Urban Development and Social Change in Qatar: The Qatar National Vision 2030 and the 2022 FIFA World Cup

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Published online: 03 Dec 2012.


To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21534764.2012.736204

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Urban Development and Social Change in Qatar:  
The Qatar National Vision 2030 and the 2022 FIFA World Cup

NADINE SCHARFENORT

Abstract: On 2 December 2010, Qatar, the exotic outsider, surprisingly won the bid for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, thereby becoming the first Middle Eastern country chosen to host the global festival of this ‘royal football league’. Qataris have high hopes for the tournament, and ambitious aims for their country’s development in preparation for 2022 and beyond. Since the rise to power of the current Amir, Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, in 1995, he has gradually introduced neoliberal policies in an attempt to build a knowledge-based economy. These developments are taking place in the context of Qatar’s National Vision 2030, the blueprint for Qatar’s economic, social, human, and environmental development over the next two decades. This paper examines these developments and the social and cultural challenges Qataris will face as a result of their implementation.

Keywords: Qatar, Qatar National Vision 2030, FIFA World Cup, football, development, tourism, social and cultural change, GCC states, Gulf

1 “Today we celebrate, but tomorrow, the work begins…”¹

During its bid for the 2022 FIFA World Cup (with France’s former midfielder Zinedine Zidane appointed ambassador of the tournament entry), Qatar offered the biggest and most profitable event ever for FIFA, along with untapped opportunities for potential investors, while positioning itself as a gateway to the MENA region. When the smallest country to host the World Cup since Uruguay (1930) was simultaneously awarded the 2022 tournament and the 2021 FIFA Confederations Cup on 2 December 2010, Qatar also became the first Middle Eastern country to accommodate the ‘royal tournament’. Having seen off rivals like Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the USA,² Qatar must now convince its critics in the world of football of its potential.

Although the FIFA decision was in doubt from the start, suspicions soon developed that Qatar had paid off key members of FIFA to win the bid ahead of the other competitors — suspicions that were never unsubstantiated. Awarding the World Cup to ‘Islamic’ Qatar was contemptuously referred to as a ‘Qatarstrophe’ in the boulevard press, and many feared that FIFA was damaging

¹ HH Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani on the occasion of winning the bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup on 2 Dec. 2010.
² At the time of the decision, bids for 2018 were made by Belgium/the Netherlands, England, Portugal/Spain, and Russia, while Australia, Japan, Qatar, South Korea, and the United States were bidding candidates for 2022.
its flagship product. Allegations of corruption among FIFA officials raised questions about the possibility that Qatar (and Russia, which had been awarded the tournament for 2018) had bought the Cup through bribery on the part of the Qatari FIFA official Mohammed bin Hammam.\(^3\)

Qatar has ambitious aims: to bring all outlying towns and settlements together, to offer a modern, prosperous urban culture featuring breathtaking stadium designs, accompanied by a new metro and railway network and a much-expanded international airport and port, as well as bridging the gulf between Bahrain and Qatar. These objectives are all part of the Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030), a comprehensive long-term plan agreed in 2007 that visualizes Qatar’s development up to 2030.

Qatar is currently undergoing a process of massive urban and infrastructural development. During the past decade, its capital Doha has changed visibly, from an inconspicuous, mid-sized town into a bustling hotspot with an alluring waterfront area (Corniche) and a signature skyline. Construction is a profitable sector, and will continue to be so in the coming years, since infrastructure, the transportation network, and the urban area are still being improved and extended.

Having already transformed its urban appeal during the past decade, Qatar will undoubtedly provide an excellent infrastructure to meet FIFA’s demands and will refashion itself in time for the World Cup. Even so, concerns have been expressed about the social and cultural clashes to be expected in connection with the tournament. Qatar, like Saudi Arabia, follows the conservative Wahhabi branch of Islam, although, unlike Saudi Arabia, alcohol is available for non-Muslim white-collar expats to purchase in most hotels as well as two discreet, out-of-the-way stores. But regardless of whether or not Qatar will be a professional and appropriate host for the ultimate football event in 2022, this paper examines Qatar’s urban and tourism development objectives, based on the QNV 2030, and the significance of football for Qatar in its economic, political, and social dimensions. It also looks at specific social challenges that may be anticipated in the run-up to the FIFA World Cup 2022 (or similar mega events).

Discussion is based on primary and secondary sources, including the results of face-to-face interviews with staff from the Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA) and the Ministry of Municipalities and Urban Planning, from an international hotel chain, and academics from Qatar University. Interviews were appropriately annotated; the respondents are anonymous, as requested.

2 Visions for development
Since the mid-twentieth century and the exploitation of natural hydrocarbon resources (referred to as ‘oil-urbanization’ by many authors)\(^4\), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states experienced extensive urban, socio-economic, and political transformation.\(^5\) Globalization has also affected the region, especially with regard to lifestyle choices, consumption patterns, urban landscapes, the labor force, and the composition of the population. These enduring transformations constantly challenge the traditional lifestyles of the local population as well as living conditions among the migrants.

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3 On 29 May 2011, FIFA’s Ethics Committee suspended Bin Hammam (and Jack Warner) temporarily from all football-related activities, following a full inquiry into accusations that they had offered financial incentives to members of the Caribbean Football Union. Bin Hammam was banned for life from all football activities by a five-member panel of the FIFA Ethics Committee on 23 July 2011.

4 For further reading and discussion on the term “oil-urbanization” see Scharfenort, Urbane Visionen am Arabischen Golf: Die Post-Oil-Cities Abu Dhabi, Dubai und Sharjah (2009).

5 The GCC states include Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Oman.
With the growing internationalism of economic, social, and cultural relations, some coastal cities (e.g. Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha) have gained confidence in their specializations. As they integrate into the global network, they compete with each other to increase their attractiveness to investors, visitors, and residents. Over the past ten–fifteen years, they have undergone huge restructuring and re-planning processes, based mainly on the implementation of (large-scale) urban development projects and often accompanied by visionary urban plans. Spatial fragmentation of urban landscapes and design and the on-going privatization of public spaces are physically altering the urban morphology with its social structures, networks, and interactions. Thus Dubai is usually portrayed as a prime example of an unparalleled interpretation of neoliberal urbanization policies that have become a model for the Arab World and beyond; it has also set new and often copied standards for urbanization within and outside the region. Adham refers to these newly emerging urbanities as “a confluence of strategies of consumerism, entertainment, and global tourism.”

Qatar too has experienced a remarkable socioeconomic and urban transformation since Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani came to power in 1995. The country enjoys unique prosperity and exceptional economic and urban progress secured by its substantial hydrocarbon resources, which provide a solid foundation for its economic profile. The export of gas and related products still accounts for half of the country’s GDP, and provides Qatar with abundant wealth. The country has outlined public investment plans worth US$95 billion over the next five years (until 2017), aimed at turning it into a leading cultural, financial, and sporting center as it prepares to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup. For the current fiscal year alone, Qatar unveiled a further budgetary spending of US$49 billion.

Around 60% of the population is concentrated in the metropolitan area of Doha, which highlights the extraordinary importance of the capital region. Out of a population of 1.7 million (2010 census), Qatari nationals form a minority of 250,000–300,000. The country accommodates a large expatriate community with over 100 nationalities mainly from Arab countries (e.g. Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon), South and Southeast Asia (e.g. India, Pakistan, Nepal), Europe, North America, and Africa (mostly East Africa). As a result, the spatial restructuring of Doha to accommodate sustained population growth has become one of the key objectives of physical planning.

Like other GCC state capitals, Doha, though long absent from the urban discourse in the Gulf, has rapidly transformed itself in recent years. The multi-ethnic nature of the city is characterized by cultural and social fissure lines and hierarchical structures, resulting in urban islands of segregation and exclusiveness. In terms of development, Qatar is said to be ten years behind Dubai, the region’s ‘neoliberal role model’, but in general, developments have become more harmonized. Although actors and alliances are subject to change through neoliberal development.

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10. Interview, Doha, 19 Apr. 2012.
processes, Nagy emphasizes the (continuing) strong role of the government as a prominent actor in the esthetic and spatial presentation of the nation, especially in the capital city.\textsuperscript{15} Qatar’s government supports high-profile urban design and the real estate projects that have produced urban expansion and the beautification of Doha (mainly such in core areas as West Bay, the Corniche, Education City, and the city center). In recent years, Doha has hosted many important political and social events, and in 2010 was named the ‘Arab Capital of Culture’.\textsuperscript{16} But despite its rapid economic gains and overall transformation, observable in its architecture (Figure 1), Qatar has tried to defend its cultural and traditional values.

Qatar aims by 2030 to have transformed itself into an innovative country, capable of sustaining development and providing a high standard of living. According to Alraouf, Doha is considered “the most advanced city within the Middle East”, having adopted a knowledge economy as the conceptual basis for its 2030 vision.\textsuperscript{17} This vision is structured around huge investments in education, science, and research, explicitly affirming the knowledge economy as the ‘selected economic platform for the country’s future’.

2.1 Qatar National Vision 2030

Like all GCC countries, Qatar has created a master plan, the QNV 2030, for reaching its long-term objectives and to provide a framework for implementing its national strategies. Following approval by Amiri Decision 44, the plan was launched in October 2008 by HH Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, the heir apparent.\textsuperscript{18} One of QNV 2030’s main aims at the macro level is to increase Qatar’s economic, political, and cultural role in the region, particularly within the


\textsuperscript{16} A UNESCO initiative to promote and recognize Arab culture (slogan: “Arab Culture, Our Nation, Doha its Capital”) as well as to encourage cooperation in the Arab region.

\textsuperscript{17} Alraouf, “A New Paradigm in Knowledge-Based Urban Development: From Knowledge to Creativity Economy, Qatar Urbanity Transformed”, working paper submitted to the Knowledge Cities World Summit, Melbourne (2010), pp. 1273, 1279.

framework of the GCC, the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Long-term outcomes for the country are clearly defined by QNV 2030, which provides a roadmap for implementing national strategies. It also proposes solutions to key problems concerning human, social, economic, and environmental development that will meet the requirements of future generations while achieving a balance between progress and environmental protection (see Figure 2).

Qatar’s long-term progress objectives are built on principles of sustainable development for more prosperous performance, with human and cultural development being core elements in reaching the advanced status of a knowledge society. These goals can be achieved only by establishing healthy partnerships between society, business, and politics, and forming new alliances between stakeholders in planning, government, academia, and the economy.

Qatar has already made noticeable progress in the area of human development and in the group of countries with a very high human development, is ranked at 37 out of 187 countries after the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (30) and before Bahrain (42).

2.2 Tourism development

According to projections by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), international tourism will continue to grow until 2030. The Middle East has been one of the fastest-growing tourism destinations worldwide, with international tourist arrivals having increased from thirty-four million (2000) to sixty million in 2010. UNWTO recently highlighted city destinations like Dubai and Doha, as well as Oman, as catalysts for increased international demand that might lead to a boost in the tourism and hospitality industry and attract more visitors to the region.

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19 At the end of June 2011, the former Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) changed its title to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (cleverly retaining its initials).
22 United Nations World Tourism Organization, “International Tourism by (Sub)region”, UNWTO World Tourism Barometer (2012); Khalil, “Arab Spring Benefits Safe Destinations: Tunisia, Egypt Among Biggest
Within the Middle East, the oil-rich GCC states have built their economies primarily on the hydrocarbons industry. Dubai was the first destination to attempt to develop its tourism infrastructure as an alternative source of revenue, with a brand strategy to attract visitors that has proved successful in the new globalized economy. As well as more customary forms of travel (business, recreation, and Islamic travel), these states have, to varying degrees, established national tourism development and marketing strategies that have invited new forms of tourism based on retail, sports, and entertainment, along with niche tourism initiatives.

Tourism in Qatar was low-key for years, but during the past decade has developed rapidly along with Qatar’s growing popularity as host for important political events (including WTO Doha Round 2001, and GCC summits), annual sporting events (e.g. for tennis: ATP Qatar ExxonMobil/WTA Sony Ericsson Championships; for Golf: Commercial Bank of Qatar Masters; plus the Motor Bike Grand Prix, Cycling Tour of Qatar, Powerboat Grand Prix, and World Series Diving) and one-off sporting events (such as the 2006 Asian Games, the Asian Cup, 2011, and the Arab Olympics, 2011). These events all attracted international attention and pushed overall development. Development of the tourism sector represents one of the pillars of QNV 2030 to help develop the country into a competitive and recognizable economy of worldwide relevance, an ambitious objective that poses a considerable challenge since competition within the region, particularly with Dubai and Abu Dhabi, is thriving.

The foundations for strategic development were laid in early 2000, when the government-owned QTA was established. An initial and ambitious US$15 billion plan to reinvent Qatar as a premier tourist destination that would by 2010 attract over a million visitors annually, was unveiled in 2004, and the target had already been reached by 2007, when Qatar received around 964,000 visitors (increasing to 1.4 million in 2008), with 95% arriving for commercial purposes.

From the beginning of the twenty-first century, the number of hotels increased from eighteen in 2000 to thirty-five in 2005, and to seventy-four in 2011. Occupancy grew more than ninefold, from 309,216 in 1995 to 2,905,300 in 2011, and bed numbers rose to 15,312 in seventy-four hotels (2011). With further aggressive expansion plans, Qatar expects to reach the critical number of 30,000 hotel rooms and serviced apartments by 2013, and up to 2022, another 5,000 new hotel rooms will be added annually.

Although most new hotels have opened since 2009, Qatar has only just entered the take-off phase, having so far provided a fraction of the required 84,000 rooms that it promised to supply for the tournament, especially in the non-luxury sector. Half the hotels are classified below four- and five-star level, with 77% of all bed stock in these segments. Until recently, Qatar promoted hotel openings in the luxury segment, with little consideration for tourists with more modest budgets. Bed numbers in three-star hotels even decreased slightly (by around

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Govers and Go, Place Branding: Glocal, Virtual and Physical Identities, Constructed, Imagined and Experienced (2009), pp. 81–2.

Qatar’s ambitions to brand itself as a cultural destination are challenged, particularly by Abu Dhabi which is also establishing a museums hub on Saadiyat Island.


200) after 2010, to 17.5% of total capacity, while beds in one- and two-star hotels make up less than 5%. Though some hotels in the medium-priced sector have recently opened, other properties face demolition or have had to close for renovation, to maintain competitiveness and keep pace with the new supply.

3 Symbolic, political, and socioeconomic dimensions of football

Mega events are growing around the world in number and size, and sporting events in particular are attracting millions of spectators and media audiences. Some are annual events in the same location; others, like the FIFA World Cup, are subject to competition between countries and cities wishing to act as hosts. Hosting these prestigious festivals is an honorable challenge accompanied by years of careful advance planning and coordination for in cooperation with an internationally constituted body (e.g. FIFA, Olympic Committee).

Qatar aims to brand itself globally as a leading location for hosting and enjoying sports. The capital is well-defined as the country’s center for sports, and accommodates certain relevant institutions (e.g. the ASPIRE Zone). The ‘ASPIRE Academy for Sports Excellence’ (founded 2005), another segment of the ASPIRE initiative, is an elite educational sports institute that aims to develop young athletes. Over several years, Qatar has invested about US$2.8 billion in sports-related infrastructure to support sports competitions and to nurture sports activities in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and South America (thus ASPIRE Senegal, and ASPIRE Football Dreams).

3.1 Football in Qatar

Football was introduced to the region in the mid-1940s with the arrival of oil workers. The first ‘Qatari’ football team was set up in Dukhan in 1948, and Al-Najah, the first club, was established two years later. The Qatar Football Association (QFA) was founded in 1970 as a governing body. Qatar, despite its small size, currently has twelve football clubs (the latest was established in 2009), listed by the QFA as follows:

- Al Ahli, Ahli Stadium, Doha, est. 1950
- Al ‘Arabi, Grand Hamad Stadium, Doha, est. 1952
- Al Gharafa, Thani Bin Jassim Stadium, Doha, est. 1979
- Al Khor, Al Khor Stadium, Al Khor, est. 1961
- Al Rayyan, Ahmed bin Ali Stadium, Doha, est. 1967
- Al Sadd, Jassim bin Hamad Stadium, Doha, est. 1969
- Al Wakrah, Soud bin Abdulrahman, Al Wakrah, est. 1959

32 ASPIRE is a premier complex with sports stadiums and medical facilities (such as Aspetar, the region’s first specialized orthopedic and sports medicine hospital). It also houses the ASPIRE Dome, the world’s biggest convertible indoor sporting hall in the world.
33 ASPIRE Senegal is an education and sports institute encompassing eleven African nations.
34 ASPIRE Football Dreams aims to give young players in underdeveloped countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America an opportunity to reach the height of international football through careful training and development, while focusing on school education and personality development at the same time.
El-Jaish, Ahmed bin Ali, Duhail, est. 2007
Kharaitiyat, Ahmed bin Ali Stadium, Kharaitiyat, est. 1996
Lekhwiya, Thani bin Jassim Stadium, Al Wa’ab City, est. 2009
Qatar S.C., Suhaim bin Hamad Stadium, Doha, est. 1959
Umm Salal, Suhaim bin Hamad Stadium, Umm Salal, est. 1995.

In the early years, players for the Qatari clubs were mostly foreign workers from Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon or Iran, but today’s teams typically consist of a few nationals and local expatriates, along with top international players and trainers recruited under contract from all over the world.

The multi-ethnic Qatar national football team, coached since February 2012 by Paulo Autuori, was ranked 101 in October 2012 (highest FIFA ranking fifty-first in August 1993) in the FIFA/Coca-Cola World Ranking and is the most successful of the GCC teams. Despite its mid-range ranking at the international level, Qatar has never represented Asia in a FIFA World Cup before, although the national team has won the Gulf Cup at least twice (1992, 2004) and was decorated with a gold medal during the 2006 Asian Games. In 1984 and 1992, Qatar qualified for the Olympic Games football event and reached the quarter-finals during the Asian Cup in 2011.

Many of the current star players in the clubs were born outside the country but at least for their term of contract, hold Qatari passports; e.g. Sebastian Qintana (Uruguay), Fabio Cesar (Brazil), and Lawrence Quaye (Ghana). Despite being more privileged than other expatriates, they are still regarded as second-class nationals and therefore do not enjoy the boundless benefits of ‘full’ Qatari citizenship. Although Qatar still relies on external resources for its football teams by recruiting foreign players, a long-term aim is to recruit football players from within its own ranks. In this regard, ASPIRE does a good job of identifying promising young athletes whose skills are cultivated at an early stage.

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37 Since receiving Qatari citizenship Lawrence Quaye is also known as Anas Mubarak.
38 Those holding Qatari passports enjoy generous benefits, including free access to education and healthcare, preferential government housing and rental rates, and grants to facilitate everyday life. The government imposes no taxes and subsidizes water and electricity. Thus, being a non-citizen is synonymous with exclusion from all socio-economic and legal privileges that Gulf citizenship generally involves [Heard-Bey, From Tribe to State: the Transformation of Political Structure in Five States of the GCC (2008), p. 25], although citizenship is commonly perceived more as a status with benefits and rights while neglecting roles and responsibilities owed to the government.
3.2 Sports, culture, and identity

Sports and culture have become increasingly prominent, and, according to Baabood, who claims a significant interplay between identity and sports, “one of the most relevant features of sport is that it is an essential part of popular culture”, where people come together and speak a shared language to illustrate unity (e.g. team merchandise, colored faces, flag-waving, singing, and hugging; see Figure 3). Similar scenes occur even on national holidays where widespread national sentiment finds expression on the streets.

According to FIFA’s “Bid Evaluation Report” (2010), football is the most-watched program on TV in Qatar, with 77% of men and 64% of women tuning in to matches, while Al Jazeera TV network currently runs seventeen live sports channels, with more anticipated. However, because of its relatively small population, FIFA worries about Qatar’s limited potential in terms of the number of active local football supporters capable of filling the stadiums, not to mention the small market for FIFA’s commercial affiliates. Nevertheless, the GCC states collectively have one of the fastest-growing populations in the world, with an anticipated population increase up to 2020 of one-third, i.e. around fifty-three million people, most of whom will be under twenty-five years old. Furthermore, international visitors and team followers and supporters are expected to head for Qatar for short stays of at least two–three days to attend several matches.

Qatar’s overall passion for sports was initiated by the Amir HH Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, who predicted Qatar’s specialization as an athletics hub as early as 1979. Viewing sport as a unifying force, Qatar today invests in sports facilities in its own country and throughout the Middle East by building stadiums and multi-purpose sporting venues, e.g. in the Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, and Tunisia. Therefore its ambitious bid highlights its intention to unify the sporting interests of Middle Eastern populations and to initiate a new generation of football supporters. The country’s main development goals and activities are mentioned as being:

(a) the establishment of structures of non-elite football; (b) social integration tournaments for non-nationals living in Qatar; (c) grassroots and talent-scouting programs in Thailand and Nigeria (part of the ASPIRE program); (d) support through football in 16 schools in Nepal and Pakistan (in cooperation with Qatari NGO ROTA); (e) support for football programs in refugee camps in Syria and Lebanon; (f) promotion of women’s football; and (g) construction of 22 modular stadiums for developing countries.

As noted, reactions to the announcement that Qatar would host the FIFA World Cup 2022 were critical and harsh: Western countries especially were discontented with the controversial

41 Al Jazeera Sport, www.aljazeeraasport.tv.
42 This phenomenon was also observed during tournaments within (during AFC Asian Cup) and outside the country where people were paid or received free access to support the Qatari football team.
45 ROTA (Reach Out To Asia) is a Qatari non-governmental organization founded in 2005. Focused primarily on community development projects, it works to ensure that people affected by crisis have continuous access to relevant and high-quality primary and secondary education.
decision not to award the event to one of football’s ‘motherlands’. Some offended supporters condemned FIFA’s decision and raised accusations of bribery; others criticized the timing because of the summer heat and the need to play in closed air-conditioned surroundings. Others seemed irritated that this particular GCC country had been selected (instead, for example, of the UAE whose cities are more popular and better developed).47

Because weather conditions in June and July are excessively hot, rumors surfaced that the tournament would probably shift to the winter months (December/January), although Qatar has not requested a change in timing and has announced that to combat the heat, all stadiums, training sites, and open-air fan zones will be air-conditioned.49 Furthermore, any seasonal shift would disrupt the entire global sporting calendar (e.g. European football league, winter sports). FIFA confirmed in January 2011 that relocation of the tournament would be considered only if the host country submitted an appropriate request.50

In the meantime, Doha failed to reach the final list twice for hosting the 2016 and 2020 Olympic Games. Qatar had suggested holding the games in October (instead of July) to avoid the summer heat, but the International Olympic Committee (wishing to ensure the highest possible television ratings), argued that people had more free time in summer than in autumn, and that holding autumn games would mean competing with other sporting events or turning the games into a ‘weekend spectacle’.52 There are currently no plans to change the calendar.53

Giving the tournament to Qatar also revealed a delicate political dimension, since the Cup was awarded not just to a single country but to an entire region. Shaikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi was quoted as saying that seeing Qatar grab the World Cup hosting rights was a “victory for the Muslims over America” and a “slap in the face to the United States”.55 He also criticized US President Barack Obama’s comments after the results were announced as ‘very bad’ and inappropriate. Al-Qaradawi’s reactions reflect the deep resentment toward the USA felt by many people in the Arab World.

4 Preparing for the tournament

Sporting events, like the Olympic Games, the Formula One Grand Prix, and the FIFA World Cup, are generally viewed by leaders not just as cash cows, but also as opportunities for demonstrating a country’s hospitality and helping to overcome national stereotypes. Especially in the Gulf, sports are readily embraced as a non-ideological aspect of culture; equally, sporting events have served as a catalyst for urban renovation. In this context, Barcelona is regularly cited as a prime example. From being a ‘sleepy southern city’, it became a very attractive year-round tourist destination, having enhanced major public spaces and undertaken urban and seafront renovation projects in preparation

47 Interview, Doha, 13 Apr. 2012.
48 Interview, Doha, 15 Apr. 2012.
53 Interview, Doha, 19 Apr. 2012.
54 A controversial Islamic theologian of Egyptian origin, Al-Qaradawi is known for his program Ash-Shariah wal-Hayat; broadcast on Al Jazeera, it has an estimated global audience of sixty million.
for the Summer Olympic Games in 1992. The admired and much-discussed ‘Barcelona model’ has become an exemplar of how to accomplish mega-event-driven urban regeneration. Its true achievement was its urban transformation, introduced through a series of actions during a brief period of only six years,\(^{57}\) and its international recognition as a sustainable city even after the Olympics.

With its competitors, Qatar submitted its Bid Book of information on infrastructure, legal conditions, and operational and legacy-building concepts, on 14 May 2010. The bid highlighted the country’s compactness and the Doha metropolitan area which would enable participants and visitors to be lodged in a single location for the entire tournament, with easy access to all key venues via a sophisticated, well-developed road and railway network.\(^{58}\) This would allow Qatar to host the most compact tournament in history and to achieve the ‘Middle East World Cup dream’.\(^{59}\)

Qatar was finally able to convince the FIFA committee through its novel approach to event operations and legacy-building (e.g. strong commitment to a carbon-neutral event, re-using modular sections of the arenas for constructing twenty-two new stadiums in developing countries, and using only solar energy), while conceptually keeping its bid in line with the country’s national development strategy. The exceptional circumstance of relatively short distances (Al-Shamal, the furthest city, is two hours drive from Doha) between all venues and team-related facilities is advantageous, since traditional venue-specific team hotels and training sites might not be needed.\(^{60}\) Qatar has also proposed seven host cities and twelve stadiums, four of which would be renovated and upgraded, while eight newly built stadiums are to be designed for deconstruction to meet post-tournament demand. The Qatari government anticipates a budget of US$3 billion to complete all these projects.\(^{61}\)

Most of the stadiums, designed by the German architectural consortium Albert Speer and Partners, will integrate local elements in a sophisticated reinterpretation of cultural heritage to sustain national pride. In a region unembarrassed by symbolism, it is not unusual to find local images exploited as metaphors for newly constructed objects (e.g. dhow fishing boat/Al-Shamal Stadium, sea shell/Al-Khor Stadium, the national flag/Al-Gharafa Stadium, an oasis/Al-Wakra Stadium, or a pearl in the form of a spherical glass dome; see Figure 4). The stadiums will honor Qatar’s heritage through a harmonious and creative balance between the country’s past and current Western influence. Unlike previous host countries with a longer history of urban development, Qatar can develop unexploited desert land from scratch. Thus, apart from converting already-existing stadiums, new locations with supplementary infrastructure will be established without disrupting unwanted social groups or relocating people or infrastructure.

Another extremely complex and costly operation will involve integrating local transport systems (since most of the transportation network does not yet exist or is insufficient) to link Qatar to emerging intra-regional markets (e.g. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province, the UAE). A large part of the road network, particularly within and around the capital, was expanded after 2006, and further expansion is projected by 2017, with a budget allocation of US$20 billion.\(^{62}\) All venues and stadiums will be linked by expressways and will be accessible from metro stops via a short, shaded, and air-conditioned walk, except for Al-Wakra, where shuttle busses will operate to and from the stadium. Since Qatar is so compact, no internal flights are

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\(^{59}\) Interview, Doha, 19 Apr. 2012.


\(^{61}\) Ibid., pp. 4, 14.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., p. 19.
required, and all traffic movement will be handled by the road and railway systems, which is cheaper and more environmentally friendly. There are also plans for access to host cities by the sea (e.g. Bahrain to Al-Shamal).

The fact that the event will take place in June and July, with daytime temperatures in the high 40s°C/120°F (and unlikely to fall below 30°C/86°F in the late evenings), is considered a potential health risk for both players and spectators. Precautionary measures will, therefore, be mandatory at open training sites, public zones for supporters, and stadiums (e.g. hydration schemes, sun shields, cooling mist). This means that implementing state-of-the-art cooling technology infrastructure is one of the biggest preparatory challenges for the event. A solar-powered cooling system is expected to maintain pitch and stadium temperatures at a constant 27°C/80.6°F. Inevitably, introducing such new technologies is hazardous. Failure will increase the risks for all involved, but success will be ground-breaking for the tournament and for future events in similar conditions. However, another possible solution might involve shifting more activities indoors or underground to combat the summertime heat. Plans for underground railway schemes are already in the pipeline, and could be extended by adding entertainment

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63 Ibid., p. 22.
65 Interview, Doha, 18 Apr. 2012.
infrastructures (e.g. shopping malls, gastronomy, cinemas, and indoor adventure playgrounds) to accommodate resident and visitor needs.\textsuperscript{69}

While infrastructure projects have to be successfully finished and functioning before the event, the organizers will be challenged in every aspect during the course of the tournament, particularly during the peak-phase, which will require fluent handling of transportation, providing entertainment facilities for non-ticketed attendance, sophisticated security measures, etc. Provision must be made for emergencies and reasonable precautions must be taken, since failure on these counts during mega events could prove costly.

Although football stadiums are among the most popular meeting places of our civilization,\textsuperscript{70} large crowds are associated with certain dangers; thus special attention is needed to avoid construction defects and to regulate security requirements. Injuries and fatalities result not only from aggressive behavior and violence by hooligans, fans or security personnel, but are also stress-induced by panicking spectators or caused by construction defects. In the history of Arab football matches, serious accidents caused around 300 injuries in 1966, forty-eight deaths and forty-seven injuries in Cairo in 1974, and eight deaths and 600 injuries in Algeria in 1982.\textsuperscript{71} In February 2012, seventy-four Egyptians died and hundreds were injured after clashes at a football match in Port Said between Cairo’s Al-Ahly club and the local club Al-Masry.\textsuperscript{72} In Doha, the fire at Villagio Shopping Mall’s Gympanzee nursery in May 2012 caused nineteen deaths and injuries to dozens, and shocked the country.\textsuperscript{73} Although still under investigation, the fire and related deaths apparently resulted from both technical failure and human error. A number of questions are now being raised by the public in Qatar about safety standards, procedures, monitoring and implementation in public facilities, and who ultimately takes the responsibility.

5 Wahhabi Qatar to meet social challenges

Although tourism development is important in enhancing GCC economies, it may also clash with the region’s conservative traditions and culture. While Dubai is commonly accepted as a comparatively liberal and trendy metropolis with little threat of civil unrest and low crime rates,\textsuperscript{74} Qatar remains concerned about its social responsibility toward the local population and its regional standing. Although predominantly Wahhabi, Qatar is less strict than Saudi Arabia. The ‘traditional, ingenious Qatari culture’ is progressively adorned with a westernized lifestyle façade, the ‘Dubai style world’,\textsuperscript{75} and most Qataris demonstrate an open attitude in public. However, there will inevitably be clashes at various points. Some in the Qatari community are deeply worried about the external impact burdening the Qatari cultural identity and want the government to act.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{69} Interviews, Doha, 18–19 Apr. 2012.
\textsuperscript{72} Hussein, “Egypt Football Match Violence: Dozens Dead and Hundreds Injured”, \textit{The Guardian}, 2 Feb. 2012.
\textsuperscript{73} Chatriwala, “Fire Broke Out at the Villagio Shopping Mall at 11 am”, \textit{Dohanews}, 28 May 2012; Townson, “19 Die in Fire Tragedy in Doha”, \textit{Gulf Times}, 29 May 2012.
\textsuperscript{76} Interview, Doha, 16 Apr. 2012.
After Qatar had won the FIFA World Cup 2022 bid, concerns were voiced from within and outside the region about how to deal with football fans, especially the fanatical followers who would probably be drinking and partying exuberantly on the streets of Qatar.\(^{77}\) Undoubtedly, certain social rules and taboos will have to be observed by all visitors (and residents). From outside the region voices (which are usually biased), have debated extensively over matters such as alcohol consumption, dress codes, and human rights situations, and have expressed unease about the overall experience in a conservative environment.

While alcohol is not prohibited in the country, there are strict rules regulating its consumption. In Qatar, it is a punishable offence to drink alcohol or to be found drunk in public and, as in any other GCC country, alcohol sales are strictly monitored and controlled through licensing.\(^{78}\) According to the Qatar 2022 Organizing Committee, strict alcohol laws will be relaxed in dedicated fan zones\(^{79}\) where ‘beer and bratwurst’\(^{80}\) will be available throughout the tournament (FIFA expects this from the host). Qatar has come under harsh criticism from within its own ranks and from more conservative groups, not only for acceding to FIFA’s demands and to the expectations of (Western) fans, but also for tolerating an increased risk of alcohol misuse and boosting bootlegging activities.

Alcohol consumption is controversial in Qatar and subject to passionate debate. Some interviewees told me that a few years ago (particularly in the aftermath of the 2006 Asian Games) there were fewer restrictions and several licensed stand-alone bars and restaurants in Doha.\(^{81}\) More recently rules were tightened, and in December 2011, licences were withdrawn and alcohol was banned, without explanation, from restaurants at The Pearl (causing a 50% drop in revenues).\(^{82}\) Although the length of the ban was unclear, it was rumored that the Qatar Distribution Company (QDC) was due to open its second liquor store in the country on The Pearl. This proved to be another polarizing debate, like the selling of pork at a single QDC store in late 2011.\(^{83}\)

The selling of pork marks an important shift in this conservative Muslim country, with its strict alcohol consumption rules, clothing regulations (see Figure 5, left) and until recently a complete ban on pork. The government’s policy change divided Qatar’s residents, and Twitter, the latest popular means of expression, saw a flood of comments and views. Even Twibbons (see Figure 5, right) have been designed to show allegiance to the cause (e.g. protest, memorial, event, popular person).

\(^{77}\) To calm reactions, Ahmed Ijas (Director of Fanar, the Islamic Cultural Center) recommended that deeply religious people book a trip to Mecca during the weeks of the World Cup. Although he claimed that his remarks were misinterpreted and while the country’s clerics seem to have adjusted to the idea of being lenient for the duration of the tournament [Smoltzcyk, “Qatar Has High Hopes for 2022 World Cup”, Spiegel Online International, 15 Dec. 2010], all visitors must comply with certain rules of behavior.

\(^{78}\) McGinley, “Qatar Alcohol Ban Could Be Tip of the Iceberg for GCC”, Arabian Business, 15 Jan. 2012; to purchase alcohol from one of the two licensed stores one must be a non-Muslim resident, have the employer’s permission and earn a minimum specified salary. Alcohol purchase is further regulated by a generous monthly quota (doubled or tripled before Christmas and before Ramadan when the store is closed).


\(^{81}\) Interviews, Doha, 15–16 Apr. 2012.


Interpersonal relations and gender identity

Other serious social challenges arise from conservative attitudes toward couples and gender identity. The small Qatari community is a ‘veiled’ society, visible only in specific public arenas such as shopping centers (e.g., Villagio, City Center), and leisure and entertainment areas (e.g., Katara, Suq Waqif, Corniche). Since the ramified Qatari community is profoundly socially controlled, it is neither common for married couples to demonstrate affection in public, nor tolerated for couples to arrive at events or locations as a pair or even to live together before marriage, although holding hands in public is common among friends of the same gender. Conservative individuals may well feel morally undermined or distressed by what they consider ‘offensive behavior’. In this context, lack of understanding, acceptance, and respect of other cultures, norms, and social values is problematic on both sides. Based on their individual socialization and belief, people tend to judge others solely by appearance or social behavior.

In fact, Qatar appears more concerned with traditional values than, e.g., the more liberal Dubai or Manama. Local people are strongly influenced by their culture and under pressure to live up to society’s expectations. While Qatar officially allowed women to vote in 1999 and is a pioneer in

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84 Adler, “Trying to Lift the Veil on Qatar”, BBC, 4 Apr. 2009.
85 “Testing the waters” is not the only reason for “couples” (irrespective of sex or relationship) to decide to cohabit. In cities with high rents and constantly changing lifestyles, people believe it makes sense to share accommodation for economic reasons.
86 Interview, Doha, 16 Apr. 2012.
women’s rights in the region, daily life is still relatively conservative, with the gender divide and separation in public. Qatari women seek privacy and seldom open up to strangers or subject themselves to social censure. Therefore, many young Qataris turn to social networks on the Internet to escape reality and to meet and exchange views in the virtual world. Although society is affected by reforms and social change in the surrounding regions, people adhere to both traditional and modern values.

The 2003 Constitution (approved by public referendum on 29 April 2003) established Qatar as an independent sovereign state with Islam as its official religion and the Sharia as its main source of legislation. Qatar is a country that operates and practices Sharia law (although only applicable to Muslims), which is also regarded as a code of conduct; and residents and visitors, irrespective of sex, religion, nationality or cultural background, are expected to obey the rules and respect Islamic values.

Sharia law also prohibits two unmarried and unrelated persons of the opposite sex from living together. This applies to both residents and visitors. An unmarried couple (or even a married couple with different family names) wishing to share a hotel room may be required to provide a marriage certificate or face a penalty (e.g. imprisonment, deportation). Sodomy (also between consenting adults and irrespective of sex) is still under threat of punishment with lashes, or up to seven years’ imprisonment, though there have been no officially known cases of disciplinary measures in the recent past. Same-sex marriages, civil unions or domestic partnership arrangements are not legally recognized. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and intersexual individuals (LGBTIs) may face certain legal and social challenges in Qatar since in some cases the law is also enforced against non-citizens. Male-to-male sexual relationships are considered illegal according to Article 284 of the Penal Code (Act No. 11 of 2004) and the individuals concerned are executed, while female-to-female relationships are also illegal but are not explicitly articulated. Nor are gay or lesbian individuals and same sex couples permitted to adopt children.

This Islamic country appears in a bad light in the West because of its conservative handling of sensitive social taboos. Popular outrage grew in 2011 when a prominent member of the Weill Cornell Medical College Board of Overseers in Qatar established a clinic that labeled homosexuality as a ‘behavioral disorder’ and sought to treat gay people. Even HH Shaikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Misnad, wife of the ruler, was cited as being confident that homosexuality could be combated as a disease. Shaikha Mozah normally supports the breaking of social taboos (e.g. showing her face in public) and improving women’s rights (e.g. freedom to choose their clothing and vote), and champions education as an important catalyst for development by encouraging girls to become useful participants in society. While she is idealized for her activities especially by the younger female generation, she also faces controversy within the society since her behavior is considered ‘undesirable or problematic’ for a traditional country like Qatar.

In April 2011, the US Department’s 2010 Human Rights Report showed that Qatar, inter alia, was still failing regarding LGBTI rights, since same-sex relations continued to be illegal and attracted heavy penalties. Discrimination was also reported against HIV-infected patients.
HIV-positive foreigners, whose condition, typically, is diagnosed during their medical examination upon arrival in the country, are deported, while HIV-positive citizens are quarantined and receive treatment.  

In 2010, in the aftermath of winning the bid for the FIFA World Cup 2022, Qatar’s position toward LGBTI rights became a source of debate, with gay rights groups worried about homosexual football supporters being banned from Qatar and critical of FIFA for deciding to host the event in a country that considers homosexuality illegal.91 The FIFA president’s indelicate response92 — a weak attempt to joke — aroused further angry discussion. The hosting of the World Cup may eventually oblige Qatar to change its social fabric and consider ending such discrimination. South Africa (World Cup 2008) and China (Olympic Games 2008) were both similarly criticized before their events, but ultimately very little changed since attitudes, customs, and habits change less swiftly than do urban landscapes, monetary flows and demonstrating or exercising power.

Meanwhile, the homosexuality question acquired a diplomatic dimension. During a visit to Qatar in February 2011, British Prime Minister David Cameron was asked whether it was right for the World Cup to be awarded to a country that outlawed homosexuality. Cameron replied carefully that, “football could help encourage social change.”93 However, though residents generally express support and awareness of the benefits and entertainment that tourism development — and hosting a mega event like the FIFA World Cup — will bring, they clearly do not want inappropriate tourist behavior: “I would love to see Qatar as an affordable destination for all. I do not want to see irresponsible tourists which may affect the country socially over [the] long term”; “tourism is highly appreciated and welcomed in Doha, especially with all the entertainment it brings, just as long as it does not attract the drunken squad Dubai attracts”.94

### 6 Can the world expect something amazing from Qatar?

When FIFA decided to take football to new markets its fan base, especially in Europe and South America, was highly critical of Qatar’s apparent challenges (conservatism, human rights, lack of infrastructure). Questions were asked as to why Dubai, the Middle East’s ‘sin-city’, was not selected, especially as it has the appropriate number of hotels and beds for a tournament of this size and acts more liberally than neighboring Qatar. Nevertheless, the region has been ignored for too long, and sports should have no boundaries. An aspiring Arab country, Qatar has the will and importantly the wealth, to turn its promises into reality, and deserves to be respected.

Qatar was the only candidate graded by the FIFA organizational committee as having a ‘high operational risk’95 and was, therefore, considered an exotic outsider. FIFA’s decision immediately

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92 Asked if he foresaw any cultural problems, Blatter replied: “I’d say they [gay fans] should refrain from any sexual activities” [Anon., “FIFA Boss Sepp Blatter Sparks Qatar Gay Controversy”, BBC, 14 Dec. 2010]. Although he apologized for this unreasonable remark, it “reflected an insensitive attitude typical of the tired old men who run international sports” [Hersh, “January is the Right Time for Qatar’s World Cup”, Chicago Tribune, 14 Dec. 2010].
generated criticism from the media and disappointed opposing officials due to concerns about Qatar’s ability to host the event. Initial outrage was expressed through black-and-white, simplistic views concerning weather conditions, alcohol consumption, the ability to tolerate offensive public behavior or inappropriate outfits worn by fans, along with accusations of unequal treatment, arbitrary interpretations of press freedom and human rights,\textsuperscript{96} or Qatar’s (relatively liberal) attitude toward Israel: despite not recognizing the Jewish state, Qatar said it would let Israel to take part in the tournament.\textsuperscript{97} Moreover, other concerns have been voiced that gay fans may be discriminated against since Qatar views homosexuality as illicit. Furthermore, FIFA has never before taken the World Cup to an arid country that experiences exceptionally hot periods during the year with daytime temperatures reaching 45°C/113°F and more in summer. Although all requirements for contractual documents have been fulfilled, other specific measures and precautions will be necessary, given Qatar’s special circumstances and its unique hosting proposal. Though the idea of operating a compact competition in a small area is innovative, these various aspects also raise logistics and security questions.

In terms of marketing, the FIFA World Cup is particularly significant for Qatar which aspires to rise from the ashes of Dubai after the latter’s fall from glory into disfavor during the financial crisis (although it is now regaining its former pride). Qatar relies on the strategy of promoting the country and its capital Doha as a prime destination for business and leisure, and is selling itself for luxury travel. Qatar has a strong interest in finding its niche in the regional and global city network and reintroducing itself as a prime destination for business, culture, education, and sports.

Tourism plays an important role in enhancing developing economies like Qatar’s, but may conflict with the region’s conservative traditions and culture. With Sharia and conservative culture influencing developmental policies (e.g. on dress codes, alcohol consumption, public behavior), balancing tourism development, tourist inflows, and local culture and traditions will be tricky. The organizing committee does not yet seem to be fully aware of tourism’s socio-cultural effects or how to deal critically and constructively with its negative aspects and impacts. Instead, the committee seems quite naively certain that traveling will broaden horizons and bring different nationalities closer. Hopefully this will happen in Qatar too, considering the many sensitive elements involved.

The permanent re-creation of values, symbols, and ways of life attained by mixing with and differing from others, presents many challenges and opportunities for the local minority population. One is to form an identity (national and/or individual), and to set limits on sensitive transformational issues. While the new signature skyline and adopted Western lifestyle represent significant steps away from Qatar’s national traditions and culture toward Western culture and identity, intangible (cultural) steps are increasingly being taken to preserve an authentic charm.

Generally speaking, all attempts at transformation by the GCC countries (whether economic, political, social or urban) should be taken seriously and evaluated without the frequently applied imperialist undertone. As German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk put it bluntly:

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\text{… the Persian Gulf in a very short amount of time \ldots has become a collector of civilizations without parallel. […] The West has lost its monopoly on art collections like those of the Louvre and the Guggenheim. And since the decision by Zürich-based FIFA, it has also forfeited its monopoly on its holy of holies, the World Cup. The tournament is going where everything goes, it is following the money and following in the footsteps of the Formula 1 circus, cycling, tennis and golf.}\textsuperscript{98}
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\textsuperscript{96}James, “World Cup 2022: Political Craziness Favours Qatar’s Winning Bid”, The Guardian, 2 Dec. 2010.
In various ways, the World Cup is recognized as a valuable opportunity to promote the entire region and overcome prejudice. Football is one of the many mirrors of a society and is able to mobilize ‘national feeling’ within a population. Mega events can sweep a nation and, at least temporarily, boost its self-esteem and self-confidence. Therefore, the World Cup accelerates infrastructure and urban development, while simultaneously functioning as a tool for articulating serious shortcomings, including unacceptable working conditions (exploitation, violence, living conditions) or labor law in general. An army of working men (mainly of Asian origin), whose wages support their families in the home countries, is building the cities and overall infrastructure in the GCC states. This sensitive topic is not yet subject to public debate since government officials are anxious to avoid stories of abuses, and foreign contractors are not authorized to discuss workers’ rights and related matters. Although conditions have improved slightly in recent years, many issues must still be properly settled.

In the coming years, FIFA will work closely with the Local Organizing Committee to deal with the positive and negative impacts of the World Cup, as the country’s ability to deal with social change and handle the complicated logistics of completing the infrastructure on time is tested. Because “place and event have become disconnected, anything can take place anywhere, provided there is enough money”, not to mention influence and endurance to overcome political and economic saber-rattling, globally and especially in the GCC states, where ambitious ruling families are competing for hegemony in the region.

The Qatari Amir said:

We will deliver with passion and make sure this is a milestone in the history of the Middle East and a milestone for FIFA. On behalf of millions of people in the Middle East, thank you for believing in us, thank you for having such bold vision. I can promise we will not let you down.

One hopes these do not remain empty words.

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