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To cite this article: Jonathan Grix & Paul Michael Brannagan (2016) Of Mechanisms and Myths: Conceptualising States' "Soft Power" Strategies through Sports Mega-Events, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 27:2, 251-272, DOI: [10.1080/09592296.2016.1169791](https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2016.1169791)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2016.1169791>

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### (ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT)

This is the Authors' Original Manuscript in its final and definitive form. The Version of Record can be found via the following reference: Grix, J. and Brannagan, P.M. (2016) Of Mechanisms and Myths: conceptualizing state's 'soft power' strategies through sports mega-events, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 27(2), 251-272.

Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09592296.2016.1169791#abstract>

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## Of Mechanisms and Myths: Conceptualizing States' 'Soft Power' Strategies through Sports Mega-Events

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Joseph Nye's concept of 'Soft Power' has become an increasingly used term to help explain why states – including so-called 'emerging states' – are paying greater attention towards acquiring various forms of cultural and political attraction. However, within mainstream International Relations, Political Science, and Sport Studies literature, a continuous debate remains as to what actually constitutes soft power, how national leaders go about acquiring it, and how forms of attraction convert into power outcomes in both the short- and long-term. This paper endeavours to overcome these issues by offering an 'Ideal-Type' model which details states' soft power strategies, the mechanisms they use, and the tangible future outcomes they gain. The paper is separated into five sections. First the concept of soft power is introduced and its contribution, application and limitations are critically evaluated. Second, crucial background information on the various national authorities engaged with to arrive at the ideal type is offered, along with a discussion of the research methods used. Third, the paper advances an ideal-type model of a state's soft power strategy, explicitly detailing, in the process, the considerations and rationale behind the design. Fourth, empirical data gathered by the authors around Germany's hosting of the 2006 FIFA World Cup and Qatar's acquisition of the 2022 FIFA World Cup is used as 'test cases' to show the utility of the ideal-type. The paper concludes by reflecting on the contribution this model makes to current literature and how it could be used in future research.

**Keywords:** sports mega-events; football World Cup; soft power; sport diplomacy; Germany; Qatar.

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## Introduction

Recent years have seen an increase in the use of Joseph Nye's concept of 'soft power'<sup>1</sup> by scholars and commentators attempting to explain why states – including so-called 'emerging states' – are seeking to acquire various forms of cultural and political attraction. However, within mainstream international relations, political science, and sport studies literature, a continuous debate remains as to what actually constitutes soft power, how national leaders go about acquiring it, and how forms of attraction convert into power outcomes in both the short- and long-term. The intention of this piece is to move beyond a discussion of Joseph Nye's concept of 'soft power' towards an 'ideal type' of a state's soft power strategy that can be used in future empirical research – sporting and otherwise. One of the problems with Nye's work – and much of the academic discourse it has inspired – is that debates remain lofty, concepts slippery and theories opaque, rendering their use in actual research difficult. Nonetheless, instead of jettisoning the concept 'soft power', this article seeks to empirically ground it through developing a heuristic device that researchers can use to analyse a variety of cases. In previous work the authors have critiqued the term, but came to the conclusion that 'Joseph Nye clearly put his finger on something when coining the concept of "soft power"— there has evidently been a shift in attempts to manipulate the "politics of attraction" in international affairs among states of all political hues'.<sup>2</sup> The originality of the current paper lies in its attempt to build out from the authors' empirical studies of sport diplomacy to construct an 'ideal type' that can be used by researchers to analyse further case studies to understand the components of states' soft power strategies.

As part of the strategic shift from employing 'hard' to 'soft' power (see below for more on this), states have increasingly used sport in general and sports mega-events (SMEs) in particular. The latter are often used as broad-brush diplomatic tools to increase a state's international prestige, improve an often tarnished image and increase the likelihood of the host state's acceptance on the world stage. As such, this paper draws on two sports-related examples to exemplify the utility of the ideal type. SMEs are seen by the majority of regime types as part of their wider diplomatic armoury and by their very nature these events cut across all of the areas identified by the authors which are considered important for generating soft power (see below). This is significant, as current debates tend to focus on semantics or fail to engage with the concept, rather than providing a conceptual framework with which to attempt to understand a state's soft power strategy.

The paper unfolds with an introduction and discussion of the available literature on soft power in its wider and sporting contexts. As will become clear, the majority of such work has refrained from confronting many of Nye's conceptual limitations. Prior to introducing the ideal type, a section on the research methods and sources used in its construction is explained. The idea here is to indicate the data types and analyses used in empirical attempts to understand soft power. It is from such studies that significant insights have fed into the model. In introducing an ideal type, flesh is added to the theoretical bones of much of this debate by highlighting the mechanisms national governments and relevant stakeholders draw on to acquire soft power. The next step in this paper is to apply this abstract model briefly to two real-life test-cases (Germany's hosting of the 2006 FIFA World Cup and Qatar's sport diplomacy, including the

acquisition of the 2022 FIFA World Cup) to illustrate its potential.<sup>3</sup> The possible pitfalls of any soft power strategy are also highlighted. The piece concludes by detailing how the ideal type might be used in future research to help further identify and explain the mechanisms through which a state can acquire soft power.

### **‘Soft Power’: concept, debate and limitations**

The concept of ‘soft power’ was coined in 1990 by the American political scientist, Joseph Nye. For Nye, the ‘power’ side of the concept denotes one’s ability to ‘effect the outcomes you want, and, if necessary, to change the behaviour of others to make this happen’.<sup>4</sup> For twenty-first century leaders, Nye suggests political outcomes can be achieved through an amalgamation of both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power strategies.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, states may draw upon forms of ‘hard power’, through, for example, capitalizing on military force or offering economic rewards; on the other, they may choose to indirectly adapt the political agenda in such a way which shapes the preferences of others through, for instance, emulating one’s ‘intangible assets’: attractive culture, innovative ideologies, and/or credible and commendable institutions, values and policies.<sup>6</sup> It is this latter approach which Nye calls ‘soft power’: ‘the ability to achieve goals through attraction rather than coercion’.<sup>7</sup> Such attraction converts into power outcomes when those on the receiving end of the soft power strategy look to the state producing it for affirmation, guidance and leadership, or seek to imitate their domestic and/or international achievements.<sup>8</sup>

This is, however, not to suggest that soft power should replace the utilization of hard power – in-fact national leaders should, whenever possible, endeavour to combine the soft dimension of attraction with the hard dimensions of coercion and inducement (what Nye terms ‘smart power’)<sup>9</sup>. Rather, Nye advocates that nation-states should take greater advantage of the former.<sup>10</sup> Nye’s rationale for this is three fold. First, since the end of the Cold War, nation-states have become far more concerned with forms of welfare over military glory, whereby, in the modern era, national leaders need greater public support before engaging in forceful pursuits.<sup>11</sup> Second, for the majority of states, the use of force severely jeopardizes their economic objectives and ability to maintain international competitiveness.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the increasing influence of the information revolution and globalization has led to states’ behaviour coming under closer scrutiny than ever before. The result is that the use of force has become less tolerated in post-industrial (and, in particular, advanced capitalist) societies, leading to the increasing importance of soft forms of power.<sup>13</sup>

The significance of the concept is demonstrated most evidently through the increasing number of academics, politicians and governmental authorities, private institutions and agencies, and journalists and blog writers that have attempted to apply, adapt and/or measure soft power in their discussions of state-led policies. A good example from the latter group is Susie Mesure of *The Independent* who classifies the global obsession with K-pop music as a significant cog in South Korean’s soft power offensive, one which has seen the state successfully overtake rivals Japan as Asia’s ‘coolest child’;<sup>14</sup> Takashi Umekawa from *Reuters* identifies the Japan Foreign Ministry’s plan to inject \$15 million into the funding of Japanese studies and research at overseas universities as a clear push for enhanced ‘soft power’, one which is greatly helping internationally promote ‘Japan Brand’;<sup>15</sup> and, finally, Roula Khalaf of the *Financial Times* grounds the United

Kingdom's decision to commit a new fund towards the protection of historic property after Isis's 'cultural war' and subsequent destruction of ancient sites in Syria as a significant soft power coup, a decision which has been praised by numerous Syrians who are determined to safeguard their 'identity and existence'.<sup>16</sup>

A second group consists of politicians and governmental authorities who have referred to soft power in speeches and various state policies. Prominent examples include Hillary Clinton's reference to both soft power and smart power at the 2013 Council for Foreign Relations in Washington, DC;<sup>17</sup> the UK Prime Minister David Cameron's description of Britain's place in the world as a 'soft power super power' in a speech on the importance of Scotland to the UK at the Olympic Park in East London in 2014;<sup>18</sup> and, finally, the Chinese President Xi Jinping's Communist Party address in Beijing in 2014 where he singled out the importance of raising China's soft power reach as well as the need to better communicate the country's message to the world.<sup>19</sup> With regard to governments and soft power, a good example is the workshop dedicated to the use of smart power at the U.S. Department of State's Third Annual Conference on Program Evaluation in 2010;<sup>20</sup> the British Parliament's 2013 establishment of its 'Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence', which led to the publication of two extensive volumes in March 2014<sup>21</sup>; and the centrality of soft power in the Australian Government's 'Public Diplomacy Strategy 2014-16', which lays out the state's plans to significantly increase 'trade, investment and economic prosperity promotion'.<sup>22</sup>

The third group identified by the authors consists of a number of private institutions and agencies who are concerned with measuring a state's soft power reach. These include the UK based Monocle Media Group, who, in collaboration with the UK Institute for Government, publish their annual 'Soft Power Survey', ranking the top thirty countries worldwide based on their culture, cuisine, sport, governance and diplomacy;<sup>23</sup> Portland Communication's yearly 'the Soft Power 30', which attempts to measure the soft power properties and subsequent public opinion of states, positioning the top thirty countries based on their diplomatic networks, cultural impact, governmental ideologies, level of education, digital infrastructure, and economic capacity;<sup>24</sup> Ernst and Young Global Limited's year on year 'Rapid-Growth Markets Soft Power Index', which looks to measure the leading twenty countries based on their global integrity, global integration and global image;<sup>25</sup> and finally, although not referring directly to soft power, is Anholt-GfK's 'Nation Brand Index', which grades the top fifty nations on public opinion acquired from 20,000 citizens in twenty countries on how they perceive a state's people, products, culture, government, education, lifestyle and tourism.<sup>26</sup>

The fourth and most dominant group consists of academics who have applied Nye's concept in their attempt to theorize various state-led pursuits. In the field of international relations, for example, numerous scholars have argued that China is currently engaged in a soft power offensive through the promotion of its Confucius Institutes abroad, its involvement in United Nations peacekeeping missions and various humanitarian efforts, as well as the rise and international reach of its media outlets, Central China Television (CCTV) and Xinhua News Agency;<sup>27</sup> furthermore, many have claimed that India's rising international reputation for excellence in film, business and technology equates to a drive for soft power;<sup>28</sup> likewise, Brazil is said to be engaged in a soft power strategy through its leading role in successfully negotiating

multiple international agreements related to public health, as well as its position as the world's largest aid donors;<sup>29</sup> and it has been argued that Turkey exerts significant soft power across the Arab world due its recent democratization efforts across the region, its economic success, rising credibility and shared heritage.<sup>30</sup> Finally, Russia is said to have 'failed to capitalize on the soft-power boost afforded to Russia by hosting the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi', according to Joseph Nye,<sup>31</sup> although this is, as Golubchikov<sup>32</sup> states, a 'reductionist' account of the use of this SME as a signal of Russia's growing power.

As with most mainstream concepts, the time-lag is fairly long before soft power begins to appear in sports studies literature and analyses. 'Social capital' took some 6 years from Putnam's successful 2000 book, *Bowling Alone*, to enter sport studies;<sup>33</sup> 'soft power' has taken even longer. Within the sports studies literature it took some 20 years for the concept to gain traction. In general, the use of the concept has been most prevalent by those scholars who attempt to explain the global lure of hosting both first-order (FIFA World Cup; Olympic Games) and second-order (Rugby World Cup; Commonwealth Games) SMEs. Some of the most notable work here can be found through the examples of Germany's hosting of the 2006 FIFA World Cup;<sup>34</sup> Beijing's staging of the 2008 Olympic Games;<sup>35</sup> the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa;<sup>36</sup> the 2011 Rugby World Cup in New Zealand;<sup>37</sup> the London 2012 Olympics;<sup>38</sup> Brazil's 'double hosting' of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games;<sup>39</sup> Sochi's delivery of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games;<sup>40</sup> and Qatar's acquisition of the 2022 FIFA World Cup<sup>41</sup>. In most cases, hosting a successful SME is thought to lead to enhanced soft power that can make a state's culture and political values more attractive to others, thus improving the image or 'brand' of the host and/or signalling their emerging status as a key international actor.<sup>42</sup> In short, sport is no longer just a niche cultural institution for national governments to consider employing domestically, but rather a highly relevant foreign policy tool.<sup>43</sup>

One could be forgiven for presuming that with the quantity of commentators making use of Nye's concept - across the four groups outlined - an excellent heuristic device with which to help explain how and why states engage in the "politics of attraction" on the international stage would have been developed. Unfortunately, although the concept has shed some light on why states undertake a soft power strategy (for international prestige/increased trade etc.), little has been discussed on the 'how'. Indeed, despite its growing significance, many have strongly criticized Nye's work<sup>44</sup>. Through these authors' attempts to unpick, understand and extend soft power theoretically, Nye's original concept has been, and, more importantly, continues to be, questioned on four specific levels: first, many have raised concerns over what soft power actually is, and, more specifically, whether it is merely another buzzword for conceptualizing that of nation branding and/or place marketing;<sup>45</sup> second, many have suggested that Nye fails to deliver a clear description of how one actually acquires 'soft power' or forms of attraction, leading to the concept becoming highly confusing and problematic to work with;<sup>46</sup> third, due to Nye's reliance on discussions of the West, many equate soft power as being either too structural or Western-centric;<sup>47</sup> and finally, some have argued that greater academic attention is needed in identifying and highlighting the potential pitfalls for any state that attempts to acquire soft power forms.<sup>48</sup>

In responding to the first criticism above, Nye himself - along with others - has been quick to remind us that soft power should not merely be considered another term for place

marketing/nation branding.<sup>49</sup> As Nye has been at pains to advocate, soft power is not simply the ability to persuade; it is the ability to entice and attract, leading to acquiescence and imitation. Considering this, if a state's culture, values and/or policies are not themselves authentically attractive, no soft power outcomes will be gained;<sup>50</sup> soft power cannot be achieved through slick marketing and/or branding, but emanates from, above all else, credibility – a value which simple propaganda and/or public relations campaigns often lack.<sup>51</sup> In agreement with Nye, we would argue that although selling a positive image of oneself is a significant part of public diplomacy, for soft power to work, leaders need to, first-and-foremost, build long-term relationships based on trust and credibility, eventually leading to an enabling environment for effective government policies. Given this, the authors agree with Nye that soft power aligns itself more to public diplomacy than nation building and/or place marketing;<sup>52</sup> indeed, successful soft power requires regular and equal communication with foreign audiences, 'listening as well as [simply] talking'.<sup>53</sup>

Unfortunately, however, Nye fails to offer much in the way of a solution to the remaining three criticisms levelled towards him. This contribution to the literature seeks to redress this in part by: setting out tangible areas in which states acquire soft power; offering empirical examples of real-life cases to show what soft power acquisition looks like in practice; using a non-Western case study to illustrate that soft power transcends geographical localities. There is limited space here to discuss in-depth the Janus-faced nature of a soft power strategy that relies on large, one-off, SMEs, but the authors have discussed this in detail elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> In the following sections, therefore, the focus is on presenting an 'ideal type' that goes some way to identifying how states actually go about acquiring soft power forms, the mechanisms involved, and how these convert into long-term outcomes. This is achieved by drawing on the empirical examples of one Western state (Germany and its hosting of the 2006 FIFA World Cup) and one non-Western state (Qatar's sport diplomacy) in order to identify the universal applicability of soft power.

## Methods

The ideal-type put-forward in the subsequent section is derived from empirical work conducted over a four year period by the authors with national authorities in Europe, South America and the Middle East.<sup>55</sup> In addition, the authors have generated knowledge as part of a multi-state research project on the leveraging strategies adopted by countries hosting mega-events in an attempt to produce tangible 'legacies', including, amongst others, showcasing their nation, improving their national image and putting themselves on the international map.<sup>56</sup> The following is indicative of the range of sources drawn upon which fed into the development of the idea type. Both studies of Germany and Qatar have been published in full elsewhere (see endnote 3).

After ethical approval (Universities of Birmingham/Loughborough), the data collection strategy occurred in two stages. The first included the continued collection and analysis of documents between 2011 and 2015 in connection to the foreign policy and soft power objectives of German and Qatari authorities. In selecting documents, only those published directly by state authorities or state-subsidiaries (e.g. national tourist boards, national governing bodies/sporting committees, etc.) were included in the final sample. Thus, in order to ensure the content of each document resembled the objectives of the state, any and all documents not directly derived from German and Qatari authorities were excluded. In adhering to this inclusion-exclusion criterion, the final

document sample resembled that depicted in Table 1 (below). The document analysis guided the construction of interview schedules and interviews with state officials.<sup>57</sup>

Country	Included Document Sources
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- German Federal Government Reports;</li> <li>- German Federal Ministry of Interior Reports;</li> <li>- German Tourist Board;</li> <li>- Germany 'Land of Ideas' campaign;</li> <li>- 2006 World Cup Organising Committee.</li> </ul>
Qatar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning;</li> <li>- 2022 Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy;</li> <li>- Aspire Academy for Sports Excellence;</li> <li>- Qatar Supreme Council for Health;</li> <li>- International Centre for Sports Security;</li> </ul>

**Table 1: Document Inclusion-Exclusion Criterion**

The second stage of our data collection strategy included semi-structured interviews with key officials in Germany and the State of Qatar between 2011 and 2015. The ability of semi-structured interviews to produce the most in-depth accounts of specific phenomena, as well as combine the flexibility of unstructured techniques with more focused, structured-like forms, led to the decision to use this form of interviewing.<sup>58</sup> Key organizations and personnel were chosen in line with the study's aims and objectives (see Table 2)<sup>59</sup> and all participants were required to be over the age of 18 years old.

Participant must work for state-run/funded organization;
Participant must work in relevant department (foreign policy, tourism, sports policy/development, public relations, etc.) within state organization;
Participant must hold a certain level of expertise within organization (Director, Manager, Senior Official, Committee Member, officer/analyst, etc.);
Participant must be over 18 years of age.

**Table 2: Interview Inclusion Criterion**

As shown in Table 3, the final interview sample included: the German Foreign Office; the 'Germany: Land of Ideas' campaign, the state's core place-branding initiative set-up by to showcase Germany's culture, politics and business; the German Football Federation and the FIFA 2006 Organising Committee, the organizations responsible for successfully delivering and maintaining the legacy of the 2006 FIFA World Cup; the Qatar 2022 Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, the organization responsible for the organization, delivery and maintenance of Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup legacy; the International Centre for Sports Security, the organization responsible for showcasing Qatar's international commitment to integrity, security and safety through sport; the Aspire Academy of Sports Excellence, the organization responsible



for training and development of aspiring athletes; the Qatar National Health Strategy, the organization responsible for achieving Qatar’s desire to occupy a world-leading healthcare system; and, Qatar University’s Gulf Studies Program, the centre responsible for the promotion of international collaborative education and research.

Country	Interviewee(s)
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Two Foreign Policy &amp; Communications officers from the German Foreign Office;</li> <li>- The Chief Executive of ‘Germany: Land of Ideas’;</li> <li>- The Secretary General of the German Football Federation and the Vice President of the FIFA 2006 Organising Committee.</li> </ul>
Qatar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Supreme Committee member and one Public Relations and Communications Director from the Qatar 2022 Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy;</li> <li>- Public Relations Manager of the International Centre for Sports Security;</li> <li>- Public Relations Director and the Head of Sport Development at the Aspire Academy of Sports Excellence;</li> <li>- The Director of the Qatar National Health Strategy;</li> <li>- The Director of Research of Qatar University’s Gulf Studies Program.</li> </ul>

**Table 3: Interviewee positions and organizations**

Data was subjected to a thorough thematic analysis through first, reading and re-reading of documents and transcribed interviews; second, generating ‘initial codes’ which identified parts of the data found most significant; third, identifying the various relationships that existed between these initial codes, which allowed the authors to begin the process of creating overarching themes; fourth, the themes were then re-worked until each theme was distinctive in its own right. Following this stage the authors then re-consulted the literature and concluded the analysis by assigning a name to our themes which captured the overall ‘story’ each was telling.<sup>60</sup>

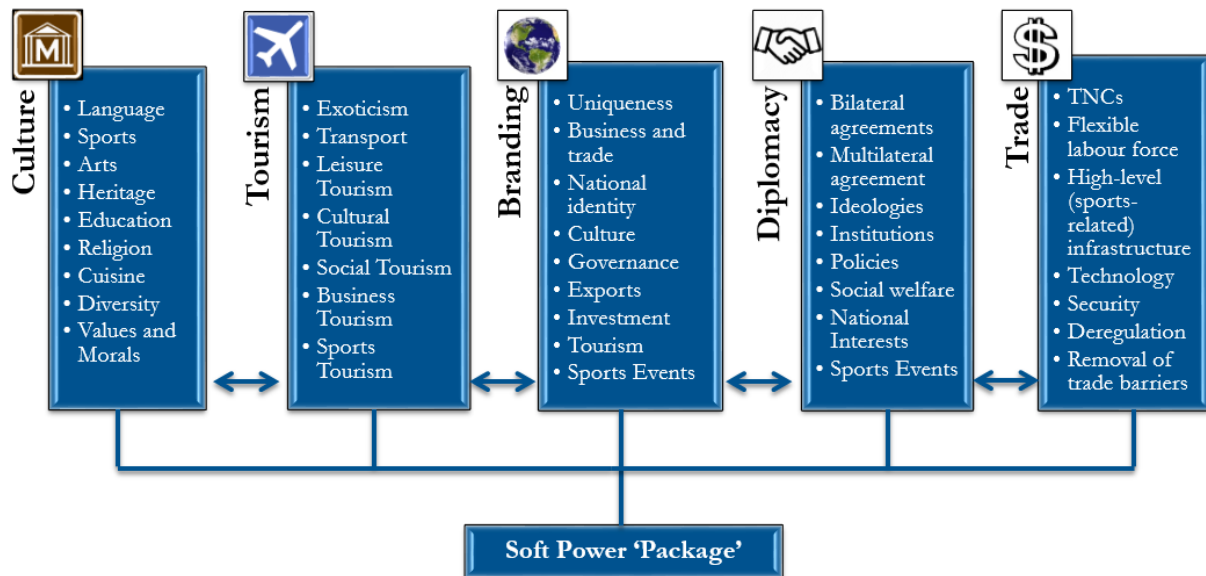
A central part of our contribution is the development of an ideal type of soft power that will be of use to both academics and practitioners alike. An ideal type is, of course, a construct that represents an intellectual description of a phenomenon in its abstract form and does not provide us with explanations. What follows should not be understood as an ‘ideal’ standard ‘in the sense of being perfect, but rather that it is “ideal” in the sense of being an intellectual construct that may never exist in the real world’.<sup>61</sup> Rather, an ideal type is a conceptualisation with which the researcher can compare reality on the ground (empirical evidence). Ideal types are thus hypothetical constructs formed by emphasising aspects of behaviour and institutions which are (generally) empirically observable. These constructs isolate ‘those variables central to the study of a problem, putting aside those aspects of the reality which seem inessential to the analysis’.<sup>62</sup> This

ideal type has been developed through an iterative process between concepts and empirical data across a number of cases, as stated above, including non-Western states (Brazil, Qatar, Russia) and Western states (UK, Germany, Canada). Two key points ought to be noted at this juncture: first, the purpose of an ideal type is to be parsimonious. By definition this will mean that there will be a number of aspects that are not included in our model; second, our purpose is not to advance a ‘theory’ of soft power or an explanatory framework for predicting outcomes, but rather to produce a tool that can be used and adapted by researchers looking at a variety of states and their soft power strategies.

### **Towards an ‘Ideal Type’ of a States’ Soft Power Package**

This section introduces the ideal type of soft power and the domains within which they are likely to be found. The two ‘test cases’<sup>63</sup> – one actual SME (FIFA 2006 World Cup) and one longer-term sports diplomatic strategy (by Qatar) – are drawn from sport for two, simple reasons. First, sport is an under-researched yet fruitful area for soft power/diplomacy research; both political science and international relations as disciplines are bereft of in-depth studies using sport/sporting events as part of a nation’s soft power strategy.<sup>64</sup> Some slow progress has been made since Taylor suggested in 1986 that IR and sport suffer from a case of ‘mutual neglect’.<sup>65</sup> Sports studies literature more broadly has begun to engage with the political and diplomatic use of sport. SMEs, in particular, are considered as significant soft power opportunities, acting as major contributions in the process of improving their nation’s image, profiling and showcasing themselves globally and ‘attracting’ others.<sup>66</sup> International sporting success, whether by athletic competition or by the effective staging of SMEs, is said to provide the perfect opportunity for states who seek to ‘attract’ others with their values and culture and persuade them to want what they want by projecting specific images, principles, achievements and visions to foreign publics.<sup>67</sup>

The second key reason why sporting test cases were chosen is that sport and sports events play a role in all five of the (interlinked) ‘resources’ that appear essential in a state’s successful soft power strategy (see figure 2 below). First, is the resource of ‘Culture’ – to which ‘SMEs’ belong. A state’s culture is often central to making a state more attractive to others, one of the reasons states such as Germany and China invest heavily in language institutes abroad; art, heritage, history and literature fall under this category too and are often leveraged to improve a state’s global standing. The UK’s World Service acts as a cultural conduit exemplifying the global reach of English as a language and the British values of democracy and fair news reporting.<sup>68</sup>



**Figure 1: Soft Power 'Resources'**

The second resource, 'Tourism', is closely linked with both 'Branding' and 'Diplomacy' (the third and fourth resources respectively) and serves the purpose of attracting foreigners to a state, bringing with them business for the tourist industry; equally, satisfied tourists can act as multipliers passing on positive messages about the host country on their return, something reported to have happened in Germany's case through hosting the 2006 FWC.<sup>69</sup> 'Branding', the third resource, takes aspects such as 'tourism' and 'culture' and attempts to package them to 'sell' a country externally. Van Ham suggests that such state branding is an attempt to gain prestige on the world stage.<sup>70</sup>

Diplomacy is a broad resource that entails formal state-to-state relations, but also encompasses the multitude of actors now involved in diplomatic relations. Public diplomacy studies differentiate between the 'old' modus operandi via 'hierarchical state-centric structures' on the one hand and the 'new' model of a 'network environment' in which several actors, of which the state is but one, undertake public diplomacy.<sup>71</sup> One can also speak of a growing 'sports' diplomacy - that is, the use of sport to achieve diplomatic ends. Whereas a few well-known examples of sport being used as an 'ice-breaker' in diplomatic affairs are regularly cited (e.g. the 'ping-pong' diplomacy between the US and China), a wide range of regime types are now signing up to host a SME to signal their arrival on the world stage. Recent examples include the 'BRICS' states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), Qatar and Aserbaidshan.

Finally, the 'Trade' resource is straightforward: states use all of the resources discussed above to increase their global trade and grow their economies; this can entail finding new markets within which to sell products they manufacture or to sell their own 'goods' such as financial services. SMEs are often used to send out a 'signal' that a state has the requisite infrastructure and logistical know-how to do business at the highest and most efficient level; the construction of sporting sites themselves often lead to extensive flows of human capital between states.

Taken together, the five domains highlighted above constitute the areas within which states attempt to gain soft power. Clearly, some of the components of the ideal type above are relatively constant, for example, ‘art’, ‘language’, ‘national identity’ and ‘values and morals’. Other components can be stimulated by key events, such as an SME. The latter can kick-start tourism, impact diplomatic relations and affect trade relations. Any success in these areas then becomes part of the nation’s ‘branding’. Australia, for example, understands and brands itself as a ‘sporting nation’, despite the fact that they suffer high levels of obesity. The Australian Tourist Commission suggested that the Sydney Olympics in 2000 ‘accelerated development of brand Australia by 10 years’.<sup>72</sup> Of interest to the discussion here is that ‘sport’ (including SMEs) cross-cuts all of the domains outlined. ‘Sport’ is part of a nation’s cultural make-up. The majority of mainstream sports today began life in England in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; sports were spread across the world (in great part through the British Empire) and now stand as a cultural, universal language (i.e. association football (‘soccer’) shares the same rules throughout the world). SMEs are major tourist attractions – although net tourist gains are often off-set by ‘regular’ tourists remaining at home. Nonetheless, sports events often ‘force’ fans to visit places they would otherwise not; this can lead to repeat visits and the ‘multiplier’ effect – returning home and telling others of the good time spent in the host country. Nation’s and cities are often branded through sporting events (see Qatar below). Canada has become ‘addicted’ to hosting SMEs,<sup>73</sup> for example, in an attempt to showcase itself globally. Finally, SMEs are often used as an arena to show diplomatic solidarity (but also disunity) between states.

The next section offers a brief overview of how the ideal type above could be applied to an empirical case.

### **Germany’s Soft Power Strategy: the 2006 FIFA World Cup**

Germany’s hosting of the 2006 World Cup offers an excellent example of how a state can actively seek to make themselves both more attractive and more influential on the world stage. The following is necessarily brief and focuses on just some short examples from the ‘resources’ highlighted in the ideal type above. A desk officer at the German Foreign Office set out their position in relation to cultural foreign policy:

We spend almost a quarter of the whole budget for foreign policy on culture which is more than 700 million Euros....this is the long-term promotion of ‘soft power’....we want to bring people together....and sport is one part of this [promotion of Germany’s culture]<sup>74</sup>

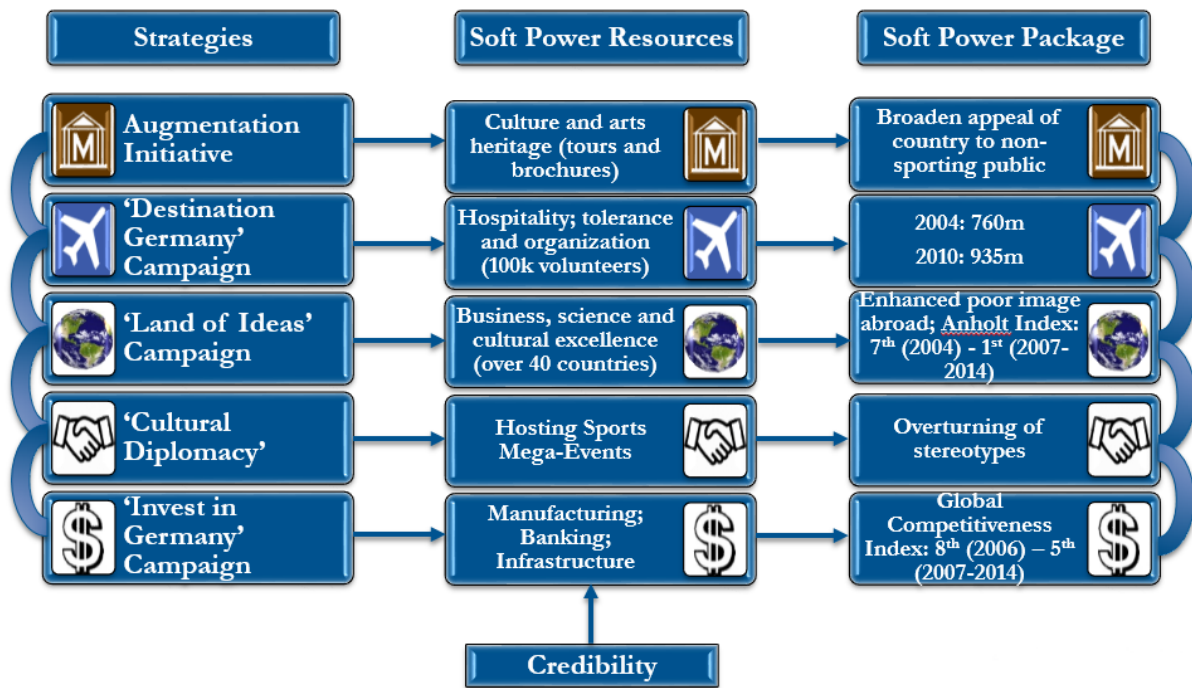


Figure 2: Germany's Soft Power 'Package' (2006)

Germany wasted no time in implementing its 'World Cup Hosting Strategy'<sup>75</sup> with the express purpose of improving its poor image abroad. Overcoming negative stereotypes, it was believed, would lead to an increase in in-coming tourism and position Germany as an economic and scientific country to trade with.<sup>76</sup> The German government also wanted Germany to be seen as a nation of culture ('Kulturnation') and its people to be known for more than just being 'punctual, reliable and disciplined'.<sup>77</sup>

The German strategy resulted in a long-term, carefully planned, coordinated and implemented set of actions designed to change the national 'image' of Germany among foreign publics. The 'strategies' in figure 2 above take place in the resources identified in the authors' soft power ideal type: the cultural augmentation strategy greatly increased the international scope of Germany's World Cup through showing projects in 40 different countries and 87 different international cities.<sup>78</sup> According to Green<sup>79</sup> such 'augmentation' – that is, putting on activities, entertainment and services over and beyond the event itself – enhances and broadens the appeal of an event. In preparation to receive tourists, a number of campaigns were specifically designed to prepare Germany and the Germans to be hospitable to the crowds of foreign visitors that were expected for the competition.<sup>80</sup> One of the latter was the 'Nation-wide Service and Hospitality Campaign' which published millions of brochures and held numerous workshops.<sup>81</sup> The tourism industry seems to have benefitted from the four-week tournament, allegedly earning 'an extra 300 million Euros in revenue...'<sup>82</sup> The 'Branding' resource was headed up by the 'Land of Ideas' campaign, launched in 2006 and designed to improve the German national image by showcasing Germany and attracting tourism and foreign investment. It was so successful that it continues to this day, bringing together key actors from business, science and culture, and facilitating the promotion of Germany's image externally.<sup>83</sup>

The diplomatic resource put into the 2006 World Cup extends to efforts to win the event in the first place (rumours of high-level bribery came to light in the most recent FIFA scandal), to securing the success of the event. The Foreign Office (FO) pursued an overall ‘cultural diplomacy’ strategy, within which sport diplomacy took centre stage. The German FO worked closely with the Organising Committee and organized a whistle-stop ‘welcome tour’ for Franz Beckenbauer, the Committee’s Chair, to all 31 countries qualified for the tournament. According to the Vice Chair of the Committee, Horst R. Schmidt, ‘we received a high-level reception [in all 31 countries; Grix, 2013]; he went to the countries to welcome them to Germany....this greatly influenced the media coverage of the event positively...’<sup>84</sup>

On trade, the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK) in their report indicated that

the most important economic stimulus was due to a greater willingness among Germans and foreign football fans to spend money. Almost 50% of all businesses who reported a positive effect from the FWC also reported increased sales in this context...<sup>85</sup>

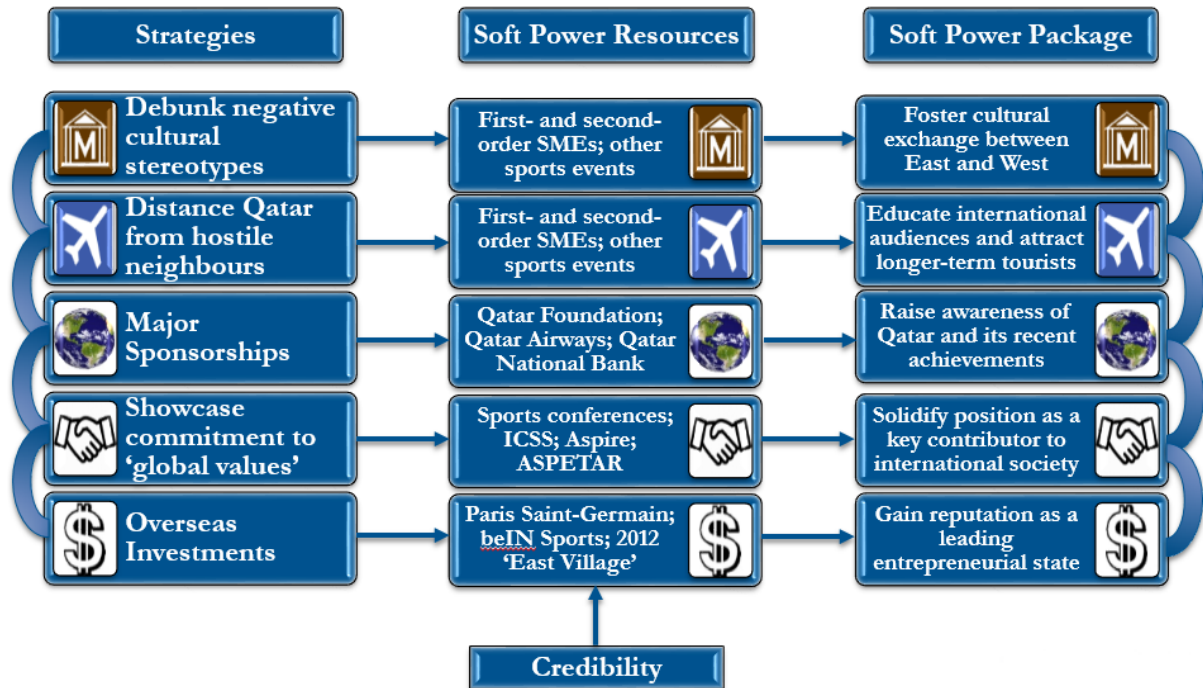
Economically, the 2006 event appears to have paid off. The 2 million foreign tourists who travelled to Germany during the month-long tournament are estimated to have spent 600 million euros.<sup>86</sup> While it is notoriously difficult to find accurate data on the exact economic impact of the FWC on a nation’s economy, half of the companies who reported a positive ‘FWC’ effect on their business thought the gain in reputation of Germany and its products was ‘the underlying reason for the economic success of this mega event’.<sup>87</sup> This ‘reputational gain’, while hard to calculate, is clearly part of a successful soft power strategy.

It is clear that the above ‘resources’ identified overlap: an augmentation plan involving arts, heritage and history is designed to attract tourists (‘Tourism’ resource) and to get them to stay longer and spend more money (‘Trade’). It also greatly adds to the ‘Branding’ resource – Germany’s cultural history as the ‘land of poets and thinkers’ helps sell it as a tourist destination. Equally, part of the reason Germany’s soft power strategy worked well was because of wealth: hardly any resources were spent on ‘infrastructure’ (building roads, transport systems, stadia), as these were already present and at a very high standard. Thus, resources could be re-directed into the type of campaigns discussed here.

### **Qatar’s Soft Power Ambitions through Sport Diplomacy**

This section applies the ideal type to the case of Qatar and its soft power strategy via sport diplomacy. Due to its abundance of wealth, predominantly from the sale of crude oil and liquefied natural gas, Qatar is able to invest heavily in the acquisition of soft power through sports diplomacy. Qatar’s nominal GDP per capita is almost double that of Germany’s (US\$93,965 compared to roughly US\$47,589)<sup>88</sup> and, relative to many states, a substantial proportion of this wealth has been invested in various sporting endeavours.<sup>89</sup> Based on the authors’ various engagements with Qatari authorities and relevant documents, the argument is

that Qatar's soft power objectives through sport rest upon the mechanisms of culture, tourism, branding, diplomacy and trade (see figure 3). It should be noted, however, that as Qatar's engagements with global sport are fairly recent, the actual soft power outcomes have yet to fully materialize, and, therefore, the paper offers only the intended outcomes that Qatari authorities seek to achieve.



**Figure 3: Qatar's Soft Power Sports Package**

One of the Qatari authority's central objectives through sport is to debunk various negative cultural stereotypes, most particularly the 'orientalist' connotations of Arabs as static, undeveloped and lazy.<sup>90</sup> In this sense, authorities see the hosting of SMEs that attract international audiences - such as the 2019 IAAF World Championships and the 2022 World Cup - as the most suitable vehicles through which to 'create better understandings between the East and the West'.<sup>91</sup> Most specifically here, Qatari authorities seek to 'signal' the ability of Arabs and Qataris to handle the logistical complexities of hosting major sports events. In addition, such events offer an ideal international showcase to their capacity for creating and implementing innovative and state-of-the-art technologies: the state's achievements in designing carbon-neutral, environmentally friendly cooling technology for the 2022 World Cup is a case in point.<sup>92</sup>

Enhancing inward tourism is closely linked to debunking stereotypes, as in the German case study. At present, Qatar's tourism trends are mostly made up by those who travel to the state predominantly for various short-term conferences and business seminars.<sup>93</sup> According to Qatari authorities, one reason the state fails to attract longer-term holiday-makers is due to the continuous inaccurate media portrayal of the Middle East as a homogenous region plagued by conflict and civil strife. Thus, hosting SMEs is one way in which to 'educate international audiences of the differences between us [Qatar] and many of our regional [Middle Eastern] neighbours'<sup>94</sup>. The intention is also to show that the state is a safe and peaceful tourist

destination. The hoped-for outcome here is the desire to attract longer-term holiday makers who will provide the state with a much needed revenue stream once its crude oil reserves diminish.<sup>95</sup>

The 'Branding' resource sets out to raise awareness of Qatar - its location, history, culture and achievements. Two examples stand out here: the first is the Qatar Foundation's original €170 million deal with FC Barcelona in 2010 to become the club's shirt sponsor, the first ever commercial sponsorship of the FC Barcelona shirt; and second is the 2013 agreement with FC Barcelona for Qatar Airways to replace the Qatar Foundation's original agreement. Sponsorship of one of the globe's largest sporting brands looks to raise international awareness of what Qatari has achieved in a short space of time: the Qatar Foundation's 'Education City' plays host to the largest enclave of American universities outside the US, and has thus converted Doha into one of the leading educational hubs across the Middle East;<sup>96</sup> and Qatar Airways has established itself as one of the fastest growing airlines in the world.<sup>97</sup>

The diplomatic resource includes the regular accommodating of sports conferences and athletic talent. The Doha Goals Forum, for example, annually invites hundreds of sports academics and athletes to Doha to discuss and debate the role of sport for economic and social progress; the Aspire Academy of Sport Excellence's Football Dreams Initiative acts as an elite development programme, wherein 'annually over 600,000 boys from across the world...undergo preliminary trials, with the best candidates being invited back to Doha for expert training'<sup>98</sup>; and the Academy's sports medicine hospital, 'ASPETAR', welcomes a plethora of elite athletes each year to provide specialist expertise and treatment. In all such cases, the Qatari authorities look to transform the country, and the capital, Doha, into a key international centre for dialogue, research and training.<sup>99</sup>

With regard to trade, Qatar has invested heavily abroad in a number of different areas, including multiple international sporting acquisitions. Most well-known is the Qatar Sports Investments' acquisition of Paris Saint-Germain in 2012. In the same year, Qatar Sports Investments also purchased the French Ligue 1 television rights; broadcasting under the name 'beIN Sports', the network now holds the rights to transmit live sport in 'Hong Kong, the US, Canada, Australia and Indonesia'<sup>100</sup>. And finally Qatari Diar purchased a large part of the London 2012 Olympic Village, now known as 'East Village'. Qatari Diar, the real-estate wing of the Qatar Investment Authority, purchased the land in 2011 and is, along with other major stake-holders, Delancey, transforming the complex into luxury housing.<sup>101</sup> Apart from the obvious long-term financial investment the state wishes to recoup, such projects also look to demonstrate Qatar's acumen in the areas of business, finance and real-estate.

Taken together, Qatar draws strongly on all five areas identified in the idea type with the express purpose of improving its standing on the international stage. As is well documented, the hosting of a sports event as part of this strategy can also backfire: by inviting the amount of media attention that a global sporting event attracts, a state is challenging insatiable 24 hour media to scrutinize its *modus operandi*. In Germany's case the global media witnessed a well-run, carnivalesque festival of sport enjoyed by a variety of cultures with very few problems; Qatar, however, has had an avalanche of poor media coverage around its dealings with foreign construction workers and the extraordinary employer-employee relations that exist.



## Conclusion

Clearly further research is needed to develop the ideal type of soft power put forward in this paper. However, the attempt has been made to partially fill a major gap in the literature by offering a start to the debate on grounding soft power in empirical research. The latter was drawn from a test-case of Germany's hosting of the 2006 FIFA World Cup and Qatar's sport diplomacy strategy. There has not been adequate space to develop the linkages between the 'resources' highlighted in the ideal type: Culture, Tourism, Branding, Diplomacy and Trade. Yet, it is clear that these areas overlap and several institutions – for example, the Foreign Office in the UK – seek to promote all in the work that they, and their sponsored organisations do.<sup>102</sup> The significance of this piece lies in the attempt to spell out soft power resources, which then allow researchers and policy makers to consider the potential gains and draw-backs of strategies designed to win over opinion abroad and make states more attractive to others. Such an ideal type is useful as a starting point in understanding how and why states seek to influence others using sport diplomacy and SMEs. It is clear that not all states seek a soft power strategy as put forward in this article. Some, like Russia, for example, confound the standard rationale and do not fit the ideal type. Rather than rendering the ideal type problematic, such 'outliers' can be understood better, if researchers know in which way they differ from the mainstream.<sup>103</sup> Debates on and around the empirical aspects of 'soft power' are to be encouraged and it is hoped that this article has been able to persuade scholars of the value of studying sport diplomacy and SMEs in order to shed light on their role in a "politics of attraction".

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