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To what extent has the architectural development in **Qatar** reflected its foreign policy ?

1995-2030

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To what extent has the architectural development in Qatar reflected its foreign policy with a focus on the period from 1995 to 2030?



Introduction

Evolution in flux

¹ (Juul Holm and Kallehaug
2014)

² (CNN 2021)

³ (Kamrava 2015)

Doha, the capital of Qatar, an inhospitable fishing village only a few generations ago, plays an important regional and global capital in the Middle East and has become a pivot of globalization with its defining moment marked in 1940 with the discovery of oil in the Dukhan Field on the Arabian Peninsula¹. The rapid increase in oil production no doubt led to its physical transformation: a speeded-up process by which cities are historically made; a frantic evolution from a small coastal town to a metropolis. As a result, oil has instigated both political and physical change and the effects have been unprecedented. In this change, architecture orchestrates a central role.

The transformation of Doha from vernacular mud settlements to an oil-expanding city is geared to diversifying the country's economy in new directions and marks a second major phase of urban transformation; 'the art mecca of the Middle East'². This entails significant urban development including, the construction of impressive iconic buildings and the establishment of renowned cultural and educational facilities led by international star architects.

In the current context of rising international competition between the world's major cities, diverse new challenges are emerging as each metropolis tries to find ways to sustain its growing populace, expand its economy and extend its influence. During the regime change from Sheikh Khalifa Al-Thani (1972) to Hamad Al-Thani (1995), several diplomatic events have occurred where the winning bid FIFA 2022 acted as a catalyst of the infrastructural development of the country. Tamim Al Thani (2013) has broadened the country's financial portfolio where the role of architecture is a central factor³. This economic dynamism and vibrancy forged Qatar as an emerging powerhouse. It also embarks on an aggressive branding campaign to achieve global recognition.

Many international relation specialists explain this phenomenon as *Soft power*. But what is soft power? After a detailed analysis of Qatar's history, and an exploration into the country's use of architecture to exude soft power to achieve its aims, we have to ultimately probe the question: what are the dynamics that impact the cultural influence of small countries in its process of state-nation building ?

Soft power

A tool of persuasion

“A country’s ability to influence the preferences and behaviors of various actors in the international arena (states, corporations, communities, publics etc.) through attraction or persuasion rather than coercion.”⁴ - Joseph Nye

⁴ (Nye 2004)

⁵ such as

⁶ (Mattern 2005)

⁷ (Nye 2004)

⁸ *ibid*

A few could argue with the statement that power is the currency of the political world. Traditionally, countries exerted military power and economic accumulation - both tangible resources recognised as hard power. However, political commentator Joseph Nye among many IR scholars⁵ contested this simplistic notion and coined a new concept of power now known as soft power. The conventional notion of power being *tangible* and *coercive* was now better defined as a ‘relationship’ and *intangible*⁶ - the power of attraction. Therefore, soft power is *influence* and *persuasion*. Nye argues that traditional power resources such as wealth only provide the potential, but not the manifestation of power⁷; hence well-designed strategies and skilful leadership can transform potential power into actual power to leverage with. It is in this definition I will be analysing this paper in the context of architecture and politics.

According to Nye, soft power can be exercised through three primary pillars: ‘a nation’s educational and scientific resources, media reach and influence, and a favorable business climate’⁸. In other words, cultural exchange plays a fundamental role in the success of a country’s soft power exertion. Thus, success in its economical and political endeavors is not enough to build a strong nation brand and positive soft power reputation if a cultural connection is missing, especially in an interconnected and globalized world. In order to assess Qatar’s success in exerting soft power through architecture, it is vital to prove that it has fundamentally enhanced its cultural exchange with other nations and people across the globe.

For actors who aim to deploy soft power, success will ultimately depend on knowing how exactly to make their ideas and themselves attractive to a target population. It also allows a country to rise in the esteem of its neighbors, market its resources and compose the face it presents on the international stage.



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الجزء الاول

وقائع استقلال دولة قطر 1971م

Politics of a small nation

Soft power strategies

⁹ (BBC 2012)

¹⁰ (Nye 2004)

¹¹ (Mattern 2005)

¹² (The national news 2011)

¹³ (Architectural digest 2018)

¹⁴ (BBC 2012)

‘ 20 years ago, a wise decision of our government, we have been investing in the right things education, sports and culture’⁹ - secretary general, Qatar olympics committee.

One can affect other’s behavior in three main ways: threats of coercion (sticks), inducements and payments (carrots) - resting in hard power - or ‘entic[ing] others through attractive culture, policies and/or achievements’¹⁰. Therefore, it can be stated that Qatar deploys soft power through heavily relying on carrots and attraction. To succeed in this, communication and information technology is crucial. The ability of any nation to exert soft power influence by promoting ‘its ideals or values depends largely on its ability to tout the utility of the proposed ideals via a medium the targeted audience trusts or derives its information from’¹¹.

In this manner, Qatar has managed to become a significant and influential player on the international stage. Qatari owned Al Jazeera, acts as one of the most renowned media outlets of the Arab world and is a classic example. It grants Qatar political and diplomatic muscle throughout the region and across the globe altering its international image from an oil state to a thriving hub in the Middle East. In 2011, Hillary Clinton acknowledged the soft power influence of Al Jazeera testifying US’s loss in the information war through her statement ‘ Al jazeera has been the leader that is literally changing people’s minds and attitude. And if you like it or hate it, it is really effective.’¹². Its strategic branding is also projected architecturally by occupying one of the most symbolic buildings on London’s cityscape - the shard - whereby the use of landmarks has become a visible branding tool to enhance its international profile.

Qatar’s soft power resources depend on its matrix of foreign relationships. Perched in a region with a turbulent political climate, it receives military security from the Udeid Air Base, the United States Central Command headquarters. This enables the nation to prioritize domestic and international ambitions rather than on security. The corollary of this is its drastic urban expansion both horizontally and vertically - advertising its advanced society with its globally praised and awarded architecture. The Aga Khan foundation and renowned magazines declare Qatar’s

modernization: 'With a dichotomy of angular constructions and fluid lines, Qatar's architecture astounds in the Middle East' ¹³. Here too architecture becomes an agent of the nation.

Qatar's aspiration to be the center of innovation based in the Middle East but global in scope and impact, does not only rely on its media reach and political alliance alone. Its wealth - the world's highest GDP - plays a major role (carrots) in purchasing its influence and image. However, unless strategically pursued capital is an insufficient ingredient. This is evident in its continuous international brand visibility promoted by its vast scope of investments in domestic and international urban development of cultural, educational and sport facilities. Therefore, this paper will focus on architecture in these sectors.

The secretary general, among many other high rank individuals in the country see the post-oil vision of their leaders in recycling the financial resources into long-term assets : 'The blessing of the oil and gas won't last forever - so focusing on something sustainable is more important' ¹⁴. There is a cultural dimension to all this reaching out, with Qatar acting as a bridge between the West and the Arab world.



Qatar's debut on the international stage

National Symbolism

¹⁵ (Kamrava 2015)

¹⁶ (Politics Today 2021)

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ (BBC 2017)

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ (Qatar Airways 2013)

²¹ (Qatar Airways 2021)

Today, Qatar is often known by its 2022 World Cup win, the first ever World Cup to be held in an Arab nation. Nonetheless, a lot of observers are yet unaware of its significance as a country and its endeavors on the international stage. In this regard, its small geographical and demographical size often plays a major role in its relatively low recognition. Qatar is one of the smallest countries in the Middle East with a total landmass of 4,471 sq mi and boasting 2.7 million inhabitants of which nationals make up only 250,000¹⁵ - a minority in their country.

In the current context of rising international competition between the world's major cities, diverse new challenges are emerging as each metropolis tries to find ways to sustain its growing populace, expand its economy and extend its influence. Although a small country, Qatar has emerged as an influential player on the international stage with its financial power to deploy soft power. To enhance its global profile and political legitimacy through substantial foreign investments using its Sovereign Wealth Fund and Qatar Investment Authority.

Reports show that Qatar invested over \$400 billion in more than 40 countries¹⁶. From historically prominent hotels and landmarks to the cranes arcing over ports, Qatar has placed a considerable amount in real estate in some of the most 'strategically important Western cities such as London, Paris, and Washington D.C'¹⁷. Among these is the Hausmann Building in the center of Paris, one of the world's most recognizable buildings, now home to Qatar's embassy, boasting its flag on Champs-Elysees. Meanwhile in London, the nation owns more than the Queen herself¹⁸. Its growing portfolio includes the luxury department store Harods and not just any hotels, but Claridge's, the Berkeley and the Connaught, as well as the Intercontinental in Park Lane¹⁹. In this way, Qatar has invested in high-value assets to present its national brand on a global platter.

Further to analyzing Qatar's investments aimed at elevating its brand visibility on the global forum, one can see Qatar Airways as a high-profile national symbol visible across the globe in some of the most prestigious airports and stadiums. Founder Akbar Al Baker states 'Qatar and Qatar airways are synonymous because we carry the name of our country and you can see it is spelt in the boldest way on the fuselage of our airplanes'²⁰ flying millions of passengers across the globe. In 2021, it was named 'the world's top airline' in the annual Skytrax World Airline Awards for its high levels of passenger service excellence²¹. The airline is also the

greatest sponsor of football associations such as FC Bayern München, and Paris Saint-Germain. This is a vital branding tool by which soft power is deployed. These symbolic state-owned bodies and investments in culture and sports collectively appear to reflect Qatar's success in pursuing a new, high-profile image as an ambitious, pioneering and vital actor in international affairs.



Transformative state

*Fro, pre-oil settlement
to global hub*

*'Why did Doha escape the fate of the generic, which applied to almost every other city that emerged out of 'nowhere' in the last quarter of the 20th century? Our 'age,' when cities were no longer the outcome of political, ideological, or aesthetic principles but were by 'definition' left to the forces of the market.'*²²

²² (OMA 2019)

²³ (e-architects 2019)

²⁴ (Kamrava 2015)

²⁵ (The National News 2015)

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ (CNN 2021)

Qatar was confronted with modernization from the early seventies - at the beginning of its independence - and a sequence of rulers from the Al-Thani Family were forced to engage with the complex tides and trends of globalization. Social and political ambitions were pursued in direct relation with the building of the capital - today Doha is a 'record of successive priorities'²³ and response to the flux of new ideas. As a British Protectorate from 1916 to 1971, the country was described as an inhospitable landscape. However, with the discovery of oil, a concrete jungle was erected from the desert plane replacing the nomadic settlements and mud-huts. The modes of the modern age were launched with its infrastructure - airports, factories, hospitals and schools - and were boasted on the old Tv channel Al Rayan. The emir at the time, Sheikh Ali Bin Abdullah Al-Thani's first endeavors to create a functionalist urban condition laid the foundations for the young icon today.

In the process of defining the values and conditions amid high modernism in the seventies and eighties, Qatar has grown exponentially not just infrastructurally but also mentally - from a traditionalist to a forward looking mindset. Chosen agents of the local population were educated abroad to develop a framework that will take the nation from tribalistic society to an economic powerhouse in only 2 decades. The term high modernism is premised on a break with the past: 'The past is an impediment, a history that must be transcended; the present is the platform for launching plans for a better future'²⁴ and thus becomes a visual statement of a nation's mindframe. In addition, laying the foundations of a municipal bureaucracy through foreign influence, a new steering concept for its growth and development was established, and architecture became the face of the nation - growing bigger and higher. A concept seen for centuries before where technological and architectural innovations reflected the upwardly mobile aspirations of nations such as the skyscraper iconic to 1920 America.

* Imagined geographies was first coined by Edward Said. Where 'imagined' refers to perception rather than 'made-up'.

As a result of breaking with the old and establishing a new modern idea of Qatar, its construction was driven by property speculation and market logic with the royal family at the nexus of this unfolding. Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, who seized power in 1995, took the nation to its second chapter of modernism. Together with his wife Sheikha Moza bint Nasser Al-Misnid who gained a reputation as a pioneer of education with Qatar Foundation, a non-profit organization to create national economic sustainability through innovation in education and research, raised the country's profile. Spearheading an international campaign as she presents the nation through initiating partnerships and investing in education abroad. The use of high rank Qatari figures as representations of good modern architecture associated with *attractive* causes is a strategy Qatar does well. In the opening ceremony of Oxford's East wing her royalty was invited to present the new iconic extension with star architect Zaha Hadid. The new building 'looks like the Middle East of the 21st century, so why should we be lagging behind the region we study?' ²⁵ director of the Middle East Center stated when questioned on the sculptural form of the wing. Adding, 'We should be as bold - as a scholarly community - in what we commission as is the current trend in the region itself.' ²⁶ This statement suggests that the Arabian peninsula conjures ideas of a state-of-art nation.

In parallel, while the knowledge-based economy might be a generative force for Qatar's global profile, Princess Sheikha Mayassa Al-Thani represents the country as an incubator of culture and art. Her founding of Qatar Museum Authority, an entity responsible for art and museology in the country, strengthens Qatar's foreign diplomacy: 'As the rest of the world turns their eyes on Doha, we thought one of the best ways to introduce ourselves and create a dialogue would be through art in the public sphere' ²⁷ Qatar Museum's Director of Public Art states to CNN. Substantiating a culturally open brand through commissioning famous international artists and architects to ornament the capital with their masterpieces drawing both international attention and influence. Her excellency's funding of *Contemporary architecture in Qatar* suggests the urgency to disseminate Qatar's name in the world of scholars. Shaping the minds and hearts of the elite and thus exuding soft power through an indirect avenue.

This desire for proving successful autonomy, erasing the recent imperial past and narrating a new identity based on generated ideals and values is explained through the concept of *imagined geographies* * - the perception of a nation and region created through imagery, texts and /or discourses. Knowledge and power are thus intertwined. The heavy investment and engagement in commonalities, such as the aforementioned architecture, literature and media articles on its contribution to education and culture, help in defining the emerging modern nation. It is a tool of power to install a favored image for those imagining - observers, tourists and investors. Nonetheless, it is not a new tool, cities such as Paris are associated with the Eiffel tower and romanticism. Qatar's first launch on the international stage was through its FIFA 2022 World Cup bid presentation, boasting its drastic urban expansion with a timeline of its skyline starting with 1995. Here, architecture is among the most obvious and tangible choices for manifesting a nationalist style and image that at once is modern yet imbued with historical references - obscuring heterodox realities of Wahhabism and desert plain.

Doha's theatre 'starchitecture'

Architect's playground

²⁸ (Ashraf and Wiedmann 2013)

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ (Bennett 2020)

³¹ (Matt 2016)

When looking externally, Qatar is boasting its name all over the globe through architecture shopping, but does this also reflect in its internal affairs? Less than 40 years ago, the Sheraton Grand Doha Resort's pyramidal structure was one of the only buildings in the capital and the first notes of modernity. Today, if visiting, even the most casual observer will be astonished by the lineup of superlative and futuristic skyscrapers making the city a huge construction site. It is locally known that every other day new highways are opened, old neighborhoods are replaced by modern progressive cities and landmarks. However, the most distinguished image that conjures when speaking of contemporary architecture in Qatar is the West Bay skyline, the capital's theatrical front on the Corniche: exhibiting over 100 extravagant architectural performances - designed by star architects such as Jean Nouvel - creating 'visual images of heroic progress towards a totally transformed future'²⁸. An architectural staging of soft power and state-branding in pursuit for global recognition as an ultra-modern country with the capital as its stage.

The use of architecture to communicate this commitment towards modernity extends as the capital becomes a playing plane for prestigious architects. The nation's experimental nature in that it is in the process of state-nation-building offers the opportunity to invent a reputation and define a contemporary society under almost *tabula rasa* conditions - one that represents openness, forwardness and legitimacy at a competitive level. Though these artistic expressions are globally noticed, they stand as object building in their socio-cultural context - aesthetic yet isolated entities 'a typical phenomena when environments are built without considering the actual demands, needs and desires of people.'²⁹ By looking at the key initiatives of international collaboration, I argue that the state uses cultural diplomacy - through architecture - to produce and then disseminate an identity narrative of Qatar where local demand is not a priority.

To begin, according to Mark: 'the deployment of a state's culture in support of its foreign policy goals or diplomacy, [and] is frequently seen as a subset of the practice of public diplomacy, a government's communication with foreign audiences in order to positively influence them.'³⁰ The ambition to attract visitors and promote culture and tourism has been acknowledged as a crucial part in establishing Doha as an emerging hub in the world, while diversifying the economy and fostering the city's brand appeal as an investment magnet. In that, ASHGHAL - an autonomous body established by Sheikh Hamad Al-Thani in 2004 - manages

Figure 5: Doha's remaining old neighborhoods in Al Asmakh area.

all infrastructural projects inside the country and is a major player in delivering the nation's aspirations. In 2016, the economic downturn with the rapid drop in Gas and Oil prices pressed the government to the downsize state-projects such as healthcare centers while World Cup projects remained unaffected³¹. It becomes evident that the tourism industry is the driving force behind the country's rapid developments with the FIFA bid as an acting catalyst. The acronym continues to dominate the urban landscape with its banners festooning the capital, highlighting the nation's frantic need to build an impressive visual statement during the World Cup to prove its success and abundance to the globe.

It is therefore clear that Qatar is punching above its weight, investing culturally both abroad and internally to promote itself to the global audience. However, this can draw a massive gap between the reality of the nation and the idea of it. Thus, the question is how this explosion of molded geometric spaces of cement glass and steel - as much as it follows a direction and a sense of meaning - expresses the identity of the people inhabiting it. Is the country's identity - the key ingredient in cultural exchange - compromised in the process?





Identity formation: architectural propaganda

National branding

³² (weber shandwick 2014)

³³ ("Urban Branding The Politics Of Architecture" 2013)

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ (Molinari 2016)

³⁶ (Mitchell and Katodrytis 2015)

'Cultivating a national identity that leverages a country's attributes whilst giving itself sufficient latitude to create its own brand is difficult [thus] to preserve a culture that is unique to them, city leaders need to identify the make-up of that culture. Knowing what motivates and inspires their citizens is a fundamental first step' ³²

A preliminary consideration needing addressing before attempting to answer the aforementioned questions is urban branding, which has become a universal trend pursued by governments to draw investors. In this context urban identity is a unique selling point (USP). In corporate literature, it can be described as one identifiable quality that sets the city in question apart from other competitive cities³³. Marketing this distinct feature convincingly ultimately determines the success of a venture. Thus, in terms of architecture the concept is key and should be presented as a landmark. Designer and marketing experts may appropriate these myths and even originate them in an attempt to position a city, region, or even a nation against their competitors. Architecture as propaganda demonstrates a nation's power, establishing a national identity to express visions for the future : a 'phenomenon of architectural communication.'³⁴

In the quest of fostering a national identity nation-building myths have been derived out of symbolisms. Nonetheless, with a young history as an inhabitable dusty plane, this pursuit becomes a challenge. During the early 1970s international consultants were appointed to create the first masterplan for the capital.³⁵ As a result, vernacular neighborhoods were replaced and the indigenous population moved to new suburbs. Doha became disconnected and car-oriented. A national response was to invest in cultural projects to create a national narrative and official voice on the global forum. The founding of the Qatar Museum Authority in 2005 aimed to develop a 'cultural center of the Arab world, and to both reinforce and promote Qatari national identity regionally and internationally.'³⁶ In practice, there is no culturally Arab concept behind most ostentatious bought-in-constructions ; rather elements inspired by Arab history are glued-on by predominantly non-Arab architects in order to sell an Arab identity. This is reminiscent of *eclecticism* - a combination of influences that are superficial as to be of little meaning. The brand is a commitment to stand as a pivot of culture and art. There is no desire to be higher than the neighbor but a desire in creating a modern country that finds its roots in culture.

³⁷ (Molinari 2016)

³⁸ (CNN 2021)

³⁹ (Vogue 2019)

⁴⁰ (Roberto 2021)

⁴¹ (Exell and Rico 2014)

Nonetheless, it is argued that symbolization, cultural and personal affiliations are recognised as modes of comprehending our identity.³⁷ An example of such is the Islamic Art Museum designed by I.M Pei, a monolithic complex inspired by an ab-lution fountain in Cairo. It was one of the first monumental pieces turning the local landscape into a ‘vast outdoor art museum experience.’³⁸ Additionally, the dazzling National Museum by Jean Nouvel, a desert rose, native to the Gulf has astonished the world of art and high fashion with a Vogue representative stating: ‘it was difficult not to be awed by the capital’s impressive museums, spearheaded by the dynamic leadership of Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa (who has topped ArtReview’s Power 100), chairperson of the Qatar Museums Authority’.³⁹ Though these recycled and easily digestible version of Qatari history’s key periods, it still communicates a clear cultural identity to the world - paradoxically, exactly this shopping for architecture bound by traditions and arab values may illustrate the shaping of this identity in-the-making today. It becomes clear that architecture plays a vital role in pushing a national mythos.

In its early years Qatar has often been described as the ‘Las Vegas or Disneyland of the Middle East’,⁴⁰ referring to its artificiality and architectural hyperbole: constructing distorted versions of reality and out of context architecture. A striking example is *The Pearl*, constructed in 2004 an artificial island made up of 12 districts some of which resemble Venice, the colosseum in Rome, Moroccan architecture are all romanticized replicas from around the world. Critics refer to this as ‘Dubaisation’, though the Dubai model has been praised for its economic prosperity it has also been criticized for its ‘failure to counteract a gradual process of cultural degradation and loss of identity’.⁴¹ Nonetheless, Dubai has been successful in establishing a USP - it is the de luxe version that the Sheikh has succeeded in marketing and thus standing as the Luxury utopian city of the far East and the rich person’s playground. Its name alone conjures up a whole series of images and emotions, resulting in an ‘impression value’. Urban branding that draws not only on cultural but also imaginary narratives. To succeed in soft power, one must be able to sell its urban identity. Thus, it is important that Qatar focuses on one story to convey a clear brand with a distinct USP.

Qatar tries to dissociate from Dubai and adopt an alternative approach to reconcile its architectural language and urban brand. In this case a focus on culture and art. Reconstructing architecture in an attempt to invent new identities and rebrand themselves so they can position themselves on the world stage. The Msheireb project proposes a new paradigm of architecture and architectural scheme. Redefining Qatar’s identity that is not limited to regional aesthetics but responding to the climate, lifestyle and values. The project becomes an architectural balance between modernity and tradition expressed with the latest technologies. In that balance, it creates a narrative that is progressive and forward looking. The role of architecture as an instrument with the emphasis on heritage becomes increasingly highlighted and a key ingredient in Qatar’s branding policies. Thereby the nation asserts itself as the destination of architectural design and culture.

In recent years, the capital has held multiple important exhibitions such as Virgil Abloh’s last demo at the Fire station Gallery *figures of speech* before his passing. Further investments to stand as a representational force and voice of influence has been placed in public panels and cultural summits that make efforts to call on some of the best architects of the world in a way that portrays the nation as the pivot of cultural intersections and discussions. In the opening ceremony of the National Museum, a public talk was held called *Architecture as a face of a nation*, gathering Rem Koolhaas, Jean Nouvel, Ben van Berkel and Jacques Herzog to discuss the very essence of this panel; is architecture the face of Qatar? Conclusions drawn were that archi-

ecture is not the face of a nation driven by the market but rather an incarnation of its dialogue in capturing an identity. This is questionable, when looking at Herzog's Orientalist museum in the ultra futuristic Lusail city. Here, a dramatic round plate rises from the ground by the waterfront, a poetic interplay of land and water. Once again, architecture is designed to test the boundaries of design and technology. The architectural gesture is too extravagant to serve as solely a dialogue. It sends a message that the nation is an advocate of culture and the cradle of innovation.

Nonetheless, the growing competition from its bigger and more aggressive neighbor - Saudi Arabia - who has opened its nation to culture, art and entertainment has undoubtedly affected Qatar's deployment of soft power. Saudi's crown prince Mohammed bin Salman realized the urgency in changing his nation's foreign diplomacy and wahhabism in order to survive. The question is how will Qatar respond to the growing tension from its neighbor?



Education city

Cultural exchange

⁴² (BBC 2012)

⁴³ (Mitchell and Katodrytis 2015)

⁴⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁵ (Molinari 2016)

⁴⁶ (Jodidio 2019)

⁴⁷ *ibid*

⁴⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁹ (Brannagan 2018)

⁵⁰ (Qatar Foundation 2015)

The attempt to negotiate identity in the Gulf is also evident in the numerous educational institutions built. Though the tourism industry was the first alternative model towards an oil independent economy; parallel attempts have been taken to establish knowledge-based economies. The petrostates recycle their gas and oil into knowledge. But 'a high quality education system is not created overnight' says Dr Abdullah so they decided to 'jump start' this with overseas partnerships.⁴² Eight prestigious international universities, predominantly from the US - such as Texas A&M and Georgetown - to set up state-of-the art bases in Qatar's Education City campus - a megalomaniac project, showing off a new channel of wealth and abundance. It is no coincidence that higher education is a major form of attraction and conduit of cultural exchange as well as a non-controversial avenue to shape values and ideals. This new educational hub in the Middle East serves as a credible alternative to the West for higher education especially for those residing in the region.

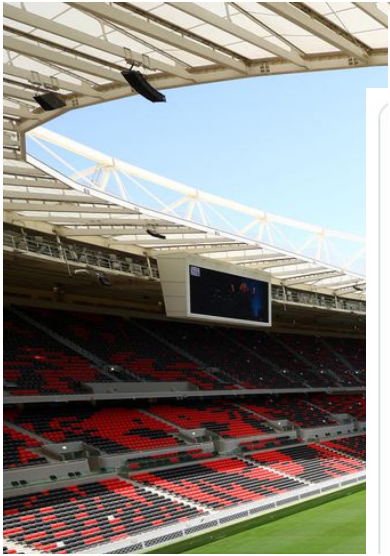
Education city was first established in the late 1990s starting with only a few educational facilities and residential blocks covering 2500 acres.⁴³ Today, the masterplan has developed the campus to rather a university city, and boasts buildings of immense architectural distinction brought through the collaboration of multiple premier international architects - notably Mangera Yvars Architects' mosque at the entrance of the city campus, a highlight on Doha's landscape. As well as Rem Koolhaas' National Library, 'The level of quality in the design and construction that is evident in Qatar Foundation's flagship project has not been matched elsewhere'.⁴⁴

The prestigiousness of the project together with the generous National Research Fund attracted global cooperation such as Shell, General Electric and Microsoft. Such international collaborations serve as a vital channel for soft power enabled by the 'unmatched facilities' offered⁴⁵. As a result, tolerance towards Qatar's future endeavors is ensured as people become more susceptible to misconceptions of the past. On June 17, the Qatar-American Institute hosted architectural author Phillip Jodidio in Chicago for an Expressions Artist Talk centered around contemporary architecture in Qatar. Here he presents the nation to a crowd of American educators in an influential and progressive light: 'I have visited Qatar 18 times and I can tell you the nation is open and forward-looking'.⁴⁶ During this lecture he also emphasizes Qatar's importance in the world of architecture and as the cultural leader of the region with its own public buildings being 'indicative of the nature of the nation and of what is happening there, it is a symbol'.⁴⁷

Architecture becomes a messenger of tolerance and multiculturalism. Jodido expands to make clear that these masterpieces 'are essentially for the public, these are not works that are often related to business they are more related to education and culture.'⁴⁸ Thus, the question is why are these public? Public buildings such as the *National Convention Center* in Education City are edifices that showcase and educate international audiences about its domestic economic capabilities. This is achieved through the use of *soft power senders* - diplomats, officials and emissaries - and hosting of events that are generous and allows nations to entice others through attractive culture and achievements.⁴⁹ In 2015, Michelle Obama visited Qatar to join Sheikha Moza's summit on education for girls where she made a keynote speech.

The same year, Mangera Yvars Architects' mosque won an award at the World Architecture Festival, a prestigious global celebration of inspirational architecture, held last week in Singapore, promoting its reputation abroad. Architecture remains the nation's main conduit of persuasion. During this event, architectural manager Ameena Ahmadi Added: 'This is a great achievement for Qatar Foundation and Qatar as a whole. We are proud to have had the opportunity to showcase this Qatari landmark on an international stage and to shed light on Qatar Foundation's work to foster a society that embraces and enhances Qatari culture and promotes global tolerance of Islamic values.'⁵⁰





Qatar will host a World Cup but not as we know it

By Simon Evans

Football Daily @footballdaily

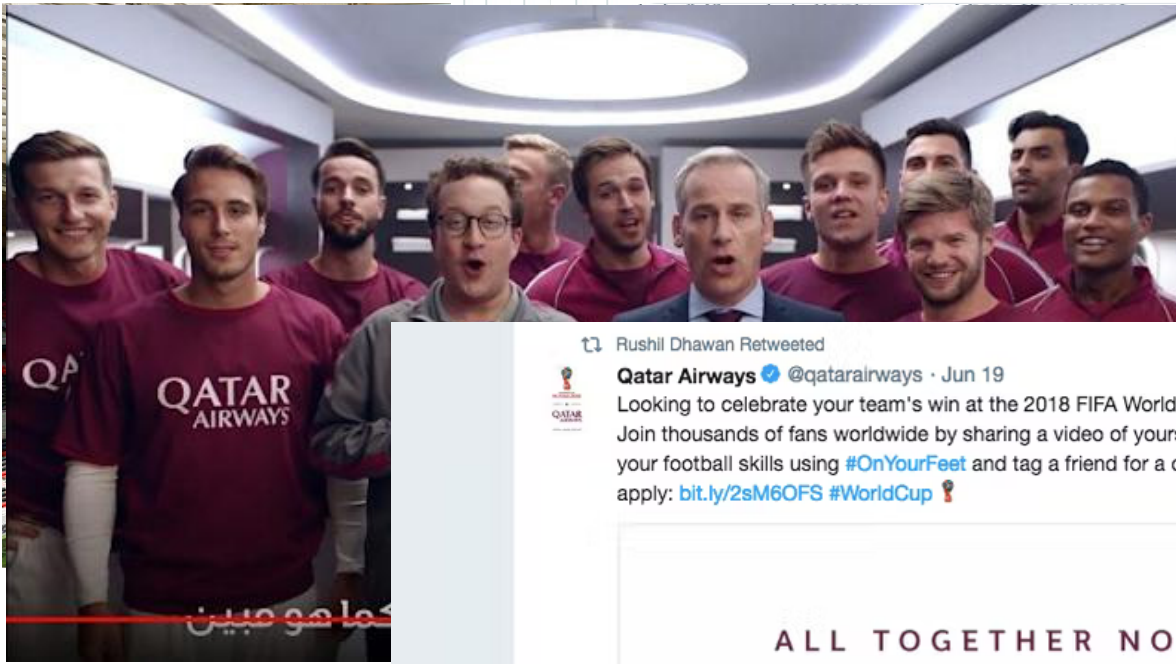
"This is perfectly set up for the players."

David Beckham shares his thoughts on the Qatar World Cup, with it being the first time it takes place in the middle of the season in November



, 2022

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WORLD CUP DRAW 2022

ALJAZEERA

Sports: under the lens

International profile

'We tap into our spirit of innovation to find and showcase the best ideas on a global stage'⁵¹ - Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC).

⁵¹ (Arab.org)

⁵² (Team Qatar 2011)

⁵³ (Neville 2021)

⁵⁴ *ibid*

⁵⁵ (Roadto2022 2021)

⁵⁶ (Widewalls 2019)

⁵⁷ (Hakoumi 2022)

⁵⁸ (The New Statesman 2021)

Jodido also mentions the second phase of Qatar's architectural development referring to the stadiums. The hosting of prestigious sporting events is an opportunity for nations to publicize their cultural achievements. Thus, winning the rights to host the 2022 World Cup has been a major source of pride for the nation as well as the region. The first world cup to ever be hosted in the Islamic world: 'we go new lands...the arabic world was waiting for a long time to have the World Cup.'⁵² After decades of dormancy, the nation is placed as a legitimate player on the world map. No doubt the bid became a cornerstone of its future endeavors. But 'can Qatar host the world's biggest party?'⁵³ is a question much debated on the news. With a spending of 400 million pounds a week in preparation for the World Cup, it is clear that the country is not cutting short to impress.⁵⁴ In this, architecture is the main prop.

A successful hosting would further embed the reputation of the nation. Nonetheless the display of culture and hospitality - main resources of soft power - are key in order to appear attractive and alter preconceived ideas of the country. Thus the challenge is how does a young nation amid a construction boom with an unclear urban milieu become successful in captivating acrobats and fans from around the world? To begin, further endorsing *imagined narratives* whereby architectural credibility - world-class facilities by renowned architects such as the Zaha Hadid and Fosters and Partners - becomes part of Qatar's toolbox to convey culture. The Al Bayt Stadium where the opening game will be held is inspired by a primitive structure - the tent - can hold a capacity of 60,000 people.⁵⁵ Within this specific agenda, heritage is showcased with Western derivatives, promising *the Arabian experience*. Furthermore, its technological innovation and nationalist ambitions coincide with the imaginative narrative the nation is striving for - an unprecedented experience for the world to witness.

These culturally state-led legacies are sold long before the onset of the first game. The funding of celebrity ambassadors such as David Beckham, the purchasing of football teams and participation in sports events such as Formula 1 to ensure maximum exposure. No expense is spared for its self-staging effort to showcase its nation and buildings that rival landmarks across the sea. Indeed, the first encounter spectators have when they land is with Architecture, the Hamad International Airport does not promise less than the best, setting 'a new parameter for the trav-

eling experience on global scale' ⁵⁶. The airport becomes an immersive exhibition consisting of a myriad of works of globally renowned artists such as Jean-Michel Othoniel. Establishing prestige and reputation to strategic niches - art, sports and culture - can influence agenda setting and preferences. However, the many allegations that have been made towards corruption and human rights can lead to *soft disempowerment* and failure to build confidence to its forged narrative.

International marketing is not enough to craft diplomatic posture and thus diplomacy is essential to appear as a good global citizen. The focus on *emotional branding* where a relationship and familiarity is built between the audience and the 'sold' product ⁵⁷. In this case, Qatar is perpetuating a positive image to assure confidence through activism and generous donations to third world countries. The secretary general of SC stated 'the plan is to remove the upper tiers (of stadiums) and donate this to countries in need of sporting infrastructure.' ⁵⁸ However, in theory, Qatar can develop soft power, but to whom do these strategies and endeavours appear attractive? To centralize most of the infrastructural development and budgets on the World Cup creates a great real-estate speculation that goes beyond elite architects and impressive architecture. Though social media - a virtual public space - may entice the international audience using a credible attractive *filter*, will the filter hold when confronted with the nation in real life?

Architecture is the forefront of contemporary culture and in Qatar its modernity makes it not an artifact but a function of contemporary design that serves as an inspiration for the future, in the Middle East and beyond. In that respect, it succeeds in its appeal, but at a community level its infrasturctural developments are standardised and disorganised. There is an incoherence in the urban context these architectural masterpieces are in.

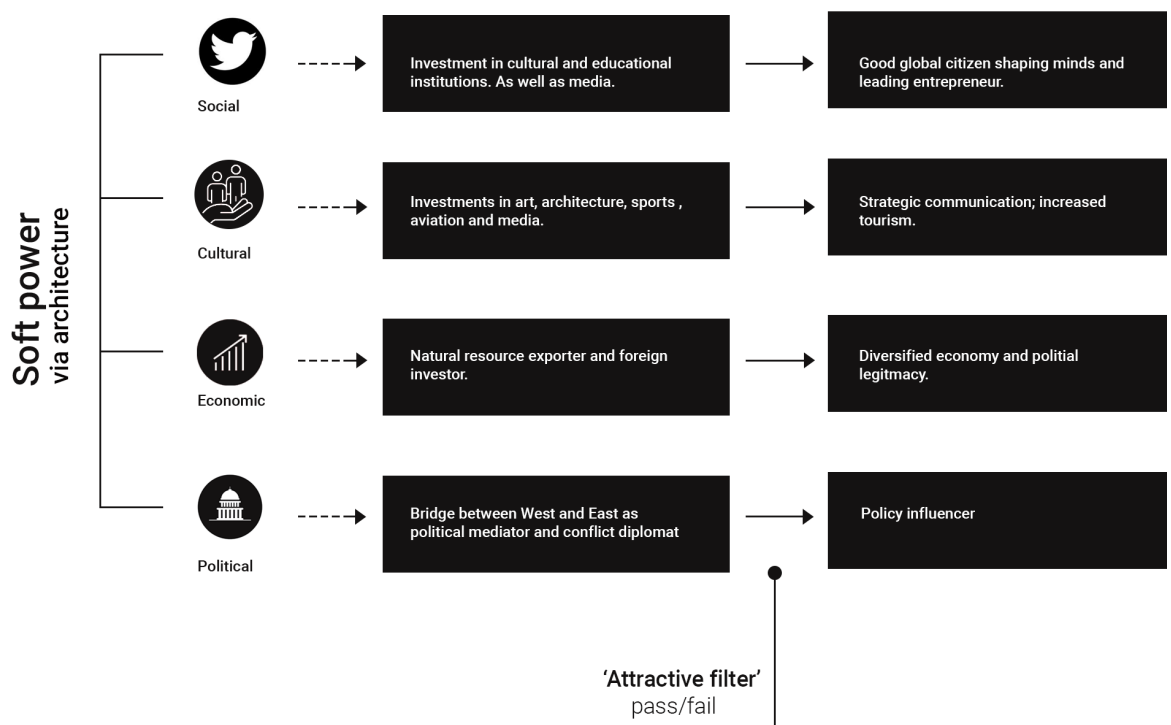


Figure 9: diagram summarising soft power resources, outcomes and the role the 'attractive filter'. Architecture is presented as the main instrument to lend credibility to the soft power resources.



Figure 10: Al Bayt Stadium render shared on social media. A clear border or boundary between the desert house typologies and the iconic stadiums.

Conclusion

a future (un)seen

Exponential growth

⁵⁹ (Zakaria 2011)

⁶⁰ (OMA 2019)

⁶¹ (Fabbri 2021)

⁶² (Reuters 2012)

⁶³ (Mitchell and Katodrytis 2015)

In recent years, there has been a steady shift of power and influence away from the West to the East. Fareed Zakaria explains this as the 'post American World'.⁵⁹ Whatever this new world order will look like, it is clear that focused *entrepreneurship* like Qatar cannot be dismissed. Architecture becomes an instrument of its endeavours with visible changes on its urban plane, revealing the complicated and fragile relationship between modernization, nation-building and internationalism. The need of an authentic Qatari identity and playing out its imagined narratives creates an incoherent dialogue. As a result, leaving a gap between the brand it markets and the product the audience receives.

Marketing and heavy financial injections into urban development is not sufficient to convince to the point of credibility. What urban governance need to grasp is that architecture - as a representational force - may act as a superficial display that conveys a message through its appeal, materiality, technology and reference. But it is not a case of *Fait accompli*; it continues to evolve. However, in Qatar this evolution is observed to be speeded-up and as Rem Koolhaas puts it: 'typically a learning curve eventually flattens out. By relentlessly placing tremendous challenges before itself - a major airport, the World Cup, the Olympics, new cultural institutions like Qatar Museums and Education City - Qatar put itself in a situation where the curve constantly became steeper.'⁶⁰ The question is where does this lead at a human and urban scale?

These mega-events and projects are catalysts of change to gain legitimacy yet the danger is that this deliberate impetus is annihilating the organic growth of urban complexities resulting in *place marketing* rather than *place making* - the 'Genius loci has become the Genius logo'.⁶¹ The corollary of this is a great change in culture and identity. Though this is a natural result of progress, the speed that this is currently happening - evolution x 1000 - can expect to lead to a backlash. Michael Stephens, researcher at the Royal United Services Institute in Qatar states: 'the Qataris don't want to see their country's culture given over to foreigners. You'd get serious anger if that ever happened.'⁶² Natural growth in Qatar is not an option. Its urbanism does not belong to its people but the global market. Katodrytis and Mitchell are urban scholars that explain this: 'the expansion of cities like Dubai and Doha results in global media attention that focuses on the scale and speed of growth; however characterizations are often reduced to caricature, which prohibits a more nuanced understanding of forces that shape architecture and urbanism in the region.'⁶³

Figure 11: a worker cleaning one of the skyscrapers in West Bay.

Thus in answering the fundamental question: *To what extent has the architectural development in Qatar reflected its foreign policy with a focus on the period from 1995 to 2030.*

The iconic and distinguished architecture may serve as a tool of the nation's boundless ambitions, but they fail in terms of essence and functionality. Hence, its power is limited.



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