

# **Qatar 2022 and the Obsolescing Bargain from Bid to Delivery**

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#### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** This paper examines the evolution of Qatar 2022 from award to event, seeking to explain the progression between the ambitious bid vision and divergence with what was eventually delivered.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Using a single-case study method this paper overviews and assesses the progression of key Qatar 2022 infrastructure categories from to bid to delivery, specifically facilities, transportation, and accommodation. The case study is informed by document review and site observations during Qatar 2022.

**Findings:** Qatar's ambitious bid was sufficient to win the event, but was not well-suited to maximizing resources in pursuit of the soft power and accelerated economic diversification objectives that underpinned its reasons for seeking the World Cup in the first place. Qatar's utilization of shifting bargaining power over time achieved a more realistically deliverable World Cup that better aligned with its objectives and proved the viability of a one-city World Cup. At the same time, leveraging bargaining power provides significant lessons for future prospective hosts and governing bodies alike.

**Originality:** While many works cover the progression from bid to legacy, there is insufficient focus on bargaining power and leverage between host and governing body leading to the event. The application of new theory to the sport event context can have impact well beyond the Qatar context, to events on very different scales and timelines, and likely even those beyond sport.

# Keywords: Qatar 2022; Mega-event; Bid; World Cup; Obsolescing Bargain; Stadiums; Transportation; Accommodation

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#### 1. Introduction

A successful bid to host a sporting megaevent such as the Olympic Games or FIFA World Cup is often designed to impress voters beyond core technical competencies. However, the journey from bid to event delivery is frequently fraught with complexities, changes, and compromises. The 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar offers unique insight into this evolution, given the extensive timeframe from award to event, unprecedented infrastructure spending, and a contentious socio-political backdrop. While considerable work covers the journey from bid to post-event legacy, there is less squarely focused on the path and transformation between bid and event delivery.

This mixed-method case study aims to understand how the event envisioned in Qatar's bid evolved into a final product in many respects quite different from the initial plan. Focused on the key delivery headings of facilities, transportation, and accommodation, this paper is set against the concepts of "wicked problems" (Rittel and Webber, 1973) and the "obsolescing bargain" (Vernon, 1971) to illuminate the shifting dynamics between host nations and organizing bodies like FIFA. Indeed, Qatar 2022's evolution underscores a negotiation process as a solution to delivering an overly ambitious initial vision, shaped by logistical realities, strategic decisions, and divergent interests between host and governing body.

Beyond dissecting the Qatar 2022 experience, this paper aims to contribute to the broader discourse on mega-event planning, execution, and legacy, with a focus on the understudied transformation between bid promises and event reality. As cities and nations consider or compete for hosting rights in the future, understanding the dance from bid to delivery becomes even more critical. The application of lessons from Qatar 2022 offers insight for prospective future hosts, bidders, and awarding bodies alike. These lessons may well apply for events beyond sport, as well as those on a far smaller scale, where similar bargaining dynamics can be found.

# 2. Mega-events: from bid to delivery and legacy

Mega-event bids often entail a political campaign of persuasion directed at both governing body voters and host country citizens. McGillivray and Turner (2018) detailed the infrastructure, resistance, narratives, tactics, and impropriety often involved in the bid wining process, and their discussion is especially pertinent to how Qatar was able to win the World Cup. Other pieces touch directly on the logistics, controversy, and objectives of the Qatar bid (e.g., Becker, 2013; Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2018; Brannagan and Reiche, 2022). These objectives were primarily grounded in soft power, raising Qatar's international profile, and accelerating the development of a knowledge-based and tourism economy (Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2014; Scharfenort, 2012).

A vibrant literature exists discussing the path from mega-event bid to legacy, particularly well summarized by Thomson et al. (2019). Preuss (2007) characterized the long-lasting effects of sport events, or "sport event legacies," as planned or unplanned, positive or negative, tangible or intangible structures that endure beyond the event itself. Indeed, legacy planning has become central to bidding parties in selling bids to internal and external actors (VanWynsberghe, 2015). In particular, the literature has addressed sport event legacy from the perspective of urban studies, event management, and stakeholders.

Work on the path between bid and event delivery tends to focus on cost overruns (Flyvbjerg et al., 2016; Preuss et al, 2019; Preuss, 2022), methodology for systemic explanations for cost overruns (Khraiche et al., 2021; Muller, 2015), case studies (Davis, 2019; Jennings, 2012) and how particular event iterations (Muller, 2017) or venue projects (Drummond, 2019) went off the rails. Others evaluate how failed bids may leave tangible legacies (Oliver and Lauermann, 2017).

In the Qatar context, McGillivray et al. (2018) offer a conceptual model for bidding, planning, and delivering major sporting events that lever human rights. But this normative proposal is more in response to events such as Qatar 2022, as opposed to reflective of how an event like Qatar 2022 moved from bid to delivery. Senouci et al., (2016) evaluate cost and time overruns in Qatari public works projects broadly, but did not specifically address World Cup projects.

Instead, the path from Qatar's World Cup bid to delivery is perhaps better drawn from a combination of explanations in policy and resource development. First, is the concept of "wicked problems". Stemming from Rittel and Webber (1973), a wicked problem is defined as difficult to solve because of hard to identify, complex, contradictory, and changing requirements. These problems can be exacerbated through attempts to correct one aspect accentuating other issues. In the megaevent context, Byers et al. (2020) argue that engrained social structures inform stakeholder relations and in turn impact legacy delivery potential (positively or negatively).

Working from a similar framework, Stewart and Rayner (2016) focus on how wicked problems lead to "uncomfortable knowledge" for mega-event organizers when deciding the legacy phase, and in turn, create divergence between bid proposals and realized legacy. Applied to the London 2012 context, the authors argue that bid stage "constructive ambiguity" allows for disparity in how final outcomes are initially conceived. This disparity is subsequently compounded by formalization of the bid into a host contract, and eventual reckoning and compromise between key stakeholders. However, where a mega-event derived "wicked problem" may arise from divergent stakeholder conceptions of legacy, similar issues can be found in reconciling overpromising with delivery capacity. Historically, bidders have often promised events beyond what fiscal, political, and infrastructure capacity can realistically deliver to win a competitive process. Where the bid is enshrined in a host contract, the issue of delivering less (or different) from what was initially promised becomes more central. When this variety of wicked problem arises, something effectively must give (usually budget, scale, or scope) while being reconciled with host contract commitments.

A potential response to this uncomfortable knowledge derived from wicked problems may lie in the obsolescing bargain, or the shifting of deal parameters over time (Vernon, 1971). Stemming from the energy and resource sectors, and applied more generally to foreign investment and infrastructure projects (Bennon and Fukuyama, 2022), this changing bargain is typically found in resource-rich less-developed countries who need foreign expertise and capital to commence extraction and generate revenue. Over time, as local capacity increases, and the foreign investor has increased its commitment, bargaining power shifts to the host country. Applied to the mega-event context, while a bidder must impress the awarding body (e.g., the IOC or FIFA) to win the event, as time draws closer to the event, the

awarding body has fewer options to replace wayward hosts. Although the host contract plays a role in compelling enforcement, a bargaining compromise with an existing host as opposed to sourcing a new host is usually the preference and reality. Where a host megaevent host is replaced, it is more often the host itself withdrawing (Denver, Victoria) than being stripped of the event (Durban).

This is especially true for the Olympics, where specialized facilities with limited post-Games use and the need for massive athletes' villages all within a core host city, make alternative hosts more difficult to source. However, for the World Cup, there are many more interested and viable prospective hosts with sufficient football stadiums that could theoretically step-in on shorter notice if there is nothing new to construct. Thus, a World Cup host may have a different post-award bargaining timeline and capacity to shift parameters between bid and delivery than an Olympic or similar multisport mega-event host. For Qatar 2022, this dynamic was accentuated by the twelve-year horizon between award and event.

### 3. Method

This paper uses a single-case study method with retrospective elements to assess the bid and progression of Qatar 2022 over time, focused on sub-categories under the three key headings of facilities, transportation, and accommodation. Using a snowball technique, documents were collected from bid, governing body, media, mapping, industry, community, legal, and academic sources. Over 170 documents covering a period from 2008 to 2023 were then reviewed for their prospective relevance. Once preliminary application was assessed, documents were analyzed and synthesized across source headings as appropriate under one of the thematic headings.

Financial figures were also compiled from this document review process. Primary sources, such as bid books and governing body documents, are supplemented by secondary sources, with a focus on media coverage and research institute analyses. Secondary sources were obtained through the same search process, as well as from new search combinations prompted through review of primary documents until the discovery of new relevant sources is exhausted. Secondary sources are then sorted and reviewed under key headings with the intent of supplementing gaps in primary sources as well as confirming or challenging data derived from primary sources. Where there are conflicting or inconsistent financial sources, the figure with the strongest evidentiary basis is used.

The retrospective and financial data gathering elements were complemented by site observations at Qatar 2022 during the Group Stage, from November 22 to December 2. The author attended ten matches at six stadiums, and travelled to the security perimeter prior to four additional matches. The author also attended the FIFA Fan Festival on two nights. The author stayed in Qatar at the single largest fan accommodation, Barahat Al-Janoub, and travelled extensively by bus and metro. Due to transport and security arrangements, many team facilities outside of the tournament transportation network were not accessible for site visits. Outcomes for nonvisited facilities were exclusively measured through completion and a secondary review of media and commercial mapping imagery, with a focus on media sources from competing nation outlets covering a specific team facility.

### 4. The Oatar 2022 Bid

As with several Olympic and World Cup bids that have made later unfulfilled promises, Qatar provided a sweeping vision to win a bid that would allow for future shaping into a somewhat different reality after the fact. Beyond obvious violations of technical specifications that saw the competition shift from summer to November and December, there was the opportunity to realign the event from the framing necessary for the bid to that more conducive to a one-city concept in a country with only one major city.

The progression from bid to delivery can be evaluated through three evaluation categories FIFA identified as medium to high risk: competition, transportation, and accommodation. This paper is concerned with construction delivery aspects as opposed to operational. These risks were also notable for their elevated levels relative to the other eight bids submitted for 2018 and 2022. Within the competition and transportation headings, there were also multiple sub-categories, which guide the headings of inquiry for this study. For the competition category, these included stadium construction and team facilities, while for transport there were airports and international connections, ground transport, and Host City transport.

### 5. Facilities

#### Stadium construction

FIFA's bid specifications required a minimum of twelve stadiums. As the bid planned for a summer competition, cooling technology was promised to make the stadiums tolerable in the heat. Qatar proposed nine new venues and major renovations to three stadiums. Four years after the World Cup was awarded to Qatar, FIFA approved a reduction to eight stadiums, citing budget overrun and completion risks. Of the nine new construction stadiums in the successful bid, five were realized in their planned locations. Lusail, Al-Janoub, Education City, and Doha Port stadiums were constructed to their proposed capacities in their planned locations.

Lusail Stadium was initially budgeted at \$662 million and came in at a reported \$767 million. Al-Janoub stadium had a bid budget of \$286 million and was completed for between \$572 million and \$656 million depending on the source. A similar overrun was seen at Education City Stadium, with a final reported cost of \$700 million smashing past the bid budget of \$287 million (McCormick, 2022; Whiteside, 2022). The Doha Port Stadium became Stadium 974, a temporary stadium constructed largely from shipping containers. While the capacity, concept, and location were as planned in the bid, the modular design was considerably different from initial renderings. Although the bid evaluation cited a \$202 million budget for Doha Port Stadium, the completed Stadium 974 cost \$717 million (Okonknwo, 2022).

Figure 1. Education City Stadium (Author)



Likewise, Al-Khor Stadium, redubbed Al-Bayt Stadium, was built in the bid-planned location, with an increased capacity of over 60,000 to host a semi-final. In addition to becoming the furthest afield stadium in the downscaled eight-venue concept, Al-Bayt Stadium also hosted the opening match initially allocated to Lusail. From its bid budget of \$251 million, the finished product designed in the style of a Bedouin tent, was the most expensive stadium at \$847 million (McCormick, 2022; Whiteside, 2022).

Five new stadiums proposed in the bid were never constructed. Al-Shamal would have been the most distant stadium (110 km) from Doha in the original concept and only hosting group stage games. The city of 11,000 at the time of the bid was the closest to Bahrain, where the bid predicted 10% of attendees would originate from with the construction of a rail and road bridge. Cost overruns and financial risk on the never completed bridge project likely contributed to the cancellation in 2014. With the bridge's indefinite postponement in 2015 and the suspension of diplomatic relations between Qatar and Bahrain in 2017, the cancellation decision was further supported.

Umm Salal Stadium was planned for the northwest of Doha, along the Doha Expressway corridor. While a future Metro Green Line expansion is planned to the area, other Doha stadiums closer to the center and accommodation clusters would be better served by the event-time Metro. This logic did not apply as easily to the cancellation of Qatar University Stadium, served by the Metro Red Line, and well connected by the road network. With ample unallocated space for future expansion, the stadium would not have crowded out academic expansion. However, the existing 10,000 seat stadium and playing fields along with student housing, made the university also ideal for team facilities, which hosted Argentina and Spain during the competition.

At \$1.6 billion, Doha Sports City Stadium would have been the most expensive and debatably most architecturally ambitious proposed venue, with substantial mixed-use elements integrated into the design. The original proposal would have included a convention center, water park, mall suspended above ground, hotel, museum, and amphitheater (Meis, 2023). The combination of financial cost, completion risk, and opportunity cost for a large prime site in central Doha were the likely culprits for cancellation. The reframing of Doha Sports City and potential sport-related ancillary uses to the Aspire Zone surrounding Khalifa International Stadium may have also been influential.

Three further stadiums were proposed as major renovations. The 2001 constructed Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium was instead demolished and rebuilt adjacent to bid-proposed capacity. The bid book renovation budget of \$135 million was far exceeded by the final cost of \$360 million for the new venue (McCormick, 2022; Whiteside, 2022). Qatar's oldest major stadium, Khalifa International, was intended to be expanded into the second semi-final stadium with a capacity of 62,000. Although the stadium was further modernized with a new seating tier added from a 2005 expansion for the Asian Games, the capacity did not increase from 45,000. Instead, the stadium became the focal point for a larger Aspire Zone development, which includes a large aquatic center, indoor stadium, sport hall, and a landmark hotel tower. The complex is served by its own stop on the Metro Gold Line. Again, the proposed renovation budget of \$71 million was far exceeded with a final cost of \$374 million (McCormick, 2002).

# Figure 2. Khalifa International Stadium (Author)



The third proposed renovated stadium was left off the final roster altogether. Al-Ghafara Stadium, at the heart of a larger club sport complex, would have been expanded from its club capacity of roughly 20,000. However, with three stadiums already on the west side of Doha connected to the new Metro lines, Al-Ghafara likely became a transport-derived casualty. There was also one new construction stadium not included in the bid, Al-Thumama Stadium. The business case for Al-Thumama relative to other cancelled venues is unclear. The stadium is in a largely infilled low density residential area with no direct metro connection. Alongside the stadium, there have been extensive highway network and interchanges built from scratch. There may have been a geographical balancing argument, with Al-Thumama being the second of two stadiums to reside south of the city center and toward significant planned accommodation clusters in Al-Wakra (FIFA 2010b). Budget may have also been a contributing factor, as the reported cost of \$342 million (McCormick, 2022; Whiteside, 2022), made it the cheapest stadium in the tournament. After the tournament, the stadium area was slated to anchor a sport complex, boutique hotel, as well as retail and commercial development (Gulf Times, 2017).

In 2016, after the reduction in venues from twelve to eight, the Secretary General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy claimed that total stadium construction costs would range from \$8 billion to \$10 billion (Al Heialy, 2016). The high end of reported figures at a venue level total \$4.76 billion, meaning that either certain related costs were excluded, or significant cost savings were found in the six years preceding the tournament. Given the cited cost of hosting at the time of the tournament was over \$200 billion and most of that budget is said to have been spent on infrastructure, venue related infrastructure such as roads and rapid transit is likely excluded from stadium costing. While most traditional sport venues and mega-event hosts incur land and

land opportunity costs, with stadiums largely rising from undeveloped desert, the land was likely to have been government owned and not developed any time soon in the "no World Cup" alternative.

Another potential means of reconciling the 2016 estimated global stadium cost and the reported venue level costs is the significant post-event legacy costs. While most venues will remain in place, only Khalifa Stadium will remain as-is. The other stadiums will have post-World Cup conversions to the end uses, and much of the modular seating will be disassembled and transported to other countries. In addition to a unique legacy, this plan will avoid the worst of white elephant stadium status burning maintenance costs. It is unclear whether the present value alternative of increased future maintenance costs would have exceeded the cost of large-scale disassembly and transport.

Relative to bid figures, reported construction costs represent a significant overrun, but not necessarily an outlier where other recent World Cups are considered if the stadium level costs are taken. Qatar's stadium construction costs range of between 211 and 231% of bid budget. This can be compared to the previous three World Cups in developing countries: Russia 2018, Brazil 2014, and South Africa 2010. Figures from Russia range between 113% (Bershidsky, 2018) and 234% of budget (Muller, 2015). Brazil's stadiums came in at 150% of their original budget according to an official audit (Downie, 2014). Similarly, South Africa's stadiums came in at 166% of the bid budget (Baloyi and Bekker, 2011).

Nor were these figures out of line with cost overruns with the Olympics. Evaluating at an event as opposed to venue level, the Oxford Olympics Study found an average and median cost respectively of 276% and 183% of the initial budget for Summer Olympics (Flyvbjerg et al., 2016). For the smaller and less venue intensive Winter Games, the average and median costs were respectively 155% and 146% of the initial budget.

# Team facilities

The traditional FIFA World Cup model calls for venue-specific team hotels (VSTHs), venue-specific training sites (VSTSs), team base camp hotels (TBCHs) and team base camp training sites (TBCTSs). This reflects an event where a team will be based in one part of a country and will have to travel to games in multiple distant cities, necessitating the need for a game-specific hotel and training sites beyond the base camp. Thus, at the time of bid evaluation, Qatar was required to have 48 VSTSs, 24 VSTHs, 64 TBCHs and 64 TBCTSs. The bid however, proposed only 36 VSTSs and 24 VSTHs, reflecting limited need for teams to relocate from base camps, while still needing to come close to meeting formal bid technical requirements. Additionally, the bid structured the base camps as 32 individual hotels and training sites, with two further sites where the other 32 base hotels

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and training sites would be clustered in villages of 16. The bid evaluation itself acknowledged that the requirements were likely surplus to actual needs given the effective one city structure of Qatar's bid. The risk however, came from the lack of existing facilities at the time of bid – of 64 TBCHs and TBCTSs proposed, 54 and 39 respectively did not exist.

As with stadiums, the practical reality of Qatar's compact concept led to rightsizing in the delivery phase. Venue specific sites were discarded in favour of TBCHs and TBCTs. The village base camp concept did not come to fruition either. Instead, teams had an accommodation site usually nearby their training site and there was one base camp and training site assigned to each team. There were three types of training sites: purposebuilt clusters, universities, and local soccer club facilities. Several sites served several teams, although each had exclusively designated spaces within clustered locations. Teams were generally assigned to training sites with proximity to their accommodation.

28 teams were housed in hotels or resorts, two at Qatar University dorms, and two at sport academy campuses. All but four teams were housed within Doha and immediate suburbs. Often the hotels were far beyond what was required to house a team. With teams taking over the entirety of many premier Doha hotels in terms of room count and location, this had further adverse impact on the fan accommodation market.

# 6. Transport

## Airports and international connections

At the time of the bid, the existing Doha International Airport handled over 16 million passengers annually. However, the bid promised that Doha would have a new airport opened by 2012 and completed by 2017, largely on land reclaimed from the Persian Gulf. The completed new airport would have a capacity of 50 million passengers per year, hourly capacity of 6,400 passengers, 41 contact gates, and a further 22 remote stands. The first two phases of the new Hamad International Airport opened in 2014, with a further partial expansion opening a week before the tournament, in theory taking annual capacity to 53 or 58 million passengers depending on the source. The airport capacity prior to the expansion was 35 million passengers per year, with the ability to accommodate 8,700 passengers per hour through 41 contact gates and 65 remote stands. Although its promised final yearly capacity was not reached and the third phase is still under construction, Hamad had become one of the highest rated airports in the world. Despite reports of pre-tournament operational concerns, Hamad was also able to handle event-time arrivals and departures, with a direct Metro connection and integration into the World Cup bus system. The burden on Hamad was supplemented by the neighboring Doha International Airport, which was retained for private, charter, and diplomatic flights, as well as select commercial airlines during the World Cup. Between the

two airports, Doha handled over 14,000 flights during the World Cup period, including more than 7,000 concentrated in the first week of the tournament.

Figure 3. Hamad International Airport (Author)



Although the effective single-city World Cup precluded the usual World Cup need to travel between host cities, the challenges of accommodating well over a million visitors in a city of 2.3 million made short haul flights an attractive option. These included over 160 daily shuttle flights from carriers in neighboring Gulf countries, where passengers returned same-day, and were limited to carryon to reduce airport impact and enhance turnaround. While these flights relieved some pressure on Doha accommodation, many of the environmental benefits of eliminating intra-county flights were negated.

# International rail connections

The bid promised a high-speed rail network connecting Qatar to Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, with a \$24 billion budget. The Doha to Manama connection was to be completed by 2019 with a travel time of under 1 hour, and the Saudi rail network connection had a 2017 opening date. Neither project was completed by 2022, due to cost and political considerations. As early as 2012, Bahrain's foreign minister claimed construction would only be finished near the World Cup. The 40kilometer causeway over the Gulf was a complex and expensive project, but not infeasible considering that Bahrain was already connected by a similar length causeway to Saudi Arabia. The Qatar to Saudi portion was part of the large Gulf Railway project connecting six Gulf States, with each country responsible for the portion within its territory. Where Qatar was concerned, its political estrangement from its Saudi, Emirati, and Bahraini neighbors between 2017 and 2021, including the severance of diplomatic relations, further complicated infrastructure development. The lack of international rail connection limited efforts to have neighboring states reduce the accommodation burden on Doha. This in turn only left the option of shuttle flights, with their commensurate environmental footprint. Domestic rail and metro connections

The bid also committed to 70% operational capacity for a 340-kilometer metro network system by 2022, with connections between all bid-proposed Host Cities. Considering the bid had one host city in Al-Shamal at the far

north of the country, the selection of metro (usually used for dense urban environments with stations at 1-2 km intervals) for this rail segment seems highly questionable. Although the Al-Shamal stadium was cancelled, the bid also proposed a metro connection to Al-Khor, which became home to the realized Al Bayt stadium. This Al-Khor metro however has been postponed to 2050, and Al-Bayt was accessible only by road.

Within Doha, metro rail was proposed to connect all stadiums, with a north-south line following the north coast and splitting toward Qatar University (where the bid proposed a stadium) and The Pearl luxury mixed-use development. In reality, Qatar University did not host a stadium, but was connected to the Metro Red Line, which ran to Lusail Stadium as proposed. The metro alignment however, followed the eastern side before crossing west toward Qatar University and proceeding north to its terminus at Lusail. The partially completed Lusail Tram light rail following the coast further north and reconnecting with Lusail Stadium was not included in the bid proposal. In central Doha, the Red Line was built along alignments proposed in the bid, with a spur to the new international airport. However, the event-time southern terminus in Al-Wakra did not include four further south stations seen in the bid evaluation or reach the southernmost Al-Janoub Stadium.

Figure 4. Al-Wakra Metro Station (Author)



The bid proposed metro map also included a further five west bound lines, which align with proposed future spurs of the Green and Gold Metro. By the World Cup, two of these lines had been completed. Additionally, the bid map contemplated an extension of what became the Gold Line to the new airport, which has not been constructed. Despite the World Cup time network not nearly resembling the ambitious bid maps, by November 2022 the Doha Metro had gone from non-existence at the time of the bid to having three automated lines with 37 stations and 76 kilometers of track. These stations and trains were among the nicest and smoothest the author has seen in extensive world travels, with well-designed crowd flows and reliable intervals.

#### Road connections

In central Doha, road construction and improvement proposed by the bid has mostly been realized, including the north-south Doha Expressway at the west edge of the center and the Ras Abu Abboud Expressway leading southeast to the airports. Although the bid documents showed a causeway running over water between Ras Abu Abboud and West Bay, this has not been constructed. The continuation of the Doha Expressway south to Al-Wakra along with major arterials was also completed on the same or similar alignments to bid proposals. To the north in Al-Daayeen, upgrades to both Al-Shamal Road and the Al-Khor Coastal Road were realized, while connecting arterials to the south of the plan were generally built as planned, but further to the north remain desert.

While Al-Khor saw significant new road investments, these were on a very different plan than the bid proposal, which also had a stadium site roughly 3 kilometers north of where Al-Bayt Stadium was built. Most notably, a ring road motorway and radial arterials did not materialize, but the Al-Khor Coastal Road was upgraded to a motorway leading directly to the stadium site. Similarly, in the Al-Rayyan suburb west of central Doha where three stadiums were located, a planned arterial road became a ring road motorway, while some other planned arterials are still desert. Where bid proposed stadiums were cancelled, road networks were also partially still realized, although more was built in the Doha suburb of Umm Slal than the far north location of Al-Shamal.

Although the tournament bus network was not mentioned in the bid evaluation, the extensive investment in road capacity beyond existing local demand (or immediate potential to induce demand) facilitated relatively smooth movement of 4,000 tournament shuttle buses connecting major accommodation clusters, stadiums, attractions, the city center, and airports. Roughly 3,000 buses were acquired specifically for the tournament, which were then donated to developing countries afterward. About 700 tournament buses were electric.

# 7. Accommodation

Qatar proposed over 240 properties to provide 84,000 contracted rooms, more than the 60,000 required by FIFA. At the time of the bid, this included 100 existing properties with 40,000 contracted rooms, including several apartment complexes with more than 2,000 rooms. Two thirds of the more than 55,000 rooms in 140 additional properties planned to be constructed were to be found in 17 properties, including a 6,000-room cruise ship village in Al-Wakra. Existing rooms at the time of the bid were overwhelming concentrated in Doha and Al-Wakra, with 17,000 in the former and 27,000 mostly temporary accommodation rooms in the latter. A further 20,000 rooms were planned in Doha, 13,000 in Al-Wakra, 12,000 in the northern Doha area of Al-Daayen (which became better known as Lusail), 6,000 in the far north planned resort town of Umm Slal, 3,000 to the west of Doha in Al-Rayyan, and 1,000 in Al-Khor.

In practice, accommodation was concentrated in four areas mirroring larger Doha development trends: traditional central Doha, the new West Bay core, Lusail, and Al-Wakra. 105 of 140 proposed new properties materialized, with the total rooms available exceeding 120,000. Instead of at Al-Wakra, the more centrally located Doha Port hosted the cruise ship cluster. Although staffing was cited as a concern by FIFA, the broad management agreement with French hotel giant Accor for operating 65,000 rooms in temporary accommodations provided ample staffing and operational competence.

Thousands of these rooms, however, were purely temporary cabin or tent villages, while many thousands more were in new labor accommodations in peripheral locations reliant on shuttle buses. The largest of these, Barahat Al-Janoub, with a capacity of 11,000 fans, was in the desert 25 minutes by bus to the furthest south metro station, with a legacy use as labour housing. The labour camp, however, was equipped with grocery stores, a competent transport system, and large units with private bathrooms at an affordable \$84 US/night. Tent dwellers paying double that price for central locations had many more complaints with shared washroom facilities and spartan accommodations.

Figure 5. Barahat Al-Janoub Accommodation (Author)



## 8. Discussion

The Qatar 2022 World Cup bid presented a compelling vision of a compact tournament with state-of-the-art infrastructure. However, the bid was never expected to win – and but-for a ruthless campaign utilizing means that other bids were not willing to – likely would not have won. When combined with the longest ever horizon between award and event, the bid's evolution to delivery saw significant changes and challenges. Stadium construction experienced notable budget overruns and cancellations, diverging greatly from the original plan. Transportation infrastructure, including the never completed high-speed rail network and partially realized metro system, faced delays and modifications but performed well during the tournament. Accommodation exceeded FIFA's requirements in room numbers but featured a different distribution than initially proposed.

Where significant risks were evaluated by FIFA in the completion of major infrastructure components of World Cup delivery, the organizers were able to for the most part complete what was required to a specification that made practical sense given the context. Although the lofty plans in the bid were not necessarily realized as originally outlined, debatably something better emerged from the years between award and event. However, initial budgets were often greatly surpassed despite access to vast pools of cheap labour and highly criticized working conditions.

Often mega-event hosts are hemmed in by contracts with governing bodies that bind them to effectively deliver the proposed vision, with major changes subject to approval by that governing body. This has regularly led to scenarios where the sweeping visions deemed necessary to win competitive bids very suddenly become costly and binding host contracts theoretically enforced by substantial penalty clauses. However, the subsequent practical reality – as often seen with the Olympics – is that organizers will negotiate with governing bodies to come to a reasonable compromise that meets minimum requirements for a functional and successful sporting event. Instead, penalty clauses come into play only where a host withdraws altogether (such as Victoria 2026), and an event will only be stripped from a host where there is no realistic feasibility of delivery (see Durban 2022).

As the event draws closer, the fewer external options the governing body has to relocate the event that will have greater prospects of success than trying to work through issues with the awarded host. At the same time, the completion and feasibility picture only becomes clearer as the event nears, past the effective point of no return. Further, any relocation will also come with major sunk costs and reputational risks to both the governing body and host, incentivizing compromise.

As with many mega-events, the Qatar bid was framed to best achieve the initial objective of winning the event. Compared to most mega-events however, the timeframe between award and event, as well as the gap between current and event conditions in terms of venues, infrastructure, and national development, was much more significant. Whereas the "uncomfortable knowledge" with many successful mega-events is delivering on a well-defined and advanced concept, Qatar's first element of uncomfortable knowledge was actually delivering an event that no one was expecting it to win. This was followed quickly by reconciling an exceedingly ambitious bid with what could be delivered, what made sense for Qatar as a legacy, and what FIFA would accept.

With these framing limitations in mind, Qatar delivered on a plan that was substantially developed in the post-bid stage. However, there were substantial tensions between capacity and sensible legacy on one hand and delivering what FIFA required, or thought it required, to stage the World Cup. Qatar's response can be viewed similarly to earlier stages of the country's economic development through the energy industry. In effect, this meant utilizing shifting bargaining power over time to achieve a more deliverable and practical World Cup, while limiting the opportunity for FIFA to say "no" to major changes.

As with many resource-rich countries, Qatar extensively used foreign expertise and concessions to develop its energy sector. Then, the state energy company, Qatar Energy, became dominant as Qatar became one of the largest gas producers in the world. Applied to the World Cup, FIFA plays the role of the foreign firm, necessary to accelerate the industry in the first place through awarding the event. This was complemented by a host of foreign contractors required to operationalize a bid into a functional event, through planning, construction, event management and staging, transportation, logistics, and accommodation functions.

As Qatar gained more leverage as the event drew nearer, it started reframing the event to better fit its own revised needs focused on soft power and economic diversification. Whether this was shifting from summer to winter, not delivering on the high-speed rail network (in large part due to border disputes), downscaling the number of stadiums, and reducing hotel rooms to something more feasible for post-event Doha, Qatar was able to easily enough make sensible compromises with FIFA on elements not essential to a successful event. As the event neared, the leverage shifted further toward Qatar, culminating perhaps with the ban of alcohol service at stadiums 48 hours before the tournament, reneging on a key bid promise with FIFA rendered powerless to intervene.

Although the final product looked quite different from the bid, Qatar still spent an estimated \$200 billion on World Cup related projects. The result was a generally well-executed event, framed on the host's terms. For Qatar, the event has developed local expertise to potentially replace foreign contractors for future events, as well as making bids for events such as the Summer Olympics far more credible. But this obsolescing bargain may extend to non-sport related infrastructure, construction, and professional functions that were also accelerated by the unprecedented event spend and objective of using the event to prompt economic diversification.

Qatar 2022 was also evidence that a onecity concept could be viable. While no city would be well-advised to build eight stadiums, a four-stadium concept in the future could deliver one game per day per stadium during a traditional 32-team tournament. With FIFA moving to the extreme opposite of the in 2026 with 48 teams in 16 host cities, the Olympic-like quality of fans from all countries in the same city and being able to see multiple games in the same day will be lost. However, future bid concepts could focus on two or three hub cities, broadening the range of prospective hosts to countries that do not viably have the four cities for a traditional joint-bid without anything as diffused as the 2021 Euro concept (twelve host cities in eleven countries).

Similarly, the ranging differences between what was promised and the event delivered beyond the normal scope of what is often seen with the Olympics, has demonstrated and reinforced the viability to future bidders of a strategic plan to win the event through providing one vision, while only having to deliver on a very different set of outcomes. This may be the contrasting bookend to arguments that strategic deception explains much of mega-project cost-overruns (Flyvbjerg et al., 2009) - here the deception would moderate ambition and cost. Finally, for governing bodies, the Qatar experience highlights the importance of enforceable host contracts that bring significant and proportionate penalty clauses for going beyond the remit of reasonable post-award negotiation and optimization, and instead aim to use event-time leverage to create outcomes that would have never been approved at the award stage.

# 9. Conclusion

Upon winning the 2022 World Cup, Qatar was presented with the "wicked problem" of how to deliver a bid that was designed to impress more than win. The response to this uncomfortable knowledge can be partially understood through the obsolescing bargain, a concept borrowed from the resource sector through which we can recognize the shifting dynamics of deal parameters over time. Applied to the mega-event context, the obsolescing bargain will see a host country like Qatar initially need to impress the governing body, but continually gain more bargaining power as the event nears. Indeed, once awarded the bid, Qatar was able to deftly navigate its promises to FIFA and use increased leverage nearer to the event to deliver the World Cup that best fulfilled its objectives of using sport for soft power and economic diversification.

Qatar's bid was built on a vision that aimed to satisfy FIFA's technical requirements while proposing a compact concept in effectively a single host city, a significant departure from the typical bid proposals. This paper has documented and scrutinized key aspects of this journey from bid to delivery, including facilities, transportation infrastructure, and accommodation, evaluating how each were adapted and modified over time to meet the evolving demands of hosting the World Cup. For prospective hosts, this paper also provides guidance on the viability of a one-city concept for future World Cups and similar major international single-sport tournaments. Likewise, Qatar 2022 serves as an excellent case study in how mega-event hosts can strategically walk the line between visionary bids and more realistic delivery, even where the governing body and key stakeholders may be strongly opposed to certain decisions.

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