

The Impact of Hosting and Organizing Sporting Events

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore and evaluate the multifaceted impacts—including political, economic, social, cultural, civilizational, geographical, media, and marketing dimensions—that have emerged and evolved as a consequence of hosting this tournament. This study examined the strategic, political, economic, social, cultural, media, and geographical dimensions associated with Iraq's hosting of the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup Football Championship in Basra in 2023. It aimed to assess the extent to which the event contributed to strengthening national identity, improving Iraq's regional and international standing, and promoting local development. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining descriptive analysis with a case study design. Data collection covered the period prior to 2022 through 2023. The findings indicate that the championship functioned as a form of sports diplomacy, facilitating political rapprochement between Iraq and the Gulf states and contributing to a more favorable international perception of Iraq. The study recommends developing clear strategies to maintain the event's economic, cultural, and social benefits and to engage the national and regional private sectors in sustaining its long-term legacy.

Keyword: Geopolitical Boundaries; Sports Tourism; Marketing and Media; History and Civilization; Sports Economics

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1. INTRODUCTION

Hosting major sporting events is one of the most important means countries rely on and use to enhance their global standing. These activities contribute to political gains by strengthening the soft power of the country hosting the tournament (Ahmady et al., 2016). Research shows that sporting events and tournaments are ways to enhance diplomatic influence and strengthen international ties and bonds (Akta et al., 2011). This highlights the role of geopolitical dimensions in hosting and organizing such sporting events and competitions (Badmus, 2019).

(Barrick et al., 2015) Undoubtedly, the researcher confirms that politics plays an important role in the world today. From this standpoint, sports are considered one of the most important fields that can be exploited and relied upon to promote countries, raise their status, and market them. In this context, we find most countries around the world today trying to host sports competitions and events (Bayram & Shields, 2021). This, if anything, indicates that they have proven their ability and significant role in directing attention to countries (VanPatten, 1990). This is what we have observed over the years, the most recent of which was the FIFA World Cup hosted by the State of Qatar in 2022, and we witnessed its significant impact on the world. In line with what was mentioned, the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup Football Championship in the city of Basra in southern Iraq in 2023 embodied Iraq's role in the Arabian Gulf region and the world, as it strengthened its position and role in the region. Iraq achieved significant gains, especially political and diplomatic, and this competition had a profound impact on everyone who watched and attended this global Gulf event (Al-Emadi et al., 2022). This championship strengthened ties between Iraq and its Gulf Arab brethren, after decades of disputes and problems (Al-Emadi et al., 2022). This competition was considered a message to international sports organizations, demonstrating Iraq as a safe and stable country with the ability to organize competitions and sporting events, whether at the regional or international level (De Bosscher et al., 2009). (2023, <https://n9.cl/h5wr0>) On the other hand, the economic sector is the largest beneficiary of hosting competitions and sporting events, and is almost the main reason for which countries make great efforts to obtain and organize championships (Elahi et al., 2021). Countries enhance their opportunities to strengthen their domestic and national economy by increasing spending on the tourism sector, creating and creating job opportunities, and encouraging other sectors such as hosting, reception, and travel. A research paper showed that hosting major sporting championships increases tourism income and revenues, while creating new jobs and businesses. These matters raise the level of economic progress and advancement in countries that organize

sporting events (Nikolaou et al., 2023). (Lin & Lu, 2018) From this standpoint, the 2023 Arabian Gulf Cup in Basra contributed to stimulating the economy of this city and increasing its activity. We noticed this through the attendance of fans and visitors in large numbers that the city had never witnessed before. This resulted in increased demands for hotel reservations, which were completely full, as well as restaurants, as well as transportation and transport. Reports indicated that this huge event brought economic benefits to many sectors, and created jobs and businesses for the people of Basra Governorate. The city hosted 34,000 fans on the first and second days of the tournament (2023, <https://n9.cl/zdlly>). From a cultural and civilizational perspective, this event serves as a platform for presenting Iraq's cultural and civilizational heritage. Such sporting events are an opportunity to showcase their customs, traditions, and cultural history for the world to see. They are also an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the improvement and growth achieved by host countries in various sectors by hosting international competitions and activities. These events contribute to strengthening and enhancing the cultural and civilizational awareness of peoples, familiarizing them with their significant heritage, and strengthening and reinforcing national identity, as well as the glory and pride of the country's heritage (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006). Furthermore, these competitions significantly contribute to consolidating and strengthening the impression and effective and positive influence of the host countries, reflecting their ability and capacity to successfully manage and organize these tournaments. They have demonstrated Iraq's ability to successfully organize these tournaments despite the obstacles and problems it faces (Toohey & Veal 2007). In this context, the Arabian Gulf Cup Championship in the Iraqi city of Basra demonstrated and reflected its civilizational and cultural heritage and historical depth that dazzled the world in the land of Mesopotamia, where those who attended the championship, whether in the stadium or through the media with its various tools, watched the opening carnival and the start of the championship with its big surprises, given the events and activities that were presented that dazzled the world, and are still being talked about today, to the point that it was preferred to the opening of the last FIFA World Cup and other countries that organized and hosted world championships previously (2023, <https://n9.cl/fujwl>). From a marketing and media perspective, such major sporting events and competitions create suitable opportunities for companies, factories, products and services, as well as institutions and organizations to market and promote them through sponsorships and advertisements, as these tournaments contribute to supporting, strengthening and spreading the commercial significance and raising the level of awareness of what it offers and sells, which in turn will strengthen, support and increase returns, whether commercial or investment (Chalip, 2004). This tournament received great media attention and all media outlets and tools, and it was met with unexpected favor and satisfaction, given what was seen in it, as it showed the status of Iraq and demonstrated its role through marketing and media aspects at the global and regional levels. The Washington Post described it as a unique, distinctive and tremendous moment, which brought Mesopotamia back to the circle of Gulf and Arab enlightenment after the Gulf countries had been away from Iraq for a long time, as this sports tournament helped and assisted it in highlighting Iraq as a country of peace, stability and reassurance, with unparalleled hospitality, and with the capabilities and ability to organize major sports tournaments despite obstacles and challenges, and this contributed to strengthening the mental image of the country among Arab and foreign fans (2023, <https://n9.cl/jn7y8>). In line with the above, the marketing aspect showed significant progress and improvement, as observed through the organization and management of the opening and closing ceremonies of the tournament. A contract was signed with a global company specializing in organizing and importing major competitions and events, PICO. This organization relied on the use of advanced visual displays with 3D lighting technology. The activities showcased the essence of Iraqi culture through artistic and musical performances and folklore, which were disseminated directly to the crowds and fans, both inside and outside the stadium, and to the entire world. This demonstrated a marketing factor that exceeded expectations in achieving success and highlighted Iraq and Basra with a new, liberated, different, and culturally diverse image (2023, <https://n9.cl/hk8zod> Pico). The celebration and closing ceremonies received extensive media coverage by major media institutions and channels, most notably the world-famous Gulf channels and international newspapers. Social media was abuzz with the two events, showing the astonishment of people around the world. Given the circumstances Iraq was previously experiencing, no one expected such a tournament to be organized, with such success and such development on all levels and in all aspects.

The importance of this research paper is highlighted by its shedding light on a regional and international activity that has crossed geopolitical borders, by combining the sports sector with the changes and transformations on the social, political, economic, cultural, civilizational, geographical, etc. aspects, after Iraq's

absence from hosting tournaments that extended for 40 years. This event represents its return to the international and regional arena in an international region characterized by thorny historical decades of conflicts, disputes, rivalries, wars, alienation, and diplomatic isolation. The study and research of the 25th Arabian Gulf Football Championship in Iraq achieves and surpasses this event and the championship itself, to clarify and reveal to us the ways and procedures of investing and seizing the great and major events as a way and path of international regional engagement and integration with the promotion of an effective and optimistic national and patriotic outlook in addition to supporting and strengthening the internal and external economy of Iraq and the city of Basra in particular, with the activation of popular diplomacy and returning Iraq to its Arab and Gulf surroundings after the long lean years that separated us. Therefore, this study gains its scientific and academic status from the unique and tremendous roles and effects felt by the Iraqi people in general and Basra in particular and the masses who visited Iraq in this championship. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is no previous study on these effects of the diverse and multiple nature that we studied in this study that examined the role of the sports sector as a tool representing comprehensive development (political, economic, cultural, civilizational, historical, geographical, marketing and media, etc.). This adds scientific and academic advantages and benefits to the field of sports management and its economies and the Iraqi government on the one hand, and the international one that You want to learn from this unique experience in a country that was full of security, political and social problems and crises in all aspects of life on the other hand, to benefit from it and build on it and exploit it in its new and future projects, and on the other hand this research paper came at a time characterized by competition between countries at the global level in hosting and organizing sports tournaments and events, as they are ways, means, tools and future plans in order to secure, accomplish and achieve development and sustainable progress, and this shows the 25th edition and the Arabian Gulf Cup in Basra Governorate and Iraq as a realistic model that can be benefited from.

This study aimed to identify and analyze the political, economic, social, cultural, civilizational, geographical, media, and marketing impacts that resulted and improved as a result of hosting the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup Football Championship in 2023, and to evaluate the level and degree of its contribution to enhancing and improving growth at the local and national levels and strengthening the Iraqi national identity with openness at the Gulf, international, and Arab levels.

The research problem was represented by the following question: What are the reasons that led Iraq to host and organize the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup Football Championship in 2023 in the city of Basra, and how was this competition invested in various aspects: political, economic, social, marketing and media, cultural and civilizational, and geographical?

The researcher assumes that hosting the Arabian Gulf Football Championship came with incentives, motives and reasons of a comprehensive and integrated strategic nature with the aim of achieving an effective and positive impact with multiple dimensions and variables including political, economic, social, marketing, media, cultural, civilizational and geographical aspects, and that Mesopotamia strengthened its development of a local, national, international and regional nature and improved its mental image, with an increase in the activity of the investment and media scene in this region of the world through this hosting.

The study's timeframe encompassed the period from 2022 to the end of 2023, with the potential to include indications and references to the periods preceding and following this tournament. The spatial framework focused on the city of Basra in particular, as it hosted this tournament, and Iraq in general.

Theoretical Framework

1- The Arabian Gulf Cup Football Championship: The first edition of this competition began in 1970 in the Kingdom of Bahrain, with the participation of only four teams (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE). Since then, it has become a very influential and important historical sporting activity in the Arabian Gulf region. What is striking about this tournament, from its inception to the most recent tournament held in the Iraqi city of Basra, is the significant development it has witnessed in various aspects, whether organizationally, technically, media-wise, marketing-wise, economically, etc. The number of participating teams increased to (8) in the (17) tournament hosted by the State of Qatar (<https://n9.cl/ikp37>).

2. Objectives of establishing the tournament: To support and strengthen competition between Gulf

countries, in order to raise the level of performance and development of these teams. To strengthen cultural and social ties between the peoples of the region. To showcase talents and provide opportunities for young age groups to showcase their potential. To improve and strengthen solidarity and cooperation between football associations in the Arabian Gulf (2024 - <https://n9.cl/nrh2i>).

3- Basra City: It is located in southern Iraq and is its economic capital. It overlooks the Arabian Gulf and is distinguished by its geographical location. It is considered of great economic importance as it contains the main seaport of Iraq and the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. It is considered one of the important Islamic cities and has been a cultural, artistic and civilizational center throughout ancient and modern history. It is classified as the second largest city in Iraq and has hosted many artistic, cultural and sporting events, activities and events, most notably the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup Football Championship in 2023, which was crowned with resounding success in various aspects (2021, <https://n9.cl/w2tkj>).

4 - Theories that explain and rely on this topic, which address the role of sporting activities and major events in societies:

1 - Short-term economic impact: This is a classic rule that predicts that major events and activities result in direct growth and advancement in domestic and local spending, with increased profits and returns from the tourism sector, and increased employment and work. (Thabi, K. 2024).

2 - Sustainability and feasibility: In the last (5) years, literature has increased, warning against exaggerating benefits, excluding and marginalizing costs, or ignoring the social sphere. This has led to a narrowing of the role and status of planning, beyond championships and activities, as well as environmental sustainability. (Zourgani, & Bihi, 2023).

3 - Soft power and sports diplomacy: Recent studies demonstrate the impact of sporting activities as a field for rapprochement at the political level, improving and strengthening the nation's image at various levels, both regionally and internationally, and reshaping and expressing international and national politics. (Adel Al-Jubouri, 2023).

4- Local and national identity: It has been shown that major sporting events and tournaments support and strengthen national ties and identity, and lead to effective and positively directed transformations and changes in collective behavior, cohesion and solidarity in societies (Solberg, Storm, Swart, 2024).

Previous Studies

1. Fong, K. (2025) The Power Play: Assessing the Impact of Hosting Global Sporting Events.

This research paper aimed to identify the impact of organizing and hosting sporting events, such as the World Cup and the Olympic Games. It focused on economic gains, such as foreign investment and infrastructure expansion and development. It discussed and analyzed social transformations and changes, such as strengthening and enhancing national identity and increasing tourist numbers. It also explored financial obstacles and challenges, and the increased costs of hosting tournaments. It emphasized the role of continuous planning to secure and guarantee the benefits for residents of host countries and cities. This research paper provides an analytical model for estimating benefits versus costs.

2- Alshikhy, T., O'Sullivan, H., Polkinghorne, M., & Gennings, E. (2025). The Role and Impact of Sporting Mega-Events in the Context of Soft Power.

This research paper examines the impact of major sporting events and tournaments on enhancing and strengthening countries' soft power. It emphasizes and focuses on how major sporting events, such as the Olympics and World Cups, help change the global perception of host countries. It discusses the relationship between sports and diplomacy and their role in improving foreign relations. This study focuses on examples of countries that have hosted and organized sporting events and have used sports to enhance and develop their international influence and visibility. It also examines the effective elements, such as media coverage and popular and general perceptions.

3 - Nair, Girish K. (2021). Hosting Major International Sports Events in a Country: A Socioeconomic Impact.

This study examined the economic and social impact of sponsoring major sporting events in Qatar,

focusing on the FIFA World Cup. A questionnaire was used to collect information and data, and seven dimensions representing economic and social aspects were studied. The sample size was 126 individuals representing managers in the tourism sector and sporting event sponsorship. The results showed that the greatest impact was on the environmental awareness variable among Qataris, followed by the economic variable. The study also demonstrated the impact of sporting events on developing the tourism sector, increasing investments, enhancing cohesion among citizens, and improving the international community's perception of the country.

Hosting major sporting events has emerged as a strategic tool for countries seeking to enhance their international image and political influence. Several scholars highlight how such events serve as a form of soft power, enabling nations to foster diplomatic relations and reshape global perceptions (Ahmady et al., 2016; Akta et al., 2011). In particular, the geopolitical implications of organizing international tournaments are increasingly emphasized, as hosting becomes a means to project stability, competence, and openness to the world (Badmus, 2019; Bayram & Shields, 2021).

The 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar is a notable example of how sports can act as a diplomatic platform, amplifying national narratives and facilitating regional re-engagement. Similarly, Iraq's hosting of the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup in Basra in 2023 marked a critical moment in its efforts to reposition itself within the Gulf and Arab spheres after decades of political isolation and conflict. This event provided an opportunity not only to improve Iraq's regional ties but also to demonstrate its organizational capacity and internal stability (Al-Emadi et al., 2022; De Bosscher et al., 2009).

Beyond political and diplomatic dimensions, sporting events also have measurable economic, cultural, and media-related impacts. They stimulate local economies through tourism, hospitality, and employment generation (Elahi et al., 2021; Nikolaou et al., 2023). Moreover, such events become platforms for cultural diplomacy, allowing host nations to present their heritage and identity to global audiences (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; Toohey & Veal, 2007).

Despite a growing body of literature examining mega sporting events in the contexts of economic gain or soft power—particularly in Western and Gulf countries—few studies have explored how such events function as multi-dimensional development tools in post-conflict nations like Iraq. This research addresses that gap by analyzing the broad-ranging impacts—political, economic, social, cultural, and media-related—of the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup in Iraq.

By focusing on a country emerging from prolonged instability, this study provides insight into how sports can be leveraged not merely as entertainment, but as an integrated strategy for national rebranding, internal development, and regional reengagement.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the political, economic, social, cultural, geographical, and marketing dimensions of the global sports industry, using the English Premier League (EPL) as a case study. Data were collected through a combination of content analysis and document review, drawing from official league reports, media publications, academic journals, and institutional databases relevant to the EPL's operations. The selection of the EPL as a case was based on purposive sampling, due to its status as one of the most globally recognized and economically influential sports leagues. To ensure validity and reliability, data triangulation was applied by cross-referencing multiple reputable sources, and thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns and issues. The analytical process followed systematic coding procedures to enhance the consistency and credibility of the findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social and Cultural Impacts

The data presented in Table 1 reveal that the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup held in Basra in 2023 was not merely a football tournament—it was a comprehensive social and cultural phenomenon that transcended the boundaries of sport. With over 450,000 attendees and stadium occupancy exceeding 95%, the tournament reflected the Iraqi people's deep-rooted passion for football and their readiness to unite under a national

identity. This extraordinary public engagement marked a significant turning point in Iraq's social revival, reinforcing a sense of unity, pride, and national belonging.

Cultural festivities accompanying the event—including 12 side activities and the participation of over 1,500 volunteers—showed the depth of societal involvement, especially among youth. Notably, women's participation in stadium attendance rose by 30%, highlighting a growing inclusivity in Iraqi society. Moreover, media coverage across over 500 reports elevated the national narrative, while extensive social media interaction demonstrated the global reach of the event. Local unity also saw a remarkable boost, with citizen approval rates exceeding 90% and visible cross-sectarian solidarity.

The championship not only fostered national pride but also bridged regional gaps. The two-week reception of Gulf delegations underscored Iraq's role as a hospitable and unified host. Campaigns like "Ain Ghata wa Ain Farash" epitomized Iraq's welcoming spirit. Overall, the Gulf Cup catalyzed the projection of Iraq as a peaceful and capable nation, ready to reengage with the Arab and international community. Such events serve as instruments of soft power and public diplomacy, enhancing Iraq's image and societal cohesion (Ludvigsen, Rookwood & Parnell, 2022).

Economic, Marketing, and Tourism Impacts

Table 2 indicates that the Gulf Cup generated significant economic momentum in Basra and beyond. The Iraqi government allocated approximately \$33 million in support of tournament logistics and infrastructure—covering stadiums, roads, and public services. This investment spurred a direct economic benefit: 100% hotel occupancy, a 45% rise in tourism sales, and a 25% increase in domestic trade during the tournament period.

The economic ripple effects extended to multiple sectors. Marketing contracts—totaling more than 12—attracted both Gulf and local companies, while ticket revenues reached \$5 million, supporting a sustainable event budget. Temporary job creation rose by 18%, benefiting workers in hospitality, transportation, and security. Additionally, delivery and logistics services generated nearly \$4 million, emphasizing the impact of tourism-related mobility.

Basra's visibility as a tourist destination significantly improved, with projected tourism growth beyond the event expected to rise by 30%. Media contracts and broadcast partnerships with seven foreign TV outlets extended Iraq's reach to Gulf and Arab audiences. Despite organizational challenges related to crowd capacity and transportation infrastructure, the tournament proved to be a strategic economic driver that positioned Basra as a viable hub for future regional events (Taghreed Al-Otaibi, 2017).

Political, Diplomatic, and Cultural Dimensions

As shown in Table 3, the Gulf Cup played a notable role in Iraq's political and diplomatic repositioning. The presence of 18 official Gulf and ministerial delegations reflected an unusual level of political engagement unseen since the 1990s. The event catalyzed political discourse at various levels—both indirectly through sports diplomacy and directly via supportive governmental declarations, reinforcing Iraq's openness to the Arab world.

Media presence during the tournament was unprecedented, with over 2,475 journalists covering the event and 1,000+ news reports produced, signaling intense international interest. The opening carnival intentionally employed Iraqi cultural symbolism, creating a narrative that celebrated the country's ancient heritage. Moreover, despite debates around the championship's name and regional sensitivities, the overall Gulf media discourse remained positive, commending Iraq's organizational success.

On the cultural front, the tournament coincided with a surge in art exhibitions, heritage celebrations, and cultural festivals, all of which played a role in redefining Iraq's modern identity. The event encouraged the internal discourse of national unity and showcased Basra as a "Gateway to the Gulf," reaffirming Iraq's regional integration. The tournament also supported Iraq's diplomatic agenda by highlighting security stability and enhancing its international reputation as a capable host for global events.

These findings affirm the transformative power of sports as tools of soft power, public diplomacy, and national identity building. As Doğaner (2022) notes, sporting events now occupy a strategic position in shaping international relations, enhancing national prestige, and influencing public perception—an insight powerfully

demonstrated by Iraq's successful hosting of the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup.

4. CONCLUSION

The 25th Arabian Gulf Cup in Basra demonstrated Iraq's exceptional ability to foster national unity, strengthen civic identity, and promote inclusive participation across societal lines. Beyond its sporting dimension, the tournament became a unifying force that transcended sectarian and regional divisions, revitalized values of citizenship, and reinforced a culture of coexistence. Economically, it stimulated significant growth through surges in tourism, hospitality, and local commerce, proving Iraq's potential as a viable host for major sporting events. Politically, the competition served as an effective instrument of sports diplomacy, enhancing Iraq's image as a stable, welcoming nation and opening doors for closer cooperation with Gulf countries. The wide-reaching media coverage helped shift global perceptions, portraying Iraq in a positive light and highlighting its cultural richness and organizational capacity. Moreover, the tournament deepened connections to Iraq's historical and cultural identity, inspiring pride and engagement among youth and intellectuals alike. To sustain this legacy, it is recommended that Iraq: (1) invest in lasting sports tourism infrastructure; (2) enhance youth and women's involvement in sports through educational and professional development; (3) maintain civic engagement via community and volunteer initiatives; (4) integrate national and Gulf private sectors to preserve the tournament's long-term social and economic impact; and (5) capitalize on the tournament's diplomatic momentum by institutionalizing sports diplomacy and establishing research centers to evaluate and build upon the event's success.

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