
Title	A typology of countries using place branding through sport
Author(s)	André Richelieu, Yen-Chun Lin and Ho Keat Leng

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A Typology of Countries Using Place Branding through Sport

Abstract

The main objective of this conceptual paper was to identify the profiles of countries using a strategy of place branding through sport and group them into clusters. As detailed in the methods section, the focus was voluntarily set on countries from regions which are active in this regard. Three clusters have emerged following the analysis: ‘diplomacy branding’, ‘balanced structure’ and ‘economic legacy’. Two strategies of place branding through sport were identified: pursuing a socio-economic legacy or utilizing sport diplomacy to build a soft power. Admittedly, China is asserting itself on the world stage. Meanwhile, countries and territories such as Australia, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, are making a case for themselves. Truly, adaptability and vision can lead to a successful place branding strategy through sport. This is in line with previous research, helping extend the body of knowledge, especially as far as sport diplomacy and soft power are concerned.

Keywords

Place branding; legacy; soft power; sport diplomacy; diplomacy branding.

Introduction

Once an afterthought in an organization's priorities (Bastos & Levy, 2012), both brand and branding are now considered a strategic leverage for managers in all industries. This applies in general (Kapferer, 2012), and in sport, in particular, at the domestic and international level (Bauer et al., 2005; Mullin et al., 2014), for both commercial and not-for-profit sport entities (Richelieu & Webb, 2019). In sport, this relates to teams, leagues, federations, players, equipment makers, sport infrastructures, sporting events, as well as places. Indeed, these places, namely cities, regions and countries, are increasingly trying to capitalize on sport in order to (re-)define, position and promote themselves on the world stage (Tasci et al., 2019), by implementing what is known as a place branding strategy through sport (Richelieu, 2018). Contemporary examples include both developed and emerging countries, among others Australia, China, Qatar, Russia, Singapore and Vietnam, to name but a few.

This strategy is receiving increasing attention from academics and managers alike, as sport represents a potentially compelling leverage for many jurisdictions (Giulianotti, 2015). This stems from the emotional resonance of sport, its ability to engage a conversation with a large audience and the possibility of instilling a bond of trust between the messenger and potential customers (Taks, 2013). Not only is sport one of the fastest growing industries worldwide, but travel undertaken for the purpose of engaging in a particular sport, i.e. sport tourism (Gibson, 1998), is also the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry: it was forecasted to have a direct contribution to the worldwide GDP of over 4 trillion US dollars by the end of 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic hit tourism and the world economy (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2021).

In fact, place branding through sport is considered to be potentially beneficial for communities when articulated and implemented with the underlying goal of leaving a socio-economic legacy for the respective location (Knott et al., 2015). Preuss (2007, p. 211) defined this sport legacy as “all planned and unplanned positive and negative, tangible and intangible structures created for and by a sport event that remain longer than the event itself”. This indicates that structural changes are essential in order to leave a legacy (Scheu et al., 2019); yet, how often this happens remains debatable (Caiazza & Audretsch, 2015; Lu & Lin, 2021). Hence, place branding through sport deserves more analysis considering the strategic leverage and benefits it can trigger, and how.

In this regard, the main purpose of this article is to articulate a typology of countries using a strategy of place branding through sport events and, consequently, group these countries into specific clusters. Countries and territories are appropriate as a selection criterion because the jurisdiction, sovereignty and administrative resources equip the central government of a country to holistically leverage the benefits and cost of place branding (Dowse, 2012; Rojas-Méndez, 2013). This shall be complemented by identifying which of these countries are more likely to leave a socio-economic legacy to their constituents, and which ones are more inclined to utilize sport diplomacy to build their soft power. This undertaking shall begin with a literature review, followed by an analysis and results section, prior to the presentation of a conceptual framework. The paper concludes with a discussion on the contributions, conclusion, limits and future research opportunities.

Literature Review

A synthesis of place branding through sport

Place branding and place branding through sport

A diverse nomenclature is used to describe the concept of place branding. Three of the most common terminologies discussed are place branding, nation branding and destination branding. Place branding is the generic terminology associated with a location's strategy to (re-)define, position and promote itself (Zenker, 2014). Nation branding specifically applies to a country's brand strategy (Knott et al., 2015). Finally, destination branding primarily deals with the touristic positioning and promotion of a jurisdiction (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998), by leveraging an authentic brand that bridges customers, employees and a network of stakeholders (Dos Santos & Campo, 2014). As per place branding through sport, four platforms are available: a sport event platform, whether it is a major or a minor event; a sport team platform; a sport participation platform; or a sport place (or sport hub) platform (Gibson, 1998; Rein & Shields, 2007; Roche et al., 2013).

In recent years, place branding, in general, and more precisely place branding through sport has been complementing what is known as 'diplomacy branding' (Grix & Brannagan, 2016; Rofe, 2016) which is used by countries to shore up diplomatic initiatives, along with peace building initiatives (Dixon et al., 2019). 'Sport diplomacy', as it is labeled, highlights how certain countries use sport to enact their legitimacy, gain international respectability, increase their influence in world affairs and, as a result, build a 'soft power' (Abdi et al., 2019; Giulianotti, 2015; Grix & Lee, 2013). This is because sport can be a conspicuous vehicle of national expression (Dóczy, 2011; Jaksa, 2011; Morgan, 1997). In addition, international sport competitions allow nations to display their strength and gain recognition

from other nations (Wicker et al., 2012). These issues shall be further developed below, in a dedicated section of the literature review.

Socio-economic legacy and social capital

Due to the high financial cost of hosting sporting events and the need for political actors to assuage public concern, a greater emphasis is often exerted on the economic benefits of hosting such events (Agha & Taks, 2015; Roche et al., 2013). However, there are other non-economic benefits as well. When a major sport event is successful, it can raise citizens' perception of the ability of their government and support the legitimacy of current political institutions (Dowse, 2012). Other non-economic benefits include an increase in community pride, sport participation rate, as well as in the level of awareness of traditions, culture and environmental concerns (Kim & Petrick, 2005; Leng et al., 2014; Ritchie et al., 2009; Wood, 2006).

Because the sustainability agenda is gaining increasing traction worldwide, place branding via sport is expected to leave a socio-economic legacy for the local population (Kaplanidou, 2012; Leopkey & Parent, 2015; Veal et al., 2012). Socio-economic legacy means that there is creation of value for external but also, and especially, local stakeholders (Caiazza & Audretsch, 2015; Green et al., 2016; Knott et al., 2015). On this subject, the socio-economic legacy of place branding through sport for the local population implies a horizontal social capital (Taks, 2013), which manifests itself in benefits that cut across the society, with stronger community bonding and lasting effects, by maximizing these benefits before, during and after a sporting event (Dawson & Jöns, 2018). The concept of social capital refers to “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social

trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1995, p. 66). By contrast, a vertical social capital is reflective of an event that solely favors a limited number of stakeholders (athletes, spectators, international federations, sponsors, organizers, politicians). Moreover, a socio-economic legacy can be achieved by adopting a holistic approach to place branding through sport, in which sport, economic, commercial and social dimensions are combined (Richelieu, 2018).

‘Leveraging’ sport events via sport diplomacy and ‘soft power’

Though four different platforms can be used within a place branding strategy through sport, as identified previously, the most common one is the sport event platform (Taks, 2013; Taks et al., 2016; Green et al., 2016). Thus, place branding through sporting events shall be considered in this paper’s analysis. Developed countries, as well as emerging nations and powers, now anchor their respective place branding strategy with sporting events. Yet, as underlined by the debate in economics between the ‘seen benefits’ and ‘hidden costs’, the anticipated benefits of events are often inflated and the projected costs are often underestimated (Moghaddam & Shahabzade, 2015). Thus, socio-economic legacy is seldom taken into consideration and measured objectively (Baade & Matheson, 2016).

In this vein, for several authors (Jago et al., 2010; Smith, 2014; Ziakas, 2015), a focus on ‘leveraging’ is required in order to assess the impact of sporting events, capitalize on the latter and favor strategic planning. According to Smith, (2014, pp. 15-16), ‘leveraging’ is “an approach which views mega-events as a resource which can be levered to achieve outcomes which would not have happened automatically by staging an event”. The concept of ‘leveraging’ emphasizes the importance of socio-economic legacy and horizontal social

capital that was underscored earlier (Agha & Taks, 2015), when pursuing a strategy of place branding through sport, by blending multiple stakeholders' perspectives in the process (Kotsi et al., 2018).

What is more, sport becomes a leverage when countries are looking to establish or increase their influence in international affairs, by combining sport and diplomacy. This situation emphasizes the need to understand the relationship between sport and diplomacy (Rofe, 2016), and how the latter can lead to 'soft power'. Soft power can be defined as the power of influence a country gains on the world stage by articulating a mix of culture, tourism, branding, diplomacy and trade; or, as Giulianotti (2015) summarized it, by combining three elements: commerce, international diplomacy and sport. This strategic mixture has been baptized the 'soft power package' by Grix & Brannagan (2016). The soft power package can be epitomized by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a project in which the Middle Kingdom has already invested over US\$1 trillion in order to connect 138 countries through land, sea and technology investments (Oliveira et al., 2020).

Hence, the research questions are as follows:

- What are the existing profiles and clusters of countries using a strategy of place branding through sport, and more specifically sporting events?
- Which countries employing a strategy of place branding through sport are more likely to leave a socio-economic legacy, and which ones are more susceptible to resort to sport diplomacy in order to build their soft power?

The rationale behind the idea of a typology is to elaborate a structured overview of a portfolio encompassing a limited number of countries that follow a place branding strategy

through sport, balancing the diversity of cases, on the one hand, with a degree of in-depth analysis, on the other. This will be further explained in the upcoming methods section.

Methods

The aim of this conceptual paper is to analyze place branding strategies through sport which are pursued by countries via sporting events, by using secondary data published over the last twenty years (1999 – 2019). Going back twenty years was considered a valid timeline to evaluate what had been done or what is currently undertaken by countries within the confines of place branding through sport.

The integrative review approach (Snyder, 2019) guided the literature review process of this study. The purpose of this approach is to synthesize the literature on a research topic in a way that enables new perspectives to emerge (Torraco, 2005). The aim of a data analysis in an integrative review is to critically analyze and examine the literature, in conjunction with the main ideas and relationships of an issue. The integrative literature review contributes to the advancement of knowledge, taxonomy or classification, or theoretical frameworks (Mazumdar et al., 2005; Torraco, 2005).

First of all, the review of the literature started by searching the academic databases: Abi / Inform Complete, Business Source Complete, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Scopus and Web of Science. The scope was to find and analyze a targeted, yet extensive selection of scholarly documents, to ensure the quality of the studies consulted, with the latter being available in English, in order to allow for the accessibility and comparability of the results. This approach was followed by Scheu et al. (2019) in their review of the legacy of the

Olympic Games. In line with the two research questions, the following keywords were associated in the search process: ‘Sport AND Place Branding’; ‘Sport AND Nation Branding’; ‘Sport AND Destination’; ‘Sport AND Tourism’; ‘Sport AND Diplomacy Branding’; ‘Sport Diplomacy’; ‘Diplomacy Branding’; ‘Sport AND Soft Power’; ‘Place Branding AND Sport(ing) Events’; ‘Place Branding AND Legacy’. The search with the above-mentioned terms provided a wide number of references and led to a saturation point, as underscored below.

Second, while studying the articles assembled throughout the initial round of search, additional relevant cited sources were identified and included in the literature review, as suggested by Webster and Watson (2002; ‘going backwards’). This approach expanded the search in order to select other academic publications, some seminal ones, which could have been overlooked initially.

Third, in order to find practical examples, the search needed to be rounded off by singling out place branding strategies through sport undertaken by countries via the Internet, with more academic journals, together with government publications, newspapers, magazines and books. The high number of documents, both scientific and media files (from over 300 references, initially, over one hundred references were retained for the completed version of the manuscript), also mirrors a saturation point that is achieved in this kind of research when the contribution from additional data becomes marginal. It shall be stressed that, as this paper was initially submitted in 2020 and revised in 2021, some references from the latter years were included for additional examples.

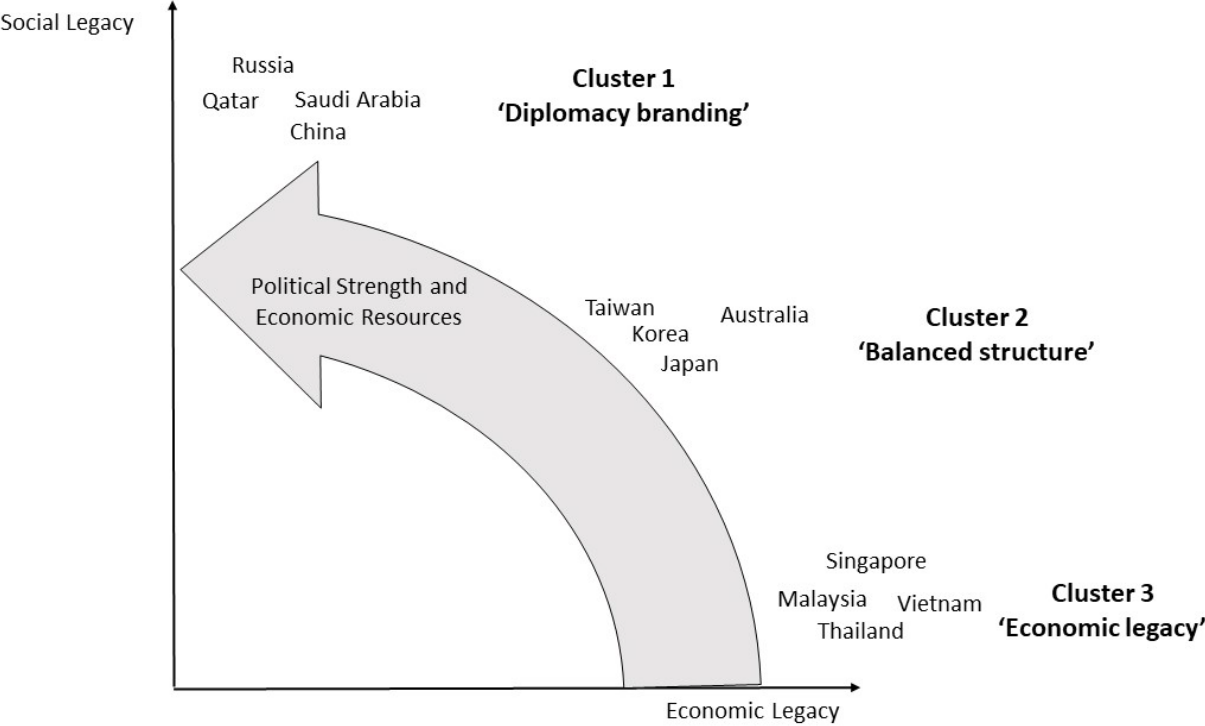
Analysis and Results

The main objectives of this article are twofold: first, define a taxonomy of countries using a place branding strategy via sporting events and assemble them into clusters; second, identify which countries are more inclined to leave a socio-economic legacy to their population, while others focus on sport diplomacy in establishing their soft power.

A taxonomy of countries leading to three clusters

The narrative of place branding through sport can take different forms. The findings suggest that these can be categorized into three major clusters, depending on their focus on either social or economic legacy. This is presented in Figure 1. Indeed, it is observed that differences across the clusters may be due to both the political strength and economic resources of countries. On the one hand, countries in Cluster 1 generally appear to have greater economic resources at their disposal based on their political system. Consequently, without neglecting the economic legacy, countries from Cluster 1 have seemingly selected to use sport to engage in ‘diplomacy branding’ (Grix & Brannagan, 2016; Rofe, 2016). On the other end of the spectrum, the economies in Cluster 3 are generally less mature, perhaps more fragile, and the economic resources are, overall, less abundant. Hence, the probability that sport is used to build up an economic legacy is higher. As per the countries in Cluster 2, they follow a balanced approach, as described below.

Figure 1
Three clusters of countries using place branding through sport ¹



¹ Please, note that within each cluster, countries are positioned in no specific order.

Cluster 1: 'Diplomacy branding'

In the first cluster, called 'diplomacy branding', countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Russia and China are the most active in deploying a place branding strategy, in general (Balakrishnan, 2008), and through sport, in particular (Rofe, 2016). Sport can be wielded through policies and strategies to help the respective nation build a 'soft power' (Giulianotti, 2015; Grix & Lee, 2013), by improving one's image and reputation, and by increasing its influence, regionally or internationally (Saber et al., 2018).

Long in the shadow of Qatar, as far as sport is concerned, Saudi Arabia and its Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, are counting on the 'Vision 2030 plan' to reduce the country's high dependence on oil by stimulating innovation and favoring the transition towards a knowledge-based economy (Nurunnabi, 2017). Additionally, Saudi Arabia posits that it wants to open up its country and cities to tourism and entertainment, including sport, as exemplified by the Annual Camel Festival, the Dakar Rally, both the Italian and Spanish Super Cup finals, the Hail International Rally and, eventually, a Formula 1 race in Riyadh (Ahmed, 2017). However, a study concluded that there is no strong evidence to support the socio-economic legacy of hosting sporting events in the short term, as far as international tourism is concerned (Moss et al., 2019). Though this might not be an issue in the immediate future, as COVID-19 has nearly halted international travel, it represents an opportunity to re-evaluate how tourism could positively fit into Saudi Arabia's impending strategy.

Neighboring Qatar is investing in line with this type of 'diplomacy branding'. However, it is facing increasing scrutiny. This is because of questionable respect of human rights and the environment, massive spending, as well as a backlash from regional rivals (Saudi

Arabia, United Arab Emirates), and from countries where Qatar is taking over national interests, such as France (Beau & Bourget, 2013). In effect, it can become challenging for a country, and the destination it represents, to make itself attractive and build its reputation, when sport initiatives are tarnished by controversial human-right and environmental issues, along with financial and diplomatic tactics (Andersson et al., 2021; Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2018).

For Russia, sport is a means to detoxify its image and coax the international community in order to regain its political influence, following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Truly, Russia tries to demonstrate it has global reach and relevance, because of the rise of China and the United States of America's more aggressive stance in international affairs (Lebedeva, 2021). The Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics and the 2018 FIFA World Cup were a manifesto of this return to the center stage for Russia: both events led to massive investments in sport, but also peripheral infrastructures, in excess of an estimated US\$ 65 billion (Fett, 2020). On the one hand, some of these investments contributed to an urban renaissance, such as the VTB Arena in Moscow's Petrovsky Park. Hereof, mega sporting events have been identified as a potent source of 'psychic income', meaning that the feelings of excitement, pride, and euphoria are triggered among the host residents by staging these events (Agha et al., 2012). On the other hand, the 2014 Olympics and the 2018 football World Cup were overshadowed by human rights violations and severe damages to the environment, among others (Knott et al., 2015). In fact, challenges are plentiful in Russia: popular discontent is growing because of international sanctions against the country and the pension reform; Russia's continuous involvement in conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, not to mention a stronger opposition to President Putin's leadership

(Popkova, 2020). This is in addition to the economic crisis following the COVID-19 pandemic to which Russia is all the more vulnerable and deprived of a margin for maneuver after massive overspending for the Olympics and the World Cup (Kobierecki & Strożek, 2021). As a result, the recession Russia is facing might jeopardize its ambitious place branding strategy through sport, notwithstanding the fact that the socio-economic legacy of this strategy might be very thin, after all (Müller, 2017).

As far as China is concerned, it is establishing itself as the next leading economy and shaping its soft power by combining three components: commerce, international diplomacy and sport (Giulianotti, 2015). The 2018 FIFA World Cup was a case in point, when four out of the twelve major sponsors were Chinese: Wanda (entertainment, movie theaters), Vivo (technology), Hisense (electronics) and Mengniu (dairy milk products). Huawei could also be added to this list, despite its regulatory hurdles in Western countries, as it successfully tested its 5G technology, alongside Russian telecom operator MegaFon; this was followed by Huawei's 5G rollout at the 2019 African Cup of Nations in Egypt (Cockayne et al, 2021). Besides, China is positioning itself as the world's next ski destination, with the goal of having 1,000 ski resorts and 300 million new winter sport practitioners by the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics (Fang et al., 2021). Football is another priority, with the aim to organize the FIFA World Cup by 2050 and grow into a legitimate contender for the World title by then (Li & Feng, 2021; Ma & Kurscheidt, 2020; Tan et al., 2016). Moreover, in the era of 'sportainment' (the merger of sport and entertainment; Richelieu, 2021), Chengdu is positioning itself as a gaming and sci-fi hub, ahead of Shanghai, looking to host the 2023 World Science Fiction Convention, which fits into "a broader initiative of cultural diplomacy aimed at projecting a positive and engaging

impression of the country abroad [...] (and) at developing Chinese cultural soft power” (Yue et al., 2020).

Overall, the analysis of Cluster 1 stresses the potential high reward, but also the high cost and risk of the place branding strategies pursued by these nations, as they try to construct and establish their soft power (Grix & Brannagan, 2016) within the framework of sport diplomacy (Dixon et al., 2019; Rofe, 2016).

Cluster 2: ‘Balanced structure’

The second cluster, which is baptized ‘balanced structure’, is comprised of countries and territories such as Australia, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan¹. In Australia, sport is a leverage to consolidate its economic status and reaffirm its regional and international leadership (Australia Unlimited, 2021; Garamvölgyi et al., 2021). The 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, along with subsequent sporting events, including the 2006 and 2018 Commonwealth Games, as well as the 2003 Rugby World Cup, have triggered economic, social, environmental, sporting and political legacies (Moss et al., 2019; Toohey, 2008). For example, the Sydney Olympic Park 2030 project is a community lifestyle hub that is similar to the VTB Arena in Moscow, mentioned earlier. The ‘Australia Unlimited’ campaign and brand signature embody the nation’s place branding strategy; they also highlight Australia’s Unique Selling Proposition (USP) which is being supported by its regions and cities’ distinctiveness and attractiveness (Australia Unlimited, 2021).

¹ Or territory, in the case of Taiwan, depending on which political perspective the reader takes.

In the case of Japan, the country is gradually switching from branding itself globally through mega sporting events to focusing, to a greater extent, on domestic social and economic development, and on its legacies (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2014). When the Tokyo Olympic Games were held in 1964, Japan earned a legitimate status back in the global community (Hargreaves, 1992) which facilitated the national development in several areas. The nation branding, yet to be named at that time, was aided through displaying the infrastructure reconstruction and the technological advancement (Guajardo, 2016; Tokyo 2020 Olympics, 2016). Over fifty years later, the rescheduled 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games were aiming to brand Japan as one of the current global leaders, through cultural narratives and government-led reform initiatives in human resource development (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2014). Despite its aging population, not to mention a long period of economic stagnation, hosting the Olympic Games was aimed to narrow the gender and age gaps in the labor market, integrate foreign workers and internationalize higher education institutes in the pursuit of a socio-economic legacy (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2014). Admittedly, this was before COVID-19 altered Japan's plans and increased Japan's debt; the latter weakening Japan's capacity to invest in infrastructure and human resource development, while challenging Japan to innovate further (Heinonen & Strandvik, 2021).

Within the same cluster, South Korea and Taiwan are examples of countries² which were staging sporting events for political purposes, infrastructure development and gradual transformation, as depicted below. The end goal was to establish social, cultural and

² Please, see previous note about Taiwan.

economic legacies. South Korea hosted the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympic Games and the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games. In 1988, the Olympic Games marked South Korea's grand entry into the developed world and the substitution of the military authoritarianism for direct democracy. In 2018, the theme of the Winter Olympics was peace, in line with the country's willingness to ease the tensions with North Korea. Both Olympic Games emphasized the infrastructure development (in Seoul, in 1988, and in Gangwon Province, in the northeast part of the country, in 2018). However, the main metamorphosis that followed the 2018 Games was highlighted by the advanced technology and popular cultural products that were on display during the event (Snyder, 2018). For South Korea, sport was seen as a leverage to maintain regional peace and cooperation; but also, to showcase its innovations in infrastructure, technology, entertainment and culture, while, making the country a more attractive economic partner, touristic destination and diplomatic stakeholder. Thus, sport diplomacy for soft power gains was used in line with national political objectives and international geopolitical realities (Kang & Houlihan, 2021).

Winning in sport competitions has been a major force to build a sense of national pride for the Taiwanese since the 1960's (Chen, 2019). International sport achievements can become a catalyst for forging a national identity, especially for Taiwan which struggles to be recognized as a nation by the international community because of the diplomatic dilemma the latter faces with mainland China (Bairner & Hwang, 2011). Thus, hosting sporting events serve multi purposes for the Taiwanese government, as diplomatic efforts, branding the nation and its cities, as well as leaving a socio-economic legacy, are all included in Taiwan's national policy (Chang & Huang, 2009). In 2009, the Taipei Summer

Deaflympics created a unique social legacy, such as a deaf-friendly culture and a successful city branding in the global deaf community (Karvelyte & Chiu, 2011). The same year, Kaohsiung hosted the World Games and targeted the transformation of the city, with new sport facilities and infrastructure, economic and cultural development of the community through ancillary events, along with the national and international promotion of the destination (Chang & Huang, 2009; Ma & Kaplanidou, 2017). After four previous failed bids, the 2017 Summer Universiade was the highest level of international multi-sport events, within the Olympic family, to ever be held in Taiwan (Lee & Li, 2015). The successful hosting of the Summer Universiade has enabled Taipei and Taiwan to increase their image, improve the infrastructure and solidify the national identity, leaving a sustainable legacy (Lu & Lin, 2021). Nation and city branding through sport remains the main goal to demonstrate the presence of the country in the global community and promote Taipei as a favorable tourist destination. Furthermore, the events were organized for university athletes; thus, the educational legacy derived from university volunteers and the development of sport culture in universities was underscored (Lee & Li, 2015).

Hence, in all four cases of Australia, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, socio-economic legacy and horizontal social capital (Dawson & Jöns, 2018) are prevalent. They both appear as objectives of a ‘balanced structure’ cluster, with international and domestic ramifications, as well as long-lasting benefits for the community (Agha & Taks, 2015; Taks, 2013). This ‘balance structure’ could also help build a soft power, thanks to what might be perceived as a more subtle (or ‘softer’) sport diplomacy approach than the one related to Cluster 1.

Cluster 3: 'Economic legacy'

Singapore is identified, here, as one of the countries belonging to the third cluster, named 'economic legacy' (Figure 1), alongside Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. Countries in this cluster tend to focus more on the economic benefits of hosting sport events.

When Singapore gained its independence in 1965, the country was facing a range of economic and social problems. In these early years, the government encouraged its population to engage in sport to improve their health and to build a productive workforce to sustain its fledgling economy. In addition, sport was a catalyst to instill a sense of national identity and civic pride (Hallmann et al., 2013; Wood, 2006) for the young nation (Peh, 2012). By the 1990s, Singapore's economy was considerably more developed, and this allowed it to embark on bolder plans. The Singapore government implemented a plan to host one marquee sporting event every month (Singapore's Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, 2008). The belief was that staging such major sport events would have beneficial long-term impacts on the economy and allow Singaporeans to unite around a common passion (Singapore's Ministry of Community Development and Sports, 2001). This approach was also seen as contributing to the government's master plan to position Singapore as a vibrant city to attract more foreign investments and stay ahead of the global economic competition (Singapore's Ministry of Community Development and Sports, 2001; Singapore's Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, 2008). As a result, Singapore has been playing host to several international sporting events, including the first night street race Formula 1 Grand Prix in 2008 which is accompanied by live marquee music performances (Roult et al., 2020), the inaugural Singapore 2010 Youth Olympic Games and the WTA Finals from 2014 to 2018. Therefore, albeit the focus

is on economic legacy (Figure 1), it can be said that the concepts of socio-economic legacy and horizontal social capital, with long-term benefits that cut across the population (Agha & Taks, 2015; Dawson & Jöns, 2018; Taks, 2013), are also present in Cluster 3, as far as Singapore is concerned.

Singapore's closest neighbour, Malaysia, was also interested in boosting its economy through sport tourism. However, Malaysia's sport industry is still young, with mainly small and medium-sized firms (Yusof & Shah, 2008). Malaysia is not yet recognized as displaying a strong sporting culture and its participation in international sporting events is not particularly noteworthy. Yet, in 1998, it decided to host the Commonwealth Games (Van der Westhuizen, 2004). As a result, more than US\$ 550 million were spent by Malaysia to attract 6,000 athletes from 50 countries in 15 different sports. The idea was to stimulate its economy through the promotion of the country, its regions and cities, as tourist destinations. Major marketing events were organized, including media broadcasts. As a follow-up to the Commonwealth Games, the country welcomed additional sport events in 1999, including the cycling event 'Tour de Langkawi', and the World Cup of Golf (Silk, 2002; Van der Westhuizen, 2004). Still in 1999, Malaysia became one of the first Asian countries to host the F1 Grand Prix (Watanabe et al., 2018). However, due to escalating costs and dwindling ticket sales, the Grand Prix in Malaysia was removed from the F1 calendar in 2017. Malaysia realized that it could pursue political gains and international recognition through sporting events. For example, it leveraged the Commonwealth Games to instill a sense of national identity among its citizens as a means of shoring the government's political legitimacy. This was particularly constructive because of the backdrop of the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and the political crisis, following the removal

of then Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, in 1998 (Silk, 2002; Van der Westhuizen, 2004).

Other countries identified in the cluster shared similar motivations in hosting sporting events, at least before the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Thailand is counting on sport, among others, to reshape the country's image and reputation (Nuttavuthisit, 2007). Vietnam, for its part, is aiming to leverage sport to attract tourists and continue feeding the economic growth through events such as the Formula 1 Grand Prix in Hanoi which, because of COVID-19, had to be cancelled (Do et al., 2021). Hence, although countries in Cluster 3 may focus on economic legacy, the nature of major sporting events allow them to pursue, in parallel, sport diplomacy and soft power, but perhaps at a lower level of intensity than China, for instance (Giulianotti, 2015).

Discussion and Conclusion

First, place branding via sport has become a common strategy for countries in order to (re-)define, position and promote themselves on the world stage. Truly, following the two research questions, there are different profiles of countries trying to leverage sport within a place branding strategy. These profiles have been grouped into three clusters in this conceptual paper: 'diplomacy branding', 'balanced structure' and 'economic legacy'. Clusters are based on the purpose and objectives of the place branding strategy borrowed by the respective country; it is about the intention rather than solely the actual social or economic situation of that country. It should also be mentioned that countries can switch from one cluster to another over time, as the country's objectives and, thus, its strategy can change. Besides, for countries which do not pertain to any specific cluster or do not

recognize themselves in one of the clusters, this situation might underline, at this moment in time, the absence of a clear vision and objectives in establishing a place branding strategy through sport.

Second, two main strategies of place branding through sport were identified. One is pursuing socio-economic legacy and the other is utilizing sport diplomacy to build soft power. Truly, certain types of strategies of place branding through sport are more conducive than others to leave a socio-economic legacy, while helping develop a 'competitive identity' (Anholt, 2003). Among the countries being the more assertive with their place branding strategy through sport, China appears set to achieve its goals by strategically combining sport, international diplomacy and commerce, whilst enabling the Middle Kingdom to establish its soft power. That being said, it could be argued that countries belonging to Cluster 1 ('diplomacy branding') are not necessarily the most prone to leaving a socio-economic legacy. In fact, based on the analysis undertaken in this paper, countries in Cluster 2 were the ones making the strongest case for leaving a socio-economic legacy (Kaplanidou, 2012; Knott et al., 2015; Leopkey & Parent, 2015; Veal et al., 2012; Scheu et al., 2019), on the one hand; and for triggering a horizontal social capital (Agha & Taks, 2015; Dawson & Jöns, 2018; Taks, 2013), on the other. This is notwithstanding their ability to also build, at least in some cases, their soft power through sport. Overwhelmingly, countries on Cluster 2 favor a more balanced approach. As far as countries in Cluster 3 are concerned, if they principally focus on economic legacy, the disposition of major sporting events allows them, nonetheless, to seek sport diplomacy and raise their soft power.

Third, and this is a key contribution of the research, this paper underscores the growing strategic importance of combining sport and diplomacy for countries and territories.

Indeed, either applied assertively or with more subtlety, as we analyzed earlier, sport diplomacy shall become part of a holistic place branding strategy in shaping a nation's brand (Richelieu, 2018; Rojas-Méndez, 2013).

Fourth, in this article, the proposed framework suggests that policy makers can impose their agenda and solely pursue brand awareness objectives, though the latter only represent a small part of how the socio-economic legacy should manifest itself. Could we expect, in a post-COVID-19 world where sustainability becomes front and center, that communities of cities, regions and countries demand that socio-economic legacy and horizontal social capital are *sine qua non* manifestations of a sport-oriented place branding strategy implemented by policy makers? If that were to occur, this could be a new way of leveraging sporting events (Agha & Taks, 2015; Smith, 2014) and influence prospective sport diplomacy-related place branding strategies.

Limits and Future Research

This is a conceptual paper based on a documentary research. Understandably, it was not realistic to analyze the place branding strategies through sport of more countries, if only for time and space constraints, even within the regions that were selected. We are nonetheless confident that the groups and clusters described (Figure 1) are reflective of today's reality for the regions that were elected for the purpose of the study.

Future endeavors could include additional countries, alongside managers and citizens' viewpoints. A longitudinal study could also be relevant in understanding how countries evolve in their place branding strategy through sport, and which factors do influence their

passage from one cluster to the other. Admittedly, in this study, the focus was on benefits. It must be noted that there are negative social impacts in hosting sport events, which have been suggested in this study (vertical social capital) but not expanded upon. These could be examined in future research, as well, as place branding, sport diplomacy and soft power shall probably remain on nations' agenda within the realm of what could be a new world order taking shape before our eyes (Silvius, 2021).

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