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Game of influence - Winning hearts and minds

ISOs' Strategic Narratives and Responses to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Abstract

This thesis sought to investigate how ISOs shaped their strategic narratives, linked to their reactions and actions against Russia, since the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In addition, it also intends to shine light on how international sport activities can be used as a soft power tool in international politics. Using a combination of a case study and qualitative content analysis, it is revealed how the ISOs shape their strategic identity narratives around their values and their “unifying mission”. Further, the strategic issue narrative is shaped through the motivation that Russian violent actions prevent the ISOs from carrying out this “unifying mission”. It finds how the past is formed as a time when the ISOs succeed in carrying out their “unifying mission”. While the present is formed in contrast to the past, as an aggressive time where the ISOs have to act against their “unifying mission” in order to ensure peaceful competition. Finally, the future is formed by referring back to the time when they could carry out the “unifying mission” Through the theoretical framework the thesis argues that a conflict over soft power is happening in international politics, where the ISOs have a massive power in regulating countries' soft power resources through international sport activities. This conflict of soft power is based on that actions could be seen as the ISOs weaponizing sports in order to de-weaponize Russia's earlier weaponization of sport.

Key words: ISOs, IOC, FIFA, strategic narrative, soft power, Russia, actions, reactions, unifying mission

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Abbreviations

ISO/ISOs - International Sports Organisations: ISOs in this thesis refers to FIFA and the IOC

IOC - International Olympic committee

FIFA - Fédération Internationale De Football Association

SME - Sport mega-events

IF - International Sports Federation

NOC -National Olympic Committees

1. Introduction

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination.”

(Mandela, Nelson 2000 see Fraser 2021)

This quote by the former South-African president could be described to capture an ideal image of sport as a power resource and being a utmost good political force. However, the relationship between sport and politics is not always this ideal image where sport only works as a peaceful force that fights discrimination and unifies the world. The relationship is much more complex than the quote by Mandela and has been a highly debated topic for years. To say that sport and politics don't mix could be seen both as utopian and ignorant due to both historical aspects and examples, as well as to recent events.

For instance, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the FIFA World Cup in Qatar and the allegations against Israel to have violated international Law have shown the impossibility for International Sport Organisations (ISOs) to be politically neutral. The sports largest and most powerful ISOs, FIFA and the IOC, claim to be just ‘political neutral’, but are in reality two major political actors on the international stage. The two presidents Thomas Bach and Giorgio Infantino are indeed political actors since they represent organisations that oversee Sporting Mega-Events, watched by billions of people all over the world (Belcastro 2023).

When Russia initiated their offensive war against Ukraine, critical voices were raised against the relationship between the sporting world and Putin’s Russia. “For years, sports have given everything to Putin - now it's time to close championships and exclude Russian teams”, wrote the Swedish sport journalist Simon Bank the day after the invasion (Bank 2022, translation by the

author). Myself remember reading the article and realised how much sport has been used by Russia as a way to create a positive image of the country. I had followed the Olympics in Sochi 2014 and the FIFA World Cup in 2018 without reflecting a second about the political dimension of it.

This politicisation and weaponization of sports along with the contemporary relevance got me interested in investigating the relationship between sport and politics. The quote by Simon Bank further drew my attention to look at the responsibility of ISOs and question how they act and react in the case of an armed attack by a country against another nation. This thesis will therefore focus on the reactions and actions by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Association Football Federation (FIFA) since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022.

The thesis begins by giving a brief background of FIFA and IOC as organizations and actors on the international political stage before continuing with an overview of previous literature related to the field of study. Then there will be a presentation of the theoretical framework guiding this study, followed by an outline of the methodology of this paper. Thereafter, the analysis of this thesis will be presented before continuing with final reflections, considerations and concluding remarks in the discussion and conclusion sections.

1.1 Purpose and research question

This thesis formulates the following research question:

- *How can international sport activities be used as a soft power tool in international politics?*
- *How have the ISOs shaped their strategic narratives, linked to their reactions and actions against Russia, since the invasion of Ukraine in 2022?*

Building upon the contemporary wave of research and debates on the sportwashing phenomenon and use of sporting mega-events which has increased as a reaction to events like the FIFA 2018 World Cup in Russia and FIFA 2022 World Cup in Qatar (Belcastro 2023). This thesis strives to research on the reactions and the actions by the sports biggest actors. The contribution this thesis aims to offer is a deeper insight and understanding of how the sport's largest and most powerful actors react and actually act in the event of a countries' violent actions against another state. There has been, which will be developed further in the previous research section, studies on sport and the olympics as a peacemaking power and the role of sports diplomacy. There has also been research on how countries use sport in order to shape a discourse and their strategic narratives. Still there is not some extensive research on the role of ISOs when it comes to their actions in the case of violent conflict by countries participating in their international competitions.

The study further intends to shine light on the connection between sport and politics and demonstrate the massive power ISOs have with deciding who is allowed to participate and who should host the next Olympics or the next FIFA World Cup. This thesis is also dedicated to problematize the discussion of weaponization and politicisation of sports by both countries as well as International Sport Organisations.

This thesis will analyze how FIFA and the IOC shaped their strategic narrative in relation to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and how sport can be used as a soft power tool in international politics. Answering this, the thesis contributes to understanding of the complex role of sport as a soft power tool in international politics. By applying comparative aspects in the analysis and discussion it will be shown how FIFA and the IOC shape react and act differently in some aspects, but how they still can be combined in an overview of how ISOs formed their strategic narratives.

2. Background

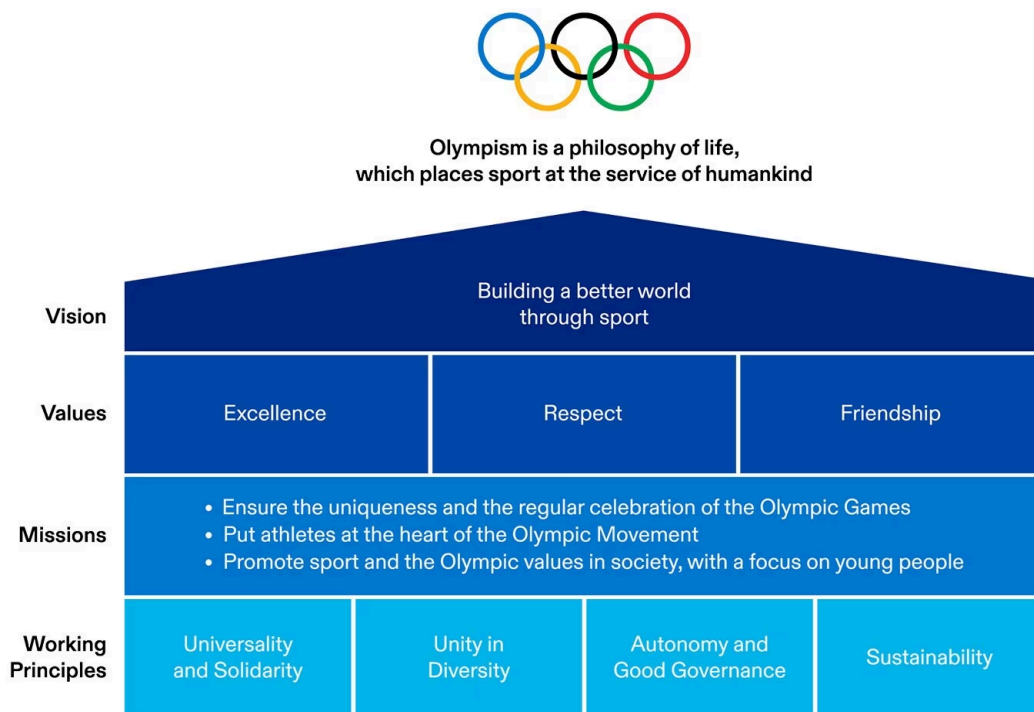
2.1 FIFA and IOC

The International Olympic Committee is a global organisation that is responsible for the collaboration between all Olympic stakeholders along with the public and private authorities, including the United Nations and other international organisation (IOC, International Olympic Committee). IOC describe themselves to be at the heart of sport and have the task of promoting Olympism worldwide. They also have the task of overseeing the Olympic Games and the organisation's main representative is their president, which since 2013 is Thomas Bach (IOC, The Organisation). The president's role is defined under rule 20 in the olympic charter which states: “The President represents the IOC and presides over all its activities” (Olympic Charter 2020: 49). The IOC has a clear vision based on three core values and a defined mission with stated working principles. As shown in the picture below, their vision is “Building a better world through sport” with the values: “excellence”, “respect” and “friendship”.

It is also stated in the Olympic Charter (2020) that the role of IOC is, “amongst other thing to cooperate with the competent public or private organisations and authorities in the endeavour to place sport at the service of humanity and thereby to promote peace”

Another relevant principle of Olympism for this thesis is the fundamental principle 5 that states, “Recognising that sport occurs within the framework of society, sports organisations within the Olympic Movement shall apply political neutrality...”(Olympic Charter 2020) Lastly, one important aspect to mention regarding the IOC and the Olympic movement is the “Olympic Truce”. The truce is a symbolic resolution where the UN General Assembly every two years adopts a resolution called “Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic Ideal”. The resolution calls upon all nations to settle their international conflict through the use of peaceful means. The truce begins seven days before the opening ceremony and ends seven days

after the closing ceremony. The Olympic Truce resolution that was adopted in 2021, did so with 173 Member-States co-sponsoring it, including the Russian Federation (United Nations n.d).



(IOC Principles)

The Fédération International de Football Association, FIFA, is the governing body of international football. The organisation exists in order to govern and develop football all over the world and have the following vision: “to make football truly global, diverse and inclusive, for the benefit of the whole world” (FIFA, “About FIFA”). The organisations has 211 affiliated associations and it is the president, Giorgio Infantino, that is highest in the hierarchy and acts as the organisation's chief executive (FIFA “Organisation”; FIFA, “President”). In the FIFA statute it is stated that “the President represents FIFA generally” and that “the President shall aim to foster a positive image of FIFA and to ensure that FIFA’s mission, strategic direction, policies and values, as defined by the Council, are protected and advanced” (FIFA, “FIFA Statutes” : 40).

The vision mentioned above, about “making football truly global” is the leadworld FIFA vision 2020-2023 which were based on 11 goals in order to make football truly global. Some of these were for number 10. “Protect positive values in football” and number 11. “Impact society through the power of football” (FIFA, the vision). Like the International Olympic Committee, FIFA is an organisation based on policies and values which in FIFAs case is stated in the statute. It says for example under general provision number 4.2 that “ FIFA remains neutral in matters of politics and religion. Exceptions may be made with regard to matters affected by FIFA’s statutory objectives” (FIFA statute 2021).

3. Literature review

Before starting to analyze how IOC and FIFA, as governing bodies in sport, reacted and acted on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it is vital to acquire knowledge about previous research in the area of study. Therefore, this chapter will go through and present previous research relevant to this thesis and in order to place it in the academic context.

Historically, the relationship between politics and sports has been an underdeveloped area of study in peace and conflict studies as well as in International Relations (IR). The connection between the global sport arena, with its extensive power, and the international political system have been a relatively unexplored concept despite its relevance for the IR field (Cha 2009: 1581; Allison & Monnington 2002). During the last decade however, this void has begun to be filled by studies on the role and power of sports in international relations (Grix & Houlihan 2014: 574). Foremost, it has mostly been researched about aspects like sports diplomacy (Murray 2018), sportwashing (Boykoff 2022) and identity and nationalism (Ecker 2014; Rider & Llewellyn 2015). *The Routledge Handbook of Sport and Politics* presents a series of works on sports roles on the international political stage (Bairner et al. 2017). Amongst these works, Udo Merkel (2017) argues in one chapter on how sport can be used as a foreign policy tool and used in a long term strategy for a country to reach different political goals. This through so-called sports diplomacy. Related to Merkel's view on sport as a diplomatic tool is the thoughts of Ber et.al (2017) on the sporting arena as a battlefield for public diplomacy. With the statement that in contemporary politics, alongside military warfare, a battle of image is taking place it is argued that the sporting arena is a place for countries to promote narratives in order to achieve different goals (ibid: 227-228).

Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle, who is almost alone in discussing strategic narrative in relation to sport, also discusses how public diplomacy practitioners have started to realize the power of sport as potential diplomatic tool and use sporting organizations “to conduct joint projection of strategic narratives” (Miskimmon et.al 2013: 115). In addition, Johanna Szostek

identifies the so-called mega-events, for example the Olympics, as an important part of the desired state identity in Russia's strategic narrative with the goal of presenting the country as an attractive and welcoming nation (2017). The article uses the terminology of strategic narratives, by Miskimmon et.al (2013), where it is defined as “a form of communication through which political actors attempt to give meaning to the past, present and future in order to achieve political objectives” (Szostek 2017: 575). In an article by Grix and Kramareva (2017) this kind of use of SMEs, as a soft power strategy by Russia is investigated. They conclude that Russia, unlike other states, uses the mega-events like Sochi Olympic Games in order to create a type of backward-looking and produce a national identity discourse based on a traditional, glorious and imperialistic Soviet-era. This in contrast to other countries' use of mega-events forward-looking dimension to show economic and political development (ibid: 472). Furthermore, on the connection between sport and politics in the case of Russia, there have been studies on the aspect of weaponization (Coates 2017). Since the Russian revolution, sport has been the subject for weaponization by the Russian state. Through state funded doping, hosting international sporting events and propaganda, former Soviet and today's Russia have strived to outperform other countries and foremost western countries during Olympics and other sport competitions. This in order to shape the national identity and show a sort of supremacy (ibid).

And since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the debate regarding how to deal with russian teams and athletes in international sport, have further fueled the debate on the connection between sports and politics (Belcastro 2023: 107). International Sport Organisations (ISOs) play a major role in this connection and Belcastro has highlighted this through a case study of FIFA (2023). The study demonstrates the immense power that FIFA holds through its possibility to include or exclude countries from the game of football and the power of assigning the hosting of tournaments to countries. With the possibility of hosting a major sport event comes political advantages, both domestic and internationally, for a country (ibid: 111). Belcastro argues that with the symbolic power of sport and major sport events, one could argue that a FIFA president has the same amount of soft power as the leaders of major churches (ibid: 112). One of the most interesting conclusions and statements in Belcastros study is the one of selective neutrality. By comparing FIFAs action in Ukraine with their actions against Israel, the study states that FIFA

uses its “neutrality card” whenever it fits the interest of the organization (Belcastro 2023). The aspect of neutrality is, when applied to ISOs, often discussed along with politicization of sports (Goretti 2022). When the IOC took measures against Russia after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, these were partly motivated by the fact that they wanted to defend the principle of neutrality and avoid politicization of sport (ibid).

An identifiable key position and argument in the existing literature is that IOC and FIFA could be spoken of as the by far two most powerful of sporting organizations and that the Olympic summer games along with the FIFA World cup are the two largest sport events (Grix & Houlihan 2014; Hoberman 2011; Cha 2009). These two organizations are often analyzed together and compared in several contributions (for example Meeuwssen & Kreft 2023; Allison & Mornington 2002). The literature of FIFA and IOC, and other ISOs as political organizations is of great relevance for this thesis due to its presented aims and purpose. Two additional contributions on this area are by Lincoln Allison (2005) and Allison and Tomlinson (2017) which try to create a comprehensive conceptualisation of International Sporting Organizations and their political role. These contributions are used in the conceptualization of ISOs that will be applied in these thesis.

There is also relatively extensive research on sport as a soft power tool (Freeman 2012; Cha 2016; Allison & Tomlinson 2017) that is most relevant for this thesis and will be developed in the theoretical framework.

Through the literature review, it is shown that the relationship between sport and politics is a growing field of study within peace and conflict, as in international relations (IR). However, the field is still relatively understudied and there are research gaps to fill. The theory of strategic narratives is yet to be fully implemented in the area of sports in IR and peace and conflict studies. Therefore, this thesis intends to contribute to this implementation of strategic narratives in the relationship between sport and politics. Further, the study aims to build upon existing literature on sport as a tool of soft power and how it is used in international politics.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1 Strategic Narrative

The concept of *Strategic Narratives* in the field of IR is considered to be introduced by Lawrence Freedman (2006). He argues that narratives are created in a certain way, in order to affect the way other people react and act on different events. It could both be to direct the opinion amongst people and make them act in a certain way, or affect the emotions and attitude to a specific issue. Freedman defines the concept of narratives as “the ways issues are framed and responses suggested”. The narratives become strategic since they are consciously constructed and do not emerge spontaneously (ibid: 22-23).

After the concept was introduced by Freedman, it has been developed further and Miskimmon et.al (2013) presents a conceptual framework of strategic narratives. They define strategic narrative as: “a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international politics [...] Strategic narratives are a tool for political actors to extend their influence, manage expectations, and change the discursive environment in which they operate [...] the point of strategic narratives is to influence the behavior of others” (ibid: 2). Miskimmon et.al (2018: 6-7) describes the different parts of a narrative according to their definition. These four parts are: 1) *agents* (actors), 2) *scene* (setting/environment), 3) *act*, (conflict) 4) *agency* (behavior/tools) and 5) *purpose* (solution/goal). This definition of strategic narrative is the one that will be applied in this thesis. Miskimmon et.al (2013) ground their study in a constructivist approach and discuss the ways in which actors use narratives strategically in order to shape attitudes in a direction beneficial to their own interests (ibid: 21, 108).

According to Miskimmon et.al (2018: 9), the narrative process consists of three phases: formation, projection and reception. The first phase, formation, is where the narrative is constructed. It is in the formation phase that ideas and themes are formed and what is the role of different actors within the narrative (Miskimmon et.al 2013: 8-10). The second phase, projection,

addresses in which way the narrative is being projected to the public. This is being done through different mediums where the type of medium being used can affect the message. Within the projection phase, both the main narrator and the space where the story is narrated is being considered. (ibid: 10-11, 115). In the third and last phase, reception, it is addressed regarding how the narrative is received (ibid: p.11-13). Through these three phases it is possible to better understand the communicative process of strategic narratives and the strategic function with it.

Furthermore, Miskimmon et.al (2013: 7) outline three different types of strategic narratives: *system narratives*, *identity narrative* and *issue narrative*. System narratives are about the structure of the international system. It tells us about the actors and their power as well as how the system works. The second type, identity narrative describes a specific story and identity of an actor containing the perceived self image, values and goals. Lastly, issue narratives tell us in which context that the political actions take place within. It gives a description of what the issue is about and how a specific way of reaction and action is preferable (Miskimmon et.al 2018: 8).

4.2 Sport as a Soft Power tool

Miskimmon et.al (2013: 3) describes how their idea about strategic narrative is closely related to Joseph Nye's concept of soft power. He defines the concept as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies” (Nye 2004: x). Nye also states that seduction is always a more effective way than coercion and that the resources of soft power are assets that produce the degree of attraction (ibid: 6). A level of soft power rests on the ability to shape and direct the preferences of others. This by getting others to admire your values, culture and striving to follow your example (ibid: 5). Roselle et.al (2014) discusses the definition and function of soft power as the power within culture, value and policies that are used in order to affect others, through attraction. Further Roselle et.al means that we could think of soft power as a way of creating a shared meaning amongst a group of people and within a society. This creates an opportunity for political leaders to use soft power in order to shape the shared meaning of

something in a way that benefits their own interests and contributes to the desirable objectives (Roselle et.al 2014: 72-74).

This could be concluded by characterizing soft power as a form of indirect power in contrast to hard power which is a direct form of power. Two examples of hard power are military and economic power and can come in the form of both “sticks” (threats) and “carrots” (inducements) (Nye 2004: 5).

Jonathan Pridemore and Paul Michael Brannagan (2016) have created an analytical framework for studying how states, by creating a soft power package, could gain soft power. This soft power package contains five forms of sources of soft power: culture, tourism, branding, diplomacy and trade. In each of these five areas, sport has the potential to play a role. It is clear that sports can be an important part of a nation's culture and history and that hosting sporting events generates tourism. Finally, a SME also brings opportunities for conducting sports diplomacy (ibid: 259-261). When a country performs well in different sporting events this leads to national pride that can enhance the country's image of itself and project this to the outside world (Freeman 2012: 1260).

5. Methodology

In the following chapter I will go through and discuss the methodology and research design for this thesis. The chapter will present the chosen method and a motivation for why I regard this as the most suitable and appropriate approach in order to answer the research questions posed above. Furthermore, there will be discussion on the case selection as well as the material collection where arguments for the selections are presented. At last, the chapter ends with consideration of different limitations and constraints with the study's methodology.

5.1 Analytical Framework

This thesis will utilise the strategic narrative concept both as a theoretical and as a methodological tool. The strategic narrative concept as an analytical tool will be based on the ideas of Miskimmon et.al (2013). In order to enable a systematic analysis, as for the purpose of increased transparency in the study, an analytical model has been developed (table 1). Furthermore, the application of the model will contribute to an avoidance of subjectivity in the analytical process. The analytical model has been developed by using the description by Miskimmon et. al (2013:7-8) regarding three types of strategic narratives: *system narratives*, *issue narratives* and *identity narratives*. Moreover, the operationalisation is done based on the strategic aspect of the narratives. This table (1) will function as a way of guiding the researcher in analyzing the material and at the same time help the reader to follow the work of the researcher. Through the table it is possible for the reader to see what questions that have been asked about the material and what questions the analysis is based upon. Hence the table will not be answered directly or presented as a table in the analysis, but instead work as a guiding tool that contributes to transparency.

Table 1. Operationalisation of the strategic narratives types

Type of Strategic Narrative	Possible question	Operationalisation of question
System narrative	How is the system and overlying structures presented?	Is the reactions and actions of the ISOs a product of the international system or overlying structures?
Issue narrative	What are the concrete issues the ISOs talked about? How is the context presented?	How do the ISOs motivate their reactions and actions? What are the expected effects and how are they argued for?
Identity narrative	What image do the ISOs present of themselves?	What are the central themes and values presented connected to the self-image of the ISOs? How does the self-image relate to presented images of other actors?

Note: this is a self made framework based on the ideas of strategic narratives by Miskimmon et.al (2013)

5.2 Method and research design

The chosen research design for this study is a qualitative case study with comparative aspects, due to the possibility of doing an in-depth analysis and conducting a profound research on the case. In extension, this enables the study to reach a higher degree of internal validity. The opportunity of deriving more internally valid results is a main reason for choosing the case study design, and more precisely a single-N study (Halperin & Heath 2020: 234; George & Bennett 2005: 28-29). One identifiable weakness with the single-N case study approach is the aspect of

less external validity. This shortcoming results in a more challenging task to generalize the findings (Halperin & Heath 2020: 168). Yet, the aim of this study is not to draw general conclusions, but instead contribute to deeper understanding of how ISOs shape their strategic narratives in relation to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and produce findings that can develop the field further.

The analysis of the case will be conducted through the method of a qualitative content analysis. As stated above, this study aims to look at the reactions and actions of the IOC and FIFA in relation to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and how this shaped their strategic narrative. Therefore, a qualitative content analysis is a suitable method as it enables us to understand the meaning and understanding of IOCs and FIFAs reactions and actions (Esaiasson 2017: 211). By using qualitative content analysis we strive to draw conclusions on the meaning, purpose and motives which is inherent in the textual material. Furthermore, the content analysis offers the possibility of finding information regarding different hidden attitudes and perception in the material (Halperin & Heath 2017: 211-213).

The qualitative content analysis requires that the researcher read the textual material thoroughly and at the same time keep in mind the context that the material has been produced in in order to look at underlying themes. These themes could be identified by codifying and grouping the information into sections and categories, which is done in table (1) above. And then, by analyzing how these categories interact, one can get an overall picture of the data. It is important that the researcher is clear and structured in how the analysis is conducted, which will be ensured through the analytical tool (Esaiasson 2017:211-213, 216; Schreier 2012: 12).

As stated above, this thesis will use comparative aspects in addition to the qualitative case study. These comparative aspects will be the reactions and action by the two ISOs, FIFA and the IOC, in order to highlight differences and similarities. These differences and similarities will then be used in order to create an overview and draw a general conclusion regarding how the two ISOs shape their strategic narratives in relation to the Russian invasion. Case studies often go hand in hand

with comparative research since it is a good way of producing some conclusions that are a little more generalizing than just a single-N case study (Halperin & Heath 2017: 214-217).

5.3 Selection of case and actors

The case of Russia was chosen since it is a major contemporary case that has been discussed extensively in relation to the connection between sport and politics, both by academics and in the media. This is a strength since the field of study that this thesis positions within is relatively understudied. Furthermore, this is a compelling case of when International Sport Organizations have reacted strongly and taken clear measures against a country that has committed and conducts violent acts against another state. Additionally, Russia is one of the world's political and economic superpowers which makes this a case of utmost relevance for the field of study. The distinction from other cases is the fact that there have been extensive and concrete measures against Russia by ISOs, as to the importance of sports for Russia's national identity and their strategic narrative.

Due to this thesis limits in both time and scope, it is not realistic to look at all big ISOs. Hence, in this study, the IOC and FIFA constitute the objects of study and represent ISOs which were defined previously. These two ISOs are chosen due to the fact that they are recognized as the two largest and most influential ISOs in the world (Hoberman 2011; Grix & Houlihan 2014).

5.3 Material

In order to analyze and answer the research questions there is a need to collect data on reaction and actions on the case from the two ISOs. Thus, the data that the analysis will build upon consist of two types: official statements/media releases and speeches. The official statements/media releases have been collected on the official websites for IOC and FIFA and are used to examine the measurements and actions taken and the motivation behind them. Meanwhile, the speeches are more utilized to get a picture of the reactions and emotions by the ISOs and their officials related to the case. Therefore, the speeches have been collected by focusing on those containing

statements and reactions on the Russian invasion by the ISOs and their officials. An important aspect to lift is the one of potential bias when choosing material focusing on and containing a specific type of content. However, since this thesis aims to describe and analyze reactions and actions made by IOC and FIFA, this is a necessary focus and selection criteria. Regarding the speeches, there have been collected one made by the president of FIFA, Gergio Infantio and one by the president of the IOC, Thomas Bach. The speech by Infantino was held at the FIFA world summit in Doha in March 2022 and the time frame that was set for the collected data was the day of the invasion and around a year forward. Their frame of a year forward was set due to the interest of getting a broad picture of actions made by the ISOs. The speeches were transcribed by using the ai based website of Turboscribe and then controlled by the researcher so that the transcriptions were correct.

5.4 Limitations

As with all method and research designs, the case study and qualitative textual analysis consist of some aspects that should be discussed due to its limitations and weaknesses. Since the case study design and the qualitative textual analysis is applied in order to do an in-depth analysis, and identify certain aspects and themes in the material, the analysis requires an interpretation of the material. The perceptions of what is a part of an actor's strategic narrative and what they connect to their self-image can not be fully based on fact and therefore require an interpretation by the researcher. With this in mind, there is a need to in some way reduce the bias which in this thesis is done through transparency in the research. This transparency will be achieved through the earlier presentation of the analytical framework along with empirical evidence in the form of clear citations and references to the material. (Esaiasson 2017: 228-231; Boréus & Kohl 2018 : 85)

Some considerations of the thesis as a whole is that the theory is also constructed from a state perspective which could be seen as a limitation, since the application here in the thesis is on ISOs. However, in the thesis, the ISOs are seen as political actors and similarities are drawn between a state and the ISOs on this aspect. The fact that Miskimmon et.al (2013:115) mentions

that sport organisations play a part in countries' strategic narratives also strengthen the application of the theory in this thesis.

6. Findings and Analysis

This thesis aims to study how ISOs shape their strategic narratives linked to their reactions and actions in the event of a country's violent actions against another state. Therefore the following analysis is divided into three parts: strategic system narrative, strategic issue narrative and strategic identity narrative. Each of these sections will build on both the material connected to IOC and the ones connected to FIFA.

6.1 Strategic Issue Narrative

During the first week that followed the Russian invasion of Ukraine, IOC issued three statements. The first condemnation of Russia's armed offensive was stated by the IOC on the same day as the invasion saying: “The International Olympic Committee (IOC) strongly condemns the breach of the Olympic Truce by the Russian government” (IOC 2022-02-24). This condemnation was repeated the day after, accompanied by a statement where the executive board of IOC urged all International sport Federations to relocate, or cancel sporting events planned to be held on the territory of Russia or Belarus. The call for relocation and cancellation of events in Russia were motivated by referring to the breaking of the Olympic truce and the priority of ensuring the safety and security for athletes (IOC 2022-02-25). In the third statement, made four days after the invasion, the call for relocation and cancellation were followed by sanctions and protective measurements. The sanctions included that no international sports events, that were organised or supported by an IF or NOC, should be held on Russian or Belarusian territory. Further, no flags, anthems, colors or identifications of Russia and Belarus should be displayed at sporting events. Additionally, the IOC also ordered sanctions against individuals such as Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation along with other Russian officials and politicians, through the withdrawal of Olympical Orders. Along with the sanctions, protective measures were taken in the form of the recommendation of no participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes or officials in sports events (IOC 2022-02-28).

These actions have been motivated, as mentioned, by the IOC referring to Russia's violation of the Olympic Truce. At the end of December 2022 Thomas Bach, President of the IOC, gave a New Year message speech where he motivated the protective measures by saying that the IOC had to “ensure the integrity of international sports competition” since governments had started to decide which athletes should be allowed to participate and who should not be allowed. This created a situation where the IOC had to act against its own mission, “...to unify the entire world in peaceful competition”, by prohibiting athletes only because of their passport. He called the invasion a “blatant violation of the Olympic Truce and the Olympic Charter” and suppressed his and the IOCs support for and solidarity with members of the Ukrainian Olympic Committee (IOC Media 2022).

In the same way as Thomas Bach and the IOC, FIFA expressed their full solidarity with people affected in Ukraine and condemned the use of force by Russia. FIFA also urged the restoration of peace and called for immediate constructive dialogue. Motivated by the recommendations from the IOC, FIFA also took measures against Russia. These measures first included no international competition on the territory of Russia, while the Russian team still could compete if their home games were played on neutral ground without an audience, no Russian flag or national anthem. Further, the member association of Russia should not, if participation, go under the name of Russia but instead do so under the name “Football Union of Russia ” (FIFA 2022-02-27). The day was a joint decision from FIFA and UEFA declaring the suspension of all Russian teams, national representatives or clubs teams, from participating in FIFA and UEFAs tournaments (FIFA 2022-02-28). About a month after the invasion and the suspension of Russian teams by FIFA, the president Giorgio Infantino held a speech at the FIFA congress where he spoke about the ongoing war in Ukraine. He mentioned the fear of a global conflict, describing the events as terrible, that innocent people are suffering and dying. He further made a plea to all those who have power in the world to stop conflicts and wars, and instead engage in dialogue with their enemies. He said in connection to this plea: “For our children. For our future...Please try to come together”. Infantino argued that if the world comes together and lay down their arms, football can be a driver in rebuilding relationships and keep on their work in promoting peace (FIFA “Congress” 2022).

Through the above description of the two ISOs initial actions and reactions to the Russian invasion during the first year, we see the formation of a strategic issue narrative. Foremost, the concrete actions taken are in the form of hard power sanctions and protective measures. However, these hard power actions are largely directed towards Russia's soft power capacity. The thing that the sanctions and protective measures remove is Russia's, and Belarus' opportunity of using sport as a soft power tool. Through the prohibition of displaying the national flag, national anthem or national colors, an extensive soft power resource is taken away from Russia and Belarus. It is these national symbols that contribute to the national identity and which shared values are centered around. This together with the “no participation of Russian or Belarusian athletes” and “no international competition on Russian or Belarusian territory”, eliminate the soft power benefits with SMEs. Aspects like tourism, nation-branding, display of the nation’s culture and history, the display of national pride through sporting successes and opportunity of sports diplomacy, is what the sanctions and protective measure target. It gets much more difficult for the Russian and Belarusian states to attract people through the admiration of Russian national values, beliefs and nation-identity.

The two ISOs, as we can see, creates a strategic issue narrative with the issue being that the two organisations can't carry out their mission, to unite the world in peaceful competition. The IOC foremost declares the breach of the Olympic Truce by Russia as a main factor for taking the actions. The reactions connected to the invasions and the actions is a strong condemnation of the violent actions, without mentioning that any responsibility lies with them. On the contrary, Infantino rather explicitly says that they do not have any responsibility at all through his plea to all of those with power to act. Finally, the actions taken are framed to be preferable since the safety of the athletes can't be guaranteed and peaceful competition is impossible with Russian and Belarusian participation.

6.2 Strategic Identity Narrative

Through the lens of strategic identity narrative we can see how IOC and FIFA have a very clear formulated self-image, connected to some central values that they want to project to the outside world. Even though these self-images do, in some ways differ, they are still in an overall picture very similar to each other. One significant aspect regarding the self-image of both the two ISOs is how they speak about “our mission”. In a statement made by IOC four days after the invasion, the Olympic movement is defined as a “united in its mission to contribute to peace through sport and to unite the world in peaceful competition beyond all political disputes” (IOC 2022-02-28). In his New Year message 2022, Thomas Bach also talks about: the “mission to unify”, “our unifying olympic mission”, “our peace mission” and “once again fully live up to the mission of sport to unite”. He also speaks about IOC “opening new horizons and reaching new audiences with our values” (IOC Media 2022). In the same way Infantino speaks about FIFA and football “bringing the world together”, “cross cultural borders”, “having a unique position” and the need to focus on “our job, on our mission, on our functions, on our duties”. He also stated that when the conflict in Ukraine is over, and all other conflicts, “football can play a small part in rebuilding relationships, in establishing peace and understanding. And we will be there at the forefront of doing that” (FIFA “Congress” 2022).

A central theme that both IOC and FIFA often involves in connection to their self-image and how it relates to others is “solidarity”. Bach mentioned how the “Ukrainian athletes can count on the full commitment to this solidarity from the IOC and the entire Olympic movement” (IOC Media 2022). They frame much of their identity through the use of “solidarity” which is an apparent appeal to the emotions amongst the recipients.

Interesting is, as described in the previous section, Infantino's plea to “all those with some form of power” to act (FIFA “Congress” 2022). With this statement, Infantino lowered his power and possibility of action and projected this to other actors. He also by doing this, he also takes away some responsibility from FIFA and himself. Still, Infantino talks about having respect for the football pyramid and how FIFA is at the top of this pyramid (ibid). Hence, by saying that other

actors with power need to act is to say that the football community does not have enough power to do a profound change and further do not have any responsibility.

Furthermore both ISOs use positively charged words in connection to the work and actions of their organization. For example, Bach uses words like “pride”, “successful”, “exceptional”, “optimism”, “unique” and “hope” (IOC Media 2022). Infantino uses words such as “unique in the world of sports”, “positive spirit”, “unique position”, “great success” and “proud of the work” (FIFA “Congress” 2022).

As noted above in the analysis of the strategic issue narrative, the IOC motivated its sanctions and protective measures against Russia with the argument that Russia's invasion was an action against the peace mission of the Olympic Movement (IOC Media 2022). Here we can see how the identity and self-image that IOC projects is used in relation to the actions of others. They have in other words have formulated an image and an identity of Russia as something that goes against their own self-image. IOC have shaped their strategic identity narrative based on “their mission”, that includes certain values and themes, and that Russia has acted against this and prevented IOC from fulfilling its unifying mission. It is clear how the Olympic values: Excellence, Respect & Friendship, stated by the IOC, is consistently used in the formation and projection of the strategic identity narrative.

The formation of the strategic identity narrative is made around central themes like “solidarity”, “unity”, “peace” and “excellence” which is connected to the description of “our mission”. The mission to unify all in peaceful competition shows how they relate to others as being a unifying force that are determined to live up to their mission. By using the perspective of soft power we see that both IOC and FIFA are aware of and believe in SMEs as a soft power tool, powerful enough to unite the world. Finally, the way that Infantino makes a plea to all of those with power shows an attempt to place the ISOs as the good force working for peace unlike the aggressive politicians not engaging in dialogue. Additionally, it is evident how the soft power aspect goes through the formation of the strategic identity narrative. By using the positive charged words described above, we see how the two ISOs are trying to affect the emotions amongst the recipients by creating a sort of admiration. The use of words like “success”, “peace”,

“exceptional” and “unique” are all examples of how they want others to admire them and strive to follow their example. They way that they consequently talk about “our values” and connect them with the positively charged words they try to attract others to buy in on their values and beliefs and follow them.

6.3 Strategic System Narrative

If we look at the ISOs reactions and actions from the perspective of Strategic System Narrative, we see how this is very interconnected with both the strategic issue- and the strategic identity narrative. The formation of the strategic system narrative is based on the strategic identity narrative when it comes to what main problem the ISOs aim to overcome. Both of the two ISOs describe the international political scene as being a divided and aggressive world characterized by conflict. Thomas Bach (IOC Media 2022) describes it as “a time when tragically it is not people but the guns of war that do the talking”.

Combined with the description of a divided and aggressive world, in which violent conflict is a part of everyday life for many people all over the world. The two ISOs are portraying a unified sports world. The IOC, likewise FIFA highlights how the world supports the sporting movement as a positive and powerful force and enabler for change. In his new year speech, the IOC president refers to a resolution that were adopted by the UN General Assembly 10 months after the invasion:

This resolution highlights that the unifying and conciliative nature of major international sports events should be respected by all the member states. What is more, the resolution was passed by consensus by all members of the UN General Assembly, which is remarkable. This includes Russia and Ukraine. Such encouraging signs of support... (IOC Media 2022).

Another example of how Bach portrays the support for sport as a positive force in his New Year message is: All the support from all walks of life for our peace mission shows the power of sport as a force for good in the world is widely acknowledged and it is needed more than ever” (Bach,

Thomas). In the statement made 28th of February 2022, where Russian football teams were suspended from all competitions, FIFA together with UEFA declared the following: “Football is fully united here and in full solidarity with all the people affected in Ukraine” (FIFA 2022-02-28).

With this formation and projection of a unified sports world, through the Olympic Movement and the football community. Along with the international community, united in their belief in the power of sport, they strategically shape the present situation in FIFA and IOC as something positive, powerful and hopeful. By projecting the image of sport as a power that the world believes in, they show the existence of shared meaning around the organisations, which is a sign of enormous soft power resources.

Interestingly regarding how the two ISO presidents talk about conflict is how Giorgio Infantino clearly states that it's not only Russia and Ukraine that are at war at this moment. At the 72th FIFA Congress he said: “With, of course, the terrible events happening in Ukraine. But there are terrible wars and conflicts happening as well in other parts of the world and we don't have to forget that” (FIFA “Congress” 2022). He also mentions that Russia was host to the FIFA World Cup in 2018 and that the last Euro final he worked on was in Kiev (ibid). Through the formation of the past as a time, when international sport competition could be held successfully and peacefully in all countries, they form the image of a possible future of a similar kind. Further, by not directly blaming Russia in the speech, they are also paving the way to fully welcome Russia back into participating in future competitions. In extension, this means an access for Russia to the opportunities and benefits that sporting events and participation bring in terms of soft power.

When we have looked at the potration of sport, by the ISOs, as something that is supported all over the world and seen as something positive in a divided and aggressive world we can distinguish the *problem* that the ISOs want to overcome with their *solution*. The main problem that the two ISOs want to achieve and solve through their work is, the divided and conflict affected, international system. FIFA and Infantino calls for unity by saying “Four our children,. Four our future” (FIFA “Congress” 2022) and IOC by repeatedly stating “Give Peace a chance”

(IOC 2022-02-24 & IOC 2022-02-28; IOC Media 2022). The solution to the problem is “the power of sport as a force of good” (IOC Media 2022) and “the power of football to bring people together” (FIFA “Congress” 2022). The IOC president and the FIFA president talks about how their organisation embodies this power in the following quotes:

Our values, our solidarity, our unity, our peace mission. All this makes our beloved Olympic movement so unique. This is the solid foundation on which we can build our future. On which we can build a better and more peaceful world through sport” (IOC Media 2022)

Please try to come together. And football will be there and will help in working together for peace
(FIFA “Congress” 2022)

By looking of this ways of embodiment, of the power that these two organisatons holds, through the theoretical framework we can distinguish a strategic and clear appeal to emotions and creation of soft power. The way in which Bach and Infantino talk about unity and solidarity for the sake of our “future” is an example of how they are trying to affect people's emotions and attitude to the ISOs work and their position in the political system. At the same time, the talk of “values”, as discussed in the “strategic identity narrative” is an example of creating soft power through building a shared identity and meaning within and around the ISOs.

7. Discussion

Through this study's analytical framework and the selected material, the analysis has shown how the ISOs shaped their strategic narratives much based on their values, their self-image and their stated missions. They motivate their actions against Russia by stating that they are prevented from carrying out their mission and need to take the actions in order to do so. Their strategic identity narrative is constructed around a self-image and values that are very positively charged and appeal to emotions amongst the recipients. They contrast themselves to other actors on the international stage by formatting a self-image as the good and peaceful force in an aggressive world. Further, this strategic identity narrative and strategic issue narrative paves the way to the formation of a strategic system narrative. It is clear how the three types of strategic narratives interplay with each other and in some way contribute to the formation of each other.

The following section will discuss these findings, as well as other interpretations that are not covered by the theoretical framework, and contrast them with previous research. But before the discussion it is critical to note that the purpose of this thesis is not to conclude and generalise on how ISOs will act in every case of violent actions by a country or to state that the presented strategic narratives are representable for all sporting organisations in the world. The aim is to illustrate how ISOs, by looking at FIFA and the IOC, shaped their strategic narratives in relation to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Beginning with the strategic identity narrative, the ISOs have a very clearly formed self-image that they project in relation to their reactions and actions on the invasion. This self-image is constructed around the idea of "our mission". Both FIFA and the IOC talk about their mission to unify the world and their peace mission. The talk of "our mission" is connected with some central values and themes like the "Excellence", "Respect" and "Friendship" which are the Olympic values but are also used or described by FIFA. Alongside the values they use many positively charged words such as for instance "success", "exceptional", "pride" and "hope". Further, Infantino made a plea to all of those with some power in the world to initiate dialogue. It is clear

how they project their self-image in order to affect the attitudes of people against the ISOs by appealing to their emotions and shaping a soft power resource through the force of attraction. By this projection of the strategic identity narrative we can draw a connection to the thoughts of Ber et.al (2017) on the “battle of image” taking place in contemporary politics and that the sporting arena is a good place for projecting narratives.

As presented in the background, both ISOs declare their political neutrality but this isn't something that is stated clearly in the strategic identity narrative. They talk about their work as “going beyond all political disputes” and the plea made by Infantino was also directed to the political leaders in the world. Even if they do not portray themselves as political actors it is clear that they are not politically neutral through their actions and statements.

And as previous research presented, Goretti (2022) concluded that the IOC motivated their actions against Russia by saying that it was a defense against the neutrality principle and the avoidance of politicization of sports. This thesis analysis does present findings through the strategic issue narrative, that indirectly supports Gorrettis. The strategic issue narrative was formed on the motivation that the actions were taken due to Russia stopping the ISOs from carrying out their mission and preventing them from carrying out their work. And since their mission and work principles include political neutrality and avoidance of politicization the findings indirectly support the thoughts of Goretti.

As the analysis has shown, the ISOs aim to create a shared meaning of the past, present and the future. It is shown that the past is formatted as a time when the ISOs succeed in carrying out their unifying mission and peaceful competition could be held successfully with excellence. The present is formed in contrast to the past as an aggressive time where the ISOs have to act against their unifying mission in order to ensure peaceful competition. Finally, the future is formatted around the ISOs vision and refers back to the time when they could unite the whole world in peaceful competitions that could be held everywhere. The findings also show how the ISOs talk directly about the future, as something that is dependent on the present changing to the better. What is interesting with how FIFA formate the present and future is how Infantino does not

directly talk about Russia as the “guilty ones' ' which could be seen as a move of paving the way for Russia to return as soon and as simply as possible. It could in extension be seen as FIFA being aware of the extensive power that Russia holds through its culture and history of sporting success that is a potential resource for FIFA.

Based on the analysis one could argue that the ISOs with their hard power actions, sanctions and protective measures, take away the possibility for Russia to use international sport as a soft power tool. As previous research has shown (Szostek 2017; Grix and Kramareva 2017), Russia uses SMEs as a soft power resource and that sport plays an important role in shaping the state-identity in their strategic narratives. Belcastro (2022) framed the power ISOs had through the aspect of deciding who are allowed to participate and who are not allowed. Through this thesis finding, it is presented how the ISOs are aware of the massive power that they have as organisations and that they have an understanding of the importance that sport has as a soft power resource for countries. Hence, the sanctions and protective measures against Russia, this massive power is demonstrated by the ISOs decision to prohibit Russian athletes and Russian national symbols from international sports competition. The actions could be seen as the ISOs weaponizing sports in order to de-weaponize Russia's earlier weaponization of sport (Coates 2017). These findings show that there is a conflict over soft power and that this conflict is a defining part of the role the ISOs play on the international political stage. Taking the conflict over soft power into consideration, along with the selective neutrality and the battle of image taking place, it is demonstrated how sport constantly is being politicised and that the ISOs play an important political role even though they do not project that self-image.

As for the aim of this study, it was not to present some generalizing conclusion on the weaponization or selective neutrality of sports. It was not either to contribute to a full picture of how the soft power in sport is used by countries or other political actors. Hence, there is a need for further research investigating the weaponization of sports and selective neutrality in other cases and on a deeper and broader level. This could be done through comparative studies with for example the contemporary case with Israel. There is also a need to investigate the use of sport as a soft power tool by for instance looking at the reception of the ISOs strategic narratives and how

these strategic narratives develop over time. Moreover, this study intended to demonstrate the massive power that ISOs have regarding the soft power aspect and not to present generalized conclusions on how they are using this massive power. This needs to be investigated in further research and in the context of comparing cases.

In order to refer back to the introduction and the quote by Nelson Mandela it is clear how the ISOs are aware of and believe in the power of sport. It has also been shown how they use this in their formation of strategic narratives and use it in their actions against Russia. And to take Simon Banks' demand for a reaction into consideration, the ISOs did act and excluded Russian teams from international participation. Yet, the future has to present how the ISOs will act in relation to similar cases and how they will relate to Russia onwards.

8. Conclusion

The two research questions was:

- *How can international sport activities be used as a soft power tool in international politics?*
- *How have the ISOs shaped their strategic narratives, linked to their reactions and actions against Russia, since the invasion of Ukraine in 2022?*

The study demonstrated how the ISOs, through their sanctions and protective measures, take away the possibility for Russia to use sport as a soft power tool. Previous research has shown how sport can be used as a soft power tool and this thesis findings build upon that. The discussion suggests that there is a conflict over soft power happening in international politics, where the ISOs have a massive power in regulating countries' soft power resources through international sport activities. The way that the ISOs prohibit the Russian flag, national anthem and other Russian national symbols from being displayed in international competition, along with the prohibition of Russian athletes, demonstrate this massive power.

Through the findings of this thesis, we see how the ISOs are aware of their massive power, the sport as a soft power tool and how this is used in their strategic narratives. They shape their strategic identity narrative around their mission to unify the world in peaceful competition. By projecting the self-image as being a unifying force that can bring people together over cultural and physical borders, they state the immense power of sport. The strategic issue narrative is shaped through the motivation that Russian violent actions prevent the ISOs from carrying out their unifying mission. Therefore there is a need for the actions taken against Russia, even if this is an action against their values and mission. Finally the strategic system narrative shows how the ISOs talk about an aggressive world where they are a good force pleading to all of those politicians with some real power to engage in dialogue. Their sanctions and protective measures

are a product of this systematic problem that the ISOs, through their work and actions, want to overcome and unite the whole world in peaceful competition.

To conclude, through this thesis finding, future research is needed on how the ISOs strategic narratives develop as the Russia-Ukraine conflict continues. Moreover, there is also a need for more extensive research regarding the weaponization of sport and the aspect of selective neutrality in relation to International Sport Organisations.

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10. Appendix

1. Transcription of: FIFA President 72nd Congress Speech

So dear friends, dear colleagues, as I said in my welcome, it is really a privilege and a pleasure to be here together with you in person, to feel this positive spirit after three years of joining the world, of bringing the whole world together. Now I want to address in my address right now three topics and I will address three additional topics in my concluding remarks. In my concluding remarks I will speak about the World Cup, about Qatar.

Now I want to address three different topics which are of concern, I think, to all of us because we are living turbulent times, we're living difficult times. We had Dr. Tedros here, we are in a pandemic, COVID-19, which reminded all of us that health comes first, even before football, of course before football. We were thinking football is the most important and we still behave sometimes as if football is the most important thing in life. It is the most important thing of the least important things, as you know. But health comes first and we have been able to bring football back, you have been able to bring football back, and we have been helping at FIFA with the COVID-19 relief fund. 1.5 billion US dollars have been allocated by the FIFA Council and by the Congress to help all of you resume with football.

This is unique in the world of sport, in the world of football, and this is possible only thanks to the way FIFA is governed today. Thanks to the fact that money doesn't disappear anymore but goes where it has to go to help our member associations. And now that we were seeing light at the end of the tunnel of the pandemic, now that we were looking forward to a fantastic World Cup here in Qatar, we have almost terminated the qualification games with 29 teams having qualified.

What happens now? War. War with the fear of a global conflict. With, of course, the terrible events happening in Ukraine.

But there are terrible wars and conflicts happening as well in other parts of the world and we don't have to forget that. Places where, sadly, innocent people are suffering and dying. We live in an aggressive world.

We live in a divided world. But as you know, I am a big believer in the power of football to bring people together and to cross cultural boundaries. Nelson Mandela was saying that sport has the power to change the world.

Now football is the world sport. But at the same time, dear friends, we are not that naive to believe that football can solve all the problems. Of course not. I am looking, of course, at Ukraine with a heavy heart. The last Euro I organised together with UEFA, as the UEFA General Secretary, was in Ukraine and Poland. The last final that I was working on was in Kiev.

And the last World Cup that I contributed as well to organise as FIFA President was in Russia. The last final was in Moscow. And the Russia World Cup in 2018, four years ago, was by all means a great World Cup.

A great success sportingly and culturally. But obviously, it did not solve the problems of the world. It did not even solve the problems in the region.

It did not create a lasting peace. But what I want to say now is that once this terrible conflict is over, and all other conflicts around the world as well, hopefully very soon, football can play a small part in rebuilding relationships, in establishing peace and understanding. And we will be there at the forefront of doing that.

In Ukraine and everywhere else in the world, where we are needed, where FIFA is needed, where you are needed, where football is needed. Therefore, my plea to all of those who have some power in this world, to all of those who are in important political positions in the world, please, please, stop conflicts and wars. Please.

For our children. For our future. Please engage in dialogue, even with your worst enemy. Please try to come together. And football will be there and will help in working together for peace. Because we have to learn again to live together and we have to learn again what it means to live together.

And this Congress is a testimony of that. We have to learn that we cannot impose our beliefs to the others. If we think our beliefs are stronger, are better, we have to try to convince the others.

But we have to respect them. We have to be tolerant with them. We have to be tolerant with everyone.

And we have to learn again to come together. The second topic I want to address is that, of course, in spite of these turbulent times, of these difficult times, we have to focus on our job, on our mission, on our functions, on our duties. And in doing this, from time to time, it is useful to have a look at this little booklet here.

It's the FIFA statutes. It's what governs the world of football. And if you look at the FIFA statutes, in Article 2, the objectives of FIFA are, our first objective is development, football development.

Now, let me say that I'm proud. I'm proud of the work that FIFA is doing. And when I say FIFA, I mean all of you, all of us, for developing football.

Our finances are great. And, of course, when you want to develop, you need to have resources. And you don't need to hide for that.

You need to be proud of that. You will hear it later, but you've seen already the documents on the financial report of FIFA. Not only in a period of COVID, FIFA did not suffer any loss. Not only has FIFA already now, in March 2022, reached the target of revenues at 6.4 billion, which was the revenue for 2022 until the end of the year, which means we'll reach around 7 billion, 600 billion more than what was projected in a period of COVID, I repeat. Not only that, but we are able as well to invest in football. And we are able to do that because, as I was saying before, the governance of FIFA today is right.

And this has been recognized as well recently by the Department of Justice of the United States of America. They seized from corrupt FIFA officials 201 million US dollars. And now they gave this 201 million back to the FIFA Foundation to be reinvested in football together with CONCACAF and CONMEBOL, because they trust in the new FIFA. FIFA moved from the status of a toxic organization to a status of a trustworthy organization. Because what we do is investing in football all over the world. We invest in football.

And the new forward program, Forward 3.0, will see again an increase of 25%. Now, 25% increase means that, compared to 2016 when I arrived as FIFA president, each member association will now receive around 8 million in a four-year period. This corresponds to seven times more than what was the case before 2016.

Seven-fold increase of money that goes where it has to go, in solidarity projects, in football development projects. This is 2.2 billion US dollars, which will go straight to the member association's development programs. Now, we didn't increase our revenues by a factor of seven.

Of course not. We increased them by 20%, 25%. But we increased the solidarity and the development by 500%.

Because the money has to go to our children all over the world where it's most needed. And we can do that because, of course, money in FIFA does not evaporate anymore, does not disappear anymore. It goes where it has to go. And this goes, of course, as well with accountability, with good governance, with transparency, and with integrity, which is exactly the way we are working and exactly the way we are asking each and every one of you to work. I repeat what I already said. If anyone believes that he can still misappropriate FIFA funds, he must know that he will be caught, and then he will have to leave football.

We don't want cheaters in our game. We want people who believe in football, who believe in our mission. And we know that three-quarters of you, 150 associations or so, they depend on the revenues of FIFA.

They depend on the solidarity program, on the forward program of FIFA. And being able to receive around 8 million in the next cycle in a 40-year period will make a big, big difference for all of these countries where football would simply not exist if the solidarity funds of FIFA were not there. Solidarity funds which are generated, of course, thanks to the men's World Cup, the next edition of which taking place here in Qatar at the end of this year.

One month in a four-year period, which finances 150 associations over four years. And this leads me to the third topic, which is the future of football. And if we look at the FIFA statutes again, and we look at Article 2 again, and we look at the objectives of FIFA again, and we look at the second objective of FIFA, then it's written that FIFA has to organize its own international competitions.

It's one of our objectives. And of course, competitions drive development. We know that.

Every one of you has developed its own competitions to make them better, to make them more powerful, to make them more impactful, to make them richer as well. And that's great. And we should all do that.

And you should all do that. Unfortunately, FIFA in the last decades had other priorities than developing competitions and football, as we know. But these times have now changed.

We spent the first few years to put the house in order, and now it's time to focus on the future of football, on the future of competition. Competitions for everyone, men, women, boys, girls, for everyone to hope, to dream, to participate, to show to the world that football is not limited to a few, but it's open to everyone. What more than emotion can we give to this world? What more than dreams can we give to this world? And we are in a unique position to be able to do that.

So let me clarify one thing here. And of course I want to speak about some of the discussions and also speculations on the biannual World Cup. Let me be very clear that FIFA has not proposed a biannual World Cup.

Let's get the process clear here. The last FIFA congress asked the FIFA administration with a vote, in which 88% voted in favor, to study the feasibility of a World Cup every two years, and some other projects related to women's football and youth football. Now FIFA, the FIFA administration, under the leadership of Arsene Wenger, did exactly that.

We studied the feasibility. But FIFA did not propose anything. FIFA came to the conclusion that it is feasible, that it would have some repercussions and impacts. But once this is certified, the next phase starts. And it's the phase of consultation. It's the phase of discussion.

It's the phase of trying to find agreements and compromises. And in addition to the confederations and the member associations, I'm looking at the leagues, the clubs and the players present here as well. With David, Nasser, and I don't know, I cannot see who is there from the World League Forum.

Yeah, I cannot see till there, I'm sorry. Enrique, Enrique, yes. Very good. To say that we work together, we try and will try to have a debate and a discussion, to find what is most suitable to everyone. Because everyone has to benefit. The big ones have to become bigger, of course, they are the locomotive of the whole movement.

And the small ones have to benefit as well, and we have to give opportunities to everyone. And I'm thanking everyone for your input, for your feedback, positive or negative or neutral. Every feedback is good.

What is important in this discussion, and I'm proud of that, is that we put back on the agenda national team football, which is what makes football live all over the world. We have to do this in

balance with the clubs, of course, which is the biggest part of where the players are playing. And there are ways to find compromises and to find agreements.

What is important, and we have all been defending it for the last over 100 years and will continue to do that as well, is respect of the football institutions, respect of the football pyramid, with FIFA at the top, with the confederations, the member associations, the leagues, the clubs, the players, where everyone has his own role. FIFA is in charge of organizing international competitions, meaning competitions between continents, of course, confederations, competitions in their continents, of course, member associations, competitions in their country, of course. And sometimes they delegate it to professional leagues, the professional part of the game.

That's how football is organized, and it's paramount that we protect this organizational model of football from all possible challenges. But the future of football is much more than that, and shouldn't be reduced to a World Cup or competitions. The future of football is about women's football, about our investment of one billion into the development of women's football, about the next Women's World Cup attracting over a billion viewers, certainly as well, about the new calendar for women's football.

It's also about youth football, where our World Cups take place only every two years and we always lose one generation. We should play our World Cups at youth level every year and double the number of participants to give more hope, more chance, more opportunity to everyone in the world. It's already happening in some continents. It has to happen as well at a global level. We have to develop football development, training with the talent program of Arsene Wenger and his team, who I thank very much for his leadership to give every talent a chance, whether you are born in Paris or London or in Hanoi or in Yaoundé, you have to have the same opportunities to live your dream and you have the same rights to dream as well, even if you're not a football player, even if you are a fan. So we want to give every talent a chance and we are changing our transfer regulations in this respect as well, creating a clearinghouse, making sure that three to four hundred million a year will go now where they have to go, to the clubs, training the players, investment in training and compensation of players.

It's important that we do that. It's important as well that we protect our children, that we create an environment where our children can have sport, not only football, in a safe way. We are advocating for the creation of an agency, multi-sport and governmental agency, safe sport agency to protect children from abuse.

When we started with this project and we are pushing it forward, many were saying to us, well don't enter into this project because it's delicate for the PR and for the image of football. Are we crazy? We are speaking about children. We have to do whatever we can and even more to protect our children and we will invest into creating an agency to protect children to have safe sport.

We have to continue to fight as well, that's also part of the future of our football, continue to fight discrimination, to fight racism, to work together to prevent abuses, to educate our people and to intervene and sanction where it's not possible to do anything else. We will not tolerate any form of discrimination in FIFA event, any form, anywhere and we have to continue all together to work on that. And of course, we have to work with our fans and we will launch very soon in the next few weeks a project in FIFA which we call FIFA Plus, which is a new digital portal of world football, of FIFA to give a platform to all of you, mostly of course those who don't have other platforms, but to engage with fans from all over the world.

So we want to be about inclusivity, about democracy and we want to be about giving a voice to those who are never heard, to the silent majority. We want to work together with you, we want to continue developing football now that we come out of the pandemic, we want to continue engaging tirelessly with all of you day and night because in the football world the sun is always shining, somewhere in the world it's always day and we are always there to work together. And since, dear friends, these days FIFA is not only resuming its full activities and bringing the world together, but FIFA is also an open, transparent and democratic organization.

Please, let us know your views, let us know your ideas, contribute with us to shaping the future of football. Thank you very much.

2. Transcription of: New Year Message from IOC President Thomas Bach

Dear Olympic friends, what an Olympic year lies behind us. As we welcome a new year, we can look back with pride and satisfaction to 2022. It was an Olympic year as successful as it was turbulent.

It was greatly successful because with the truly exceptional Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022, we have written history together. These Olympic Winter Games faced unprecedented challenges against the backdrop of political tensions and a global pandemic. Despite this, these Games offered the most outstanding conditions for the athletes in an absolutely safe and secure environment.

These athletes expressed their gratitude by stepping up and amazing the world with their response to all the challenges and adversity. They showed all of us the best that humankind can be if we come together in peace and solidarity. With this outstanding performance, they touched the hearts of so many people.

In fact, more than two billion people around the world followed these Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022. This makes Beijing 2022 the most digitally engaged Olympic Winter Games in history. Following Beijing 2022, the Olympic Games continue to be the most appealing sports and entertainment event in the world.

This is confirmed by independent research, which has also shown that the Olympic rings remain one of the most widely recognized symbols globally. Give peace a chance. This was my appeal to the political leaders across the world in my opening and closing speeches in Beijing.

As it turned out, the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022 were but a fleeting moment of hope that peace would prevail in our turbulent times. Only three days after the closing ceremony of Beijing, Russia invaded Ukraine in a blatant violation of the Olympic truce and the Olympic Charter. The IOC immediately condemned the war and sanctioned the Russian and Belarusian states and governments in an unprecedented way.

These sanctions include no international sports events being organized or supported in Russia or Belarus. No national symbols whatsoever of these countries being displayed at any sports event or meeting. These sanctions against the Russian and Belarusian states and governments are not new.

At the same time, we are supporting the athletes and members of the Ukrainian Olympic community everywhere with all our solidarity. Also in the new year, the Ukrainian athletes can count on the full commitment to this solidarity from the IOC and the entire Olympic movement. We want to see a strong team from the NOC of Ukraine at the Olympic Games Paris 2024 and the Olympic Winter Games Milano-Cortina 2026.

On the other hand, following the outbreak of the war, many athletes, national Olympic committees, international federations and the IOC were exposed to political pressure and interference. Some governments started to decide which athletes would be allowed to participate in international sports competitions and which athletes would not. This is why in addition to the sanctions, we had to take protective measures to ensure the integrity of international sport competitions.

This led the IOC to act against our own mission, our mission to unify the entire world in peaceful competition. Since we had to prohibit athletes from participation because of their passport only. Thankfully, there have been in the meantime many encouraging statements and declarations from a number of individual world leaders supporting our unifying Olympic mission.

In this respect, the recent adoption of this sport as an enabler of sustainable development resolution by the United Nations General Assembly on the 1st of December stands out. This resolution highlights that the unifying and conciliative nature of major international sports events should be respected by all the member states. What is more, the resolution was passed by consensus by all members of the UN General Assembly, which is remarkable.

This includes Russia and Ukraine. Such encouraging signs of support give us all the more reason to promote our unifying mission with our full determination and it gives us hope that it will bring us closer to being able to once again fully live up to the mission of sport to unite the entire world in peaceful competition. In this spirit, we can look ahead to 2023 with hope and optimism.

All the support from all walks of life for our peace mission shows the power of sport as a force for good in the world is widely acknowledged and it is needed more than ever. Especially in a time when division and conflict is gaining ground over dialogue and cooperation. In a time when tragically it is not people but the guns of war that are doing the talking.

2023 is a pre-Olympic year. The athletes will concentrate on qualifying for the Olympic Games Paris 2024. All of us, the IFs, the NOCs, the National Federations, the IOC and the entire Olympic community, all of us will support and assist them to be able to give it their best.

One of the ways in which we are doing so is with the Olympic qualifier season, which are highlighting the great achievements of the athletes on the road to Paris 2024. The Olympic qualifier season is ongoing and already now have generated over 100 million additional engagements across Olympic social media platforms, thereby promoting the athletes and their sports in new and really exciting ways. Another highlight of how we are opening new horizons and reaching new audiences with our values will be the inaugural Olympic Esports Week in 2023.

Held in Singapore next June, the Olympic Esports Week will be the next major step for us to engage even deeper with the young generation. Thanks to the great preparation by the Paris 2024 Organising Committee, we can look forward to Olympic Games of a new era, inspired by Olympic agenda from start to finish. The Olympic Games Paris 2024 will be more inclusive, more youthful, more urban, more sustainable, and they will be the very first Olympic Games with full gender parity.

And all of this in one of the most beautiful cities in the world. This positive momentum is

something that we can carry into the new year. Our values, our solidarity, our unity, our peace mission.

All this makes our beloved Olympic movement so unique. This is the solid foundation on which we can build our future. On which we can build a better and more peaceful world through sport.

So let us join hands to go faster, aim higher, become stronger, together. In this true Olympic spirit, I wish you all a happy, healthy and successful pre-Olympic year 2023. All the very best.