

# Tokyo 2020: Taking the Gold in Sustainability?

## Soft Power and the theory of Ecological Modernization

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## **Abstract**

Drawing on Nye's concept of soft power, this thesis discusses the strategic adoption of a rhetoric of Ecological Modernization as a discursive tool of public diplomacy. It makes use of the upcoming 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games as a case study. Indeed, the increased perceived value of sport mega-events in promoting soft power suggests a political instrumentality in hosting such events. This thesis employs discourse analysis as a method to investigate, or deconstruct, the official narrative of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. In this way, aspects of the theory of Ecological Modernization that are being used to frame the event can be identified. Specifically, findings reveal that Japan is promoting its soft power by throwing domestic and international political agenda in terms of sustainable development into the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. In addition, winning the right to host the 2020 Olympic Games has given Japan a platform on which the nation's traditional culture is presented to the world.

Keywords: Ecological Modernization, Soft Power, Sport Mega-Events, Environmental Sustainability, 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

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## **Abbreviations**

JOC	Japanese Olympic Committee
IOC	International Olympic Committee
EM	Ecological Modernization
DA	Discourse Analysis
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
OG	Olympic Games
SMEs	Sport Mega-Events
UN	United Nations
GHGs	Greenhouse Gases

## **I. Introduction: Japan, the Abnormal State**

*“During the late 1970s (...) the state of the environment was recognized as posing a profound obstacle to future economic expansion. Since this period, Japan has made commendable strides in reducing industrial emissions and has become an international leader in the development of environmental technology” (Cohen, 1997, p.112).*

One cannot deny Japan’s role as an international player with the capability to make international contributions and influence international politics. Nonetheless, unlike other global powers, Japan in effect lacks hard power resources as a consequence of constitutional constraints and post-war pacifism. Therefore, the nation has had to rely on its intangible assets to gain international outreach (Lam, 2007, p.350, 354). Informed by Nye’s argument (2008), most of the academic attention in studies of Japan’s noncoercive power has been directed to its cultural dimension. Indeed, Japan has gained broad exposure in the public sphere and academia alike for its mastering of so-called culture diplomacy (Heng, 2017); through the “cool Japan” campaign, the nation has managed to promote its unique traditional arts, world-renowned cuisine, and high-standard technology and is now ranked 5<sup>th</sup> according to the annual index published by Portland and the USC Center on Public Diplomacy (2018). However, this thesis aims to investigate an under-explored pillar of Japanese soft power, namely its commitment to fight anthropogenic climate change (Schreurs, 2004, p.107; Asselt et al., 2009). Indeed, Nye (2008) puts forward the hypothesis that when one’s political values align with global norms then attraction can be generated. At a time when concerns for the environment are increasing globally, the promotion of an environmentally friendly model of development thus appears to advance Japan’s position on the global stage. To that end, Japan has sought to pursue environmental protection as a major aspect of its foreign policy (Schreurs, 2004, p.93-94; Mol, 2010).

As a cultural phenomenon that attracts substantial attention globally, many see the Olympic extravaganza as a platform on which host nations can project their political agenda (Mol, 2010; Grix and Houlihan, 2013). Indeed, sport mega-events (SMEs) such as the Olympic Games (OG) are seen as an instrument of public diplomacy in their own right because they mobilize all three resources of soft power identified by Nye (2008), namely culture, foreign policy, and political values (Donos, 2012; Grix and Houlihan, 2013). On that account, winning the Tokyo bid for the 2020 Summer Olympics is a welcome opportunity for

Japan to manage its international image, or “brand”. If successful, an Olympic edition is said to foster benefits for the host country not only in terms of reputation but also in terms of economic gain through increased tourism and foreign investment (ibid). Therefore, the event has always been subject to significant targeted investment. More specifically, host countries and cities have invested more and more in new green technologies since the incorporation of an environmental dimension into the Olympic movement. Used as a vehicle to spread technological innovations nationwide and worldwide as to cope with challenges arising from their staging – including environmental loads – and stimulate economic growth, the Games has come to catalyse environmental protection through new environmental technologies (Kassens-Noor and Fukushige, 2018). This twofold objective reflects, it is argued, the so-called theory of Ecological Modernization (EM), whereby environmental challenges can be overcome thanks to technological development and continued economic growth (Millington, Darnell, Millington, 2018).

At the heart of this thesis is the assumption that the discourse of EM can be employed to improve a country’s soft power as part of a broader public diplomacy strategy. This research project includes a case study of the upcoming summer Olympic edition. It examines the official discourse surrounding the event strategically designed to green Japan’s international image that, it is argued, has been framed using aspects of the discourse of EM. To that end, this thesis first looks at official documents produced by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC), as well as transcribed interviews from government officials in order to demonstrate whether or not the event has been framed within the paradigm of EM. Through a deconstruction of the official narrative of the 2020 Olympics, aspects of the discourse of EM that are most likely to generate soft power can be identified. Specifically, findings reveal that Japan is promoting its soft power by throwing domestic and international political agenda in terms of sustainable development into the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Second, a third category of empirical materials has been collected and data retrieved from articles of online newspapers. This allows for an understanding of how non-state actors are making sense of the event and of what is being said about it in the public sphere. Subsequently, a conclusion regarding the efficiency of Japan’s public diplomacy strategy can be drawn. In sum, this thesis investigates the strategic adoption of a rhetoric of EM as a tool of public diplomacy. In this way, aspects of sustainable development which have the most impact on the politics of sustainable development too can be further identified.



## 1. Research questions

In order to test the claim that framing the Olympics within the paradigm of EM might benefit Japan in terms of soft power gain and foreign policy, this thesis addresses the following question:

**Can the discourse of Ecological Modernization be employed to gain soft power in the context of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games?**

Sub-questions were added to complement the main research question:

- To what extent are the concepts of soft power and Ecological Modernization related?
- How is the 2020 Tokyo Olympics being framed within the paradigm of Ecological Modernization?
- How is Japan's public diplomacy through sports perceived by foreign publics?

## 2. Contribution

Because we tend to think of the environmental dimension of the OG mainly in terms of environmental costs and urban regeneration of host cities (Karamichas, 2013, p.1), this thesis thus attempts to move beyond such reasoning by shedding light on another aspect of the environmental discourse surrounding the event. Mobilizing Nye's concept of soft power, the current research bridges his concept with that of SMEs and EM in order to generate new theoretical ideas. With the stated aim of this thesis being to investigate the impact of EM on public diplomacy's strategic use of SMEs, the focus here is not on sport mega-events per se, but rather on the political instrumentality of such events that are being framed and used to serve foreign policy objectives. The process does not only pretend to fill a gap in the literature on sports diplomacy and (Japanese) soft power but also to produce a heuristic device that could be used by governments and scholars alike to understand and make use of soft power strategies.

## 3. Scope and limitations

It is beyond the scope of the current study to assess the actual degree of EM of Japan or even that of the 2020 Games. Previous works have been dedicated to this task (see for instance *Ecological Modernization and Japan*, Barrett, 2005). Similarly, it cannot give an assessment of the sustainability performance of the 2020 Tokyo Games firstly because, at the time of

writing, the event remains yet to happen. Second, this thesis investigates the strategic use of the discourse of EM rather than its validity. Only future studies could identify environmental improvement in Japan, or the lack thereof. Rather, critics (Karamichas, 2013; Millington, Darnell and Millington, 2018) argue that the incorporation of an environmental dimension into the Olympic Movement does in no case lead to any meaningful environmental sustainability improvement, “and that the games may in fact compound environmental degradation, even though notions of environmental “remediation” or “development” have specifically informed bids to host SMEs” (ibid). In sum, because Japan has won the bid to host the next Summer Olympics does not mean that meeting environmental standards will necessarily lead to the successful implementation of these standards.

#### 4. Disposition

Chapter I provides some knowledge background that is essential to understand the topic of this thesis. It is followed by a review of the key concepts under scrutiny, which allows for the identification of a gap in the existing literature in chapter II. Chapter III outlines the theoretical framework within which the research is conducted. The methods of data collection and analysis are discussed in Chapter IV, and findings presented in Chapter V. Ultimately, conclusions are drawn in Chapter VI.

## **II. Literature Review**

The literature review bridges the key concepts of public diplomacy, SMEs, and EM. These conceptual factors are central to the understanding of how the framing of the OG within the EM paradigm might generate soft power. These concepts overlap and often include elements of one another. First, the key concept of SMEs is discussed theoretically and paired with notions of soft power and public diplomacy, mobilizing Nye’s work. Subsequently, sustainability seen as a global attractor is introduced and linked to notions of the discourse of EM as a theory of environmental sociology.

Drawing upon the findings of Dono’s thesis (2012) on the relationship between soft power, public diplomacy, and SMEs, this thesis positions itself as an extension of his study. As stated, “the relationship between public diplomacy and the hosting of [the OG] still lacks (...) rigorous empirical analyses” (ibid, p.94). Therefore, this current research project aims to identify aspects of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics relevant to the practice of public diplomacy and “that have the most impact on foreign policy objectives” (ibid, p.103). More

specifically, it focuses on the discourse of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic as identified by an empirical study of the pre-event phase of the Games.

## 1. Public Diplomacy through Sport Mega-Events

Roche (1994, p.1) defines SMEs as “large-scale, cultural events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance. They are typically organised by variable combinations of national governmental and international non-governmental organisations and thus can be said to be important elements in ‘official’ versions of public culture”. Along these lines, the OG is an ephemeral cultural occurrence which brings together actors from multiple socio-political spheres. They are “time-space condensed hubs” where cultural, political and economic orders come to overlap, and a global social structure emerges (Mol, p.515, 2010). The mutual involvement of national governments and civil society actors in the organization of SMEs indicates their perceived value in positively impacting the host country’s international image and subsequently promoting soft power (Grix and Houlihan, 2013). Consequently, SMEs are of significant interest to understand why states compete to host them.

However, sport remains an under-researched field despite its alleged benefits in terms of soft power gain (ibid). This thesis positions itself partly as a contributing work to the literature on sports diplomacy. In his work on the relationship between soft power and SMEs, Donos has demonstrated that SMEs are tools of public diplomacy per se and identified “a clear potential for developing soft power capacity” as suggested by their positive impact on the host nation’s reputation, credibility, and legitimacy (ibid, p.93, 104). Specifically, SMEs are known to project an image of the host nation that is attractive to others because they are highly visible events that offer an opportunity to gain international precedence in terms of social, economic, and political development (ibid). In fact, in the context of globalization, host cities paradoxically try to differentiate themselves and attract foreign audiences with their traditional culture and values while operating in an international normative structure formulated by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (Grix and Houlihan, 2013).

Legitimacy, reputation, and credibility gained from “the successful delivery of a sport mega-event” (Donos, 2012, p.4) are expected outcomes of public diplomacy and strategically contribute to creating an international order beneficial to host nations. Hence, the potential for soft power gain is very clear and SMEs such as the OG are now being used as a tool of public diplomacy in their own right, whereby attracting foreign audiences and advancing foreign policy agendas pursued by host countries (ibid). In effect, the benefits of

hosting such a popular cultural event – as suggested by its massive media coverage – stretch beyond mere domestic borders. SMEs have the potential to create or strengthen diplomatic ties and improve how other states perceive the host nation. In sum, the OG is used as a platform on which nations can manage their global image, thereby providing “a function beyond the game” (Murray and Pigman, 2014, p.1098). There is no doubt that SMEs such as an Olympic edition can be an effective tool of public diplomacy within the paradigm of soft power. Actual approaches of SMEs as an instrument of public diplomacy differ depending on the host nation’s foreign policy objectives and in relation to their framing within identified overarching themes (ibid). As such, they reveal diverse public diplomacy strategies adopted by host countries. As a popular cultural event yet hazardous public diplomacy strategy, the OG must display social norms and values in line with that of the international community, including peace, human rights, and environmentalism. In so doing, the host nation demonstrates that it “participates in a socially constructed and internationally approved system of norms, values, and rules” (Donos, 2012, p.34) and ensure that the nation’s public diplomacy strategy will not have a disempowering effect. Many argue that hosting SMEs could have a rather negative impact on the host nation’s international image if foreign audiences came to rigorously scrutinize the event and found that that it does not live up to its promises (Grix and Houlihan, 2013).

## 2. Turning the Games Green

Located at the focal point of different levels of social development, SMEs are a heuristic device through which common norms and values crystalize and pervade global practices. The OG particularly has contributed to turning sustainability into a global norm redirecting social-cum-material structures globally for it is a highly visible phenomenon that attracts substantial attention (Mol, 2010). Under the continuous process of globalization and modernization, the OG has attracted corporate actors who see the opportunity to benefit from the convergence of global flows and networks. However, the awarding of an Olympic edition does not only depend on the vested interests of global corporations.

With public diplomacy dependent on soft power resources, governments have sought to mobilize the OG as an instrument of foreign policy strategy. Since the emergence of environmental concerns in general, and of criticism regarding the environmental impacts of the Games specifically (Hayes and Karamichas, 2012; Karamichas, 2013; Millington, Darnell and Millington, 2018), it has been observed a tendency to “green” the Games starting with “the entry of sustainable development (...) discourse” into the planning and hosting stages of

the OG (ibid). Indeed, adopting international values and norms expressed in political agendas has the potential to increase countries' influence amongst other international actors (Nye, 2008). Peace, human rights and environmentalism are three examples of concepts acknowledged by the international community that can foster soft power. The latter is at the heart of this study. In the wake of the international environmental commitment from the 1990s onwards, the IOC has shown an increasing interest in pro-ecological policies “with a particular focus on the sustainability legacy the Olympics afford host cities and countries” (Hayes and Karamichas, 2012; Karamichas, 2013; Millington, Darnell, and Millington, 2018). The drafting of Agenda 21 eventually led to the creation of the IOC Sport and Environment Commission in 1995, thereby defining the environment as the “third dimension of Olympism” (ibid). It is argued that the OG now “functions as a regulatory authority for the development and dissemination of environmental best practice and sustainable technologies” (ibid). In sum, the Games have come to reflect “the internalization of environmental values and norms”, and environmental commitment by host countries a condition for awarding the Games (ibid). As have demonstrated Kim and Chung (2018), and Millington, Darnell, and Millington (2018) in their study of the 2016 Rio Olympics and the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics, respectively, the environment has become a key concern for governments Olympic authorities during the organization and planning of the Games. Because they are global event securing media attention, the Olympics are a platform on which host countries can showcase their commitment to environmental protection and fight against human-induced climate change to foreign publics. Awarded in 1993 thanks to their environmental bid – that is, the incorporations of environmental concerns into the organization and hosting stages of the Games – the 2000 Sydney Olympics were the first instance of “green Games” and set the tone for future Olympic editions, such as the 2008 Beijing Olympics which started “integrating the environment into the design of the Games at an early stage” (Hayes and Karamichas, 2012, p.133).

### 3. The Olympic Games and Economic Growth

With regard to sustainability as a global attractor, environmental concerns from candidate host cities are now central to winning Olympic bids. Therefore, many have witnessed the emergence of a new environmental discourse surrounding the planning and hosting of the OG. In line with the United Nations' definition of sustainability, the IOC's approach to greening the Games too rejects the opposition between economic development and environmental preservation. By mentioning sport as “an important enabler of sustainable development”, the

UN (2016) has set a milestone in the history of the relationship between sport, development, and the environment. Sport now appears to pair economic growth with environmental sustainability.

What is more, the environmental approach of the Games is growth-oriented and seen as a way to foster economic development through “the dissemination of sustainable technologies facilitating the creation and growth of new markets” (Haye and Karamichas, 2012). This reflects notions of the so-called EM theory, which has changed the theoretical perspective on not only the connection between economic development and environmental sustainability but also the OG and environmental concern (Mol, 2010; Karamichas, 2013). The introduction of an EM rhetoric within the sphere of global sport was also meant to face criticism regarding the environmental costs of hosting the Games. With priorities of the international community shifting towards a more sustainable model of development, prospective host cities of sport mega-events, such as the OG, often use concepts related to the paradigm of EM to formulate and communicate discourses surrounding the event.

The 2020 Tokyo Olympics was awarded in 2013. In the wake of the 2011 triple disaster, the decision was regarded as highly symbolic for it would bring about multiple questions regarding public safety. For Japan, the 2020 Tokyo Games can then be seen as a means to rebuild its international image. This thesis argues that Japan’s planning and hosting of the next summer Olympics have been strategically aimed to function as a form of public diplomacy, and even more so in the face of rising neighbouring countries such as China and the two Koreas (Jackson, 2016). The 2020 Tokyo Olympics appears to give the nation-state an opportunity to signal its willingness to play a proactive role in mitigating ecological problems effectively for the world will have its eyes on Japan. During the event, approximately 900.000 visitors are expected to visit the Olympic venues per day (Bank of Japan et al., 2016), which means that the Games will not only have an influence on actual visitors but also on spectators abroad through mass media communication and stories that will be brought back home by spectators. Japan’s role as an environmental leader ought to be addressed in studies of Japanese soft power in the same way as its cultural assets. Paired with the concept of SMEs, Japan’s environmentalism can be further analysed and relocated within the literature on soft power.

#### 4. Identifying a gap in the literature

It has previously been noted the continuous inclusion of the idea of sustainability into multiple public and private spheres but seen through the lens of the EM perspective, this concept thus becomes a global attractor both in terms of soft power gain and economic development. Although much has been said about the relationship between soft power and SMEs on one hand, and between SMEs and EM on the other hand, there is still no research on the relationship between the paradigm of EM and soft power. Similarly, there are much fewer studies of Japanese soft power which are not concerned with its culture diplomacy than accounts of it. Therefore, by using the 2020 Tokyo Olympics as a case study, this thesis investigates Japan's strategic adoption of a rhetoric of EM as an instrument of public diplomacy in order to fill the two identified gaps.

### **III. Theoretical Framework**

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the theoretical framework within which the analysis is conducted. In order to serve the qualitative researcher's needs better, this thesis adopts an exploratory stance "associated with the generation rather than the testing of theory" (Bryman, 2012, p.41). With one aim of this study being the exploration of the relationship between soft power gain and the discourse of EM, the two concepts are first discussed separately, before being brought together to generate new theoretical ideas.

#### 1. Soft Power and Public Diplomacy

This first section is dedicated to an overview of the joint concepts of soft power and public diplomacy. It attempts to identify foreign policy strategies which can help states to improve their international outreach. Coined in 1990 by American political scientist Joseph Nye, the concept of soft power is often criticized for being elusive and difficult to conceptualize, and whose theories remain yet to be empirically tested. With that in mind, this thesis must then acknowledge the extended academic literature on soft power as well as its widespread use by various actors such as private agencies, governmental authorities, and journalists as to demarcate elements of the concept that are relevant to this thesis. It finds its assumptions on soft power to be informed by Nye's work mainly.

Echoing Nye (2008, p.94-95), soft power is referred to as "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment". In other words, soft power rest on the ability to "co-opt people rather than coerce them" (ibid)

using intangible assets. This begs the question of how can states build and deploy their soft power. Public diplomacy, in particular, and soft power, in general, are primarily preoccupied with a country's public image "as embodied in its reputation, credibility, and legitimacy" (Donos, 2012, p.5-7). Each of these three components serves as a solid foundation for soft power and is one of the desired outcomes of public diplomacy. In order to understand how attractiveness can, theoretically, shape publics' preferences, one has to look into the relationship between soft power and public diplomacy. Soft power is a result of a country's attractive culture, political ideology, as well as internal and external policies which are perceived by foreign publics through public diplomacy (ibid). Defined as "an instrument (...) to communicate with and attract publics of other countries, rather than merely their governments" (ibid, p.95, 99), public diplomacy has long been a tool that governments have used to improve their international image and shape other states' preferences in the long term as to create a favourable environment for their policy agenda. Unlike traditional diplomacy, public diplomacy focuses on direct and face-to-face communication with foreign audiences through various channels such as cultural events and mass-media communication. In the process, practitioners of public diplomacy operate within a global political, economic and socio-cultural context to build sound relationships with other states. Moreover, theories of soft power and public diplomacy emphasise the importance to acknowledge the changing nature of the global context practitioners evolve in. It is all the more important to understand the foreign publics one wants to engage with for public diplomacy does not necessarily benefit practitioners; altering foreign public opinions to advance one's own political agenda is a hazardous, speculative move. Indeed, it might cause countries of targeted audiences to become suspicious about practitioners of public diplomacy and eventually take on hostile actions (Hall and Smith, 2013, p.12). Drawing on other works on the matter, Hall and Smith (2013, p.12) argue that failed public diplomacy "can deepen mistrust and harden hostility", thereby begging the question of how one can use public diplomacy in such a way as to avoid disempowerment.

Lee and Melissen (2012, p.27) have identified an "emotional dimension" to soft power, which measures cultural proximity between nations. They define cultural proximity as the "belief that one's own country and other countries share similar values" (ibid). As noted, while a soft power strategy that emphasises one's own social and cultural values might not translate into beneficial outcomes, narratives embracing international norms and values may bring about soft power gain. Similarly, the literature argues that a "smart public diplomacy requires an understanding of (...) the role of civil society in generating soft power" (Nye,



2008, p.108) because being open to criticism and allowing communication channel for alternative voices tends to generate credibility, legitimacy and moral authority, as well as improving country reputation. Lee and Melissen (2012, p.8-9) too acknowledge that when governments monopolize soft power resources, public diplomacy fails to convince and seldom successes. Rather, it results in mere propaganda and is counterproductive.

All things considered, this section finds that public diplomacy narratives revolving around shared international values – over one’s own ideals – may succeed in achieving foreign policy goals. In fact, understanding the current international normative structure and the nature of the relationship amongst states is very important. Countries’ reputation, credibility and legitimacy are dependent upon global norms and values and those are more often than not set by international institutions (Lam, 2007). However, this does not mean that nations do not rely on their cultural traits to gain soft power. On the contrary, Japan is the epitome of countries which have mobilized their culture and traditions to serve foreign policy objectives. Before identifying the latest standards that prevail in today’s globalized world and are likely to enhance nations’ soft power, let us move on to discuss key features of the EM theory. The extent to which the latter concept echoes characteristics of soft power will then be assessed.

## 2. Ecological Modernization

The environmental debate started in the 1970s has raised questions about the environmental harm of modernization. The concept of EM has been central to this shift of priorities-cum-concerns thus far. Born in western Europe in the 1980s on the basis that industrialized countries would eventually need to restructure their political and economic institutions to face an ecological crisis, EM has spread to developed and developing regions alike. The paradigm of EM captures several essentialities: 1) economic growth is not incompatible with environmental preservation 2) economic development can help solve environmental challenges (modernization over de-modernization) 3) current institutions need not change as they are able to adapt, that is to incorporate an environmental dimension into their political, economic, and social agenda 4) production and consumption processes ought to include an environmental dimension 5) science, technology, and market dynamism have the potential to address anthropogenic climate changes.

From an EM perspective, “environmental regulation is used as a driving force for innovation in the market, and as a way to incentivise behavioural change in the industrial sector” (Schlosberg & Rinfret, 2008, p.254). In sum, it is a win-win relationship both in

economic and environmental terms. Because it bridges the concepts of development and environmental protection and does not call for dramatic systemic change per se, the paradigm of EM has come to dominate political debates over environmental concerns (Haye and Karamichas, 2012). Similarly, industry is argued to be “the solution to, rather than cause of, ecological degradation” (Millington, Darnell, Millington, 2018, p.8). As both a theory and political programme, it is suggested that EM happens during the third stage of industrialization, after industrial breakthrough and industrial expansion, when economic efficiency is improved at the expense of the environment. Focusing on industrial and technological innovations as solutions to mitigate environmental dilemmas, it is understood as a “post-political” approach to facing challenges ahead (ibid, p.11). Simply put, the state is no longer seen as the main actor to be held accountable for “cleaning-up after business” (Schlosberg & Rinfret, 2008, p.256). Rather, the theory of EM can be distinguished from previous theories on society-environment relationships firstly because it argues that it will take new forms of cooperation between various social actors to palliate climate change. Second, it introduces a new approach to dealing with environmental costs focusing on anticipation and prevention of environmental harms rather than their mere mitigation. Third, it sees environmental protection as an outcome of economic growth. In sum, the theory of EM has it that the relationship between environmental preservation and economic growth is that of a positive-sum game and does not see the two goals as fundamentally conflicting.

That being said, discussions between critics and supporters of the theory have led to the formation of two discourses of EM within the existing literature. Drawing on Christoff’s (1996) and Mol’s (2001) work, Schlosberg and Rinfret (2008) identify two strands in both the theoretical and political discourse of EM. A weak version of EM focuses on new technology and efficiency rather than “precaution, reflexivity and consumption levels” as solutions to environmental issues (ibid, p.255). Weak EM is characterized by its “technocratic and corporatist style of policy-making” (ibid, p.268) and its exclusion of alternative voices from the decision-making process. As such, weak EM is pointed out for its top-down approach to environmental protection. They argue that, by adopting a weak form of EM, national and international governments alike seek to maintain their legitimacy in a socio-political context informed by neoliberalism ideas, whereby market competitiveness and economic gain prevail. In sum, EM in its weak form offers a narrow definition of the relationship between economic, technological and environmental benefits. This is the version of the EM paradigm that has dominated academic and political circles thus far. Critics argue that weak EM “may simply

put a green gloss on industrial development” and miss the point; it omits to call for change in social behaviours, as well as in political and corporate apparatus (Schlosberg & Rinfret, 2008; Karamichas, 2013, p.84). Central to this assumption is the argument that “the dominant institutions indeed can learn and that their learning can produce meaningful change” (Hajer, 1996, p.251).

Unlike weak EM, a strong approach to EM emphasises the role of civil society as an actor of change (ibid). Based on a precautionary principle, strong EM sees the decision-making process as democratic and inclusive (ibid). Echoing Christoff (1996, p.488), a strong version of EM would “stress the transformative impact of environmental awareness on civil society and the public sphere, and on the institutions and practices of government and industry. They emphasize the ways in which citizenship and democratic participation in planning may serve to socialize and ecologize the market and guide and limit industrial production.” In other words, a strong version of EM would focus on maximum social-cum-environmental benefits for people and the planet.

### 3. Ecological Modernization within the Soft Power Paradigm

A critical review of the scholarly literature on the concepts of soft power and EM has revealed an oversight of the role of the discourse of EM as a soft power resource. At last, this section attempts to fill the gap by merging/bridging the two concepts as to offer a new theoretical justification to the use of the discourse of EM as a tool of public diplomacy.

The above sections have identified nation’s conformity with global normative institutions as a soft power resource for it enhances nation’s credibility, reputation and legitimacy. The question of which ideologies wield such power then arises quite naturally. Since the 1980s, the world has witnessed the spread of neoliberalism as the dominant paradigm of our era (Falkner, 2012, p.519-521). Through the lens of neoliberalism, we can see how most countries have adopted pro-market policies designed to deregulate, open up national markets and shrink states’ presence have flourished since then. Yet, many have come to denounce the environmental costs of a capitalist global economy. Because anthropogenic climate change can no longer be denied, the adoption of pro-ecological policy measures has, therefore, “gained near-universal support” (ibid, p.513). Environmentalism, whereby environmental sustainability concerns are being internalized into national and international governance landscapes, now exists side-by-side and competes with established global institutions such as the market. This section identifies key features of the EM paradigm which reflect and echo characteristics of the soft power concept; central to the paradigm of

EM are the ideas of sustainability and modernity, particularly in terms of technological innovation and economic growth. Since its rise in the 1990s, the EM theory has opened up new ways to integrate the environment into debates over modernity. On that account, it can be seen as a new environmental-sociological theory, whereby market principles and environmentalism are being reconciled. The EM theory does not see the modernity project and economic development as inherently bad for the environment (Karamichas, 2013, p84). On the contrary, it formulates a “theoretical foundation for feasible solutions to environmental problems” (ibid, p.89), including modern institutions of economy and technological innovation which are to play a major role in “bringing about the switch-over into more sustainable production and consumption” patterns (Spaargaren, 1985).

### 3.1. Environmentalism as a Soft Power Resource

Following the emergence and subsequent rise of environmental concerns from the 1960s onwards, sustainability has become a global concept (Millington, Darnell, and Millington, 2018). In the wake of the Brundtland Report, anthropogenic environmental changes could no longer be ignored, and nations started incorporating environmental policies to their agenda, as illustrated by the formulation of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) designed to inform sustainable practices and policies (ibid). In sum, environmental interests became that of governments and business alike. Echoing Hayes and Karamichas (2012, p.126), the concept of sustainability has become a “global attractor” and “a shared notion”, with sustainability concerns and priorities integrated into global institutions, practices, structures, norms and ideologies. With pro-environmental discourse placed on top of policy agenda, the sustainability label helps actors to legitimize their behaviour and is “an aspirational selling point” (ibid, p.147).

Subsequently, many have witnessed a greening of foreign and domestic policy-making worldwide, with the prospect of gaining leverage on the international stage, “where interests of political actors are realized and secured” (Wyligata, 2012, p.1). In this context, increased attention has been given to pro-ecological activities and to the role of ecology in countries development (ibid). On that account, compliance with global ecological norms has the potential to help countries to build up their soft power (Karakir, 2018). In effect, promoting sustainability allows nations to advance their position vis-à-vis other states and take responsibility regarding global matters. Most countries have sought to actively engage in climate change negotiations and play a more important role in the global environmental governance scheme in order to gain more influence in international politics (ibid). All in all,

“green diplomacy” illustrates both a modern understanding of power relations and the use of pro-ecological activities as soft power instruments. The twin concepts of climate change and sustainable development, as a global challenge and priority respectively, have the potential to build, or increase, states’ influence for they are common concerns.

### 3.2. The Project of Modernity

To follow Berger et al. (2001), the theoretical foundations of the EM paradigm lay in the theory of modernity as traditionally laid out by Beck (1992; 1994). By arguing that environmental challenges can be overcome thanks to modern factors such as new technology, science and private economic actors, EM is indeed a modern project designed to palliate consequences of capitalist rationalization and industrialization, without compromising economic growth and nations’ development process (Mol, 1997). The EM theory posits that environmental protection can and must happen within the institutions of modernity and refers to the environment in economic terms, thereby using “the language of business and [conceptualizing] environmental pollution as a matter of inefficiency” (Hajer, 1995, p.31). For instance, Wong (2012, p.100) argues that EM only focuses on production and fails to address demand-side issues. Hence, because it does not call for systematic change and echoes the logic of market capitalism in a democratic world, the EM theory has thus been attractive to and eventually adopted by, dominant governing agencies, themselves born from the influence of liberal democracies following the end of the Cold War. In essence, liberalism was identified as the basis of soft power when Nye coined the term in the first place (Li, 2018). Although the world has witnessed significant democratic setbacks around the world (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018), hence suggesting that we are not at the end of History (Fukuyama, 1989), an extensive review of the literature has allowed us to argue that the use of the modernity dimension of the EM paradigm in terms of technological innovation can, in fact, build up soft power because EM relies mainly upon new technology to simultaneously foster economic growth and mitigate environmental issues more than market instruments and public environmental policy per se (Hajer, 1995).

## 4. Summary

With the identification of key features of the EM paradigm, the potential effects of using EM as a tool for managing country image on soft power were presented. Given the rise of environmental concern and the internalization of ecological standards into global systems of governance, any theory of capitalist-based modernity alone would certainly not be enough to

legitimize nations' thirst for progress. By providing a new approach to conciliating economic growth and environmental protection more in line with international standards, the discourse of EM thus appears to have the capability to improve nations' soft power. In sum, an approach of incorporating the rhetoric of EM into the literature on soft power was developed to better suit the aim of the present study and guide future research.

## **IV. Methodological Approach**

### **1. Research Design**

An exploratory approach was chosen to match the stated aim of the thesis – that is, to establish a relationship between soft power and EM. One limitation of an exploratory research design is the difficulty to provide empirical results and quantitative hypothesis-testing that can be generalized. Nonetheless, findings may provide solid grounds for future studies on this under-researched aspect of EM in the context of international relations. The strategic approach of this thesis is located within the logic of case study analysis. As such, it relies on the collection of data that “are separated and categorized based on emerging patterns observed by the researcher” (Stewart, 2002, p. 143).

The research design was adjusted to include the pre-event phase of the upcoming Olympic Summer Games when the JOC first submitted their bidding application and made commitments to prepare to fulfil environmental objectives. In so doing, the narrative surrounding the event can still be assessed even though the Games has not taken place at the time of writing the thesis. In order to limit the amount of data that would be collected, the pre-event phase has been defined as the period beginning with the opening of the application and bidding process back in 2011 and ends with the opening ceremony of the Games in July 2020. However, materials that were selected were the ones issued before the submission of the present study due to time constraints and the fact that it is carried out before the opening ceremony of the Games.

This thesis relies primarily on a qualitative analysis of texts in order to analyse the narrative of the 2020 Tokyo Games and its potential capacity to level up Japan's soft power. Thus, the twofold aim of this thesis is not compatible with quantitative conclusions. Furthermore, its qualitative nature is paired with its methodological approach to data analysis, discourse analysis (DA), which is further outlined later in this chapter. Content analysis and qualitative data analysis were discarded for they leave less room for the researcher to interpret the collected data, whereas DA allows searching for bigger narratives lurking behind one's use of discourse (ibid). Inspired by Foucault's work, critical

discourse analysis too was disregarded because of its emphasis on power relations and “social difference in society” (ibid), which are not the focus of this research.

## 2. Epistemology and Ontology

The methodological approach is tied to the ontological positioning of this project. The latter sees reality as socially constructed and a “constantly shifting property of individuals’ creation” (Bryman, 2012, p.36). Therefore, language in talks and texts, as depicted in DA, is producing the social world (ibid, p.528). Through the “action orientation” of DA, discourse becomes a framework within which an event happens (ibid, p.529). With that in mind, analysing the official narrative surrounding the 2020 Tokyo Olympics might shed light on Japan’s foreign policy strategy. This accounts for the epistemological orientation of the thesis, which embraces interpretivism. Given that this thesis is interested in the discourse framing the Tokyo Olympics and aim to see it in terms of the purpose it serves, the discourse per se is treated as a tool strategically creating a story that benefits one’s cause (De Leeuw, 2018, p.24).

## 3. Methodological Approach

### 3.1. Discourse Analysis

*“Discourse is concerned with establishing one version of the world in the face of competing versions. In other words, there is a recognition that we want to persuade others when we present a version of events” (Bryman, 2012, p.530).*

Although there is no such thing as a single version of it, DA treats language as more than a mere vehicle for communication; discourses bear a purpose and wield power (Bryman, 2012, p.528-536). As such, it is producing a particular version of reality and reflects a strategy to generate particular intended effects. Given that the stated aim of this thesis is to analyse the use of the EM discourse as a tool of public diplomacy, whereby attraction and power are generated through a particular depiction of reality, DA appears to suit the needs of the thesis best. By adopting “a posture of sceptical reading” (ibid, p.530), the question of what the purpose of the discourse is and how this is constructed in various materials will be answered. Through the deconstruction of discourse, whereby elements constituting a given discourse are mapped out and revealed (Jorgensen and Philips, 2002), the story of the Games is seen in terms of the purpose that it serves for the Japanese government. Besides understanding how various discursive elements are articulated, it is also important to pay attention to what they

refer to as “discourse struggle” (ibid, p.6). Indeed, any discourse exists in parallel with and is contested by other opposing discourses (ibid, p.47-49). If any, antagonistic discourses must be identified for they challenge and can potentially transform any existing discourses. In this way, the researcher can verify whether or not it overpowers the official discourse surrounding the Games, thereby impeding Japan’s prospect for soft power.

### 3.2. Selection of materials

This thesis relies primarily on a qualitative analysis of documents or, more precisely, of texts. Bryman (2012, p.543) uses the generic term “document” to refer to any source of data that is somehow readable, has not been produced with the purpose of being used by social researchers, and is available and relevant to the research that it is used in. Official documents produced by governmental bodies are the type of documents this study is concerned with. Based on a constructivist approach, data were extracted from official documents produced by the JOC and the IOC regarding Japan’s bid and subsequent nomination as the host country of the 2020 Olympics. Such documents were accessed through the English version of the official website of the 2020 Tokyo OG, which eventually proved to serve best the stated aim of this thesis; it was indeed a rich source of materials where press releases and reports from the JOC could easily be accessed.

In order to ensure the quality of the materials and data, four criteria were taken into consideration during the collection process: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning (ibid, p.544). Assessed against these criteria, state documents can surely be seen as authentic and meaningful. Credibility and representativeness were somewhat treated more carefully for such documents are unique and convey more often than not a biased message (ibid, p.550). However, the questions of credibility and representativeness of official documents, however questionable, make them interesting to analyse; given that this study attempts to analyse the official Japanese discourse, it does not treat official documents as an accurate depiction of reality, but rather it sees them for what they really are, a production of a one-sided reality by a biased source. As such, all documents turned out to be authentic and meaningful, as well as representative of the source’s opinion – which I want to look at. As for their credibility, they may or may not be free of distortion but that is what makes them admissible in a study of public diplomacy strategy.

Data were also extracted from online newspaper articles. The rationale behind the use of newspaper articles was twofold. First, a full version of officials’ interviews was not available online although that would have been a relevant source of data.



Therefore, articles reporting on them naturally appeared to be the best option. The selected articles transcribe directly and/or indirectly officials' statements regarding the 2020 Games.

Second, alternative voices ought to be valued and reflected upon as they produce either an alternative discourse to or a discourse consistent with the official version. With the media acting as an amplifier, a DA of newspaper articles related to the Games can help to answer the main research question; if the discourse conveyed by non-state actors is consistent with the official story, then the discourse of the government can be seen as being attractive, and Japan's public diplomacy strategy can be deemed potentially effective. The selection and collection process first started with a heuristic search on web search engines which eventually led to the identification of keywords. This was followed by a more systematic search of newspaper articles through newspaper databases such as LexisNexis. Keywords used to find relevant articles were: 2020 Olympic Games, Tokyo Olympic Games, Tokyo 2020. This process resulted in the collection of a significant amount of texts. Upon reading, it appeared that the content of "small" newspapers was consistent with that of well-known and widely read newspapers. Therefore, when a certain topic was found in both, the former was discarded for they have a limited readership, and thus, less impact on public opinion.

All in all, articles used in the present study were collected from online newspapers published in English, including The Guardian, The New York Times, The Mainichi, the Japan Times, The Asahi Shimbun, The BBC, The South China Morning Post, Reuters, and The New Delhi Times. Others were found on [insidethegames.biz](http://insidethegames.biz), a website dedicated to providing news related exclusively to the Olympic and Paralympic Games in general. Also, because it would be too time-consuming to keep going through the same process until the time of writing the thesis, RSS feeds were used in order to stay up to date with the latest news that matter most to the present research.

### 3.3. Data collection: operationalization

The point of departure of the analysis of data was the categorization of the collected materials which helped to make sense of the data. Upon collection, documents were sorted into different categories and subcategories:

- 1) documents shaping the bigger narrative of the Games including a) official documents produced by the IOC and the JOC, and b) newspaper articles transcribing interviews from IOC and Japanese officials.
- 2) online newspaper articles about the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Documents from category 1 were useful to demonstrate that a narrative reflecting the discourse of EM has been used to frame the Games. On the other hand, documents from category 2 allowed us to look at opinions of non-states sources; they reflect a critical analysis of the happenings, thereby portraying the official discourse surrounding the Games as attractive or not depending on whether their account of the event is consistent or critical of that of Japan's officials. A different category of nodes was used to codes them for they serve a different purpose. Using different categories of materials allowed for the triangulation of the retrieved data. Indeed, by combining transcribed interviews and official documents a "cross-checking of findings" was possible (Bryman, 2012, p.392).

Focusing on how events are presented as to influence others through the use of language, a systematic DA was carried out upon collection of the materials and started with the consideration of the "three basic discourse-analytic questions" (Bryman, 2012, p.36):

1. What is this discourse doing?
2. How is this discourse constructed to make this happen?
3. What resources are available to perform this activity?

The first question refers to the aim of the thesis; the demonstration that a discourse of EM has been created and used to tell the story of the 2020 Tokyo OG. The second question can be interpreted as, for instance, the analysis of the language/data found in documents. This leads to the third question, which has to do with the material used to extract and collect data. With the aim of the thesis stated earlier, a subsequent method to analyse the construction of the discourse came up quite instinctively. After a repeated and thorough reading of the selected texts, main themes were identified, and more specific keywords were added to the first list of keywords used to sort out materials, such as innovation, environment, new technology, sustainability, and energy. Those themes and keywords guided the analytical process and informed the coding stage of the analysis. Having a coding frame indeed "helps to make sure that the process is consistent" (Bryman, 2012).

The main themes that were identified are (1) technological innovation, (2) economy/modernity, and (3) environmental sustainability. Each theme reflects an aspect of the EM discourse that might heighten soft power as discussed in the theoretical framework. At this stage, each theme was then associated with a set of particular codes to help with the sorting out and analysis of data, whereby the researcher attempts to identify consistent patterns, or lack thereof. Throughout the analysis and a careful reading of the

selected texts, more codes were added to the initial coding frame. As it turned out that coding is a rather time-consuming process whereby the researcher is trying to make sense of the data (Bryman, 2012), the Nvivo word query tool helped to go back to texts I had already analysed so new codes could be applied to them too (so I would not have to read through them once again). Consequently, hypotheses were formulated and tested within the theoretical framework outlined in chapter III. The qualitative analysis of textual materials was carried out through the software Nvivo, and data retrieved using nodes and other functions of the software such as word clouds and word queries. This was useful to carry out a systematic DA of the collected materials and assess the greater narrative of the Tokyo Olympics being constructed during the pre-event phase as a mean to gain international leverage.

#### 4. Limitations and ethical issues

This thesis does not rely on the completion of a field study to collect primary data. Therefore, ethical issues, challenges, risks, and limitations associated with such task are deemed irrelevant and will not be addressed further in this section.

For qualitative researchers to assess the quality of research, “reliability and validity are important criteria” (ibid, p.389). These can be complemented by trustworthiness, authenticity, and reflexivity. With that mind, I shall reflect upon the epistemological orientation previously accounted for which represents a point of departure in assessing the quality of the project. Conclusions and knowledge drawn from the collected data are a function of my own interpretation as a social researcher, so it is essential that I produce objective knowledge by reflecting on my own background and what it is that I know of the topic under scrutiny. This is what Bryman refers to as the process of reflexivity, whereby researchers “should be reflective about the implications of their methods, values, biases, and decisions for the knowledge of the social world they generate” (ibid, p.393). As my role will be central in analysing and interpreting the discourse of the 2020 Games being constructed by the authorities organizing the event, I shall not let my own assumptions regarding, for instance, Japan’s actual achievements in terms of sustainability thus far alter the quality of the thesis.

As noted, I will most likely use materials in English. This can be a limitation to consider for I may collect data from interviews transcribed in online newspaper articles. Indeed, translations may distort the actual meaning of original texts, thereby ignoring inherent dynamics and nuances (ibid, p.314). However, such reports of interviews can be found on English-language Japanese newspaper websites, so I venture to think that the translation work is supervised by experimented and qualified professionals.

Last but not least, I ought to be aware that the collected materials are designed for an international audience, and as such reflect what the IOC and Japanese officials agree to publicly share. Accordingly, findings will reflect the official discourse of the upcoming Olympic summer edition that the IOC and the Japanese government are intentionally creating for the purpose of public diplomacy.

## V. Analysis

*"Hosting the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games will serve as the catalyst to create the ultimate 21st-century showcase of environmental responsibility and sustainability (...) Making the games sustainable can only be achieved if it intensifies its efforts to showcase green technology innovations to the world at a time when climate change is the prevailing reality" (Masato Mizuno, 2012).*

This chapter explores ways in which the JOC has been using a rhetoric of EM to frame the 2020 Tokyo Games as part of a public diplomacy strategy designed to improve Japan's international image. Therefore, in order to empirically test the key hypothesis of this project and make sense of the data, a discursive deconstruction is required to map out the way in which the official narrative of the Games has been constructed. As noted in chapter IV, discourses are the fundamental elements of bigger narratives. Subsequently, discourses at the heart of the story are revealed and conclusions are reached by drawing on the theoretical framework established earlier.

First, I start by presenting a general overview of the findings and identifying main patterns/topics, before moving on to an in-depth analysis of texts. In this way, an environmental discourse is uncovered and analysed. This leads us to reflect on how the Japanese authorities offer to handle environmental loads stemming not only from the Olympic extravaganza but also from today's economic model. In order to answer the research question guiding the analysis, I will also consider the discourse of online newspapers regarding the Games. By analysing the opinion of non-state actors, I set out to verify whether the official narrative is being contested. This exploration will finally tell us of the efficiency, or attractiveness, of Japan's public diplomacy.

### 1. Overview of the findings

At the heart of this thesis is the assumption that, paired with the concept of SMEs, the discourse of EM is being used as a tool of public diplomacy in its own right. Before

demonstrating that the official narrative surrounding the Games reflects notions of the EM paradigm, some key findings are introduced. The software Nvivo was used throughout the process of writing the thesis, from initial readings to the ultimate writing stage. With DA as the method of analysis, the word frequency tool particularly proved to be useful to generate ideas. Upon completion of the coding stage, word clouds were generated to visually identify recurrent key themes/topics within the selected materials (see [annexes](#)). In this way, a way of deconstructing the official narrative was also established. Deconstruction is important for it allows to see how Japan's officials have been telling the story of the 2020 Olympic Games, and which discourses form the bigger narrative of the 2020 Tokyo Games.

Different versions of word clouds were generated to make sure that results would be consistent regardless of the material used. As shown, the same words are recurrently used across different types of texts, including transcribed interviews and official documents widely available online. Terms like SDGs, environment, sustainability, resources, renewable, recycling are combined with terms like technologies, production, consumption, energy. Other terms are transport, procurement, green, waste, sourcing, climate, hydrogen, carbon. This means that most documents, if not all, address the matter of sustainable development and/or that of modernity. This corroborates our initial hypothesis; sustainability and economic development are not treated as intrinsically conflicting matters but are rather compatible.

Seen from the perspective of EM seen as a soft power resource, various discourses are being simultaneously constructed and eventually brought together to form a bigger, attractive, narrative of the Games. Pressing domestic and global environmental challenges are acknowledged, and solutions to palliate human-induced climate change and promote a sustainable model of development are introduced. After identifying two key discourses – environmental sustainability and economic/technological modernity – forming the bigger narrative of the Games, the analysis moves on to an in-depth textual analysis of documents.

## 2. Discourses

A general overview of findings has revealed two main dimensions within Japan official discourse of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. In this section, each thematic discourse is further discussed separately, and the way they are coupled/articulated occurs to reflect notions of the EM paradigm, whereby sustainability and economic development are reconciled.

## 2.1. Environmental Discourse

By using discourse analytical tools, the social phenomenon of depicting Japan as an environmental frontrunner is scrutinized. As presented in the literature review, environmental sustainability has become a global attractor, meaning that countries display and harness their environmental concern as a way to gain international recognition. Japan is no stranger to this type of foreign policy. Seen as an instrument of public diplomacy per se, it is argued that Japan is strategically framing the 2020 Olympics within an environmental discourse in line with the Olympic and Paralympic movement, and by extension, the UN climate regime as shown in chapter II. In turn, the following section will investigate this aspect of the environmental discourse of the event as well as ways in which it is operated within the UN narrative.

### *2.1.1. World agency and responsibility*

*"For decades Tokyo has been a world leader in long-term environmental planning (...) Hosting the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games will serve as the catalyst to create the ultimate 21st-century showcase of environmental responsibility and sustainability" (Masato Mizuno, 2012).*

The first element of this quote legitimizes Japan's hosting of the 2020 Games for it has a "long-term" experience in dealing with environmental sustainability. The second element of the quote suggests that the Games is a mere platform on which Japan can showcase solutions to mitigate environmental loads within its domestic borders as well as overseas. Chapter III has made a point to emphasize the role of responsibility in improving country image. Tied to the notion of responsibility is that of leadership, which Japan claims when representatives state that the country has "the ability to lead global efforts towards a 21st-century sustainable society as an advanced country that has solved various challenges ahead of other countries" (JOC, 2018). Problems from the past that Japan has managed to overcome are assessed against current challenges facing the island nation and more generally, the world. This account of past ecological crisis serves, it is argued, as a frame of reference for foreign audiences; Japan strategically recalls its shortcomings to better anchor the discourse of the event in environmentalism. By stating that "Japan and Tokyo have overcome serious pollution issues" (ibid), any mention of specific ecological crisis is avoided. Japan's dealing with pollution is referred to in vague terms because, it is argued, it wants foreign publics to focus on what it is that matters now, that is, the fact that it is able to handle environmental issues.

Meanwhile, Japan seems to realize that it cannot operate alone and

needs to utilize foreign public policies to gain soft power. Therefore, the environmental discourse of the 2020 Games is operationalized within the bigger narrative of the UN. In 2018, Japan joined the UN Global Compact Initiative in order to encourage businesses to adopt strategies and measures directed to environmental protection. More than 160 countries have joined the initiative thus far, and Japan was one of the first to mobilize (JOC, 2018). Mentioned 76 times in the collected documents, the UN SDGs are the main point of reference to assess environmental challenges and priorities. Within this overarching theme, current environmental challenges are introduced, and objectives are fixed. Those the 2020 Tokyo Games focus on are waste reduction, energy efficiency, and reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. It goes without saying that the SDGs encompass more goals and targets (17 goals and 169 targets in total), however, the three objectives listed above are repeatedly mentioned in the empirical documents and referred to as “top priorities worldwide” (Hueston, 2018).

Japan has made a point to “include sustainability in all aspects of the Olympic Games”, starting with the publication of a sustainability plan (JOC, 2018). Released in 2018, the plan emphasizes the relationship between the 2020 Tokyo Games and the SDGs, including ways to reach a set of related targets. Under the plan, five areas of action are outlined: 1) “Climate Change (Carbon Management),” 2) “Resource Management,” 3) “Natural Environment and Biodiversity,” 4) “Consideration of Human Rights, Labour and Fair Business Practices” and 5) “Involvement, Cooperation and Communications (Engagement)”. With three out of five themes directly related to sustainability, it is clearly indicated that Japan wishes to honour its pledge to deliver “the first SDGs Olympics” (Maeda, 2018). By constructing an environmental discourse within the bigger narrative of the UN, I argue that Japan navigates within an established global order to better manage its reputation; the vision of the 2020 Olympic can attract international actors for it not only reflects global challenges and priorities but also suggest that it implements norms associated with the UN SDGs and Olympic movement.

To summarize, it is argued that the story of the 2020 Tokyo Games is being told with a purpose in mind, that is, to improve Japan’s soft power by aligning with internationally shared values such as environmentalism. Moreover, Japan aligns its activities and vision with that of the international community by repeatedly referring to the Paris Agreement – which has brought to light the issue of climate change – and initiatives of the United Nations. In so doing, Japan demonstrates that it belongs to an “internationally approved system of norms” (Donos, 2012, p.34) and contributes to a better future “for the people and the planet” (JOC,

2018). By mentioning “the people” and “the planet”, this statement captures two of the essentialities of the definition of sustainability formulated by the UN: environmental protection and social development. Next, a global sustainable model of development based on some “unique features” of the relationship between the Japanese people and the environment is presented.

### 2.1.2. *Japanese-ness in environmentalism*

*“The Japanese people have national characteristics that accept diversity of ethnicity, culture and religion, and they developed through harmonizing the new with the old, and blending aspects of Japanese culture with Western ways of doing things. The Tokyo 2020 Games will be an opportunity to share traditional Japanese virtues and culture with the world.” (Toshiro Muto, 2017).*

The above statement is retrieved from the official website of the 2020 OG. Japan is clearly described as unique and as having its own way of doing things characterized by a combination of Japanese and Western elements. This illustrates Japan’s way of complying with global norms and values so that its reputation and credibility are enhanced. Also, it relies on its national intangible assets as it cannot deploy hard power resources. Japan plans to set up a “Japanese-style” sustainable environment based on traditional Japanese values in order to promote sustainable practices across the world (JOC, 2018). *Mottainai* (no waste), *edomae* (the traditional Tokyo style), *satoyama/satoumi* (appreciation for the ecosystem services of mountains and seas), and *taru wa shiru* (to know what is enough; to do with what one has) are Japanese values and concepts believed to lead to a sustainable society (ibid). Particularly, the concepts of *edomae* and *satoyama/satoumi* have informed the way the Olympic authorities have treated the environment/nature thus far. Those are socio-environmental concepts which see nature in terms of the functions it serves for humans.

As such, it can be argued that Japan’s vision of nature is pragmatic. Under the goal "City within Nature/Nature within the City" (ibid), the JOC mixes existing natural environments with environments newly created by humans, thereby adopting the EM’s conceptualization of nature which sees nature in terms of the functions it served for humanity. In turn, when concrete examples of natural areas are cited, sites such as artificial greeneries and marine parks and gardens are mentioned. As stated, the overall aim is to “realise a comfortable urban environment which exists in harmony with nature”, where natural assets are “an oasis for citizens to enjoy on a daily basis” (ibid). Subsequently, the analysis has



found that the environmental discourse of the 2020 Tokyo Games instrumentalizes the environment; it becomes an entity created by society for society. Nature is portrayed as a facility utilized to improve people's comfort rather than a natural legacy that should be cherished and protected but not left untouched by mankind. In this context, Olympic authorities tend to see sustainability as a way to enhance urban development, especially in the Tokyo area.

This type of relationship between society and nature had been predicted by critics of EM, for whom policies informed by the discourse of EM would eventually come to utilize the environment for human use. They warned against the objectification of nature and ecosystems at an early stage of the development of the theory (Spaargaren, 1985). Therefore, the analysis of the environmental discourse of official documents reveals that Japan's understanding of the environment and of how it relates to society reflects notions of EM. Nonetheless, the environmental discourse is overall very positive; there is no negativity towards the feasibility of managing environmental costs that come with the organization and staging of SMEs. Rather, the cost of hosting the Tokyo 2020 is "seen as an investment" (Muto, 2017). Accordingly, current environmental issues are not impossible to be dealt with. Rather, a wide range of solutions is introduced to mitigate impacts on the environment. Such solutions will be introduced in the second section.

To summarize, a sense of Japanese-ness is conveyed by the environmental dimension of the discourse of the 2020 Tokyo Games; the event is to be an enabler, or "catalyst", of sustainable development and environmental protection through the incorporation of defining characteristics of Japanese-ness into all stages of preparation. More specifically, green technological innovations appear to be central to achieving the SDGs.

## 2.2. Solutions for a Green Development

The environmental discourse unveiled in the previous section is paired with a discourse reflecting notions of modernity. By taking the deconstruction process a step further, several prominent topics forming this second discourse are brought to light. First, Japan's society is strategically portrayed as capable of enabling a green model of development, thereby legitimizing Japan's hosting of the upcoming Summer Olympics. Second, solutions to palliate climate change are introduced. This ultimately leads to the consideration of the role of civil society in advancing a sustainable society.

By considering the following statement from the JOC (2018): "Japan has the history of causing pollution (...) in the process of industrial development and overcoming them through environmental regulations and the development of environmental technologies to satisfy the

regulations”, it can be argued that Japan clearly believes it can overcome anthropogenic environmental loads. It makes use of the rationale behind the EM discourse and sees technology as an enabler of environmental protection.

### *2.2.1. Japan and Tokyo: a mature city within a mature country*

A tendency to emphasize Japan’s advanced/developed economy-cum-society as “catalyst” for a sustainable model of development has been discovered. The JOC (2016) relies on “the unique features of Tokyo and Japan” such as to successfully deliver an unprecedented sustainable Olympic edition, which, they argue, “will leave a valuable legacy that will bring about a new evolution in Japan’s mature society” (JOC, 2018). Mentioned 14 times over 6 different documents produced by the JOC, Japan as a “mature” society could mean that it is able to reflect on past experiences and learn from them to build a sustainable future. In fact, the term can bear multiple meanings in this context. From the EM perspective, a “mature society” could also suggest that Japan is a technologically advanced nation. Indeed, by “unique features” they especially mean Japan’s “technical excellence” (JOC, 2013) and “renowned urban infrastructure (...) that are among the best in the world” and expected to “be a great opportunity to promote technological innovation” (JOC, 2017; JOC, 2018).

The case study of the city is particularly relevant; back in 1964, Tokyo was known for staging the “most technologically advanced Games at the time”, when the famous Shinkansen (bullet train) was introduced and later copied by countries all over the world (Kassens-Noor and Fukushige, 2016, p.85). Toshiro Muto, chief executive officer of the JOC announced (2017): “The Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 1964 helped to announce Japan's re-emergence onto the global stage, and gave a strong boost to its then still-developing economy”. In a similar manner, the Tokyo 2020 Games is expected to spur the same benefits and foster economic development by “maintaining an appropriate balance between economic rationality [and environmental protection]” (ibid). This, the analysis finds, perfectly reflects the idea at the heart of the EM paradigm, namely that economic growth is “the solution to, rather than the cause of, ecological degradation” (Millington, Darnell, Millington, 2018, p.8). Today’s rising global environmental concerns have informed the type of new technologies that are needed and developed nowadays. For instance, by shifting to a hydrogen society, Japan aims to “generate beneficial economic ripple effects” as the shift to a new source of energy will subsequently open up new markets, demands and create new job opportunities (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2016).

Under the slogan “discover tomorrow”, the bid aligns with national strategic development plans, and the role of Tokyo – “the world’s most forward-looking city” (JOC, 2013) – as an accelerator of new technological developments through the Games is emphasized. By mentioning Japan’s “cutting-edge” technical excellence, the JOC advertises Japan as a “global trendsetter for technologies” (Kassens-Noor and Fukushige, 2016, p.85). One particularly relevant feature of the Tokyo bid is its link to Tokyo Vision 2020, which the JOC together with the Japanese government is especially focusing on. The project lays out urban and social developmental goals on the principle of sustainability, “focusing on greening the city and economic growth” through technological innovations (ibid). This provides grounds for an analysis of terms in which solutions offered by the JOC and state authorities are conveyed to a foreign public. Paired with an environmental discourse revolving around Japanese values and concepts, a discourse of environmental technology innovation “made in Japan” is created. The event is expected to be the epitome of green OG.

### 2.2.2. Solutions

#### a) technology innovation

*“The 2020 Games will be an opportunity for the development and promotion of the world-class environmental technologies in Japan. By introducing Japan’s proven environmental technologies in various fields (...) Tokyo will leverage the opportunity the Games accord to promote these technologies and showcase them as viable environmental protection and sustainable measures” (JOC, 2013).*

Through the use of environmentally friendly technologies, Japan argues that it can reduce the massive environmental footprint of the event, as well as create a legacy for future Olympic editions in terms of environmental achievement. Known as the major cause of global warming and climate change, the reduction of carbon emissions is the main objective set by Japan. Also, they set out to solve global sustainability issues by having Japanese companies involved. However, sustainability issues are not limited to greenhouse gases (GHGs) emissions and certain issues are marginalized in the official discourse; this is the case of biodiversity loss for instance. Similarly, while numerous solutions to reduce GHGs emissions exist, the JOC and the city of Tokyo have chosen to focus mainly on specific, technology-related measures. By analysing this discourse, aspects of sustainable development which matter most to Japan are revealed.

In order to achieve a carbon-society, the city of Tokyo has come up with an urban

development plan calling for the maximum use of green technology innovations. In order to realize a society with minimal carbon footprint, they set out to turn Japan into the first “hydrogen society” (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2016) starting with the objective to fully power the Games with renewable energy. The role of Japan as a pioneer of hydrogen energy technology is strongly emphasized in the collected data. The main sector hoping to spur innovation is transportation. The car manufacturer Toyota has been nominated to develop and then equip the city and Japan with hydrogen-powered cars (Heng, 2017, p.183). With 8 hydrogen stations currently in use in Japan, the government plans on increasing the number to 35 by 2020 in order to move closer toward a hydrogen society (ibid). Consequently, the analysis has found that in the official discourse hydrogen energy as a solution to global warming is predominantly used while other solutions to cut down GHGs emissions such as the reduction of meat consumption are simply not mentioned. This strategic oversight reflects the discourse of EM which regards systemic change of social behaviour as unnecessary (Wong, 2012, p.100). In turn, solutions based on technology are preferred and rationalized. Solar panel roads are being installed in Japan to help generate energy, and fuel cells vehicles are increasingly replacing other means of transportation in “the most advanced and efficient public transport network in the world” (JOC, 2018). As such, this innovative technology is changing the perception of roads from a means of connection to a means to promote clean energy. This reflects the Japanese socio-ecological concept of *edomae* and *satoyama/satoumi*, whereby ecosystems and landscapes are shaped according to human needs. Japan also came up with its own certification standard for assessing and rating the environmental performance of buildings – known as CASBEE (Comprehensive Assessment System for Built Environment Efficiency). All Olympic facilities being built or renovated are therefore tested against it (JOC, 2018).

Chapter III introduced two versions of EM. Due to the emphasis on technological innovation, it would be right to assume that the official narrative of the Games reflects a weak version of the theory. Likewise, it appears that Japanese official promotes “sustainable and responsible consumption” and production (ibid) as a way to combat climate change, which suggests that they believe in environmental protection being achieved through consumerism, a characteristic of today’s capitalist global economy supported by the theory of EM. However, the use of a discourse of inclusiveness suggests otherwise.

## b) inclusive Games

*“Tokyo 2020 would place major emphasis on cooperation and consultation with the many stakeholders involved in the sustainability and environment-related field. This engagement and dialogue with NGOs, other community organisations, government bodies and the academic and private sectors would (...) maximise sustainability, reduce the environmental footprint, and ensure a spirit of co-operation and partnership” (JOC, 2013).*

New technologies alone are not the only solution offered by Japanese officials to overcome environmental issues. From the EM perspective, civil society and business alike are seen as actors of change. A recurring theme uncovered during the analysis was the important role of non-state actors in contributing to sustainable Games, specifically, and to a sustainable society, in general. Emphasizing collaboration across sectors, Japan has relied on the expertise of scholars and businesspeople to design an event which reflects modern concerns regarding environmental sustainability. Accordingly, the participation of various actors such as municipalities, non-governmental organizations, and civil society is seen as a crucial step toward the realization of a zero-carbon society. Building on Nye’s conceptualization of soft power, I argue that the inclusion of civil society in the decision-making process is another way for Japan to gain soft power, together with its compliance with a global established normative structure. Particularly, the private sector has been called upon to maximize efforts towards sustainability. Using the latest “cutting edge environmental technologies” (JOC, 2013), companies are currently working on various projects to “achieve global sustainability aligning with the Olympic and Paralympic movement” (JOC, 2018). For instance, uniforms for the Japan team will be made from recycled sportswear and Olympic medals will be made out of precious metal collected from used mobile phones and other electronics such as cameras. Citizens were mobilized to help with this comprehensive initiative (ibid).

Interestingly, only Japanese companies are mentioned in the documents, hence reinforcing the idea that *Japan* does put a lot of efforts into building a sustainable society. In so doing, the nation attempts to improve its reputation; Japan takes the responsibility to deliver environmentally friendly Games as a symbol of green economic development and a solution model of global sustainability. Toyota, Asics, NTT Docomo are amongst the companies which are currently involved. The JOC also emphasizes the importance of educating citizens about sustainability challenges and why it matters. Therefore, besides requesting citizen participation in campaigns such as the national collection of used electronics to manufacture

thousands of Olympic medals, exhibits will be organized during the event as to spread knowledge and information regarding environmental issues to domestic and foreign publics alike. At the same time, new measures related to the environment are being discussed between governmental agencies, academic experts, and NGOs and will be introduced ahead of the Games.

The goal “zero waste” – inspired by the Japanese concept of *mottainai* – is also a major theme addressed in the documents. Other than solutions concerned with matters of supply-chain logistics, non-state actors are said to be capable to reduce waste in ways that serve the purposes of public diplomacy. The committee plans to cut down on food waste by introducing information and communication technology during the Games to educate visitors. Overall, this emphasis on the role of civil society reflects a post-political approach to climate change, whereby solutions are being gradually depoliticized.

### 3. Discussion

At the heart of the official narrative of the 2020 Games co-exist two thematic discourses, environmentalism and modernity-cum-innovation. The analysis has demonstrated that the two discourses are constructed and articulated in such a way so that, together, they form a bigger discourse of EM. While the world is plagued with issues related to climate change, some have come to argue that humankind will reach a point of no return soon unless we start downscaling production and consumption patterns. In other words, they advocate for a model whose purpose is not economic productivity, or capitalist growth (D’alisa, Demaria and Kallis, 2014). The first part of the analysis chapter was an attempt to demonstrate that Japanese officials’ vision is definitely not that of “degrowthers”. By stating that they want to use energy more efficiently, improve structures in a sustainable manner and benefit from subsequent economic ripple effects, topics such as the reduction of the use of resources for the purpose of production and consumption are avoided. Rather, as assumed in our theoretical framework, an environmental dimension is incorporated into production and consumption processes. The official discourse surrounding the 2020 Games suggests that Japan sets out to contribute to the realization of a green model of development, and the event is a platform on which it plans on showcasing a Japanese-style sustainable society. Furthermore, by setting the official discourse within the narrative of the UN, Japan admits that it belongs to an existing global order. Japan is unmistakably aware that, in order to secure its position in the international arena, it must align with the current international normative structure formulated by the international community, especially through the UN. By mentioning the UN Agenda

30, SDGs, and Global Impact Initiative – to which the 2020 Tokyo Games is said to positively contribute – Japan sets the discourse of the 2020 Games within the environmental framework formulated by the UN. Therefore, it can be argued that the official discourse of Japan exhibits its ambition to gain, or secure, its credibility, reputation and legitimacy as an environmental frontrunner.

Additionally, with the motto “be better, together – for the planet and the people” alone, the discourse and vision of the 2020 Games reflect a strong version of EM. Since the JOC emphasises the importance of collaboration and consultation in handling climate change in documents it has produced and made available online, the analysis finds that the committee sees the decision-making process as democratic and inclusive. The environmental awareness of civil society is said to be crucial in bringing about change, that is, to lead to a sustainable model of development. This vision meshes with international structural norms as discussed in the theoretical framework. It also echoes Nye (2008, p.108), who argues that we can gain soft power through “an understanding of the role of civil society”.

A deconstruction of the official narrative of the 2020 Olympics and of its constituting discourses has allowed understanding how Japanese values and concepts have translated into ways in which the JOC and the Japanese government set out to organize the most environmentally friendly Games ever. As presented in the introduction, Japan lacks hard power resources and has had to rely on its cultural traits to gain international leverage. This has led to the incorporation of concerns regarding nature-society relationship into the design of the Games. Coupled with “made in Japan” cutting-edge technology, a Japanese version of sustainability is constructed and communicated to the world.

In summary, the discourse of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics does make use of notions of EM which are most likely to generate soft power. Referring to the economic benefits of developing new environmental technologies only proves that the framing of the Games is guided by a liberal logic. However, in order to answer the research question guiding this thesis, it is not enough to conclude here. To verify whether or not Japan can possibly gain soft power by adopting a rhetoric of EM, I ought to look at what is said about it within the public sphere. In the theoretical framework, I have noted the use of SMEs as tool public diplomacy in their own rights, whereby host nations can manage their international image. Therefore, by conducting a DA of news media content, the analysis investigates the efficiency of Japanese public diplomacy.

#### 4. Alternative Discourse: limits on Japan's public diplomacy?

Building on Jørgensen and Philips (2002), I argue that the narrative of the OG and its discursive components exist in parallel with other discourses. In fact, the discourses analysed above establish *one* version of reality and are seen in terms of the purpose that they serve for the Japanese government, namely, public diplomacy. Bryman (2012, p.530) too argues that discursive tools are used when “we want to persuade others”. Because any existing discourse may be overpowered in the process of establishing a different version of events, I ought to consider what they refer to as “discourse struggle” (ibid). In order to verify whether are not the official discourse is being challenged by any opposing discourse, thereby impeding Japan's efforts to gain soft power, the analysis moves on to investigate what is said about the event in the news media. Indeed, public diplomacy is concerned with engaging with foreign audiences through news media, amongst others (Nye, 2008, p, 100).

After demonstrating that the narrative of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics has been framed within the paradigm of EM, the analysis proceeds to a DA of news media content related to the 2020 Games for the media can act as an amplifier and allow the researcher to know what is said about a given topic by alternative voices and what the generic opinions about this topic are. In this way, it is expected to help to understand what the public opinion on the event is, and how the media are making sense of the official narrative (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). As such, by analysing the discourses of other practitioners, I set out to verify whether alternative discourses are consistent or critical of that of the Japanese government for they may impede Japan's efforts to gain soft power. An exploration of how newspaper articles depict the Games will finally tell us of the efficiency, or attractiveness, of Japan's public diplomacy strategy.

##### 4.1. Early scandals

It goes without saying that such a major event as the OG is bound to draw attention globally. Through the use of online databases and RSS feeds, a pool of articles about the 2020 Tokyo Olympics was retrieved. The first review of news media content accessible online revealed that regardless of the source – for instance, regardless of its nationality – all newspapers include athletes-related news mainly. However, the Games have also suffered from repeated scandals since Tokyo has been chosen as the host city. At an early stage, foreign critics accused the JOC of plagiarism, but they were rapidly silenced after the committee revealed a new logo for the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games (The Guardian, 2016; The BBC, 2015). More recently, other scandals have emerged that could tarnish the image of the Games.



More specifically, the recent resignation of JOC chief Tsunekazu Takeda following French investigation regarding suspected corruption has been reported many times in newspapers and has thrown the winning bid into question: Takeda is accused of paying bribes to secure the success of Japan's bid to host the 2020 Games question (The Guardian, 2019; The New York Times, 2019; The Japan Times, 2019). Even though the accusations have not been confirmed at the time of writing the thesis, the scandal has already shaken the JOC's reputation and integrity. It occurred that an equal number of articles covered those two cases (4 out of 36 articles). Moreover, two more articles pointed out the use of 30,000 unpaid volunteers during the event, which for some is a "clear economic exploitation" rather than a one-time opportunity (The Japan Times, 2019; The Mainichi, 2019). The number of articles reporting on those cases is relatively low in comparison to how often other topics were brought up in the media as illustrated below.

By positioning the discourse of EM within the soft power paradigm, this thesis sets out to demonstrate that the environmental discourse of the theory, coupled with a discourse of technology and innovation, can generate soft power. As such, while scandals regarding corruption and plagiarism may tarnish Japan's reputation and should not be discarded, they do not question Japan's achievement in terms of sustainability and environmental protection. Therefore, its credibility as an environmental frontrunner is not thrown into question, and neither is its reputation as a technology and innovation leader capable of handling climate change. Yet, another discourse being constructed by news media occurred to be at the other end of the spectrum. Thus, a DA of online newspaper articles has been deemed necessary because it might challenge the official narrative. Special attention was given to quantitative indicators and reporters' lexical choice.

#### 4.2. Contesting the environment discourse of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics

Two thirds of the collected articles addressed the environmental dimension of the 2020 Games, and nearly half of those reflected one of the most recent public outcries regarding the Games – that is, its environmental loads observed abroad. After pieces of tropical wood from the notorious Malaysian logging company Shin Yang were discovered on several construction sites (Gartland, 2017), 47 NGOs took on the JOC and the Japanese government for failing to meet international environmental and social standards in relation to the organization of the Games (Dela Rosa Yoon, 2017; Gartland, 2017; Neslen, 2018). The company has already a history of human rights abuses, rainforests destruction, and illegal logging reporters say (Dela Rosa Yoon, 2017; Gartland, 2017). Given the high risk of using illegal and unsustainable materials, activist groups addressed a letter to the IOC in September 2017 deploring the lack

of transparency regarding the origin of the timber and claiming that this is a “clear and significant breach of Japan’s commitment to a sustainable 2020 Olympics” (Gartland, 2017). However, neither the JOC nor the Japanese government has been able to guarantee that the wood has been harvested legally and in respect of the environment and livelihood of local communities, even though they “promised to adopt environmentally sound practices and to contribute to global environmental protection” (Dela Rosa Yoon, 2017). On top of that, many have deplored the “loophole in [Japan’s] wood procurement policy” (Dela Rosa Yoon, 2017; Gartland, 2017) that has allowed potentially illegal and unsustainable tropical wood to be imported into Japan.

An article from The Asian Correspondent (Dela Rosa Yoon, 2017) refers to the JOC’s promise to “adopt environmentally sound practices and to contribute to environmental protection” to denounce the fact that Japan has not lived up to it. The article presses the JOC to respond to NGO demands to disclose the origin of the timber used to build Olympic facilities. This is a clear breach of the official narrative analysed earlier; the news media discourse does not believe in the Olympic authorities’ claim to prioritize “cooperation and consultation with the many stakeholders involved in the sustainability and environment-related field”, including NGOs (JOC, 2013). The news media discourse explicitly questions “Japan’s ability to make good on its commitment to host sustainable 2020 Olympic Games” (Gartland, 2017). Doubting Japan’s accountability in terms of sustainability commitments, NGO concerns tarnish the reputation of the 2020 Tokyo Games.

In an attempt to respond to critics, the JOC and Japanese government have revised the 2020 Tokyo’s Sustainable Sourcing Code – a part of the event’s sustainability plan – but a statement released by several environmental NGOs at the beginning of 2019 said they were left “deeply disappointed” by the amendments as it “regrettably makes minimal improvements and fails to ensure the sustainability or even legality of the timbers being procured” (Reuters, 2019). Raising environmental questions regarding the 2020 Tokyo Games is a threat to Japan’s apparent commitment to pave the way for a more sustainable future. The Sustainability Plan crafted by the JOC has been “mocked by local environmentalists for providing little more than lip service to the issue” (The South China Morning Post, 2018). With headlines such as “How the Tokyo 2020 Games are *killing* rainforests in Malaysia and Indonesia” (ibid), the tone used in newspaper articles to talk about the environmental dimension of the 2020 Games is highly dramatic as opposed to the optimism of the official discourse regarding the environmental costs of hosting an Olympic edition, thereby questioning the credibility of the nation’s environmental commitment. This counter environmental discourse is centred around

environmental issues found in Southeast Asia, including “the permanent loss of tropical rainforest”, “irreversible harm to precious biodiversity reserves, and “the destruction of critically endangered orangutan habitat” (Neslen, 2018). This recalls early accusations that Japan was exporting pollution to Southeast Asia as a way to get around Japan’s stricter environmental regulations (Schreurs, 2004). As “the largest global consumer of tropical plywood (...) Japan has a huge impact on rainforests” activists say (The South China Morning Post, 2018). Critics also use figures to make their point – that is, Japan’s consumption of tropical wood is “driving deforestation in Indonesia and Malaysia” (Neslen, 2018). For instance, the Guardian writes: “Globally, tropical forests covering an area the size of Bangladesh – 158,000 square km – disappeared last year, the second highest rate of deforestation since 2001” (ibid). Accordingly, Japan is faced with harsh criticism as it falls short on its promises to host sustainable Games, thereby impeding its reputation of an environmental frontrunner.

## 5. Discussion

The case of Japan’s “irresponsible procurement” (ibid) was, at first, mainly relayed by “small” news websites before it appeared in “bigger” online newspapers in Japan and abroad, including in the UK, the US, and China. Although a counter-discourse is thereby suggested, the relatively limited audience of the former limits the outreach of their criticism. For any critical discourse to have a significant impact on public opinion, it is argued that the same discourse must be presented by “bigger” newspaper articles as well for they enjoy a broader readership. However, it appeared that such articles nuanced the environmental shortcomings of the Games by systematically including references to the JOC’s plan to “focus on environmental sustainability” (The New Delhi Times, 2018). Moreover, the coding revealed that reporters’ lexical choice was very close to the language used in official documents, and terms associated with Japan being “a global environmental leader” (Reuters, 2018) were repeated: “big step toward ‘carbon-free’ society” (Hueston, 2018), “sustainability at the heart of the 2020 Tokyo Games” (Brittlebank, 2016) “Tokyo 2020 Committee eyes greenest Games ever with SDGs” (Maeda, 2018). In fact, 15 out of the 25 articles that somehow addressed the environmental dimension of the Games were found to praise Japan’s commitment to sustainability through technological innovation. Japan’s “efforts to promote decarbonization” is a common topic across all articles and newspapers, and practical solutions are presented without being questioned (Mogg, 2018). Rather, Japan was referred to as a game changer and its capability to stage an Olympic edition enabling sustainable development was emphasized.

In this way, the news media discourse cannot fully challenge the official narrative. Therefore, I can conclude that the official discourse of the OG is a hegemonic discourse; the discourse being constructed by and conveyed in news media is, to some extent, consistent with the official version. Japan's public diplomacy is thus deemed effective. Japan is seen as a credible and legitimate actor in the transition to a sustainable society. As shown, foreign readerships are willing to believe that Japan is in the process of hosting what could be the greenest Olympic ever organized as a means to stem a legacy in terms of environmental technologies.

## **VI. Conclusion**

The impetus behind the present research and its guiding research question was the assumption that, by combining the two discourses of modernity and environmentalism, countries such as Japan could strategically boost their credibility, legitimacy and reputation. The theory of EM, whereby technological innovations can help solve environmental dilemmas, was identified as a theory which reconcile both objectives, and therefore it has informed the theoretical foundation of this thesis. By bridging Nye's conceptualization of soft power with the theory of EM, the findings have shown that a discourse of EM is being widely employed by the JOC and Japanese government to frame the Tokyo bid for the 2020 Summer Olympics and for the organization of the event. More specifically, a DA of documents produced by the JOC and the Japanese government has demonstrated ways in which the official narrative of the 2020 Tokyo Games has been informed by and come to reflect the discourse of EM. In designing the first SDGs Olympics, the conflicting ideas of modernity/economic growth and environmental protection become compatible in the narrative surrounding the event, which appeared to be operated within the greater narrative of the climate regime formulated by the UN. In turn, the framing of the Games within the paradigm of EM suggests that by combining an environmental discourse and a discourse of modernity, an improvement of Japan's soft power is possible. Moreover, the analysis has demonstrated that the Tokyo 2020 Games is strategically focusing on Japan's tangible and intangible assets to promote a sustainable model of development. What is more, the Japanese government's use of EM is narrowly defined in terms of a consumption-oriented economic sustainability through rationalized environmentalism. Indeed, capitalist-driven technology innovation can, it is argued, help solve pending environmental crisis. In this way, Japan's mature society is emphasized, which rationalizes the conceptualization of nature of Japanese officials. Nature becomes an enabler of economic growth and EM is posited as a common-sense response to

addressing matters of climate change (Millington, Darnell, Millington, 2018). Revolving around international values seen from a Japanese perspective, Japan's public diplomacy can theoretically generate soft power.

The 2020 Tokyo Olympics presents an interesting case for understanding how modern concerns about environmental sustainability and economic development are constructed and communicated within the public sphere. By adopting a strong version of the EM discourse and introducing concerns for environmental sustainability to the public, the JOC has raised citizen environmental awareness as well as presented a new way forward in which technological innovations allow non-state actors to take actions. At the level of the state, the Japanese government is engaging in a discourse of EM within a post-political framework, thereby aligning with global efforts to protect the environment through sustainable practices and collaboration with the private sector, rather than public policy initiative alone. It is inviting businesses to adopt sustainable measures and sustainability principles for two reasons: environmental protection and the sake of Japan's economy. In this context, the Japanese government is giving a reason for business to keep innovating. On one hand, the framing of the Games within the EM paradigm has promoted environmentally-friendly sourcing practices and production processes – such as the use of recycled materials – as well as opening up participation channels for alternative voices, especially from civil society. On the other hand, with EM's reliance on technology innovations viewed as another business opportunity, environmental sustainability is discursively challenged by economic feasibility. Environmental interests are more often than not secondary to economics. Indeed, many argue that “stressing an environmental mandate does not mean that standards will be implemented or even that the implementation of environmental standards (...) will lead to ecological improvements”, what is suggested is that discourses tend to exceed commitments (Millington, Darnell, Millington, 2018). This has been acknowledged as a limitation of this thesis – that is, that it is beyond its scope to determine whether or not Japan is or will actually making any environmental improvements. Only future studies will be able to say whether the Tokyo 2020 Olympics will have a positive impact on Japan's sustainability performance. Despite the fact that meeting the IOC's environmental standards is encouraging the Japanese government to change the nation's environmental-cum-development policy framework, “these efforts may be more a matter of political positioning than a genuine commitment to environmentalism” (ibid). That is to say, an ecologization of Japan's national economy might not follow.

At last, in order to find out whether or not the discourse of EM can be employed to gain soft power in the context of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, the analysis finally

undertook to look at opinions from foreign audiences, especially through online newspaper articles. As shown, the discourse conveyed in news media does not come to overpower the official discourse being told by the JOC and the Japanese government; although accounts of the Games' environmental shortcomings are presented, criticism rather focuses on other topics and do not represent a threat to Japan's public diplomacy strategy. Major newspapers tell a story much like that of the official narrative; that of an innovative Japan using its cutting-edge technology to build a sustainable society. In summary, no overpowering antagonistic discourse has been discovered. Therefore, drawing on the theoretical framework, I can conclude that the official discourse of the OG is a hegemonic discourse. Japan's strategic use of the OG and the theory of EM can potentially affect others' preferences and positively impact Japan's international image in the long run. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to evaluate such outcomes. How foreign audiences will actually react to the event, only future research can tell. The Games are yet to happen, and perhaps more importantly, it remains the question of how soft power can be measured.







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