

Introduction

Deliver Amazing!

This is a book that illustrates the impacts of a unique educational experience in Qatar. It is the story of an international education project developed thanks to the collaboration between SDA Bocconi and Josoor Institute to develop human capital for sport and major events in Qatar and the MENA Region. But it's not the simple story of a training course. It's something far more articulated, encompassing the allure of football, the cultural differences between the Middle East and the rest of the world, and a set of international managerial practices. All this is why we thought it would be interesting to tell the story of what's happening in Qatar for the FIFA World Cup 2022™ and why we call this country “the land of sports and events.”

Writing to you here is Dino, the founder of the SDA Bocconi Sport Knowledge Center. The person who realized that in Qatar there might be a story to tell, with the help of all the other authors of this book. A crucial part of the path took place in Doha on 23 December 2016. Milan and Juventus were battling it out on the pitch in the final of the Italian Super Cup at Jassim bin Hamad Stadium, with a seating capacity of around twelve thousand spectators, home of the local Al Sadd club. I was sitting in the grandstand in a classic Arab setting, very comfortable stadium seats, with ample space between each, Arabic coffee and dates to enjoy, marble on the floor. I looked over at the stands and saw a lot of white spots, which I took for empty seats. It was still early, after all. But then it hit me – the stadium was actually packed, with many local spectators in *thobes*, their traditional long white cotton robes. From that day on, it would be a regular sight at all the games I watched in Qatar. For the record, AC Milan won on penalties, 5 to 4. But there was another match being played in the stands.

I had arrived in Doha two days earlier, on the invitation of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, to meet a number of Qatari leaders who were working on the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™. I was staying at the Sheraton, a charming hotel built in 1979 in the shape of a pyramid, right on the sea, still today Doha's landmark hotel. The mission of the trip was to understand the country's strategies and figure out what role SDA Bocconi and the Sport Knowledge Center could play. The invitation to go to Qatar didn't come out of thin air, but to explain we need to backtrack a bit. Let me tell you how it was that I ended up watching that match.

The first time I actually studied Qatar was in January of the same year, for the start of the Management Module, offered in Milan at SDA Bocconi, as part of the 16th edition of the FIFA Master. During the traditional orientation day, one of the students, Mead Al Emadi, introduced herself as the first Qatari to ever enroll in the Master. She went on to tell me about the gap year she had to do to participate in the Master, and said that she was already working for the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy. This institution was founded by the government of Qatar to oversee the construction of the stadiums for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™, and to deal with all things tournament-related. Mead signed up for the FIFA Master because she wanted to grow her knowledge of sports; she was keen to make it the best World Cup ever, and she wanted everyone to come to appreciate Qatar.

As I listened to those words, I could hear something click in my mind; her story really resonated with me. I listened, took notes, and invited her to tea a few days later. I was really taken by her reflections. I knew that on 2 December 2010, FIFA had awarded the 2018 World Cup to Russia and the 2022 Cup to Qatar. I had followed all the clamor that came after FIFA's decision in awarding the bid, up until Blatter's resignation as FIFA president in December 2015. But until that moment I didn't fully understand the challenge the country was facing and all that it would imply.

I remember having tea with Mead like it was yesterday. She told me how she found out about the FIFA Master during an observational program she did at the World Cup in Brazil in 2014, and she shared her biggest dream: "I want this knowledge of Sport Management to be shared among my colleagues, among the region and among the people that are really interested in having the international knowledge of how sports events are being hosted. This is really a step forward for everyone and for the legacy to be kept in the country and for the coming years."

I was curious, but didn't really know much about the project as a whole. This wouldn't be the first time that the tournament was being organized in a developing country, with respect to the traditional nations of Europe and the Americas (for example, South Africa, South Korea and Japan). But from what I was hearing, the Qatar project was different.

Mead continued, "We always say this will be the first time that the World Cup is being hosted in the Middle East. I hope that this will show the world and erase the stereotype of this region being what it is in everyone's mind. It's a chance to change this picture in everyone's head and for them to come and see the real people of the region, and of Qatar, and the totality of the region: how innovative and creative it is and how culturally rich the countries are in this area of the world."

Also, everybody kept telling me that FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ would be the first World Cup played in wintertime, but that is only true if we take a Northern Hemisphere's perspective. Actually, the World Cups played in countries like Brazil (1950, 2014), Argentina (1978), and South Africa (2010) were already played in wintertime, as these countries are located in the Southern Hemisphere. Thus, their seasons' cycle was within winter when World Cups were played in the months of June and July and in the Southern Hemisphere, winter lasts from 1 June to 31 August. This provides a valuable example of how in sports and events – just as in life – different perspectives change one's opinion and idea of a single circumstance.

Sport is a very powerful thing. It represents a universal language that deserves to be studied from multiple angles, through multiple disciplines, starting from the assumption that it is, perhaps, the only word in the world that needs no translation. This is a source of unparalleled strength when it comes to the rules of the game, and to champions in sport. But it must also be said that sport is a concept that has different interpretations in the different regions of the world. For this reason, the first World Cup of football in the Middle East and in the Arab world is an event that will make history in international sport, and in economic and social terms as well.

Continuing my conversation with Mead, I replied with something I had put in the book I wrote in 2015 with my colleague Dick Holt, published by Routledge, *The Handbook of Sport and Legacy*: "Many countries try to use sporting events as drivers for development, but not always with success. Indeed, we often talk about money that is wasted and infrastruc-

tures that are no longer used, such as stadiums or roads.” Instead, Mead presented me with a different perspective.

“Professor Dino,” she said, “the uniqueness of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ will be how we connect Qatar to the region and how the region is connected to the world. This will be a story that can be told to everyone, and that can change Qatar on the map for everyone, making it a sport hub.”

In a few minutes I felt like I was part of that story, and I wanted to be part of that project. I could see that it was the best interpretation of sport, the one I liked most, the one I had been taking into the classroom for some time. Not just a question of sport plus economic impact, but a wide-angle perspective of social, educational, political, urban and cultural impacts. When we were done with our tea, I left with some simple but meaningful words: “Mead, I’d love to help with this project, I don’t know how, I trust you.”

The Management Module was winding down and one day Mead came to see me in my office. She presented her idea, which was simple yet compelling at the same time: to invite Nasser Al Khater, Deputy Secretary General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, to come to SDA Bocconi to present the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ project to the FIFA Master students. No sooner said than done. Nasser presented the overall project, and talked about the new stadiums, FIFA, and the country’s vision. He concluded by saying, “We will deliver Amazing!” I had never heard that expression, those two words put together. I had certainly heard the word “amazing” referring to an incredible performance, and the verb “deliver” which doesn’t have an exact translation in Italian related to the events. But it does give the idea of doing everything necessary to achieve something relevant. Put together, those two words seemed to be a perfect fit for Qatar.

A few months later, Mead invited me to the Italian Super Cup final on 23 December 2016. And it actually turned out to be the perfect chance for me to meet a dozen representatives of the sports world of Qatar. One of them was Vasco Kurkjian, at the time education specialist at Josoor Institute, a unit of the Supreme Committee that deals with training and research on sports and events. Vasco started talking to me about the Diploma Programme in Sport and Major Events Management, and telling me about the strategy of Josoor Institute. So quite quickly a common path seemed to emerge between me and Qatar, and in fact in April 2018

the Sport Knowledge Center team tendered a bid for four cohorts of the Diploma Programmes, from 2019 to 2022. On 10 February 2019 in Doha, SDA Bocconi, represented by Dean Prof. Giuseppe Soda, and the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, represented by Secretary General H.E. Hassan Al Thawadi, signed the contract that represents an essential building block in the bridge that was being erected between Italy and Qatar, between Milan and Doha.

The ultimate goal of the book is to tell the story of SDA Bocconi's journey to Qatar, the challenges we faced and in general the impact this project has generated in the country, but also in the minds and hearts of the authors. It is not just a physical journey from one country to another, but more importantly it's an intellectual journey touching on cultural norms, economic-managerial content, case studies, speakers, visits and the many stories of the delegates of the Diploma Programmes, our protagonists because they were the people who gave the true meaning to the whole experience. This was our starting point for creating a useful, rigorous and enjoyable book. Useful for all those who want to understand a little more about Qatar and the relationship the country has with sport and the world of events, rigorous for having consulted a large number of authoritative sources, enjoyable as far as a reading that's rich in sociological and economic insights with a focus on sports.

The key word in our journey was "impact." For all the ideas that we learned, for the people who want to make a concrete impact on their careers and the emotions that we hope they experience. Here's what we always say: we want to serve the country and generate the best possible impact, aware of the great responsibility that Mead – directly or indirectly – has given us.

So we've told you what the book is, but now we also want to anticipate what the book is not. It is not a tribute to Qatar or a case of international best practices. It is the result of an education initiative linked to a country and its legacy. It is also a map for those who are willing to understand the evolution and path that led Qatar to become a sports and event hub. In the book we have reported objectively and faithfully the accusations and criticisms that have been raised in recent years by the media, along with the countless investments and projects carried out by the government. We know that Qatar has set out on a path, they've decided to get in the game, so to speak, and it's unavoidable that some lessons may be learned only during the way.

When someone asks me for a reflection on Qatar, I tell them that the country has a clear vision for 2030, and though they really wanted this World Cup, they were also aware that there would be contamination, influence, resistance and change. In other words, if they hadn't wanted all the things that are happening – and will be happening – they know very well that they should have stayed away from the world of football.

The best way to tell the results of an in-depth and detailed research process, which by definition is not exhaustive, is to describe the stages in the journey that we've taken to this point as a team.

Chapter 1: *An Overview of Qatar's Economy and Society* describes the social and economic history of the country. Similar to the document I prepared for my colleagues who were going to teach with me in Qatar. Studying and understanding the context is indispensable.

Chapter 2: *Major Sports and Entertainment Events* is where you can learn everything that Qatar has done in terms of events, starting from the Asian Games 2006, the turning point of its destiny. We deliberately talk about sporting events *and* entertainment, because Doha is becoming a place that goes beyond sport and sports facilities. There are cultural, commercial, musical events and more that are filling up the calendar of life in Doha.

Chapter 3: *The Aspire Ecosystem* describes one of the most important athletic academies in the world. To be a leader in the world of sports, in addition to stadiums and infrastructures, it is necessary to cultivate talents, celebrate champions and successes on the field. This is the only way for the country become recognized and respected.

Chapter 4: Now all the essential pieces are in place, so we move on to detail the *FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™* – how Qatar dreamed, attained and planned the most important football tournament in the world. Each of these first chapters covers a clear, specific topic which can be read as stand-alone content; we sequenced the chapters in this order to follow the same path we did in discovering Qatar as a country and as an economic system in terms of sports and events.

Chapter 5: *Josoor Institute for Skill Building* takes a deep dive into the role of this organization and SDA Bocconi in the overall design of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™, with special focus on the experience of the two Diploma Programmes in Sport and Major Events Management offered by Josoor Institute.

Chapter 6: The book closes with *Legacy and Future Impacts*, outlining what we know today and the possible short- and long-term impacts of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ on the country, and finally what will happen in the near future.

The overall aim of this book is to understand this process, without conveying positive or negative messages, but with the awareness that change is one of the most difficult processes in life and in business.

In this journey my constant source of inspiration is what Mead first told me back in 2016. It seems like a long time ago, but actually the years have passed quickly. After the unforeseeable travel disruptions caused by Covid-19, I finally caught up with Mead in Doha in November 2021. I told her about the idea of this book and asked her what happened to Qatar, FIFA and her, with respect to the ideas she had when we met in Milan. About the country, here's what Mead said:

“Before we won the bid for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ we had the vision of the country of 2030. The main things that we accelerated on, to be ready for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ before we reached the 2030 vision, are the human legacy, the infrastructure, the environmental and health sector and more. This tournament being in Qatar – it was an accelerator for the vision we have for the country in 2030.”

Usually we talk about the legacy of an event for a territory, not vice versa. But this World Cup will clearly have a legacy for FIFA too, an impact from the Qatar experience on FIFA's operating model. In Mead's words: “We have planned a lot of changes that Qatar has made in light of FIFA's governance, how we added the Arabic language to FIFA's official languages, and how we started different activities with FIFA for people and football fans to better understand our culture and country.”

So, for Mead, what's happened in these past few years?

Mead herself is a clear example of the legacy of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™, as she says. “I myself am the best example: in 2022 I would never have been in Brazil, I would never have known about the FIFA Master and we wouldn't have known about the possibility that SDA Bocconi could be here in Doha. All of this is part of the legacy that we want to take to the next generation, and we hope from each aspect of life that it will have a greater impact after the tournament is over, even financially and economically. It's putting Qatar on the map, as a touristic destination – understanding our culture, our music, our food, that we have something for everyone, for every passionate person who decides to come to Qatar.”

So, we can say that the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ will be a source of legacy for many of the people who will experience it first-hand and live it intensely. And we can also say with pleasure that this book is the best description of my legacy, that of my co-authors and of SDA Bocconi in Qatar. A project that has made us grow both intellectually and humanly.