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This article analyzes how the BRICS countries and Qatar used sporting mega-events as a discourse to expand their political influence. To this end, the article discusses (a) the public sphere and its interfaces in sports and (b) the 2010 to 2022 World Cups as examples of Soft Power, Sportswashing, and Sports Diplomacy. As an analytical structure, we will make an interface between the studies that discussed the role of the Western media during the events and FIFA's 3 S's. The central argument resides in FIFA's role during the World Cup cycle in countries of the Global South and the existence of a FIFA modus operandi in the last four World Cups.

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# The 3 S's of FIFA — Soft Power, Sportswashing, Sports Diplomacy: The Brics and Qatar World Cups

Marco Antonio Bettine de Almeida<sup>α</sup> & Marina Özdemir<sup>σ</sup>

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 21st century, new regions, represented above all by the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), have been reconfiguring the world's political and economic power centers, shifting them away from the United States and Western Europe. Comprising 41 percent of the world's population and 24 percent of the world's GDP, the countries in the bloc have turned to holding major sporting events to boost their economies. This phenomenon began with the Olympic Games in

Beijing in 2008. Then it was South Africa's turn to return to the world stage: after almost half a century of apartheid rule (1948-1994), the country had elected Nelson Mandela as president, promulgated a new constitution, and redesigned its national flag, which came to symbolize the various elements of the country's society. In Sports Diplomacy, the organization of the FIFA World Cup in 2010 — the first held on the African continent — accompanied this process of overcoming the past and seeking a new level of global integration. The international community's use of sport to condemn the segregationist regime in the past makes this event even more important. Specifically, the country was not allowed to compete in the Olympic Games from 1964 until 1988 and faced a ban from FIFA between 1961 and 1991.

Under the first Lula government (2003-2011), Brazil broadened its space for multilateral relations through Soft Power and intended to redesign the UN Security Council. It hosted the first Olympic and Paralympic Games in South America and was the first country to organize the world's two most significant sporting events in less than two years, the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Rio Games.

Russia, for its part, hosted the Winter Olympics in 2014 and the FIFA World Cup in 2018. Vladimir Putin was personally involved, including visits to other committee member countries where he sought support in the votes, such as sports diplomacy. The organizers aimed to showcase the new Russia, as strong as it had been, to the world and its citizens and to make the country more attractive for establishing relations with other countries. All of this stimulated a sense of

national pride after a period of domestic crisis resulting from the collapse of the USSR, at which point discussions began about the abuse of Soft Power and the attempt to use sport to wash away a tarnished reputation or Sportswashing.

Qatar was the first Arab and Muslim country to host the FIFA World Cup. It aimed to extend partnerships with the West for the sale of gas. The deliberate use of sporting soft power contrasted with the analyses of sportswashing in Qatar and the Gulf States.

In the specific case of this article, we will analyze how the BRICS and Qatar have used sporting mega-events as a discourse to expand their political influence.

We will explore the following topics in depth:

- The concept of the public sphere and its interfaces in sports diplomacy;
- The broadening concept of sports diplomacy in the context of global society and its limits, and
- The use of the World Cups from 2010 to 2022 as examples as an analyze FIFA's 3 S's — Soft Power, Sportswashing, and Sports Diplomacy — by analyzing articles that studied the Western media during the events.

We will review recent research into tangible and intangible legacies and the problems these countries face in hosting mega-sporting events. One of the aims of this article is to maintain a dialogue with national and international publications and to consider, through these countries' experiences, the dynamics of international confederations and federations as global players in international relations.

## II. SPORTING MEGA-EVENTS, TRANSNATIONALITY, AND THE STRUCTURE OF ANALYSIS

The use of sporting mega-events in the globalized world goes hand in hand with advancing neoliberalism. Nye shares this view on the idea of Soft Power, where military and economic coercion must be combined with cultural influence. For Bettine, it is building the quest for international

prestige and influence through military and symbolic force.

Jennings (2011), Murray (2012), and Müller (2015) present the new contours of sporting mega-events in the 21st century. Firstly, for the authors, there has been an increase in the use of sport as a diplomatic means, Sports Diplomacy; secondly, the exponential increase in public spending in the BRICS countries and Qatar to host the FIFA Men's Football World Cup; and lastly, structural corruption in FIFA and the use of events to clean up the organization's reputation — Sportswashing. This article aims to understand FIFA's *modus operandi* across the four FIFA Men's World Cups by seeking cross-cutting analyses with critical literature on FIFA, including works by Ferreira (2020), Gaffney (2018), Damo (2016), Brannagan and Rookwood (2016), and Cornelissen (2010).

According to Bettine (2023), developed nations use cultural and social co-optation elements to impose their strength in the international political arena. The author advocates for a broader understanding that builds the phenomenon of sport as a global structure based on Debord's principles of the society of spectacle. According to this model, the dominant nation captures the hearts and minds of dominated nations, thereby exercising domination through strategic co-optation and reification.

To analyze the sports phenomenon in mega-events, particularly FIFA's, the concepts of the public sphere, Soft Power, Sportswashing, and Sports Diplomacy will be explored in depth. The analysis is transversal and tangential to the three previous categories, the so-called legacies.

Examples of legacies range from commonly recognized aspects (urban planning, sports infrastructure) to intangible legacies, such as urban regeneration, international reputation, tourism, improved public welfare, jobs, business opportunities, corporate relocation, city marketing, renewed community spirit, better inter-regional cooperation, production of ideas, production of values, popular memory, educational opportunities.

These positive legacies contrast with negative legacies such as construction debts, high opportunity costs, unnecessary infrastructure, temporary exclusion of citizens, loss of tourists, increased property rents, socially unjust displacement, and poor income distribution.

If, on the one hand, the Olympic Games and the World Cup have extended their global reach from Eurasia to South America, passing through the African continent and ending in the Persian Gulf, on the other hand, there are engaged and politicized social movements. People and communities have developed an awareness that the costs of mega-events — social, economic, and environmental — often exceed their benefits. Academics and activists have attracted significant attention in political circles, with publications demonstrating mega-events unfavorable cost-benefit ratios (Kassens-Noor, et al., 2015; Zimbalist, 2015). The global media widely publicized the negative consequences of the Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014 and Rio de Janeiro in 2016, and the World Cups in South Africa, Brazil, Russia, and Qatar, ranging from human rights violations to financial excesses and dubious legacies.

Public opinion in many cities has also turned against mega-events. Mega-event boosters' promises to increase jobs, transform a city's image, and build new infrastructure are now subject to intense public scrutiny. Ongoing cases of corrupt dealings by mega-event owners have caused a public outcry and increased pressure for mega-event reforms (Lenskyj, 2020).

The BRICS Cup occurred in South Africa in 2010, Brazil in 2014, and Russia in 2018. In 2022, the World Cup took place in Qatar. Generally speaking, the final FIFA tournament will be held in one country, except Japan and South Korea in 2002, and Canada, the USA, and Mexico in 2026. The media have widely discussed the fairness of the selection process for these countries. FIFA, the World Cup Organising Committee, and the Local Organising Committee have been portrayed and shown to have complex bribery structures and a lack of transparency, as Jennings (2011).

The analyzed countries faced significant challenges during the implementation phase of their bid pledges, encountering the expected delays characteristic of Global South nations. The term "realization" refers to the actual period of the games and the extensive years of preparation that precede the championships. These challenges largely stem from FIFA's increasingly stringent and demanding requirements over the years, which have necessitated the completion of urban infrastructure projects outlined in the Bid Books and later modified by the Inspection Reports.

As a result, the specifications FIFA set for stadiums, tourist transport, and game logistics received priority from an early stage, frequently overshadowing the infrastructure developments intended to benefit the local population.

The article presents FIFA's governance model through a comprehensive analysis of the World Cups in the BRICS countries and Qatar. It posits FIFA as the protagonist in numerous political-economic transactions throughout the World Cup cycle. Additionally, it identifies a *modus operandi* with the Global South countries, amplifying the host country's Soft Power and fostering a structure of Sports Diplomacy. Cases of corruption are softened with the discourse of the wonder of sport and its art, in other words, Sportswashing.

### III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### 3.1 *Newspapers as Articulators of the International Public Sphere*

The public sphere takes on the symbolic function of promoting social integration and ensuring the autonomy of the world of life in relation to the system. "It emerges as a conflict zone in which opposing principles can be debated in the search for consensus" (Avritzer, Costa, 2004, p.715). The primary characteristic of the public sphere is that it serves as an unrestricted space for communication and public deliberation, with no possibility of predetermination, limitation, or restriction, and one cannot anticipate its constitutive elements. In principle, it is open to the whole of society. There are no a priori topics or contributions that are included or excluded.



The public sphere is always indeterminate regarding the content of the political agenda and the individuals and groups that can feature in it.

In this approach, Habermas (2014, p. 93) suggests adopting the procedural idea of public deliberation. According to this idea, the "contours of the public sphere take shape through the processes of identifying, filtering, and interpreting" themes and contributions that emerge from autonomous public spheres and move to the formal and institutionalized forums of the political and administrative system. This procedural character of legitimacy justification actualizes the normativity of the public sphere.

The public sphere is a way of looking at something that is judged and questioned and has a vital function in controlling the exercise of political power. By publicizing institutional political actions, the public can supervise and criticize them, ensuring greater transparency. The notion of public opinion is fundamental because it is based on the communicative rationalization inherent to the human condition, enabling any argument to be put to the test (Losekann, 2009).

The critical and selective potential of an audience, capable of preserving its internal differences and plurality despite the media's culturally and politically homogenizing pressure, should not be underestimated. The source of political legitimacy cannot be the will of individual citizens but the result of the communicative process of forming a collective will. This process operates within the public sphere and mediates between the world of life and the political system, allowing impulses from the world of life to reach the decision-making bodies established by the democratic order (Lubenow, 2012; Melo, 2015).

As far as international media material is concerned, the various transformations of globalization have greatly affected journalistic material.

The mass culture of transnational capitalism has begun to blur the boundaries of erudite culture, popular culture, and advertising. It has even contributed to dissolving the delimitations of textual practices in the idea of genres in

journalism. Even the World Cup has become a consumer product of FIFA's highly profitable cultural industry, surpassing mere sporting competition between countries.

As a marketing item, the World Cup has become increasingly present in the lives of its audience/recipient/consumer, especially in the 21st century. This presence spans from publicizing major brands and venues to ticket sales, building new stadiums, boosting tourism and hotels in the host cities, and advances in advertising and publicity, including broadcasts on TV, the internet, and international news media (Maharaj, 2015).

Alongside this evolution, the change in the "how to" of journalism reflects a growing concern about how events and concepts are reported, underscoring that this concern is as significant as the obligation to inform about society and what is happening worldwide critically. The current moment serves as a backdrop for relativizing the precepts that govern factual discourse and, in this way, reflecting on the place of journalism, redefining the role of the text producer and that of the reader as (re)producer of discourses.

Communication is no longer identified with information but with a simple signal transmission procedure (Habermas, 2012a, p.35). On the contrary, in a broader sense, the theory of communicative action has treated interaction as central. For interaction, it is increasingly necessary to know who the possible listeners of the message are, its recipient-interpreter, and the contexts in which it was produced and received.

As Habermas (2012a, p.123) wrote, "Human specificity lies in subjectivization and dialogue." No communication vehicle writes in vain but presupposes another, a necessity intrinsic to the social character of language. Communication, journalism, culture, and narrative are words under reconstruction through the eyes of communicative action.

The purpose of communication is to give meaning to the act of speech and to make language part of the World of Life. It is the sign of exchange, of relationship. It is the place of observation of the

world in which we live and speak, the world as it happens. There is no journalism without communication. Journalism is a cultural-historical process, the locus of mediations and representations. Journalists use language to cover events and create meaning for them to happen. That is why it is essential to get to know the culture to insert oneself in order to understand the communication processes and, from there, to produce narratives.

Audience segmentation and the frequent search for audiences exemplify these concepts in journalism. The Information Age (immediate and multi-platform) demands more from journalism if it wants to remain significant. It needs to offer information as an educational process in a more in-depth, analytical way and, above all, embedded in a language that belongs to the reader. A language that is part of their context and represents the World of Life. Information becomes pure enunciation in contexts that can vary according to the target audience or recipient-subject that the vehicle/journalist envisages when producing content. "It builds knowledge and, like all knowledge, it depends at the same time on the field of knowledge that circumscribes it, on the situation of enunciation in which it is inserted and on the device in which it is put into operation" (Habermas, 2012b, p.12).

The media, whose informational, economic, political, and sociological roles, among others, are presented simultaneously at various times, will be understood by their communicative characteristics. There is no naivety in thinking that the media used does not have a systemic structure, both in the Money System and the Power System. They function according to the economic logic that makes every information organization act like a company to produce a product defined by its place in the consumer goods exchange market. However, we will focus on the symbolic logic that makes every information system participate in constructing the public sphere.

Journalists construct meanings for objects in the world, transforming an event into news. News articles act as speeches for communicating

subjects, whose mission is to inform and bring the news to their audience, enabling subjects to understand objects.

The countries studied are not only made up of institutions but also of symbols and socially shared representations of their people's characteristics. These constructed meanings are embedded in memories, essential for constructing an identity and part of an imagined community (Hall, 2005, p.57). Language plays a fundamental role in this process because it is through language that these shared representations materialize, coming from the individual's experience and contact with other community members.

In countries with a wide range of ethnic and cultural diversity, as well as in an event such as the FIFA World Cup, multiple and unstable identities become even more visible as we problematize and try to characterize them. South Africa, Brazil, and Qatar are no different from the colonies and other dependencies of former empires that became liberated countries. Like them, "however new and unprecedented their emergence, they need a history and a flag. Only in this way can their memory of the old empire be dominated by the story of the creation of the new country, which tends to take the form of a founding myth of struggle and liberation" (Hobsbawm, 2014, p.82). Alternatively, conversely, to legitimize the return of an empire, which would be the USSR.

With the advent of mass media, international competitions have also become a spectacle, and host countries and cities have taken advantage of the increased attention from foreign audiences to project their image to the world. The governments see the organization of mega-sporting events of the host countries as a platform for the international promotion of their interests and for the dissemination of messages directly to the populations of other countries.

With cameras all over the world focused on these countries, the media allows itself to construct the identity of a country through the multiple personal identities, the multiple characters interviewed, and the multiple facets constructed

from the published reports. Communication is a privileged area for the exercise of understanding, in the broadest sense: an excellent arena for rethinking the relationship between subject and object, between the familiar and the distant, and for reviewing the hierarchies of cultural classifications.

## IV. RESULTS

### 4.1 *Analysing the Data*

Turning to the material under analysis, we examine the subjects: South Africa, Brazil, Russia, and Qatar. All these nation-states utilized the mega-sporting events as a showcase. The country's leaders perceived the mega-sporting events as an opportunity to demonstrate the country's development and organizational capacity to the world. Through the games, they aimed to portray themselves as nations that adhere to international rules within the framework of neoliberal globalization. In addition to using typical international relations strategies for foreign trade demands, what has become evident in the 21st century is the strategic use of sport to seek international political and economic promotion, as well as the intention to reinforce domestic agendas, political legitimacy, and national cohesion.

In South Africa, the focus of the press was on apartheid, the racist regime that was in force between 1948 and 1994, which was discussed in depth by the press, from its historical roots to its contemporary ramifications, using strategies of Soft Power and Sports Diplomacy. In the Daily Mail, an emblematic article called "South Africa skipper Aaron Mokoena: Mixed-race football helped overcome my fear of white people" (Barlow, 2010). In the article, the captain of South Africa's national team recalls Nelson Mandela's achievements at the 1995 Rugby World Cup as a device for uniting the country. Mandela encouraged blacks to support the Springboks, traditionally a symbol of the white Afrikaner ruling class. The team's victory, according to Mokoena, helped unite the nation. Mokoena says, however, that in 1992, the town where he lived was the scene of a massacre. The South African

captain was 11 years old when "46 people were killed by members of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)" (idem).

The former president and Nobel Peace Prize winner Nelson Mandela dominated the international media, with reports analyzing his daily life, story, and political views. His prominence was further heightened by the tragic car accident that claimed the life of his niece on the eve of the opening ceremony, which garnered widespread press coverage of his mourning.

Russia has an important influence on Western culture: its literature, films, the Bolshevik Revolution, and tsarist are all sources of topics for understanding the world of Russian life. However, the most discussed topic was the country's return to the negotiating table with Western nations. In the New York Times article, "Russia has set the terms of the World Cup for the West. Will Russians embrace Putin's party?" Smith (2018) discusses how Russia won the right to host the tournament, its warlike culture; the spectre of racism and homophobia, and disfiguring hooliganism, "this will be the big event in Putin's move" (idem). At various times, Russia is portrayed by a Sports Diplomacy orientated towards the East and the use of Sportswashing.

Concerning Qatar, strong criticism of the country's culture, especially regarding gender inequality, was anticipated. However, the researcher saw the possibility of finding articles that discussed the origins of Islam, the figure of Mohammed, the cities of Medina and Mecca, Arab culture, the relationship with the Ottoman and Persian empires, architectural forms, sand cities and a little about the transition from a small tribe that lived off pearls to one of the largest petro-monarchies in the Middle East.

However, public opinion in journalistic discourses presented Qatar as a hostile environment for tourists unless they were extremely wealthy. The Qataris did not seek dialogue with the visitors; the reports showed that only the migrant community related to those who visited the World Cup. Newspaper records show that the number of tourists staying in Qatar was the lowest of all the



World Cups studied (Bettine, 2023). The universe of documents analyzed shows the recurrent use of Sportswashing by Qatar and the Gulf countries.

The Guardian's text announces the start of the Qatar World Cup as follows: "Qatar 2022 is actually happening" (Liew, 2022). The article reports on the deaths of migrant workers on the construction sites, "we owe the victims of this World Cup our present remembrance and future vigilance" (idem). Another editorial in The Guardian (2022) discusses the employment system in Qatar, the Kafala, "Has the World Cup really improved workers' rights in Qatar? Five experts give their verdict".

Contrary to what one might expect, the mega-sporting events did not show unique aspects of the culture of these countries but rather focused on elements already common to readers, in this case, Apartheid, the warlike history of the USSR/Russia, migrant labour, and the lack of human rights in Qatar.

Another important aspect was the newspapers' analysis of football culture in each country. In South Africa, the media portrayed football as an emerging sport. In Brazil, the focus was on the sport's deep historical significance and the metaphor of the "country of football" and the "homeland of football boots" (Daily Mail, 2014). The main football news story in Russia was the relationship between host cities and football teams. According to the Spanish newspaper El Mundo, of the eleven host cities for the 2018 World Cup, only five have football teams in the top division. At the Qatar World Cup 2022, Qatar's investment in European international football was discussed, especially the purchase of PSG and investments in Germany and England. One point unique to Qatar compared to other World Cups was the BBC's journalistic investigations into "fake fans".

The Guardian (2022) discusses "What does the World Cup mean to the Middle East and Arab world?". "The first thing to make clear is that we are talking about a massive slice of humanity". The "Arab world" stretches from Morocco on the northwest coast of Africa to, depending on your

definition, the United Arab Emirates or as far east as Afghanistan. If we define the Arab world only as those nations where Arabic is predominantly spoken, we're still talking about 22 countries with a population of 430 million.

People viewed Russia as a country hostile to foreigners, one that warranted caution due to its racist, misogynistic, and homophobic culture (Senett, 2018). The country arrested several activists and expelled or denied entry to reporters from free media outlets. The World Cup has strengthened warmongering, such as the war in Syria, the downing of a civilian aeroplane by a missile, and the poisoning murders of Putin's opponents.

Qatar followed the same path as Russia, but with the added duality of extremely wealthy tourists and those who came on a budget and with a lot of passion to follow the World Cup. The citizens of other countries had little contact with the Qataris, the locals were extremely segregated, with draconian laws regarding women, homosexuals, and the journalistic community that would like to build a vision of Qatar by the Qataris and not be limited only to the official discourse.

Another objective of a nation hosting a mega-sporting event, from the perspective of Sports Diplomacy, is to publicize its political values, to demonstrate that the institutions work, the country is safe, and that it respects diversity in every sense. Communicative action plays a fundamental role in this process, presenting the country to the foreign public with otherness, seeking to know the other and help them, to have democratic institutions that uphold the rights of all nations and beliefs, where the host country is an inspiration to visitors, who can take back home the feeling of being in a place that respects universal ethical values.

The literature analyzed casts doubt on the institutions of the host countries, especially their democracies, which were considered fragile (South Africa and Brazil) or undemocratic (Russia and Qatar). These countries were considered structurally corrupt. About human rights, structural racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and

homophobia were evident. In the case of South Africa and Brazil, the literature is dominated by social issues, mainly related to inequality, sanitation, lack of opportunities, and urban infrastructure.

In the case of South Africa, there was widespread discussion of the AIDS epidemic. In Brazil, the *El País* editorial published a report titled "Childhood + Favela = Football" (Hierro, 2014). The media often utilized the favelas in Brazil and the townships in South Africa as focal points for discussing the social situation in these countries. These areas were depicted in a conflicting manner: on one hand, the media portrayed the communities as unique and exotic regions with a more authentic culture, but on the other hand, they highlighted severe social and economic problems in these regions (Almeida, Özdemir, 2022).

In an article published in the *South Africa Medical Journal*, Richter and Massawe (2010) discussed the 2010 World Cup. The researchers pointed out that in South Africa, extraordinary courts were set up in the host cities to curb violence against tourists. The reports analyzed often referred to the United Nations and the presence of Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon. The secretary pointed out that the infrastructure for the games should go beyond the World Cup to build compelling campaigns against child abuse, exploitation, child sex tourism, and human trafficking. Other events and campaigns should include racism and intolerance, child labor, violence against women and girls, and HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care, and support.

In Brazil's case, the media widely covered the collapse of a viaduct built for the games in the host city of Belo Horizonte, highlighting the lack of quality in the infrastructure and the expenditure on the World Cup without any benefit for Brazilians. The portrayal of the favelas and the clashes between the police and the communities, resulting in the deaths of young black men, was extensive, with a reference to the UN report. Another significant point was raised by Irina Bokova, Director-General of the United Nations

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, who highlighted the deaths of journalists in Brazil. In Russia, new elements emerged. The coverage focused on social issues such as racism, sexual harassment, homophobia, and xenophobia. Xenophobia and racism follow a similar trajectory. The issue of xenophobia is present in the British press, such as in *The Guardian*, in a report on 14 June 2018, "Don't have sex with men from 'different race' during World Cup, warns Russian politician," in which Russian legislator Tamara Pletnyova states: "Russian women should avoid sex with non-white foreign men during the football World Cup because they could become single mothers of mixed-race children" (*The Guardian*, 2018). In this case, the legislator describes to the newspaper the difficulty of non-white children in Russian society. In the case of homophobia, the concern comes from the idea that Russian society is hostile to the civil rights of the LGBTQIA+ community, as in the case of CNN, "UK gay rights activist arrested in Russia as World Cup opens". Russia has adopted a series of laws restricting the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community (Spark, 2018).

In the case of Qatar, FIFA intervened directly by banning the teams from wearing the rainbow armband. *Folha de S. Paulo* discussed why FIFA threatened to issue a yellow card so that the teams would not wear the armband against homophobia. According to the Brazilian newspaper, since being nominated to host the event in 2010, Qatar has been heavily criticized, further intensified by the proximity of the tournament, especially in terms of human rights, particularly LGBTQIA+ people and migrant workers, including those who worked on the World Cup construction sites. Another UN report in 2018 by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) describes unmistakable evidence of successive purges against LGBTQIA+ people, suggesting a pattern of impunity detrimental to accountability for human rights violations. Qatar is an example of Sportswashing, deliberately trying to use sporting Soft Power to change a tarnished global reputation.

International politics is communication between nations, which communicative or strategic interests can guide. In the focus of this study, Sports Diplomacy uses international norms and values, as well as other agents in the public sphere, such as clubs, federations, and NGOs, to build institutional bridges in foreign relations. For South Africa, it was a question of demonstrating that the country had built up Western values after the international community's embargoes linked to apartheid; Brazil wanted to secure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council; Russia sought to present its credentials as a holder of power in order to impose its demands after the fall of the USSR; Qatar wanted to increase its participation in the Western political scenario in order to protect itself against the embargoes of the Gulf countries.

## V. DISCUSSION

The countries analyzed used the event to expand Sports Diplomacy and Soft Power, with different personalities and world leaders who would circulate during the event, creating bigger agendas in international relations.

In Russia's case and especially Qatar, the term Sportswashing was often used to demonstrate the use of sport to clean up the country's image. The term Soft Power in sports originated in Africa but had more repercussions in Brazil due to the doubts hanging over the event's organization after the June 2013 protests.

FIFA commercializes its product, and among the many points for selling this product are Sports Diplomacy and Soft Power. For a long time, the host country will be in the sights of the world media. It will be able to conclude its commercial agreements in a neoliberal environment based on systemic structure and strategic action. However, intangible values such as culture, political values, and international politics have not been achieved because they lack elements of communicative action and valorization of the world of life.

The countries analyzed have fed FIFA's power due to their feeling of a lack of representation and interest in increasing their strength and power in the global geopolitical arena. In these countries,

the World Cup has left a trail of corruption, displaced people, violence against human rights, and obscurity. FIFA involves its partners and top management in a system of corruption and power, as demonstrated by the investigations into the scandals generated over the last two decades.

The World Cup in countries of the Global South demonstrated (a) evictions of poor populations without any compensation; (b) abuse of workers, especially migrants; (c) changes in civil rights and the curtailment of social movements; (d) threats, intimidation, and imprisonment of free media journalists.

When analyzing the news coverage, one can observe that the media outlets' various formats and editorial lines did not impact the surplus. The newspapers tended to discuss the same events with a similar focus, a trend already noted in other studies. There is no editorial conflict between outlets, as a few critical issues are covered in one outlet rather than others (Graeff et al., 2019; Gutierrez & Bettine, 2020).

It is only possible to speculate on the reasons for this homogeneity of coverage, which could be related to the fact that it is a sole event that takes place over a limited period, not allowing for a broader approach, or have roots in the way the press in developed countries portrays the countries of the Global South.

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