these concerns.

These results are consistent with previous research and media coverage on the manipulation of sporting events to advance particular geopolitical narratives. The German news magazine "Tagesschau" reveals that, one glaring example of how sporting events can be used to spread propaganda and sway public opinion is the editing of videos and images during the UEFA EURO 2024 in Germany (cf. Siggelkow, 2024). The ongoing conflict in Ukraine is once again brought to the fore by this manipulation, which also emphasizes how international sporting events can serve as platforms for geopolitical influence through disinformation.

One partly surprising finding is the extent of economic power wielded by sports organizations. FIFA's revenue from the World-Cup year in Qatar 2022 reached \$5.7 billion (cf. Ritter, 2023), which is almost higher than the annual GDP of a smaller European country like Montenegro (\$6.2 billion), which has over 600,000 inhabitants (cf. World Bank, 2024). This demonstrates FIFA's considerable economic power and influence, which are seldom equalled by other global non-governmental organizations. The interviews also demonstrated how these organizations' decision-making procedures can have a major impact on local politics. Examples of the widespread and occasionally unanticipated effects of sportswashing include situations where Middle Eastern investments in European football clubs have impacted local politics and media coverage.

The generalizability and scope of this study are impacted by a number of limitations. First off, qualitative research requires an even larger dataset with more interviews to fill any gaps in the answers to the questionnaire. This would require further interviews with, for example, officials from one of the mentioned sports organisations, journalists from the world's leading media with reference to this field or experts from the two respective countries in order to gain more than just an external perspective. Although pertinent, the findings may not apply to other contexts or democratic countries involved in comparable practices due to the focus on Russia and Qatar. Moreover, even with efforts to include reliable sources, there is a chance that the interpretations of the results will be influenced by potential biases in media reports and interviews. To validate and expand on these findings, future research could benefit from a more varied range of case studies.

These findings have important implications for the way international sport is organised. To prevent them from being misused for sportswashing, sports organisations such as FIFA and the IOC need to be more accountable and transparent. To ensure fair and ethical procedures in the selection and planning of major sporting events, policy makers and interested parties should consider introducing stricter rules and control mechanisms. Further research on the links between international relations, politics and sport is also needed to gain a better understanding of sportswashing and its effects. However, it must also be recognised that the research community in this field of research is still very small and closely networked. This could lead to insufficiently far-reaching results.

Research gaps include the need to investigate the power and influence of sports organizations, which are not always legitimate and democratic players in this process. There is still no oversight or regulation of these organizations, despite the fact that media outlets have only partially revealed these problems. The influence that sports federations have over geopolitical environments, and the world economy has not yet received enough attention in the scholarly discourse. These organizations are not subject to legal supervision or have the necessary legitimacy. Moreover, despite these sports federations' growing significance as global players, there is no division of powers within them.

Further investigation is also required to ascertain the impact of sportswashing on local politics. Saudi Arabia's ownership of football clubs in Newcastle has a significant and often overlooked impact on local politics. This is just one example of how sportswashing works. Similar issues have arisen as a result of Abu Dhabi's investments in Manchester, where they aim to regulate the use of funds and influence local politics. One of the interview partners stated that the Spanish football league has also had instances where press conferences were closed to journalists and where specific questions were forbidden to prevent significant concerns about investments made in the Middle East from being brought up.

Added to this is the indirect influence exerted by state-owned companies that exert influence on clubs and major sporting events, even though they are not in their region. This sponsorship could also lead to a kind of sportswashing without directly organising the event. This also requires further attention.

These results highlight the need for more investigation into the causes and effects of sportswashing, especially in light of the growing power of sports organizations. Future research can contribute to the

development of strategies for reducing the detrimental effects of sportswashing and guaranteeing a more open and equitable global sports environment by filling in these gaps.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, this thesis offers a thorough analysis of sportswashing with a particular emphasis on its causes, mechanisms, and effects in the context of Qatar and Russia's geopolitical environments. The study adds several significant insights to the corpus of current knowledge regarding this subject.

First of all, the study sheds light on the complex relationships that exist between politics, sport, and society. Through the application of a rationalist framework, the study clarifies the strategic utilization of major international sporting events by nations such as Russia and Qatar in order to accomplish economic growth, foster national pride, and improve their international standing. This study emphasizes how complex sportswashing is, with important socio-political and economic ramifications that go beyond simple image enhancement.

Sportswashing is made possible by the significant influence of major sports organizations like FIFA and the IOC, as evidenced by investigations into their roles. These organizations, which are marked by a lack of transparency and accountability, frequently put political and financial gain ahead of morality. The study shows how these organizations' acts support host countries' attempts at sportswashing by exposing instances of corruption and anti-democratic behaviour. This realization necessitates closer examination and change within these institutions to guarantee more moral and open management of international sports.

The thesis also advances the discussion of soft power by connecting it to the practice of sportswashing. It explains how using major sporting events as a soft power tool helps nations project a favourable image abroad, strengthen diplomatic ties, and reap financial rewards. In the cases of Qatar and Russia, where large investments in sports infrastructure and international sporting events have been leveraged to achieve broader geopolitical and economic goals, this strategic use of soft power is especially clear.

Through its qualitative methodology, which combines case studies, literature analysis, and in-depth interviews, the study offers a perspective-rich approach. By highlighting the complexities involved and capturing the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, this approach guarantees a thorough and nuanced understanding of sportswashing. The results highlight the need for additional study on the effects of sportswashing on local politics and the covert influence that state-owned businesses have through sponsorships. The thesis emphasizes the need for changes to the international sports organizations' governance in order to address the effects of sportswashing. Stricter regulations and oversight procedures should be put in place to improve accountability and transparency and stop sporting events from being used improperly for political and financial gain. To create policies that lessen the detrimental impacts of sportswashing and advance a fairer international sports environment, the study also champions a more expansive research agenda that investigates the interaction between sports, politics, and international relations.

To conclude, this thesis not only broadens the knowledge of sportswashing but also lays a vital basis for upcoming studies and the necessary creation of new laws. It adds to the continuing discussion about the moral and political implications of major international sporting events as well as their wider social effects by bringing attention to the calculated use of sports for political and commercial gain.

7. Personal reflection

I would like to report on my learning process during the writing phase in order to reflect on the thesis. Since I was a young child, I have had an intense passion for sports. For me, the Olympic Games, the Football World Cup, and the Euros are always the highlights of the year. Through my academic career and studies, I simultaneously developed a strong passion for international politics, which was fostered by motivating professors and teachers.

I had the extraordinary opportunity to integrate my two passions - international politics and sport - into my Bachelor's thesis. I am very grateful to my supervisor, Le Anh Long, for her support and advice. The topic of the thesis was inspired by the extensive media coverage of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar and my belief that sport should uphold moral principles in society.

I would like to thank my interviewees for their participation in these very insightful interviews. Through researching and writing this thesis, I have gained a comprehensive understanding of how countries use sporting events to pursue political and economic goals, often at the expense of moral values. Even though I can now better understand, from a geopolitical view, why sportswashing is practiced by some nations. My initial gut feeling that sport is often instrumentalized for the wrong purposes has been confirmed in the academic debate. Despite the benefits that sportswashing can have for the organizing countries, I hope that in the future measures and regulations will be taken to keep sport in the hands of the fans and not abuse its broad and powerful impact for political or economic purposes.

Overall, this work has helped me to develop a more critical and reflective view of the role of sport in international politics and to recognize the importance of transparency and ethics in sports governance

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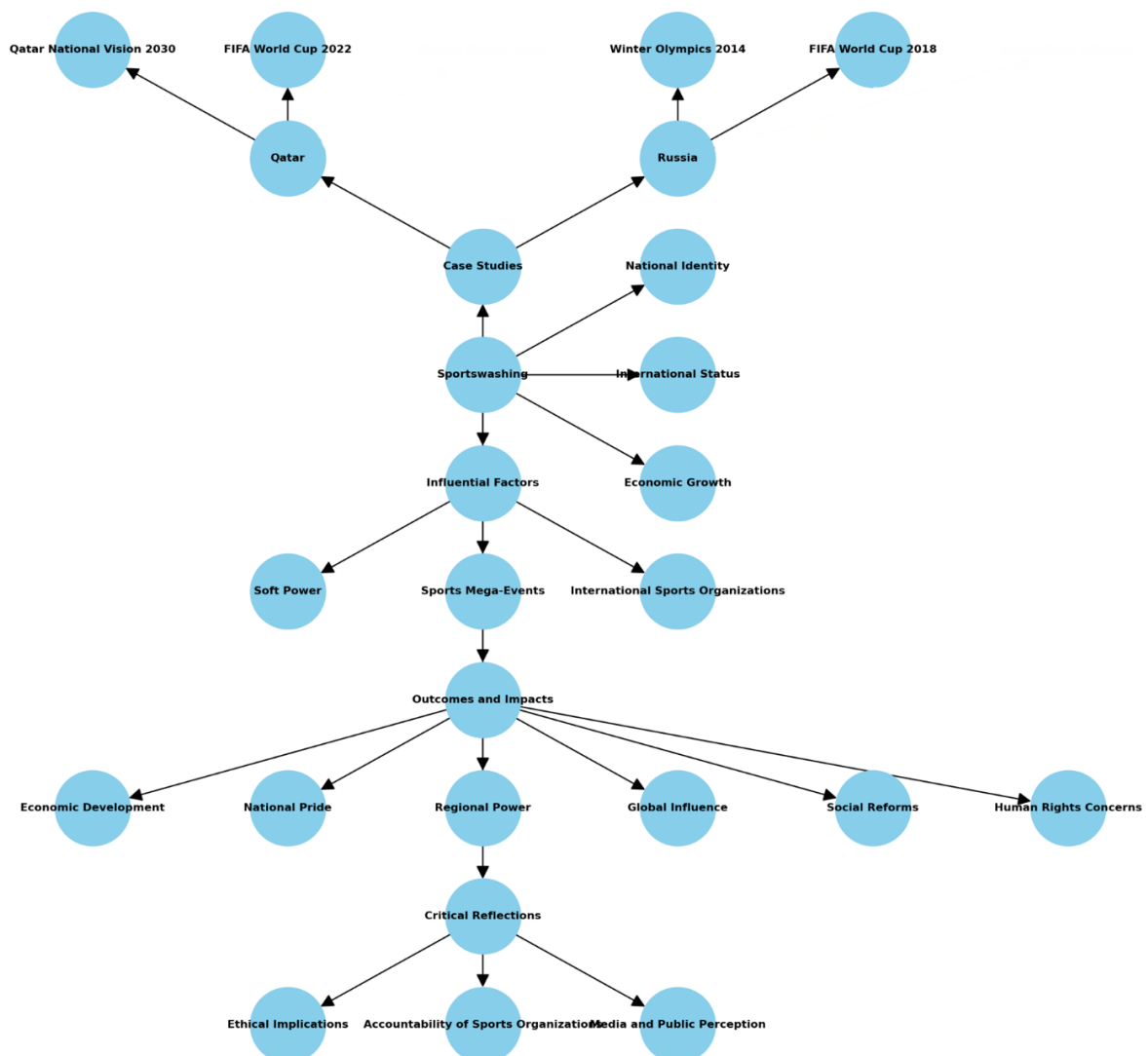
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9. Appendix

Appendix A: Key themes and codes



Appendix B: Questionnaire for the interviews

SQ: Nation states interests

- What does it cost a city/region/country to host a large sports event?
- Why would they want to host the event despite these costs?
- Do you have any thoughts about X (Qatar) and Y (Russia)? Why did the regimes in this country bid to host these events, in your opinion?

SQ: Influence of sport organizations

- Do you know anything about the organizations FIFA and IOC?
- Recently, many people have criticized the amount of (unchecked) power sports organizations have.
- Do you agree with these critiques? Why/why not?

SQ: Geopolitical Implications

- Have you ever heard of sportswashing?
- Do you think the events in Russia and Qatar really are kinds of sportswashing?
- If so (YES), what in your opinion are the geopolitical implications of sportswashing?

Additional Questions

- In your opinion, will this field of research become more relevant in the coming years, or will the peak be reached with the “sportswashing year 2022”?
- How is this concept evolving? Is it becoming a common strategy?
- What do you think needs to be examined more closely in this context?
- Is this concept necessary?

Appendix C: Interview 1 (Transcript from Teams)

SQ: Nation states

Yeah. It's like, of course, one of the currently hot topics in, especially when we are talking about the mega sports events like Olympic Games and and the FIFA World Cup, these two are of course the most important examples of the megasports events that the costs for organizing them is constantly rising is rising at the tremendous pace.

So it includes for the cities many kinds of infrastructure investments, like for instance, very often like something related to public transportation, airport renovations and also like a renovation like street renovations. They have to build a whole new lane for. Transport for like High ranking officials of internationally, the committee and organizing committee.

And at decently like, it includes a lot of green space investments or other like facelifting investments of the cities. And of course, the Olympic Village and the Media Center, which is always very expensive.

So especially in the Olympic Games, because it's mainly it has only One CTO, or perhaps one main CT and a couple of satellites, so it's a tremendous investment for for good specific city and it tends to be that the packets are not being kept so that the staging the event costs much more than it was initially planned and so on.

So of course, many of these investments are something which can be used or which can be beneficial for the city afterwards, but generally speaking now it tends to be extremely expensive.

And yeah, it depends basically on the on the side how much it will cost.

So there are tremendous differences between the different games organized.

But yeah, the trend is that they are getting all the time more expensive and especially in the Western countries, we think about Other costs.

What the society has because of the population aging and and these kind of challenges, I think there is like all the time more and more higher like higher and higher opportunity cost also. So this money could be spent elsewhere. To basically more important things.

It's getting more and more like it's it goes into the direction of of how the rest of the world perceives the particular location. So that's basically very often the.

If we think about basically any seeds and not like anything related to the authoritarian regimes, but also like in a democratic country, it's much about the public opinion elsewhere, because of course it brings a lot of media attention to the city. So I think there is basically behind. The organizing cities are thinking in the countries are thinking is also the long term impacts in tourism, Long term impacts in foreign investments and and these kind of things. Which are also attractive to the cities which are difficult to estimate.

How high they will be and how much money they will bring in some time in the future.

So but also what I like to bring up here that they are very often prestige projects like a city politicians given it the democratic country or authoritarian country, many politicians think it like they want to leave something behind so that they are basically, they want to have some sort of like a status symbol for themselves: "that I was the one who brought the Olympic Games to the city." And so this is very attractive for individual politicians.

And then, yeah, public opinion can be secondary very often for many, many politicians in in that sense.

So I think that this reasons are what I mentioned.

The indirect future benefits through foreign direct investment through long term development in tourism and through prestige are something which are very often pushing.

Yeah, despite the high high cost.

I think it in both of the cases.

Why Russia has invested in in mega events like the Olympic Games in Sochi and the World Cup World Cup football World Cup as well as Qatar, as they are heavily investing in sports events or heaviest, it's part of their strategy. I think there are these two reasons which I already mentioned. They want to attract foreign investment.

Uh, and that was basically the specially important for Qatar.

They are a small country in the region and competing heavily against countries like Saudi Arabia and

other Gulf states from foreign investment. So that's certainly one of the reasons. So they want to basically put themselves into the world map.

Russia, of course, is a different case.

I guess they are of course, as a former super power already in the world map and well known, but they probably one of the reasons why they are investing these and they wanted to normalize themselves in the world's eyes so that they would also attract more, more economic industrial investments.

That was before the Ukraine war.

Also the one reason is certainly, which is also the topic of your thesis that they want to sort of like both of the countries have had heavy problems with the human rights, with the democracy lack, so they want to basically a little bit like make the world forget these kind of problems.

so in order to basically, was their images which is here the sportswashing part.

But one thing which is not to be forgotten here is the third reason is that they want to also, it's not only the external image what they want to improve, but also internally, so that's basically the old, very old idea regarding the Roman already from the Roman Empire. They have this concept of "bread and circuses", so give the people bread and circuses and they will never revolt.

So that's another topic, which is certainly I think it's a little bit less discussed, but it certainly one reason why this country is why this regime wants to host that events.

So that's directed to their own population.

So sort of sort of like they are giving the circuses and provide for their own people that our countries is organizing that kind of events and the whole world is watching us and yeah so basically increase the approval of their own regime within the people's eyes. And this is certainly something which should be also considered as one of the important reasons.

So they to decrease the probability for rewards basically and the protests and these kind of matters. In both countries, they extremely fear the public uprisings like in Russia they were very much afraid of the developments, what happened in Ukraine 2014, the Maidan demonstrations and what happened in Georgia and other countries also in, in Belarus. That the people stood against their own regime and that's something what the Kremlin extremely fears. So that's one thing.

Also, same applies to Qatar. There were a lot of revolts in the other Gulf states, other Arabic countries. The Arab Spring and so on.

So they this is also directed to the own population to bring something those kind of circuses in order to make them happy and less likely to protest.

SQ: Sport Organizations Influence

Basically, the decision making structure. In both cases, in the case of IOC, in case of FIFA, a very challenging one. The IOC is a private club.

Basically they decide themselves who are the members and who make all the decisions. So basically, they decide the people who decide so they can themselves accept people into as members of IOC and who will then make all the decisions regarding the staging of the Olympic Games, so this is a very undemocratic structure in that sense.

FIFA, on the other hand in that sense is a problematic structure because they have all the member countries have one vote. And that means big football countries like, for instance, Germany has as much to say as a small Oceanian Islands like Tuvalu and so on, and that's basically when they decide about the host of the World Cup.

They are basically, that Tuvalu as powerful as Germany, and that makes it vulnerable.

I don't want to like say that they're automatic a bad system, but it's a vulnerable system, meaning that if in a country like, in very small countries the people who are in the heads of the the local football associations might be there because of the wrong reasons.

because of the relatives of some like high ranking politicians, and further they are very like much more vulnerable to any kinds of corruption than in the bigger countries where these organization are much stricter controlled by the government and so on. So it doesn't mean that there wouldn't be any corruption in German Football Association or in the European associations or North America, but the smaller ones are even more vulnerable to that.

So that means if someone wants to state like what we also saw in the case of Qatar, that they bribed many of the smaller country representatives to vote for Qatar instead of England. So that's basically says that there is this kind of very vulnerable decision making structure, even though it's from the idea Democratic.

SQ: Geopolitical implications

Perhaps they were not entirely sportswashing, but there are certainly in both cases, there are these phenomena is clearly visible, so that the one of the if we think about, for instance, Sochi Olympics, here were like the internal Investments or problems regarding the investments infrastructure investments in these areas, there are really problematic because of the internal corruption they were state Enterprises which were given the construction assignments without any basic financial market competition. So they were awarded the construction basically automatically because they were Government near enterprises.

And that was inefficient, but also that they want to invest heavily. So they didn't even try to make any any direct economic profit for the region, which is the case in the democratic countries today, at least, even though the investments into the mega events are not usually profitable in the Western countries, western democracy, Liberal Democratic countries, they at least try to make the events profitable in economic terms, but in Russia and also in China, there were there was not even this kind of goal. They knew that they are going to make heavy economic losses.

So I think this already shows that there is a sort of like motives behind.

I we can say that uh, afterwards for instance, the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, I think it it was in many, many terms very successful event for from the perspective of Qatar regime, they were the world record breaking TV audiences even though in Germany we saw the different frames. So with the with the less interest on the World Cup.

Also, Germany played bad but also it was despite of that, the opening game attracted much less audience than previously in the World Cup, so there are in Germany we saw some kind of a negative trend on a lot of protest, but this was not a global phenomenon.

Even in other Western countries, liberal democracies, the event was, in the end, actually very successful.

So I think we can, we can argue that the the receiving Qatar and organizing committee is happy what's happened.

So they got their attempts and they got also negative attention, a lot of criticism, but I think the further the games advanced less we talked about any kind of human rights issues or or environmentally issues

or anything. The more we we talked about sport and and the event itself.

So I think in that sense it remains to be seen how much it has been the political impact, we don't know it yet because it's a long term thing. But and that's also how they have calculated it.

So it's it's a long term thing, but I think in that sense, yes and now everywhere in the world, people know basically Qatar and then when we talk about not traditional European or American liberal democracies, the this negative topics were not basically discussed much at all like if we go somewhere in in the developing countries, this issues were not really discussed so they are also also the target audience for the Qatari Regime. So my answer at this point is that they probably are happy with the result.

Additional Questions

Yeah, but it's not a new concept.

It's a very old concept or very old strategy.

Even though the word sportswashing didn't exist long time ago about the phenomenon itself existed already, If we think about, from the beginning of the Olympics.

Uh and the early Olympics, Modern Olympics of this kind of phenomenon has happened for instance in 1936, in Berlin was one example of when the Nazi regime.

Really Like washed the image of the of themselves and I wanted to soak their own power in a positive light and they were rather successful also on that because from there onwards to the to the beginning of Second World War, they actually created a lot of positive attention that they were very like a hospitable guest and they were like, not really like any kind of a huge scandals. There were a couple of things where we can, where we still discuss, but basically they managed to create a positive image on their own regime.

I do think that this concept will continue.

I mean that that in the future we will see this kind of.

Like efforts as well, Saudi Arabia is one example. They want to host the Olympic Games as well, They want to host FIFA World Cup.

They are doing a lot of their investing, a lot of state money and sports currently.

Uh, like to leave golf tour with the their own domestic Football League.

So I think this is a Phenomenon which we do have and we'll have also in the future, but it depends also much how far the Olympic, the IOC and the FIFA will accept this.

So this is something which remains to be seen and very often they are being basically utilized because they themselves like the IOC and FIFA, they both say that we don't want to mix politics with the with sport, but this is I'm I think in my opinion to say it's frankly, Very intellectually lazy thinking is the politics and sports politics has been always involved in sports, so this is basically something that they want to actively forget and want to just close their eyes on on this fact. But politics is part of sport, and as always been since the ancient Olympic Games. So that's basically.

Yeah, it will continue If we don't, or if the the international sports organizations do not accept this concept that politics and sports are bound together.

So that's it will certainly go on. So that's my opinion and this phenomenon may even strengthen uh as we look at the geopolitical situation in the world, many countries want to challenge this current geopolitical situation, which the liberal democracies, the Western democracies, have basically been the dominant power.

Now there are a lot of powers. Which one to challenge this this situation like for instance China, India want to do it as well Russia, Arab world and so on.

So this is a it in that sense.

I think these events will be also in the future or like utilized as a tool for sports watching.

Yeah, it's certainly a necessary topic, it's evoking slowly interesting or it has open lately quite a bit of interest in the sports politics, sports, economics and sports management research fields and this is certainly a topic which is going to remain as a very important topic and you have to also from the perspective of sports schoolers, it's a little bit challenging topic.

If sports, economic, sport management and sport politics, will be rather like a a small field, a small community, so there is a a lot of also personal connections. The whole sports area is a small community.

There are personal connections to between the researchers and management of international sports organizations.

And so this challenging might be from the personal perspective a little bit difficult.

That's one of the things, but that's more related to the relationship between the sports scholarship and for sports economics, sports, politics, scholarship and the international sports organizations.

I think this is clearly an important topic to be researched.

Also, the not only the sports was seen as such but but utilizing sport as soft power tool.

So which is then, as you already mentioned, less perhaps like you like achieving some, let's say positive goals through sport.

So image related goals through sports, so this is also something which is interesting, but that's mentioned the both of those are old topics. They have been always, always utilized. So this phenomenon itself is nothing new, but now the because the geopolitical situation and the challenge of the Liberal Democratic dominance of the world politics at this concept is becoming more and more important to research, so that we understand it's not only in historical perspective, but in the current perspective as well.

I just briefly mentioned as a in the end that soft power utilizes and this is also highly interesting.

That's also from my own country and from Finland, so from my own country perspective.

Uh, this has been heavily utilized in the past, so Finland became independent in 1917, but they had and on Olympic team in the in the Olympics of 1912 in Stockholm and they were heavily investing in athletic facts because they wanted to basically the world to get to know that there is a country like Finland somewhere. So and they were actually at that time very successful in that. So that was also soft power utilization, but. Also, before the terms of power was used, so very old phenomenon as well.

Appendix D: Interview 2 (Transcript from Teams)

SQ: Nation states

I'm I I only have a clue, I mean it runs in the billions of dollars.

I think you can quite easily find in the media roughly how much money Qatar spent, for instance on the World Cup the other year.

Uh, and that that was absolutely fantastic the amount of money, I I don't remember the exact figure but it was billions and billions of dollars.

And I think similarly with the Olympics, I mean what happens every time is that they come out with a very optimistic, lets going to say it's self-financed and all those things.

And then afterwards they always found out that no, it wasn't. They ran over the budget and I think you could quite easily find figures for the Paris Olympics, for instance, How much money they're investing. But I don't have any of these numbers in my head, but it's only that it's an amazing amount of money every time.

It vary from place to place, of course. In Qatar there is no explicit evidence of this, but I'm pretty sure that they're doing it to get international recognition and influence.

And it's so well aligned with all other activities they're doing in Qatar with, you know, investing in Aljazeera, the news channel, supporting various political and non political organizations in a lot of areas they've set up these can't remember this, the Qatar Forum or something? For political debates and discussions and a lot of other things.

So I think the World Cup was just one of several instances in their ambitions to you know, be recognized and also you know, respected and perhaps well liked on on the international scene if you compare with say, London or Paris when they organized the Olympics. I don't think there are as clear political motives in that case. I t's quite a different story.

You know, I I guess it's always nice for politicians in a country or a city to to be associated with a well-liked arrangement, you know, for the local voters and so on.

But I don't think there's the same International angle to it.

The history and all the implications and do you have a clue as well like about Russia, why they did it like the Sochi Games and why these regime bit to host these events in your opinion.

I read a very interesting analysis I I think I cited it in my papers. So you can check the reference list there.

But this paper argued that the Sochi Olympics was very much for an internal Russian audience, and they linked the Sochi Olympics to the subsequent invasion or of Ukraine. You know in 2014 that they grabbed a Crimea and the eastern parts of Ukraine and this analysis argues that the Sochi Olympics was a build up for this national pride nationalism and also expansionism.

You'll never find anyone in Russia admitting to this, of course, so it's circumstantial, but I think it's pretty well argued.

With the Football World Cup it's hard to say. I haven't seen any in depth analysis of that, but you know it's the biggest sports event in the world, possibly together with the Olympics. And you know, it was an opportunity for Russia to get at least some more acceptance on the international stage.

Perhaps draw attention away from their ill behavior in a lot of other places, and so on. So yeah, I think that's the best way we can reason on the basis of the available evidence it might be possible to dig deeper but probably your sources would be in russia and you know it could be a bit difficult to find that.

SQ: Sport Organizations

My first association to both it is corruption and shame.

I mean FIFA seems to be through and through corrupt.

Uh, I don't know if you've seen this a very good documentary about FIFA and all the scandals.

I can't remember whether it was not on Netflix or whether I saw it on Swedish national TV, but it's actually excellent and if you can find it, do watch it.

But I mean they they had a lot of corruption scandals and and I think there's pretty good evidence that that, you know the whole process of Qatar getting the World Cup, what was completely corrupt.

It's quite astounding if you're from the civilized part of the world.

No, I think also, and in a number of people have mentioned this that that because of the very high costs for organizing the World Cup and the Olympics and these major events, it's more or less impossible to do it in a democracy because people won't accept that you risk that much money. And I can't remember.

I think that was one of the either a city or one of the states in Germany where there was a referendum on organizing, was it the Winter Olympics or something like that?

And of course, all the voters said no.

And there's been other instances too, with a lot of public opposition towards organizing these games.

And of course if you're a autocratic state, you don't have to worry about or worry too much about what people think so?

I'm I mean the in market terms FIFA and the IOC and the other big sports organizations, they have a monopoly and of course they have great power.

Both economic and political, and I mean economic in the sense that the sponsorship money, TV rights, mania and what other other sources of revenue they have that they are so large, so this gives them massive economic power and of course, politically, by awarding the games to one place or another, through a very non transparent process leaves them open for corruption and for wielding political influence.

And I mean, if you ask me it, it's a very unfortunate situation both for the sport because sport has become much more about money than sportsmanship.

And these organizations, I mean, they've been implicated with autocratic states that they are have shown several examples of hypocrisy, you know, saying before the games that they require transparency, democracy, freedom of speech and all these things. And when the host counter doesn't deliver, it doesn't have any consequences.

And there's also, I mean there are a lot of issues surrounding who selected to all the committees, the boards and so on of these organizations, it's not transparent.

I I think you know there's quite a lot of evidence of corruption there too. So yeah, I I think these organizations are far too powerful and and the lack of transparency is very disturbing.

SQ: Geopolitical Implications

I think you have implications in in many ways.

Am I mean one that you don't hear that much about it is the domestic audience where you know, in Saudi Arabia, for instance, that it's a country with a lot of issues around democracy, freedom, women's rights, gay rights and so on.

You know, they're all saying economic issues with high unemployment, very unequal distribution of both income and capital and so on.

I think it's possible that that you know, Saudi, they're organizing all these sports events, they're buying football players for absolutely enormous amounts of money.

And it it provides a distraction for the local audience.

You know, you give people entertainment and they don't have that much time to think about a lot about other issues.

With Saudi it is perhaps the best example of sportswashing now with their investing everywhere. Formula 1, boxing football and they're doing it domestically and they're doing it Abroad. Golf, this whole live tour they started and the number of other examples.

So it it entertains the local audience, distracts them from a number of political issues.

And it also provides, you know attention and recognition for Saudi Abroad.

That's, you know, definitely a good example of sportswashing and consequences.

I think also in a number of cases you know, we usually talk about the general audience when it when you talk about sportswashing and you know people will like Qatar better or be distracted from whatever infringements of democratic rights are going on and so on, but you also tend to get at least with the major events, opportunities to invite leading politicians, entertain them, and so on.

And open up for one on one meetings between the people in power in the host country, with leaders from other parts of the world and so on.

I think also again and it's an underresearched area, but the sportswashing debate has been very focused on on western democratic countries.

But you know, changing opinions and these things, but perhaps the biggest effect could be in less democratic, democratically minded countries, where you know there's not room for people to debate all these things, they might not be as aware and so on.

So you know the question is how does sportswashing affect people and say, India, Indonesia, these are both democracies or, you know, more autocratic states in Africa or what you call it these days, the global South and so on that is not known.

But I suspect the positive effect of Sportswashing could be much greater there than what you're getting in Western democracies.

Additional Questions

I think you can look at it two ways. I suspect that that public interest in sports, but washing, it hasn't vanished.

But it's much less prominent now than what it was two years ago. But in in terms of the practice of sportswashing, it seems to be growing and I'm thinking again of Saudi Arabia, Qatar. I mean, Russia is out at all of the books now.

China seems to have lost interest. Not entirely, but there's much less now going on from China than what you had a few years ago.

But you know, we might see other actors, but particularly in the Middle East it's an ongoing activity, but I strongly suspect that the general public in most countries, will care less about sportswashing.

And of course, there there's a danger in this because you know, if there's no debate, talk about these things, there's a higher likelihood of sportswatching actually having the positive effects that that the people who are doing it expect.

I mean, one aspect of sportswashing that hasn't been discussed that much yet, it is, you know what happens when when Sportswashing goes Abroad?

if you take, Qatar bought Paris SG, the football club. Saudi bought Newcastle United in the UK. Abu Dhabi bought Manchester City a number of years ago.

Uh, and there are other examples too

And this is starting to have local political effects, so I I've heard you know how Saudi tries to influence what happens in local politics in Newcastle, in Manchester, you've had similar issues with you know, Abu Dhabi investment funds going there, but they're trying to control how they are used and what's going on in local politics and so on.

I also think there are examples of, I think it was in Spain where the football organization or the league or whatever it was. That they started, banning certain questions at press conferences.

They've also banned certain journalists from it, even attending press conferences, in order to avoid the critical questions about but the particular Middle East, money and and such things.

And of course it if if you have censorship or control of journalism, that's extremely serious, you know, democracy. Say if you get this secondary effects as a result of sportswashing, it could have serious consequences also outside the country, so that are involved in it.