

SPORTING DIPLOMACY: ANALYSING THE LEGACY OF THE LONDON 2012 AND THE PARIS 2024 OLYMPIC GAMES

Louise Marie-Eva Sophie Kemita Gueydon

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how the diplomatic legacy of Sport Mega Events (SMEs) can be understood to enhance host countries' soft power while aligning with local and international strategies. Through an analysis of the London 2012 and Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic legacies, this research project frames legacy as a diplomatic resource that States can use to enhance their soft power. Rather than focusing on the International Olympic Committee (IOC), this study centres on how host nations, in this case, the UK and France, organise and present the Games to serve their own diplomatic agendas. It contributes to the growing field of sport and diplomacy by analysing legacies through a global diplomacy framework as defined by Rofe, which moves beyond traditional state-centric models to include non-state actors and symbolic representation. It also contributes to the academic discourse by arguing that sport diplomacy should be recognised as a field of diplomacy.

London 2012 demonstrated the UK's use of the Games to project global leadership in business, sustainability, inclusion and green innovation. It also used the Games as a platform to promote economic growth amid an economic crisis. Paris 2024, the first Games fully aligned with Olympic Agenda 2020, introduced a series of pioneering initiatives that positioned France as a leader in sustainable and inclusive SMEs hosting.

Despite contextual differences, both case studies shared similar objectives, including enhancing national prestige through elite sport, promoting disability rights and inclusivity, stimulating economic growth, and advancing environmental innovation. These ambitions led to new frameworks and regulations that redefined sport policy and diplomacy. In this context, SMEs became instruments of strategic transformation and long-term investment for the host countries.

This thesis contributes to the literature in four key ways: (1) It offers a framework for understanding how host countries frame and mobilise diplomatic legacy; (2) It examines how positive legacies are constructed and mobilised in ways to pre-empt or mitigate potential negative consequences associated with SME hosting; (3) It highlights the importance of aligning legacy programmes with development and national agendas; and (4) It expands the theoretical lens of sport diplomacy through the global diplomacy framework by defining each type of legacy and highlighting how it intersects with diplomacy.

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Abbreviations

AFD *Agence Française de développement* (French Development Agency)

ANLSP *Association Nationale des Ligues de Sport Professionnel* (National Association of Professional Sports Leagues)

ANSSI *Agence nationale de la sécurité des systèmes d'information* (National Cybersecurity Agency of France)

CNOSF *Comité National Olympique et Sportif Français* (French National Olympic and Sports Committee)

COJO / COJOP *Comité d'Organisation des Jeux Olympiques et Paralympiques* (Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games)

CoSMoS *Conseil Social du Mouvement Sportif* (Social Council of the Sports Movement)

CPSF *Comité Paralympique et Sportif Français* (French Paralympic and Sports Committee)

CSL Commission for a Sustainable London

CSR Corporate Social Responsibility

DAECT *Délégation pour l'Action Extérieure des Collectivités Territoriales* (Delegation for External Action of Local Authorities)

DCMS Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

DIJOP Interministerial Delegation for the Olympic and Paralympic Games

EU European Union

FCO Foreign and Commonwealth Office

FNASS *Fédération Nationale des Associations de Sportifs* (National Federation of Athletes' Associations)

FEP *Fédération des Educateurs Physiques* (Federation of Physical Educators)

GLA Greater London Authority

HVO high-value opportunities

IBC International Broadcast Centre

IDFM Île-de-France Mobilités

IFs International Federations

IOC International Olympic Committee

IPC International Paralympic Committee

LLDC London Legacy Development Corporation

LOGOC London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games

MEAE *Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères* (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs)

MPC Main Press Centre

MSJOP *Ministère des Sports et des Jeux Olympiques et Paralympiques* (Ministry of Sports and the Olympic and Paralympic Games)

NGO(s) Non-Governmental Organisation(s)

OCOGs Organizing Committees of the Olympic Games

ODA Olympic Delivery Authority

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OPLC / OPLG Olympic Park Legacy Company / Olympic Park Legacy Group

ORN Olympic Route Network

PLC Public Limited Company

PRN Paralympic Route Network

SGDSN General Secretariat for Defence and National Security

SSE *Économie Sociale et Solidaire* (Social and Solidarity Economy)

SMEs Sports Mega Events

UN United Nations

UNEP United Nations Environment Programme

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNFCCC United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

WCED World Commission on Environment and Development

WCPPP World Class Performance Programm

Introduction

Sports Mega Events (SMEs) and global events more broadly, have become increasingly significant instruments of international positioning. Their importance results from the scale of public investment they require and the long-term implications they carry for host countries. As the OECD notes, global events “have a global reach (in terms of participation, audience and/or media coverage), require significant public investment and have an impact on the population and built environment” (OECD, 2021, p.7).

Within this broader category, the Olympic and Paralympic Games stand out for the way in which their scale and visibility have progressively expanded expectations about what they should deliver beyond sport. As Holt et al. observe, the IOC and FIFA now seek to ensure that the competitions they oversee “amount to more than a few great moments, no matter how extraordinary or inspiring they might be: that these events live on through their legacy” (Holt et al., 2015, p.1). They add, SMEs are expected “not only [to] succeed in their own terms but also bear the weight of great public expectation: to renew a city, to revive an economy, to re-brand a nation” (Holt et al., 2015, p.2).

This evolution also reflects the political and institutional constraints placed on hosts, who must meet the costs of organising “extremely expensive events” and deliver them according to the governing body’s “specifications” (Holt et al., 2015, p.2). For democratic hosts in particular, this legacy imperative is inseparable from public accountability. As et al. underline:

“Democratic politicians have to take the people with them. They have to face their voters and their taxpayers. They need to be able to respond clearly and convincingly to critics of environmental cost and public concern about the massive disruption and expense involved” (Holt et al., 2015, p.1).

This dynamic is not limited to liberal democracies. As Holt et al. illustrate through cases such as Beijing 2008 and Sochi 2014, hosting SMEs requires coherence between domestic development goals and broader diplomatic or geopolitical objectives. In their words:

“There are few regimes with the wealth and political autonomy to stage a major sporting event without apparent concern for the cost. The Beijing Olympics of 2008 and the Sochi Winter Games of 2014 come to mind. However, even in China or Russia there are also plans for domestic legacy, which co-exist with the wider geo-political agenda” (Holt et al., 2015, p.2).

This demonstrates that, whether in liberal democracies or not, hosting and legacy must still coexist with domestic political or developmental agendas. Legacy’s importance for public

accountability renders its incorporation into SMEs planning indispensable. Holt et al. argue that legacy is “more effective if it is combined with a pre-existing plan to transform the city” and that it “works best when it is “designed into a bid from the outset” as part of a broader vision shared by stakeholders (Holt et al., 2015, p.2).

The OECD similarly underlines that event impacts may arise either from “the initiation of policies and investments” or from the “acceleration of already planned activity” making it essential to distinguish between what was caused by the event and what was simply brought forward or expanded because of it (OECD, 2023a, p.17). This distinction helps explain why host countries often present the Games as a policy accelerator and a catalyst for long-term change. In 2016, Theresa May reflected on London 2012 in precisely these terms:

“London 2012 was an extraordinary moment in our country’s recent history. Like many people I will never forget the excitement of watching the world’s best athletes perform here on our shores, and the wonderful spirit of national pride we felt during those weeks. But the story hasn’t ended there. We have shown that hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games can result in much more than a fantastic summer of sport. We’ve taken advantage of trade and investment opportunities, seen our tourism sector continue to break new ground, and published Sporting Future – a new strategy for an active nation, launched to help even more people become active and enjoy the many benefits of sport. And we have continued to welcome the world to our country, for events like the 2015 Rugby World Cup and the 2014 Tour de France Grand Départ, each time showing the UK at its very best and inspiring people across the country to get involved. [...] You only have to look at the once neglected area of east London – now such a thriving, connected and dynamic community – to get a sense of the lasting change that the Games can bring. 2012 was a great summer, and we can be proud of what has been achieved since. While we pause to remember the Games four years ago, we also look ahead to the next stage of the incredible story of London 2012” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.7).

Her words highlight how the Games served as an opportunity for long-term benefits in trade, tourism, urban regeneration, national pride, sustainability, accessibility, inclusivity and economic growth. Similarly, Tony Estanguet, President of Paris 2024, described similar ambitions:

“Since the early stages of the project, nearly ten years ago, Paris 2024 has carried a strong ambition: to deliver Games that are both spectacular and that celebrate sport and athletes, but also Games that are more open, more responsible, and more committed. Over the years, this vision has guided our strategy and actions, allowing us to bring to life a new model of the Games, both popular, with momentum that exceeded all our expectations, and at the same time responsible and engaged in addressing the challenges of our time. Convinced that sport and the Games must reinvent themselves in the face of today’s challenges, with Paris 2024, we have proven that it is possible to do things differently. [...] We hope that the path we have taken will continue to be explored, for future

editions of the Games and by the organizers of other sporting events, in order to keep evolving their model”¹ (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.10).

His statement reflects a shift toward a more engaged and sustainable Olympic model, responding to contemporary challenges while inspiring future organisers.

Both speeches emphasised the importance of the legacy the Games would generate across multiple domains, including infrastructure, education, sport, environmental policy, logistics, transportation and mobility, security, and emissions reduction. They also emphasised that the Games must be exemplary, as they attract global attention and offer a unique opportunity for the United-Kingdom (UK) and France to showcase their infrastructure and organisational capabilities. This international visibility, combined with demonstrated expertise, further strengthens each country’s capacity to continue hosting SMEs in the future.

The two speeches also highlighted the extensive upstream preparation required to shape a meaningful and sustainable legacy, stressing both the long-term impact the Games already achieved and the one yet to come. Legacy emerged as a central notion in both addresses, serving as a guiding concept for London 2012 and Paris 2024. Taken together, these speeches crystallise the dual ambition of both editions of the Games: to deliver a successful global sporting event while embedding its success within a broader national project of long-term, sustainable transformation.

It is within this context that this thesis is situated. By examining the diplomatic dimensions, as defined by Rofe (2016, 2018, 2021) and Murray (2008, 2018, 2024), this research explores how the Games are not only a moment of international visibility but also a tool for projecting the values, capabilities, and strategic priorities of the host countries. Through a diplomatic reading of official reports and pre- and post-Games documents, this thesis questions how diplomatic legacy is represented and argues for the importance of identifying and linking it to existing diplomatic theories. In doing so, it contributes to the consolidation of sports and diplomacy as a field of study as defined by Rofe (2021) and Murray (2024) and further developed in Chapter 1, Section 3.

¹ « Depuis les prémices du projet, il y a bientôt dix ans, Paris 2024 a porté une ambition forte : proposer des Jeux à la fois spectaculaires et permettant de magnifier le sport et les athlètes, mais aussi des Jeux plus ouverts, plus responsables et plus engagés. Au fil des années, cette vision a guidé notre stratégie et nos actions et nous a permis de donner vie à un nouveau modèle de Jeux, à la fois populaires, avec un élan qui a dépassé tout ce que nous pouvions imaginer, et en même temps des Jeux responsables et engagés par rapport aux défis de notre époque. Convaincus que le sport et les Jeux doivent se réinventer face aux défis de notre temps, avec Paris 2024, nous avons prouvé qu’il était possible de faire différemment. [...] Nous espérons que la voie que nous avons empruntée continuera d’être explorée, pour les prochaines éditions des Jeux et par les organisations des autres événements sportifs, afin de continuer à faire évoluer leur modèle ».

1. Problem statement

This research is part of the growing recognition of Sports Diplomacy. It explores the role of Sport as a tool of soft power and diplomacy and the increasing literature on this subject. This research is also part of a growing work on legacy, especially since the concept is recognised as a central element of the Olympic movement by the IOC.

The importance of legacy has been formally recognised in Rule 2 of the Olympic Charter since July 4, 2003 (IOC, 2017, p. 9). In the Chapter 1 of the Olympic Charter, the IOC explicitly includes among its roles the responsibility to:

“take measures to promote a positive legacy from the Olympic Games to the host city and the host country, including a reasonable control of the size and cost of the Olympic Games, and encourages the Organizing Committees of the Olympic Games (OCOGs), public authorities in the host country and the persons or organizations belonging to the Olympic Movement to act accordingly” (IOC, 2003, p.19).

The recognition of legacy as a central pillar of Olympic planning is further reinforced by the Legacy Strategic Approach, drawing on the Olympic Charter and on the recommendations of Olympic Agenda 2020. This strategic roadmap addressed legacy in three key recommendations:

- 1) The first recommendation, “shape the bidding process as an invitation”, introduces an assistance phase to guide candidate cities in aligning their bids with long-term legacy goals but also introduces “how previous cities have ensured positive bid and Games legacies” (IOC, 2017, p.10).
- 2) The second recommendation “evaluate bid cities by assessing key opportunities and risks” aims to encourage the use of existing or temporary infrastructure and incorporates independent assessments of social, economic, and environmental factors, with a strong emphasis on sustainability and legacy.
- 3) The third recommendation “include sustainability in all aspects of the Olympic Games” calls for post-Games legacy monitoring in collaboration with National Olympic Committees and external partners such as the World Union of Olympic Cities (IOC, 2017, p.10).

This strategic shift has not only institutionalised legacy within Olympic governance but has also led to a growing body of academic research on the topic, reflecting its increasing relevance in policy, institutional and scholarly discourses.

It is important to clarify that this research does not centre on the IOC as an institution, nor does it focus primarily on Olympism or the Olympic Movement. Instead, it examines how host countries have strategically organised and presented the Olympic Games as an example of SMEs to serve their own legacy objectives.

This research aligns with existing scholarship on legacy and sports diplomacy (see Chapter 1, Section 3), while offering a distinct contribution by providing a diplomatic reading and understanding of these legacies, and examining how they can be mobilised as diplomatic resources. In doing so, it addresses gaps in the literature related to the framing of the diplomatic legacy of SMEs (see Section 2) and aims to contribute to the development of a methodological approach for analysing diplomatic legacy, building on existing frameworks, primary sources, and diplomatic theory.

As outlined in the Introduction, drawing on Holt et al.'s observations on the financial and political pressures placed on host nations, the rising costs of the Games and the reliance on public funds have increasingly intensified expectations surrounding legacy. This has led scholars to argue that the benefits of hosting the Olympics are often overstated. Consequently, there has been a growing emphasis on legacy studies as a means of justifying the substantial public investment required. This perspective is supported by Atkinson et al., who observe that:

“In order to justify the large public subsidies required to host such an event, advocates have tended to argue that there are significant economic benefits both directly and indirectly attributable to hosting these events. However, economists have raised a number of challenges to these optimistic figures. Direct benefits are likely to be small, since impacts such as net additional tourism are likely to be limited. In addition, mega-event investments tend to displace better alternatives in the host city or beyond” (Atkinson et al., 2008, p.420).

Taking these considerations into account, this dissertation has four main objectives:

- 1) To contribute to a deeper understanding of how host nations strategically frame and mobilise legacy as a diplomatic instrument. This includes analysing how legacy discourses are constructed in official documentation, identifying diplomatic intent, and clarifying how legacy framings contribute to soft-power projection. The thesis also develops a conceptual framework for understanding diplomatic legacy across international, national, regional and local scales, highlighting which practices appear transferable and how legacy narratives may inform shared knowledge for future hosts.
- 2) To analyse how host countries frame legacy in ways that anticipate, manage, or minimise potential negative outcomes associated with SMEs (underused infrastructure, financial

costs or socially uneven effects). Rather than evaluating whether these risks are mitigated, the goal is to understand how official documents strategically present their legacy to support broader diplomatic narratives.

- 3) To analyse the importance of aligning legacy programmes with national, regional, and local development agendas. By examining how legacy is embedded within wider policy priorities, the thesis demonstrates how such alignment enhances long-term benefits and contributes to the host country's soft-power objectives.
- 4) To distinguish between short-term and long-term diplomatic objectives by analysing how they intersect with legacy ambitions across international, national, and local levels.

2. Research Question

The literature review reveals several gaps that this thesis aims to address in relation to the framing, implementation, and evaluation of diplomatic legacy within the context of SMEs. These gaps present an opportunity to contribute to scholarly knowledge by examining how legacy can be strategically mobilised to serve both domestic and international objectives. Accordingly, this thesis is guided by the following research question:

How can the diplomatic legacy of SMEs be mobilised to enhance soft power for host countries, while aligning with domestic and international development strategies, as examined through London 2012 and Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games?

To support this central question, the following sub-questions are outlined:

- Drawing from the experiences of the Paris 2024 and London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, what strategies can be highlighted to ensure a successful and sustainable diplomatic legacy?
- What constitutes a diplomatic legacy in the context of SMEs?
- What specific insights and lessons can be drawn from these two case studies?
- How can diplomatic frameworks be applied to assess legacy outcomes across different domains?

3. Choice of countries: The United Kingdom and France

France and the UK are two countries with a long-standing tradition of hosting international competitions. Both countries have built a strong SME pipeline, regularly hosting high-profile sporting events such as the Olympic Games, the men's Football and Rugby World Cups, the European Football Championships (men's and women's), and the Ryder Cup.

Additionally, each country hosts one of the four Grand Slam tennis tournaments, Roland Garros in France and Wimbledon in the UK, as well as Formula 1 races, Silverstone in the UK and Le Castellet in France. France has also hosted the Winter Olympics and organises the Tour de France, arguably one of the most globally visible annual sporting events. The UK, meanwhile, has hosted the Cricket World Cup, further demonstrating its SME hosting capacity.

3.1 The UK and London 2012: Setting the standard for legacy in Olympic bids

The UK ranked second in the 2019 Portland Soft Power Index. While Brexit slightly disrupted the UK's situation and weakened its soft power (especially in terms of the Government and Enterprise sub-indices), the UK maintained a strong performance in education, culture, and digital innovation (2019, p. 43). Technology companies remain competitive in the global market, and institutions such as the BBC and the British Council continue to support British soft power. The country also remains active in international organisations like The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Commonwealth. As the Portland Report notes:

"The UK's greatest soft power strengths lie in Culture and Education, which – to date – are feeling no ill effects from Brexit. British art, film, music, and sport continue to hold enormous global appeal" (2019, p.42).

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games were notable for their strong emphasis on legacy, which has since become a central criterion in Olympic bid processes and in the hosting of other SMEs. London 2012 played an essential role in establishing new standards and benchmarks for sustainability, influencing both mega-event management and wider practices across the construction and event industries. London was widely recognised for its sustainable approach in its bid, thanks in part to the creation of the Commission for a Sustainable London 2012 (CSL), which provided independent oversight throughout the planning and delivery of the Games. The involvement of an independent commission providing an assurance function on sustainability was unprecedented. While acknowledging the negative impacts of SMEs, CSL concluded that the sustainable practices inspired by London would likely outweigh these

impacts over time, offering a model for future host cities and related industries (DCMS, 2013, p. 20).

Examining the UK's approach to legacy as a diplomatic narrative offers insights into how host countries construct and mobilise legacy to support international and domestic positioning. This thesis analyses the UK case to identify patterns, strategies and lessons that can inform how diplomatic legacies are framed while highlighting elements presented as best practices.

3.2 France and Paris 2024: the first Olympic Games fully aligned with Olympic Agenda 2020

France ranked first in the Portland Soft Power Index published in 2019 and continued to position itself as a key actor in global sport diplomacy. It hosted the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games and secured the 2030 Winter Olympic and Paralympics in the Alps. According to *The Impact of Major Sport Events: Study of Soft Power, Trade and Investment Impacts* (2021, p.23), France is increasingly leveraging sport diplomacy to achieve broader public policy goals. The French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs' Sporting Diplomacy Team focuses on three strategic objectives:

- 1) "Organizing major international sporting events. Holding the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Rugby World Cup, the French Open (Roland Garros) and the Tour de France bicycle race in France helps to enhance the country's international outreach" (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, n.d.).
- 2) "Making sport central to our bilateral partnerships by strengthening the role of sport as a tool of cooperation and rapprochement with our foreign partners" (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, n.d.).
- 3) "Using sport as a tool of influence and attractiveness. Beyond the performance of French athletes, sport is an exceptional showcase for national innovation and expertise in many areas, including the economic, social and environmental sectors" (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, n.d.).

Paris 2024 was a particularly symbolic event, marking 100 years since the city last hosted the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 1924. To celebrate this centenary, the event was framed around the concept of positive legacy, essential notion for the IOC (IOC, 2024a).

Paris 2024 aimed to make a positive contribution to climate action with one its central objective being a significant reduction of the Games' carbon footprint. An emblematic initiative was the

plan to make the Seine swimmable (IOC, 2025a). Its relevance for the legacy of Paris 2024 was symbolised by President Macron's public commitment to swim in the river during the inauguration of the Olympic Village in Seine-Saint-Denis in February 2024 (France Info, 2024). Both the Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, and the Minister of Sports, Amélie Oudéa-Castéra, swam in the Seine in July 2024, as a symbolic gesture to demonstrate improved water quality. This environmental ambition was rooted in the requirements of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement.

A focus on social inclusion complemented the environmental objectives, alongside strategies to develop employment and support populations or territories with limited access to opportunities, such as Seine-Saint-Denis (IOC, 2025b). According to the IOC, Paris 2024 was "setting new benchmarks for the positive impact and legacy the Games can create for the local people and community and their environment" (IOC, 2025b, p.39). The event was the first to be fully aligned with Olympic Agenda 2020, which redefined the relationship between host cities and the Games, shifting from cities adapting to the Games, to the Games adapting to the economic, social, and environmental needs of the host (IOC, 2025b, p.4).

This thesis examines the Paris 2024 Games to identify lessons and patterns that can inform understandings of how sustainable and diplomatic legacies were framed by the host nation.

4. Thesis structure

This thesis examines the diplomatic legacies associated with hosting the Olympic Games, with a particular focus on London 2012 and Paris 2024. It examines how SMEs are utilised as instruments of soft power, and how host countries frame their Olympic projects to serve both domestic and international diplomatic objectives.

This thesis is divided into three parts. The first part comprises two chapters, the first one focusing on the literature and the second one introducing the methodology. The second part contains four empirical chapters, two about London 2012 and two about Paris 2024. The chapters are divided between pre-Games and post-Games reports. The final part presents the concluding remarks, summarising the research contributions and suggesting directions for future research.

Part I, Sport and Diplomacy: Literature, concepts and methods, provides the theoretical, methods and historical foundation for the thesis.

The first chapter reviews existing literature on sports diplomacy and legacy, and outlines the conceptual tools used to analyse legacy from a diplomatic lens and is organised as follows: firstly, it introduces the existing literature by presenting the historical background of sport in diplomacy and key theoretical perspectives. It then develops the key concepts and definitions of sport, politics, sport politics, diplomacy, politics and diplomacy, global events, and the impacts and legacy of global events. Next, it explores the theoretical perspectives, explaining the conceptual ambiguity and evolution of the term *sports diplomacy*. It identifies the two dominant strands of sports diplomacy research and argues for a broader understanding of sports diplomacy beyond state-centric approaches. The chapter also clarifies terminology, distinguishing between *sport as diplomacy*, *international diplomacy of sport*, and *sport and diplomacy*. It further expands on the relevance of the global diplomacy framework and explains how sports diplomacy can be considered an emerging academic field. The chapter then addresses the concept of legacy, why it is important in sports diplomacy and how it intersects with SMEs. Finally, it introduces and frames different types of legacies from a diplomatic perspective, based on existing research and literature, and highlights current gaps.

Chapter 2 develops the methodology of the thesis, which employs thematic analysis to examine official legacy documents from London 2012 and Paris 2024.

Part II: Sport diplomacy and legacy: analysis of London 2012 and Paris 2024 introduces the four empirical chapters. The first two chapters focus on London 2012, while the following two examine Paris 2024.

The first chapter analyses pre-Games legacy official reports and documents for London 2012. It is organised as follows: this chapter frames legacy from a diplomatic perspective in the pre-Games' reports. It first develops the concept of economic diplomacy and the knowledge economy, showing how London planned to exploit economic opportunities for growth, support small businesses, build industry skills, and enhance employment. It also explores how London positioned itself as a global knowledge hub, before focusing on tourism, soft power, and economic diplomacy.

The chapter then moves to urban diplomacy, examining how infrastructure was planned as a diplomatic showcase. It discusses how transport infrastructure and the regeneration of East London can be considered forms of urban diplomacy.

Next, it focuses on green diplomacy and sustainability, showing how environmental transformation and green infrastructure were framed within green diplomacy. It highlights the importance of community engagement and everyday sustainability practices in reinforcing

green diplomacy and finally explores how sustainability was embedded into the governance structures of London 2012.

The chapter then turns to cultural and sporting legacies, emphasising the role of the Cultural Olympiad and the London 2012 Festival, followed by an analysis of government-led programmes and global engagement. It concludes with a discussion of elite sport and performance legacy.

Finally, the chapter addresses social legacy and diplomacy, showing how London planned to create new opportunities for disabled people, enhance the potential of the Games to drive social change, and encourage a new culture of volunteering.

The second chapter evaluates post-Games reports. It is organised as follows: first, it explores economic diplomacy focusing on how London 2012 was leveraged to enhance the UK's global economic positioning. This section examines the immediate and long-term impacts of the tourism economy, including the strategic deployment of the 'Great Campaign' and the role of para diplomacy and city diplomacy in promoting tourism. It then analyses UK Trade and Investment's (UKTI) legacy, showing how the Games were used to position the UK as a global business partner, and concludes with a discussion on expanding UK influence through strategic partnerships.

The chapter then turns to urban diplomacy, analysing how sustainability and adaptive design were framed as diplomatic tools. It highlights the inclusive and community-based legacy and explores the role of UK regions as agents of subnational diplomacy and finally considers transport development as a form of urban diplomatic engagement.

Next, the chapter addresses cultural and sporting diplomatic legacies, beginning with nation branding through cultural initiatives. It discusses participation in sports after London 2012 and the ambition to build a sporting nation. It then discusses how the UK became a world leader in culture and tourism. It concludes by examining how London has been framed as a capital of culture.

Finally, the chapter explores the social legacy of London 2012 through a diplomatic lens. It examines initiatives aimed at bringing communities together, such as 'Spirit of 2012' and 'Join In', and the development of a volunteering culture. It also discusses programmes supporting healthy living and explores the legacy of the Paralympics.

Chapter 5 focuses on Paris 2024 pre-Games reports and documents. It is organised as follows: first, it examines the importance of Paris 2024 within the Olympic Agenda.

The chapter then turns to economic diplomacy and economic soft power, analysing the sustainable procurement strategy, licensing and merchandising initiatives, and efforts to maximise economic benefits for French regions while discussing sound budget stewardship.

Next, it explores cultural and sporting diplomacy, focusing on media and digital diplomacy, performance-based diplomacy through the 'Ambition Bleue' strategy, and the hosting of SMEs as a strategic diplomatic lever for France.

The chapter then addresses social legacy and diplomacy, highlighting the role of volunteering, inclusion, and representation. It discusses how the ecological transition is framed as both a diplomatic and societal lever and analyses the designation of sport as the 2024 national cause, positioning it as a priority for social transformation.

Finally, the chapter examines urban and infrastructure diplomacy, focusing on investment in sport to enhance local services, territorial development as a driver of sustainable change, and the vision of building the city of tomorrow through sustainability, accessibility, and quality of life. It concludes with an analysis of transport and territorial cohesion, and a particular focus on the legacy plans for Seine-Saint-Denis.

Chapter 6 evaluates post-Games diplomatic legacies. It is organised as follows: first, it examines economic diplomacy, analysing investments, infrastructure development, and the economic impact of tourism.

It then explores inclusive and sustainable economic diplomacy, highlighting responsible procurement, inclusive employment practices, and the intersection of economic and social legacy.

The chapter then turns to cultural and sporting legacy and diplomacy, focusing on the post-Games outcomes of the 'Ambition Bleue' strategy, the Games as a cultural showcase, and the role of international engagement and digital innovation in promoting France's cultural influence.

Next, it addresses urban diplomacy, beginning with security and transport development, and moving to the transformation of territories. It discusses the expansion of urban heritage through sustainable and reusable facilities, refurbished iconic venues, and legacy beyond the Île-de-France region.

The chapter then explores social legacy and diplomacy, focusing on universal inclusion, international cooperation, and green diplomacy as responses to contemporary challenges.

Finally, the chapter concludes with an analysis of Paris 2024's contribution to the creation of new standards for organising SMEs, positioning the Games as a benchmark for future Olympic and international sporting events.

The final chapter summarises the key findings of the thesis and reflects on the insights drawn from London 2012 and Paris 2024. It discusses the contributions of the research to the field of sports and diplomacy, presents the limitations of the research and some potential areas for further research.

**PART I – SPORT AND DIPLOMACY: LITERATURE,
CONCEPTS, AND METHODS**

Chapter 1: Analysis of the existing literature

1. Historical background of sport in diplomacy and theoretical perspectives

The intersection of diplomacy, sport, and legacy is increasingly attracting attention from scholars as nations leverage sporting events to foster diplomatic relations and build lasting legacies. Despite this growing interest, the existing literature on sports and diplomacy remains limited, with much of it focusing primarily on the Olympic movement or specific historical periods. In many cases, sport is relegated to a minor section in books on diplomacy, and the literature regarding sport, development, and peace tends to remain separate from diplomatic or sociological studies (Rofe, 2018).

To better understand this gap, Pigman and Rofe (2014) examine existing literature on sport and diplomacy. Before proposing a more structured approach to the study of sport and diplomacy, they critically examine a series of existing works, which, although relevant, remain fragmentary and limited to a single discipline.

In philosophical and sociological literature, interest in sport has been present for several years. It has been theorised by authors such as David Black and Robert Redeker, whose contributions Pigman and Rofe praise (2014, p. 1095). Robert Redeker, for example, approaches sport from a philosophical and sociological perspective, criticising its ideological functions. In particular, he argues that modern sport is an illusion of civilisation and humanity (1999) and that the idea of sport as an instrument of peace or international diplomacy is an illusion (Redeker, 2008). David Black (2022), for his part, focuses on the role of sport in peacebuilding and peace consolidation. In particular, he analyses how SMEs, especially the Olympic Games, accompany and reflect the transformations of the neoliberal world order since the 1980s. He demonstrates that sport contributes to both the reproduction of global power (through prestige and conspicuous consumption) and its contestation (through boycotts and sanctions). He also develops a critical approach to 'Development Through Sport' (2010) and examines the political use of SMEs, showing how these events are mobilised as instruments of political and symbolic legitimisation, combining discourses of universal openness with logics of national prestige and global competition (2007).

Although these authors enrich their respective disciplines, whether in philosophy, sociology, or political science, their work does not address international sport in depth as a primary diplomatic object.

In addition to these disciplinary contributions, some case studies have begun to explore the diplomatic dimensions of sport as Pigman and Rofe also point out. This is the case with Chehabi (2001), who analyses Mohammad Khatami's initiative in sports diplomacy, comparing it to the ping-pong diplomacy between China and the United States. Similarly, Manzenreiter (2008) examines how football has been utilised by Japan and its former colonies, Korea and China, to express and negotiate issues of identity, power, and status in international relations. However, Pigman and Rofe highlight that these works do not present a structure or comprehensive research on the role of international sport in diplomacy. Building on these observations and addressing these gaps, Pigman and Rofe (2014) created the Diplomacy and International Sport research group in 2011, highlighting the need for a structured approach to studying sport and diplomacy. To fill the gaps in understanding the full scope of sport and diplomacy, there is a need for more comprehensive research and publications, as investigating the relationship between sport and diplomacy is essential for advancing academic research and recognising the importance of sports in shaping global relations (Pigman & Rofe, 2014).

Examining this relationship helps clarify how sport has evolved into an integral component of broader political and social dynamics among diverse actors within the international system (Rofe, 2018). There is also a need to create theoretical frameworks to document sport and diplomacy, providing researchers with tools to compare case studies and identify relationship patterns between diplomacy and sport (Pigman & Rofe, 2014).

Building on these theoretical foundations and identified gaps, a systematic investigation of sports diplomacy becomes essential. Pigman and Rofe (2014) argue that two primary factors underscore the relevance of this research today:

“First, nowhere has the diffusion and redistribution of political and economic power in our globalizing world been more visible to the general public and scholars alike than in international sport. Around the world on any given day, at almost any hour, sporting experiences that once were limited to thousands are now shared by millions. [...] The second rationale [...] is the relative rise in the importance of soft power, the power to persuade and attract, as a major development in international relations since the end of the Cold War. As diplomacy is one of the primary and perhaps most important tools of soft power, there has been a heightened interest in diplomacy, and in particular the techniques of public diplomacy and place branding, amongst scholars and the general public alike. International sporting competition is perceived increasingly as an ideal channel for nations, regions and cities to share their identities, their merits and ‘brands’ with the rest of the world” (Pigman & Rofe, 2014, pp. 1095-1095).

They also emphasise the need for scholars and practitioners to establish benchmarks for identifying and disseminating best practices in sport and diplomacy, noting that this can enhance credibility. All sectors, including governments, sporting federations, sponsors, and

media, can learn from one another to improve the technical and ethical aspects of sports diplomacy from a more informed perspective. However, crises in international sports, such as sporting scandals, can undermine the role of sports in diplomacy (Pigman & Rofe, 2014, p. 1097).

As the relationship between diplomacy, soft power, legacy and SMEs is multifaceted, scholars and policymakers must explore the broader implications of sport and diplomacy at different levels, both local and international. SMEs operate as diplomatic platforms for countries, organisations, or individuals to cooperate and compete on the global stage. As a result, participation or abstention from these events can be viewed as a diplomatic practice or challenge.

Overall, the concepts of diplomacy, soft power, and legacy are intricately interconnected. This thesis aims to examine these links through a diplomatic reading of legacies, contributing to the structured study of sport as an instrument of diplomacy. Additionally, it responds to the need for theoretical frameworks that document the relationship between sport and diplomacy.

2. Key concepts

Before exploring the concept and terminology of 'sport and diplomacy', it is useful first to examine each term individually and consider how they interconnect. This section outlines key definitions of 'sport', 'politics', 'sport politics', 'diplomacy', 'global events', 'and sports mega-events', laying the foundation for the theoretical perspectives presented in Section 3.

2.1 Sport

It is hard to define sport as definitions vary, however, Coakley defines it as "a well-established, officially governed competitive physical activities in which participants are motivated by internal and external rewards" (Coakley, 2007, p.6).

2.2 Politics and sport politics

Grix gives an interesting definition of politics and sport politics. He defines politics as follows:

"In general, there are two ways of understanding the term. First, it refers to the formal institutions of government (parliament, government departments, ministers, the president or prime minister and so on) and the ideologies that underpin different political stances.

Second, a much broader understanding of the 'political' includes everything to do with power, power relations, the distribution and origin of power. So, wherever there are power relations in society, 'politics' is said to exist" (Grix, 2016, p.4).

He then defines 'sport politics' as a: "shorthand for an area of study that deals with the politics of sport and politics in sport" (Grix, 2016, p.23).

Grix further elaborates on 'politics of sport', stating that:

"as discussed, sport and politics are impossible to separate. A game of football or an athletics event may not be political in and of itself, but the manner in which sport is used by governments, by individuals and groups for ends that are not sporting renders them such. This includes the context in which sport is played; as soon as sport is funded, political questions arise. Who funds them? Why? What does sport give in return?" (Grix, 2016, p.23).

He then turns to 'politics in sport', noting how sport organisations such as FIFA or the IOC operate as political entities ('political units'). For instance, these organisations may recognise would-be states that are not acknowledged by the UN or the international community (Grix, 2016, p.23).

Grix's definitions of the politics of sport and politics in sport provide a useful foundation for understanding the power dynamics at play. However, to refine the conceptual boundaries between politics and diplomacy, it is necessary to challenge the persistent myth that "sport and politics don't mix" (Rofe, 2016, p.215). As Rofe explains:

"The notion has been successfully deconstructed in Lincoln Allison's 1986 term, the "myth of autonomy," and is nonsensical when given more than a moment's thought.¹³ "Sport and politics cannot be mutually isolated," Trevor Taylor succinctly wrote.¹⁴ Indeed the examples that are readily used to associate sport and politics have become cliché" (Rofe, 2016, p.215).

Rofe adds that iconic Olympic moments (1936 'Nazi Games', the 1968 Black Power salute or the Cold War boycotts) are often cited as evidence of sport's political entanglement. However, these examples often obscure the complexity of each event and conflate distinct political experiences "nee caricatures, suffer from use as a "short-hand" that fails to acknowledge the detail of each episode, whilst also supposing a conflation of the "political" experience of sport that these episodes do not share" (Rofe, 2016, p.215). The case of 'Ping-Pong diplomacy' between the U.S. and China in the 1970s, for instance, has acquired a mythical status, often oversimplified as proof that sport can influence diplomacy. In reality, as Rofe explains, these

episodes reflect a far more “complex and inter-woven narrative than these familiar episodes suggest” (2016, p.215).

2.3 Diplomacy

Satow defines ‘Diplomacy’ as:

“the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of relations between the governments of independent states, sometimes extending also to their relations with vassal states; or, more briefly still, the conduct of business between states by peaceful means” (Satow, 1979, p. 3).

Nicolson adds: “Diplomacy is the management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which ambassadors and envoys adjust these relations; the business or art of the diplomatist” (Nicolson, 1939, p. 15). He highlights this definition as both precise and broad, avoiding “straying on the one hand into the sands of foreign policy and on the other into the marshes of international law” (Nicolson, 1939, p. 15).

Nicolson further emphasises that diplomacy is also a practice rooted in reliability and trust, declaring that “the art of negotiation depends on reliability and confidence is an eternal principle, however much one’s antagonists may profit by temporary tricks” (Nicolson, 1961, pp.39-49, cited in Rofe, 2016, p.216). He insists that even when opponents act unfairly, diplomats must abide by the “rules of the game”. This dimension of diplomacy, its reliance on mutual acceptance of agreed rules, offers a compelling parallel with sport, where agreed rules govern interactions (Rofe, 2016, p.216).

2.4 Politics and diplomacy

Clarifying the boundary between politics and diplomacy is challenging but essential in framing the relationship between sport and diplomacy (Rofe, 2016, p.215).

Kenneth Weisbrode, cited in Rofe, argues that since the beginning of the twentieth century, “the lines between politics and diplomacy have blurred considerably” (Weisbrode, 2016, cited in Rofe, 2021, p.8). Rofe clarifies that politics focuses on outcomes, whereas diplomacy focuses on the methods employed to achieve them: “politics can be seen as more about the ends; diplomacy more about the means” (Rofe, 2021, p.8) or “politics, concerns the message; the former, diplomacy, the mode of the message” (Rofe, 2016, p.215).

Although, interconnected and sometimes closely intertwined, politics and diplomacy are not mutually exclusive (Rofe, 2016, p.215). This distinction is further refined by Rofe's global diplomacy framework, offering a more inclusive and allowing for a deeper understanding of the relation between sport and diplomacy (see Section 3.4).

2.5 Global events

Before moving to theoretical perspectives on sport and diplomacy, it is necessary to define 'global events', which often serve as key platforms for sport and diplomacy.

The OECD defines global events as:

"events of a limited duration that have a global reach (in terms of participation, audience and/or media coverage), require significant public investment, and have an impact on the population and built environment. Global events include sporting events (such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games, world cups and international championships), cultural events (such as film festivals, book fairs and European Capitals of Culture), trade fairs and world expositions. Global events can be multi-sited, rotating between multiple venues within a city or region, or can take place in a single location. Global events can also range in timeframe, from a single day event, to a year-long programme of events. The global reach and significant investment in these types of events means that they have the potential to contribute positively to local development" (OECD, 2023a, p.5).

According to the 2018 OECD *Recommendation of the Council on Global Events and Local Development*, these events are recognised as the first internationally agreed standard for global events, setting out measures to consider when using them as catalysts for local development (OECD, 2023a, p.5).

2.6 Impacts and legacy of global events

The potential impact of a global event is wide-reaching. Global events can positively and negatively impact those directly involved and wider communities. They mobilise large numbers of people and can impact their lives in various ways, contributing to changing social attitudes and outcomes on a broader scale. Impacts can arise from the bidding and planning stages, through the delivery of the event and many years after. For example, the bidding process alone can generate benefits for candidate cities, even if they are ultimately unsuccessful. Similarly, many impacts of SMEs like the Olympic and Paralympic Games continue to be felt years after the event. These long-lasting effects are often referred to as legacy (OECD, 2023a, p.5).

Impacts extend beyond the main event to include side events and associated projects, which may or may not be coordinated by the main host. They can also be uneven across population groups and territories. The event's scale, setting, frequency, and context influence the level and type of impact achievable (OECD, 2023a, pp.5-6). For example, London 2012's main legacy objective was the regeneration of East London. A recent study by Jakar and Philippou (2025) reveals that although regeneration did occur, it did not fully align with the bid's promises, as gentrification and migration meant the original local community was not necessarily the main beneficiary (Jakar & Philippou, 2025).

Measuring impact can be costly and complex, especially for intangible outcomes. Therefore, hosts must select which types of impact to pursue and measure, aligning them with their overall vision and objectives (OECD, 2023a, pp.5-6).

Often referred to as the "triple bottom line," all events have economic, social, and environmental impacts, whether they are measured or not. These dimensions are deeply interconnected and often overlap. For instance, encouraging youth participation in sport has a social impact, but it can also produce economic benefits if it contributes to reduced disease and lower healthcare costs (OECD 2023a, pp.5-6).

Global events generally fall into three categories: cultural, sporting, and business (OECD, 2023a, p.15). Cultural Events celebrate specific art forms or a variety of cultural activities. Examples include the Cannes Film Festival and initiatives like the European Capital of Culture, showcasing regional heritage while promoting global cultural exchange. Sporting Events range from single-sport competitions to multi-sport showcases. Examples include the Olympics or the Commonwealth Games. Finally, business events include international trade fairs, exhibitions, and world expositions, which blend cultural and economic dimensions while focusing on market-specific industries.

SMEs such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games stand out among global events due to their scale, investment, and global significance (OECD, 2023a, p.16).

2.7 Sports Mega Events

SMEs are momentary or recurring events that can profoundly shape societies. The Olympic and Paralympic Games are emblematic SMEs because they encompass all three categories of global events: cultural, sporting, and business events. While they are primarily sporting events, the opening and closing ceremonies function as major cultural showcases, often used

to project national identity. They also create opportunities for networking and business development (OECD, 2023a).

By strategically planning legacies and impacts, engaging stakeholders, and considering both tangible and intangible outcomes, SMEs can drive change at local, national and international levels. However, it is also important to acknowledge both their potential and the challenges they pose to ensure that the benefits they generate are inclusive and sustainable.

SMEs also offer a lens into national and international politics, connecting sport and governance. As Murray and Pigman argue, sports diplomacy is not limited to the strategic use of sport by states but also encompasses diplomatic representation and communication arising from international sporting competitions, as well as specialised diplomacy that supports global sports governance (Murray & Pigman, 2012, cited in Acuto, 2013, p. 292; see Section 3. for an overview of sports diplomacy concepts). This multifaceted relationship has led to studies examining the political and diplomatic dimensions of the Olympic Games.

A notable example is the London 2012 Games and the collection *Watching the Olympics*, which explored these dimensions through the Games' multimedia bidding process, branding and imaging strategies, and the security and control mechanisms surrounding the event (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2011, cited in Acuto, 2013, p. 292).

Having established the multifaceted nature of SMEs, the following point explores how SMEs intersect with the concept of soft power and how their value is being re-evaluated in a changing global context.

2.7.1 Soft power and the shifting value of SMEs

Nye defines soft power as “the ability to affect others and obtain preferred outcomes by attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment” (Nye, 2023, p.37).

The link between SMEs and soft power has generated significant debate, especially within broader discussions questioning the usefulness of soft power compared to hard power. On one hand, soft power can be seen as a means of reaffirming or reshaping existing hegemonies, provided that “its practice needs to engage with a so-called audience as a peer and co-contributor rather than as recipient” (Rofe & Beacom, 2018, p.251). On the other hand, scholars have noted moments when soft power appeared to decline or lose political support. This was particularly true in 2017, when US budgetary policies favoured military power over diplomacy, reducing resources allocated to diplomacy. Nye argues that effectiveness lies in combining soft and hard power, and weakening diplomatic capacity ultimately undermines

national attractiveness, which remains a key component of global influence (Rofe & Beacom, 2018, p.251).

Rofe observes that the broader international context after 2016 revealed additional pressures on soft power. The rise of nationalism, coupled with a more realistic approach to international relations (“realist zero-sum focus”), contributed to a retreat from soft-power based strategies, as exemplified by Brexit (Rofe & Beacom, 2018, p.251).

This shift had implications for sport, although these are blurred, particularly regarding how SMEs are perceived. The case of Brazil illustrates this complexity. Massive protests challenged the hosting of the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games, as they were targeting the government but also international tourism, revealing a divide between diplomatic ambitions and social reality. According to Rofe, Brazil’s image as a rising power, capable of hosting a successful SMEs was therefore challenged (Rofe & Beacom, 2018, p.251).

These events highlighted a growing questioning of the ability of states to derive diplomatic advantage from SMEs. These questions about the ability and capacity to host the games put pressure on international organisations regarding the hosting criteria. This partly explains the decline in bids and the subsequent reforms introduced by the IOC, including the simultaneous awarding of the 2024 and 2028 Games, the simplification of the bidding process, and the adoption of a more transparent dialogue with interested cities. These adjustments reflected efforts to address growing concerns about the costs, governance and social acceptability of SMEs (Rofe & Beacom, 2018, p.252).

In the current diplomatic context, cities are playing an increasing role in decisions related to the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Their influence is evident both in the rejection of certain bids, sometimes in opposition to national policies, and in their engagement in municipal diplomacy. Citizen movements, through referendums and social media, reinforce this dynamic by voicing opposition to hosting SMEs. Faced with the financial and social risks associated with SMEs, some cities favour smaller-scale international sporting events, which are perceived as more sustainable and strategically advantageous. Examples such as the Commonwealth Games in Manchester (2002) and Glasgow (2014) illustrate how these events can contribute to regional development and broader political objectives (Rofe & Beacom, 2018, p.252).

In recent years, the diplomatic value of SMEs has come under increasing scrutiny, as global shifts and local resistance have challenged their effectiveness as tools of soft power. Soft power nevertheless provides the conceptual foundation for understanding how SMEs can shape global perceptions. The next section examines how states draw on the soft power potential of SMEs to pursue concrete diplomatic objectives at both domestic and international levels.

2.7.2 State strategies and functions of SMEs

Governments have historically used sport as a diplomatic tool, providing a low-risk strategy for enhancing international relations and prestige (Murray, 2018; Grix & Brannagan, 2016). Beyond functioning as instruments of nation branding, sporting events can also reflect broader international relations and the evolution of diplomatic discourses, including territorial disputes, cultural and political identities, and local and regional identities. In this sense, SMEs serve as a lens through which the political and diplomatic dimensions of international relations can be observed (Beacom & Rofe, 2018, p.243).

Iver B. Neumann, cited in Rofe & Beacom (2018, p.244) identifies SMEs as “sites of diplomacy”, spaces where diplomatic practices are enacted through rituals, symbols, and performances. The opening ceremony of London 2012 is an example of what Neuman calls “sublime diplomacy”, a form of diplomacy designed to impress and emotionally engage international audiences (Neumann, 2013, pp.121-46, cited in Rofe & Beacom, 2018, p.244).

In addition to their symbolic and diplomatic functions, SMEs are deeply tied to the concept of legacy, which plays a crucial role in justifying state investment and can serve as a platform to shape long-term policy outcomes. As mentioned, legacy is an essential concept that intertwines with sport and diplomacy. As discussed in the introduction, legacy is central to how states justify and leverage SMEs. Legacy helps justify the expenditures of the host country and sponsors (Holt et al., 2015, p. 1) and measuring the legacy allows governing bodies and organisers to answer any criticism about environmental costs, expenses, and massive disruptions (Holt et al., 2015, p. 1). Legacy then becomes both a political argument and a diplomatic narrative through which states frame the value of hosting SMEs.

Legacy operates at multiple levels. As Holt et al. explain, domestic legacy plans must be balanced with the host country’s broader geopolitical agenda (Holt et al., 2015, p. 2). Murray similarly underscores the significance of domestic sports diplomacy, arguing that this dimension merits greater academic attention (Murray, 2018, p.9). These perspectives highlight that state strategies around SMEs are shaped by domestic priorities and international ambitions, reinforcing a dual diplomatic function of legacy. Building on this strategic dimension, the next section focuses on the domestic dimension of legacy.

2.7.3 Domestic diplomacy and SMEs as tools for internal transformation

In their article, *Soft Power, Sports Mega-Events and Emerging States: The Lure of the Politics of Attraction*, Grix and Lee address why “emerging states” are interested in hosting SMEs. Through the examples of Brazil, South Africa, and China, they argue that hosting SMEs is a public diplomacy tool that States use to demonstrate existing soft power capability and pursue further enhancement (Grix & Lee, 2013). This argument also appears in Cornelissen’s *Scripting the Nation: Sport, mega-events, Foreign Policy and state- building in post-apartheid South Africa*, which suggests that SMEs not only contribute to foreign policy but also the pursuit of domestic goals (Cornelissen, 2008).

Many states pursue domestic goals through SMEs by shaping their strategy around them. This is notably the case in Qatar, where Brannagan and Giulianotti (2014) identify three key national priorities connected to hosting SMEs: “health and wellbeing”, “progress and modernisation”, and “Peace and security”. Among these health initiatives, targeting obesity and diabetes, are a central focus, with SMEs encouraging young people to increase their physical activity and develop a sporting culture. However, this objective is difficult to measure, as establishing a precise correlation between increased sports participation and hosting SMEs remains challenging. This priority is supported by initiatives such as the ‘Aspire project’, which runs an after-school programme with a Multi-Skills Development Centre to encourage young children to engage with sports daily (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2014). This example shows how domestic goals, reducing obesity and diabetes and promoting a healthy lifestyle, can be pursued through hosting SMEs.

These examples show how SMEs are embedded within domestic strategies, serving as tools for internal transformation. To better understand these dynamics, the following section outlines the theoretical frameworks that inform the study of sport, diplomacy, and legacy.

3. Theoretical perspectives

This section explores the theoretical foundations of sports diplomacy. It begins by tracing the evolution of the concept, from early definitions of sports diplomacy centred on state-led practices to the emergence of the concept of track two diplomacy (Rofe, 2018). Next, key conceptual distinctions are clarified, including the differences between ‘sport as diplomacy’, ‘international sports diplomacy’, and ‘sport and diplomacy’ (Murray & Pigman, 2014; Rofe, 2021, p.214). The section also examines the role of non-state actors and transnational dynamics. Finally, it introduces the ‘global diplomacy framework’, as defined by Rofe (2021),

as a response to the limitations of state-centred and fragmented approaches, before considering 'sport and diplomacy' (Rofe, 2021) as an emerging academic field, reflecting its growing relevance across disciplines.

3.1 Conceptual ambiguity and the evolution of sport diplomacy

Postlethwaite et al. (2023), in their comprehensive integrative review of sport diplomacy literature, observe that diplomatic efforts in sport are increasingly acknowledged and formalised by a range of actors. They highlight, for example, the IOC's involvement in the 2021 conference titled "Can sport diplomacy contribute to building a stronger Europe in the World?", which reflects growing institutional interest for the field, even if the focus of the conference is limited to a European perspective. However, as Postlethwaite et al. note, the use of the word "can" in the title reveals an ongoing lack of consensus around the meaning and conventions of sport diplomacy. As they analyse it:

"The use of the term "can" in the conference title is notable and implies that to date, there has been little in the way of consensus to the significance or adoption of conventions to what the phrase sport diplomacy means or is underpinned by" (Postlethwaite et al. 2023, p.363).

According to Postlethwaite et al., this ambiguity stems from the traditional state-centred view of diplomacy, which assumes that only sovereign nations and trained diplomats engage in formal diplomatic actions. Expanding on this, Postlethwaite et al. argue that: "the expansion in who and what constitutes diplomatic activities both in sport as diplomacy and diplomacy in sport ruptures the state and diplomat-centred notions of diplomacy" (2023, p.363).

This shift invites a broader consideration of the role of non-state actors, such as multinational corporations, international sport organisations, and individuals (Black & Peacock, 2013; Murray, 2018; Rofe & Dichter, 2016 cited in Postlethwaite et al., p.363). It therefore calls for a broader and more inclusive framework to analyse sport diplomacy, that goes beyond traditional state-centric models.

3.2 Two dominant strands of sport diplomacy research

3.2.1 Sport as a tool of state-led diplomacy

Postlethwaite et al. (2023) identify two dominant strands in sport diplomacy research. The first strand views sport as a tool of state-led diplomacy ('sport as diplomacy'). This approach is rooted in early scholarship that retrospectively analysed the use of sport in international relations from a nation-state perspective. As Postlethwaite et al. note:

"Examples of early scholarship include Peppard and Riordan (1992) and Soares (2007) who consider the use of ice hockey at international sporting events during the Cold War to symbolise ongoing diplomatic issues between the United States and the Soviet Union" (Postlethwaite et al., 2023, p. 363).

In these studies, sport diplomacy is framed as a mechanism for governments to enact broader political agendas. According to this understanding, authors such as Hong & Sun (2000) have written about the role of Ping-Pong diplomacy between the United States and China in the 1970s; Macintosh et al. (1994) and Cornelissen (2008) have examined how international sporting boycotts were used to isolate Apartheid South Africa (cited in Postlethwaite, 2023, p.363). As the authors summarise:

"The phrase sport diplomacy, therefore, has been applied to contexts where sport has been used as a vehicle for governments to drive a broader diplomatic agenda using direct or indirect means" (Postlethwaite et al., 2023, p. 364).

Murray refers to this practice as 'traditional sports diplomacy', which is a fundamental component of international relations that he defines as:

"The opportunistic use, strategic exploitation and, in some cases, abuse of elite sport, sportspeople and sporting events in order to advance a state's foreign policy objectives. Governments tap into sport in order to complement, or, in some cases, scupper a diplomatic relationship, or to disseminate and amplify a diplomatic message. The practice is often sporadic, opportunistic and, arguably, somewhat clumsy, occurring in a short-term manner before, during and shortly after a major match, tournament, or mega-event such as the Summer Olympic Games, or the World Cup (football). There is nothing new about the practice, hence the label traditional sports diplomacy" (Murray, 2018, p.61).

In his book, Murray establishes a clear connection between sport and diplomacy. He notes that many governments utilise elements such as culture, art, music, animals, food, and, most notably, sports as supplementary tools in traditional foreign policy and diplomatic endeavours (Murray, 2018, p.61). The intertwining of sports and diplomacy dates back a long way, as Grix

and Brannagan emphasise, governments have turned to sport as a powerful means of communication because of its global reach, widespread popularity and generally non-controversial character (Grix & Brannagan, 2016, p. 252, cited in Murray, 2018, p. 61). Building on this, Murray further argues that:

“As noted, sportspeople and sporting events are employed ‘as broad-brush diplomatic tools to increase a state’s international prestige, improve an often-tarnished image’ or encourage ‘acceptance on the world stage’. At its simplest, international sport creates opportunities for governments to demonstrate various types of superiority, from their athletic abilities, to the ideology of a particular system of state, to their logistical prowess in organising and hosting a sporting mega-event” (Murray, 2018, p.61).

Together, these points show that sport’s visibility and popularity give governments a useful way to communicate and strengthen their international image.

3.2.2 Sport diplomacy beyond the state

The second strand explores sport diplomacy in broader, non-state and non-combative contexts. Scholars such as Beacom (2012) and Murray (2018) have contributed to this more expansive understanding of sport diplomacy, moving beyond the traditional state-centric model. In this view, sport is not only a tool of governments but also a medium accessible to a wide range of actors, including international organisations and civil society.

Postlethwaite, et al. describe this approach as “a dense spectrum of actors, networks, activities and outcomes in international affairs” (2023, p.364). They note that contemporary uses of sport diplomacy are increasingly proactive and often linked to peacebuilding or “divisive agendas” (Postlethwaite et al, 2023, p.364).

According to their analysis, non-state actors such as the United Nations (UN), the IOC and the European Union (EU) have played a growing role in shaping sport diplomacy practices.

“In an EU-commissioned report, the importance of harnessing the “unconventional” and “soft power” tools of sport diplomacy was a key aim for the body to “amplify key EU diplomatic messages” with an expanded understanding of who are “agents of this diplomacy” (Zintz & Parrish, 2019. p. 3). This framing by the EU is similar to that of the activities by the IOC (2021), Australian Government (2019) and British Council Wales (2020), where the discussion centres around the more expansive view of sport diplomacy in an attempt to operationalise the term in a strategic, non-combative and proactive manner” (Postlethwaite et al, 2023, p.364).

This strategic use of sport by both state and non-state actors is captured in Murray’s definition of sport diplomacy. He describes it as:

“a new term which describes and reconceptualises an old practice: the use of sport to realise goals, minimise friction and – generally – bring strangers closer together. More specifically, it can be defined as the conscious, strategic use of sportspeople and sporting events by state and non-state actors to engage, inform and create a favourable image among foreign publics and organisations, to shape their perceptions in a way that is (more) conducive to the sending group’s goals (Murray and Pigman 2014; Murray 2017)” (Murray, 2018, p.3).

Within this strand of sport diplomacy research, which explores broader, non-state contexts, Rofe (2018) offers a particularly useful conceptualisation through the notion of track two diplomacy. He emphasises the importance of other actors in shaping international relations, where people-to-people exchanges, frequently organised by private individuals or organisations, also help to change perceptions and can play a significant role (Rofe, 2018, p.4). These interactions can contribute to global diplomacy in ways traditional diplomacy often cannot. This research uses Rofe’s concept of track two diplomacy to explore how sport enables international engagement beyond state-led diplomacy.

Complementing this perspective, Acuto (2013) draws on Murray and Pigman to argue that the deployment of sport as a diplomatic tool is only one aspect of a broader and more complex relationship between international sport and diplomacy. This relationship should also include diplomatic representation and communication emerging through sustained international sporting competitions along with the specialised diplomacy required to govern international sport itself. This insight highlights that the links and overlaps between sport and diplomacy are multifaceted and continuous. To use Acuto’s words, “endless” (Murray & Pigman, 2012 cited in Acuto, 2013, p. 292).

3.3 Clarifying terminology: international sport as a diplomatic instrument, international-sport-as-diplomacy and sport and diplomacy

As the field of sport and diplomacy evolves, scholars started refining its terminology to better capture the nuances of the interconnection of sport with diplomacy and international relations. To clarify the conceptual terrain, scholars have proposed distinctions between three key terms: “international sport as a diplomatic instrument”, “international-sport-as-diplomacy” and “sport and diplomacy” (Murray & Pigman, 2014; Rofe, 2016, p.214).

International sport as a diplomatic instrument

Murray and Pigman define 'international sport as a diplomatic instrument' as "cases in which international sport is consciously employed by governments" (Murray & Pigman, 2014, p. 1099). They explain that this is:

"the more familiar form of sports diplomacy. In this traditional sense where diplomacy is the 'dialogue between states', sports diplomacy is often associated with governments employing sportspeople to amplify a diplomatic message, or with states exploiting sporting events for public diplomacy opportunities, to cool tensions in flagging diplomatic relationships or to simply test the ground for a possible policy change" (Murray & Pigman, 2014, p. 1099).

In this category, sport is therefore used by governments to pursue national interests and foreign-policy objectives. Here, sport is viewed as a means to an end, serving political and strategic goals (Murray & Pigman, 2014, p. 1099).

International-sport-as-diplomacy:

Murray and Pigman distinguish this from 'international-sport-as-diplomacy', which they define as the ways in which sport functions as a medium for "diplomatic representation, communication and negotiation between non-state actors that take place as a result of ongoing international sporting competition" (Murray and Pigman, 2014, p. 1099).

They note that this second category is less well understood. It includes both the broader effects of international sport on diplomacy and what they call the 'specialised diplomacy of international sport' that they define as "the diplomatic activities that occur to make international sporting competition possible" (Murray and Pigman, 2014, p. 1099). They add:

"In the modern, plural diplomatic environment, non-state actors such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) can be said to practice a distinct type of diplomacy. These organizations and individuals consistently engage in representation to and negotiation with governments, the regional and national organizing bodies of sport, large global firms that sponsor competition, global media firms and global civil society organizations (CSOs). Arguably, the impact of this category on diplomacy is greater by virtue of its volume, frequency and ability to engage the hearts, minds and wallets of the global public" (Murray and Pigman, 2014, p. 1099).

Sport and Diplomacy

Rofe (2016) highlights that the debate about sport and diplomacy remains open, as various academic disciplines also use “sport” as a prefix to different subjects, such as ‘sport history’ or ‘sport politics’ in history and political science.

However, a broader and more balanced perspective would be to use the term ‘sport and diplomacy’. This approach does not position sport as a prefix to the subject of diplomacy but instead recognises it as a distinct yet interrelated field. Using the conjunction “and” acknowledges how these two realms influence each other, rather than sport being subordinated to diplomacy (Rofe, 2016, pp. 214-215).

These distinctions are essential to avoid oversimplification and to ensure analytical precision. This clearer understanding of terminology lays the groundwork for examining how sport interacts with international relations and the role of the state.

Postlethwaite et al. (2023) highlight that recent developments in sport diplomacy reflect a broader moment in the field, where scholars are increasingly encouraged to move beyond empirical case studies and engage in deeper theoretical debates to better define and conceptualise sport diplomacy.

Building on this conceptual foundation, the following section introduces the ‘Global Diplomacy Framework’ as defined by Rofe (2021) to further explore how sport diplomacy functions across multiple scales, actors, and agendas.

3.4 Global diplomacy framework: expanding the scope

The global diplomacy framework provides a broader and more inclusive lens for analysing sport and diplomacy beyond traditional, state-centric understandings. While traditional views on diplomacy focus on visible rituals and formal government-to-government interaction (embassy activities and high-profile meetings), global diplomacy highlights the multiple actors, levels and processes involved in contemporary diplomatic practice, allowing the representation of the evolving nature of diplomacy. As Rofe argues:

“Global Diplomacy offers a more fundamental, inclusive perspective on diplomatic practice acknowledging both its political context and broader range of activities that in turn provides a consciously intersectoral perspective” (Rofe, 2021, p.3).

Global diplomacy highlights how sport diplomacy operates across multiple levels (city, national, international) and multiple types of actors (states, cities, Organising Committees for

the Olympic Games (OCOGs), International Federations (IFs), NGOs, businesses, communities). Rofe (2016) notes Global diplomacy is a useful framework for analysing sport and diplomacy, as it includes:

1. Diplomacy that existed before modern states (pre-1648) and includes beyond-state discussions
2. A bridge between “old” and “new” forms of diplomacy.
3. Recognition that as states evolve, so do their diplomatic practices.
4. The idea that the core nature of diplomacy remains unchanged (Rofe, 2016)

Global diplomacy, according to Rofe, sits between traditional state-based views, as defined by scholars like Murray, and more symbolic approaches such as Dittmer’s (2015) (both cited in Rofe 2016, p.219). This approach is particularly relevant to sport as it is a global phenomenon and involves a wide range of transnational actors, including athletes, businesses or sponsors, who operate beyond the state. These actors also contribute to diplomacy by building long-term international relationships.

Two perspectives highlighted by Rofe are instructive here. First, Neumann explains “what is new about globalization and what is relevant to diplomacy depends on your time perspective” (Neumann, 2008, p.15 cited in Rofe, 2016, p.217). Second, Martin observes that globalisation is marked by contradiction as it brings both hope (countries working together) and fear (problems spreading across borders) due to the interdependence of nations that comes with globalisation (Martin, n.d., pp.742-43 cited in Rofe, 2016, p.217). Building on these ideas, Rofe argues that a global diplomacy framework is necessary to understand how sport and diplomacy interact as “sports sits within this space” (Rofe, 2016, p.217).

To capture these dynamics, Rofe draws on two influential models of contemporary diplomacy that clarify the role of state and non-state actors. The first model is Geoff Wiseman’s identification of polylaterality, defined as:

“The conduct of relations between official entities (such as a state, several states acting together, or a state-based international organization) and at least one unofficial, nonstate entity in which there is a reasonable expectation of systematic relationships, involving some form of reporting, communication, negotiation, and representation, but not involving mutual recognition as sovereign, equivalent entities” (Wiseman, 1999 cited in Rofe, 2016, p.218).

The second is Hocking’s work on multi-stakeholder diplomacy, which argues for a perspective that perceives diplomacy as:

“concerned with the creation of networks, embracing a range of state and non-state actors focusing on the management of issues that demand resources over which no single participant possesses a monopoly” (Hocking, 2006 cited in Rofe, 2016, p.218).

These models recognise the involvement of both state and non-state actors in diplomatic relations, a pivotal aspect to be explored in the analysis of the Games as both models reflect the composition of Olympic and Paralympic ecosystems: cities, organising committees, international organisations, businesses, sponsors, athletes and other actors operate together in and around the Games, building relationships over time. As Melissen (2011, cited in Rofe, 2016, p. 218) argues, transnational diplomatic practices tend to be more effective when rooted in local politics and are most effective when sustained over the long term.

Sport is not a solution to major global problems, but it helps build lasting international connections. Even though transnationalism is a popular idea today, it is not new, as Rofe points out, the fact that people have long identified with groups beyond their nation creates a web of international relationships, which scholars like Keohane and Nye call “complex interdependence” (Nye & Keohane, 1973 & 1977, cited in Rofe p.218).

In parallel, Pigman’s work on diplomacy and international relations highlights that “traditional” separations between public and private, domestic and international, political and economic, or social and cultural are no longer relevant as diplomacy constantly evolves and cannot fit rigid categories (Pigman, p.95 cited in Rofe, 2016, 219). He calls for a “new diplomatic studies paradigm” that transcends those categories (Pigman, p.95 cited in Rofe, 2016, 219). As Rofe puts it, global diplomacy steps onto this intellectual playing field (2016, p.219).

Rofe (2021) distils sport diplomacy into three interrelated dimensions: communication, representation, and negotiation, which intersect in practice. Sport facilitates communication, as seen in its ability to spark dialogue across diverse contexts (from school playgrounds to public gatherings), offers powerful opportunities of representation through symbols such as uniforms, flags, anthems, and venues (“from the individual to the nation state”, Rofe, 2021, p.4) and embeds negotiation (formal sponsorship or informal agreements on rules and participation) (Rofe, 2021, p.4). This framework also builds on Rofe’s earlier work (2016), where he introduced a reflective, “two-way dialogue” to sport and diplomacy. In this view, communication, representation and negotiation operate together as part of an ongoing dialogue, allowing for mutual influence and deeper understanding (2016, p. 219).

In this thesis, the global diplomacy framework is used at the interpretation stage of the analysis. After themes are identified inductively from the documents (see Chapter 2), this

broader framework helps explain how certain legacy initiatives can carry diplomatic significance, even when they are not explicitly framed as diplomacy in the reports. It therefore works alongside the analytical categories developed in Section 5, by providing a wider understanding of the actors and processes involved in diplomatic practice. This combined approach guides the empirical chapters 3–6.

Having explored the theoretical frameworks, the next section considers sport and diplomacy as an emerging academic field.

3.5 Sport diplomacy as a new academic field

In the past decade, sport diplomacy has evolved into a formal academic field, offering new insights into the complex connections and intersections between sports and diplomacy. As Rofe (2021, p. 8) notes, this emerging discipline provides a lens through which to understand the intricate network of connections between sporting practices and diplomatic processes.

To further develop the conceptual landscape, scholars have explored the relationship between sport and diplomacy and related concepts such as cultural relations, cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, and soft power. While some view sport diplomacy as part of these concepts scholars, like Rofe and Murray, treat it as a distinct field that enhances sport policy by providing a framework. Recognising these concepts' links and shared interests enriches our understanding of sport and diplomacy (Rofe, 2021, p.10).

Building on this, Murray has been advocating for positioning sport diplomacy as a subfield within diplomatic studies. In an interview with the Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, he stated:

“Sports diplomacy is a subfield of diplomatic studies, and I think the marginalization comes from our mother discipline. I don't think, however, that sports diplomacy will fly under the radar for too much longer. We have a field of studies, government strategies, and a growing body of students and practitioners” (Murray, 2024).

Rofe similarly positions sport diplomacy within the broader discipline of diplomacy. In the introduction to *Sport and Diplomacy: Games within Games*, he describes it as a “specific but nascent field” that is gaining scholarly attention across multiple disciplines. He writes:

“After many years of relative neglect by their separate disciplines, the realm of sport and diplomacy together is attracting renewed scholarly attention across a range of academic

fields. This book is deliberately aimed at broadening and deepening the debate about sport and diplomacy, and expanding this specific but nascent field. [...] With a combination of theoretical chapters grounded in historical examples and chapters which address particular episodes, the book will help guide future research on sport and diplomacy by illustrating the value of studying the two together. This has the added benefit of showing that scholars of sport and diplomacy do not view themselves as distinct but instead come together to continue to expand the nascent field while making valuable contributions to each subfield” (Rofe, 2018, p.5).

Rofe’s decision to publish *Sport and Diplomacy: Games within Games* responded to the limitations of existing literature after noting that most academic work on sport diplomacy had focused narrowly on the Olympic movement or specific historical periods. When sport appeared in broader diplomatic studies, it was often relegated to the end of books or to chapters on international organisations. By editing a volume that combines theoretical and empirical contributions, Rofe sought to move beyond these constraints and help establish sport diplomacy as a legitimate and expanding area of inquiry (Rofe, 2018).

Murray and Rofe both advocate for the recognition of ‘sport and diplomacy’ as a subfield of diplomatic studies and for moving beyond the vision of sport as only a tool of cultural diplomacy. They argue for establishing sport and diplomacy as a structured academic domain. This thesis contributes to this emerging field by examining legacy as a key dimension through which sport acquires diplomatic significance.

Building on these theoretical foundations, the next section examines the concept of legacy and its evolving role in sport and diplomacy. It explores how legacy is framed, mobilised, and increasingly scrutinised as a key component of sport and diplomacy.

4. The role of legacy in sport and diplomacy

The concept of legacy in SMEs has undergone a significant transformation. These events are now scrutinised as potential catalysts for urban, social, environmental and economic transformation. As mentioned previously, hosting entities are now under immense pressure to justify allocating resources to these events, especially considering competing demands such as education, healthcare, and housing (Holt et al., 2015, p.2). This heightened public scrutiny, and expectations have placed considerable pressure on organisers and sponsors alike.

To understand the evolving role of legacy in sport diplomacy, this section begins by defining the concept and its relevance. It then explores the various types of legacy, before turning to the often overlooked but significant dimension of diplomatic legacy.

4.1 Definition

Understanding the concept of “legacy” and providing a clear definition is essential for exploring its significance as a field of study. The term “legacy” is often misused or misunderstood, particularly regarding the presumed legacies resulting from SMEs, and the exact definition of sports legacy remains ambiguous (Grix et al., 2017). Scholars have provided several definitions of legacy (Chappelet, 2012; Thomson et al. 2020), and the IOC first included the term legacy in its Olympic Charter in 2003.

In 2017, the IOC Sustainability and Legacy Commission defined Olympic legacy as: “the result of a vision. It encompasses all the tangible and intangible long-term benefits for people, cities/territories, and the Olympic Movement” (IOC 2018, p.13 cited in Preuss, 2019, p.106).

However, this definition lacks precision. Another definition of legacy is provided by Preuss (2007, p.211), stating that legacies are: planned and unplanned, positive and negative, tangible and intangible structures created by and for a sport event that remain for a longer time than the event itself” within a specific time and space (cited in. Grix et al., 2017, p.4).

This definition is more technically detailed than the IOC’s and refers to six possible structural changes identified by Preuss (2015; see Section 4.3). Despite these efforts, uncertainty remains about the meaning of “legacy”. As Grix et al. explain:

“The foremost reason for the remaining uncertainty surrounding the meaning of ‘legacy’ is that, in the, etymological clarity gives way to SME legacies being understood simply as a given; something that is self-evident and positive; something that leads to desired, long-term ‘outcomes’ (cf. Cashman, 2006; Preuss, 2007; Girginov, 2011; Leopkey and Parent, 2012)” (Grix et al., 2017, p.4).

Therefore, Preuss suggests the following definition:

“we can say that the fundamental elements of a definition of legacy are as follows:

- (1) It lasts longer than the event and its directly initiated impacts. Legacies can derive from structures already completed before the event, but most legacy stems from changed location factors after the event takes place (time).
- (2) It produces new opportunities out of an initial impact and may even develop its own dynamics over time as the environment changes (new initiatives).
- (3) It consists of changes that bring positive outcomes for some stakeholders and negative outcomes for others (value).
- (4) It may be tangible or intangible, or material or non-material (tangibility).
- (5) It is essentially limited to a defined space, that is, a city, but some of its effects may extend beyond the city. It can be individual (affecting only one person) and local, or international and global (space).

(6) It is often developed indirectly by the event. A negative legacy reminds us that outcomes may be unintentional (intention)” (Preuss, 2015, p.5).

4.1.1 Legacy and impact

Although seemingly straightforward, legacy becomes a complex concept when applied to large-scale events. The IOC has stressed the importance of distinguishing between impact and legacy, particularly in a 2002 conference that sought to clarify the long-term benefits of the Games beyond immediate expenditures on infrastructure and facilities (Holt et al., 2015, p.2).

The impact of an SME refers to its immediate and measurable effects. In contrast, legacy is the enduring benefits after the event, such as sustained growth in tourism, improved infrastructure, or heightened international reputation. The IOC underscores this distinction, emphasising that legacy extends beyond temporary impacts to include long-term transformations in urban development, governance structures and cultural practices (IOC, 2017)².

Transforming an event's immediate impacts into a legacy requires deliberate planning, effective governance and sustained effort. Legacy is not an automatic outcome of an event's success. It depends on how impacts sustained over time. External factors also often complicate the relationship between impact and legacy. As Holt et al. (2015, p. 3) note, just because one event follows another, it does not mean the first caused the second.

To ensure impacts become legacy, effective legacy planning must take place well before the event occurs. Host cities must integrate legacy into their bidding process and ensure it aligns with broader local, regional, and international development strategies. Long-term legacies result from event impacts and broader socio-political, economic and cultural factors (Holt et al., 2015, p.3).

There is ongoing debate among scholars regarding the appropriate timeframe for evaluating Olympic legacies and determining when an impact becomes a legacy. Cornelissen et al. (2011) argue that a legacy must be sustained for a substantial period to be considered successful, recommending a minimum of 20 years for proper evaluation:

“It is important to stress that legacies should be sustained for a significant period after the event and have long-lasting effects, and should be evaluated for at least 20 years after the event” (Cornelissen et al., 2011, p.309).

² For a detailed examination of the IOC's approach to legacy and impact, see p.15 of *IOC Legacy Strategic Approach: Moving Forward*, (IOC, 2017).

In contrast, Li and McCabe (2013) suggest that a shorter timeframe of 5 to 10 years may be sufficient to gather meaningful data: “Data need to be collected for 5 to 10 years after the event finishes to accumulate sufficient information for measuring legacies” (Li & McCabe, 2013, p.12).

The IOC created the Olympic Games Global Impact (OGGI) project to attempt to standardise legacy evaluation. It spans 11 years, from the bidding phase to two years post-Games. While this initiative introduced a structured methodology across economic, social, and environmental indicators, it has been criticised for its limited post-event scope. Gratton and Preuss explain: “the main problem, however, with the OGGI project is that it ends 2 years after the event, which is much too soon to measure the legacy of the event” (Gratton & Preuss, 2008, p.1923). They further emphasise that a comprehensive assessment of Olympic legacy requires a much longer horizon:

“It will take 15–20 years to measure the true legacy of an event such as the Olympic Games... So far, nobody has been prepared to commit the research resources required to carry out a scientific study of net legacy benefits” (Gratton & Preuss, 2008, p.1933).

Considering these perspectives, it appears that while 10 years may allow for preliminary research and insights into legacy outcomes, a 20-year timeframe is recognised as a more robust standard for evaluating legacies. It is important to note, however, that the appropriate timeframe may depend on the specific objectives and goals of the legacy being assessed.

It is also important to acknowledge several theoretical concepts that help frame the temporality of legacy defined by Preuss (2015, pp.655-659): the “pregnancy effect”, where legacies emerge during the preparation phase before the event, the “latent legacy”, which refers to impacts that only materialise when future circumstances activate them. In other words, an event creates the opportunities for another event to happen. Finally, the “retro legacy”, involves accelerated redevelopment of infrastructure that was already needed, often transforming urban spaces in the process. As Preuss states, “practically, nothing new is constructed but the renovation extends the lifespan of the structure” (Preuss, 2015, p.650).

Beyond the question of duration, it is equally important to consider how legacies emerge and evolve over time.

4.2 Historical context

Although the term legacy is not new, its recognition by the IOC and its integration into the bid processes of host countries have occurred only in recent years. The concept took time to gain institutional traction. It first appeared at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics (N.N., 1965 cited in Preuss, 2019; IOC, 2017). The term legacy was then used in Calgary's bid for the 1988 Olympics, where the "candidature file appointed the specialised sports facilities to train high-performance sport as a planned legacy" (N.N., 1981, p.132 cited in Preuss, 2019; IOC, 2019). However, it was not until 1987 that an international conference was held in Seoul about legacy. In 1991, the Organizing Committee for the 1996 Atlanta Games incorporated a commitment to delivering a positive physical and symbolic legacy into its mission, and by 1997 the Athens 2004 candidature similarly framed its project as "A legacy for Olympism" (Theodoraki, 2009; Chappelet, 2012, cited in Preuss, 2019).

In 1999, the IOC 2000 Commission recommended hosting the Paralympic Games in the same city as the Olympic Games to promote greater inclusiveness. It also issued guidance on education, culture, humanitarian engagement and knowledge transfer, strengthening the Olympic Movement's potential to support social and human development (IOC, 2017).

From 2000 onwards, however, "the IOC requested a legacy planning from each applicant as part of the bid process" (Preuss, 2019). In 2002, the IOC organised an International Symposium to discuss the legacy of the Olympic Games. This symposium brought together National and International Federations, Olympic bid committees, Olympic Games Organising Committees, and National Olympic Committees, represented by 150 experts and researchers (IOC, 2017). The congress, "The Legacy of the Olympic Games: 1984-2000" sought to define the concept of legacy, but as Preuss notes, at that time, several definitions of legacy coexisted, and other terms were even used (Preuss, 2019).

In 2003, a report was issued by the IOC Olympic Games Study Commission "which referenced the importance of the Olympic legacy and recognised the need to ensure that host cities and their residents were left with a significant legacy of venues, infrastructure, expertise and experience" (IOC, 2017, p.9).

It was only with the London 2012 Olympic Games that legacy was explicitly considered during the bidding phase, and the city developed a legacy plan for each construction project, coordinated by the Legacy Trust UK (Girginov, 2013, p. 169 cited in Preuss, 2019). However, as Preuss highlights, this legacy plan was initiated by the host city itself, not by the IOC (Preuss, 2019). Following the 2015 Olympic Games, the IOC created the Sustainability and Legacy Commission to coordinate the legacy of the Olympic Games.

The adoption of the Olympic Agenda 2020, the strategic roadmap for the future of the Olympic Movement, in December 2014 marked a critical step forward in defining the direction, objectives and ways of working of the IOC. Legacy is highlighted explicitly by three recommendations (1, 2 and 4):

"- Recommendation 1: shape the bidding process as an invitation

The IOC to introduce an assistance phase during which cities considering a bid will be advised by the IOC about bid procedures, core Games requirements and how previous cities have ensured positive bid and Games legacies.

- Recommendation 2: Evaluate bid cities by assessing key opportunities and risks

The IOC to consider as positive aspects for a bid: the maximum use of existing facilities and the use of temporary and demountable venues where no long-term venue legacy need exists or can be justified.

6) The [Evaluation] Commission to benefit from third-party, independent advice in such areas such as social, economic and political conditions, with a special focus on sustainability and legacy

- Recommendation 4: include sustainability in all aspects of the Olympic Games

3) The IOC to ensure post-Games monitoring of the Games legacy with the support of the NOC and external organisations such as the World Union of Olympic Cities (UMVO)" (IOC, 2017, pp.8-9-10).

Despite the progress made by the IOC, the perception and implementation of Olympic legacy remain complex and challenging (IOC, 2017, pp.8-10)

All Games following London 2012 have acknowledged the importance of legacy in both their bids and planning processes. However, as Preuss stresses, it will only be with the 2026 Olympic Winter Games that bid cities will receive full consultancy from the IOC and be contractually obligated to track their legacy for several years after the Games (IOC, 2017, p.25 cited in Preuss, 2019).

4.3 Different dimensions of legacy

Various authors have proposed different classifications. Chappelet and Junod (2006 cited in Bob & Swart, 2010, pp. 80-81) identified five key themes:

- Sporting legacy,
- Urban legacy,
- Infrastructural legacy,
- Economic legacy
- Social legacy.

Building upon this framework, Cornelissen et al. (2011, cited in Grix et al., 2017) added three additional dimensions:

- Environmental legacy
- Political legacy
- Image branding legacy

Grix et al. (2017) expanded this list further, identifying:

- urban regeneration,
- national pride or “feel-good factor”,
- increased involvement and participation in physical activity,
- international reputation,
- soft power.

Additionally, Preuss developed a conceptual framework, the ‘Olympic Games legacy conceptual framework’, to help understand and evaluate the legacy of the Olympic Games. This framework is built around three key dimensions. The first is structural change, which refers to anything new or modified such as buildings, policies, or ideas, that was directly caused by the Games. This step is crucial because it requires proving that the change would not have occurred without the Olympics. Preuss precises:

“That is particularly difficult for general urban regeneration, economic or tourism development or ecological projects. It is easier to see causality when the structural change is directly linked to the Olympic Games, such as an Olympic invention/innovation such as an Olympic song, sports development, upskilling volunteers or the construction of a sports venue” (Preuss, 2024, p.6).

The second dimension is consequences, meaning the positive or negative outcomes resulting from these structural changes, which vary depending on the stakeholders affected.

The third and most important dimension is stakeholder perception which Preuss defines as “the opinions of people or institutions that affect, or are affected by, the hosting of the Olympic Games” (Preuss, 2024, p.5). In short, the framework shows that legacy is not just about what was built but concerns how changes affect people over time and in different contexts.

To better understand Olympic legacy, Preuss developed seven guiding principles that underpin the legacy framework:

“1. The Olympic Games always cause a change in existing tangible and intangible structures.

2. These so-called “structural changes,” of which there are six [...], have a consequence for people and/or space (nature or city).
3. The consequence of a structural change creates or destructs value for the lives of people or nature.
4. The value creation or value destruction due to the consequences is determined by the context of a specific stakeholder. Thus, the value is different for each stakeholder (in reality for each person) and is heavily determined by the situation and context in which the stakeholder operates (Is the structure needed or not?) and the stakeholder’s environment (Does the city offer alternatives? Is there a lack of that structure in the city?). Therefore, some consequences can be positive for some stakeholders and at the same time negative for others [...].
5. The effects of the consequences unfold differently in different sectors. [...]
6. The value of consequences alters over time. It depends on the utilisation of the consequences. [...] This principle makes it quite clear that legacy research results always have to be interpreted at the time when they were evaluated.
7. The consequences are always bound to a particular territory. Legacy effects can be personal, local, regional, national, or global [...]” (Preuss, 2024, pp.6-7).

The six structural changes referenced by Preuss (2024, pp.7-8) are:

- urban factors,
- environmental factors,
- policy and governance factors,
- human factors,
- cultural and creative factors,
- social factors

This research engages with existing gaps in the literature by examining how diplomatic legacies are framed, implemented, and evaluated within the context of SMEs. Through the case studies of London 2012 and Paris 2024, the analysis adopts a diplomatic lens to assess how legacy contributes to broader agendas and can be strategically mobilised to enhance soft power.

Based on the coding of official reports and planning documents from London 2012 and Paris 2024 using Nvivo, this thesis identifies the following key dimensions of legacy (see Chapter 2 for further details):

- Economic legacy
- Cultural and sporting legacy
- Tourism and image branding legacy
- Infrastructure and urban legacy
- Environmental legacy
- Social legacy

- Legacy as a response to contemporary challenges
- Establishing new norms legacy

While these categories are analytically distinct, they often overlap in practice. For example, tourism can be interpreted both as an economic and a cultural legacy. The category "Response to Contemporary Challenges" is particularly illustrative of this overlap, as it may encompass both environmental and social legacies depending on the host city's strategic priorities.

It is also important to note that the empirical chapters do not follow the order of this list. Moreover, subcategories are not detailed here. For instance, themes such as inclusion or gender equality have been identified as legacy dimensions but are discussed within the broader category of social legacy (see Chapter 2 for further details on the coding process and categorisation).

4.4 Situating London 2012 and Paris 2024 within the legacy literature

Scholarship on the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games is extensive, but it is also thematically fragmented. A large body of work examines urban regeneration, social legacies, cultural programmes, and security/governance. Another strand addresses public diplomacy, soft power, and city diplomacy. What is comparatively rare are studies that analyse how these legacies were articulated in official planning and connect multiple legacy domains to show how they were mobilised together for domestic and international diplomatic purposes.

Urban legacy and development constitute a highly developed strand of research. Davis (2019) shifts attention from the products or outcomes to the processes, exploring how these are articulated through legacy planning and urban design, and why these matters for regeneration, illustrating how London's regeneration legacy took shape as a long-term futurescape forged over a decade of planning, design and temporal negotiation. Evans (2016) offers an in-depth examination of London's Olympic legacy planning, drawing on insider access to show how organisers sought to harness the commercial momentum of the 2012 Games for long-term post-industrial regeneration in East London, positioning London as the benchmark for future mega-event legacies. Brown et al. (2012) trace how the London 2012 Olympics was conceived and delivered as a regeneration programme, showing how governance structures and delivery mechanisms evolved from the bid stage through to legacy planning. They argue that early, robust and empowered legacy institutions are essential to sustaining regeneration once the

Games' deadline pressure disappears. Duignan (2019) complicates the positive narrative by documenting small-business displacement and a "clone town" effect in Greenwich, showing that local economic and place-based legacies can diverge from bid-time aspirations.

The social and educational dimensions of the London 2012 legacy have also been documented. Some authors present different perspectives on the 'inspire a generation' agenda. Lovett and Bloyce (2017) examine Birmingham, as a non-host city and find that despite national promises of a sporting participation legacy for London 2012, planning processes in Birmingham were hampered by budget cuts, shifting governance and coordination challenges, leading to confusion and producing "initiativitis" rather than sustained participation growth, showing that strategic coordination and communication, is crucial for leveraging sporting legacy. Kohe and Bowen-Jones (2016) report mixed attitudes toward PE, sport, and the Games themselves from young people and question the durability of inspiration effects among young people. Complementing these, Hayday et al. (2017) investigate how SME was leveraged to increase participation by examining national governing bodies' attitudes following London 2012. Using Critical Realism, it highlights how communication, the competitive sports system, media influence, club engagement, organisational capacity, and monitoring and evaluation shape the complex processes of leveraging and legacy creation, offering insights to strengthen policy implementation and future SME strategies.

Another strand focuses on cultural legacies. Pappalepore and Duignan (2016) find that despite policy rhetoric promising positive cultural and creative legacies from London 2012, local small creative organisations in East London experienced limited benefits, facing barriers to participation, inadequate consultation, and missed opportunities for cultural tourism, exposing a gap between rhetoric and local reality. Bourgeois (2019) shows that the London 2012 Arts Festival operated as an exercise in cultural diplomacy, showing how Olympic cultural programmes can generate outcomes such as international collaboration, shifts in global perceptions, shared values and increased cultural tourism, dimensions often overlooked in legacy debates that focus mainly on economic and infrastructural impacts.

Regarding public Diplomacy and soft power studies, Li (2013) contrasts Beijing 2008's tightly managed, state-led public diplomacy ("top-down centre-driven approach") with London 2012's more plural, multi-actor approach. Pope (2014) examines the public diplomacy discourse surrounding London 2012 and critiques "branded cosmopolitanism" in the UK's communication strategy arguing that this competitive, exclusionary messaging limited the effectiveness of UK public diplomacy. Burchell et al. (2015) examine how hosts and international broadcasters used social media during London and Sochi to shape soft power

narratives, highlighting how the contested nature of the Games and the shift to networked media challenge traditional public and cultural diplomacy. Crucially for this thesis, Acuto (2013) positions London as a city-diplomatic actor, a theme further developed in Chapter 1, Section Section 5.7.

Because Paris 2024 has only recently taken place, the academic literature on its legacy remains relatively limited and is largely pre-Games or anticipatory. However, existing research is beginning to converge around several key. Some authors focus on sustainability and low-carbon delivery, highlighting Paris's "circular heritage" and low-infrastructure model (Ricordel, 2023). Others emphasise innovation and social inclusion, exploring how technological and organisational tools are expected to generate inclusive legacy outcomes (Byers et al., 2021). A further strand examines governance and political dynamics, analysing how legacy framing contributes to policy stabilisation, territorial coordination, and legitimacy (Chaboche and Faure, 2024; Bourbilleres, 2026). Other bodies of work address cultural narratives, tourism, and place image highlighting both the potential and the limits of image transformation in areas such as Seine-Saint-Denis (Gignon et al., 2024).

However, across the rich and extensive scholarship on legacy, some gaps stand out. Most studies treat legacies in isolation, offering limited analysis of how these connect and can be mobilised together as part of a coherent strategy. With some exceptions, research often overlooks bid files and the official documentation produced pre- and post-Games in relation to legacy, and rarely links those legacy strategies to diplomatic studies, instead often subsuming them under the broader umbrella of public diplomacy.

Responding to these gaps, this thesis advances a diplomatic reading of legacy and contributes to the literature in several ways. It interprets SMEs legacy as an instrument of soft power and multi-level diplomacy, and systematically codes and compares official planning and legacy documents produced before and after the Games for London 2012 and Paris 2024. It provides a cross-domain reading connecting the different legacies and shows how they can be mobilised together for domestic and international positioning. It treats London 2012 and Paris 2024 as complementary cases in the diplomatic framing of legacy, rather than as oppositional comparators. Finally, it bridges legacy studies and sports diplomacy and specifies the mechanisms through which each legacy domain intersects with diplomacy.

The next section reviews existing literature on legacy, examining how they have been linked to diplomacy and sport. It also identifies key gaps, particularly the limited attention given to the diplomatic framing of legacies in the context of SMEs. This leads to a discussion on city diplomacy, drawing on the work of Acuto, whose conceptualisation provides a crucial lens for

understanding cities as active diplomatic actors in the context of SMEs. This analysis is enriched by Murray's emphasis on non-state-led diplomacy and Rofe's notion of track two diplomacy and the need to operate across multiple scales.

5. Framing diplomatic legacy

This section explores how different types of legacy intersect with diplomacy, forming diplomatic legacies. Rather than treating diplomacy as a separate outcome or independent means, this analysis frames diplomacy through the legacies of SMEs. A key premise underpinning this approach is that sport itself is rarely sufficient to generate diplomatic outcomes. While sport can function as a diplomatic tool, scholars broadly agree that its effectiveness is highly context dependent and never operates in isolation. Sport diplomacy works best when embedded in favourable political conditions, when supported by complementary strategies, and when aligned with broader national or city level objectives (Murray, 2018; Grix & Brannagan, 2016). This reinforces the importance of examining diplomatic outcomes through legacy narratives rather than treating sport itself as the primary driver. To use Zhang's metaphor, sport acts more as a "diplomatic lubricant" (2013, p.233), facilitating interaction rather than driving outcomes. Its effectiveness therefore depends on the political environment, governance conditions, and the relationships between actors involved. Some situations are simply more conducive to diplomatic success than others and future research could benefit from studying the political context both upstream and downstream of sporting events.

Building on this premise, this section analyses how each legacy contributes to diplomatic outcomes. In doing so, it offers a reading of legacies through a diplomatic lens while identifying key gaps in the literature.

5.1 Economic legacy and diplomacy

While the economic impact and legacy of SMEs are widely researched, being among the most well-known dimensions, economic diplomacy, despite its growing recognition as a key aspect of international relations, has received comparatively limited scholarly attention, particularly in relation to SMEs.

Some studies have begun to explore the intersection between SMEs and diplomatic objectives, offering valuable insights into how economic strategies are embedded within

sporting investments. For instance, Brannagan and Giulianotti (2014) show how Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup was used to present the country as a safe, modern, and welcoming for visitors, boosting tourism and contributing to the broader goal of economic diversification and regional leadership.

Similarly, Grix and Brannagan (2016) analyse Qatar's strategic investments in sport, including for example, the acquisition of PSG in 2012, French Ligue 1, broadcasting rights through beIN Sports and the purchase of a part of the London 2012 Olympic Village, to showcase Qatar's expertise in business, finance, and real estate and to recover significant financial investment. However, while these case studies touch on diplomatic elements, their primary focus is not on defining economic diplomacy itself. To better understand the concept, it is useful to turn to more theoretical definitions.

Rana (2007), former Indian Ambassador and Senior Fellow at DiploFoundation, defines economic diplomacy as:

"Economic diplomacy is the process through which countries tackle the outside world, to maximize their national gain in all the fields of activity, including trade, investments and other forms of economically beneficial exchanges, where they enjoy comparative advantage; it has bilateral, regional and multilateral dimensions, each of which is important. No longer the monopoly of state entities, the official agents – the foreign and economic ministries, the diplomatic and commercial services, plus their promotional agencies – now engage in dynamic partnerships with an array of non-state actors. Indeed, such domestic collaboration is a sine qua non for effective external outreach; abroad, in mirror fashion, the actions similarly address a wide field of foreign stakeholders" (Rana, 2007, p. 1).

Complementing this, Moons and van Bergeijk (2017) define economic diplomacy as:

"Economic diplomacy [...] is increasingly being recognised as an instrument that can be used to deal with these intangible barriers to trade (e.g. van Bergeijk, 2009; Yakop and van Bergeijk, 2011). Economic diplomacy aims to influence decisions on cross-border economic activities pursued by governments and non-state actors (Bayne and Woolcock, 2003; Okano Heijmans, 2011). Economic diplomacy involves the activities of the government and its (inter)national networks and can be defined as the use of government relations and government influence to enable international trade and investment. [...] Economic diplomacy typically is an interdisciplinary subject to the fields of international economics, international political economy and international relations and is receiving increasing attention in all three disciplines (van Bergeijk et al., 2011b)" (Moons & Van Bergeijk, 2017, p.336).

Chadwick and Widdop (2023), introduce a new research field, the "geopolitical economy of sport", which they define as:

“The way in which nations, states and other entities engage in, with, or through sport for geo-geographic and politico-economic reasons in order to build and exert power, and secure strategic advantages through the control of resources within and via networks of which sport is a constituent part” (Chadwick & Widdop, 2023, p.287).

Taken together, these definitions of economic diplomacy align with broader shifts in diplomatic practice, acknowledging multi-level activity and the involvement of non-state actors. In the context of SMEs, this implies that economic legacies, such as inward investment, the development of cross-border economic relationships or trade promotion, can function as instruments through which states, cities and non-state actors pursue national gain, exercise influence, and engage with wider economic networks. This economic perspective sets up the next section on urban legacy, another widely studied dimension that also carries significant diplomatic significance.

5.2 Urban legacy and diplomacy

Urban legacy from SMEs extends beyond infrastructure development. From a diplomatic perspective, urban transformation can serve as a visible demonstration of a host city’s capacity for innovation, sustainability, and global engagement. From the regeneration of underdeveloped areas to improvements in public amenities, urban development illustrates how SMEs contribute to the wider cityscape (Holt et al., 2015). While hosting SMEs often accelerates urbanisation, their legacy depends on various factors and can lead either to sustainable regeneration or to financial burdens and potentially social unrest. This section explores the connection between SMEs, urban legacy and diplomacy while highlighting gaps in existing research.

Although the literature on urban transformation through sport is growing, the link between sport and urban diplomacy remains underdeveloped. Several studies have examined how SMEs reshape cities, but few have explored how cities use these transformations as tools of international influence or diplomatic strategy.

Some works explore the relationship between sport and the built environment. For instance, Flowers (2017) examines how architecture and sport converge in events like London 2012 and the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, highlighting their cultural and symbolic significance. Similarly, the *Routledge Handbook of Sport and Legacy* (Holt et al., 2015) includes case studies on urbanisation and legacy, such as Sydney Olympic Park, Athens transport systems, and London’s sustainability agenda, but without systematically addressing diplomatic dimensions.

Other studies focus on urban development and policy. For example, Chalkley and Essex (1999, 2004) provide historical analyses of the Olympic Games' impact on host cities, identifying phases of infrastructural transformation and discussing SMEs as tools of urban and regional renewal. However, their work remains mainly focus on planning and governance and does not engage with city diplomacy.

Environmental concerns are addressed by Collins et al. (2007), who assess the ecological impact of the FA Cup Final, and by Gaudette et al. (2017), who review tourism-related effects of the Winter Olympics. These contributions enrich the understanding of SMEs' legacies but do not conceptualise cities as diplomatic actors.

Acuto's (2013) work offers a significant theoretical advancement in bridging the gap between urban transformation and diplomacy in the context of SMEs. As noted above, Acuto highlights that mega-events have long been central to urban studies, while also pointing out how they strengthen global urban networks and reaffirm cities' positions on the international stage. Rennie-Short, cited in Acuto, even describes cities as "laboratories for future urban forms" (2012, p. 188 cited in Acuto, 2013, p. 294). However, Acuto introduces a distinctly diplomatic dimension based on the role of cities as actors. He explains:

"This article seeks to go beyond both the dominance of the state and the urban legacy of the Olympics, illustrating how cities themselves have the capacity to partake in the governance of the Olympics (and of sport mega-events in general) and how the Games' planned imprint can also be interwoven with 'local' agendas with a global reach" (Acuto, 2013, p.294).

The aim here is not to explore all types of diplomacy related to urban diplomacy, as these links will be examined in greater depth in the empirical chapters. However, it is important to emphasise that urban diplomatic legacy can include specific dimensions such as security diplomacy. Rofe (2018) highlights the security issues associated with SMEs, pointing to events such as the Boston Marathon bombing (2013), the attack on the Stade de France (2015), and the Munich Olympics tragedy (1972) as illustrations of the vulnerabilities of SMEs to security threats. He adds that in the digital age, these challenges extend to electronic infrastructure: "while the future of e-sports is unfolding, the electronic infrastructure underpinning major sport and the conduct of diplomacy is integral in the twenty-first century and therefore vulnerable" (Beacom & Rofe, 2018, p.255). Security thus becomes an extraterritorial issue requiring international and inter-agency cooperation, particularly in the field of intelligence. Like accessibility, security is now a major diplomatic concern in SMEs governance, revealing a constant tension between openness to the public and the protection of infrastructure and participants (Beacom & Rofe, 2018, pp.254-255).

In this study, a distinction is made between city diplomacy and urban diplomacy, even though the terms are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature. Drawing on authors such as Acuto (2013) and van der Pluijm & Melissen (2007), 'city diplomacy' refers to the international activities of cities as political actors, focusing on the networks they build or the negotiations they undertake (see Section 5.7 for further details). Here, 'urban diplomacy' refers to the diplomatic implications of urban development itself. Inspired by authors such as Holt et al. (2015), who highlight how SME-driven urban transformation reshapes the cityscape, urban diplomacy captures how urban regeneration, spatial planning, and territorial redesign are strategically mobilised to enhance international influence, signal governance capacity, and align local agendas with global expectations.

Although environmental legacy could be considered part of urban legacy, through its impact on infrastructure for example, it also constitutes a distinct and transversal field. Environmental concerns increasingly influence not only urban legacies but also economic, social, and touristic legacies. As such, environmental legacy is now deeply intertwined with and informs all other forms of legacy.

5.3 Green diplomacy

While much of the literature focuses on economic legacies, often seen as the primary reason for hosting such events (Davies, 2002; Ingerson, 2001; Jennings and Sambrook, 2000, cited in Samuel & Stubbs, 2012), Samuel and Stubbs argue that environmental impacts are equally significant due to the extensive travel and resource consumption involved (Pitts and Liao, 2009 cited in Samuel & Stubbs, 2012). In response to growing concerns, the IOC modified the Olympic Charter in 1996 to include a commitment to environmental responsibility to:

“‘[e]ncourage and support a responsible concern for environmental issues, to promote sustainable development in sport and to require that the Olympic Games are held accordingly’ (IOC, 2011: 16)” (Samuel & Stubbs, 2012, p.486).

Although scholars have long raised concerns about the environmental and social impacts of the Olympic Games (Halls and Hodges, 1998; Lenskyj, 2000; Malfas et al., 2004; Ruthheiser, 2000; Weicker, 2003 cited in Samuel & Stubbs, 2012) research specifically focused on green legacies remains limited (Tian & Johnston, 2008, cited in Samuel & Stubbs, 2012). More broadly, the literature on green diplomacy is still underdeveloped, and this gap is even more pronounced when examined in relation to sport.

The concept of sustainability has become central to discussions on SMEs, such as the Olympic Games. However, as Gold and Gold (2015) highlight, the concept remains contested. Popularised by the World Commission on Environment and Development's (WCED) Brundtland Report in 1987, sustainability is defined as: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED 1987, 43)" (Gold & Gold 2015, p. 1). Gold and Gold (2015) also note that the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and Agenda 21 further advanced this agenda, addressing global issues such as poverty, health and pollution. However, sustainability remains interpreted differently across sectors. Critics argue that the social dimension is often underdeveloped compared to economic concerns, and that sustainability can function, as Gold and Gold state, as:

"an "empty signifier", "a concept that possesses a 'certain, yet unstable, contingent and contestable, temporary coherence or content' (Swyngedouw, 2010, 305), well able to absorb and naturalise differing viewpoints" (Gold & Gold, 2015, p.2).

The IOC progressively institutionalised environmental sustainability. The shift began in the 1990s when the IOC first acknowledged environmental concerns by including a reference to the environment in the 1991 Olympic Charter and by taking part in the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. The same year, the IOC introduced environmental criteria in the Olympic bidding manual, which influenced bids like the 2000 Sydney Games. A significant milestone was reached in 1994 when the IOC signed an agreement with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), formally recognising the environment as the third pillar of Olympism, which led to the creation of the IOC's Commission on Sport and Environment (Gold & Gold, 2015). By 1997, the IOC had published a Manual on Sport and Development, promoting sustainable practices across the Olympic Movement. In 1999, it released Agenda 21, a comprehensive framework inspired by the UN's Agenda 21, which outlined strategies for sustainable event planning. This included environmental impact assessments, stakeholder engagement, and community involvement. The Sydney 2000 Games became the first to embrace this agenda fully, earning the label of 'green bid' through its collaboration with Greenpeace (Gold & Gold, 2015, p.146). Further institutionalisation happened in 2002 when the IOC, following its Mexico City session, formally added legacy to the Olympic Charter, embedding legacy alongside sustainability as a core principle. This decision influenced the bidding strategies of subsequent host cities, including London 2012 (Gold & Gold, 2015, p.146).

Samuel and Stubbs (2012) argue that the greening of the Olympic Games is increasingly shaped by institutional processes. Drawing on DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) concept of institutionalisation, they describe:

“the emergence and structuration of an organisational field as a result of the activities of a diverse set of organisations; and, second, the homogenisation of these organizations, and of new entrants as well, once the field is established” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p.148, cited in Samuel & Stubbs, 2012, p.500)

Various actors have influenced the greening of the Games, through their power and commitment levels including the media, the UN, the IOC, NGOs, governments, and the public. Mimetic processes are particularly evident in the way host cities learn from and emulate previous Games. For example, Beijing learned from its loss to Sydney and submitted a more comprehensive sustainability plan for 2008 (Samuel & Stubbs, 2012, p.488). Legitimation is crucial during both the bidding and operational phases. Cities must present themselves as environmentally responsible and show they are building on past legacies. However, as Samuel and Stubbs (2012) note, the extent to which these commitments translate into tangible outcomes remains underexplored.

According to Acuto, SMEs like the Olympics also function as arenas for political signalling and international image-making, reflecting “contexts of political competition and international posturing” (Acuto, 2013, p.303). This creates opportunities for host cities to demonstrate leadership on key issues, such as environmental sustainability. This was according to Acuto, particularly the case of London which committed to deliver “the greenest Games ever” (Acuto, 2013, p.303).

Overall, the literature reveals three main dynamics: the rising prominence of sustainability in SMEs planning, the institutionalisation of environmental standards by the IOC and related actors and the use of environmental initiatives to signal responsibility and leadership in global arenas. Despite this, research explicitly conceptualising green diplomacy and its links with SMEs remains limited.

A concise definition of greening, and the characteristics associated with green legacy, is provided by Samuel & Stubbs (2012):

“Strategies and initiatives undertaken to integrate sustainability (environmental and social outcomes) into the OG. Greening is variously described as ‘a state to which we aspire’ (Chernushenko, 1994: 9) and ‘a process rather than a quick fix’ (Lenskyj, 1998: 343). However, the authors acknowledge that there is no consensus on the meaning of sustainable development, sustainability, and greening (Dresner, 2008) – they mean different things in different social contexts” (Samuel & Stubbs, 2012, p.486).

They identify several key determinants for achieving green legacies:

“the breadth and depth of environmental commitments during the bid process; embedding sustainability in the vision, mission and branding of organising committees; embedding sustainability in various aspects of OG organisation, which is an important practical application of a sustainability vision; and the transfer of knowledge from one OG to the next, allowing newer host cities to enhance green legacies” (Samuel & Stubbs, 2012, p.485)

Based on Samuel & Stubbs (2012), green diplomacy refers to the strategies and initiatives through which hosts integrate sustainability, including environmental and social outcomes, into the planning and delivery of SMEs. It involves setting broad environmental commitments from the bidding phase, embedding sustainability into the vision, mission and branding of organising committees, incorporating sustainability across operational practices, and transferring knowledge between editions of the Games to strengthen future green legacies. In this sense, green diplomacy shows how sustainability becomes both a goal and a practical way of working. Host cities use it to show responsibility and leadership in different social contexts. As with other legacy dimensions, green diplomacy also intersects with social and economic legacies and can support broader reputation-building agendas.

5.4 National branding as diplomatic legacy

Nation branding stands out as an exception among legacy types, as it is frequently framed directly within a diplomatic context. In some cases, it is even the only legacy dimension interpreted through a diplomatic lens. For instance, when a country leverages urban regeneration primarily to enhance its international image, the diplomatic reading focuses solely on nation branding outcomes. This framing risks overlooking the diplomatic potential of other legacies.

This section examines how hosting SMEs contributes to global image-building and strategic positioning within the international system. It also investigates how national branding has been framed by scholars, focusing on how it is theorised within sport and diplomacy and legacy studies.

National branding is a central motivation for hosting SMEs. Zaharna (2009, cited in Rofe, 2018) conceptualises national branding as a fusion of public diplomacy and tourism. Organising sporting events enables these two elements to converge in pursuit of political objectives. Building on this, Dubinsky (2019) analyses the Olympic Movement as a mirror of a country's image, showing how nations use the Games to innovate infrastructure, promote tourism, showcase technology, and pursue political and social goals. He also traces how various actors (countries, cities, communities and other advocacy groups) have used the Games across the Olympic Movement's major phases, from its rebirth to the legacy era in the

twenty-first-century. Dubinsky further explains that 'country image' is intrinsically multidisciplinary:

"Fields of research such as public diplomacy (Cull, 2008) and soft power (Nye, 2008), national and collective identity (David & Bar-Tal, 2009), agenda setting and framing (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Yoo, Smith & Kim, 2015) Countries, and place branding (Anholt, 2010) influence the field of country image (Fan 2010)" (Dubinsky, 2019, p.28).

According to Anholt (2010, p.81 cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p.28), "a successful Olympics is the start of the process, not the end". Building a national image, therefore, requires coordinated efforts across policy, culture, tourism, and business.

Historically, the role of 'country image' emerged with the revival of the modern Olympic Games, mainly attributed to Baron Pierre de Coubertin, and encouraged by countries such as France, England, Prussia and Greece, which saw sport as a tool to address social and political agendas (Boykoff, 2016; Guttmann, 2002 cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p.28). The creation of the IOC in 1894 (Guttmann, 2002) was part of a wider dynamic in which sport gradually became a tool of public diplomacy, as Dubinsky points out (2019, p.28).

Yet, contrary to Coubertin's desire for the Games to be apolitical, they almost immediately intersected with international politics. Examples include the American's refusal to lower their flag in 1908 during the parade in front of the British monarchy after the American flag was not raised in the London 1908 Games opening ceremony and the 1912 debates on the independence of Finland and Bohemia, when their athletes were required to march under the flags of Russia and Austria (Guttmann, 2002; Boykoff, 2016, cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p.29). Thus, before WWI, states recognised the Games' potential but used them in largely symbolic ways. Public diplomacy was basic, and national identity the primary vehicle of image-building. Dubinsky (2019, p. 29) argues that a purposeful branding use of the Games to change national image accelerated after WWI.

From the 1970s, research on country image & public diplomacy intensified, especially during the Cold War, when states used sport, particularly the Olympic Games, as a strategic foreign policy tool (Cull, 2008; Dubinsky, 2017; Nye, 2008 cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p.32). The Games became a battleground between Western and Eastern blocs, each seeking to demonstrate superiority, including through doping (Hunt, 2007, cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p.31).

Authoritarian regimes also used the Games to reshape international perceptions. In 1936, Hitler and the Nazi regime were the first to use the Olympic Games to transform Germany's image by spreading propaganda of power and order (Dubinsky, 2017; Murray, 1992; Davis, 2008; Guttmann, 2002, cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p.30). The Berlin Games illustrate how the Olympics, or SMEs in general, can be used to mask political intentions (Boykoff, 2016, in

Dubinsky, 2019, p.30). Yet, Jesse Owens' victory disrupted the intended narrative, becoming a symbol of resistance to racism in both Germany and the United States (Schwartz, 2000, cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p.30).

In the context of Cold War tensions and decolonisation, the IOC became increasingly internationalised, and the Olympics expanded as a tool of diplomatic visibility (Dubinsky, 2018; Guttman, 2002, cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p.30). Boycotts & exclusions (Germany and allies in 1948, the 1956 Games in Melbourne with boycotts linked to the Suez Crisis, the recognition of Taiwan and the Soviet invasion of Hungary) further underscored politicisation. The infamous water polo match between Hungary and the USSR symbolised this politicisation, becoming an emblem of Cold War violence (Boykoff, 2016; Guttman, 2002, cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p.31).

Since WWII, countries have used the Games to rebuild their image and infrastructure, pursuing both national and international goals (Dubinsky, 2018 cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p.30). Italy (Rome 1960) sought distance from fascism, Japan (Tokyo 1964) presented a peaceful, technologically advanced nation, Mexico (1968) tried to counter "underdeveloped" stereotypes, though the Tlatelolco massacre undercut this narrative (Guttman, 2002, cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p.31). More recently, Qatar used the 2022 FIFA World Cup to challenge orientalist narratives and assert itself as a modern, cooperative regional leader and a progressive state that celebrates Arab and Eastern culture (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2014, p.160). Germany leveraged the 2006 World Cup to challenge historical stereotypes, while Brazil's hosting also attempted to manage the narrative, although there was domestic instability and unrest (Grix & Houlihan, 2013, cited in Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2014, p.160). With the end of the Cold War and the intensification of globalised capitalism, the Olympics entered an era of commercialisation where objectives shifted from political image-making to lasting economic impact (Davis, 2008; Dubinsky, 2017, cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p.33). Under Samaranch, the IOC reformed the Olympic Movement, after the problematic Olympic Games of Munich, Montreal and Moscow (Dubinsky, 2019, p.33):

"The 1984 Olympic Games were significant not only because of political reasons. It was the first the Olympic Games were funded by the private sector and used existing facilities which led to an operational profit (Davis, 2008). [...] Private sponsorship and especially the TOP program that was established in 1985 changed the face Olympic Movement" (Dubinsky, 2019, p.33).

In the twenty-first century, the commercialisation of the Olympic Movement intensified. Bidding cities now focus not only on short-term financial impact but also on long-term legacy (Dubinsky, 2017). Yet criticism has grown over long-term profitability. While Sydney 2000 arguably enhanced Australia's image, other hosts faced over-spending, corruption scandals

and rising security costs, especially post 11 September 2001 (Boyle et al., 2014; Coakley, 2015, cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p.34). Athens 2004 is an example of this ambivalence: despite investments in infrastructure and the promotion of historical heritage, the economic benefits were limited, and the facilities became a burden on public finances (Davis, 2008; Fola, 2011, cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p.34).

Two approaches crystallised in the early twenty-first century (Dubinsky, 2018): authoritarian models (Beijing 2008, Sochi 2014) using the Games to demonstrate state power, and democratic-inclusive models (Vancouver 2010, London 2012) emphasising sustainability & community engagement (Dubinsky, 2019, p. 35).

Athletes also became central to branding, with elite figures used diplomatically to humanise or reframe national identity. For example, Yao Ming's popularity helped bridging China–US cultural divides, challenging stereotypes and humanising China's image, while simultaneously introducing American basketball culture to Chinese audiences (Zhang, 2013, p. 229; James Sasser cited in Zhang, 2013, p. 229).

Crucially, the strategic use of SMEs for national branding varies by historical context, political goals and international positioning. Hosting similar events does not produce uniform outcomes. As Grix et al. (2015, p.478) explain:

“Whereas the UK's image abroad was very positive before the event and to better this was not the key aim, Germany used the 2006 World Cup to alter a tarnished image; Brazil, on the other hand, does not suffer from a negative image abroad, but wishes to consolidate its regional power position on the global stage” (Grix et al., 2015, p.478).

In this thesis, national branding as a diplomatic legacy describes how hosts use SMEs to influence a country's image and international reputation through planned strategies. These strategies can change over time, and their effects depend on context and are closely linked to broader foreign-policy agendas. It is important to add that nation branding is one of several lenses (economic, urban, green, cultural, social), that intersect in practice and are analysed complementarily in the empirical chapters.

5.5 Cultural diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy has emerged as a key dimension of soft power, particularly within the context of SMEs. Drawing on Cummings, Schneider (2005) defines cultural diplomacy as “the exchange of ideas, information, art and other cultural expressions among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding” (Cummings, 2003, p.1 cited in Schneider, 2005,

p.147) and thus operates through values, culture, and ideas rather than coercion (Schneider, 2005, pp.147-148).

Scholars such as Fisher (2017) and Lynch (2019) similarly underscore the role of cultural diplomacy in enhancing soft power, building trust, and facilitating dialogue. They argue that cultural diplomacy contributes to peace and cooperation by transcending political differences and fostering people-to-people connections (cited in Goytom, 2024, p.29).

This perspective is echoed by Grix & Lee (2013) who highlight that international sporting events serve as platforms for soft power projection, enabling nations to showcase cultural heritage and project a positive image internationally (cited in Goytom, 2024, p. 29). Blanchfield (2015), likewise, emphasises the potential of these events to influence international perceptions (cited in Goytom, 2024, p. 29).

The Olympic Games have long served as vehicles for cultural diplomacy. Beyond organising sporting competitions, Coubertin aimed to “revive art and cultural competitions”, several editions of the Games, therefore, featured programmes in which “art, culture, music, literature, painting, sculpture and architecture were part of the Olympic programme” (Stromberg, 2012, cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p. 30). This was the case from Stockholm 1912 to London 1948. Since the 1950s, artistic competitions have given way to cultural programmes and spectacular ceremonies, making the Olympic and Paralympic Games a showcase for national heritage and cultural expression, especially via the opening and closing ceremonies and the cultural Olympiads (Garcia, 2011; Arning, 2013 cited in Dubinsky, 2019, p. 30).

Beyond the Olympics, other SMEs perform similar cultural functions. Events such as the FIFA World Cup have served as platforms for cultural diplomacy where hosts use the event to display identity and organisational capacity (Grix and Lee, 2013). Guttman (2018) notes that Brazil 2014 emphasised the country’s passion for football and vibrant culture, while Russia 2018 sought to promote a more positive international image (Grix et al., 2016; Guttman, 2018, cited in Goytom, 2024, p. 28). Giulianotti and Higham (2018) extend this argument by drawing attention to the diplomatic practices surrounding SMEs, such as receptions, bilateral meetings, and cultural exchanges (cited in Goytom, 2024, p.28)

These studies show that SMEs function as important platforms for cultural diplomacy. Cornelissen argues that the Olympics exemplify how mega-events operate as major sites of cultural diplomatic performance and diplomatic relations (Cornelissen, 2016 cited in Goytom, 2024, p.28) and Riordan highlights how SMEs sit at the intersection of sport, politics, and culture, offering an important global platform (Riordan, 2014, cited in Goytom, 2024 p.28). Similarly, Deardorff argues that SMEs bring together diverse actors around the same event,

creating opportunities for cultural exchange and promoting mutual understanding (Deardorff, 2018, cited in Goytom, 2024 p.28). Zhang and Zhao (2018) provide a comparative analysis of multiple SMEs, concluding that they can promote bilateral and multilateral relations through cultural exchange and people-to-people interactions, provided significant resources are invested. They observe that ideas and values are often projected via ceremonies and side-events such as exhibitions or hospitality programmes (Zhang and Zhao, 2018 cited in Goytom, 2024 pp.28-30).

Despite these insights, there remains a lack of empirical research on the mechanisms through which cultural diplomacy contributes to diplomacy outcomes (Grix & Carmichael, 2019, cited in Goytom, 2024, p.28). While Blanchfield (2015) reports statistical evidence of sport diplomacy facilitating détente and conflict resolution in at least 14 instances between 1980 and 2014, the enabling processes and conditions remain not well understood (cited in Goytom, 2024, p. 29).

In summary, cultural initiatives linked to hosting SMEs can support soft power, international cooperation, and even conflict mitigation. However, their effectiveness depends on context, coordination, and strategic intent. For the purposes of this research, we use Schneider's definition of cultural diplomacy, "the exchange of ideas, information, art and other cultural expressions among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding" (Cummings, 2003, p. 1, cited in Schneider, 2005, p. 147), applied to SMEs, to the cultural programmes, ceremonies, and associated exchanges.

While international sporting events offer powerful opportunities for cultural diplomacy, they also invite heightened scrutiny. Increasingly, hosts face complex challenges related to cultural sensitivity, ethical governance, and human rights (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011, cited in Goytom, 2024, p. 28). For example, FIFA's selection of Qatar 2022 sparked global concern over migrant worker conditions and broader social implications (Amnesty International, 2020, cited in Goytom, 2024, p. 28). The following section examines the social legacy of SMEs and the diplomatic narratives that emerge from efforts to address such social challenges.

5.6 Social legacy and diplomacy

The concept of social legacy has garnered significant scholarly attention, especially in the context of SMEs. Researchers have explored its multifaceted impact, from social inclusion to volunteerism and urban regeneration. However, the intersection between social legacy and

diplomacy remains under explored. As in previous sections, this review outlines key social legacy research and introduces a diplomatic lens to connect these fields.

Several scholars have examined the social outcomes of SMEs, highlighting both tangible and intangible legacies. Cornelissen et al. (2011) discuss legacies and consequences of SMEs and emphasise the importance of integrating the 'triple bottom line' (as defined in Section 2.6) into the planning, delivery and evaluation of SMEs. Their study on South Africa highlights how social legacies can be shaped by broader development goals. Similarly, Swart et al. (2011) examine the 2010 FIFA World Cup, identifying social outcomes such as community integration and intangible legacies (youth development, social integration and community pride).

Thomson et al. (2020) provide a systematic review of 77 empirical studies published between 2000 and 2016. They identify 34 distinct types of social legacy, including civic pride, inclusion, and quality of life, which remain, according to their review, under researched. They note that research is geographically concentrated and methodologically limited, calling for greater intentionality in defining and investigating social legacies. Similarly, contributions in Holt et al. (2015), illustrate the breadth of social legacies through case studies on the Paralympics (Gilbert & Schantz), European youth football (Marston), the Torino 2006 Cultural Olympiad (Guala), and responsible business practices in London 2012 (Timms). Dickson et al. (2022) investigate the volunteering legacy of Sochi 2014 highlighting the need for strategic volunteer management to enhance long-term social and human capital. Slender (2014) also conducted a systematic review of social impact and legacy of sports events.

Despite this rich literature, few studies explicitly link social legacy to diplomatic objectives. Even when studies engage with themes relevant to diplomacy, such as inclusion, human rights, and soft power, they rarely frame them within an explicit diplomatic lens.

Recent scholarship has begun to address this gap. Chatziefstathiou and Rofe (2024) examine human rights discourse in Olympic contexts. They trace the evolution of Olympic universality, critique its Western-centric roots and explore the challenges in promoting human rights. They also engage sportswashing³ and soft power, using Sports Diplomacy to interrogate these issues, and consider how anti-corruption reforms could help create lasting human rights legacies.

They highlight how Olympism, as conceived by Coubertin, promoted ideals of universalism and moral development, yet was historically shaped by exclusion, gender discrimination, racial

³ Even if not the scope of this research, there is a growing body of literature on sportswashing and soft power, including work from Boykoff, 2022; Grix, et al., 2025; Grix, & Brannagan, 2024; Brannagan et al, 2025.

prejudice, and Eurocentric values. Scholars have criticised this paradox, pointing out that the Olympic movement favoured Western norms and marginalised athletes from colonised or non-Western regions. Coubertin's own writings illustrate the racialised and colonialist attitudes inherent in early Olympic discourse, calling into question the notion of Olympism as a universal framework for human rights. As Chatziefstathiou and Rofe (2024) note:

“Nevertheless, although Coubertin’s Olympism sooner or later gradually adapted to the emergent socio-political, and cultural values, the Olympic Movement has always been criticised for Western-centrism, in particular Eurocentrism” (Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p.3).

They conclude that Olympic internationalism rests on a Eurocentric conception of universal truth, often disregarding cultural and traditional differences. Olympic values are thus largely seen as Western moral ideals, rooted in liberalism (Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p.3).

Sports Diplomacy, has emerged as a major concept in sport studies, offering tools to understand how countries use sport not just for competition, but for political influence, including sportswashing and soft power. To better understand these dynamics, definitions of sport diplomacy by Rofe and Murray are useful. As mentioned in Section 3, Murray considers Sports Diplomacy as a “new term that describes an old practice: the power of sport to bring people, nations, and communities closer together via a shared love of physical pursuits” (Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p.3), while Rofe’s analysis points to Sport and Diplomacy as an “explanatory overlay to the network of evolving networks within the worlds of sport and diplomacy” (Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p.3).

Building on these frameworks, Chatziefstathiou & Rofe explore the concept of sportswashing, defined by Boykoff as:

“a phenomenon whereby political leaders use sports to appear important or legitimate on the world stage while stoking nationalism and deflecting attention from chronic social problems and human-rights woes on the home front” (Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p. 3)

They argue that soft power provides the scope for sportswashing, allowing governments to influence public opinion through sport and culture. Governments use SMEs to promote their own stories often hiding or justifying issues like homelessness, surveillance, or gentrification (Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p.4). Recent examples of sportswashing given by Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, include: the FIFA World Cup in South Africa in 2010, The FIFA World Cup in Brazil in 2014 and the Rio Olympics in 2016. The Los Angeles Olympic bids, also framed

solutions to homelessness as part of the Games' legacy, utilising a social crisis into a political opportunity (2024, p.4).

The IOC's choice of Beijing and Sochi as Olympic and Paralympic hosts, despite serious human rights concerns, has fuelled criticism as critics consider these decisions contradict the IOC's supposed values of peace and democracy (Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p.4).

In response to criticism, a new narrative has developed highlighting how SMEs promote human rights and anti-corruption reforms. For example, the UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution supporting human rights through sport, and the IOC launched the Olympic Agenda 2020 to reinforce values and improve sport's role in society. In 2017, new human rights contractual provisions were added to the Host City Contracts, starting with Paris 2024 (Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p.4). Host countries must guarantee compliance with these standards and even the suppliers working with the IOC must respect human rights and avoid being involved in abuses. The new rules aim to protect people and fix violations, but there are limitations. However, implementation remains uneven: the Coordination Commission has limited oversight, infrequent visits, and no robust enforcement mechanism. Additionally, the human rights obligations depend on the host country's laws and not all countries have the same level of Human rights protection (Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p. 5).

Recent scholarship highlights that there is a pivotal moment between SMEs and human rights. Boykoff is urging scholars to "peer behind the shiny scrim of the Olympics and seriously scrutinise the effects that staging the Games has on host cities" (Boykoff, 2019 in Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p.5). While the IOC's embrace of human rights is often celebrated, scholars caution against uncritical praise. Byrne and Lee Ludvigsen argue that reforms in the Olympic arena will always face limitations due to the neoliberal underpinnings of the Olympics and other SMEs. They write:

"Olympic "legacies" do not always materialise that the celebrated reforms that have thus far taken place, are subject to critical and ongoing scrutiny—from academics, advocacy groups, journalists, and practitioners—to determine their human rights compatibility with internationally protected standards" (Byrne & Ludvigsen cited in Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p.5).

As Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, note, SMEs can bring positive outcomes (for example, increased physical activity or sports participation), but they can also carry risks, such as human rights violations, displacement of vulnerable communities, and ideological contradictions in Olympic values. Public pressure and global anti-corruption movements (including sponsors) have pushed sports organisations to fight corruption or protect human rights. They also encourage

to adopt stricter ethical rules and increase transparency in how events are planned and hosted.

Philippou (2021, cited in Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, p.5) stresses that anti-corruption efforts are essential to uphold human rights. Now, host countries are judged not just on their infrastructure, but also on their human rights record and anti-corruption commitments, which is seen as a positive shift by Rofe & Chatziefstathiou (2024, p.5).

Scholars such as Amis and Heerdt “advocate for multi-stakeholder collaboration and the inclusion of human rights provisions in bidding and hosting agreements.” (Heerdt, 2018, 2023 cited in Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p.5).

Additionally, fighting corruption and ensuring good governance in SMEs can lead to positive legacies beyond sport, such as better public administration and “acknowledging these potentials is key to the framework Sports Diplomacy provides” (Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p.5). Public finance should be managed carefully to avoid corruption, and civil society and international organisations play a key role in pushing for reforms. A strong anti-corruption system needs cooperation between law enforcement at all levels (local, national, and international). Authors highlight that if anti-corruption reforms are properly applied in SMEs, organisations like the IOC, FIFA, and host countries can help build a strong human rights legacy. Anti-corruption reforms can have long-term human rights benefits, but only if everyone involved works together in a coordinated and comprehensive way.

These new legacies show that sport is changing by becoming a tool for social progress. Authors conclude that “by embracing human rights the Olympic Games, and other MSEs provide an opportunity to restate their place in the public’s conscience as catalysts for positive change” (Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p.6).0

Finally, as Rofe & Chatziefstathiou declare:

“The new legacies’ calls for scrutiny, demonstrate the network of networks of Sports Diplomacy: i.e., the manner in which sports activities through their convening power—to “attract”—demonstrate impacts in other parts of global diplomatic practice across human rights, education, health and well-being, and sustainability” (Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p.6).

Building on this notion where new legacies reveal the complex web of Sports Diplomacy, and where sport influences other areas like education, health, sustainability, and global diplomacy, we can begin to bridge the conceptual gap between social legacy and diplomacy. In this light, social legacies such as inclusion, education, health promotion, and sustainability become

integral components of a broader diplomatic practice. These social legacy initiatives can be interpreted through Rofe's lens of sports diplomacy as an "explanatory overlay to the network of evolving networks within the worlds of sport and diplomacy", and Murrays definition considering sports Diplomacy as a "new term that describes an old practice: the power of sport to bring people, nations, and communities closer together via a shared love of physical pursuits" (Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p.6).

For the purposes of this research, social diplomacy refers to the ways in which the social legacies of SMEs, such as inclusion, human rights, community engagement, health promotion, volunteerism, and education, interact with diplomatic practices and narratives. It captures how these socially oriented initiatives are mobilised to support soft power, international cooperation and political credibility, while acknowledging that different readings of social legacy shape distinct diplomatic outcomes.

This framework will be applied to the social legacies identified in the empirical chapters, allowing for a diplomatic reading of those lasting impacts. This approach also opens the door to examining another dimension of diplomacy often overlooked in traditional analyses: the role of cities.

5.7 City diplomacy

An often overlooked yet increasingly significant aspect of international relations and diplomacy is the role of cities. City diplomacy is a crucial concept for this thesis because SMEs are negotiated and delivered at the city level. Bid processes are led by cities and they also negotiate with international organisation while embedding legacy strategies in local governance. Understanding cities as diplomatic actors therefore helps illuminate how other legacies acquire diplomatic significance. Although often overlooked in traditional diplomacy, cities have always played a major role in international affairs. As Acuto notes:

"Cities have long crowded the realms of world affairs, with a plethora of transnational activities linking global narratives to urban developments on the ground. Do these often-ignored 'subnational' actors provide a new form of international negotiation? Do they represent a potential solution for contemporary global challenges? Do they undercut the near-monopoly of the state on diplomacy? Some interesting answers might emerge from an investigation of these unconventional realms of international affairs, which are often considered beyond the purview of diplomacy and diplomats. Sport is no exception" (Acuto, 2013, p.287).

The Olympics and Paralympic Games provide a unique opportunity to study how cities engage with diplomacy. Acuto highlights two often-overlooked dimensions of city diplomacy: the use of SMEs as instruments for political intervention in everyday affairs and the centrality of city leadership in these (para)diplomatic processes (Acuto, 2013, p.288).

While cities have gained increasing recognition in international affairs, the literature on their diplomatic and political role has remained fragmented. Early discussions around 'paradiplomacy'⁴ primarily focused on federated states.

Cities were often viewed as “passive spaces suffering the indiscriminate exercise of top-down logics” (Le Galès, 2002, p.262 cited in Acuto, 2013, p.289). The concept of paradiplomacy challenges this by recognising that local bodies such as cities, can engage in diplomatic action alongside nation-states. Since the 2000s, this perspective on paradiplomacy is gradually making up for the lack of detailed analyses of the potential of cities as actors in international relations. Duchacek's foundational work, as summarised by Acuto, “revived the idea of paradiplomacy as a form of political agency by sub-national entities” (Acuto, 2013, p.290).

Despite this progress, much of the literature still focuses on regions within federal systems, rather than cities, and often fails to explain how cities exert influence or what their impact is on global governance. More ambitious works consider cities not just as participants in paradiplomacy but as integral players in international affairs. As early as the 1990s, Chadwick stressed the need to bridge the gap between global perspectives and everyday urban experiences through the “world relations of cities” (Chadwick, 1990 cited in Acuto, 2013, p.290); scholars, such as Hobbs, examined the international missions of American mayors (1994, cited in Acuto, 2013, p.291) while van der Pluijm and Melissen have, more recently, explored “city diplomacy” as a form of political engagement between cities and international processes (2007, cited in Acuto, 2013, p. 291). The edited collection *Cities and Global Governance*, according to Acuto, also underscore the various intersections between the local and the global, calling for urban renovation and a rethinking of the role of cities in international relations (Acuto, 2013, p.291).

This emerging body of research shows the potential of cities to transform international relations, yet a persistent gap remains: cities are generally depicted as places where international relations occur but the mechanisms of their diplomatic influence within their own urban environment remain under-analysed (Acuto, 2013).

⁴ “short for ‘parallel diplomacy’, a long-lived notion that has been used since the 1960s to describe the possibility of the coexistence of parallel external relations ‘tracks’ running across countries, this scholarship has introduced some attention for the external relations of local actors” (Acuto, 2013, p. 290).

The 2012 London Olympics marked a turning point. It sparked an increase in publications focusing on the international and political dimensions of the Olympics and contributed to the growing popularity of SMEs in urban studies. Acuto identifies two trends from this renewed focus: the enduring dominance of the state in the politics of sport, and the use of the Olympics to create political-economic legacy across societies, illustrating how world politics plays out in cities (Acuto, 2013, p.293).

Acuto argues that London is an opportunity to explore how cities participate directly in the governance of SMEs, how their agendas can align with local objectives and acquire global significance (Acuto, 2013 p.294).

He highlights a paradox: the political participation and role of cities in Olympic sport diplomacy is often overlooked in the literature which tends to favour the state despite the Olympics being named after host cities (e.g Beijing 2008, London 2012, Paris 2024). As he notes:

“This is to an extent paradoxical when we consider that the role of city leaders in shaping the dominant rhetoric, carrying out much of the negotiations and paradiplomatic activities as well as defining the context in which Olympic politics take place, is even less directly theorized. For instance, in 272 pages of *Watching the Olympics*, the mayor of London received only four marginal mentions with an essentially un-problematized political role. It is therefore imperative here not to forget that the overlap of sports, diplomacy and local government also has the potential to demonstrate more mundane connections between cities and international politics” (Acuto, 2013,p.294).

To secure the Games, cities must engage in complex diplomatic or para-diplomatic efforts: they must negotiate with international organisations such as the IOC, carry out public diplomacy initiatives, and deploy various negotiation and networking techniques to beat their competitors. These pre-Olympic processes are so intense that they have been described as “lobbying orgies” (Douglas Booth, cited in Acuto, 2013, p.295). Municipalities must practise “catalytic diplomacy” by working simultaneously with the States, other cities and numerous private players, the goal being to build a solid coalition with enough political support to enhance their negotiating position. (Acuto, 2013, p.295). Olympic bids often form “growth coalitions” between governments and stakeholders, including sporting associations and community groups. These alliances reflect the shift from “municipal welfarist and bureaucratic politics to entrepreneurial business leadership, with cities as the pivots of these coalitions” (Acuto, 2013, p.295). Manchester’s failed bid and the British Olympic Association’s pivot to London illustrate these dynamics and the importance of global city status in securing international events (Acuto, 2013, 295).

Acuto's analysis reveals the capacity of cities to transcend traditional nation-state hierarchies while functioning as catalysts for multi-scalar political alignments. As the London Olympics show, cities engage in diplomatic practices within urban planning and bridge transnational initiatives with concrete local developments. Acuto calls for a reconceptualisation of the political role of cities in international relations theory to accommodate the complex, multi-layered role they occupy in global governance frameworks. He argues that diplomatic studies provide tools for conceptualising cities as active agents rather than passive "places" (2013, p. 310).

This perspective aligns with Murray's "innovative school" of diplomatic studies, which seeks to reconcile traditional state-centric models with emerging forms of diplomacy involving non-state actors. Acuto's work contributes to this school by positioning cities as active agents in global politics, particularly through their engagement with sport and MSEs (Murray, 2008, cited in Acuto, 2013, p.310). As Acuto writes:

"by bringing cities within the study of diplomacy, the discipline could aspire to become a more understandable, practice-oriented, international relations discussion that does not stop at diplomacy, but rather reaches 'into' the deep socio-political transformation that diplomacy could inspire. This could demonstrate to those outside the discipline how much the study of diplomacy has to offer beyond its traditionalist roots, while reiterating the legitimate role of the city in global governance" (Acuto, 2013, p. 310).

Finally, Acuto notes that developing "sport diplomacy" does not require reinventing a new field. It involves translating and bridging across disciplines and using diplomatic studies and existing frameworks to explain how cities act internationally rather than inventing a wholly new paradigm (Acuto, 2013, p.310).

Given the constraints of a single article, Acuto (2013) narrows his analysis to the bid and planning phases of the 2012 London Olympics to shed light on how a political agenda centred on environmental leadership was strategically positioned as a core narrative. He stresses the role of the GLA and the Mayor in promoting a 'green' agenda, framing the Olympics as part of London's broader environmental diplomacy. This focus illustrates how the event enabled London to align its climate commitments with its own agenda and shows how cities can leverage SMEs to assert diplomatic agency and embed international agendas into local governance.

This section therefore provides a conceptual foundation for understanding city diplomacy as a practice-oriented dimension of international relations, opening space to examine how cities contribute to enduring political and diplomatic legacies.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the evolving relationship between sport, diplomacy, and legacy through a comprehensive and interdisciplinary lens. Beginning with a critical review of the literature, it identified the fragmented nature of scholarship on sport, diplomacy and legacy and the need for structured theoretical frameworks to understand sport as a diplomatic object. It also clarified key concepts such as sport, politics, diplomacy, and global events.

Section 3 argued for recognising sport and diplomacy as a distinct academic field within diplomatic studies, rather than an extension of other fields. Drawing on frameworks such as Rofe's global diplomacy and Murray's typologies, the chapter showed how sport and diplomacy encompass a wide range of actors, practices, and symbolic interactions operating across multiple scales.

Section 4 focused on the concept of legacy, tracing its historical evolution and examining how it has become a central justification for hosting SMEs. It outlined the different legacy dimensions identified for this thesis and highlighted how these legacies are complementary and at times overlapping.

Section 5 reviewed existing literature on specific legacy domains and analysed how each has been framed in relation to diplomacy and sport. It demonstrated that legacy functions as a strategic tool of diplomacy and offered a critical lecture of existing studies by identifying conceptual gaps, particularly the limited attention given to the diplomatic framing of legacies in the context of SMEs.

Together, these sections establish the theoretical and conceptual foundation for this thesis. They justify the need for a diplomatic reading of SMEs legacy and provide the analytical lens through which the case studies of London 2012 and Paris 2024 will be examined. Building on this foundation, the next chapter outlines the methodological approach used to investigate how London 2012 and Paris 2024 legacies were framed, implemented, and evaluated as diplomatic tools.

Chapter 2 – Methodology

1. Rationale

This thesis employs thematic analysis (TA) to examine official legacy documents from London 2012 and Paris 2024, with the aim of identifying and interpreting how legacy is framed in relation to diplomacy. Because the focus is on framing (what is claimed and how), rather than impact evaluation, document analysis is the appropriate method. Official documents (legacy reports, policy white papers, IOC frameworks) are the primary sites where actors define, justify, and align legacy with diplomatic aims. A complementary reading of pre- and post-Games materials for London 2012 and Paris 2024, across different official bodies in each case, shows how diplomatic claims can be constructed and how they can change over time and across institutions. The study is textual and interpretive; the main objective is not to test whether legacies “worked”, although impact references are noted and sometimes analysed where they clarify the framing. Crucially, the purpose of the thesis is to make explicit the connection between legacy studies and diplomacy, wherever it is implicit or partial. To do so, the theory developed in Chapter 1 Section 5 and the global diplomacy framework, including Rofe’s (2021) three dimensions of sport diplomacy (negotiation, communication, and representation), is used at the interpretation stage of the analysis. Once themes have been identified inductively from the documents, these concepts help explain how certain legacy initiatives can carry diplomatic significance. This framework works alongside the definitions and analytical categories developed in Chapter 4, Section 5, which provide a more specific structure for identifying and interpreting diplomatic legacy. These approaches guide the analysis in the empirical Chapters 3–6.

The analytical process follows the principles of Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis, as outlined in their foundational work (2006) together with Byrne’s applied guide (2021). While this study draws inspiration from Braun and Clarke’s work and Byrne’s (2021) applied example, it does not adopt a fully reflexive thematic analysis approach (RTA). This choice is explained by the document-based nature of the dataset. As the analysis focuses on institutional texts rather than lived experiences, researcher’s positionality is not treated as a central part of the analysis. TA is therefore used here, as a flexible method to identify patterns in qualitative data without foregrounding researcher positionality as an explicit analytic resource.

Although originally developed within psychology, TA is an interesting method as it is considered “as one of the most straightforward ways of deducing patterns of meaning – referred to as themes – from qualitative data” (Herzog et al., 2019). In this project, TA is used

to capture both the explicit content of texts (semantic coding) and the latent diplomatic significance of those claims (latent coding).

2. Coding Strategy

The coding process combined inductive analysis with a set of broad theoretical categories drawn from Chapter 1, Section 5. These categories (economic legacy, urban legacy, green legacy, national branding, cultural legacy, social legacy and city diplomacy) were not used as a predefined codebook, but as broad thematic areas that helped organise the first cycle of reading. They guided attention to relevant parts of the documents without dictating the content of the codes. Although the researcher entered the analysis with a theoretical understanding of Olympic legacy as defined in chapter 1, Section 4.3, Different dimensions of legacy, this did not dictate the coding process. Most codes and sub-themes were developed inductively. As the documents were analysed, recurring ideas and emphases, were identified within and across the broad theoretical categories. This inductive process created the sub-themes used in the analysis chapters (for example, within economic diplomacy: “exploiting opportunities”, “knowledge economy”). This approach aligns with Braun and Clarke’s (2013, 2020) view that inductive and deductive reasoning often coexist in thematic analysis, with one predominating (Byrne, 2021, p.1397).

At the analytic level, this study employed both semantic and latent coding. Semantic codes captured explicit content (how legacy was described, under what category or chapter, and how it was communicated in the reports of London 2012 and Paris 2024). Latent coding was then used to interpret how these elements aligned with diplomatic processes, drawing on the diplomatic legacy definitions developed in Chapter 1, Section 5. For example, sustainability initiatives were read as green diplomacy, cultural programmes as cultural diplomacy. In many cases, diplomatic meaning was not interpreted directly in the documents, identifying this latent diplomatic significance is a central contribution of the thesis. The use of semantic and latent coding allowed for a nuanced analysis that respects the textual content while also engaging critically with its deeper implications.

Although the core analytical categories were drawn from Chapter 1, Section 5, the broader conceptual discussions developed in Chapter 1 (for example, the concept of track-two diplomacy or the global diplomacy framework) also informed the interpretation stage of the analysis. These concepts were not used to generate codes, but to support the latent reading of themes once they had been inductively identified. Section 5 provided the overarching

legacy–diplomacy structure, while the wider theoretical material in Chapter 1 enriched the diplomatic interpretation of specific themes where appropriate.

Because this research adopts a complementary approach, the final themes were not forced to mirror each other across London and Paris. The thematic structure reflects the emphases specific to each dataset. For example, in the Paris documents, social and environmental elements converged into the broader theme “contemporary challenges”, while tourism shifted from an economic category to a nation branding related one. Thus, the broad theoretical categories provided the starting structure, while inductive analysis shaped the final thematic content.

These final themes structure Chapter 1, Section 5 and organise the empirical chapters (Chapters 3 to 6).

Table 2.1: Worked example (London pre-Games: Economic diplomacy)

Analytical Stage	Role in the analysis	London pre-Games example	Where used in the thesis
Broad theoretical category	Use Chapter 1, Section 5 categories to orient first-cycle reading (not a fixed codebook)	Economic diplomacy and knowledge economy	Chapter 1 – Section 5.1 and Chapter 3 Section 1
Inductive sub-themes	Develop from the data within that category	1.1 Exploiting opportunities: economic growth. 1.2 Supporting small businesses and building industry skills and employment. 1.3 Positioning London as a global knowledge hub. 1.4 Soft power and economic strategy	Chapter 3, Section 1-4
Semantic evidence	Textual claims in the reports	“By awarding 98% of contracts to UK-based companies, two-thirds of which went to small or medium-sized enterprises, the London 2012 Games demonstrated how empowering the domestic economy can enhance international economic projection (DCMS, February 2011, p.20).” “Beyond immediate business benefits, UKTI also worked to ensure that capabilities acquired while working for London 2012 could be exported to future host nations such as Russia and	Chapter 3: evidence paragraphs

		Brazil, through agreements like Host2Host (DCMS, December 2010, pp.6–7)."	
Latent diplomatic reading	Interpret the sub-themes through Chapter 1, Section 5 definitions to make the legacy → diplomacy link explicit.	<p>"This approach resonates with Rana's definition of economic diplomacy as a "process through which countries tackle the outside world to maximize their national gain in all the fields of activity, including trade, investments and other forms of economically beneficial exchanges, where they enjoy comparative advantage" (Rana, 2007, p.1)."</p> <p>"This initiative aligns with the concept of comparative advantage in economic diplomacy (as defined by Rana (2007, p.1), where nations leverage unique expertise to strengthen their global positioning."</p>	Chapter 3: Interpretation lines
Chapter architecture	Use sub-themes as section headings and organise the narrative accordingly.	Sections 1.1–1.4	Structure of Chapter 3

Note: The same analytical stages are used across other legacy–diplomacy domains introduced in Chapter 1, Section 5.

This thesis draws on Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2020) six-phase process for TA, as explained by Byrne (2021, p.1398), but applies it in a flexible and iterative way. While the phases provide a helpful structure for organising the analysis, the progress through them was not linear. As Byrne (2021, p.1398) notes, thematic analysis often requires researchers to move back and forth between phases as new insights emerge. The coding and theme-development stages were revisited repeatedly as new patterns appeared.

Given the interpretive nature of this study, the six-phase process was not applied rigidly but adapted to suit the evolving understanding of legacy and diplomacy across the dataset.

The following sections will detail how each of the six phases were implemented in this research.

3. Familiarisation with the data

Byrne (2021) defines this phase as:

“The ‘familiarisation’ phase is prevalent in many forms of qualitative analysis. Familiarisation entails the reading and re-reading of the entire dataset in order to become intimately familiar with the data. This is necessary to be able to identify appropriate information that may be relevant to the research question(s)” (Byrne, 2021, p.1398).

Aligned with this definition, familiarisation in this study involved multiple readings of the entire corpus of official documents related to London 2012 and Paris 2024. The dataset included pre- and post-Games legacy documents, policy and evaluation reports, IOC frameworks, and speeches from governmental bodies involved in legacy planning. Key issuers included LLDC, ODA, DCMS Mayor of London, London 2012, Home Office, Paris 2024, MSJOP, French Government, IOC, UNESCO, OECD, OECD LEED and The Olympic Museum.

Documents were selected for their relevance to legacy, governance, and diplomatic themes (economic, urban, environmental, social, branding, cultural, city-level). They were sourced from official repositories, government websites, and Olympic archives. Because the original London2012.com site is no longer available, archival materials were retrieved from The National Archives and the IOC archive, while Paris 2024 documents were obtained from French Government platforms and Paris 2024’s official platforms. Public speeches in French were collected from *Vie Publique* using specific filters: Keywords included “Olympic Games”, and the types of issuers were limited to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Presidency of the Republic, the President of the Republic, and the Prime Minister. As the focus of the thesis is on the diplomatic framing of legacy, speeches were selected from those actors as they hold formal responsibility for diplomacy and international relations. These speeches were sourced from 23 June 2015, the date on which Paris officially announced its intention to bid on Olympic Day. In the United Kingdom, speeches were collected from gov.uk using the keyword “Olympic Games”, starting from July 2003. Speeches delivered prior to the Games were included in the policy analysis, while those delivered after the Games were incorporated into the document analysis.

An initial list of all document titles and issuers was created, which provided a preliminary sense of how legacy was categorised and framed. Reading began with pre- and post-Games reports from London, followed by pre- and post-Games reports from Paris, and then proceeded through a complementary cross-reading (pre-Games London with pre-Games Paris, and post-Games London with post-Games Paris). This approach facilitated the groundwork for identifying thematic patterns and potential diplomatic interpretations.

For consistency, Paris documents were analysed in French and translated by the author when needed, with official English translations used when available.

This familiarisation phase was essential for identifying where legacy was framed explicitly, implicitly, or not at all in diplomatic terms. It laid the foundation for inductive sub-theme development and for the subsequent latent diplomatic interpretation grounded in the framework introduced in Chapter 1, Section 5. A full list of documents is provided in Appendix A.

4. Generating initial codes

Byrne (2021) describes codes as:

“the fundamental building blocks of what will later become themes. The process of coding is undertaken to produce succinct, shorthand descriptive or interpretive labels for pieces of information that may be of relevance to the research question(s)” (2021, p.1399).

In this study, initial coding was undertaken in NVivo 14, where documents were organised into two main groups (Pre-Games and post-Games Reports) and subdivided into London 2012 and Paris 2024. This structure allowed coding to capture both temporal and case-specific emphases.

Initial codes were created inductively within the broad theoretical areas introduced in Chapter 1, Section 5 (economic, urban, green, branding, cultural, social, city diplomacy). These categories were not used as a predefined codebook, but rather as orientation points that helped identify relevant material. Most codes emerged directly from the documents. As coding progressed, codes were refined, merged, or discarded according to their analytical value and relevance to the research question.

Semantic codes captured the explicit content of each document and latent codes were developed to identify potential diplomatic significance, especially where official documents did not articulate the link between legacy and diplomacy. For example, codes relating to sustainability, skills development, cultural programming or volunteering were later interpreted during the analytical stage, through diplomatic categories such as green diplomacy, economic diplomacy or cultural diplomacy. The inductive coding stage therefore laid the foundation for the later thematic structure as shown in Table 2.1. This approach made possible to detect recurring emphases in each dataset while remaining open to new patterns. This ensured that final themes reflected actual priorities in the documents, not theoretical expectations alone. The transition from initial codes to broader themes is explained in the next section.

5. Generating themes

Following the initial coding process, the analysis moved from examining individual coded data extracts to identifying broader patterns of shared meaning across the dataset. At this stage, codes were reviewed and combined where they reflected similar underlying ideas, allowing themes and sub-themes to be constructed. Theme development therefore involved an active interpretive process, in which relationships between codes were considered to produce coherent analytical narratives (Byrne, 2021, p.1403).

During this phase, codes were examined for shared meanings and grouped into broader categories to begin constructing themes that reflected both legacy content and its potential diplomatic significance. Themes were therefore developed by organising related codes within and across the broad theoretical areas introduced in Chapter 1, Section 5, while remaining open to new patterns emerging inductively from the documents.

Some themes aligned closely with the expected legacy–diplomacy domains (city diplomacy, economic diplomacy), whereas others emerged inductively from the data and required further refinement. In some cases, codes were grouped into a single theme because they had common underlying meanings. In other cases, a single code was elevated to a theme because it represented a broader narrative. In the Paris 2024 materials, for instance, codes relating to social inclusion, environmental responsibility, and quality of life converged into the broader theme “contemporary challenges”, which reflects the integrated way these issues were framed in Paris’s official documents.

Some codes migrated across categories as analysis progressed. For example, tourism, initially coded within economic diplomacy, was ultimately placed under national branding, aligning better with how the documents framed tourism as a vector of international image and reputation.

Transport and security, initially coded separately, were grouped under urban diplomacy due to their shared role in demonstrating governance capacity and infrastructural competence.

Some codes and themes were discarded because of their limited relevance or analytical depth.

Finally, translations were harmonised where Paris documents required English labels, ensuring consistency across the thematic structure for both cases.

As Bryne states (2021):

“It may be beneficial to construct a miscellaneous theme (or category) to contain all the codes that do not appear to fit in among any prospective themes. This miscellaneous

theme may end up becoming a theme in its own right, or may simply be removed from the analysis during a later phase (Braun and Clarke 2012)” (p.1403).

This led to the creation of a Methodology category, which grouped all information related to how the legacy reports were produced. Although this category did not directly address the research question, it could not be excluded entirely due to its relevance in understanding the framing and credibility of the documents.

During this phase, the usefulness of specific legacy reports was also reassessed. For instance, some documents were primarily intended for media use during the Games and focused on guidelines for managing promotional content. As these did not contribute meaningfully to the analytical objectives of the study, they were excluded from the NVivo dataset. A written record of these discarded documents was maintained in a separate file to ensure transparency and traceability.

The themes developed at this stage formed the analytical backbone of the empirical chapters (Chapters 3–6). Because the study adopts a complementary design, the thematic structure was not forced to mirror exactly across London and Paris. Instead, themes reflect the most analytically relevant points in each dataset and support the goal of making diplomatic framing explicit.

6. Reviewing potential themes

Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 65) proposed a series of questions to help select potential themes (see Bryne, 2021, p. 1404 for the list of questions). Bryne states that the analysis of this phase comprises two levels:

“Level one is a review of the relationships among the data items and codes that inform each theme and sub-theme. If the items/codes form a coherent pattern, it can be assumed that the candidate theme/ sub-theme makes a logical argument and may contribute to the overall narrative of the data. At level two, the candidate themes are reviewed in relation to the data set. Themes are assessed as to how well they provide the most apt interpretation of the data in relation to the research question(s)” (Bryne, 2021, pp.1404-1405).

This phase involved revisiting earlier coding decisions to ensure that emerging themes captured both the legacy content and its diplomatic implications. Some themes were retained, others were merged, split, or discarded depending on their coherence and analytical value. For example, the Paris 2024 category “contemporary challenges” was confirmed at this stage, as codes relating to social inclusion or environmental responsibility formed a coherent

narrative. Health and wellbeing, originally a stand-alone category, was attached to the social category, itself included in the theme tackling contemporary challenges.

It also became clear at this point that the themes identified for Paris and London would not be identical. Certain themes emerged specifically for Paris, such as “setting new standards” and material linked to the Olympic Agenda 2020, reflecting strategic emphases unique to this edition of the Games. These were retained as stand-alone themes.

7. Defining and naming theme

Bryne declares about this phase:

“At this phase, the researcher is tasked with presenting a detailed analysis of the thematic framework. Each individual theme and sub-theme is to be expressed in relation to both the dataset and the research question(s)” (Bryne, 2021, p.1407).

Following the reorganisation of the themes during the previous phase, this stage focused on refining and clearly naming each theme so that it captured both its legacy dimension and its diplomatic significance. The aim was to ensure that themes were internally coherent, legible in relation to the documents analysed, and clearly aligned with the research question on diplomatic framing.

Theme labels were therefore revised to integrate the diplomatic dimension explicitly. For example, economic related codes became “economic diplomacy”, cultural programmes and ceremonies formed “cultural diplomacy”, infrastructure, security and transport were grouped under “urban diplomacy” and sustainability related material became “green diplomacy”.

Because many Paris 2024 documents were written in French, this phase also required linguistic harmonisation. Theme names were translated and aligned with the terminology used for London 2012 to ensure the consistency of the overall thematic framework across the two cases.

These final themes provided the structure for the empirical chapters (Chapters 3–6) and shaped the way diplomatic framing was analysed throughout the thesis.

8. Producing the report

This final phase involves organising the analysis into a clear and compelling account grounded in the themes developed in the previous steps. In this study, this meant structuring the

empirical chapters (Chapters 3–6) around the final themes and sub-themes, and presenting each with selected data extracts and a diplomatic interpretation informed by Chapter 1, Section 5.

Only data relevant to diplomatic framing is analysed in depth. Rather than offering an exhaustive account of all legacy outcomes, the thesis focuses on selected examples that best illustrate the diplomatic dimensions of legacy planning and implementation.

As mentioned previously, this approach is complementary and pre- and post-Games materials are placed alongside one another to show how particular emphases are introduced, developed, reinforced, or nuanced, without evaluating which edition “performed better” but highlighting the lessons learned and good practices.

Each theme is presented through three elements. First, a brief explanation of how the theme appears in the documents (semantic level), a diplomatic interpretation drawing on the framework developed in Chapter 1, Section 5 (latent level) and finally, a short synthesis that clarifies how the theme contributes to understanding the diplomatic framing of legacy.

Verbatim extracts from the official documents are incorporated directly into the analysis to demonstrate how interpretations are grounded in the dataset.

The final thematic structure established in the previous sections, therefore shapes the organisation of Chapters 3–6, ensuring that the analytical narrative remains focused on diplomacy reading throughout. A full corpus list is provided in the Appendix A to support transparency.

9. Epistemological orientation, quality, and limitations

This thesis adopts a constructivist–interpretivist approach. Meanings around legacy and diplomacy are understood as constructed through official documents. The study is therefore textual and interpretive. It examines how legacy is framed in reports and policies and interprets the diplomatic significance of these framings. The aim is not to assess whether legacies “worked”, but to understand how official texts construct, justify and position legacy in diplomatic terms. Coding was largely inductive, and themes were developed from the data. Once these themes were identified, the diplomatic significance of each one was examined using the conceptual definitions introduced in Chapter 1, Section 5. In other words, theory was used to interpret the themes, not to predetermine them. This interpretive step is central to the contribution of the thesis, since official documents often express diplomatic relevance only partially or indirectly.

Given this interpretive orientation, ensuring quality and rigour was essential. Credibility was addressed by analysing documents produced by different official bodies within each host city (e.g., DCMS, ODA, LLDC, Mayor of London, Paris 2024, MSJOP, the French Government) and by examining both pre- and post-Games materials to observe how framings were introduced, reinforced or reframed over time. Consistency was enhanced through a code-recode check conducted on the documents selected. Transparency was maintained through a versioned codebook, coding memos, theme-revision notes, and a log of excluded documents with reasons. Trustworthiness was strengthened by recording document provenance and grounding all interpretations in verbatim extracts. Where Paris documents were written in French, translations were carried out by the author unless official English versions existed.

This thesis acknowledges that using official documents presents limitations. Such materials are often strategic, selective and produced for political or promotional purposes, they may emphasise certain successes, minimise challenges, or align with institutional agendas. To mitigate this, the analysis drew on multiple official bodies within each host city, considered pre- and post-Games documents, examined two Olympic editions in a complementary way, and treated omissions and emphases as analytically significant. Claims were also situated within broader IOC requirements, Agenda 2020 priorities and Host City Contract obligations to contextualise framing choices.

Together, these practices provide a clear and consistent analytical foundation for examining how legacy is framed diplomatically in the empirical chapters.

**PART II – SPORT DIPLOMACY AND LEGACY: ANALYSIS
OF LONDON 2012 AND PARIS 2024**

Chapter 3 – Framing legacy: soft power and diplomacy in London 2012 pre-games reports

Hosting SMEs provides cities and states with opportunities to deploy city diplomacy, project soft power, strengthen national branding, and reinforce their international reputation. Understanding how legacy, diplomacy and soft power overlap is essential to interpreting the broader significance of legacy planning.

The London 2012 Games marked a pivotal moment for London, reflecting its ambition to present itself as a global knowledge capital and showcase its capability to host a major international event. Pre-Games legacy documents repeatedly emphasised four key themes: sport, economic impact, community engagement, and the regeneration of East London, supported by cross-cutting concerns such as sustainability, inclusion or urban development (DCMS, 2013, p.4).

The aim of this chapter is not to catalogue these legacies, but rather to analyse how they function diplomatically, drawing on the frameworks introduced in Chapter 1. Although official documents rarely use diplomatic language, their objectives and narratives can be interpreted through a diplomatic lens when read alongside these theoretical perspectives. This chapter examines pre-Games legacy reports including documents from the ODA, the IOC, the LOCOG and the DCMS. By framing legacy as a diplomatic narrative, this chapter situates London 2012 within a global context where cities act as agents of international relations.

1. Economic diplomacy and knowledge economy

Read through the diplomatic lens established in Chapter 1, this section examines economic diplomacy. The initiatives discussed in pre-Games reports targeted international investors, future hosts, OCOGs, IFs, trade partners, and global business audiences, aiming to project the UK's comparative advantage and credibility as a knowledge-driven economy. Although framed as economic objectives, these initiatives also performed diplomatic functions by shaping how the UK sought to position itself internationally.

A clear illustration of this appears in the DCMS's own framing of the Games:

“The London 2012 Games provide a unique opportunity to showcase the best of British business throughout the world and to build a legacy of globally competitive and innovative

organisations. Olympic host nations share a unique relationship and it makes good business sense to extend cooperation and knowledge beyond sport into the economic development arena” (DCMS, July 2011, p.5).

This narrative shows that London 2012 was conceived as more than an economic opportunity. This subsection therefore examines how the government and key stakeholders framed London 2012 as a platform to advance the UK’s economic interests, positioning the UK as a leader in the knowledge economy and capitalising on the economic growth created during the event.

To clarify what is meant by “knowledge economy”, it is helpful to refer to the following definition:

“The term ‘knowledge economy’ is often used but seldom defined. Essentially, it refers to a transformed economy where investment in ‘knowledge based’ assets such as R&D, design, software, and human and organisational capital has become the dominant form of investment compared with investment in physical assets – machines, equipment, buildings and vehicles. Thus, the term ‘knowledge economy’ captures the subsequently changed industrial structure, ways of working, and the basis on which organisations compete and excel” (Brinkley et al., 2009, p.9).

As discussed in Chapter 1 (Section 5.1), economic diplomacy refers to the processes, strategies and instruments used by state and non-state actors to influence and facilitate international economic activities such as trade, investment, cooperation and other exchanges beneficial for the host country. London 2012 therefore provide a useful case study for understanding how SMEs function as platforms for economic diplomacy.

1.1 Exploiting opportunities: economic growth

The preparations for the London 2012 Olympics took place during the most severe global economic crisis since World War II. Despite these circumstances, both the Government and sponsors continued to invest in the Games to contribute to the UK’s economic recovery (DCMS, 2012a, p.28). In this context, the Games formed part of a broader strategy to reposition the UK as a globally competitive, innovation-driven economy. It also allowed the UK to open opportunities abroad for its businesses and attract tourism (DCMS, 2012a, p.31). David Cameron, Prime Minister at the time, emphasised this ambition:

“We are determined to deliver a lasting economic legacy that will benefit the whole country. There are so many great things about Britain and we want to send out the message loud and proud that this is a great place to do business, to invest, to study and to visit” (DCMS, 2012a, p.29).

This was echoed by Jeremy Hunt, Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, who stated:

“When we won the right to host the Games in 2005, no one could have predicted that we’d be delivering them in such a tough, global economic climate. But today London 2012 represents a unique opportunity to support economic recovery and help generate growth” (DCMS, 2012a, p.30).

This strategic use of the Games aligns with models of economic soft power and diplomacy, in which hosting SMEs is mobilised to reposition nations within the global economy. The emphasis by the DCMS on the UK’s capacity to “restore UK’s reputation for delivering large-scale projects”, “showcase the expertise of UK plc⁵”, “improve the ambition and capability of British businesses”, “support the UK’s economic recovery by maximising trade and investment opportunities”, and “realise the potential of the tourism industry as a major growth sector” reflects this agenda (DCMS, 2012a, p.30).

This ambition was subsequently translated into an explicit economic legacy strategy, structured around several key themes introduced in the Meta-evaluation research (DCMS, 2011e): “Business access to 2012”, “Promoting the UK as a place to invest”, “Export and trade promotion”, “Tourism”, “Employability and skills development”, “Sustainability” and “Disability” (DCMS, 2011e, p.14).

Within the pre-Games narrative, indicators linked to international competitiveness, particularly Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), were frequently mobilised to support these claims. According to the Meta-Evaluation of 2012:

“In 2010, the UK had the highest share of both projects and jobs created by Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Europe, representing 19% and 14% of the European market respectively. Within the UK, London’s share of FDI projects increased from 25% to 33% between 2000/1 and 2009/10” (DCMS, 2012f, p.13).

This visibility was expected to enhance the UK’s appeal to global investors. Initiatives such as the British Business Embassy and the Global Investment Conference were framed as opportunities to increase inward investment enquiries and successful projects across the country (DCMS, 2012f, p.13). Without the Games, such promotional efforts and exposure to international business audiences would likely have been far more limited. It is important to note that while the Games were positioned as a catalyst for inward investment, the report cautions that external economic and locational factors also play a role in shaping international business decisions (DCMS, 2012f, p.14).

⁵ plc stands for public limited company

The ambition to use London 2012 to stimulate economic growth was not limited to attracting foreign investment and promoting domestic industries, it also extended to strengthening the national economy by, for example, supporting small businesses, improving workforce skills and creating jobs.

1.2 Supporting small businesses and building industry skills and employment

This subsection analyses economic diplomacy through procurement and supply-chain mechanisms, including the positioning of UK Small and Medium Enterprises and supply-chain capability for international partners.

By awarding 98% of contracts to UK-based companies, two-thirds of which went to small or medium-sized enterprises, the London 2012 Games demonstrated how empowering the domestic economy can enhance international economic projection (DCMS, 2011a, p.20). This strategy aligns with Rana's understanding of economic diplomacy as the maximisation of national gain across trade, investment, and other exchanges in which a country enjoys a comparative advantage (2007, p. 1).

Supporting small or medium-sized enterprises through Olympic procurement stimulated local economies and was framed as contributing to job creation but also positioned the UK as "a powerhouse economy capable of competing in high value sectors of the global market" (DCMS, 2011a, p.20), offering a model of inclusive, innovation-driven growth. As the DCMS put it, "the Games offer a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to showcase the best of the UK – the country's culture, creativity, industry, innovation and sustainability" (DCMS, 2010, p.7).

CompeteFor is highlighted as a key supply-chain mechanism, connecting businesses with Olympic-related opportunities and providing targeted support to enhance long-term competitiveness (DCMS, 2011a, p.21). In the pre-games documents, the narrative is that this strategic investment would help UK firms export Games-related expertise and reinforce the UK's image as a reliable partner and an attractive place for businesses.

A compelling example is Welcome Gate, a London-based start-up that secured a contract via CompeteFor before the Games began. Its founder credited the platform with providing essential visibility and credibility and reported growing international interest, including potential contracts in the Middle East (ODA, 2009, p.6). This example shows how Olympic procurement can help businesses to build international relationships and facilitate the export of UK

expertise. Additional case studies documenting how small and medium-sized enterprises benefited from London 2012-related contracts, across the UK, are well documented in official legacy reports, such as those compiled by the ODA (2009).

UKTI built on this logic by promoting companies involved in Olympic services and supporting export-oriented programmes such as Host2Host, designed to ensure that Games-acquired capabilities could be transferred to future host nations, including Russia and Brazil (DCMS, 2010, pp.6–7). According to DCMS, businesses supported through these initiatives were expected to generate higher export volumes than they would have otherwise, with impact assessments scheduled for 2012–2013 (Thornton, 2012, p. 14). This initiative again reflects the use of comparative advantage in economic diplomacy (Rana 2007).

Pre-Games documents also highlight early Games-time activations as evidence of this diplomatic ambition. For example, during the Games, the British Business Embassy at Lancaster House hosted daily events connecting UK companies with international businesses, (DCMS, 2012f, p.89). As Jeremy Hunt, Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics Media and Sport, remarked: “The Olympic Park is the story of UK plc written on an epic scale” (DCMS & Armit, 2012, p.3). The Games thus became a window for British businesses, and a demonstration of the country's ability to organise and deliver high-profile projects on time and within budget, even considering the economic environment (DCMS & Armit, 2012, p.3).

In employment terms, the host boroughs saw their employment rate rise from 59.0% in 2004 to 63.2% in 2010, reflecting the impact of Olympic-linked employment and training initiatives, even though the employment rate across the whole of the UK declined slightly in 2010 (ONS APS, cited in DCMS, 2012f, p.15). Programmes such as the Local Employment and Training Framework were presented as strengthening the UK workforce and preparing it to compete globally.

These elements show how London 2012's procurement and employment strategies were framed as an economic diplomatic legacy, stimulating domestic economic growth while transforming Olympic-related expertise into exportable value and fostering international business relationships.

1.3 Positioning London as a global knowledge hub

“ Whilst many international observers might believe that London's economy relies primarily upon its financial services cluster, the reality is that London's economy is highly diverse,

ranging from manufacturing to creative industries, business services to personal care. And what is striking about London's economy is not just this diversity but also how important 'knowledge intensive industries' – including not just finance but also high to medium tech manufacturing, telecommunications, business services, education and health – are to its economy" (The Work Foundation & Oxford Economics, 2010, p.11).

London 2012 provided a strategic opportunity to reposition both London and the UK as global hubs for innovation, technology, and knowledge-intensive industries within the global knowledge economy. Pre-Games reports emphasised the UK's expertise in "advanced manufacturing services, low-carbon goods and services, creative and cultural industries, and high-tech business services", reinforcing an image of the UK as a competitive economy (The Work Foundation & Oxford Economics, 2010, p.5).

Pre-Games documents also acknowledged a central challenge: while London is well-positioned to lead in the global knowledge economy, there is a risk that residents, especially in East London, may be excluded from its benefits due to a lack of relevant skills. The Work Foundation & Oxford economics, supported by DCMS, stressed that future economic growth would come from knowledge-intensive sectors, requiring targeted skills development to ensure more inclusive access to these opportunities (The Work Foundation & Oxford Economics, 2010, p.5). One major legacy initiative responding to this challenge was the development of East London Tech City. As DCMS notes:

"Stretching from Shoreditch to Stratford, Tech City became home to one of Europe's largest concentrations of small, fast-growing digital technology companies, including Last.fm, Tweetdeck, Songkick, and Dopplr" (DCMS, 2012a, p.68).

Tech City was thus framed as a means of embedding London more deeply within transnational innovation and knowledge networks.

The Olympic Park itself was reimagined as a hub for digital innovation, supported by a cluster of research centres such as Queen Mary University's Department of Materials, the University of East London's Manufactured Aggregates Research Centre, and the Centre for Contaminated Land Remediation at the University of Greenwich (Thornton, 2011, p.200)

Cultural initiatives also reinforced London's knowledge economy. During the Games, the Science Museum hosted a six-week exhibition led by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills aimed at showcasing the UK's skills and expertise in advanced manufacturing and science and engineering. Expected to attract one million visitors, the exhibition formed part of a broader campaign to build confidence in UK capabilities and inspire young people to pursue STEM careers (DCMS, 2012a, p.38).

Across these initiatives, the Games' diplomatic legacy extended beyond business and skills. London 2012 also helped shape global perceptions of the UK, enhancing cultural visibility and contributing to soft-power gains through tourism, innovation and cultural projection.

1.4 Soft power and economic strategy

This subsection explores how London 2012 was framed as a soft-power platform designed to influence global publics while enhancing the UK's attractiveness to investors and international partners.

"In recent decades London has begun to establish itself as the most successful city in the world. It has overtaken New York as the world's most important financial centre. It won the competition to host the 2012 Olympic Games. It is a world leader in tackling climate change. It is the first major city in the world to see a significant shift from the private car to public transport, walking and cycling. London is universally recognised as one of the most culturally dynamic and creative centres in the world and it enjoys excellent community relations in a city of unparalleled diversity" (GLA, March 2008, cited in The Work Foundation & Oxford Economics, 2010, p.11).

Pre-Games discourse positioned London as a leading global city, recognised for its financial strength, cultural creativity, and commitment to sustainability. The Games were framed as a powerful instrument of soft power. As Lord Sebastian Coe declared in 2005:

"London's vision is to reach people all around the world to connect them with the inspirational power of the Games... Choose London today and you send a clear message to the youth of the world: more than ever, the Olympic Games are for you" (DCMS, 2012a, p.9).

This vision was echoed by Jeremy Hunt, then Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, who described London 2012 as "a once-in-a-generation opportunity," highlighting its potential to stimulate investment, promote tourism, and strengthen community engagement (DCMS, 2012a, p.9).

A key dimension of the UK's soft-power strategy was the tourism legacy. The UK government announced a £1 billion PR and marketing campaign aimed at attracting one million additional overseas visitors annually and generating £2 billion in extra visitor spend (DCMS, 2011a, p.20). This initiative was expected to create up to 50,000 new jobs across the country (DCMS, February 2011, p.20). This campaign formed part of a broader effort to position the UK as a premier destination for tourism, investment, and business (DCMS, 2011a, p.20).

DCMS similarly emphasised that:

“If we make the most of this defining moment we will boost national self-confidence, enhance the UK’s reputation abroad and fully exploit the opportunities for growth offered by hosting the Games [...]. This plan highlights what else we are doing to promote UK capability in the UK and internationally and to attract high value inward investment” (DCMS, 2010, p.7).

To implement this strategy, British diplomatic missions worldwide launched a global public diplomacy campaign aimed at establishing a lasting international legacy for the Games, aligned with the UK’s foreign policy objectives of enhancing security, promoting economic prosperity, and strengthening bilateral relations (DCMS, 2011a, p.20). Activities included specially commissioned films and cultural events but also online and digital tools to engage overseas audiences (DCMS, 2010, p.8). One example was *London 2012: Going for Green*, a film produced by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the ODA. It showcased the UK’s expertise in sustainable development and infrastructure delivery, reinforcing the country’s reputation for innovation and environmental responsibility (DCMS, 2010, p.8).

The Games also showcased the UK’s commitment to inclusion and diversity, further contributing to the Games’ soft power narrative. By the end of the construction phase, around 40,000 people were planned to have worked on the Olympic Park or Athletes’ Village, with: “20 per cent of the cumulative workforce employed on the Park was from the local area, with 15 per cent black, Asian or minority ethnic. Three per cent were women and 1.5 per cent were disabled people” (ODA, 2011c, p.5). These figures reflected the ODA’s commitment to equality and fair opportunity.

Related achievements included a skills-development programme within the London 2012 construction project, the contribution of the Job Brokerage in enhancing workforce diversity and local employment, and the systematic collection of data to guide the ODA’s strategic planning (ODA, 2011c, p.5). The Learning Legacy website offers an evaluation of the approaches used to advance equality, inclusion, employment, and skills, highlighting how these strategies met ambitious project targets and how they may be adapted for future initiatives (ODA, 2011c, p.5).

In sum, the 2012 Games were framed as a comprehensive exercise in soft power and global positioning, offering a platform to influence how the UK is perceived globally. This extended beyond symbolic gestures: The UK’s ability to deliver the Games on time and under budget became a demonstration of competence. This fiscal discipline was praised by: Jeremy Hunt (DCMS & Armit, 2012, p.3), Hugh Robertson (DCMS, 2012d, p.4) and Sir John Armit, 98

Chairman of the ODA, and was recognised by both the National Audit Office and the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee as a means of reinforcing the UK's reputation as a reliable partner (ODA, 2012, p.4).

With an estimated global audience of 4 billion, 120 Heads of State, 320,000 additional visitors, 14,700 participants and 20,000 accredited journalists, the London 2012 Games offered a unique opportunity to shape international perceptions of the UK (DCMS, 2010, p.7).

This section has shown that London 2012 exemplifies how SMEs can be strategically leveraged for economic diplomacy. Pre-Games documents positioned the UK as a capable and competitive economy, promoted SMEs and supply-chain expertise as internationally exportable, portrayed London as a global knowledge hub and used the Games as a platform for cultural visibility and international influence. By aligning economic and reputational ambitions with diplomatic objectives, London 2012 constructed a narrative of national competence, innovation, inclusivity and global relevance.

This framing sets the context for examining how London's urban transformation also carried diplomatic significance.

2. Urban diplomacy

Olympic master planning processes often serve as catalysts for aligning local authorities with long-term urban development goals, even when a bid is unsuccessful. In London's case, this helped consolidate a legacy narrative that extended beyond the event itself (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p.14).

This narrative was reinforced by the way London 2012 was framed as a moment of national pride and global visibility, with the ODA portraying London as a "world-class city" capable of hosting the "greatest sporting event on the planet" (ODA 2010, p.5). Hosting an event of this scale required extensive urban planning and investment, from welcoming athletes and visitors to broadcasting the experience and enabling mobility across the city. The regeneration of East London became a tangible demonstration of the UK's infrastructural capacity and planning expertise (ODA, 2010, p.5).

As Prime Minister David Cameron noted in July 2011:

"Within the space of just five years, forty thousand people have helped create an entirely new quarter of London, built some of the most inspiring sporting venues ever seen, and

written a new chapter in the history of sustainability and cutting-edge design. [...] The overhaul of local infrastructure has turned one of the most poorly served areas in London into one of the best. The broken, dilapidated buildings have made way for an Athletes' Village that will eventually house thousands of people. That's before we get to the Games venues themselves – a series of ground-breaking and truly iconic designs. And let's not forget the biggest achievement of all: all of this has been delivered on time and within budget, a shining example of UK construction and innovation. [...] Billions of people are going to look at this spectacle and see Britain in a new light – as a country that can deliver a huge project, that can host the rest of the world and put on a fantastic show” (ODA, 2011b, p.5)

The regeneration of East London was presented as a strategic opportunity created by London 2012. As ODA Chairman John Armitt argued:

“The regeneration of East London through energy network, waterways cleaning, new road work and infrastructure new transport links, new education and healthcare facilities, was presented as a unique opportunity to transform one of the UK's most underdeveloped areas” (ODA, 2011b, p.20).

This section draws on Acuto (2013), Rofe (2018) and Holt et al. (2015) to interpret Olympic-led urban regeneration as a form of urban diplomacy (see Chapter 1, Section 5.2). London's transformation projected the UK as a capable and visionary actor. As Acuto argues, cities are not merely sites of policy implementation but active agents in global governance (2013). In this context, London's Olympic-led regeneration functioned as a diplomatic performance.

2.1 Infrastructure as diplomatic showcase

The London 2012 Olympic infrastructure was a display of national capability, innovation, and sustainability. The Olympic Stadium, for example, was designed for ceremonies and post-Games adaptability. Pre-Games documents framed its transformation as a model of long-term urban planning, reinforcing the UK's image as a leader in sustainable development (DCMS, 2011a, p.7).

Similarly, the Aquatics Centre, was conceived with a dual purpose. While it was intended to serve as a world-class competition venue during the Games, it was planned to become a community facility post-Games, accessible to schools, clubs, and elite swimmers, thereby signalling inclusive regeneration and blending elite sport with public access (DCMS, 2011a, p.8).

The Velodrome, completed ahead of schedule as the first finished Park venue (2011), anchored the VeloPark for both community use and elite training, and provides another example of how expertise, sustainability and delivery capability were showcased (DCMS, 2011a, p.8).

Alongside these permanent structures, temporary venues were also used to project expertise. For example, the Basketball Arena was designed to be able to be reused or recycled, reflecting a sustainability commitment (DCMS, 2012a, p.10).

The International Broadcast Centre (IBC) and Main Press Centre (MPC) served both diplomatic and legacy functions. During the Games, they were intended to operate as a 24-hour media hub for over 20,000 journalists and broadcasters, contributing to global coverage of the Games, a crucial element for the UK's soft power. Post-Games, these facilities were designed to become over 90,000 square metres of business space, with the potential to generate thousands of jobs (DCMS, 2011a, p.9)

Beyond London, the Games also catalysed investment in sporting infrastructure across the UK. Through the 'Places People Play' programme, nearly £100 million was awarded to facilities linked to the Games that would not have existed otherwise (DCMS, 2012a, p.10).

These initiatives and investment extended the legacy to local communities, sport clubs, and elite athletes, across the country (DCMS, 2012a, p.10)

The transformation of the Olympic Park itself was equally significant. More than 30 bridges were constructed to improve connectivity, turning previously inaccessible parts of East London into well-integrated urban spaces (ODA, 2009a, p.32).

Each of these projects contributed to a narrative of exportable expertise. The UK showcased its ability to deliver complex, high-profile projects on time and within budget, promoting a model that could be replicated internationally

In this way, London 2012's infrastructure strategy was not only about delivering a successful event, but it was about demonstrating expertise. The UK positioned itself as a global leader in sustainable urban development, event planning and infrastructure delivery.

2.2 Transport infrastructure as urban diplomacy

"London 2012 will be the first 'public transport' Games, aiming for 100 per cent of spectators to arrive by public transport, walking or cycling in the summer of 2012. With just over one year to go, a significant programme of transport upgrades across the capital has been completed" (ODA, 2011a, Foreword).

At the heart of the transformation of London to host the Games was East London, historically one of the most poorly connected and under-invested areas of the capital. The Games drastically changed the connectivity situation of East London. Transport infrastructure

renewal was not only functional but symbolic, contributing to a narrative of inclusion and regeneration. As the DCMS noted:

“From being one of the worst connected parts of the capital, East London is now one of the best, with a major share of the £6.5 billion of investment triggered by London 2012 used to modernise and expand the area’s transport infrastructure” (DCMS, 2012a, p.70)

A key example is the redevelopment of Stratford Station, which was reframed as a symbol of modern urban mobility. As part of the broader £6.5 billion investment, the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) was extended, the Jubilee and Central lines were upgraded, and the London Overground was expanded (ODA, 2008).

In parallel, officials repeatedly emphasised completion of the “Big Build”, the ODA’s construction programme of the main venues and infrastructures, ahead of schedule as evidence of “British construction and engineering excellence” (DCMS, 2011c, p. 3).

Central to the Games’ transport strategy was the Olympic Route Network (ORN) and Paralympic Route Network (PRN), designed to ensure the smooth movement of the approximately 80,000 people essential to Games operations (athletes, officials, media personnel). The ORN and PRN were described as “temporary, proportionate, tailored to the local area... and only used when they need to be” (ODA, 2010, p.5).

“It is our ambition that London is a ‘public transport Games’, with 100 per cent of spectators travelling to the Games using the public transport network, or by walking or cycling. [...] Many are already in place so Londoners are benefiting from this investment well before the Games, and they will continue to do so for decades to come” (ODA, 2010, p.5).

The planning and implementation of the ORN/PRN involved extensive consultation with local authorities, businesses, and residents. As the ODA noted, “The experience of previous Host Cities has shown that the key to a successful ORN and PRN is good preparation, and early and effective communication with those who may be affected” (ODA, 2010, p.32).

Beyond physical infrastructure, the Games were used to model and promote changes in travel behaviour. The ambition to host a “public transport Games” was explicitly framed as symbolic. As the ODA stated: “By holding a ‘public transport’ Games we also want to change people’s attitudes to travel and encourage them to use environmentally sustainable and active transport” (ODA, 2008, transport section).

The upgrades, the ORN and PRN, and the “public transport Games” narrative projected London and the UK as competent and sustainable examples of urban diplomacy aimed

externally at the IOC, IFs, peer cities, international investors, and the global media. At the same time, these transport interventions primarily targeted domestic beneficiaries, notably Londoners, and local communities, underlining the tangible benefits of Olympic led investments for domestic audiences. As Hugh Robertson noted, the “build project [...] will be held up as an example of British construction and engineering excellence for decades to come” (DCMS, 2011c, p. 3).

2.3 Security as urban diplomacy and diplomatic performance

For London 2012, security was framed as a public demonstration of national competence and inter-agency coordination. While this legacy could be situated within other dimensions, such as cultural diplomacy or national branding, it is included under urban legacy due to its deep connections with spatial planning and infrastructure development.

As Sir Ian Johnston, Director of Security at LOCOG, stated, “Security is a vital part of ensuring we host a spectacular and successful event” (Home Office, 2011, p.11).

For London 2012, security also functioned as a strategic instrument of soft power. In the context of urban diplomacy, the UK’s ability to deliver a safe Games in an environment shaped by a heightened terrorist threat was presented as a demonstration of national competence and international reliability. The Games offered a platform to showcase the UK’s capacity to manage risk and coordinate across agencies, while preserving the celebratory atmosphere of the event (DCMS, 2011c, p.27). The UK’s security strategy was described as intelligence-led and risk-based (Home Office, 2011, p.11):

“A key element of our strategy is to identify any threats to the Games accurately and at an early stage. This enables us to take appropriate action to ensure that they are disrupted before they can have any impact on safety and security. Intelligence is central to this effort. Whether the threat is from terrorism, serious crime and fraud, crowds, protests, community tensions or natural hazards, we will ensure that law enforcement and other agencies have the right people with the right information to accurately identify and disrupt any threat” (COI, 2011, p.11).

Security planning for London 2012 required coordination between local police forces, national agencies such as the UK Border Agency, and international partners. As with other dimensions of diplomacy previously discussed, security planning extended beyond the Games period and was designed to leave a lasting legacy. This legacy was repeatedly framed in two dimensions. First, the knowledge acquired would benefit future events, for example, the Commonwealth Games held in Glasgow in 2014. Second, there was an employment dimension targeting local

communities, with the newly trained security workforce presented as capable of pursuing long-term careers after the Games ended (Home Office, 2011, p.14).

In short, organising the Olympic Games and guaranteeing their security, was presented as a showcase of national capability. Beyond the immediate imperative of safety, the UK narrative strategically emphasised the use of security measures to reinforce institutional knowledge, prepare for future international sporting events, and generate employment opportunities. These efforts were explicitly directed at multiple audiences: the international media covering the Games, future host cities observing London's model, local communities engaged or affected by operations (and potentially benefitting from workforce opportunities), and the wider public attending the event. In this way, the security legacy fed directly into the UK's broader diplomatic narrative of competence, standards, and long-term strategic planning.

2.4 East London regeneration and urban diplomacy

"This summer the world will see for itself a new, revitalised, East End. And millions of Britons are going to have to dump their old stereotypes. [...] Pockets of high deprivation, high employment and academic under-achievement can be reversed over time to bring greater prosperity to the area. Linking with long-term plans developed by the Mayor of London and local authorities, London 2012 has been the catalyst for one of the biggest and most ambitious transformation projects in Europe. Using the Games to bring in new investment, improve services and raise living standards has been a big challenge. But this has been about much more than just bricks and mortar. It is about helping make peoples' lives better, reviving old communities and creating new ones – making a world of difference" (DCMS, 2012a, p.65).

The regeneration of London's East End for the Games is a clear example of urban diplomacy. The Olympics were used as a tool to reshape urban space and to project a transformative narrative enabling the redevelopment of one of the most disadvantaged urban areas in the UK.

At the heart of this transformation was City E20, London's newest district, born from the Olympic legacy. With approximately 75% of Olympic build expenditure invested in the regeneration of East London, the Games became a vehicle for targeted development and the acceleration of regeneration plans already in motion (DCMS, 2012a, pp.62-63).

As the DCCMS stated :

"The social, sporting and economic benefits of the Games are being felt across the country – but nowhere more so than in East London. Here, the impetus provided by London 2012

is helping to accelerate long-term regeneration plans by the Olympic host boroughs and the Mayor of London. The result is urban regeneration at a pace and scale never seen before, transforming places, strengthening communities and changing lives throughout the East End” (DCMS, 2012a, p.62)

Among the objectives listed by DCMS for the regeneration of East London were:

- “Transform one of the most deprived areas of London,
- Create a thriving new quarter for the capital,
- Drive jobs, skills and investment across London,
- Improve public services and community infrastructure,
- Enhance lifestyles and raise the quality of life in East London” (DCMS, 2012a, p.64)

These goals reflect a strategic alignment between local aspirations and national policy, with the Prime Minister declaring that “let’s make sure the Olympics legacy lifts East London from being one of the poorest parts of the country to one that shares fully in the capital’s growth and prosperity” (Thornton, 2011a, p.57).

Even before the Games began, the physical transformation was profound. Over 300 hectares of contaminated industrial land were cleaned, around 2 million tonnes of contaminated soil were treated, 5.5 km of waterways were improved, and new transport links were provided. These works aimed to create a riverside environment considered to be “one of the finest development sites in the world” (DCMS, 2010, p.11). The Olympic Village was also intended to be converted into 2,800 homes and to become a hub for world-class sports and social facilities (DCMS, 2010, p.11)

Additionally, employment opportunities surged during the preparation stage of the Games. Over 30,000 people worked on-site during construction, including significant representation from the six Host Boroughs and previously unemployed residents (DCMS, 2010, p.11). The DCMS estimated the rise in employment as follows:

“The workforce on the site at the end of September 2010 numbered 10,333 on the Park and Village. 23% of the Park workforce and 29% of the Village workforce were from the 6 Host Boroughs. 12% of the Park workforce and 10% of the Village workforce were previously unemployed. [...] By the time the build is complete over 30,000 people will have worked on site with numbers reaching their peak at 11,000 during 2010. In addition LOCOG estimates that it will require a contractor workforce of 100,000 people for a short time in the summer of 2012” (DCMS, 2010, pp.11-12).

Over the longer term, the Park, alongside Stratford City, was set to become a cornerstone of a new growth economy, driven by opportunities in culture, sport, leisure and tourism. Eventually, the Park was projected to generate between 8,000 and 10,000 jobs, in addition to

the 20,000 positions anticipated within Stratford City (DCMS, 2010, p.12). These projections underline that regeneration was framed as human capital development and social mobility, not only construction.

The creation of the Olympic Park Legacy Company (OPLC), followed by the proposed establishment of a Mayoral Development Corporation in 2010, sought to consolidate the OPLC and other public bodies operating in the area into a single entity under the Mayor of London, thereby granting greater powers and control over public land to maximise the Olympic Park's potential. As stated in the DCMS report in 2010:

“The Mayor's corporation will be accountable to Londoners through him and the ballot box, meaning that decisions on the future use of the Park are made where they belong – at the local level” (DCMS, 2010, p.13).

The OPLC was tasked with securing private investment and innovation to create Tech City, “a new cutting edge technology and business district for the capital” (DCMS, 2010, p.12), managing urban parkland, and developing new neighbourhoods with distinct identities (DCMS, 2010, pp.12-13). The vision for Tech City, was to merge “the creativity and energy of Shoreditch” with “the possibilities of the Olympic Park”. It exemplifies how the Games were leveraged to reposition East London as a hub to attract innovation and enterprises. As the government emphasised:

“Our multi-billion-pound commitment to Crossrail will help ensure that this momentum continues to build across wider East London and so help unlock its vast potential and make a reality of its ambitions” (DCMS, 2010, p.12)

The “convergence” vision of the host boroughs was also embedded into London's strategic planning framework to ensure that within 20 years, their communities enjoy the same social and economic chances as the rest of London (DCMS, 2010, p.13). In 2010, the Mayor of London described closing the gap between East and West London as “London's single most important regeneration project for the next 25 years” (DCMS, 2010, p.13).

These projects not only positioned London as an attractive destination for global business but also ensured that East London would benefit from the Games and actively participate in the knowledge economy (The work foundation & Oxford Economics, 2010, p.35). Furthermore, the Mayor articulated a broader vision to capitalise on the visibility offered by the 2012 Games, aiming to position London as the “World Capital of Business”. This included transforming the Thames Gateway into one of the most dynamic urban regions globally, with the Olympic Park serving as a catalyst for economic expansion and eastward growth, driven by innovation and technology (DCMS, 2010, p.13).

However, the regeneration legacy of London 2012 has not been without contestation. While official narratives emphasised transformation, convergence, and opportunity, academic and post-Games assessments have questioned the extent to which benefits were equitably distributed among existing East London communities. For example, Watt (2013) wrote about gentrification and displacement. He argues that while London 2012 was officially framed as an inclusive regeneration project, Olympic-led redevelopment in East London accelerated gentrification and displacement. Through case studies, he shows that many lower-income residents did not experience the Games as benefiting them, instead facing direct or indirect displacement pressures and housing insecurity. These critiques suggest that official reports privilege a coherent success narrative over a more critical account of social change.

The regeneration of East London through the London 2012 Games therefore illustrates how SMEs can function as platforms of urban diplomacy. The Games enabled cities like London to renegotiate their roles within national and global contexts. In this case, the legacy extends to a regeneration narrative of opportunity, resilience, and global engagement designed to contribute to the global knowledge economy and to attract investment and enterprises.

2.5 Legacy governance and post-games diplomacy

After the event, legacy governance becomes a site of urban diplomacy, functioning as a public test of delivery claims and institutional credibility directed at local communities, future hosts, and international observers. The promise of long-term benefits, in infrastructure and urban transformation, is central to the narrative cities construct when bidding for the Olympic Games. After the Games, governance becomes a critical arena for urban diplomacy. The planning of legacy by London 2012 was a key component in the bid, notably through emphasising the sustainable use of facilities and the integration of Olympic infrastructure into the city's long-term development (Thornton, 2011a, p.39)

“The potential impact of the Games on physical sporting infrastructure and future sporting provision tend to be among the most prominent claims made as part of the 2012 Games bidding process, but this is often fairly lightly scrutinised. Claims are difficult to rigorously evaluate at the time of bidding since post-Games strategies are often based upon using the facilities to attract future major events and to stage 'home-grown' events, contingent upon winning bids for these events and/or obtaining financial or other support” (Thornton, 2011a, p.39)

The potential consequences of insufficient research and attention on post-Games planning and facilities use have been exemplified by previous host cities. For example, the Sydney

Olympic Park at Homebush was underused, while Athens experienced early decay and vandalism of its facilities (Thornton, 2011a, p.39). Thornton adds:

“Ironically Beijing, despite the uncertainties surrounding post-Games use of its two major iconic facilities (the Bird's Nest and the Water Cube) would seem to have had the clearest strategy for post-Games usage” (Thornton, 2011a, p.39).

To avoid similar outcomes, London embedded legacy governance directly into the Games' delivery model. This included the early involvement of diverse stakeholders, such as local authorities, national sports bodies, and community organisations.

“London 2012 is working with the Mayor of London, Government, Transport for London (TfL) and the London boroughs to ensure everyone can make the most of all the events and festivities happening in London throughout the summer of 2012, and that businesses and residents can plan ahead effectively” (ODA, 2010, p.6).

However, the success of legacy governance cannot be guaranteed by planning alone. It also depends on community engagement, affordability and service delivery models to ensure that the new infrastructure does not become under-used or exclusive. The report by Thornton for DCMS (2011) gives the example of Sheffield's facilities after the World Student Games (1991), where centralised investment led to the closure of local swimming pools. The result was higher entry costs and longer travel times, which caused a decline in swimming participation (Thornton, 2011a, p.41).

In this light, the challenge lies in ensuring that new facilities are not only maintained but also kept accessible to diverse groups, especially underrepresented ones. New facilities also need to contribute to other goals such as health, social cohesion, elite athletes training and community pride, representing intersections of between different forms of legacies.

Urban diplomacy, as defined in Chapter 1, Section 5, captures the diplomatic implications of urban development or redevelopment. Olympic-driven spatial planning, regeneration and territorial redesign are strategically mobilised to enhance international influence, signal governance capacity, and align local agendas with global expectations. In London 2012, infrastructure delivery, transport renewal, security planning, and East London regeneration were framed as proofs of competence, sustainability, and inclusivity targeting the IOC but also peer cities or future hosts, investors, global media, and domestic publics.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that official narratives can be selective. They emphasise on-time delivery, connectivity, and community benefits, while giving less attention to the distributional tensions that can emerge. In short, urban diplomacy here uses the city's

legacy to demonstrate competence, both to local communities and to wider international audiences.

3. Green diplomacy and sustainability

The Games provided London with a unique opportunity to engage in what Acuto refers to as 'green public diplomacy', a form of diplomacy that leverages environmental leadership without appearing overtly political or commercially driven. This concept is often referred to simply as 'green diplomacy' (Acuto, 2013, p.309).

It is important to note that the concept of green diplomacy in London 2012 was not confined to environmental policy alone. Sustainability was treated as a cross-cutting legacy, embedded across multiple dimensions of the Games such as social, economic or urban legacy. London's ambition was to make sustainability visible and central to the legacy narrative, allowing green diplomacy to intersect with other legacies.

Green diplomacy was not only limited to external projection. The Games facilitated public diplomacy within London itself, actively engaging the public and mass media, which helped amplify the event's sustainability message. Most importantly, the city's green agenda was implemented locally, reshaping infrastructure and influencing the everyday lives of residents. As Acuto notes, this "developmental cheque" (2013, p.309), the ability to turn the diplomatic vision into a real practice and change, is a form of implementation power often unavailable to traditional diplomatic actors.

One of the environmental legacy goals of London 2012 was not only to deliver 'green games' but also to inspire people and businesses to adopt an environmentally friendly way of living (DCMS, 2012a, p.60). As with the transport ambitions (Chapter 3, section 2.2), the environmental legacy sought durable behaviour change, positioning London as a model of environmental leadership and soft power with the potential to inspire future hosts.

This ambition was also expressed through urban transformation, as discussed in section 2.4. London 2012 set a precedent for future host cities by demonstrating that SMEs could be environmentally conscious, reinforcing the UK's soft power. Sustainability became a planning norm, positioning the city as a leader in green innovation and responsible regeneration.

As Gold and Gold (2015) observe, following the two unsuccessful bids by Birmingham and Manchester, it became clear that London was the only city that could have the political and institutional capacity to gain IOC support. The creation of the GLA in 2000 allowed for a more

coordinated and strategic approach to bidding. East London was ultimately chosen over Wembley as the main site for hosting the Games, due to its potential for long-term urban transformation and regeneration. Although environmental sustainability was not initially central, by the 2004 submission it had become a core element, with commitments to low-carbon development, zero-waste strategies, biodiversity conservation, and environmental education.

The cleaning of the Olympic Park was described as “the most extensive and sustainable clean-up operation ever seen in the UK” (ODA, 2011b, p.10). Preparing the site for the “Big Build”, the transformation of the 2.5 km² site in East London, required extensive clearing and cleaning, including the installation of new water and power networks. All these efforts transformed the environment in and around the Olympic Park (ODA, 2011b, p.10), laying the foundations for long-term environmental regeneration and urban renewal.

An energy centre combining biomass boilers, gas systems and a CCHP plant was also created to power the Games and serve local communities post-Games (ODA, 2009). This infrastructure exemplified ‘green diplomacy’, combining event delivery with lasting community benefit.

London 2012 also functioned as a hub for innovation, particularly in systems, mobility, and logistics. The Olympic Park featured the UK’s largest non-potable water network, distributing reclaimed wastewater and contributing to a 57% reduction in potable water use. More than 98% of demolition materials were reused, and 1.5 million m³ of soil were cleaned on-site, representing the UK’s largest contaminated land clean-up (ODA, 2011c, p.15). These efforts resulted in the creation and enrichment of more than 100 hectares of open space, enhancing biodiversity and contributing to the city’s green legacy (ODA, 2011c, p.15).

In terms of mobility, the Games introduced a fleet of 200 electric vehicles, supported by the largest network of charging points ever assembled in the UK, in partnership with EDF, GE, BMW, and Transport for London (TfL) (DCMS, 2012a, p.60).

“Not only will this keep the Olympic fleet moving during the Games, it is also a first step towards moving Britain’s motorists from the pump to the plug by improving charging infrastructure in London and beyond” (DCMS, 2012a, p.60).

Further investments included £10 million to upgrade pedestrian and cycling routes to Olympic venues, alongside 60 projects promoting greener travel (DCMS, 2012a, p.61). These

innovations projected the UK's leadership in green logistics and sustainable urban systems, reinforcing soft power claims of environmental excellence.

Community engagement was also central to this strategy. The BioRegional One Planet Experience Centre, opened in 2011, enabled visitors to engage with energy conservation and waste reduction (DCMS, 2012a, p.60). Other initiatives, such as the 'Transform' programme, supported community gardens like the one in Woodberry Down, fostering local involvement and environmental awareness to change and involve the community. These grassroots initiatives can be read as a form of 'Track-Two diplomacy', operating outside formal state-to-state channels and, instead, engaging civil society, local communities, and non-state actors directly. By embedding sustainability practices into everyday activities, these initiatives extended the reach of green diplomacy into daily community life, reinforcing the Games' legacy locally and promoting behavioural change (DCMS, 2012a, p.60).

Sustainability was institutionalised in ODA governance. Ambitious sustainability targets for ODA and contractors were integrated into project systems, tools and culture and lessons were explicitly captured for wider industry and government uptake (ODA, 2011c, p.15). As the ODA noted:

"The ODA and its Delivery Partner worked extensively with industry and the supply chain to capture lessons learned on sustainability and how they can be applied to future projects and programmes" (ODA, 2011c, p.15).

By institutionalising sustainability in delivery and governance, London 2012 positioned its practices for export, helped shape emerging standards, and reinforced the UK's reputation as a responsible global actor. The lessons were explicit for industry and government to inform future projects in the UK and abroad. Consistent with the definition of urban diplomacy developed in Chapter 1, Section 5, these sustainability choices show how spatial planning and environmental systems were strategically mobilised to enhance international influence, signal governance capacity, and align local ambitions with global expectations, including through 'Track-Two' diplomatic channels.

Beyond environmental innovation, the next section turns to cultural and sporting legacies, examining how participation contributed to London's broader diplomatic strategy.

4. Cultural and sporting legacies

This section examines how the London 2012 Games catalysed a wide array of initiatives in which cultural expression, elite performance, and international cooperation intersected. From the Cultural Olympiad and the London 2012 Festival to government-led programmes promoting sport and global engagement, these legacies show how the UK used the Games as a platform for cultural diplomacy and national branding.

In line with Coubertin's vision of the Game as a celebration of culture and arts, London staged "the UK's largest ever cultural festival" (DCMS, 2012a, p.55). The festival aimed to showcase national artistic talent and global creativity, and to promote Great Britain as a cultural and touristic destination. By March 2012, DCMS reported that 14 million people had attended or taken part in performances across 1,000 events organised as part of the festival. According to the report, this represented 10 million "opportunities to enjoy the best cultural performances from Britain's and abroad" (DCMS, 2012a, p.55). Events were staged in every UK region, highlighting local heritage and international collaboration (DCMS, 2012a, p.55). From major premieres to local exhibitions, the festival positioned the UK as a leading cultural destination.

4.1 Government programmes and global engagement

Government-led programmes formed an important part of London 2012's cultural and sporting legacy, working through people-to-people engagement with young people, schools, international partners, and wider publics.

Some of the programmes planned as part of the London 2012 legacy illustrate cross-cutting initiatives. These programmes could be classified under both social and cultural legacies. However, they all contributed to the ambition of making the UK a sporting nation and harnessing the country's passion for sport.

As part of the London 2012 legacy, the UK Government sought to deliver a lasting impact on youth sport and physical activity in general. Central to this effort was the ambition to inspire a new generation to get active and participate in sport, from grassroots to elite levels. The Government aimed to reinvigorate a culture of competitive sport in schools and promote mass participation and healthy living across the country (DCMS, 2011a, p.17).

To support this vision, the Government launched the £135 million lottery-funded initiative 'Places People Play' in 2010, managed by Sport England. This programme was designed to

transform local sports facilities and bring the sporting legacy of the Games into communities across the UK (DCMS, 2011a, p.17).

In addition, a £10 million investment was announced in October 2010 by the ODA and LOCOG to upgrade facilities in schools, universities, sports clubs, and leisure centres to encourage more people to get involved in sport. The investment planned to use the venues for the athletes during the games and then make them available to local communities (DCMS, 2011a, p.17)

The Government also introduced the 'School Games', a new programme inviting every school in the UK to participate in a structured series of annual events at school, district, county and national levels (DCMS, 2011a, p.17). These mechanisms reflect key features of Track-Two diplomacy as defined by Rofe (2018). Although supported by government, these programmes worked through sustained people-to-people ties within local communities, complementing state-level objectives through everyday cooperation. In this sense, initiatives such as 'Places People Play' and the 'School Games' show how government-supported programmes can operate beyond formal state-to-state diplomacy by building networks, trust, and shared practices.

Internationally, the Government maintained its support for the International 'Inspiration programme', which used sport to provide young people with access to high-quality sporting opportunities (DCMS, 2011a, p.17). Led by the International Inspiration Foundation and supported by partners such as the British Council, UNICEF, and UK Sport, the programme reached over 6 million children globally. In the UK, more than 300 schools established educational partnerships through their involvement as International Inspiration partner schools (DCMS, 2011a, p.18).

Examples of projects supported by International Inspiration include training teachers to deliver swimming lessons for more than 80,000 children in Bangladesh, expanding youth participation in sport in Jordan and recruiting local leaders in Zambia to train peers and reach out to disadvantaged children through sport. To date, over 11 million young people in 17 countries have actively participated in sport and physical education as a direct result of the programme. Nearly 80,000 teachers and coaches have been trained to promote sport and physical activity in their communities. The programme was delivered in partnership with in-country stakeholders, including governments, National Olympic Committees (NOC), and National Paralympic Committees (NPC), and tailored to the specific needs of each country (DCMS, 2011c, p.4).

These initiatives reflect the UK's broader cultural diplomacy strategy. By promoting inclusive sport, fostering international partnerships, and building educational links between UK schools

and those abroad, the Government used sport as a medium to project national values and strengthen international relationships. The 'International Inspiration' programme is an example of how sport can serve as a tool of cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and soft power, key components of cultural diplomacy as defined by Schneider (2005, p.147) (see Chapter 1, Section 5.5).

4.1 Elite sport and performance legacy

London's elite-sport programmes also carried diplomatic significance, projecting national capability and competitive excellence to international sporting bodies, future hosts, global media and partner nations. At the same time, the programmes contributed to domestic aims of strengthening performance pathways and positioning the UK as a sporting nation.

Another objective of the London 2012 Games was to maintain the world class performance of the UK. Building on Team GB's best-ever performance at the Beijing 2008 Olympics, the UK invested heavily in its world-class performance system to ensure athletes were fully supported in the lead-up to London 2012, and beyond to Sochi 2014 and Rio 2016. According to Ben Ainslie, three-times Olympic gold medallist

"The investment in the UK's world-class performance system over the years has been second to none: unquestionably, it's helped to make Team GB one of the best prepared teams going into London 2012. For a top sportsman, it means you can completely focus on finding that extra one or two per cent that will make all the difference" (DCMS, 2012a, p.20).

This investment included access to top-tier coaching, rehabilitation services, and ongoing care for athletes. As Charles Van Commenee, UK Athletics Olympic Head Coach declared: "The next generation of athletes will have continued access to world-class coaching, the best rehabilitation and ongoing support and care from UK Athletics" (DCMS, 2012a, p.21).

Despite a challenging financial climate, public funding for elite sport was protected through reforms to the National Lottery. UK Sport, the lead agency for high-performance sport in Britain, continued to receive substantial public investment, allowing it to maintain the highest standards in athlete development and competition readiness (DCMS, 2012a, p.21).

The development of elite sport policy in the UK was significantly shaped by the establishment of the World Class Performance Programme (WCPP) in 1997, following the country's disappointing results at the Atlanta 1996 Olympics. The WCPP laid the foundations for future

investment and structural reforms in elite sport. As the Games approached, this momentum accelerated for athletes, coaches and sports leaders. The strong performance at the Beijing 2008 Olympics can be partly attributed to the maturation of the WCPP and the injection of £200 million in Exchequer funding in 2006. As noted in the meta-evaluation of London 2012, even without the Games, there would likely have been a continued trend toward integration of elite sport policy and delivery, but at a slower and less coordinated pace (Thornton, 2012, p.11).

This acceleration effect is also evident in the international dimension of sport policy. Prior to London 2012, international development work around sport was limited, with few structured programmes in place. The Games acted as a catalyst for significant investment in this area, most notably through the 'International Inspiration' programme mentioned in the previous section. The programme expanded the reach of sport-for-development initiatives into regions that would likely not have been reached otherwise. While some international development might have occurred without the Games, the scale and ambition of 'International Inspiration' demonstrate how London 2012 helped embed sport more firmly within the UK's global development agenda (Thornton, 2012, p.11).

Overall, the London Games aimed to leave a strong performance-based legacy that developed over time, beginning in the preparation phase and shaping both domestic and international sport landscapes. Through the Cultural Olympiad, the London 2012 Festival and programmes such as 'International Inspiration', the UK demonstrated how sport could promote youth engagement, cultural exchange and international development. The sustained investment in elite performance also signalled the UK's ambition to remain a leading sporting nation.

The cultural and sporting legacies of London 2012 show how sport operated as a diplomatic space through communication, representation, and negotiation. Cultural programmes and elite performances created visible symbols of national capability, while government-led initiatives relied on dialogue and coordination between institutions, partners, and local communities. In line with Rofe's framework (2021), diplomacy here did not operate only through formal channels, it also involved non state actors. Through these processes, London 2012 used culture and sport to shape relationships, project values, and support the UK's broader cultural and sporting diplomacy objectives.

5. Social legacy and diplomacy

Sir Keith Mills, Deputy Chair of LOCOG, stated:

“From the days of Baron de Coubertin onwards, the Games have always been rooted in the belief that sport can improve society – and in London 2012, we will prove this is still the case by spreading the Olympic and Paralympic spirit throughout the UK” (DCMS, 2012a, p.48)

This belief in sport’s transformative power shaped the Olympic and Paralympic legacy strategy. London 2012 aimed to deliver long-term social benefits through a legacy framework centred sport, community engagement, economy, and East London regeneration. These themes were supported by cross-cutting commitments to sustainability, disability, equality, and inclusion (Thornton, 2011a, p.4).

To achieve these ambitions, initiatives were developed across the public, private, and third sectors. Among the challenges identified by DCMS, five stood out and were focused on “people”: reconnecting communities across the UK, encouraging a new culture of volunteering, creating new opportunities for disabled people, spreading the benefits of the Games across the whole country and enhancing the Games’ potential to drive social change (DCMS, 2012a, p.48).

This section focuses on three goals that most clearly illustrate the diplomatic dimensions of the social legacy: creating new opportunities for disabled people, enhancing the Games’ potential to drive social change, and encouraging a new culture of volunteering.

5.1 New opportunities for disabled people

A central challenge embraced by the London 2012 legacy was the creation of new opportunities for disabled people across sport, culture, education, and public life. As stated by DCMS, “London 2012 will build on the spirit of Stoke Mandeville to drive forward the cause of disability equality... the Games will help to make a difference for disabled people” (DCMS, 2012a, p.58).

This ambition was enacted through initiatives designed to influence attitudes, improve access and promote inclusion. Media representation played a key role in elevating Paralympic sport into the national consciousness. Channel 4 committed to 150 hours of Paralympic Games coverage, aiming to double Beijing 2008 audiences. At the national School Games finals, 200

disabled athletes were expected to compete across eight disability sports. As Paralympian Sarah Storey emphasised, the Games were:

“an opportunity to put Paralympic sport at the forefront of people’s minds, alongside the Olympic Games, where it should be. The Paralympic Games should have the same followers, the same excitement and the same public awareness” (DCMS, 2012a, p.59).

This strategy formed part of a broader effort to reshape public perceptions and increase understanding of disability (DCMS, 2010, pp.9-10). As Thornton noted, comprehensive Paralympic coverage was “at the heart of this agenda” (Thornton, 2011a, p.17).

Inclusion was also advanced through the Unlimited Fund, which allocated £2 million to commissions for deaf and disabled artists as part of the Cultural Olympiad (DCMS, 2012a, p.59).

LOCOG’s ‘Inspire’ programme also celebrated its thousandth project in March 2011, with 87% of integrated projects involving disabled and non-disabled participants, reinforcing the Games’ commitment to inclusive engagement (GLA, 2011, p.5).

Education initiatives reinforced this agenda. The ‘5-Star Disability Sports Challenge’ in Northern Ireland aimed to reach over 30,000 children in 200 schools by March 2013 promoting Paralympic values and active participation among both disabled and non-disabled children and challenging stereotypes (DCMS, 2010, p.6).

Programmes such as ‘Get Set’ and ‘International Inspiration’ extended this mission nationally and internationally.

Infrastructure and employment also formed part of this agenda. The ODA Inclusive Design Strategy, aimed to deliver the most accessible Games in history (GLA, 2011 pp.3-5). The ODA’s achievements included accessible public spaces, inclusive design standards, and employment diversity through the ‘Jobs Skills Futures Brokerage’. Six percent of workers on the Olympic Park were identified as disabled, and 1.3% registered on CompeteFor were disabled-owned. The ODA articulated a broader ambition:

“The ODA has created a template that countries around the world can apply, not only in bidding for major international sporting events, but also in terms of creating accessible and inclusive public spaces with a long-term use” (GLA, 2011, p.3).

Post-Games, assets such as Paralympic sports equipment and assistive technologies were intended to be distributed via the British Paralympic Association (BPA) to benefit community sport and support disabled people in education and employment (GLA, 2011, p.67). The GLA’s Equality and Diversity Forum also framed accessibility as a core value, noting that venues

were designed to ensure “the same positive experience” for all users, whether disabled, non-native English speakers, local residents, elite athletes or tourists (GLA, 2011, pp. 3–5). This public commitment illustrates how inclusion became part of the UK’s value-based diplomatic signalling.

Overall, these initiatives show how London 2012 went beyond improving domestic disability inclusion to position accessibility as an exportable legacy. Through the ODA’s articulation of inclusive and accessible design as a transferable “template”, the Games framed inclusion and accessibility not only as a national achievement but as a model for future hosts, strengthening the UK’s position as a leader in the organisation of SMEs and in setting new accessibility standards for future events.

5.2 Enhancing the potential of the games to drive social change

“Enhancing the potential of the Games to drive social change” was one of the core challenges identified for London 2012 (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013, p.53). This ambition was reflected in a wide range of legacy programmes that targeted exclusion, promoted equality, and encouraged behavioural change.

“Reconnecting communities” was a central objective. Initiatives such as the ‘Community Games’ in the West Midlands revived the spirit of the Wenlock Games, blending sport and culture to foster local engagement. In Wales, ‘Cryw Cymru’ empowered young people through hip hop and performance. These programmes illustrate how sport diplomacy operated at the community level to bridge divides and strengthen social cohesion (DCMS, 2012a, p.52)

Other initiatives addressed exclusion, especially among young people. For example, ‘Body Rocks’ used Olympic-style fitness training to instil discipline and self-belief in socially excluded youth (DCMS, 2012a, p.52). In London, ‘Sports Jam’ brought Team GB athletes into communities such as Tower Hamlets and Hackney, inspiring participation and reinforcing support for local clubs.

Sustainability and behavioural change also formed part of the social legacy. The ‘Inspiring Sustainable Living Fund’, led by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), supported third-sector projects encouraging communities to adopt more sustainable lifestyles, from energy efficiency to recycling (Thornton, 2011a, p.17).

Community engagement was a recurring theme across the legacy strategy. The ‘Inspire’ programme awarded 2012 branding rights to over 1,000 non-commercial projects, reaching

over 10 million people across the UK, with plans to reach more before the beginning of the Games (DCMS, 2010, pp.8-9). These initiatives empowered communities to shape their own legacy and strengthened local capacity to deliver cultural and sporting projects. As the DCMS stated:

“The 2012 Games provide a great opportunity to promote community engagement and bring people together over a national event, helping to empower and embolden communities to achieve what they want to do in their area. More cohesive and proactive communities would be a genuine legacy from London 2012, which would last for generations and would support the creation of the Big Society. We want to ensure that the Games leave a lasting legacy as the most equality-friendly ever” (DCMS, 2010, p.8)

Such programmes demonstrate how London 2012 used sport diplomacy to promote social change and bring communities together. These programmes relied on Track-Two channels, such as schools, clubs, cultural groups, youth organisations and third-sector actors, to encourage participation and build relationships within communities.

Volunteering was another important mechanism through which social legacy was pursued. The UK Cabinet Office aimed to create 22,500 new volunteering opportunities by 2011, working with organisations like Youthnet and Volunteering England. This initiative was part of the government’s ‘Big Society’ agenda, which aimed to encourage people to get more involved in their communities through volunteering and social action. As the DCMS explained:

“After the Games we want to enable a proportion of the up to 70,000 Games Makers, who will act as volunteers around the venues, to use their skills and expertise to benefit their communities. One way that we can do this is via the Cabinet Office Community Organisers programme. The programme will train 5,000 community organisers over the life of this parliament. We will invite Games Makers to take up opportunities to access this training” (DCMS, 2010, pp.8-9).

These programmes show how London 2012 sought to enhance the Games’ potential to drive social change by reconnecting communities and addressing social exclusion through sport. Delivered through Track-Two channels such as schools, cultural organisations and community partners, they created people-to-people forms of engagement aimed primarily at domestic audiences. At the same time, by demonstrating how SMEs could be used to support community cohesion and long-term social change, these initiatives helped position the UK as a leader in community-focused initiatives, offering approaches that could be inspire future host countries.

5.3 Encouraging a new culture of volunteering

Volunteering has long been a way to bring communities together and drive social change. London 2012 sought to elevate this tradition into a nationwide culture of civic engagement. As DCMS noted:

“In 1948, London was the first Games ever to use volunteers, and, fittingly, they will again take centre stage in 2012 – this time not only helping to make the Games happen, but shaping a new culture of volunteering across the UK” (DCMS, 2012a, p.50).

In the lead-up to the Games, volunteer mobilisation was significant. LOCOG's 'Games Maker' programme attracted over 240,000 applications for 70,000 Games-time opportunities, with around half of the applicants volunteering for the first time. In addition, 8,000 'Team London Ambassadors' were recruited to guide visitors across the capital, with similar initiatives in other host cities (DCMS, 2012a, p.51). According to DCMS, 40% of applicants were inspired to volunteer for the first time by London 2012, reflecting the Games' power to activate civic participation (DCMS, 2012a, p.51).

Beyond the Games, the ambition was to ensure volunteers continued to support their communities. As Sir Charles Allen, Chair of the Nations and Regions Group, stated:

“Those volunteering at London 2012 will leave their mark on the event – what's important is that they make a commitment to volunteer beyond 2012, so we can leave a mark on communities for years to come” (DCMS, 2012a, p.79)

This vision was supported by the 'Join In' programme, which aimed to channel the excitement of the Games into long-term community engagement, alongside organisations such as Youthnet and Volunteering England (DCMS, 2010, pp. 8–9), mentioned in the previous section.

Volunteering was also embedded in cultural and educational legacy projects. The 'Inspire' programme delivered over 1,300 initiatives across the UK, including many under the volunteering theme (Thornton, 2011a, p.17). Examples include the 'Tate Movie Project', developed by and for primary school children with support from the Legacy Trust to learn new skills and collaborate on a shared creative work, or 'Greenways for the Olympics and London' (GOAL), a project run by Sustrans, TfL and the ODA, aimed at creating a walking and cycling network across London, connecting Olympic venues and improving access for all Londoners through partnerships with local communities (DCMS, 2010, pp. 10-11).

The volunteering initiatives associated with London 2012 illustrate how government-supported programmes helped create the conditions for longer-term, community-led activity. Once established, these schemes relied on the skills, relationships and enthusiasm of volunteers, local groups and cultural organisations. This demonstrates how the Games brought together actors across different sectors, with clear benefits for local communities and a wider message of civic participation for international observers.

These programmes demonstrate how London 2012 used volunteering as a tool of sport diplomacy, encouraging civic participation beyond the Games while strengthening community engagement domestically. Through initiatives such as Inspire and Join In, the Games connected volunteers, local organisations and public bodies, reflecting the “network of networks” dynamic described by Rofe and Chatziefstathiou (2024). At the same time, by presenting these approaches as transferable models, including the ODA’s legacy template, London 2012 positioned volunteering as part of the UK’s broader diplomatic and norm-setting role in the organisation of SMEs.

6. Conclusion

London 2012 demonstrates how the legacy of SMEs can be designed to serve multiple and interconnected diplomatic purposes. Economically, the Games projected competence and resilience, positioned the UK as a knowledge-economy hub, and used procurement and supply chains to prepare SMEs for international markets and to export UK expertise. Environmentally, sustainability was embedded in governance and design, turning East London’s transformation into a model of green innovation and responsible regeneration. Culturally and in sport, the UK used the Games to showcase creativity, strengthen elite sport performance, and reinforce its position as a leading sporting nation, while also using legacy programmes to improve sport participation and engagement at the community level. Socially, programmes on disability equality, cohesion and volunteering activated Track-Two channels, initiatives were government-supported but carried by people-to-people networks, embedding values locally and signal inclusion internationally while generating exportable frameworks that could be adapted and applied by future host countries.

While this chapter has examined how London 2012’s legacy was envisioned and strategically framed before the Games, the following chapter builds on this analysis by examining how legacy was framed and communicated in the post-Games reports and evaluations. Chapter 4 treats post-Games narratives as a complementary extension of pre-Games ambitions,

allowing for an assessment of how legacy priorities were sustained, adjusted or reinterpreted in practice.

Chapter 4: Framing legacy: soft power and diplomacy in London 2012 post-games reports

Well, folks, we are doing it again. We are defying the sceptics and the doom-mongers. They said we couldn't run a bath – and we delivered the greatest Olympic and Paralympic Games the world has ever seen. Then they said those Games would never leave this country a permanent legacy, and that the taxpayer would never see a return for that £9.3 billion. And look at what is happening in the Olympic Park today (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013, p.6)

Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, stressed the significant legacy of the Games, highlighting the pride associated with this event. Political leaders framed London 2012 as a remarkable sporting achievement and as a crucial and pivotal moment for the nation (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013, p.6). Lord Coe echoed this sentiment, affirming that “when our time came, we did it right” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013, p.6). Prime Minister, David Cameron, reinforced this position:

“It's a summer we will remember for a long time – but to be truly successful, the Games can't just be the memory of one summer. It was always the plan that the legacy left by the Games should last a lifetime. That's why, in every step leading up to the Games, those planning 2012 were thinking carefully about what would come after the Games – whether that's urban areas regenerated, people inspired to get into sport or athletes supported to bring home even more gold, silver and bronze for Great Britain next time” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013, p.5)

Across these discourses from different political leaders, legacy was presented as a long-term project, encompassing various dimensions such as urban regeneration and sport participation. Johnson highlighted the rapid and largely private-sector reuse of Olympic venues, claiming that “London is succeeding where virtually no Olympic city has succeeded before. In less than a year, we have found practical and primarily private sector futures for our stunning Olympic venues” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013, p. 6). These claims reinforced the idea that the transition to post-Games had been deliberately planned and efficiently executed.

Lord Coe, appointed as the Prime Minister's Olympic and Paralympic Legacy Ambassador, stressed the Games' inspiring power. He recalled:

“When I stood up in Singapore in 2005 and made my speech as part of the final bid presentation to bring the Games to the UK, I said that London's vision is to reach young people all around the world, to connect them with the inspirational power of the Games so that they are inspired to choose sport. I say “is” and not “was” because this vision is alive

as much today as it was eight years ago” (HM Government and Mayor of London, 2013, p. 9).

His role, as he explained, was to ensure that the planning and execution that successfully delivered the Games would continue into the legacy phase. Other voices emphasised the importance of preserving the legacy of London 2012. Jacques Rogge, then-President of the International Olympic Committee, praised London’s commitment:

“A year ago, the London 2012 Olympic Games wrote a thrilling chapter in the annals of Olympic legacy. London’s commitment to delivering a strong Games legacy was clear, and plans for sustainable legacies were explicitly detailed in the city’s initial bid to host the Games. These ‘happy and glorious’ Games are now on their way to leaving a fantastic legacy that will benefit the population of London and beyond. The London 2012 Games have definitively served as a catalyst for development and improvements, both tangible and intangible, which would otherwise have taken decades to achieve. There is no doubt that the citizens of London and Great Britain will benefit from the Games for a long time to come” (HM Government and Mayor of London, 2013, p. 7).

This collective framing positioned London 2012 as a transformative event whose outcomes extended beyond the competition.

As new political leaders took office, the legacy narrative continued to evolve while remaining central in the discussions about the post-Games period. Sadiq Khan, reflecting on the legacy from a social justice viewpoint, underscored the importance of addressing “the inequalities that are still evident, again in but not confined to east London, boosting skills and creating jobs” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.9). Sir John Armit, Chair of the Olympic Delivery Authority, reinforced the technical and logistical success of the Games, positioning Britain as a global leader in SME organisation and exportable expertise (ODA, 2013, p.4).

These voices unite on the same message: the Games were successful, and legacy remains central to how this success is articulated and mobilised. The argument put forward is that the UK must continue to leverage the opportunities opened by 2012 across sectors and borders.

This chapter examines how the legacy presented in the official post-Games reports can be interpreted through a diplomatic lens, as defined in Chapter 1. It explores how the narrative evolved after the closing ceremony. While this chapter does not provide a direct comparison with pre-Games reporting, it highlights areas where themes persist, shift, or diverge over time. In doing so, it contributes to the thesis’s central argument that the legacies of SMEs can be understood through the evolving relationship between sport and diplomacy.

1. Economic diplomacy

As Prime Minister David Cameron stated:

“Critically, our vision is about helping our businesses to build on the reputation secured by the Games last summer. A big part of the legacy is driving the jobs and growth we need in Britain to compete globally. This is a long-term vision, but the progress captured here shows we’re on the right track. We will make sure that the greatest Olympic and Paralympic Games ever really do benefit our entire country for generations to come” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013, p. 5).

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games were framed as an opportunity to stimulate economic growth and aid national recovery following the global financial crisis (DCMS, 2013, p.5). As outlined in the joint report *Inspired by 2012: The Legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games*, the Games were positioned as a vehicle for national economic revitalisation (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013, p.43).

The central claim in the post-Games reports is that the preparation and staging of the Games delivered a substantial boost to the UK economy, particularly during a period of economic recession (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013). The £8.9 billion Public Sector Funding Package, along with an extra £2 billion in private investments from the LOCOG, significantly boosted demand across diverse sectors. The construction of the Olympic Park notably supported a recovering construction sector. While the “administrative and support” sector saw considerable benefits, most sectors reported positive impacts. Manufacturing also benefited via supply chain enhancements (DCMS, 2013 p.6).

Importantly, the economic benefits of the Games were not confined to London. Initiatives were implemented to widen supplier participation and procurement opportunities across the UK, to ensure that the economic legacy of the Games extended across multiple regions.

In line with the definitions outlined in Chapter 1, Section 5.2, this section examines how London 2012’s legacy can be understood as a form of economic diplomacy, focusing on how the Games were used to promote the UK as a global business and tourism destination. It analyses UKTI’s trade and investment legacy and the development of strategic partnerships that extended the Games’ economic impact beyond the event itself.

1.1 Tourism economy

1.1.1 Immediate economic impact of tourism

Despite a decline in the number of visitors during the Games, the London 2012 Olympics generated a significant boost to the UK's visitor economy due to the high levels of spending by those who attended (DCMS, 2013 p.7). According to the International Passenger Survey:

"In July, August and September 2012, over 800,000 overseas visitors either attended a Games-related event or said that their main reason for visiting the UK was related to the Games. These visitors are estimated to have spent nearly £1.1 billion in the UK during their stay" (DCMS, 2013, p.17).

Most of these visitors came from Europe or North America, and they indicated that the UK's hosting of the Games influenced their decision to visit, as they likely would not have come otherwise (DCMS, 2013, p.17). Although concerns about overcrowding and rising prices may have deterred regular tourists, the average spending per Olympic visitor was approximately double that of a typical tourist. This resulted in a net increase of £235 million in overseas visitor spending, excluding ticket sales (DCMS, 2013, p.18).

When including cultural and sporting events attendance, total spending by Games-related visitors reached over £2.4 billion. The estimated net impact on the UK tourism industry in 2012 was £890 million (£598 million excluding ticket sales) (DCMS, 2013, p.17). The figures demonstrate that the Games attracted high-value tourism and elevated the UK's appeal as a destination.

In terms of the domestic tourism market, the Games had a significant impact, with domestic visitors contributing an additional net gain of over £360 million to the economy. However, it remains uncertain how much of this amounted to genuinely new economic activity at the national level (DCMS, 2013, p. 7). Estimates from LOCOG indicate that "between 80% and 85% of the 11 million tickets sold for Olympic and Paralympic events were purchased by UK residents" (DCMS, 2013, p. 18).

The Post-Games Evaluation published by DCMS in 2013, already showed promising signs that the London 2012 Games had positively influenced international perceptions of the UK as a tourism destination. Strategic campaigns and initiatives, such as the 'Great campaign', were expected to attract potential visitors to the UK, suggesting possible long-term benefits for the country's tourism sector and supporting the UK's wider economic diplomacy objectives through enhanced attractiveness, national branding and international reputation (DCMS, 2013, p. 7). These early efforts reflected a deliberate strategy to capitalise on the momentum

of the Games and extend their legacy, reinforcing the image of the UK as a capable and welcoming host nation.

1.1.2 Long-term tourism Strategy

The 2012 London Olympics presented an opportunity to create and invest in long-term promotional benefits, particularly by attracting more visitors to the country through extensive media coverage of the Games (DCMS, 2013, p. 18). This anticipated tourism boost was part of a broader strategic vision. According to the analysis by Oxford Economics, the UK was projected to gain a net tourism benefit of £1.24 billion over the period from 2007 to 2017, with 79% of this impact expected to be realised from 2013 onward (DCMS, 2013, p.18). These projections reflected the UK's ambition to leverage the Olympics as a soft power and economic catalyst, notably through campaigns like the £1 billion tourism marketing initiative (DCMS, 2011a, p.20, see Chapter 3, Section 1.4).

Building on these ambitions, tourism became one of the main objectives of the legacy announced in the pre- and post-Games reports. In the longer term, the immediate post-Games reports set a target of attracting 40 million overseas visitors by 2020, who would contribute £31.5 billion to the economy and support the creation of 200,000 new jobs across the UK (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.52).

Early indicators suggested that this strategy was effective. In 2013, VisitBritain reported a 6% increase in international visits and a 13% increase in visitor spending compared to 2012 (HM government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.52). This growth was geographically widespread: Scotland saw a 20% increase in 2013 compared to 2012, the English regions 15%, and London 12% in visitor spend. Wales recorded the highest percentage increase in holiday visits and holiday visit spend, at 13% and 27% respectively (HM government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.52). These figures were presented as evidence of the Games' tourism-related legacy, reinforcing the UK's image as a welcoming, culturally rich, and globally connected destination.

The trend continued into 2014. In the first four months of the year, there was a 7% increase in visitor spending and an 8% rise in visitor numbers compared to the same period in 2013. Holiday visits alone rose by 18% across the whole of Britain, for January-April 2014 compared to the same period in 2013, indicating sustained interest in the UK as a leisure destination (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014a, p. 53)

To support this ambition, VisitEngland launched successive waves of 'GREAT Britain' promotions including for example the 'Holidays at Home are GREAT' campaign, which by its

second wave had generated £380 million in incremental spend, aligning with its expected return on investment (HM government & Mayor of London, 2014a, p.52).

These campaigns reinforced the Olympic legacy by promoting both domestic and international tourism, contributing to the UK's economic diplomacy and nation branding, underlining the role of tourism and cultural engagement in shaping international perceptions.

To assess the long-term legacy, VisitBritain identified two key dates for evaluating tourism trends: 2020 and 2024. 2020 to determine if the objectives have been met and 2024 to see if the trends continue. It is essential to note that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the results, particularly for inbound tourism. In 2019, inbound tourism to the UK experienced strong growth, reaching nearly a record 40.9 million visits and generating £28.4 billion in spending. However, the sector faced a dramatic collapse in 2020 due to the pandemic (VisitBritain, 2021, pp.9-10). The Office for National Statistics suspended the International Passenger Survey (IPS) in March 2020. Available estimates suggest a 73% drop in inbound visits to 11.1 million and a 78% decline in spending to £6.2 billion. Domestic tourism was similarly affected: overnight tourism spending fell from £24.7 billion in 2019 to a forecasted £9.9 billion in 2020 (a 60% loss) (VisitBritain, 2021, pp.9-10). Oxford Economics projected that inbound visits would not return to pre-pandemic levels until 2025, with spending recovering in nominal terms by 2024 and in real terms by 2025" (VisitBritain, 2021).

The most recent report on tourism data for the period from April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025, indicates a substantial recovery in inbound visitor numbers, reaching an estimated 39.5 million. This figure is only 3% lower than the record set in 2017 and represents a 4% increase compared to 2023. However, while nominal spending by tourists has risen by 10% compared to 2019 levels, real-term spending remains 12% lower, suggesting that inflation has tempered the overall economic benefits of this recovery (VisitBritain, 2025).

Regional variations in tourism performance reveal uneven recovery patterns, with Scotland experiencing the most significant rebound, London surpassing the average recovery rate observed in other parts of England, and Wales showing a slower pace of recovery (VisitBritain, 2025).

These developments underscore the ongoing importance of strategic initiatives, such as the GREAT campaign, which seeks to maintain the momentum established by the Olympic legacy and positions the UK as a prime global tourist destination. As VisitBritain (2025) summarises:

"Tourism plays a key role in shaping the image of Britain overseas. It influences whether people choose to invest and trade with British companies and positively influences their views on key export, governance and cultural attributes. People who have visited the UK are 14% more positive about the UK than those who have not and more likely to invest in a British company or buy a British product. Our tourism marketing is a powerful soft power

instrument providing a positive, non-contentious narrative about Britain. Our message of welcome, diversity, inclusivity and the expression of UK culture and values has supported the FCDO's work to strengthen bilateral relations" (VisitBritain, 2021, p.8).

This quote reinforces the centrality of tourism promotion within the UK's soft-power strategy, sustaining the visibility and attractiveness generated by the 2012 Games.

1.1.3 Great campaign

Marketing campaigns associated with the Games, most notably the 'GREAT Britain campaign', were launched to capitalise on the international attention generated by London 2012 and convert it into long-term economic and reputational gains (DCMS, 2013, p.19).

The Great Campaign was launched in 2012 to leverage the visibility of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The campaign brought together all promotional efforts from across government departments and private-sector partners in the UK, focusing primarily on tourism, trade, education, and inward investment. Active post-Games in over 144 countries, it targeted key markets such as the US, China, India and Brazil for the period 2013-2015 (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p. 47).

The campaign delivered important economic returns and enhanced the UK's global image. In its first year of operations (2012-2013), GREAT secured an economic return of over £500m (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p. 48). Britain's global ranking for tourism marketing improved by 22 places, from 43rd in the world in 2011 to 21st by 2013 (UK Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.53). The campaign also gained endorsements from over 300 partners, with a brand value estimated at £217 million in 2015 (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p.52).

VisitEngland's campaign, 'Holidays at Home are GREAT', generated substantial economic returns, delivering over £500 million in incremental value between 2012 and 2014. During the same period, UKTI and the Foreign Office supported around 4,000 new service deliveries for UK companies, resulting in £268 million in total additional profit for 1,680 firms being supported through GREAT-funded activities. The British Council's GREAT-funded education-focused efforts added £32.9 million in international higher education revenue, with another £4.5 million from the Jubilee Scholarship programme in 2012 (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p.52).

The campaign continued to expand its reach and impact. In the fourth annual report in 2016, an ambitious campaign showcasing the best of Britain to global audiences in tourism,

education, trade, and investment, research showed a 10–15 percentage point increase in international intentions to visit, invest, study, and purchase UK products and services (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.48). The brand's value rose by 37% from the previous year, reaching £217 million and still had the potential to grow to £2.1 billion within five years and rank among the UK's top 50 brands (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 48).

The campaign's effectiveness has been widely recognised, earning 38 awards and commendations, including praise from the National Audit Office and communications leaders such as Sir Martin Sorrell, who described it as “probably the best example of an integrated campaign for a government and a country across the world” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.48). Confirming the campaign's important role in promoting Olympic heritage and the UK's image, the Government committed in 2015 to provide £60 million per year to continue funding the campaign for the next four years, as noted in the pending Review and Autumn Statement (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.48).

The sustained success of the GREAT campaign after the 2012 Games underscores its role as a key instrument of UK soft power, particularly in the domains of tourism and trade by amplifying national visibility and reinforcing a positive narrative of the UK internationally.

1.1.4 Paradiplomacy, city diplomacy and tourism

While the London 2012 Games were a national project, Scotland and Wales also engaged in post-Games tourism diplomacy. They used the Olympics to enhance their international visibility, attract investment, and host global events. This legacy reflects how devolved administrations assert their presence on the global stage through cultural and sporting diplomacy. It provides a concrete example of ‘paradiplomacy’ as explained by Acuto, demonstrating that cities, regions and sub nationals’ actors can engage alongside nation-states in diplomatic activities (see Chapter 1, Section 5.7).

Scotland capitalised on the Olympics by hosting major events after the Games, such as the Glasgow Commonwealth Games and the Ryder Cup, in 2014. These were accompanied by targeted promotional campaigns, including VisitScotland's ‘Brilliant Moments’ initiative (HM government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.52). The 2014 ‘Year of Homecoming’ further elevated Scotland's global profile as a culturally rich and globally connected destination, featuring nearly 900 events that attracted a substantial number of tourists. This initiative promoted

tourism and fostered a greater appreciation for Scotland's cultural heritage, thereby encouraging tourism and longer stays (HM government & Mayor of London, 2014, p. 52). These efforts demonstrate how Scotland leveraged the Olympic afterglow to strengthen its unique national identity and promote itself as a host of world-class events.

Wales similarly capitalised on the Olympic Games to establish a legacy of international engagement. A notable example of this was the 2014 NATO Summit, a pivotal international gathering held in the UK. This event underscored Wales's commitment and contributions to the global community (HM government & Mayor of London, 2014, p. 52).

Building on the legacy of London 2012, events like Gemau Cymru and the IPC Athletics European Championships demonstrated Wales's ability to host inclusive, high-profile competitions. The Welsh Government's support for bids like the 2020 UEFA Euros and the World Half Marathon in 2016 highlights a strategy to use sports to promote Wales internationally and to embed the Olympics within a longer-term tourism and sports diplomacy effort (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.52).

Both Scotland and Wales used the Olympic spotlight to showcase their international identities, attract investment, and engage in global diplomacy through sports. They crafted their own narratives and strategies for international outreach and tourism. These efforts align with the concepts of paradiplomacy, in which regions, cities and sub nationals' actors, or in this case devolved governments use cultural and sporting platforms to assert influence on the global stage and actively shape the legacy of SMEs rather than remaining passive beneficiaries.

Beyond the examples of Scotland and Wales, London's approach to tourism diplomacy provides a further illustration of city diplomacy as defined by Acuto (see Chapter 1, section 5.7). London welcomed 16.8 million international visitors in 2013, an increase of 1.3 million from the previous year, making it one of the most popular visitor destinations globally. An additional 12.3 million domestic tourists visited the capital, and together they spent over £14 billion. The influx of tourists was driven by cultural interest from world-class exhibitions, theatres, galleries, royal palaces, historical sites, and London's diverse range of food and beverage sites. This surge in tourism reflects the city's enhanced global visibility following the Olympic and Paralympic Games (HM government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.54)

Cultural institutions, such as the British Museum, the Natural History Museum, and the National Gallery, experienced significant increases in visitor numbers during the year following the Games. For example, the British Museum attracted over 6.7 million visitors, making it the museum's most successful year on record, partly due to the success of some exhibitions such

as “Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum” (HM government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.54).

London & Partners’ leisure tourism team played a key role in promoting the city through a range of marketing and promotional activities. These included managing the website visitlondon.com, collaborating with the travel trade, and running international marketing campaigns. In 2013/14, these efforts generated £118 million of gross value added (GVA) for London’s economy and supported 2,115 jobs. To build on the momentum created by the Games, London & Partners launched the London: ‘Now See It For Yourself’ campaign, aimed at converting viewers into visitors. “This campaign alone generated over £5m of GVA, returning almost £8 for every £1 invested” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.54).

Additionally, the Games created opportunities for sustainable employment. According to post Games reports, between 62,000 and 76,000 previously unemployed Londoners found temporary or permanent jobs thanks to the Games. Many of them received training to help prepare for these roles, gaining new skills with the potential for long-term benefit. The reintegration of these individuals into the workforce was presented as part of the wider social and economic legacy of London 2012 (Thornton, 2013, p.70). London, in this sense, represents a strong example of what Acuto describes as ‘city diplomacy’, where cities act as agents of diplomacy.

1.2 UKTI’s trade and investment legacy, positioning the UK as a global business partner

After the Games, UKTI led the economic legacy programme, using the visibility and credibility of London 2012 to promote trade, secure international contracts, and foster long-term cooperation. It worked with businesses to support their exports to international markets and encourage international companies to trade with UK companies as a partner of choice (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.47).

After the Games, the target was to generate £11 billion in trade and investment benefits by 2016. This goal was surpassed within just two years, with total benefits reaching £14.2 billion (HM government & Mayor of London, 2015, p.49). This success was driven by a seven-year programme, running from 2007 and including initiatives such as the British Business Embassy at Lancaster House and the Host2Host Programme, discussed in the previous chapter. The Olympic legacy programme led by UKTI aimed to showcase the UK’s ability to deliver large-

scale projects efficiently and reliably, helping to position the UK as a trusted global business partner.

A key part of maximising the economic legacy of the Games has been helping British companies secure high-value opportunities (HVOs) in the global marketplace. Over three years, the HVO Programme helped UK firms secure more than £730 million in contracts linked to significant events between 2015 and 2022 (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p.50). The successful delivery of London 2012 boosted the UK's reputation for managing large-scale projects, opening opportunities across sectors and countries and thereby increasing demand for UK expertise in hosting and delivering SMEs (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.48).

London 2012 also gave many UK companies their first experience in the sports event sector, and it led to the creation of several new consultancy firms that won contracts with future host nations. For example, 195 British experts involved in London 2012 contributed to the delivery success of the inaugural European Games in Baku in 2015 (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p.49). UK companies also used their "Games credentials" to win more than 60 contracts for the Sochi 2014 Winter Games and the Russia 2018 World Cup and secured £120 million in contracts related to the Brazil 2014 World Cup and the Rio 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games (HM government & Mayor of London, 2013, p.47).

In the years following London 2012, UKTI actively targeted hosts of future SMEs to promote UK expertise and secure business opportunities. Sports-focused trade missions were sent to countries including Brazil, Qatar, South Korea, Russia, and Japan. UKTI also facilitated visits to the UK for delegations from countries such as Turkmenistan, Libya, and Peru, allowing them to see the transformation of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and meet potential UK suppliers (UKTI, 2013, p.30). Additionally, another UKTI Host2Host agreement with future hosts of sporting events was signed in May 2014 with Japan. The agreement aimed to share UK expertise in hosting SMEs and facilitate trade connections in preparation for Japan's hosting of the Rugby World Cup in 2019 and the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020 (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.48).

Similar agreements were signed with Taipei City. In 2017, for example, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed through the Host2Host program for the 2017 Universiade (University Olympiad) to develop deeper relations (UKTI, 2013, p.30).

To showcase UK expertise, UKTI organised business events around major sports competitions. For example, during the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics, or the FIFA 2014 World

Cup in Brazil, UKTI ran some events in the host cities to create networking opportunities for UK companies with future event organisers (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.48).

These activities helped deepen relationships with key stakeholders and promote UK expertise. Carlos Nuzman, Chairman of the Rio 2016 Organising Committee, described this relationship as “the closest ever between two Olympic host cities” (UKTI, 2013, p.30). UKTI’s Chief Executive, Nick Baird, summarised the opportunity created by London 2012:

“Trade and investment has never been more important to the country’s economic prospects. At UKTI we believe that the successful delivery of the Games, one of the most high-profile and demanding of projects, on time and on budget has provided a unique opportunity to propel UK companies into global supply opportunities and underlines our message that the UK is the place to do business. Our extensive Olympic Legacy programme is maximising this opportunity and ensuring that the UK is perceived as a partner of choice for years to come” (UKTI, 2013, p.5).

Pre-Games documents framed London 2012 as an opportunity to prepare UK firms, enhance supply-chain capability, and position the UK as a credible partner. Post-Games reports focus on demonstrating how these ambitions materialised in practice. UKTI translated domestic capacity into measurable economic diplomacy outcomes, continuing to secure international contracts, formalising partnerships with various countries, and expanding the UK’s influence across future SMEs hosts. This marks a shift from pre-Games narrative framing to post-Games delivery, evidenced by measurable trade and investment outcomes presented in the different official reports.

This section demonstrates how London 2012 strengthened the UK’s economic diplomacy by enhancing its credibility, expanding international business partnerships, exporting its expertise, particularly to future SMEs hosts, and creating new channels for trade, investment and cooperation linked to the organisation of future mega events.

1.3 Expanding UK influence through strategic partnerships

Leveraging the visibility and credibility gained from London 2012, UKTI actively pursued global infrastructure projects, such as the Delhi-Mumbai industrial corridor or the Qatari Rail Network. Through these initiatives, UK companies secured more than £50m of business wins in 2014 (HM government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.48).

In addition, UKTI hosted security seminars and visits for relevant Brazilian authorities and helped UK companies in energy-related businesses around Nigerian oil and gas. These

opportunities represented £500m of business and £450 million related to the Brazilian “pre salt” oil reserves (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.48).

The Olympics also showcased the strength of the UK’s energy sector. Companies like Aggreko, UK Power Networks, and BP (an official sponsor) played key roles in delivering the Games. Energy was a central theme at the British Business Embassy during a two-day programme, drawing over 570 guests, many from overseas (UKTI, 2013, p.35). The discovery of deep-sea oil reserves and a £200 billion investment programme created significant opportunities, and UKTI facilitated high-level engagement, including visits by senior government officials (David Cameron, Nick Clegg, Vince Cable, Michael Moore, and Kenneth Clarke). As reported by UKTI, over £450 million in business was secured by UK companies as a result (UKTI, 2013, p.35)

Nigeria provides another example of post-Games business success activity. UKTI partnered with Royal Dutch Shell to support local capacity building. The Executive Secretary of the Nigerian Content Development and Monitoring Board praised the initiative at the British Business Embassy. As a result, in 2013, over £500 million worth of business was won by UK companies (UKTI, 2013, p.35).

In the civil nuclear sector, UKTI supported UK expertise through international dialogue and trade missions. A UK consortium was formed to advise Jordan on its nuclear power plans, and a nuclear trade mission to Prague was planned for October 2013. Additionally, the British Business Embassy facilitated talks between UK experts and senior representatives from the Czech Republic regarding their expansion of the Temelin nuclear power plant, potentially opening new opportunities for UK companies (UKTI, 2013, p.35).

In terms of security and legacy, London 2012 was presented as the UK’s largest peacetime security operation, showcasing expertise in biometric data, cybersecurity, and threat response:

“Britain’s biggest peacetime security operation ensured that London 2012 delivered on its promise to be the safest Games ever, despite the many and varied threats. The operation highlighted the expertise of thousands of UK security personnel and showcased our state-of-the-art technology in areas such as biometric data collection and cyber threat responses” (UKTI, 2013, p.36).

UKTI’s Defence & Security Organisation (DSO) capitalised on this legacy, promoting UK capabilities internationally. This included hosting seminars for Brazilian authorities and

collaborating with the Home Office Games Security Legacy Team to pursue post-Games opportunities (UKTI, 2013, p.36). UKTI also recruited security specialists to engage with Brazilian and Qatari authorities, and a minister-led trade mission to Qatar was planned for Autumn 2013. Further engagements with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were also presented as extensions of London's 2012's security legacy (UKTI, 2013, p.36).

Domestically, the Security & Policing Exhibition in Farnborough (March 2013) attracted delegates from 60 countries and was aimed at helping "companies involved in the search and screening techniques at the London Games to build relations with international companies involved in sectors such as nuclear security" (UKTI, 2013, p.36).

The security legacy of London 2012 has been instrumental in promoting UK expertise in surveillance, threat response, and event security management. DSO has actively supported UK companies in leveraging this legacy to access international markets, particularly in preparation for future SMEs. These initiatives demonstrate how the Olympic legacy contributed to the UK's economic diplomacy by opening new markets for British security firms and strengthening international partnerships.

From Brazil to Qatar and Russia, UK companies have leveraged this legacy to expand their reach and influence in major international projects. These achievements illustrate how London 2012 helped position the UK as a global leader in delivering complex programmes. The Games showcased British expertise in infrastructure, energy, and security, but also opened doors for international cooperation and business opportunities. As Jason Millett noted, the successful delivery of the Games marked a turning point in how UK capabilities are perceived globally:

"The successful delivery of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games has positioned the UK as one of the most skilled nations in the world when it comes to delivering major programmes, and that's a sea-change from where we were a few years ago" (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013, p.48).

It is important to note that the examples drawn from official government reports mainly emphasise positive outcomes. This thesis does not analyse whether those claims match reality, but rather, their diplomatic framing. However, it is also important to note the existence of studies, more cautious and balanced about the results. For example, in terms of employment creation, the University of East London's IOC-commissioned Post-Games report finds that national-level employment effects were modest and hard to attribute uniquely to the Games, even if time-bound gains appeared locally (University of East London, 2015, pp.145-

146) , while UCL's *State of the Legacy* notes that such gains must be "balanced against the 5,000 odd jobs lost through the process of compulsorily purchasing the site and displacing all businesses and other occupants in order to free it up for redevelopment" (University College London, 2022, p.4).

In terms of security measures, George and Mawby (2013) find that visitors felt safe during London 2012, even though the build-up was marked by G4S's inability to supply contracted security staff. While their study concludes that security was ultimately effective, this chapter highlights that the G4S failure was an important governance issue, overlooked in official narratives.

Another important point worth mentioning here is made by Houlihan and Giulianotti (2012), who highlight that security does not simply protect the Games but produces enduring legacies that normalise surveillance, expand state and private security power and can erode civil liberties and increasingly restrict who is able, or willing, to host SMEs.

The opportunities generated by the Games for UK businesses align closely with the definition of economic diplomacy set out in Chapter 1, where governments and their networks seek to maximise national gain through trade, investment and cross-border economic engagement via UK companies (Rana, 2007; Moons & van Bergeijk, 2017). UK firms benefited from a comparative advantage created by London 2012 that could be leveraged internationally. In this context, the post-Games evidence shows how pre-Games ambitions for exportable expertise and future business opportunities materialised through concrete contracts, bilateral agreements and sector-specific partnerships across energy, security, infrastructure and major-event delivery.

2. Urban diplomacy

This section explores how Olympic infrastructure functioned as instruments of urban diplomacy, enabling London to project values such as sustainability, inclusivity, long-term development, and expertise in legacy planning. Both the designs and the post-games transformations of the venues illustrate how urban planning and diplomatic aims intersected to shape the city's global image. By prioritising adaptability and community use, London 2012 signalled a model of responsible governance and embedded its commitment to sustainable urban development. In doing so, the city strengthened its soft-power appeal and positioned itself as a leader in hosting SMEs.

2.1 Sustainability and adaptive design

Sustainability was one of the key elements of London's legacy planning, mentioned in most of the pre- and post-Games reports. Using NVivo for exact match text analysis, the term "sustainability" appeared 548 times in the documents reviewed (see Appendix A), highlighting its importance in official discourse. This section also exemplifies the cross-cutting nature of sustainability, intersecting with both environmental and urban legacy dimensions.

The Velodrome, was engineered to reduce environmental impact through natural ventilation eliminating the need of air conditioning and rainwater harvesting, cutting mains water usage by more than 70% (ODA, 2013, p.30.) After the Games, the venue was handed over to the London Legacy Development Corporation in October 2012 for transformation work before its transfer to Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, which aimed to turn it into one of London's lasting assets through a multi-use cycling hub, including BMX, mountain bike, and road circuits (ODA, 2013, p.30). This transformation demonstrated how infrastructure could support both elite sport and public recreation, reinforcing London's position as a leader in organising the "greenest game ever" and broadening community engagement.

In 2025, the Lee Valley VeloPark continues to thrive as a dynamic legacy venue. It offers world-class cycling facilities to both elite athletes and amateurs. Located within Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, it is the only site globally to offer all four Olympic cycling disciplines at the same place and "the only venue in the world to have held an Olympics, Paralympics, World Championship and Commonwealth Games in the same sport" (Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, 2025).

The venue supports a wide range of activities, from professional competitions like the UCI Track Cycling World Championships to community programmes or school sessions (Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, 2025). According to Lee Valley Regional Park Authority:

"90 per cent of the programme is reserved for communities, schools and clubs and a range of funded schemes break down barriers for disadvantaged, disability and community groups, including a British Cycling programme designed to tackle inequality in cycling and increase diversity in their talent pathway" (Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, 2024).

Since 2014, the venue has hosted 18 international competitions, with 5,800 tickets distributed to community groups to introduce wider audiences to the excitement of live cycling and inspire future generations. Shaun Dawson, Chief Executive of the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, summarised this sustainability ambition:

“Our vision to deliver world class sports venues which could be accessed by the entire community, broadening participation in a range of sports pre-dated the Games. From hosting international events to breaking down barriers through funded schemes, Lee Valley VeloPark remains dedicated to inspiring the next generation of riders and maintaining its legacy as a hub for inclusive cycling” (Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, 2025).

Similarly, the Aquatics Centre, designed by Zaha Hadid, reused pool water for sanitation to reduce the amount of water used (ODA, 2013, p.24). Post-Games, the venue was handed over to the London Legacy Development Corporation and was downsized (2500 seats) and reopened in 2014 with family-friendly facilities, anticipating 800,000 annual visitors (ODA, 2013, p.24). This transformation illustrates how legacy and urban planning can support accessibility and inclusivity. According to Everyone Active, appointed by LLDC in 2023 as the new operator of the Aquatics Centre:

“The centre has attracted one million visitors over the past year while helping 17,988 local schoolchildren develop crucial swimming skills. Beyond physical activity, the venue has generated £1.6 million in social impact across the community” (Everyone Active, 2025).

Since its opening the venue has been, as the velodrome, welcoming elite sports training but also community sports. Mark Basker, Everyone Active Regional Contract Manager summarises this ambition for the aquatic centre:

“In our first year managing this iconic Olympic venue, we’ve built upon its established foundation as a community asset while continuing to support both elite performance and grassroots participation. The £1.6 million social impact we’ve generated isn’t just a number, it represents real change in people’s lives through increased access to world-class aquatics facilities. Seeing almost 18,000 children develop essential water safety skills is particularly rewarding, knowing these are potentially life-saving abilities they’ll carry forever. With more elite events on the horizon, including next month’s Aquatics GB Swimming Championships, we’re proud to continue showcasing the London Aquatics Centre as a premier venue for both top-level competition and community participation” (Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, 2023).

Temporary venues also played a role in London’s environmental leadership narrative. The Water Polo Arena and Basketball Arena were designed for disassembly and reuse, with recyclable materials and hired components. The Basketball Arena, one of the largest temporary Olympic structures ever built, was the most heavily used during the Olympics and the quickest built with its steel frame erected in less than three months in 2010 and was rapidly deconstructed (ODA, 2013, p.25). The Water Polo Arena, the “first dedicated Water Polo venue to be built for an Olympic Games” (ODA, 2013, p.31), was also designed for minimal

environmental impact. It featured an inflatable insulated roof and was fully deconstructed in 2012, with materials returned to suppliers (ODA, 2013, p.31).

This section reads London's Olympic infrastructure as an instrument of urban diplomacy. Here, urban diplomacy refers to how urban development itself can carry diplomatic effects by demonstrating governance capacity, enhancing international reputation, and aligning local priorities with global expectations (cf. Holt et al., 2015). Three main strands are visible here: using venue design and operations to stage the "greenest Games" and projecting competence in sustainable delivery to domestic and international audiences, investing in elite-sport venues (VeloPark, Aquatics Centre) to reinforce London's reputation as an experienced host of SMEs, and enabling grassroots and community participation through accessible and adaptable facilities. The long-term reuse and adaptability of Olympic venues signal responsible governance, strengthen the UK's soft power, and extend London's city branding beyond 2012.

2.2 Inclusivity and community legacy

Inclusivity was, alongside community integration mentioned above, another key theme central to London 2012's legacy strategy. This ambition was embedded in venue design and post-Games transformation.

The Copper Box Arena is a good example of this strategy. With retractable seating and flexible design, the venue transitioned into a space for grassroots sports, competitions and cultural events. Its transformation reinforced London's narrative of accessible and community driven legacy infrastructure and urban inclusivity. As its official site notes:

"Whether it's traditional sport, extreme sport or esports, Copper Box Arena has garnered a reputation as one of the most flexible indoor venues in London. As an incredibly adaptable space it is possible to play everything from a single match to a major tournament, one sport or several, all at once" (Copper Box Arena, n.d.).

Additionally, it was the first UK sports venue to be naturally lit, saving up to 40 per cent of energy annually (ODA, 2013, p. 27).

The Olympic Stadium, originally built with a flexible structure and reused materials, also underwent significant modifications to host a variety of events, from sporting events to concerts and cultural performances. After the venue was handed over to the London Legacy Development Corporation, West Ham United became anchor tenants in 2016, while UK Athletics continued to use the venue each summer. This adaptability and flexibility allowed the stadium to remain relevant internationally while serving local needs. Its continued use and the

hosting of events such as the 2017 World Athletics Championships reflect its enduring international profile (ODA, 2013, p. 29).

The transformation of Eton Manor into the Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre further illustrates this dual-purpose legacy. As the only new permanent venue built for the Games, it now serves both elite athletes and the local community. It preserved historical elements from the Eton Manor Boys' Club, a local sports institution dating back to the early 1900s. Since reopening in 2014, the venue has hosted major events such as the Euro Hockey Championships. This blend of heritage and functionality supports London's image as a city that values memory, inclusivity, and long-term public benefit (ODA, 2013, p. 18).

The transformation of East Village, originally the Athletes' Village, further illustrates the diplomatic legacy of inclusive urban development. Featuring 67 apartment blocks, shops, restaurants and leisure facilities during the Games, it was converted into a residential neighbourhood with 2,818 homes, nearly half of which are affordable. It includes Chobham Academy and the Sir Ludwig Guttman Health and Wellbeing Centre, supporting education and healthcare for the local community (ODA, 2013, p. 32).

In addition to the physical developments, the UK government and Sport England implemented programmes aimed at improving facilities and increasing sports participation through "soft infrastructure" (Thornton, 2013a, p. 78). These included: 'Inspired Facilities', consisting in upgrading local sports clubs and facilities; 'Protecting Playing Fields', consisting in preserving community sports grounds; 'Iconic Facilities', Consisting in building regionally significant multi-sport centres; 'Sports Makers', consisting in training 40,000 volunteers, with a focus on inclusion of disabled people and BME communities; 'Club Leaders', Consisting in training and supporting sports club managers with business skills and 'Inclusive sport Fund', consisting in Growing grassroots participation among disabled people aged 14+ (Thornton, 2013a, p.78).

By combining elite-level use with community access and local heritage, venues such as the Copper Box Arena, the Olympic Stadium, the Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre and the East Village demonstrate responsible long-term planning. Inclusive design and everyday use support social cohesion, broaden participation and strengthen public services. Alongside physical infrastructure, 'soft-infrastructure' programmes extend these effects through schools, clubs and community access. Together, these investments reinforce London's image as an inclusive and sustainable host city, supporting both elite sport and grassroots participation while enhancing its soft-power profile.

2.3 Regions as agents in the Olympic legacy and subnational diplomacy

Urban diplomacy was not confined to London. The Olympic Games strategically included venues beyond London, reinforcing a diplomatic narrative of national inclusivity, regional empowerment, and equitable legacy distribution across the UK. This approach aligns with theories of paradiplomacy, where subnational actors contribute to international engagement. These regional sites became platforms for engaging local communities and decentralising the Olympic experience. By investing in infrastructure across Essex, Hertfordshire, Dorset, and Berkshire, London 2012 demonstrated that the Games were a nationwide diplomatic project. After the Games, these venues continued to serve as hubs for sport, tourism, and community development, contributing to the UK's soft power.

Hadleigh Park, host of the Olympic mountain bike competition, was transformed into a public facility with graded trails for all skill levels, opened in 2015. It is the only Olympic mountain bike facility in the world opened fully to the public. Supported by Sport England, EU Interreg, British Cycling and Veolia, the site received post-Games investment that reflected a commitment to regional regeneration and inclusive access to sport (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p.18).

The Lee Valley White Water Centre, situated 30 km north of the Olympic Park, was designed from the outset for both Olympic competition and public use. Post-Games, it became a major leisure attraction and elite training venue, hosting the 2015 Canoe Slalom World Championships (HM Government & Mayor of London, August 2015, p. 21).

In Buckinghamshire, the Legacy Programme aimed to attract national and international sporting events, especially at Dorney Lake and Stoke Mandeville, historic birthplace of the Paralympic Movement (HM Government & Mayor of London, August 2015, p.39). Dorney Lake, continues to serve as a world-class competition and training facility, exemplifying how Olympic infrastructure can elevate regional prestige and international sporting diplomacy. As the ODA notes, "Dorney Lake has become a local, national, and international asset as a world centre of sporting excellence and a special venue for many other activities" (ODA, 2013, p.36). Stoke Mandeville Stadium hosted the World Para-Badminton Championships in 2015, the first global event since the sport gained Paralympic status. Dorney Lake also hosted the world's first mass participation para-triathlon the same year. A new sprint-canoeing training base was opened in March 2015 to support preparations for Rio 2016. By 2015, Buckinghamshire recorded some of the highest sports-participation rates in the UK, supported by international events and local campaigns such as the final stage of the Women's Tour of Britain (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p.39).

Another strong example of regional sport diplomacy is the Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy, host of the Olympic sailing events. The venue demonstrates how regional sites can contribute to diplomatic legacy through community engagement, international visibility and public-health promotion. The 'Natural Choices' programme, funded by the Dorset 2012 Legacy Fund, used outdoor activity to promote physical and mental wellbeing, targeting people who might not otherwise engage with nature. GP referrals aimed to reach 2,000 participants through 280 sessions. Local authorities built on Olympic momentum by organising beach sports events, health festivals and inclusive activities for disabled groups and special schools. Infrastructure improvements, such as expanding cycleways from 8 to 24 miles, further supported active lifestyles (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p.39).

The upgraded cycle network helped create Olympic-inspired tourism businesses such as Signpost Cycling and Jurassic Cycle Hire, offering holiday packages that capitalised on the region's improved facilities. International tourism promoters, including those from Denmark and Holland, were drawn specifically by the Olympic profile of the venue, enhancing Dorset's global visibility (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p.39). The Sailing Academy itself received major upgrades, including new slipways and a commercial marina and continues to serve as a training base for Team GB and hosts international competitions. The venue also provided access to sailing for children and disabled groups, reinforcing the inclusive dimension of sport diplomacy (ODA, 2013 p. 39). Numerous World and European Championships have been held at the site since 2008, and it remains a centre for elite training, community use, and commercial activity.

By investing in venues and regeneration in regions beyond London, the Games supported elite sport, grassroots participation and community programmes, thereby reinforcing the UK's soft power and projecting values of inclusivity and national cohesion across the UK. These developments also accelerated the delivery of social policies, particularly in health, sport and accessibility, due to the momentum and visibility generated by the Games. Crucially, regions became active diplomatic actors, hosting international competitions and training camps, attracting tourism and showcasing British expertise in event delivery. This reflects Acuto's argument that cities, and in this case regions, can act as agents of global governance connecting international diplomatic goals with tangible, local developments (Acuto, 2013, p.310).

2.4 Transport development as urban diplomacy

The transport infrastructure is one of the most important tangible legacies of the 2012 London Games. The investment made for the Games served not only the immediate needs of the event but also laid the foundation for long-term urban transformation. A total of £6.5 billion was invested in London's transport network prior to the Games to increase capacity and improve reliability across the system (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.42). This investment was delivered ahead of schedule and provided early legacy. It enhanced mobility especially for the East of London and supported broader goals such as population growth and economic development in the area (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013, p.63).

Transport for London (TfL) built on this legacy, using the Games as an occasion to further the regeneration efforts. From 2016, TfL applied for powers under the Transport and Works Act to construct and operate a rail extension to Barking Riverside to unlock regeneration opportunities and tackle deprivation across the Growth Boroughs (UK Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.42). TfL also initiated studies to assess the role of transport in facilitating broader change in East London.

The Games contributed to a reconfiguration of London's economic geography, exemplified by the rezoning of seven Docklands Light Railway (DLR) stations between Canning Town and Stratford International from Zone 3 to Zones 2/3. Implemented in January 2016, the change produced cheaper journeys for approximately 100,000 weekly travellers (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.42).

As mentioned above, to improve residents' daily journeys, the Cycle Hire scheme was extended to Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park to continue promoting walking and cycling. TfL also applied lessons from the Games' Travel Demand Management programme to other large-scale events and daily congestion hotspots, improving passenger communications and enabling more efficient journey planning (UK Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.42)

Finally, accessibility remained a recurrent theme across the Games' legacies. Shortly after the Games, the Department for Transport published the Accessibility Action Plan (AAP), outlining actions to promote inclusive transport between 2012 and 2015. A new AAP was later drafted with input from the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC), to ensure that the final plan addressed the problems identified in accessing the transport system (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 86). The Equality Act 2010 also played a key role in

advancing accessibility. By 2016, compliance with bus and rail accessibility regulations had reached 89% and 60% respectively. Ninety-five per cent of buses in England featured low-floor designs, and 60% of rail vehicles had been built or refurbished to meet modern access standards (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 86).

The transport legacy of the London 2012 Games included major infrastructure investment, improved mobility and accessibility, and long-term planning efforts. These developments benefited both the city and its residents, illustrating Acuto's argument about diplomacy's translation into urban practice:

"As the London Olympics' case illustrates, cities might have the capacity to link transnational diplomatic action and public diplomacy initiatives with substantial developments on the ground and in many mundane realms, whether through extensive redevelopments in transport and sporting facilities or through seemingly trivial initiatives like a food strategy" (Acuto, 2013, p.310)

In conclusion, the transport legacy of London 2012 demonstrates how Olympic infrastructure can serve as a catalyst for long-term urban transformation and a vehicle for urban diplomacy, reinforcing London's international image through accessible and reliable mobility systems.

Compared to the pre-Games emphasis on planning, ambition, and the symbolic narrative of hosting the "public transport Games", the post-Games reports demonstrate how these commitments were translated into long-term urban transformation. If pre-Games reports focused on upgrades, Games-time operations and the projection of engineering excellence, post games reports trace the implementation of transport-led regeneration, new mobility patterns, accessibility improvements and wider socio-economic impacts in East London. This shift from ambition to reality moves London from short-term infrastructure delivery to long-term urban diplomacy.

Overall, the post-Games urban legacy shows how London used sustainable design, inclusive venues, regional engagement and transport transformation to communicate responsible governance both domestically and internationally. In doing so, it reinforced the city's soft-power profile while demonstrating the importance of aligning international ambitions with local agendas.

3. Cultural and sporting diplomatic legacies

3.1 Cultural legacy and nation branding

Hosting the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games had measurable impact on global perceptions of the UK, contributing to its diplomatic legacy through nation branding. Post-Games reports consistently highlighted improvements in Britain's international image. For example, shortly after the Games, the UK rose to fourth place in the Nations Brand Index (DCMS, 2013, p.19). Gains were recorded not only in perceptions of sport and culture but also in broader categories such as "welcome" and "natural scenic beauty" suggesting that Games coverage positively influenced international audiences' views of the country and its people (DCMS, 2013, p. 19).

Further evidence underscores the Games' soft-power impact. Supplementary research found that individuals exposed to media coverage of Britain's hosting of the Games expressed more favourable views of the UK across several dimensions. Notably, 63% of respondents reported increased interest in visiting Britain for a holiday, with enthusiasm particularly high in emerging markets such as Brazil, Russia, India, and China (DCMS, 2013, p. 19).

By 2013, the UK had climbed to third place overall in the Nation Brands Index and reached fourth place for tourism. Its "welcome" score improved from 13th to 10th, marking the first time the UK entered the top ten. Seventy-five per cent of respondents expressed a desire to explore regions beyond London, and 70% agreed that Britain had impressive countryside and that they wished to see more of the country than just the capital (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p. 53). These findings demonstrate how the Games acted as a strategic platform for soft-power projection, reinforcing Britain's global visibility and appeal.

Trends in subsequent years further illustrate the endurance of this nation-branding effect. The Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Index continued to reflect a strong image of Britain, maintaining third place overall in 2015 out of 50 nations, with the "welcome" score rising to 11th (up from 13th in 2014). Tourism placed fourth, slightly lower than in 2014, suggesting a need for continued efforts to sustain the momentum generated by the Games (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 53).

This research is primarily based on official post-Games reports, the last of which was published in 2016. While the aim of this thesis is not to verify those claims but to analyse how they are diplomatically framed, more recent Anholt Nation Brands Index data (2024) offer

useful insights into the UK's evolving global image and suggest a broadly resilient and competitive nation brand in the years following London 2012 (VisitBritain, 2025).

3.2 Participation in sports post-London 2012, building a sportive nation

The London 2012 Games were used as a catalyst for increasing participation in sport across all age groups, with a particular emphasis on youth and community engagement. This ambition was central to the Games' legacy strategy, which aimed to foster long-term cultural change in physical activity and contribute to make the UK a more sportive nation.

According to the Active People Survey published in 2015, 5.5 million people were participating in sport at least once a week, an increase of 1.4 million since 2005, the year London secured the bid (UK government & Mayor of London, 2015, p.25). Among young people aged 16–25, 55% (approximately 3.8 million people) reported regular participation, an increase of 119,300 over the same period (UK Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p.25). However, the survey also noted a decline of 222,000 participants compared to October 2014, attributed largely to reduced engagement in swimming and gym activities. The Minister for Sport and Tourism, Tracey Crouch MP, described these results as “very disappointing,” prompting the government to initiate consultations in summer 2015 to inform a new sport strategy (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p.25).

Investment in community sports facilities formed another pillar of the participation legacy. Sport England invested £165 million in over 2,400 local sports infrastructures since 2011. This included £101 million for the renovation of more than 1,900 local sports clubs, £21 million for 400 projects improving over 1,100 pitches, and £42 million for 120 medium-scale projects designed to enhance the quality of local sporting experiences (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p. 25).

A notable example is the Bishop Auckland Canoe and Kayaking Club, which received £54,865 from Sport England to relocate and upgrade its facilities. The refurbishment incorporated a disability hoist and improved changing areas, extended pool hours and better access for local schools. A partnership with St John's School and Sixth Form College further strengthened community use of the pool, promoting inclusive access and long-term sustainability. As club secretary John Holmes noted, these improvements would not have been possible without the grant (UK Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p.26).

Beyond grassroots investment, Sport England directed £48 million into large-scale, strategically located sports centres through its 'Iconic and Strategic Facilities' funds. These projects leveraged an additional £439 million in partnership funding. One example is the East Manchester Leisure Centre, which received £2 million and features a community pool designed to accommodate diverse abilities and programmes (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p.26).

Several targeted programmes were also launched to engage young people in sport. Satellite Clubs, supported by £49 million, aimed to link community sports clubs with schools and colleges, establishing more than 5,000 clubs and meeting the 2017 target ahead of schedule (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p. 27). 'Sportivate', a £56 million National Lottery-funded programme, introduced more than half a million 11–25-year-olds to sport through short coaching courses, with 80% continuing participation three months after completion (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p. 27). 'Club Matters', a £3.6 million programme, provided free online resources, seminars, e-learning and mentoring for club administrators and volunteers, alongside a social networking tool to facilitate communication and development within clubs (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2015, p. 28).

The Games also impacted adult participation. Evidence from national surveys suggests a measurable rise in adult engagement with sport and physical activity in the years leading up to 2012. The rise in participation was observed across all demographic groups, with particularly notable increases among, black and minority ethnic groups (+5.0 percentage points), individuals with long-standing illness or disability (+4.2 percentage points), lower socio-economic groups (+4.2 percentage points) and unemployed individuals (+4.1 percentage points) (DCMS, 2013, p.9). These figures suggest that the Games reached communities often underrepresented in sport (DCMS, 2013, p. 9). Participation is shaped by a complex interplay of external (economic conditions, weather), internal (health, time, affordability) and systemic (facility access, provision, coaching) factors (DCMS, 2013, p. 9). Despite the recession and poor weather in the years preceding the Games, the DCMS (2013) report emphasised a significant rise in participation, illustrating the potential of SMEs to stimulate public engagement in physical activity.

The investment in community and strategic sports infrastructure, alongside targeted youth programme, reflects a deliberate effort to sustain and expand grassroots engagement in the post-Games period. These initiatives not only positioned the UK as a proactive and socially responsible nation, but also illustrated the interconnected nature of legacies, where cultural diplomacy converges with social development.

By promoting inclusive access, fostering community participation, and supporting long-term engagement, these programmes contributed to societal benefits and reinforced the UK's international image as a sportive nation, helping to maintain its strong reputation in sport, as evidenced by its 5th place ranking in the sport dimension of the Anholt Nation Brands Index 2024.

3.3 UK, world leader in culture and tourism

“The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games offered an unprecedented opportunity to reinforce the UK's reputation as a world leader in culture. The media coverage and experience of tourists to the UK reinforced this throughout 2013 and Arts Council programmes from 2013 onwards build on this momentum nationally and internally” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p. 61).

As outlined in the second annual report from Mayor of London & HM Government (2014), the cultural legacy of London 2012 was multifaceted. It aimed to celebrate the contribution of artists and cultural organisations, inspire public participation, particularly among young people, in arts and cultural activities, and foster new partnerships across art forms and sectors, including digital platforms (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.58). The Games helped shape international perceptions of Britain as modern, open and culturally vibrant.

The strategic framework for this legacy was formalised in *Great Arts and Culture for Everyone (2013)*, *Arts Council England's ten-year strategy*. This document, along with evaluations of the Cultural Olympiad and the London 2012 Festival, identified key areas for continued investment and development: “Raising the bar for cultural programming, engaging audiences and communities, supporting east London, developing tourism and exchange, developing new partnership” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, pp.58-59). These priorities supported the UK's broader diplomatic narrative, positioning London as a global capital of culture.

One of the most significant cultural legacy initiatives to emerge from the London 2012 Games was the ‘Unlimited Programme’, which took place during the Cultural Olympiad. ‘Unlimited’ supported disabled artists to develop and showcase ambitious new work, exemplifying how cultural programming can promote inclusion, diversity, and artistic excellence on a global stage (Mayor of London, 2014, p. 59).

As noted in chapter 3, The Cultural Olympiad was a four-year programme (2008-2012) culminating in the London 2012 Festival which brought international artists together to

celebrate the Games. The Festival generated “£44 million worth of public relations coverage globally with more than 7 million people attending events” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013, p.59), reinforcing the UK’s presentation as “a global leader in creativity and innovation” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013, p.59).

Through these programmes, the UK projected values internationally, and the Cultural Olympiad functioned as a soft-power instrument, enhancing the UK’s image. It also laid foundations for ongoing exchange, with several projects continuing beyond 2012. ‘Our Big Gig’, a community-led music festival, expanded audience reach with 330 events across England featuring amateur and voluntary musicians, bringing people from different backgrounds together and showcasing local talent (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013, p. 59). The Unlimited brand continued to grow, and many artists performed internationally, including at the British Council’s Arts and Disability Festival in Qatar (2013) during the Qatar UK Year of Culture (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013, p. 59). A notable example is Jess Thom (Touretteshero), whose project ‘Backstage in Biscuitland’, funded through ‘Unlimited’, toured the UK, the USA and Canada, illustrating how Olympic cultural programming extended the UK’s diplomatic reach by promoting diversity, creativity and cultural exchange (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 64).

These initiatives demonstrate how the cultural legacy of London 2012 served nation branding, international collaboration and community engagement. By organising these events, the UK strategically positioned itself within international cultural networks.

Another flagship programme was the ‘Creative Employment’ Programme, a £15 million initiative delivered by the National Skills Academy and aiming to create up to 6,500 paid opportunities (apprenticeships, internships, and pre-apprenticeships) across the cultural sector. Targeting young people aged 16–24, it addressed youth unemployment while investing in the future cultural workforce. By March 2015, it had created nearly 1,700 job opportunities (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.60). A key outcome was a lasting public appetite for cultural engagement. As noted in the report:

“The public hunger for and delight in creativity and cultural achievements, and the way in which that work connected people at key moments, has become a true legacy of 2012. Major sporting, celebratory and commemorative events now consider a cultural programme (including outdoor arts) as an integral part of an offer and a way to extend and enhance the public relationship with the theme or event” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.60).

Following this, Arts Council England supported programmes and performances including City of Culture (2013, 2017), the Benjamin Britten centenary, World War One commemorations

(2014–2018), and the Tour de France ‘Grand Départ’ (2014) (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.60). These became platforms for cultural diplomacy, connecting with domestic and international audiences. The legacy of outdoor arts and festivals was particularly significant. The report states:

“A legacy of 2012 is an apparent public appetite for high quality work in public spaces, an increased appetite from local authorities to reimagine their public spaces and increase access to culture by taking it outside of buildings” (HM Government & Mayor of London 2014, p.60).

In other words, inspired by the success of London 2012, local authorities, increasingly framed public space as a cultural venue, broadening access and fostering community engagement. Building on the Cultural Olympiad’s success in attracting visitors, Arts Council England partnered with VisitEngland to launch ‘Cultural Destinations’, investing £3 million to strengthen ties between cultural and visitor economies. Ten regional consortia across the UK (including Essex, Cornwall, Sheffield and Liverpool) received funding to develop digital offers, joint marketing and cultural ‘packages’ to showcase the value of arts and culture to the visitor economy.

London 2012 also served as an “international showcase” (UK Government & Mayor of London, 2014, pp.61-62) for cultural ambitions. Arts Council England and the Secretary of State for Culture agreed to allocate £18 million from Olympic Lottery funds to support cultural organisations working internationally, with an explicit focus on cultural exports. The International Fund adopted a dual strategy:

“ensuring that the best of our artists and cultural organisations are working overseas more regularly than at present, and that the best of international arts and culture is being enjoyed by audiences here [and] working with partners to ensure that artists and organisations develop new markets and mechanisms for export and distribution” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, pp.61-62)

Additionally, ‘UK Transform’, supported by £1 million from Arts Council England, exemplifies post-Games international collaboration. Running from 2012 to 2016, it fostered partnerships between UK and Brazilian arts organisations, supported emerging artists, promoted engagement with marginalised communities, showcased English arts and explored new models for international distribution, through creative media (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.62).

The legacy of the Cultural Olympiad also continues via sustained partnerships. New Memoranda of Understanding between the Arts Council, the British Film Institute, the British Council, and the BBC reflect a strategic alignment of resources and expertise across the different organisations. These collaborations:

“put in place the communications channels to pull on the learning gleaned from delivery of the Cultural Olympiad and to respond as one to future opportunities, for example the World War One cultural commemorations programme” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2014, p.62)

These cultural initiatives operate as instruments of cultural diplomacy and nation branding, projecting creativity, inclusion and partnership with international audiences and partners while embedding community participation on the domestic level.

3.4 London as a capital of culture

“In 2012 the ‘greatest show on earth’ delivered the biggest and most ambitious cultural festival London had ever seen, boosting London’s world position as a capital of culture. Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park – the largest public park created in the UK for 150 years – has become a cultural destination in its own right. But a cultural legacy means different things to different people: from the tangible to less obvious shifts in attitude and ways of working. Looking forward to 2020, the Greater London Authority’s (GLA) efforts are focussed on building on the success of the Cultural Olympiad, turning world class ideas into reality – to change perceptions and communities, to stimulate artists and audiences, and to bring economic benefits to the capital” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.66)

The London 2012 cultural programme elevated the UK’s global cultural standing, yet its legacy depends on translating symbolic success into sustained cultural diplomacy. This ambition of materialising world-class ideas into lasting projects was pursued through initiatives that extended the reach of cultural diplomacy. Festivals such as ‘Showtime and Secrets’ brought culture directly into public spaces, reinforcing London’s image as an accessible, inclusive cultural hub and leaving a “legacy of cultural participation” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 66).

Programmes like ‘Gigs and Busk’ in London not only supported emerging talent but also repositioned public space as a platform for artistic exchange, attracting performers from around the world. As the report notes, “London’s public spaces now provide the world’s biggest platform for new talent in the world and many popular artists have emerged from the GLA’s talent development programme” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.66)

Participatory projects such as ‘Big Dance’, engaging over 42,000 people across 44 countries, demonstrated how Olympic-linked cultural programming build international partnerships and address social issues such as health inequality. These programmes also showcased British

creativity to diverse audiences abroad, exemplified by Jeremy Deller's *Sacrilege*, commissioned by the GLA and Glasgow International, which has toured internationally since 2012 and reached over half a million people (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, pp. 66–67).

Other legacy programmes such as *Lumiere* (2016), *The Streets* (2015-2016), *Totally Thames* (2013-2016), and *Creative Barking & Dagenham* (2014-2019) extended cultural programs beyond central London, linking culture to regeneration and community engagement. According to the HM Government and Mayor of London' report, these examples signal a shift toward more inclusive cultural diplomacy (2016, p.67).

After the Games, London strengthened its claim as a “capital of culture” by moving from a one-off cultural showcase to ongoing, place-based programmes that promoted accessibility, inclusion and creative quality. These initiatives supported cultural diplomacy by projecting these values internationally while encouraging participation locally, helping to sustain soft-power benefits beyond London 2012.

4. Social legacy

As outlined in *Inspired by 2012: The Legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games*, several Games-time ambitions were articulated, including: “Encourage a new culture of volunteering; help to reconnect communities across the UK; spread the benefits of the Games across the whole country; and enhance the potential of the Games to drive social change” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2013, p.53).

In the latest report published by HM Government and the Mayor of London on the legacy of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, three key social legacies are identified among the various achievements: bringing communities together, sport and healthy living and the legacy of the Paralympic Games (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, pp. 10–11).

4.1 Bringing communities together

The long-term aims for the “bringing communities together” legacy were set for 2022, marking ten years after the Games. Beyond the outcomes, a diplomatic reading of these objectives offers a useful lens. The legacy report's vision includes increasing the number of volunteers and creating a culture of volunteering to strengthen communities, reconnecting communities

across the UK to foster “a sense of spirit and national pride” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 54), supporting social change and advancing gender and disability equality, promoting sustainability, leveraging global attention to enhance the UK’s cultural sector and international visibility, integrating Olympic and Paralympic values into youth education, building on transport investments and applying Games-time lessons to future urban planning (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 54).

4.1.1 Spirit of 2012, bringing communities together

‘Spirit of 2012’ is presented as one of the main achievements in post games reports. Established after the Games with £47 million of National Lottery funding, ‘Spirit of 2012’ exemplifies how Olympic legacy initiatives can extend influence through social investment. The charity was designed to sustain the positivity and civic energy generated during the Games by funding projects across sport, arts and volunteering that aim to improve wellbeing, bring communities closer together and challenge perceptions of disability (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 55).

As part of the UK’s soft-power ecosystem, the charity supported national events such as the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games and Hull City of Culture 2017, reinforcing the UK’s image as a sportive and cultural nation, as reflected in the Anholt Nation Brands Index 2024 (see Section 3.1). Partnerships with organisations such as England Rugby, the Southbank Centre and the British Red Cross demonstrate the involvement of various networks collaborating and engaging social communities while contributing to national and international narratives. Key programmes funded by ‘Spirit of 2012’ include: ‘Get Out & Get Active’ (promoting inclusive physical activity across 18 UK locations, aligned with the government’s Sporting Future strategy); ‘Fourteen’ (community-led wellbeing projects in 14 areas, sustaining the Glasgow 2014 legacy); ‘Inclusive Futures’ (training young volunteers to lead inclusive sports initiatives in nine UK cities, with reported attitude and behaviour change in relation to ability, access and equality in sport) and ‘Women of the World’ (WOW) Festivals, “the world’s largest festival network of its kind,” empowering women through creative platforms and public debate in five towns and cities (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, pp. 55–57).

These initiatives illustrate how the legacy of London 2012 has been leveraged to support long-term social change, while reinforcing the UK’s image as a leader in inclusive and cultural policies. ‘Spirit of 2012’ illustrates Track-Two diplomacy in practice, where social and cultural initiatives build lasting people-to-people connections outside formal government channels and bring communities together.

4.1.2 Join in, reinforcing the UK's soft power and bringing communities together

'Join In' was established in 2012 to extend the social legacy of the Games by retaining and redeploying Olympic volunteers and building the volunteering culture envisioned by HM Government and the Mayor of London. Its goal was to encourage broader participation in community sport, to embed the spirit of volunteering into everyday civic life and to convert enthusiasm into long-term social capital.

Through national campaigns, partnerships with major organisations and the private sector (including BT, BBC, ITV, Lloyds TSB, Big Lottery Fund and Intersport), and the creation of the Local Leaders network, Join In mobilised thousands of volunteers across the UK. By 2015, it had supported over 115,000 volunteers and promoted more than 25,000 opportunities for both community and SMEs. Its innovative research, such as Hidden Diamonds and Making Time, reframed sport volunteering as a source of wellbeing and social value, influencing national policy and contributing to the UK's sporting strategy. For example, Hidden Diamonds estimated that one sport volunteer generates wellbeing worth £16,032 for themselves and those they support (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.60).

The Local Leaders network also supported major events including the Commonwealth Games 2014, the Rugby World Cup 2015, the Tour de France 2015, the Invictus Games 2015 and Sport Relief 2016. Some volunteers served as Join In Legacy Volunteers at Rio 2016 (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 60).

Join In demonstrates how Olympic legacy can be translated into long-term diplomatic assets. By creating and supporting a volunteering culture, and extending its reach beyond the UK, the programme strengthened community engagement and enhanced the UK's soft power through sport diplomacy. Join In shows how volunteering networks created for London 2012 were sustained and reused for later national and international events, including Rio 2016, turning Olympic legacy into a long-term diplomatic resource.

4.1.3 Volunteering culture in London

In 2016, London was named "European Volunteering Capital 2016" (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.61). 'Team London', the GLA's volunteering programme, was created to harness the post-Games momentum and to institutionalise the volunteering infrastructure. The programme enrolled nearly one million Londoners, built a digital platform linking 1,800

charities with 350,000 potential volunteers, and introduced innovations such as 'Speed Volunteering' and a dedicated app. Team London Ambassadors, who volunteered during the 2012 Games, continued to represent the city at major events, contributing thousands of hours of service.

The programme also prioritised youth engagement through initiatives such as the Major Events Programme, 'Team London Young Ambassadors', and 'HeadStart London', linking volunteering to skills development and employability. Programmes such as 'Skill-Up' and the Small Grants Innovation Fund support local organisations and promote effective volunteering practices.

Team London has played a key role in supporting the third sector as part of the Olympic legacy. It invested over £3 million in local community groups and organisations, and delivered capacity-building such as Skill-UP, which offers free training by expert business partners in areas such as finance and human resources. Over 200 charity staff and 300 trustees benefited from these professional development opportunities (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, pp.62-63).

Team London has also forged partnerships with over 100 businesses, including sponsors of the 2012 Games like Lloyds Banking Group. These collaborations supported youth-focused programmes such as HeadStart London, which helps young people gain work experience through volunteering and the Enterprise Adviser programme, which connects business volunteers with schools to support careers education (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, pp.62-63).

Pre-Games reports framed volunteering as a cultural ambition and nation-building project. Post-Games evidence shows how this vision was institutionalised through Team London, expanded through national programmes, and extended internationally through events such as Rio 2016, transforming volunteering into a durable network of civic and diplomatic engagement. The reuse of London 2012 volunteers at later international events, including Rio 2016, makes this programme, a clear example of Track-Two diplomacy in practice.

4.2 Supporting healthy living

At the heart of the Games' ambitions was the goal to use the Games and other SMEs to deliver change in sport and physical activity. While this thesis has already outlined the cultural legacy

and the importance of increasing sport participation (see Section 3.2), the legacy strategy also aimed to ensure that the UK remained a leading nation in Olympic and Paralympic sport and to support its ambition to remain one of the most “physically active countries in the world” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 14). This objective is essential, as physical activity plays a growing role in preventing, treating and managing long-term health conditions. According to HM Government and the Mayor of London, the significant gender gap in sport participation that existed in 2012 had also substantially narrowed by 2016 (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 14). Together, these objectives contributed to supporting healthy living across the population.

To assess progress and measure impact, sport participation in the UK has been continuously tracked through the Active People Survey (APS), the largest survey of its kind in Europe. The June 2016 results showed an increase of over 340,000 people playing sport weekly compared to the previous year, with overall participation significantly higher than in 2005, when London won the bid to host the London 2012 Games, it represents 1.75 million more adults playing sport. A striking element of the survey was the narrowing gender gap: while men still outnumber women in weekly participation (40.7% vs. 31.7%), 261,200 more women participated in sport compared to the previous year. Campaigns such as This Girl Can contributed to this progress.

This shift in participation aligns with broader policy changes. Since 2015, the UK Government has reframed its approach to sport and physical activity. From focusing primarily on grassroots participation and medals won, the government started to look at how sport and physical activity could deliver long-term societal benefits. The publication of *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation* marked a turning point, identifying five key outcomes: “physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.22). The strategy, building on earlier initiatives (Moving More, Living More (2014), Everybody Active & Every Day) introduced a customer-focused model. In response to *Sporting Future*, Sport England launched *Towards an Active Nation* in 2016, committing £250 million over four years to address physical inactivity and support grassroots sport in line with the government’s new objectives (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.22).

Complementing these policy efforts, the National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine (NCSEM) was established through a £30 million capital grant as part of the Olympic legacy programme. The NCSEM became a national and international hub integrating sport and exercise medicine with public-health practice across three sites: East Midlands, London and

Sheffield. Each site has a distinct focus: East Midlands translates research into patient care across orthopaedics, mental health and pulmonary rehabilitation, supported by advanced diagnostic facilities, London provides state-of-the-art facilities for research, teaching and treatment of sports injuries and Sheffield integrates community assets with clinical provision, offering an innovative model in which assessment and treatment occur in the same community-sporting environment (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 22).

The NCSEM's growing influence was reflected in its designation by the IOC as a global Research Centre for the Prevention of Injury and Protection of Athlete Health, one of only nine worldwide. Its partnerships with organisations such as the British Heart Foundation, Arthritis UK and Public Health England have supported national initiatives and expanded the role of sport and exercise medicine within the NHS (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 22).

These developments illustrate how Olympic legacy initiatives fostered long-term health innovation, strengthened international partnerships and contributed to the UK's soft power by positioning the country as a leader in sport, physical activity and public-health integration.

4.3 The legacy from the Paralympics

London 2012 was an opportunity to advance disability equality by shifting public attitudes, improving accessibility, and creating new opportunities across sport, culture, and business. The long-term legacy vision set out several key aspirations to be achieved by 2022, ten years after the Games. These included increasing participation in sport and physical activity among disabled people and narrowing the gap with non-disabled participants, improving public perceptions of disability, reducing the employment gap between disabled and non-disabled individuals, enhancing access to public transport; making the built environment more inclusive, and ensuring disabled people face fewer barriers in accessing goods and services (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 76).

What matters most for this thesis is not the outcomes themselves, but how the pursuit of these objectives intersects with diplomacy and soft power. It is important to note that the social legacy of inclusion and the legacy of the Paralympic Games are also embedded within other legacy dimensions. For instance, the increased inclusivity of transport infrastructure, has been discussed in the section on urban diplomacy (see Section 2.4).

Building on this foundation, one of the first legacy markers of the Paralympics was National Paralympic Day. Launched in 2013 by the British Paralympic Association (BPA), the London Legacy Development Corporation and the Mayor of London, it aimed to sustain the momentum of the Games and challenge societal perceptions of disability. The inaugural event at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park mixed elite sport, participatory activities and disability arts, attracting over 18,000 attendees. It had a measurable impact as 37% of participants felt inspired to try a new sport, and two-thirds of non-disabled attendees reported a more positive view of disabled people (UK Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 76).

Following this success, and funded by Spirit of 2012, the initiative expanded to Liverpool, Birmingham, Nottingham, Brighton and Plymouth. These regional events introduced many people to live disability sport for the first time, with 79%, according to a 2014 poll (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.76), having attended disability sport for the first time, with over 4,000 trying a new sport and 60% expressing improved perceptions of disabled people. Channel 4 supported the initiative through broadcast coverage, amplifying its reach. As noted in the official legacy report:

“Through successful events each year, the NPD events have recaptured the wonder of the London 2012 Paralympic Games on an annual basis through a powerful combination of elite sport and participatory activity” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.77).

In parallel, during the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, the BPA launched a series of six Brazil-themed Carnivals across the UK to celebrate the ParalympicsGB team and promote disability sport. The events provided opportunities for the public to meet retired Paralympic athletes and medallists, as well as try out different sports, test themselves in challenges and enjoy Brazilian-style entertainment. These events also offered opportunities to meet retired Paralympic athletes, try new sports and engage with Brazilian-themed entertainment. Funded by Spirit of 2012, the Carnivals aimed to inspire children particularly through the Paralympic Torch Tour, and build national engagement around the four Paralympic values: Determination, Inspiration, Courage and Equality (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.78).

Further reinforcing this legacy, the success of London 2012 prompted the creation of the National Paralympic Heritage Trust (NPHT) in 2016. Officially launched at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, the Trust was founded by the British Paralympic Association, WheelPower, Buckinghamshire County Council and Aylesbury Vale District Council, with initial funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England. Its mission is to “enlighten and inspire

future generations by celebrating, cherishing and bringing the Paralympic heritage and its stories of human endeavour to life” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, pp.78-79).

In its early phase, the Trust focused on mapping collections, planning activities, researching and engaging the public through exhibitions linked to Rio 2016 celebrations. Over the following years, NPHT developed a comprehensive legacy strategy, including a national-standard archive, a permanent Heritage Centre at Stoke Mandeville Stadium (launched for Pyeongchang 2018), the establishment of a network of regional exhibitions telling site-specific stories and a fully accessible Virtual Museum for broader outreach. The NPHT stands as a key Paralympic legacy of London 2012, ensuring that the UK’s Paralympic history is preserved, celebrated and shared with future generations. It also builds bridges with future SMEs, such as Rio, highlighting continuity in Paralympic narratives and Team GB celebration.

Additionally, established in December 2012 by the UK Government and the GLA, the Paralympic Legacy Advisory Group plays a key role in shaping and challenging Paralympic legacy initiatives. Comprising Paralympians, national disability charities and disability sport sector representatives, the British Paralympic Association, the GLA, and the Office for Disability Issues, the group has provided strategic input across multiple areas. Its most significant contributions include promoting accessible tourism and advancing the long-term vision of the UK as a leading destination for disability-inclusive travel, in line with Paralympic values (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 80).

Finally, Channel 4 has played a crucial role in sustaining the Paralympic legacy. As highlighted in the report:

“Channel 4’s approach to Paralympic coverage is part of its remit as a public service broadcaster to reflect the diversity of the UK, challenge established viewpoints and inspire change in people’s lives” (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 88).

Nearly 40 million people watched its London 2012 Paralympic Games coverage, an increase of 251% from Beijing 2008. The award-winning Superhumans campaign redefined disability portrayal. Since 2012, Channel 4 has continued broadcasting para-sport globally, including the first live coverage of the Winter Paralympics (Sochi 2014), and disability has featured across its schedule through programmes such as The Superhumans Show, which introduced new ParalympicsGB athletes to audiences (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p. 88).

For Rio 2016, Channel 4 broadcasted 120 hours of live TV and over 500 hours of streamed content with almost two-thirds of its on-screen talent and over 15% of its production team consisting of disabled professionals (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.88).

Finally, the 2016 ad campaign was the longest and most inclusive to date, featuring over 100 disabled people, including ParalympicsGB athletes and non-athletes (HM Government & Mayor of London, 2016, p.88).

The legacy of London 2012 has been sustained through initiatives advancing disability inclusion across sport, culture, and media. National Paralympic Day and Rio 2016 Carnivals engaged the public and promoted Paralympic values while connecting with future SMEs worldwide. The NPHT ensured the preservation of Paralympic heritage, while the Paralympic Legacy Advisory Group shaped inclusive policy and tourism. Channel 4 played a pivotal role in transforming disability representation through its coverage and campaigns.

The legacy of these Paralympic Games is first domestic, as it implemented policies and allowed the UK to focus on improving accessibility nationwide and promoting sport, following its ambition to become a sporting nation. It is also global, as this legacy reinforces the UK's soft power. First by supporting inclusive tourism through the Paralympic Legacy Advisory Group, then by maintaining focus on Team GB Paralympians during SMEs and international competitions, and finally by increasing international attention on Paralympic sport through media like Channel 4.

5. Conclusion

The legacy of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games illustrates how the legacy of SMEs can be read through a diplomatic lens. The Games enhanced the UK's global standing by communicating delivery competence and showcasing British expertise in infrastructure, energy and security, which in turn opened new avenues for international cooperation, strengthening the UK's economic diplomacy.

Urban regeneration, inclusive infrastructure and community-engagement initiatives reinforced the UK's soft power, aligning local development with wider diplomatic goals and audiences. Volunteering initiatives like 'Team London' and 'Join In' functioned as Track Two channels, while cultural programmes such as 'Unlimited' projected diversity and disability inclusion to international publics. Recent Nation Brands Index results indicate that the UK's reputation has remained broadly competitive, supporting the view that London 2012's cultural signalling has had durable effects.

The Paralympic legacy further advanced disability inclusion across sport, culture, policy and media, with National Paralympic Day, 'Spirit of 2012' programming and Channel 4's coverage helping to reshape visibility and access.

The UK also positioned itself as both a pioneer and a leading nation in green and inclusive urban diplomacy.

London 2012's legacy demonstrates a shift from pre-Games projection to post-Games realisation, organised around social change, economic opportunity and diplomatic engagement that were carried through communication (via narratives of competence and inclusion, for example), representation (with London and the UK presented as reliable hosts and partners, and as engaged pioneers) and targeted negotiation (including partnerships, MoUs, and programme funding), reflecting the three interrelated dimensions of sport diplomacy identified by Rofe (2021). As outlined in Chapter 1, Section 3.4, this reading is consistent with Rofe's earlier understanding of sport diplomacy as a reflective 'two-way dialogue' in which these three dimensions operate together as part of an ongoing process of mutual influence and deeper understanding (Rofe, 2016, p. 219).

A note of criticality remains essential: official legacy accounts tend to emphasise success, while some literature nuances these results, as acknowledged earlier in this chapter, by raising concerns about unequal outcomes in employment, displacement or security. Although these issues were not within the scope of this research, they have nonetheless been acknowledged.

Overall, London 2012's legacy continued to drive social change, economic growth and diplomatic engagement after the Games. In doing so, it demonstrates how SMEs can translate legacy initiatives into sustained diplomatic effects.

Chapter 5 – Framing legacy: soft power and diplomacy in Paris 2024 pre-games reports

Paris 2024 marked a significant milestone in the evolution of the Olympic Movement. They were the first Games to be fully aligned with the Olympic Agenda 2020 and the first Olympic Games to achieve full gender parity (IOC, 2024a, p.5). With a pre-Games narrative centred on youth, urban regeneration, inclusivity and sustainability (IOC, 2024a, p. 5), Paris 2024 was framed as a powerful vehicle for global messaging and soft-power projection.

The ambition to redefine what future editions should achieve was repeatedly emphasised. As Jiří Kejval, Chair of the IOC Marketing Commission, stated: “The Olympic Games Paris 2024 set a new standard for future Games” (IOC, 2024a, p.9). IOC President Thomas Bach added:

“Paris 2024 came at the right time for the expectations of our world, with independent consumer research demonstrating that people believe the Olympic Movement’s mission to unite the world in peaceful competition is more important than ever in a divided world, and that the IOC was successful in this effort. Another landmark achievement is that the Olympic values truly resonate with younger generations, as our research shows. [...] But these Olympic Games could only inspire the world because our French hosts prepared the stage – and what an amazing stage it was. [...] The Olympic Games Paris 2024 were a celebration of the athletes and sport at its best. They were a remarkable celebration of the values we hold dear – excellence, solidarity and peace. The Olympic Games are first and foremost about sport. As we have seen in Paris, they are also about much so much more than sport” (IOC, 2024a, p.5).

These pre-Games statements illustrate how Paris 2024 was framed as a diplomatic project with global resonance, explicitly linked to peace, Olympic values, sport, solidarity, youth engagement, inclusivity, and environmental responsibility.

This chapter examines how the legacy of Paris 2024 can be understood through a soft-power and diplomacy lens. By analysing pre-Games reports and strategic documents, the chapter explores how France positioned the Games as a tool to promote its international standing, values and influence while aligning these ambitions with France’s domestic agendas.

1. The importance of Paris 2024 in the Olympic Agenda

The Paris Games were significant for the Olympic Movement because they were the first Games to be organised in accordance with the Olympic Agenda 2020. Adopted by the IOC in 2014, the Agenda was developed in response to a rapidly changing world and the need for

the Olympic Movement to play an active role in addressing these new challenges. It sought to reshape the Games so they would become more responsible and more sustainable across different areas such as economic social and environmental domains, and more closely integrated with the long-term development plans of host nations. Central to this transformation was the ambition to reduce the Games' footprint and to ensure a meaningful, lasting legacy for host territories and communities (Paris 2024, 2024a, p. 6).

IOC President Thomas Bach encapsulated this shift when he declared that “it is the Olympic Games that adapt to their hosts, not the other way around”⁶ (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.6). In other words, the Games must be an integral part of the host countries' long-term development plans, rather than being treated as an additional component. For instance, infrastructure should not be created solely for the Games, instead, host countries should prioritise existing buildings or temporary accommodations or hold events outside the central region or country. Any new sites must therefore meet local needs and contribute to the long-term development of local communities (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.6).

Another key measure introduced by Olympic Agenda 2020, mandatory for all host cities from 2030 onwards, required organisers to meet Paris Agreement climate commitments and reduce carbon emissions accordingly. As Bach emphasised, Games organisers must “strive to remove more carbon from the atmosphere than the Games project emits and use their influence to encourage stakeholders to take climate action” (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.6).

Paris, as the first edition of the Games to benefit from the measures of the Olympic Agenda 2020, sought to take these resolutions seriously by attempting to adapt to contemporary challenges. According to Bach, these initiatives were expected to be crucial in shaping future events by setting new standards for large-scale sporting events in the social and economic spheres (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.6).

A recurring theme in the official reports was the significance of the Paralympic Games and their potential for social transformation. The Paralympics were presented as an opportunity to reshape public attitudes toward disability, improve accessibility and influence policy. Andrew Parsons, President of the IPC, emphasised that hosting Paris 2024 had already triggered changes in public policy, attitudes infrastructure and communities, noting that the French government recognised the potential impact on the lives of 12 million disabled people in France (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.6).

⁶ « Aujourd'hui, ce sont les Jeux qui s'adaptent à leurs hôtes et non l'inverse ».

School-based Olympic and Paralympic Weeks further reinforced inclusion as a foundational value, raising awareness of para-sport among young people. Importantly, all Paralympic sports were expected to be broadcast live for the first time, with a potential audience of over 4 billion people. These initiatives were expected to have a profoundly positive impact on people with disabilities, both in France and worldwide (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.6).

France chose to organise the Games around the concept of legacy for future generations. This legacy was built through collective efforts involving various state and non-state actors and partners. It included urban regeneration, infrastructure development and transformations in Seine-Saint-Denis. Amélie Oudéa-Castéra, Minister for Sport and the Olympic and Paralympic Games, stressed that Paris 2024 reflected France's expertise in regional development and its international reputation for delivering major projects (MSJOP, 2024a, p. 4).

The Paralympic legacy was also positioned as an essential lever for building a more inclusive society, offering unprecedented visibility for parasports and reinforcing resources for Paralympic athletes (MSJOP, 2024a, p.4)

Another pillar of the legacy, highlighted by Oudéa-Castéra, focused on completing France's transformation from a 'nation of great athletes' to a 'great sporting nation'⁷. This ambition was reflected in multiple initiatives, particularly across schools, and the designation of 2024 as a national year dedicated to physical activity and sport (MSJOP, 2024a, p.4)

The diplomatic ambition of Paris 2024 was also reflected in the structure and planning of the Games. One year after being awarded the event, the Paris 2024 Organising Committee (COJOP) was created in 2018, structuring its work into five cycles: "strategy implementation, service planning, preparation, delivery of the Games and legacy"⁸ (Paris 2024, 2021, p.6).

Organising an event of this scale represented a major logistical challenge requiring the mobilisation of the host country's skills and expertise. Paris 2024 and its partners chose to embed environmental, social and economic responsibility into every stage, aiming to deliver Games aligned with the major challenges of contemporary society, making them more responsible, more sober, more egalitarian and more inclusive (Paris 2024, 2024a, p. 17).

⁷ « Nation sportive »

⁸ « La mise en place de la stratégie, la planification des services, la préparation, la livraison des Jeux et l'héritage ».

This ambition resulted in the implementation of a strategy structured around two pillars, grouped under the heading 'Héritage & Durabilité'⁹. The 'Héritage & Durabilité' strategy enabled Paris to set itself the goal of "reducing the climatic and environmental impact of the Games and making sport a tool for social innovation" (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.24). Before discussing the different types of legacy, this strategy needs to be presented.

The first pillar aimed to deliver "more sustainable and innovative Games in all the environmental and social aspects of Paris 2024" by minimising their ecological impact and contributing to economic and social development in host territories (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.24).

The second pillar aimed to build "a social and environmental legacy that leverages sport to the benefit of individuals, society and the environment" by using sport as a tool for inclusion, solidarity, equality and environmental action (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.24).

These two pillars structured all the reports published by Paris 2024 on its legacy and sustainability strategy.

The Sustainability and Legacy Report (Paris 2024, 2021) identified 15 strategic priorities guiding Paris 2024 in terms of sustainability, inclusion and international outreach, including: developing universal accessibility; achieving carbon neutrality and making a positive contribution to the climate; preserving and regenerating biodiversity; developing circular economy; strengthening environmental resilience; accelerating the environmental transformation of the Games; boost regional growth, appeal, and improve quality of life; promoting inclusion, equality and solidarity; promoting civic engagement; improving health by encouraging people to move more; creating economic and social opportunities for everyone by opening doors to small and medium businesses, and residents to enjoy the economic opportunities; strengthening education and civic engagement; reinforcing the fight against corruption and the protection of personal data; providing good working conditions and labour relations; promote fraternity and social cohesion at the international level (Paris 2024, 2021, pp.104-135).

These priorities established the framework through which Paris 2024 was presented as a lever for soft power, public diplomacy and societal transformation.

In addition to this, Paris 2024 developed a universal accessibility policy, initiated during the bid phase. This policy, which aimed to promote sports participation among people with

⁹ In French, the term legacy is translated as 'héritage', while heritage itself corresponds to 'patrimoine'. The word 'durabilité' in French is translated as sustainability.

In this thesis, when referring to the official strategy titled 'Héritage et Durabilité' the original French name will be retained. However, outside this specific context, 'durabilité' will be translated as sustainability and 'héritage' as legacy.

disabilities and to enhance their involvement in the project, was built around three objectives: “ensure full participation and an obstacle-free experience for all”, “leave a tangible legacy for residents and visitors with specific needs in the areas hosting events” and “leave an intangible legacy for people with specific needs in the host country and the world, in the form of best practices or an attitude that involves factoring universal accessibility into future events by default” (Paris 2024, 2021, p.106).

The reports also underscored the symbolic significance of hosting the Games exactly 100 years after Paris 1924, describing Paris 2024 as the most significant event ever held in France. With 15,000 athletes, 206 delegations, 45,000 volunteers and 20,000 journalists, organising this event represented a double challenge for Paris 2024. However, it also represented a unique opportunity for the country to shine on the international stage, to mobilise the whole of society around a common project and to use sport to inspire generations and “fast-track transformation that will contribute to a more sustainable and more inclusive society, in the host country and beyond”¹⁰ (Paris 2024, 2021, p.15). As stated by the MSJOP:

“With these Games, France is also setting a new benchmark for major international sporting events that are more socially and environmentally responsible, intended to serve as a model for the rest of the world. Iconic competition venues in the heart of the city. A carbon footprint halved. The first social charter in history. The first gender-equal Olympic Games in history. A sober and controlled budget. Accessible infrastructure and services. The Games of an entire country and a nation that is opening its doors wide. It’s quite simple: through these Games, our country is showcasing the best it has to offer – its ability to deliver major projects, its boldness and its universalism – and turning them into vectors of progress”¹¹ (MSJOP, 2024a, p.4).

As the entity responsible for organising, planning and financing the Games, the COJOP played a central role in implementing the ambitions set out by the IOC, the IPC and the French authorities. In accordance with the Host City Contract, Paris 2024 was responsible not only for delivering the Games, but also for promoting sustainability, maximising social impact and ensuring legacy.

¹⁰ « pour accélérer des transformations qui contribueront à une société plus durable et plus solidaire, dans le pays-hôte et au-delà ».

¹¹ « Avec ses Jeux, la France dessine également une toute nouvelle référence de grands événements sportifs internationaux plus responsables, tant sur le plan social qu’écologique, destinée à faire école partout dans le monde. Des sites de compétition iconiques au cœur de la ville. Une empreinte carbone divisée par deux. La première charte sociale de l’histoire. Les premiers Jeux olympiques paritaires de l’histoire. Une équation budgétaire sobre et maîtrisée. Des infrastructures et des services rendus accessibles. Les Jeux de tout un pays et d’une nation qui les ouvre en grand. C’est bien simple : notre pays, à travers ces Jeux, a fait rayonné ce qu’il a de meilleur – sa capacité à délivrer de grands projets, son audace et son universalisme – et en fait des vecteurs de progrès ».

In this context, Paris 2024 acted as a catalyst, coordinating stakeholders, supporting social innovation projects through its Endowment Fund (*Fonds de dotation*), fostering best-practice sharing and establishing a common framework for impact measurement. This approach reflected a desire to make the Games a lever for sustainable, social and diplomatic transformation (Paris 2024, 2021, p.17)

Based on this vision of tangible and symbolic legacy, this chapter examines how Paris 2024 can be interpreted as a strategic exercise in soft power and diplomacy. It explores how the Games were framed as instruments for strengthening France's global influence, aligning with long-term national development goals and addressing contemporary challenges.

With this strategic framework established, the following section examines the various forms of legacy generated by Paris 2024. The first dimension addressed is economic legacy, approached through the lens of economic diplomacy.

2. Economic diplomacy and economic soft power

Paris 2024 committed to delivering spectacular, durable, inclusive, and socially engaged Games. In line with this strategy, the organisers sought to strengthen France's economic sector, notably by enhancing its sustainability (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.12).

2.1 Sustainable procurement strategy

Paris aimed to deliver Olympic and Paralympic Games that were ecologically, economically and socially responsible. Aligned with the IOC's Agenda 2020, the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the June 2018 Social Charter, Paris 2024 sought to promote innovative environmental and social practices. Because the Organising Committee delegated a large part of its services to suppliers and partners, the alignment of procurement with sustainability goals was identified as essential. To achieve this, Paris 2024 developed a comprehensive sustainable procurement strategy covering all Games-related expenditure (Paris 2024a, p. 2).

The Paris 2024 sustainable procurement strategy was built on three core principles. First, anticipating the post-Games impact by integrating environmental, social, and economic considerations upstream, following a circular economy approach. Second, promoting inclusive and accessible sourcing. Third, creating a strategic multiplier effect by using the Games as a catalyst for accelerating social and environmental innovation across the broader Paris 2024 ecosystem (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.3).

This strategy corresponded to the logic of economic diplomacy, where procurement served broader national objectives: promoting domestic expertise, inclusive growth and environmental sustainability. It positioned France as a leader in sustainable innovation and a responsible mega event manager.

The sustainable procurement strategy applied to €2.7 billion in planned expenditure. It was presented as an opportunity to showcase French expertise, innovation and the vitality of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) structures¹².

As 2024 approached, Paris 2024 reported that it had met its commitment to organise more responsible and inclusive Games. Small and medium-sized enterprises accounted for 75% of suppliers and one-third of total procurement by value, reflecting the commitment to supporting the local economy. Through the association 'Les Canaux', more than 500 SSE structures, including social-integration and disability-focused organisations including actors involved in were mobilised.

In terms of legacy, Paris 2024 planned to actively manage the second life of assets (through resale, reuse, donation, and transformation) after the Games, in line with a circular, solidarity-based economy. According to Olivier Debargue, Deputy Director of Procurement at Paris 2024, this strategy was seen not as a constraint but as an opportunity for sustainable transformation (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.12).

Paris 2024's ambition was to implement a pioneering sustainable procurement strategy, described as "unprecedented in the history of the Olympic and Paralympic Games" (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.8). Designed as a benchmark for future global events and applied to all suppliers and partners, the strategy promoted an economic model based on doing more with less, balancing economic efficiency with social equity and the transition to a carbon-neutral economy. Through sustainable procurement, Paris 2024 used the economic dimension of the Games as a tool of economic diplomacy, mobilising a vast network of suppliers and partners committed to innovative and responsible practices. This approach supported local economic structures, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises and SSE actors, and reinforced France's international positioning as a leader in sustainable procurement, generating a comparative advantage, consistent with Rana's (2007, p. 1) definition of economic diplomacy.

¹² In French, SSE corresponds to 'structures de l'économie sociale et solidaire' (ESS), translated into English as social and solidarity economy (SSE) structures.

2.2 Licensing and merchandising

The licensing and merchandising programme for Paris 2024 illustrates how the Olympics and other sports events can operate as tools of soft power. By offering more than 8,000 officially licensed products, ranging from mascots and pins to apparel and homeware, the Organising Committee created a tangible connection between the Games and fans worldwide. This strategy generated significant revenue to support the Games while embedding Olympic values into everyday consumer culture, thereby extending the international reach of Paris 2024 (IOC, n.d., p. 98).

The volume of merchandises sold highlights this accessibility. Products were sold in 150 official shops and 30,000 points of sale across France, as well as worldwide via the online Olympic Shop and flagship stores. The Champs-Élysées megastore alone welcomed over one million visitors. The official mascot became a cultural icon, with 3.3 million plush toys sold (IOC, n.d., pp. 98–99).

Beyond this commercial success, the programme reflected a commitment to local economic development and sustainability. More than 90% of licensees were French small and medium-sized enterprises, demonstrating an effort to support and promote local businesses and craftsmanship (IOC, n.d., p. 98). This approach aligns with France's broader objective of positioning the Games as a platform for sustainable economic growth, reinforcing national expertise.

The IOC's global licensing initiative further amplified Paris 2024's soft power potential. Through three collections, namely the Olympic Games Collection, the Olympic Heritage Collection, and the Olympic Collection, the IOC collaborated with global brands such as Mikasa, Molten, Lacoste, and Warner Bros. These collections were designed to promote and celebrate different aspects of the Olympics, such as the art and design of past Olympic Games, the Games as a global phenomenon and the Olympic values. These products helped spread Olympic values and French cultural identity to various audiences beyond France, particularly younger consumers (IOC, n.d., p.100).

Commemorative products strengthened cultural diplomacy by linking past and present through symbolic objects. Limited-edition coins, stamps, and luxury items marked the centenary of Paris 1924, reinforcing national prestige and historical continuity (IOC, n.d., p. 99).

Overall, Paris 2024's licensing and merchandising strategy demonstrates how Olympic branding can serve as a powerful tool of soft power. Through widespread distribution, symbolic products (the mascot and centenary items), and the integration of French craftsmanship, the

Games extended their reach into daily life and contributed to promoting French culture, identity and values on a global scale.

Although the licensing and merchandising strategy of Paris 2024 was not explicitly presented as a diplomatic objective, it can be interpreted as such through Rofe's sport diplomacy framework (2021). Viewed through this lens, the strategy fits the three interrelated dimensions of sport diplomacy: communication (through the global circulation of licensed products), representation (through symbolic objects such as the mascot or centenary items), and negotiation (embedded in the formal licensing and partnership agreements governing the production and distribution of Olympic merchandise). Together, these dimensions enabled the Games to promote French values and those of the Olympic Movement internationally, while simultaneously supporting economic growth and the visibility of French enterprises and craftsmanship.

2.3 Maximising economic benefits for French regions and sound budget stewardship

From the bid phase onwards, Paris 2024 reaffirmed its commitment to organising sustainable Games that maximise economic benefits for French regions and stakeholders. This ambition led to two major economic impact studies conducted at key points during the project. A first study was published in 2016, aiming to estimate the impact the Games could have on the Île-de-France region, covering the entire event life cycle (2017–2034). It proposed three impact scenarios, ranging from €5.3 billion to €10.7 billion, and identified levers for action to maximise economic injections while limiting leakage. This approach was part of a broader regional economic diplomacy strategy, seeking to channel Olympic benefits directly to local stakeholders (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.83). Following significant contextual changes, including the official designation of Paris, the pandemic, and geopolitical tensions, the study was re-evaluated and updated between late 2023 and early 2024. The revised analysis, based on observed data, confirmed substantial economic benefits for Île-de-France, now estimated between €6.7 billion and €11.1 billion for the period 2018–2034 (Paris 2024, 2024a, p. 83). The updated study differentiated impacts by expenditure type (construction, organisation, tourism) and by project phase: the preparation and staging of the Games (2018–2024), followed by the legacy phase (2025–2034) (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.83).

Between 2018 and 2024, forecasts predicted that around 150,000 jobs could be created in sectors directly linked to the Games, such as tourism, construction and events. Of the 78,000 jobs directly associated with the organisation of the Games, only 6% (approximately 4,500

positions) were expected to be filled by Paris 2024 or event-delivery employees, while 94% (around 73,500 jobs) were expected to be delivered through service providers embedded within the organisation (Paris 2024, 2021, p. 21).

Economic diplomacy is not only about generating regional economic benefits aligned with Paris 2024's agenda, but it also requires responsible and transparent management of public resources. The Paris 2024 Sustainability and Legacy Report emphasised sound budget stewardship (*sobriété budgétaire*) as central to the Games (Paris 2024, 2021, p. 32). The projected operating budget for the Organising Committee amounted to €3.9 billion, of which 97% was financed by private sources. Only 3% came from public funding dedicated exclusively to the organisation of the Paralympic Games (Paris 2024, 2021, p. 32). This distribution reflected a deliberate effort to minimise the public financial burden while ensuring the viability of the Games.

The primary sources of funding included contributions from the IOC (€1.219 billion), commercial partnerships (€1.088 billion), ticket and hospitality revenue (€1.165 billion) and licensing and merchandising revenue (€127 million) (Paris 2024, 2021, p. 32).

In parallel, Paris 2024 allocated €102 million to its legacy and sustainability strategy, divided between Environmental Excellence (€52 million) and Impact and Legacy (€50 million). This budgetary choice reflected a desire to make the Games a lever for sustainable transformation (Paris 2024, 2021, p.32).

Financial governance was also structured within a rigorous regulatory framework. As an association governed by French law (*loi de 1901*), the Organising Committee was subject to the Public Procurement Code and oversight from the French National Audit Office, the Anti-Corruption Agency and the High Authority for Transparency in Public Life (Paris 2024, 2021, p. 32). To reinforce governance, Paris 2024 established three specialised committees: the Audit Committee, the Ethics Committee and the Remuneration Committee. These bodies monitored salary policies, financial risk management and compliance with accounting standards. This strengthened oversight contributed to the project's credibility, both nationally and internationally, and supported an economic diplomacy founded on trust, responsibility, and exemplary governance (Paris 2024, 2021, p.32).

The economic strategy of Paris 2024, through sustainable procurement, licensing, regional development, and robust financial governance, demonstrated how the Games functioned as a platform for economic diplomacy and soft power. With €2.7 billion in procurement, 150,000 jobs forecasted, and strong support for small and medium sized-enterprises and SSE structures, the Games generated tangible benefits across France. Transparent budget

management and regulatory oversight further enhanced the credibility of the project. These efforts positioned France as a global reference in sustainable event delivery, reinforcing its international image, influence and comparative advantage in hosting future SMEs.

3. Cultural and sporting diplomacy

Cultural and sporting diplomacy formed a central dimension of France's strategy for Paris 2024.

“Imagination of millions and setting the tone for Games defined by innovation and inclusivity. This groundbreaking approach saw Paris itself become a star of the Games, with its historic landmarks transformed into spectacular sporting venues. [...] These iconic locations and many others provided awe-inspiring backdrops to the sporting action, seamlessly blending the city's cultural heritage with the energy and excitement of the Olympic Games” (IOC, nd, p.13).

This section explores how the framing of media and digital engagement, sporting performance, and the hosting of SMEs can generate diplomatic effects, and how these practices can be linked to contemporary sport diplomacy theory.

3.1 Media and digital diplomacy

Paris 2024 demonstrated an innovative approach to engaging audiences worldwide. The Organising Committee and the IOC reached diverse publics across France and around the world through strategic partnerships, digital innovations and collaborations.

Domestically, France Télévisions played a central role in embedding the Olympic spirit into everyday life. In collaboration with Paris 2024 Organising Committee, it launched the daily programme *Aux Jeux Citoyens* and covered the arrival of the Olympic Flame in Marseille, which was symbolic of uniting mainland France and overseas territories in a shared celebration.

Internationally, Paris 2024 embraced digital platforms to connect with younger and global audiences. The launch of Olympic World on Roblox introduced Olympic values to a new generation, attracting more than 11 million visits in two weeks and becoming the most successful sports property on the platform. Paris 2024 also piloted the first-ever Olympic Creator Programme, inviting over 100 digital creators from around the world to share their experiences and amplify the Games across social media contributing to the Games' promotion worldwide.

Content partnerships further extended the Games' cultural reach. Collaborations with Netflix resulted in globally successful docuseries featured in the platform's Top 10 charts, helping build international anticipation ahead of the Games (IOC, n.d., p. 33).

Another way to engage fans and the public with the Games was through a diverse digital offering like Olympics™ Go!, the official mobile game. Virtual Regatta, downloaded by two million fans, also allowed players to compete in online sailing races (IOC, nd, p.101). All these initiatives encouraged global audiences to follow the event. As the IOC noted:

“More than half of the world's population tuned in to experience the magic of these Games. With record-breaking viewership across television, digital platforms and social media, Paris 2024 stands as the most followed Olympic Games in history” (IOC, nd, p.9).

Through national broadcasting and a strong digital presence, Paris 2024 achieved unprecedented audience engagement. By integrating new media strategies such as the Olympic Creator Programme and collaborations with major digital platforms, the Games positioned France at the forefront of digital diplomacy, where culture and technology converged to reach global publics beyond traditional state channels. In doing so, Paris 2024 enacted Schneider's definition of cultural diplomacy as an exchange of ideas, information and cultural expressions aimed at fostering mutual understanding around the values of the Games.

By mobilising digital creators, gaming and streaming platforms, and global media partnerships, the Games enabled cross-cultural dialogue and visibility on a large scale. Similar to the licensing and merchandising strategy discussed earlier, this digital ecosystem fits within the sport diplomacy framework defined by Rofe (2021): the media and digital strategy operated through communication (global broadcasting and digital storytelling), representation (mediated staging of Paris and its iconic venues), and negotiation (institutional and commercial partnerships with broadcasters, digital platforms and content creators). Together, these practices positioned Paris 2024 as a significant example of cultural diplomacy, reinforcing France's soft-power reach.

3.2 Performance-based diplomacy and the strategy “ambition bleue”

“Within the space of a year, [...] France will host two of the world's biggest sporting events: the Rugby World Cup this autumn and, next year, the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games. [...] French sport has gone through a number of crises, all of which point to the

need to support concrete and lasting changes to strengthen our institutions and our sporting model¹³ (MSJOP, 2023a, p.3).

Several strategies were launched to build the 'sporting nation' called for by the President of the Republic, notably through the overhaul of sports governance. The MSJOP report (2023a) cites, for example, the establishment of the National Committee for Ethics and Democratic Life in Sport on 29 March, and emphasises the growing use of sport as a lever for addressing contemporary challenges such as the ecological transition. To achieve high performance standards, all stakeholders (the State, the sports movement, local authorities and businesses) were mobilised and the French sports model was thoroughly revised (MSJOP, 2023b, p.4). In this context, the Games were framed as a catalyst for change, mobilising all stakeholders, institutions, regions and citizens around a shared project. These findings highlighted the need for a modernised governance model capable of responding to global performance pressures. As a result, the State created the National Sports Agency (ANS) in 2019 following a broad consultation with key actors. Organised as a Public Interest Group, the ANS brought together the State, the sports movement, local authorities and economic stakeholders. Its two main missions were developing sporting practices to increase participation, and strengthening high performance by supporting athletes and federations in their pursuit of excellence (Mouvens, 2025, p.6).

In October 2017, Minister Laura Flessel entrusted Claude Onesta to assess high-performance structures. His 2018 report called for a decisive paradigm shift: individualising support for athletes to make it more personalised, optimising structures, strengthening cooperation between stakeholders, integrating innovation and technology into preparation, and spreading a culture of performance at several levels (athletes and federations) (Mouvens, 2025, p.7). Building on these recommendations, the ANS High Performance Centre developed a transformation plan aimed at creating a "culture of sustainable performance", with the Paris 2024 Games in its sights (Mouvens, 2025, p.7).

In July 2020, the 'Ambition Bleue' strategy was introduced. It was based on: targeted resources, the contribution of complementary expertise, comprehensive support for athletes (including socio-professional support), the development of coaching skills and a community-based approach (Mouvens, 2025, p.7). After the Tokyo 2020 Games, discussions on how to maximise the benefits of hosting Paris 2024 led to the creation of 'Gagner en France' in 2022, an initiative led by the ANS bringing together all French sporting bodies (Mouvens, 2025, p.7).

¹³ « En l'espace d'un an, [...] la France va accueillir deux des plus grands événements sportifs planétaires, la Coupe du monde de rugby cet automne puis, l'an prochain, les Jeux Olympiques et Paralympiques de Paris 2024. [...] le sport français a traversé un certain nombre de crises, qui disent toutes la nécessité d'accompagner des changements concrets et durables pour renforcer nos institutions et notre modèle sportif ».

The decision to pool resources and expertise reflects several key observations aimed at transforming the French model, one of the main ones being the intensification of international competition in recent years. France had stagnated in its Olympic results and declined in Paralympic performance, demonstrating the need for renewed ambition (Mouvens, 2025, p. 7). 'Ambition Bleue' marked a strategic shift towards an individualised and targeted approach to high performance, inspired by foreign models such as the United Kingdom, while retaining the principles of the French model. The new 'Ambition Bleue's' objective was clear: keeping France in the Olympic Top Five and Paralympic Top Eight (Mouvens, 2025, p. 8).

Before the creation of the ANS, the French "high-level" model (*haut niveau*) was based on an institutional model structured around the State, federations, clubs, CREPS¹⁴ and Olympic committees. With the ANS, a transition took place towards a high-performance model, focused on measurable results and supported by scientific, technological and human resources. Beyond a change in terminology, this evolution marked a profound transformation in governance and objectives, driven by increased expectations of excellence and results (Mouvens, 2025, p.8).

Alongside performance reform, issues of equity and representation came under scrutiny. Gender imbalances, particularly in the Paralympic pool, were addressed, resulting in a parity target being set for Brisbane 2032 (40%), in line with the standards of the major Paralympic nations (40%) (MSJOP, 2023a, p.20).

Medals and international visibility also function as instruments of soft power. As noted in the MSJOP report, one of the stated ambitions of the French government was to position France among the top five at Paris 2024 (MSJOP, 2023a, p. 20). Prior to the 2024 Games, the reforms had already shown measurable results. For example, between 2019 and 2023, the number of Paralympic disciplines in which France was on the podium rose from 11 to 17, while it increased from 22 to 29 for Olympic disciplines (MSJOP, 2023b, p.11).

Hosting SMEs, particularly the Olympics and Paralympics, accelerated reforms within the French sporting model, prompting significant restructuring in governance, performance strategy and equity. The creation of the ANS, the implementation of 'Ambition Bleue', and the mobilisation of diverse stakeholders reflected a coordinated national effort to modernise performance structures in response to intensifying international competition. These initiatives aimed not only to improve results and strengthen fairness but also to reaffirm France's position

¹⁴ The CREPS (Centres de ressources, d'expertise et de performance sportive) are French local public institutions responsible for training and support in the fields of sport, youth and popular education. They play a central role in the preparation and development of high-level and elite athletes.

as a leading sporting nation equipped with and promoting a “culture of sustainable performance” (MSJOP, 2023b, p.11). Through its sporting model, France exercised its soft power, using sporting excellence to project a positive and compelling national image internationally (Grix & Lee, 2013; see Chapter 1, Section 5.5).

3.3 Hosting of SMEs: a strategic diplomatic lever for France

“France has developed a genuine sports diplomacy policy in recent years, with hosting major international competitions being one of its strategic objectives. As levers of influence, major international sporting events are intended to enhance our country's attractiveness and influence internationally, with a positive legacy in economic, social and environmental terms”¹⁵ (MSJOP, 2023a, p.48).

Over the past decade, sport has become an exceptional showcase for France, amplified by the visibility of athletes followed by millions on social media. France has strengthened its sports diplomacy by increasingly hosting SMEs¹⁶, supported by a significant increase in public investment. Annual funding grew from €3 million in 2018 to over €8 million in 2022, 2023, and 2024 (MSJOP, 2023a, p.48).

This strategy formed part of a broader ambition to raise France's profile globally and drive transformative change. SMEs were conceived as opportunities to showcase French companies' expertise, promote a values-based sporting model, and advance an ethical, inclusive vision of sport on the international stage. France also sought to use sport as a tool for cooperation and development, particularly with strategic partners such as several African nations, encouraging coordinated action across its international stakeholders (MSJOP, 2023a, p.48).

Following Paris 2024, more than 40 major sporting events were planned with State support, including recurring events such as the Tour de France and Roland-Garros, and major competitions such as the 2027 Canoe-Kayak World Championships and the 10th Rugby World Cup (MSJOP, 2023a, pp. 13-14). The International Wheelchair Rugby Cup was also planned to be held during the Rugby World Cup for the first time, offering unprecedented visibility to wheelchair rugby (MSJOP, 2023a, p. 14). As the MSJOP notes:

¹⁵ « La France a développé une véritable diplomatie sportive ces dernières années, dont l'accueil de grandes compétitions internationales constitue l'un des objectifs stratégiques. Leviers d'influence, les GESI doivent permettre de renforcer l'attractivité et le rayonnement de notre pays à l'international, avec un héritage positif dans les domaines économiques, sociaux et environnementaux ».

¹⁶ Throughout this thesis, the term SMEs refers to Sporting Mega Events. In French governmental reports, these are often referred to as GESI (*Grands Événements Sportifs Internationaux*). For consistency and clarity, the acronym SMEs is used throughout.

“By hosting these major events, France has the opportunity to showcase its expertise and set a new benchmark in terms of SMEs, based on unprecedented requirements in the areas of social and environmental issues, inclusion of people with disabilities, and the sporting and societal legacy left to the nation”¹⁷ (MSJOP, 2023a, p.13)

This commitment included the promotion of human rights, transparency and sustainable legacy planning, from preparation to post-event phases.

At the same time, France actively defended the French and European sports model in international forums, working to preserve the integrity of competitions. This included supporting and monitoring key conventions adopted by the Council of Europe (such as those on anti-doping, competition manipulation, and the convention against violence in stadiums), as well as the UNESCO Anti-Doping Convention (MSJOP, 2023a, p.48).

France’s sports diplomacy strategy, as mentioned in the MSJOP report of July 2023 (2023a, p.48), also aimed to strengthen its presence within international federations. Around twenty French nationals held positions within international federations and Francophone sports associations monitored by the Comité National Olympique et Sportif Français (French National Olympic and Sports Committee, CNOSF) in 2023 (MSJOP, July 2023, p. 48). To further enhance France’s attractiveness as an SME host, a dedicated interministerial status was established addressing fiscal considerations for international sports organisations (MSJOP, 2023a, p. 48).

In addition, France expanded its bilateral cooperation and strategic partnerships to sustain its SMEs hosting strategy. Among these strategic partnerships, the MSJOP notably supported Ukraine, allocating €1 million to facilitate the Ukrainian delegation’s participation in Paris 2024 (MSJOP, 2023a, p.48). Strategic partnerships were also established in the field of sport with many African countries, including Senegal, Benin, Cameroon, Guinea, and Algeria (MSJOP, 2023a, p.48).

The ‘French Sport Touch’, created by the MSJOP in 2017, reflected this coordinated diplomatic effort. Bringing together GIE France Sport Expertise, Business France and other actors, it promoted French expertise in event management and helped companies leverage experience gained through SMEs. Complementary initiatives such as ‘La Filière Sport’ and ‘GIE France Sport Expertise’ supported businesses in strengthening their capabilities by

¹⁷ « La France, en accueillant ces événements majeurs, a l’opportunité d’exprimer tous ses savoir-faire mais aussi de faire émerger une nouvelle référence en matière de GESI, basée sur des exigences inédites en matière sociale, écologique, d’inclusion des personnes en situation de handicap et d’héritage sportif et sociétal légué à la Nation ».

capitalising on the economic and social legacies of events hosted in 2023 and 2024 (MSJOP, 2023a, p.49).

Importantly, hosting SMEs was also seen as a way to foster domestic capacity. As the MSJOP stresses:

“Domestic markets are an essential showcase, and the economic and social legacy of the upcoming major sporting events in 2023 and 2024 must stimulate our ability to leverage this experience in a harmonious public-private partnership”¹⁸ (MSJOP, 2023a, p.49).

Overall, France developed an ambitious diplomatic strategy centred on hosting SMEs. This strategy aimed to strengthen France's international influence while generating positive social, environmental and economic legacies. Through strategic partnerships, improved coordination between sporting stakeholders, public investment and initiatives such as the ‘French Sport Touch’, France sought to position itself as a global leader in the organisation of SMEs, while enabling French businesses, stakeholders and institutions to reuse this expertise for future events. In doing so, France increased its global visibility while strengthening domestic capabilities and soft-power influence.

4. Social legacy and diplomacy

Sport is increasingly recognised as a lever for long-term social transformation and diplomatic engagement. This section explores how volunteering, inclusion and ecological responsibility contributed to shaping the social legacy of the Games while highlighting the role of institutions in aligning sport with broader societal priorities.

4.1 Volunteering

The culture of volunteering is deeply rooted in France, with more than 16 million volunteers, around a quarter of whom are active in the sports sector (Paris 2024, August 2021, pp. 122–123). Paris 2024 sought to build on this potential by reinforcing young people’s engagement through sport-based initiatives.

One of the flagship initiatives was ‘Génération 2024’, designed to encourage young people to participate in sport and to incorporate physical activity into the public-interest missions

¹⁸ « Les marchés domestiques représentent une vitrine essentielle et l'Héritage économique et social des prochains grands événements sportifs de 2023 et 2024 doit stimuler notre faculté à valoriser cette expérience dans un harmonieux partenariat public et privé ».

undertaken within schools, associations and local communities aiming to create a new generation of sports leaders. By promoting sport in educational and civic environments, this programme contributed to social cohesion and strengthened the civic legacy of the Games (Paris 2024, 2021, pp. 122–123).

Paris 2024 also aligned itself with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4 and 10) by using sport as a tool for youth engagement and equality. As part of the State's Legacy Plan, 10,000 young people were mobilised through the 'Génération 2024' civic service, integrating sport-related missions into Génération 2024-certified establishments, 'Terre de Jeux 2024' municipalities and local sports clubs (Paris 2024, 2021, pp. 122–123).

Additional programmes supported wider civic engagement and leadership development. The Universal National Service (SNU) raised awareness among young people about Olympic and Paralympic values, encouraging them to get involved in sport, while the CNOSF's 'Dirigeants de Demain' initiative sought to diversify leadership profiles by facilitating access to positions of responsibility, particularly for young women, at all levels of sport, from clubs to regional, national and international federations. These initiatives were part of a broader vision to cultivate a new generation of volunteers and leaders who can sustain the long-term civic legacy of the Games (Paris 2024, 2021, pp. 122-123)

For Paris 2024 volunteers, a dedicated skills development programme was created to encourage future vocations and strengthen the sports movement (MSJOP, 2024a, p. 21). Working with several partners, the Organising Committee co-developed an Open Badge recognising transversal skills mobilised such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving. This initiative was unique in the history of the Olympic Games and in the volunteering history of France. This credential was intended to be integrated into the digital skills passport developed by the 'Caisse des Dépôts', becoming a concrete asset in the economic and social legacy of the Games. This initiative aimed to enhance employability and professional mobility, especially for students and early-career volunteers, and could be shared across digital and professional platforms (MSJOP, 2024a, p. 25).

Volunteering for Paris 2024 also created opportunities to reinforce inclusion. One key objective was to train volunteers in welcoming people with disabilities, thereby reinforcing inclusion at the heart of the Olympic and Paralympic project. As Lambis Konstantinidis, Executive Director of Planning and Coordination for Paris 2024, explained: "During the Games, our venues will be accessible to people with different types of disabilities, and staff and volunteers will be

trained to welcome people with disabilities”¹⁹ (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.10). This approach reflects Paris 2024’s broader commitment to inclusivity, the visibility of para-athletes and the long-term promotion of disability awareness.

4.2 Promoting inclusion and representation

The feminisation of sports professions and leadership bodies was a priority for the Ministry of Sport, which supported the initiative launched by the CNOSF, ‘Club des 300 Dirigeantes’, designed to train and support women in leadership roles. Further work was undertaken as part of the Grenelle process to strengthen gender diversity across all sports professions, under the leadership of the MSJOP. In parallel, the six institutions²⁰ that signed the Paris Appeal²¹ were supported in implementing their action plans for gender equality and diversity. The relaunch of the Permanent Conference on Women's Sport aimed to structure the governance of women’s sport more sustainably and enhance its visibility (MSJOP, 2023a, p.42).

Several measures were introduced to promote inclusion. These included wheelchair reimbursement, €1.5 billion in accessibility improvements, and a reduction in VAT on assistive technologies, all intended to help people with disabilities participate in sport. Through ‘Club Inclusif’, led by Paris 2024, the CPSF and the Ministry of Sport, 3,000 sports centres received guidance on improving their accessibility (Paris 2024, 2024a, p. 6).

Beyond these initiatives, the City of Paris invested £100 million to improve accessibility more broadly, including accessible buses, adapted neighbourhoods and the deployment of 1,000 accessible taxis. These improvements were directly linked to the Paralympic Games (Paris 2024, 2024a, p. 6).

Media representation also formed a key part of the inclusion strategy. Subsidies granted by the Interministerial Delegation²² for SMEs became conditional on the organisation of parasport initiatives or demonstrations. The audiovisual fund of the National Sports Agency was increased, with a dedicated budget for women's sport to improve both visibility and broadcast quality. Additionally, the decree on events of major importance was under revision to

¹⁹ « Pendant les Jeux, nos sites seront accessibles aux différents types de handicap, le personnel et les volontaires seront formés à l'accueil des PSH »

²⁰ CNOSF; Comité Paralympique et Sportif Français (French Paralympic and Sports Committee, CPSF); Association Nationale des Ligues Sportives Professionnelles (National Association of Professional Sports Leagues, ANLSP); Conseil Social du Mouvement Sportif (Social Council of the Sports Movement, CoSMoS); Fédération Nationale des Associations de Sport Santé (National Federation of Sport and Health Associations, FNASS); and Fédération de l'Enseignement Physique et de Gymnastique Volontaire (Federation for Physical Education and Voluntary Gymnastics, FEP)

²¹ Appel de Paris

²² Délégation Interministérielle aux Grands Événements Sportifs

guarantee free-to-air broadcasting of women's sport and parasport (MSJOP, 2023a, p. 42). As Lambis Konstantinidis, Executive Director of Planning and Coordination for Paris 2024 underlined:

"The transformative power of sport, combined with the world's biggest event, is an incredible opportunity to accelerate the momentum towards a more inclusive society, which we are seizing every day"²³ (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.10).

Accessibility was integrated into the design of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games from the beginning. A dedicated strategy was approved in 2021, stipulating that Paralympic sports would be held at the same iconic venues as Olympic sports and that innovative measures would be implemented to ensure an inclusive experience for all audiences, including people with disabilities. As part of the legacy, infrastructures such as the Athletes' Village and the Olympic Aquatics Centre were planned to meet the highest accessibility standards. The Athletes' Village, for instance, was designed to offer 100% accessible accommodation (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.10).

All these efforts culminated in Paris 2024 contributing to the evolution of international standards for responsible events, notably by initiating changes to ISO 20121 and integrating universal accessibility as a central requirement of the standard (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.10).

Overall, the Ministry of Sport and Paris 2024 implemented multiple initiatives to promote inclusion and representation ranging from gender equality programmes such as 'Club des 300 dirigeantes' and the 'Grenelle process', to major accessibility reforms and enhanced visibility for women's and parasports in the media. By integrating universal accessibility into infrastructure and governance, and by influencing international standards, Paris 2024 projected a model of inclusive and socially responsible sport. These efforts supported France's soft power by promoting a model of inclusive and socially responsible sport on the global stage and by setting new standards for future games.

4.3 Adapting to contemporary challenges: the ecological transition as a diplomatic and societal lever

The Ministry of Sport recognised its responsibility in driving social change, stating:

"We seek to support the sporting world in becoming more aware of its social responsibility, whether by encouraging it to play its part in the major transformations of our time, such as

²³ « Le pouvoir de transformation du sport, associé au plus grand événement du monde, est une opportunité incroyable d'accélérer la dynamique vers une société plus inclusive, que nous saisissons chaque jour. »

the ecological transition, in particular by placing moderation at the heart of the organisation of events and practices, or by fighting tirelessly against all forms of discrimination and violence, which can never, under any circumstances, be justified”²⁴(MSJOP, 2023a, p. 45).

Paris 2024 embraced the ambition of social change from the bid phase, committing to a model of Games that were spectacular but also environmentally responsible. As Georgina Grenon, Director of Environmental Excellence for Paris 2024, emphasised, sustainability had been integrated into all aspects of the Games, following the principle of doing more with less to leave a lasting legacy at a moment when the world was watching Paris 2024 (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.8).

The Paris Games were highly ambitious in terms of environmental protection. The Games aligned with the Paris Agreement, the UN 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. These ambitions required a new methodological framework in which climate and environmental considerations became key decision-making criteria. Georgina Grenon, emphasised that Paris 2024 had made carbon footprint “an input rather than an outcome”²⁵ (Paris 2024, 2021, p.10).

To engage the sports sector in energy efficiency and environmental adaptation, the MSJOP launched an ‘Energy Efficiency Plan for Sport’. This plan outlined concrete measures such as reducing temperatures in gymnasiums and swimming pools and lowering lighting levels during professional rugby and football matches. The energy renovation programme for sports facilities, led by the ANS was extended, and a dedicated working group on the mobility of professional clubs was created to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions linked to travel.

Furthermore, a national plan to adapt sports practice to climate change was underway, including the publication of a *Guide to a Responsible Summer of Sport* and the establishment of a forward-planning unit within the Sports Department. The second phase of the ‘Plan national d’adaptation au changement climatique Sport’ (National Climate Change Adaptation Plan for Sport, PNACC Sport), carried out with the Ministry of Ecological Transition, aimed to structure long-term responses to the effects of climate change on sporting practices (Paris 2024, 2021).

The Paris 2024 sustainability strategy also sought to expand internationally and to build a clean, unique and transferable legacy for the international sports movement. This included

²⁴ « Nous cherchons à accompagner la prise de conscience par le monde sportif de sa responsabilité en matière sociale, que ce soit en l’encourageant à prendre toute sa part aux grandes transformations de notre temps comme la transition écologique, notamment en inscrivant la sobriété au cœur de l’organisation des événements comme des pratiques, mais aussi à lutter sans relâche contre toutes les formes de discriminations et de violences que rien, jamais, n’autorise ».

²⁵ « nous avons fait de l’empreinte carbone une donnée d’entrée plutôt qu’un bilan ».

international cooperation, calls for projects and educational initiatives around sport and climate, as well as mobilising stakeholders around themes such as peace and sport (Paris 2024, 2021, p.23)

The Ministry of Sport and Paris 2024 positioned ecological transition as a core responsibility of the sports sector, integrating sustainability into all aspects of the Games. Paris 2024's alignment with international frameworks such as the Paris Agreement and the UN SDGs demonstrated French leadership in climate-conscious sport governance. This approach was also a reflection of a contemporary diplomatic practice in which states seek to address global challenges through norm-setting and the diffusion of standards. Through regulatory innovation, international cooperation and the promotion of transferable models for sustainable events, these efforts reinforced France's diplomatic influence and positioned the country as a reference for environmentally responsible SMEs management.

4.4 2024 National Cause: making sport a societal priority

As mentioned above, Paris 2024 served as a lever for societal transformation and aimed to act as a “vehicle for youth development”²⁶ (MSJOP, 2024a, p.18). By designating physical activity and sport as a ‘Major National Cause’ for the first time, the public authorities affirmed their intention to place sport at the heart of public policy in response to significant challenges in health, education, inclusion, and social cohesion. In this section, the focus is placed specifically on the health dimension.

In response to the public-health challenge posed by rising sedentary behaviour among young people, particularly exposed to screens, a series of ambitious measures have been rolled out as part of Paris 2024, targeting young people primarily during school hours. These measures aimed to increase physical activity from an early age, through the introduction of 30 minutes of daily physical activity at school, which was planned for rollout in all primary schools by the end of 2023, complementing three hours of weekly sport. The development of the ‘Savoir Rouler à vélo’ programme, with a target of issuing 850,000 certificates annually by 2027, the addition of two hours of weekly sport in secondary schools, and targeted initiatives such as ‘Retrouve ton cap’ to support overweight children, further strengthened this approach. These efforts were reinforced by educational labels such as ‘Génération 2024’ and ‘Lycées professionnels et sport’, as well as ‘Pass’Sport’, which facilitated access to club sport for more than one million young people. Olympic Day and Paralympic Day were also integrated into

²⁶ « vecteur d'épanouissement de la jeunesse »

school and university timetables to introduce students to sporting activities (MSJOP, 2024a, p.18).

In this context, the President of the Republic's decision to designate physical activity and sport as a 'National Cause for 2024' marked a strong political commitment to placing sport at the heart of society. All initiatives taken under 'Sport as a National Cause' sought to encourage daily physical activity and raise awareness of the benefits of sport for health, self-confidence and social cohesion (MSJOP, 2024a, p. 22). As the MSJOP report stated:

"Everything is being done to ensure that 2024 will go down in our national history as the year when sport finally took its rightful place at the heart of our society and in the service of all our fellow citizens"²⁷ (MSJOP, 2024a, p.22).

This national mobilisation around sport as a lever for social transformation was not unique to France. Paris 2024 framed sport as a tool aligned with the SDGs, recognising sports' potential to provide solutions on a global scale. In line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda, Paris 2024 developed an innovative international legacy strategy based on cooperation and guided by two main principles:

"It extends the priorities of the national strategy aimed at supporting sports for the benefit of health, education, environment, inclusion, equality, and civic engagement. It relies on innovative and enduring collaborations with stakeholders (the French NOC, the French Development Agency, the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs) with international presence and expertise, all sharing the ambition of harnessing the energy of the Games for the benefit of all, in France and worldwide"²⁸ (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.180)

Thus, the actions carried out in France, whether in education, inclusion, environmental initiatives or, as developed in this section, public health, resonated with wider international ambitions to position sport as a universal societal tool.

Beyond its domestic impact, this mobilisation around sport reflects a contemporary form of diplomacy, where states respond to shared global challenges, such as public health, youth well-being and social cohesion, by promoting policy models and norms internationally.

²⁷ « Tout est engagé pour que 2024 demeure, dans notre histoire nationale, comme l'année qui aura vu le sport prendre enfin la place qu'il mérite au cœur de notre société et au service de l'ensemble de nos concitoyens. »

²⁸ « Elle est un prolongement des priorités de la stratégie nationale visant à soutenir la pratique sportive au bénéfice de la santé, de l'éducation, de l'environnement, de l'inclusion, de l'égalité et de l'engagement citoyen ; Elle s'appuie sur des coopérations innovantes et pérennes avec des acteurs (CNOSF, Agence Française de Développement (AFD), ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Etrangères) ayant une présence et une compétence internationale, tous animés par la même ambition : mettre l'énergie des Jeux au bénéfice de tous, en France et dans le monde ».

These initiatives illustrate how Paris 2024's social legacy formed a coherent societal strategy. Through volunteering, inclusion and representation, ecological transition, and public-health mobilisation, the Games functioned as a platform for aligning sport with broader social priorities while responding to shared global challenges. While rooted in domestic policy, these actions also acquired diplomatic significance by projecting policy models, norms and practices internationally, reinforcing France's soft power. This social dimension of legacy provides a foundation for understanding how Paris 2024's ambitions were further materialised through urban transformation and infrastructure development.

5. Urban and infrastructure diplomacy

Urban and infrastructure development constituted a central pillar of Paris 2024's legacy. Beyond their functional and social objectives, the investments associated with the Games were designed to democratises access to sport, support local development and respond to territorial inequalities, while projecting a model of inclusive, sustainable and decentralised urban governance. The French government therefore launched an unprecedented policy on sports facilities, aimed at expanding access to sport across territories. Alongside Olympic infrastructure intended to be reused after the Games to promote local development, ambitious investment programmes were rolled out to support local authorities and meet the needs of the population. These policies positioned urban transformation and infrastructure development as vehicles through which France sought to demonstrate governance capacity, territorial cohesion and socially responsible development, aligning domestic investment and development with international visibility and soft-power objectives.

5.1 Territorial development as a driver of sustainable change

The 'Génération 2024 Plan' allocated an additional €300 million between 2024 and 2026 to deliver 5,000 new facilities, including active school playgrounds, structural facilities such as swimming pools, and local sports infrastructure. These investments supported local education and sports policies and reflected a diversification of uses encouraged by freely accessible facilities and public funding such as the 'Green Fund', which enabled the renovation of hundreds of projects according to ecological criteria (MSJOP, 2024a, p. 19).

Furthermore, the 1,029 Games Preparation Centres spread across the country aimed to equip all regions with modern sports facilities by mobilising £25 million to host top-level athletes, while ensuring shared access for local clubs. This sporting heritage was intended to be promoted after the Games via a dedicated digital platform for organising training camps,

thereby enhancing the international appeal of French regions and supporting the long-term legacy of the Games. As Frédéric Sanaur, Director General of the ANS, noted, this extensive investment policy, supported by the State in partnership with local authorities, sought to increase participation over the long term and to anchor the Games within a logic of territorial and social legacy (MSJOP, 2024a, p. 19).

The Olympic Games represented also an opportunity to renovate and transform the Île-de-France region, as highlighted in pre-Games reports. This ambition was articulated by Anne Hidalgo, Mayor of Paris and President of SOLIDEO, in the publication *Paris 2024: The Material Legacy of the Paris Games* (SOLIDEO & Paris 2024, 2023, p.4). The Games also accelerated projects to regenerate and adapt the region to contemporary challenges such as climate and environmental sustainability (SOLIDEO & Paris 2024, 2023, p.4).

This regeneration of the region primarily concerned Seine-Saint-Denis, the department at the heart of the Olympic project. Historically marked by social and urban inequalities, the region received 80% of public investment related to the Games, becoming the focal point of a sustainable transformation strategy, as highlighted by Minister Oudéa-Castéra (SOLIDEO & Paris 2024, 2023, p.4)

Under SOLIDEO, 64 Olympic facilities were delivered by the end of 2023, with the ambition to make the Games a catalyst for urban, social and environmental development. Industrial wastelands were transformed into new neighbourhoods, such as the Athletes' and Media Villages, designed to be reversible and fully integrated into the local urban fabric after the Games. These facilities offered an opportunity to showcase French expertise in sustainable construction and proposed a new model capable of adapting to environmental challenges (Paris 2024 & SOLIDEO, 2023, p.4)

The Canal Saint-Denis, for instance, underwent major developments to improve connectivity and reduce urban fragmentation, including new cycle crossings and continuous soft-mobility routes. The Games also enabled significant rehabilitation of aquatic environments, with ambitious objectives such as making the Seine swimmable and hosting one of the swimming events directly in the river (Paris 2024 & SOLIDEO, 2023, p. 4). These interventions formed part of a broader vision centred on sustainability, climate resilience and territorial justice, focusing on residents' quality of life and the ecological transformation of urban spaces. In this sense, Paris 2024 became a lever for structural change in the Île-de-France region.

It is important to note that these redevelopment projects responded to long-term regional needs, involving local stakeholders in planning processes. As noted in the Paris 2024 and SOLIDEO report:

“Beyond temporary use during the Games, the aim is to improve the living environment for residents by building, renovating and making local public facilities accessible. Designed to the most demanding standards, these facilities are shaping the city of tomorrow: more sustainable, more inclusive and more accessible”²⁹ (Paris 2024 & SOLIDEO, 2023, p.10).

The Games also accelerated transformations in terms of accessibility to public spaces and infrastructure, as illustrated by the Olympic Village, as emphasised by Minister Delegate for People with Disabilities Fadila Khattabi (Paris 2024, 2024a, p. 167).

The transformation of Seine-Saint-Denis and the wider region illustrated a form of urban diplomacy that sought to make the Games an exportable model of sustainable urban regeneration. As Amélie Oudéa-Castéra explained:

“Thus, a century after inventing the first Olympic Village in history in Colombes, France is placing its Games in the grand tradition of urban planning established by Vauban, Haussmann and Delouvrier, by building a new global benchmark in construction and a source of inspiration for all regions and beyond”³⁰ (Paris 2024 & SOLIDEO, 2023, p.5).

Urban and infrastructure legacies of SMEs are not only limited to material development. They can also be understood as politically and diplomatically meaningful. From an urban diplomacy perspective, large-scale regeneration projects function as visible demonstrations of a city’s capacity for governance, sustainability and long-term planning, signalling competence and responsibility to international audiences. As Acuto (2013) argues, cities increasingly act as diplomatic actors through their spatial transformations, using urban redevelopment to align local agendas with global expectations and to insert themselves into international networks. In this sense, the urban investments associated with Paris 2024 can be read as responses to domestic territorial needs but also as components of a broader diplomatic strategy, in which urban regeneration, infrastructure delivery and sustainability standards were mobilised to project an exportable model of inclusive and environmentally responsible urban development strengthening France’s soft power.

²⁹ « Au-delà d’une utilisation temporaire pendant les Jeux, il s’agit donc d’améliorer le cadre de vie des habitants, en construisant, en rénovant et en mettant en accessibilité des équipements publics de proximité. Conçus selon les normes en vigueur les plus exigeantes, ces équipements dessinent la ville de demain : plus durable, plus inclusive, plus accessible. »

³⁰ « C’est ainsi qu’un siècle après avoir inventé le premier village olympique de l’histoire à Colombes, la France inscrit ses Jeux dans une grande tradition d’aménagement du territoire, celle de Vauban, d’Haussmann et de Delouvrier, en bâtissant une nouvelle référence mondiale en matière de construction autant qu’une source d’inspiration pour l’ensemble des territoires et au-delà. »

5.2 Building the city of tomorrow: sustainability, accessibility and quality of life

The urban legacy of the Paris 2024 Games was designed to respond to the climate challenges of 2050, the requirements of social diversity and the imperatives of quality of life. Olympic projects were conceived according to a strategy centred on the territory, focusing first on optimising existing infrastructure, accelerating useful local projects, preparing the city of tomorrow, and acting as an accelerator for universal accessibility (Paris 2024 & SOLIDEO, 2023, p. 15). Preparing the city of tomorrow involved reducing the carbon footprint across the entire life cycle of buildings, ensuring urban comfort and promoting biodiversity preservation (Paris 2024 & SOLIDEO, 2023, p. 15).

The Athletes' Village, located between the municipalities of Saint-Denis, Saint-Ouen and l'Île-Saint-Denis, embodied these ambitions. Designed as a fully accessible and adapted to future climate challenges, this neighbourhood was intended to be converted after the Games into a residential and mixed-use space, housing homes, shops, public facilities and green spaces. It illustrated an approach to urban planning based on reversibility and long-term community benefit (Paris 2024 & SOLIDEO, 2023, p. 21).

Similarly, the ZAC Saulnier, planned for 200,000 m² of post-Games development, focused strongly on development and innovation in the cultural and sporting fields. The aim was to create a balanced neighbourhood combining housing, economic activities, sports facilities and public spaces, shops and services, complementing major infrastructures such as the Olympic Aquatic Centre and supporting territorial cohesion (Paris 2024 & SOLIDEO, 2023, p.27)

The Olympic Aquatic Centre, located near the Stade de France, served as a model of eco-construction. It was also the only facility built specifically for the Games that was intended to remain afterwards. Its pools were planned to be redistributed to several municipalities in Seine-Saint-Denis, strengthening the local supply of aquatic facilities. It was also intended to host high-level events (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.17).

Finally, the Élan court hill, a natural site rehabilitated to host mountain biking events, was set to be transformed into a renatured and accessible leisure area, offering residents a peaceful living environment conducive to outdoor activities (Paris 2024 & SOLIDEO, 2023, p.53).

These projects reflected a strong ambition to make the Games a catalyst for ecological and social transition by building sustainable and inclusive urban spaces adapted to the needs of future generations. The developments carried out as part of Paris 2024 formed part of a long-term territorial transformation strategy.

In terms of accessibility, building the city of tomorrow meant ensuring universal access through the creation of new inclusive facilities and the upgrading of existing ones (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.17)

With regard to quality of life, Paris 2024 opted for simplicity in its infrastructures as 95% of venues were temporary or existing structures (MSJOP, 2024a, p.6). This approach avoided the creation of “white elephants” while enabling sustainable territorial transformation and improving residents’ living environments. All construction and renovation projects were carried out in close consultation with local stakeholders to meet the real needs of territories, particularly in Seine-Saint-Denis and Greater Paris metropolitan area. Environmental priorities remained central, with low-carbon buildings and developments designed to withstand climate change. Sustainability was ensured by the commitment that 100% of permanent facilities would be handed over to residents after 2024, guaranteeing a concrete and useful legacy (MSJOP, 2024a, p. 6).

According to the reports, Games venues, whether permanent or temporary, met the environmental excellence and accessibility requirements established by SOLIDEO and Paris 2024, thanks to a new delivery model that maintained a strong ecological ambition and ensured consistency with the sustainable legacy strategy (Paris 2024, 2021, p.39).

The legacy of the Paris 2024 Games extended beyond new construction, encompassing the renovation and redevelopment of existing sports infrastructure with the aim of making facilities more sustainable, modern and accessible. The Arena Porte de la Chapelle, delivered as part of the Games, illustrated this dual purpose: a multi-use venue designed to host international competitions while also serving local communities (MSJOP, 2024a, pp. 12–13).

In the Île-de-France region, more than 20 sports facilities were modernised, such as the Stade Yves-du-Manoir, a historic venue for the 1924 Games, completely renovated to host competitions and local sports activities, several swimming pools in Paris and the Île-de-France region, including those in Colombes, modernised to meet current standards, Gymnasiums and multi-sport facilities, adapted to the needs of clubs and schools, the Grand Palais Éphémère, converted into an event and sports venue, demonstrating the reversibility of temporary infrastructure (MSJOP, 2024a, pp.12-13).

Interpreted through a diplomatic lens, the urban and infrastructure strategy of Paris 2024 reveals a set of interconnected objectives rather than a single legacy logic. As with London 2012, urban transformation was framed around a dual ambition: on the one hand, to

improve facilities, access and quality of life for local populations, particularly in historically disadvantaged territories, thereby reinforcing social cohesion, and on the other, to sustain France's position as a leading sporting nation through the development of high-quality venues capable of hosting international competitions.

This dual framing connected domestic priorities with international projection. By investing in accessible, multi-use facilities embedded within local communities, Paris 2024, like London 2012, sought simultaneously to strengthen community ties, encourage everyday sporting practice, and maintain an infrastructure that supports elite performance and global sporting visibility. Environmental sustainability and climate resilience further reinforced this approach, embedding ecological objectives across urban regeneration projects. This interconnection between community-oriented developments, sporting ambition and environmental considerations gives the urban legacy of the Games a clear diplomatic dimension.

5.3 Transport and territorial cohesion: the Games as a catalyst for local reconnection

Another major urban-development objective concerned transport, which aimed to reconnect territories and reduce long-standing spatial divides. To promote soft mobility, five footbridges were planned for the Games to bridge disconnected areas and, at the same time, revitalise local neighbourhoods (Paris 2024 & SOLIDEO, 2023, p. 54). Among these new structures was a footbridge linking the Stade de France and the Olympic Aquatic Centre, providing easy access between two major sites.

Beyond these bridges, the Games provided an opportunity for the State and its partners to expand other types of soft mobility, such as public transport lines (tram, metro), stations renovations and the creation of cycling corridors (MSJOP, 2024a, p. 12). The ambition was to make Paris 2024 the first “cycling Games” in history, by promoting a transition to more environmentally friendly modes of transport (MSJOP, 2023a, p.18). In practice, line 14 was extended northwards to Saint-Denis and southwards to Orly Airport, Porte Maillot was redeveloped and greened and major stations such as Gare du Nord and Saint-Denis were modernised. Paris also planned 120 km of new cycle paths through the creation of an Olympic cycling network³¹ (Paris 2024 & SOLIDEO, 2023, p. 54). As Patrice Vergriete, Minister Delegate for Transport, noted:

³¹ For the complete list of measures, see SOLIDEO (2023) L'héritage matériel des Jeux de Paris 2024. Dossier de presse, September. Available at: <https://www.ouvrages-olympiques.fr/sites/default/files/fichiers/paris-2024-dossier-de-presse-heritage-materiel-des-jeux-652d40d2d8532302826803.pdf>

“The Games will leave a tangible legacy for users and local areas. The priority given to public transport and active mobility will remain a legacy for more sustainable mobility, whether through new public transport infrastructure, the creation of cycle paths, or the greening of the boat fleets on the Seine. The Games will also improve the accessibility of our transport systems. Our goal is to make this event a catalyst for concrete change for people with disabilities”³² (MSJOP, 2024a, p.12)

These mobility initiatives also formed part of the government’s broader commitment to decarbonising mobility as much as possible (MSJOP, 2023a, p.14).

Mobility became part of the Games’ diplomatic legacy, linking domestic territorial cohesion with internationally visible commitments to decarbonisation, inclusion and long-term urban planning.

5.4A particular focus on certain areas: Seine-Saint-Denis.

An iconic location for the Paris 2024 Games, Seine-Saint-Denis embodied both the challenges and possibilities of an Olympic legacy. The youngest and poorest department in France, and also one of the most lacking in sports facilities, particularly aquatic facilities, was placed at the heart of the development and public investment strategy (Paris 2024 & SOLIDEO, 2023, p.17). It received approximately 80% of all public investment, amounting to €3 billion (MSJOP, 2024a, p.7). The intention was that most of the material legacy would be concentrated in Seine-Saint-Denis.

As part of the 2016–2021 Swimming Pool Plan, several pools were built or renovated, with particular attention to accessibility and territorial distribution. These facilities responded to strong local demand and contributed to teaching swimming and reducing inequalities in access to physical activity. The ZAC Saulnier, the Marseille Marina (as part of inter-territorial cooperation) and the Élancourt hill similarly reflected a desire to renature and create sustainable living spaces (MSJOP, 2024a, p.7).

The Athletes’ Village completed in six years instead of fifteen, reduced its carbon footprint by 47% through the recovery of 96% of construction waste and the use of geothermal energy. This project, led by SOLIDEO, served as a benchmark for the housing sector, offering methods to accelerate housing construction in other priority areas (MSJOP, 2024a, p.7).

³² « Les Jeux seront un héritage concret au service des usagers et des territoires. La priorité donnée aux transports en commun ainsi qu’aux mobilités actives restera un héritage pour des mobilités plus durables que ce soit par les nouvelles infrastructures de transport en commun, la création de pistes cyclables, ou le verdissement des flottes de bateaux sur la Seine. Les Jeux permettront également de gagner en accessibilité pour nos transports. Notre objectif est de faire de cet événement un accélérateur de changements concrets pour les personnes en situation de handicap. »³²

In Saint-Ouen, the legacy included the renovation of 1,500 homes, the construction of 1,300 new homes (more than 25% of which were social housing), the creation of a school and a nursery, seven hectares of new green space, and new shops. The redevelopment of the riverbanks enabled the reappropriation of the banks of the Seine by residents. According to Karim Bouamrane, Mayor of Saint-Ouen, the Games were “a catalyst for the implementation of our shared progress policies that will improve the lives of our residents” (MSJOP, 2024a, p.7).

These projects contributed to the urban, social and environmental transformation of Seine-Saint-Denis, offering residents an improved living environment, modern infrastructures and a renewed sense of local pride. All permanent facilities were planned to be transferred to residents after the event, reinforcing a long-term sporting and urban legacy.

Beyond Seine-Saint-Denis, the urban legacy of the Games benefited the wider Île-de-France region and other territories. In Île-de-France, the challenge of making the Seine and Marne rivers swimmable mobilised €1.4 billion in investment to clean waterways, modernise sanitation systems and open around 20 supervised swimming sites by 2025, while promoting biodiversity and river-fleet decarbonisation (MSJOP, 2024a, p.11).

In other territories, the Games accelerated structural projects: in Lille, the athletes’ village was set to become a student and co-living residence; in Tahiti, new tourist and sports facilities and infrastructure was developed; in Marseille, the renovated marina and nautical stadium were intended to benefit both the public and elite athletes; in Châteauroux, the renovation of reception sites and local heritage was expected to leave a positive legacy for the city and its suburbs (MSJOP, 2024a, p.13)

Finally, the Île-de-France region took advantage of the Games to finance 2,600 sports facilities, improve transport (extension of line 14, Éole, Saint-Denis Pleyel station) and enhance the attractiveness of centres of excellence such as Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines and Vaires-sur-Marne, aiming to become “the largest whitewater centre in Europe” (MSJOP, 2024a, p.13).

The urban regeneration associated with Paris 2024 contributed simultaneously to community development and elite sporting ambition, illustrating the interconnection of multiple diplomatic legacies. Investments in accessible, multi-use facilities supported everyday sporting practice and social cohesion, while also sustaining high-performance infrastructures capable of hosting

elite training and international competitions, thereby reinforcing France's identity as a leading sporting nation and complementing performance-based and medal-related diplomacy.

This logic extended beyond the Paris region. Strategic investments in territories such as Marseille and Tahiti demonstrate how Olympic-driven urban and infrastructure legacies were mobilised across metropolitan and non-metropolitan spaces. In Tahiti in particular, the development of new sporting infrastructures associated with the Games positioned an overseas territory within France's international sporting narrative, illustrating how urban diplomacy can operate across diverse territorial scales. At the same time, the ambition to establish centres of excellence, such as Vaires-sur-Marne as a European benchmark for white-water sport, linked urban legacy to international competitiveness within the European and global sporting landscape.

These dynamics illustrate what Rofe and Chatziefstathiou (2024) describe as a "network of networks" of sports diplomacy, whereby Olympic-related activities generate diplomatic effects across social, urban, performance and sustainability domains. Rather than operating as isolated legacies, urban infrastructure, elite sport development and territorial regeneration functioned as interconnected elements through which Paris 2024's legacy extended into domestic policy, international sporting competition and broader diplomatic practice (Rofe & Chatziefstathiou, 2024, p. 6).

6. Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Paris 2024 can be interpreted as a strategic exercise in soft power and sports diplomacy. Across its preparation and delivery, the Games were framed as instruments for strengthening France's international influence while aligning with long-term national development objectives and addressing a range of contemporary challenges.

From an economic perspective, Paris 2024 functioned as a platform for economic diplomacy. Through sustainable procurement, licensing and merchandising strategies, regional development initiatives and strong financial governance, the Games generated tangible benefits across France. With significant public investment and transparent budgetary oversight, the Olympic and Paralympic Games reinforced France's credibility as a host capable of delivering large-scale events responsibly, enhancing its international reputation and comparative advantage in the global competition to host future SMEs.

Cultural and sporting diplomacy also played a central role. Media innovation, digital engagement and performance-oriented strategies such as 'Ambition Bleue' contributed to reshaping France's sporting model in a context of intensified international competition. Athletic performance, elite training infrastructures and medal-related ambitions were embedded within

a broader diplomatic narrative that linked sporting excellence to national prestige and international visibility.

At the social level, volunteering and inclusion programmes strengthened accessibility standards and public-health initiatives positioned sport as a tool for social cohesion, equality and societal transformation. Although focusing domestic policy, these initiatives acquired diplomatic significance by aligning France with global agendas related to health, inclusion and sustainable development, and by projecting policy models that resonated beyond the national context.

Environmental sustainability and ecological transition were integrated across all dimensions of the Games, aligning Olympic delivery with the Paris Agreement and the UN SDGs. These commitments reinforced France's positioning as a leader in climate-conscious governance and contributed to the international normalisation of sustainability standards in the organisation of SMEs.

Urban and infrastructure legacies further illustrate the interconnected nature of these diplomatic dimensions. Urban regeneration associated with Paris 2024 supported community development and improved access to sport while also sustaining elite-level infrastructures capable of hosting international competitions, reinforcing France's identity as a leading sporting nation. This dynamic extended beyond the Paris region, with strategic investments in territories such as Seine-Saint-Denis, Marseille and Tahiti, demonstrating how Olympic-driven legacies operated across metropolitan and overseas spaces. The development of centres of excellence and high-performance venues also linked urban transformation to international competitiveness within European and global sporting landscapes.

These dynamics illustrate what Rofe and Chatziefstathiou describe as a "network of networks" (2024) of sports diplomacy, in which economic, social, urban, environmental and performance-based legacies interact rather than operate in isolation. Paris 2024's legacy demonstrate how SMEs can mobilise interconnected legacy dimensions to bridge domestic priorities with international objectives, positioning the Games as a multifaceted instrument of diplomacy and soft power.

Chapter 6 Framing Paris 2024: post-games reports, diplomacy, and soft power

“The Games have a transformative power like no other. A century ago, the Summer Olympic Games organised by France, the most recent to date, marked a triple turning point for the Games themselves, which entered the modern era for good, for popular participation in our country, which took off, and for Greater Paris, which began to take shape. [...] By returning to the Summer Olympic Games this year and organising its very first Summer Paralympic Games, France could only renew this transformative ambition and even take it to a whole new level. This is based on a key concept: legacy, which beautifully expresses the organic, intimate link between what one generation passes on to the next, like a baton. [...] The Games of an entire country and a nation that is opening its doors wide. It's quite simple: through these Games, our country has showcased the best it has to offer – its ability to deliver major projects, its boldness and its universalism – and turned them into vectors of progress”³³ (MSJOP, 2024a, p.4).

In this discourse, Amélie Oudéa-Castéra, Minister of Sports, highlighted the unique opportunity offered by Paris 2024 to redefine France's global image while ensuring a lasting legacy. Post-Games reports presented the Paris 2024 Games a national success in terms of celebration, global visibility and organisational performance. They emphasised France's ability to deliver a world-class event and to mobilise a broad range of public and private stakeholders. Beyond celebrating sporting excellence, most post-Games publications (see appendix A) highlighted a broader ambition: to secure the long-term legacy and transformative potential of the Games across France's institutions, territories and society.

These documents constructed a narrative positioning Paris 2024 within a long-term dynamic, presenting its legacy as multidimensional (territorial, social, environmental, cultural, economic, and diplomatic). This narrative rested on a unifying vision of “bringing the planet together around the emotions of sport”³⁴ (Paris 2024, 2025, p.8), and on a method encapsulated in the slogan “Let's open up the Games”³⁵, combining celebration, participation and legacy (Paris 2024, March 2025, p.8).

³³ « Les Jeux ont une force de transformation à nulle autre pareille. Déjà, il y a un siècle, les Jeux olympiques d'été organisés par la France, les derniers en date, furent un triple tournant pour les Jeux eux-mêmes, qui entrèrent définitivement dans la modernité, pour la pratique populaire dans notre pays, qui s'envola, ainsi que pour le Grand Paris, qui commença à se structurer. [...] En retrouvant les Jeux olympiques d'été cette année, et en organisant ses tout premiers Jeux paralympiques d'été, la France ne pouvait que renouer, et même porter à un niveau inédit, cette ambition transformatrice. Autour d'une notion-clé : l'héritage, qui dit joliment ce lien organique, intime, dans ce qu'une génération, à la manière d'un relais, transmet aux suivantes. [...] Les Jeux de tout un pays et d'une nation qui les ouvre en grand. C'est bien simple : notre pays, à travers ces Jeux, a fait rayonné ce qu'il a de meilleur – sa capacité à délivrer de grands projets, son audace et son universalisme – et en fait des vecteurs de progress

³⁴ « Réunir la planète autour des émotions du sport ».

³⁵ Ouvrir Grand les Jeux

Several recurring themes emerged from these post-Games reports. First, a strong emphasis was placed on territorial and social legacy, with a focus on Seine-Saint-Denis, principal beneficiary of investment. Second, the Games were presented as accelerator of accessibility and inclusion, defining achievements of Paris 2024 and setting new standards for future SMEs. As Andrew Parsons, President of the International Paralympic Committee, observed, Paris had made “more progress than any other Paralympic host city over the same period”³⁶ (Paris 2024, 2024b, p.9). Third, sustainability remained central, with environmental transition presented as a core outcome of the Games, notably through infrastructure and soft mobility development. Anne Hidalgo declared that Paris had committed to making the Games: “a catalyst for ecological and social transformation”³⁷ (Paris 2024, 2024b, p.11).

The reports also highlighted efforts to engage younger generations through urban sports, celebration venues and the Cultural Olympiad, framing Paris 2024 as a redefinition of the Olympic experience that connected sport with everyday life, culture and artistic expression (Paris 2024, 2025, p. 12).

Finally, Paris 2024 was portrayed as an innovative Games, intended to inspire future host cities by setting new standards. Programmes such as ‘Terre de Jeux 2024’ and ‘Marathon pour Tous’ expanded participation and reinforced the image of the Games as a shared national project. As Marie Barsacq, Director of Impact and Legacy, stated: “the central issue now is that of legacy: we must secure our results and pass on the baton so that the positive impact of the Games continues in the long term”³⁸ (Paris 2024, 2024b, p.12).

Crucially, post-Games reports did more than assess a successful event, they constructed a diplomatic narrative. Paris 2024 was framed as evidence of a France that sought to appear ambitious, united, inclusive and innovative, capable of using sport as a lever for transformation, cohesion and international influence.

This chapter analyses the key legacies identified in post-Games reports and examines their diplomatic significance, focusing on how Paris 2024 set new benchmarks for the organisation of SMEs and how this framing supported France’s post-Games soft-power projection.

1. Economic diplomacy

Before examining economic diplomacy, it is important to note that, at the time of writing, the economic assessments available on the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games focused

³⁶ « Au niveau de son chemin, je pense que Paris a réalisé plus de progrès que toute autre ville hôte paralympique sur la même période ».

³⁷ « Paris s’est engagée pour faire de ces Jeux des leviers de transformation écologique et sociale ».

³⁸ « L’enjeu central est maintenant celui de l’héritage : nous devons sécuriser nos résultats et passer le relais, pour que l’impact positif des Jeux se poursuive, à long terme ».

primarily on the preparation (2018–2024) and staging phases. The ex-post report produced by EY in April 2025, commissioned by the Ministry of Sport, constituted the most recent and comprehensive analysis. It distinguished between the preparation phase (2018–2024) and the implementation phase of the Games, but did not yet include the legacy phase, which remained too recent to evaluate (EY, 2025, p. 5). This methodological limitation is therefore adopted in this chapter in accordance with the available data.

According to the EY report, the economic impact of the Olympic Games was divided into three categories: construction impact, organisational impact and tourism impact.

The construction impact corresponds to the investment expenditure incurred for the construction or renovation of infrastructure strictly necessary for the organisation of the Games. Ancillary projects carried out by certain local authorities, although geared towards legacy, were not considered in the calculation (EY, 2025, p.5)

The organisational impact includes all Paris 2024 Committee expenditure directly related to the staging of the Olympic and Paralympic events. This expenditure is entirely attributable to the Games, as it would not have been incurred in the absence of the event (EY, 2025, p.5)

The tourism impact relates to consumer spending by visitors who came specifically to attend the Games. Visitors whose trip to France was not motivated by the event were excluded from this estimate (EY, 2025, p.5)

On this basis, the Games generated a total economic impact estimated at €7.1 billion in the Île-de-France region, distributed across construction (32%), organisation (50%) and tourism (18%) (EY, 2025, p. 7).

These results provide the foundation for a more detailed analysis of how the Paris 2024 Games functioned as a tool of economic diplomacy, through investment allocation, tourism development, procurement practices and employment mobilisation.

1.1 Investments, infrastructure and economic diplomacy

The Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games generated significant economic benefits, particularly in the construction and events sectors. These outcomes reflected an economic-diplomacy strategy centred on promoting national expertise, structuring regional industries and positioning France on the international stage.

The construction and renovation of Games-related facilities mobilised the entire French construction industry, from micro-businesses and small and medium enterprises to large companies. According to SOLIDEO data, 99% of the €3.5 billion in investments benefited

French companies spread across more than 80 departments with 68% of expenditure benefitting companies located in Île-de-France. In this region alone, these investments injected €1.8 billion into the local economy between 2018 and 2024. At the national level, however, the EY report noted that the economic effect of construction activity remained neutral (EY, 2025, p. 10). The centrality of SMEs in the delivery of the Games, already strongly emphasised in the pre-Games phase, was confirmed ex post by the EY evaluation.

Micro-enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises captured more than a third of the contracts (37%, or €1.295 billion), illustrating an inclusive and regionally distributed economic dynamic. The delivery of the Olympic facilities supported the equivalent of 13,500 full-time jobs for one year, including more than 9,000 in the construction sector (EY, 2025, p.48). As the EY report observed: “the Paris 2024 Olympic Games have above all contributed to promoting the expertise of the French construction industry”³⁹ (EY, 2025, p.10).

This mobilisation enhanced the international competitiveness of the sector and aligned with broader definitions of economic diplomacy, where States leverage major events to generate opportunities for domestic firms and a comparative advantage (Rana, 2007; Moons & van Bergeijk, 2017). As a point of comparison, 98% of construction contracts for London 2012 were awarded to British companies, illustrating a similar strategy of national promotion (EY, 2025, p.47).

Overseen by the COJOP on the basis of a €4.5 billion budget, organisational expenditure amounted to €2.7 billion, of which 88% was committed to mainly French service providers (EY, 2025, p.10). The COJOP mobilised around 4,700 suppliers, 83% of which were small and medium sized enterprises and 10% of which were from the SSE (EY, 2025, p.58). As the report noted: “Hosting previous [SMEs] in France has enabled some of the service providers mobilised by the COJOP to strengthen their expertise in preparation for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games” (EY, 2025, p.59). This concentration reinforced the expertise and visibility of the French events industry and demonstrated the country’s capacity to deliver complex international events under socially responsible conditions (EY, 2025, p. 59).

The budget allocated to information systems and technologies supported cybersecurity, video refereeing and innovative projects. IOC's contributions, representing approximately one quarter of the COJOP's revenue, derived from media rights and the TOP programme, providing global visibility to Olympic partners. In line with commitments made during the bid, public funding focused on the organisation of the Paralympic Games, which are more difficult

³⁹ « Les JOP de Paris 2024 ont surtout contribué à valoriser le savoir-faire de la filière française du BTP ».

to self-finance. Public support nevertheless accounted for less than one-third of Paralympic organisational costs, compared to 50% for London 2012 (EY, 2025, p. 57).

Paris 2024 also offered the French sports-events industry strategic international exposure, likely to promote the export of its expertise. This dynamic formed part of a broader strategy of economic diplomacy, whereby SMEs function as a springboard for conquering new markets (EY, 2025, p.63). The British experience after London 2012 was illustrative: 22 British companies won 36 international contracts worth a total of £70 million, notably in connection with the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. These contracts covered a variety of areas such as urban planning, transport, communications infrastructure and information technology (EY, 2025, p.63). Similarly, French companies such as Eventeam, already active during London 2012, were able to capitalise on their Olympic experience to secure contracts for the Sochi, Rio and Tokyo Olympic Games (EY, 2025, p.63).

In the future, companies mobilised by COJOP could benefit from a comparable Olympic effect, strengthening their position within the international sports-events market. This potential illustrated how the Games served as a lever for economic nation-branding, projecting French expertise in the management of complex events at the global level (EY, 2025, p.63).

Launched in 2018 by Paris 2024, SOLIDEO and MEDEF, the 'Entreprises 2024' platform aimed to open up markets related to the Games to all French companies, with a particular focus on micro-businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises and SSE structures. It enabled more than 19,850 companies to identify and apply for Olympic tenders. Beyond the Games, the platform was intended to persist as a structural legacy, supporting access to future SME-related markets and strengthening the visibility and accessibility of opportunities for French economic actors (Paris 2024, 2024b, p.240).

The Games also functioned as a platform for international economic exchange. More than 40 high-level events were organised on the sidelines of the Games by Business France and regional agencies, bringing together hundreds of economic decision-makers.

"Held in the embassies and Olympic Houses of participating countries, their objectives were to 'encourage exchanges, generate business opportunities and thus help French SMEs and mid-cap companies to develop on the international stage" (EY, 2025, p.64).

For example, the 'Choose Paris Region' agency mobilised more than 1,500 companies around hospitality and networking events (EY, 2025, p. 64). However, despite this strong mobilisation, the EY report noted that relatively few foreign leaders directly associated the organisational success of the Games with new investment opportunities in France, a reminder of the

persistent challenge of transforming the Olympic showcase into concrete territorial attractiveness (EY, 2025).

Finally, the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games served as a strategic platform to strengthen France's economic influence in the international sports sector. In the short and medium term, there were numerous opportunities for French companies identified, particularly in Africa (Youth Olympic Games in Senegal in 2026, African Cup of Nations in Morocco in 2025, Dakar 2026), but also in the Middle East and Europe (Asian Winter Games in Saudi Arabia in 2029, 2030 FIFA World Cup) (EY, 2025, p.63).

This dynamic is part of a structured approach to 'sport export' strategy, supported by actors such as Bpifrance and Business France, which assist companies in identifying high-potential markets, organising influence and outreach missions, and promoting French expertise through economic networks (EY, 2025, p.63).

1.2 Economic impact of tourism

This subsection focuses specifically on the economic impact of tourism as one dimension of economic diplomacy. Rather than addressing the different legacy dimensions of tourism, it examines how tourism linked to the Paris 2024 Games contributed to France's international attractiveness and economic positioning in the post-Games period. The analysis draws primarily on the first ex-post economic impact report produced by EY for the Ministry of Sports, Youth and Community Life, which brings together data from multiple stakeholders (including Paris 2024, SOLIDEO, Atout France, Visit Paris Region), as well as a large-scale survey of more than 110,000 ticket holders and complementary academic and sectoral sources. While acknowledging the limits of an early post-Games assessment, this material provides a solid basis for evaluating tourism-related economic outcomes and their diplomatic significance.

The Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games were a major driver of tourist appeal, with around 4 million people attending at least one event, including 1.2 million foreign spectators, 400,000 of whom came from non-European countries (EY, 2025, p.8). Although average spending per visitor was lower than that observed at other SMEs, the direct economic impact of tourism amounted to €1.3 billion nationally and €1.1 billion in the Île-de-France region, an estimated €191 million surplus in tax revenue for the State and local authorities (EY, 2025, p.9).

Spectator demographics reflected relative democratisation of access to the Games: 45% of French spectators came from regions outside Île-de-France, women accounted for more than half of French spectators and less than half of spectators belonged to a high socio-professional category (including managerial and upper intellectual roles) (EY, 2025, p.8). Despite a slight decline in hotel stays in Île-de-France (-2% between June and September 2024), the report indicated that no significant displacement effect was observed⁴⁰. Increased use of short-term rentals and accommodation with friends and family helped absorb demand.

Beyond immediate economic outcomes, Olympic tourism supported France's economic diplomacy by reinforcing its international image. Tourism flows contributed to shaping national brand perception, stimulating future trade potential and consolidating bilateral relations, particularly with the countries of origin of foreign visitors. EY therefore suggested that tourism impacts were likely to manifest more strongly in the medium and long term, confirming the Olympic Games as a lever for international attractiveness (EY, 2025, pp. 5, 9). Paris 2024 also generated indirect structural effects, contributing to the transformation of tourism-related sectors and consolidating France's positioning within the international organisation of SMEs.

However, the economic effects of Olympic tourism were not uniformly positive across all segments. The impact on cultural tourism in the Paris region appeared mixed, with several cultural institutions recording a decline in visitor numbers during July and August 2024 compared to 2023. This trend echoes observations made during the London 2012 Games, when the British Museum experienced a 24% decrease in attendance over the same period (EY, 2025, p. 35). While this chapter does not aim to evaluate all legacy effects, these findings highlight sectoral variations.

Finally, the outlook for post-Olympic tourism was considered very encouraging, driven in particular by business customers. The diplomatic impact of Olympic tourism is therefore expected to materialise primarily in the medium term, through the consolidation of Paris's image as a global destination. As the Ministry of Territorial Development and Ecological Transition noted, the Games contributed to promoting France internationally as a tourist destination, even though the long-term effects remain to be fully assessed (2025, p. 4). And as the EY report concluded: "Paris has sent a postcard to the rest of the world for summers to

⁴⁰ See EY report, 2025, p.8 for methodological details.

come, and in the aftermath of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the outlook for tourist attendance is very encouraging”⁴¹ (EY, 2025, p.9)

1.3 Inclusive and sustainable economic diplomacy

1.3.1 Paris 2024: a model of responsible procurement and inclusive employment

Paris 2024 implemented an ambitious responsible procurement strategy based on inclusion, sustainability and social innovation. As anticipated in the pre-Games sustainable procurement strategy, the €2.7 billion procurement spent by the COJOP, was largely channelled towards French economic actors. This mobilisation was supported by ‘Les Canaux’ association and the ‘ESS 2024’ platform, as highlighted by Olivier Debargue, Deputy Director of Procurement for Paris 2024 (Paris 2024, 2024b, p.14).

The ‘ESS 2024’ programme, led by ‘Les Canaux’ and the Yunus Centre with the support of Paris 2024 and SOLIDEO, played a central role in integrating social, solidarity and circular enterprises into the organisation of the Games. Acting as an intermediary between the organisers and the social economy sector, the platform enabled more than 6,000 businesses to register, with 750 receiving individual support to respond to Olympic contracts through methodological tools, training and networking (Paris 2024, 2024b, p.27). For the first time, SSE structures were fully involved in the delivery of an event of this scale, making ESS 2024 a tangible legacy of Paris 2024 and laying the foundations for a replicable model of responsible organisation for future SMEs (Paris 2024, 2024b, p.27). The involvement of SSE structures was already presented in the pre-Games phase as a strategic objective, here it is presented in terms of operational realisation and scale.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) criteria, which accounted for 20% of strategic tenders, helped raise awareness of environmental and social issues among service providers. The proactive management of the second life of assets (resale, reuse, donation, transformation) reflected a desire to prolong the impact of the Games and confirmed the circular-economy principles outlined in the pre-Games strategy, translating initial intentions into concrete operational practices (Paris 2024, 2024b, p.14). This combination of inclusive sourcing and lifecycle management embodied an innovative form of economic diplomacy, with standards likely to influence future SMEs practices internationally.

⁴¹ « Paris a envoyé une carte postale au reste du monde pour les étés à venir, et, au lendemain des JOP, les perspectives de fréquentation touristique sont très encourageantes »

Initially framed in pre-Games reports as an unprecedented approach, the responsible procurement strategy was retrospectively validated by independent certification and institutional recognition. Developed in autumn 2018, it was rolled out in January 2020 and covered more than 500 procurement categories and mobilised 5,626 suppliers, including 3,891 direct suppliers and approximately 1,735 subcontractors. Of these, 89% were French, 85% were micro-enterprises or small and medium-sized enterprises and 476 were SSE organisations (Paris 2024, 2025, p. 158).

This strategy integrated environmental and social requirements across all stages of the procurement cycle, from design, drafting, publication, analysis of tenders to contract negotiation and monitoring of legacy (Paris 2024, 2025, p.158). It was structured around five priority commitments: economy, carbon reduction and environmental preservation, social innovation, disability and inclusion, and value creation in the regions (Paris 2024, 2025, p.159)

Paris 2024's final report also emphasised the reinforcement of inclusive sourcing practices, particularly towards SSE structures (Paris 2024, 2025, p.159). In early 2024, the Organising Committee obtained the "AFAQ Focus RSE Achats Responsables" label with an "exemplary" rating from AFNOR Certification after an in-depth audit. Aligned with ISO 20400, this recognition made Paris 2024 the first organisation in France to achieve this level of excellence, confirming the systematic integration of responsible procurement across all tenders (Paris 2024, 2025, p.160).

1.3.2 The intersection of economic and social legacy in employment

Employment was identified as a priority from the outset of Paris 2024, as reflected in the 2018 Social Charter, the first in Olympic history, which bound the Organising Committee and social partners to 16 commitments (Paris 2024, 2024b, p. 27). This framework was supported by an ex-ante impact assessment and job-mapping exercise, updated in 2023, which identified skills needs, anticipated recruitment pressures and guided training pathways linked to major-event delivery (Paris 2024, 2024b, pp. 27, 37).

All institutional stakeholders, including the State, the Île-de-France Region, local authorities, France Travail, the departmental council, chambers of commerce and employers' organisations, coordinated their efforts to promote employment. Tools, such as 'Entreprises 2024' and 'ESS 2024' and the "From the stadium to employment" Job Dating scheme were deployed to connect jobseekers and companies (Paris 2024, 2024b, p.27). The results were

significant: 1,515,000 hours of integration completed, 6,754 people recruited for integration, 181,000 jobs mobilised and nine job forums organised under the label 'Les Jeux recrutent' (Paris 2024, 2024b, p.27). These employment outcomes must be read in light of the pre-Games forecasts, which anticipated up to 150,000 jobs. Ex-post data suggest that this projection was not only met but exceeded when indirect and integration-linked employment is taken into account.

Specific measures ensured that employment outcomes were inclusive, as illustrated by the Athletes' Village laundry contract, which was reserved for structures promoting integration through economic activity (SIAE) and organisations supporting people with disabilities. This single initiative mobilised more than 450 individuals (Paris 2024, 2024b, p.128).

This mobilisation reflected a deliberate effort to embed a social dimension within the economic model of the Games. Beyond immediate job creation, Paris 2024 sought to establish a lasting social legacy by strengthening skills, promoting inclusion, and laying the foundations for an employment-management model that future SMEs could draw on. The Games also offered first professional experiences to many participants and encouraged long-term career development beyond the event (Paris 2024, 2024b, p. 37).

In parallel, Paris 2024 used its licensed products as a further showcase of responsible sourcing. As discussed in Chapter 5 (Section 2.2), all licensed products were required to adopt responsible production processes. The production involved actors such as 'Le Slip Français' (textiles), 'La Monnaie de Paris' (collectible coins), 'Vilac' (wooden toys) and 'Doudou & Compagnie' (recycled-material mascots), reinforcing the visibility of responsible French manufacturing (Paris 2024, 2024b, p.206).

Finally, Paris 2024 achieved record-breaking ticketing results, with 12.1 million tickets sold, described as "the most successful ticket sales in the history of the Games"⁴² (Paris 2024, 2024b, p.212). Accessibility remained central: Olympic tickets began at €24 and Paralympic tickets at €15, with nearly half of the tickets for the Olympic Games priced at €50 or less and 80% of tickets for the Paralympics below this threshold. This pricing policy supported inclusion, audience diversification and access for populations not usually exposed to SMEs and cultural events (Paris 2024, 2024b, p.212).

Pre-Games documentation framed economic diplomacy predominantly in terms of ambition and strategic intent, presenting procurement and employment as economic instruments

⁴² « le plus grand succès pour une billetterie de l'histoire des Jeux ».

through which Paris 2024 sought to advance inclusive and sustainable development objectives. Post-Games evaluations allow this framing to be reassessed on the basis of observed data, shifting the narrative from projected commitments to evidenced outcomes. Figures initially presented as objectives or forecasts are confirmed, refined or nuanced ex post, contributing to a more grounded articulation of economic diplomacy as the mobilisation of economic processes and actors to support national positioning and influence and strengthen a comparative advantage. Post-Games reports consolidate and legitimise the framing of Paris 2024 as an exercise in sustainable economic diplomacy, projecting French expertise, reinforcing soft power, and presenting the Games as a replicable model for future SMEs.

2. Cultural and sporting legacy and diplomacy

2.1 ‘Ambition Bleue’: mobilising sport to enhance diplomatic influence – post-Games results

The ‘Ambition Bleue’ strategy, introduced in Chapter 5 as France’s pre-Games high-performance framework, took full form in the post-Games period and its diplomatic scope became more explicit. This section examines how the programme was framed after Paris 2024 and how the results were mobilised as instruments of soft power, narrative construction, and international positioning.

‘Ambition Bleue’ resulted in a historically large French delegation, 579 athletes, one of the largest delegations at the Games, with 579 athletes competing in 263 events, a 71% increase compared with the average delegation since Barcelona 1992 and Tokyo in 2020 when France had an average of 339 athletes. Only the United States had a larger delegation with 601 athletes, while the average team size among the Top 10 nations of the medal table (excluding France) was 382 athletes (Mouvens, 2025, p.37). Although this expansion was partly facilitated by host-nation quotas, post-Games reports presented it as evidence of France’s strategic commitment to sport as a tool of national influence. It is important to note that these quotas remained limited to preserve fairness and did not apply to all disciplines (Mouvens, 2025, p.38).

Beyond the figures, it is the structure of this delegation that reveals an effective strategy: diversity of disciplines, almost perfect parity (49% women compared to only 36% in 1996, representing an increase of 107% for women compared with 41% for men), and representation

in all Olympic programme federations (Mouvens, 2025, p.38). The delegation composition reinforced a narrative of inclusivity and universality.

The distribution of events among federations further reflected strategic targeting. Swimming and athletics, with 49 and 48 events respectively, together accounted for nearly 30% of the Olympic programme. When combined with cycling, gymnastics and wrestling, these five federations represented almost 47% of all contested events (Mouvens, 2025, p. 38). Post-Games reporting framed this concentration as a deliberate choice to maximise medal potential in disciplines with high international visibility, while simultaneously projecting the image of a diversified sporting nation capable of competing across the full Olympic spectrum. This strategic mobilisation translated into historically significant sporting results. France won 64 medals including 41 gold, achieving its best performance in Olympic history and placing within the Top 5 of the medal table for the second time, after Atlanta 1996, while maintaining a Top 10 position since the Seoul 1988 Games (Mouvens, 2025, p.41). Yet disparities persisted: nearly 60% of total medals and 70% of gold medals were won by men, raising questions about gendered dynamics in high-performance sport (Mouvens, 2025, p. 41). While not the focus of this thesis, post-Games assessments acknowledged these imbalances, which slightly improved compared with previous editions but reflect limits within a strategy publicly framed as inclusive and point to potential avenues for further research (Mouvens, 2025, p. 41).

Post-Games reports framed these sporting results as validation of the 'Ambition Bleue' strategy, reinforcing the image of France as a competitive, high-performing and inclusive nation capable of uniting around Olympic values. As host country, France benefited from home-advantage effects, including specific quotas, the 'Maison de la Performance' and targeted support measures, which reports explicitly acknowledged as contributing factors. However, distinguishing the contribution of 'Ambition Bleue' from the exceptional levels of public investment remained difficult as unprecedented financial resources enabled new measures and strengthened existing ones that would not otherwise have been possible. Post-Games evaluations therefore highlighted the methodological limits of attributing performance outcomes to a single strategy (Mouvens, 2025, p.214).

Beyond the exceptional results, the 'Ambition Bleue' strategy marked a turning point in the structuring of high-level sport in France, placing high performance at the heart of national ambitions. It initiated a profound transformation, The objective was no longer simply to support athletes in their pursuit of performance, but to establish a genuine culture of high performance, based on a rigorous approach geared towards optimising results. Inspired by the British model of UK Sport, this strategy aimed to maximise athletes' performance for the Paris 2024 Olympic

and Paralympic Games, while establishing a sustainable dynamic (Mouvens, 2025). The ANS High Performance Division, under the direction of Claude Onesta, played a central role in this new governance. The organisational and operational autonomy granted to it enabled more targeted action. Nevertheless, coordination between federations, government, departments, coaches, scientific experts and local authorities required adjustments. The organisation of the Paris 2024 Games played a key role in mobilising French sport. The federations, their DTNs, performance directors and ANS advisers strengthened their cooperation, supported by several strategic initiatives. Minister Amélie Oudéa-Castéra's speech in July 2022 at a seminar bringing together the main players in sports governance marked a key moment in the remobilisation and clarification of roles. Subsequently, the creation of the 'Gagner en France' steering committee made it possible to establish a clear strategic framework, which was widely welcomed. The minister's regular presence reinforced political support for this body. While widely welcomed, post-Games reports stressed, however, that sustaining this governance architecture beyond 2024 remains a key challenge (Mouvens, 2025, p.211)

Post-Games reporting also revealed internal asymmetries. The development of Paralympic sport benefited from significantly increased support, contributing to France's return to the Top 8, yet critics noted that only two ANS advisers were dedicated to Paralympic federations out of a total of 33 (Mouvens, 2025, p. 213).

The purpose of this section is not to assess the effectiveness of the Ambition Bleue strategy or its evaluation methodology, but to analyse its diplomatic framing and scope, proposals for improvement and limitations of the strategy are included in the full report from Mouvens and the MSJVA (2025).

Although the results and limitations are not within the scope of this research, it is nevertheless important to highlight the motivation behind the creation of the 'Ambition Bleue' project which aimed to strengthen French excellence through high performance and enhance competitiveness in terms of medals on the international stage. Furthermore, as highlighted in the report, hosting the Games not only contributed to better sporting results, thanks in particular to the home advantage effect which was emphasised by the strategy 'Gagner en France', but also led to increased funding for these strategies (socio-professional support for athletes, revaluation of bonuses paid to athletes) (MSJOP, 2024b, p.13). As underlined in the same report, this vision now extends beyond Paris 2024, with a clear objective:

"The objective of achieving a Top 5 finish for all in Los Angeles will require drawing all the lessons from this summer and making new strategic choices for the upcoming Olympiad.

While preserving the universalist strength of the French sports model, it will also reinforce the ambition to foster the emergence of world-class champions” (MSJOP, 2024b, p.15) ⁴³

Thus, the investments underpinning *Ambition Bleue* were not solely oriented towards medal performance, but also towards the construction of a distinctive French model of sports governance. As framed in post-Games narratives, this model can be leveraged internationally as a tool of soft power, projecting France as an ambitious, and globally competitive sporting nation. In this sense, ‘*Ambition Bleue*’ functioned both as a performance framework and as a diplomatic instrument, reinforcing national prestige and contributing to France’s broader strategy of international influence through sport.

2.2 Games as a cultural showcase

The Paris 2024 Games achieved record-breaking reach, with 84% of the potential global audience, around five billion people, following the event. This unprecedented visibility, driven by extensive media coverage and strong engagement from Olympic partners, reinforced the IOC’s mission to unite and inspire through sport (IOC, 2024a, p.5). According to EY, “Internationally, the Paris 2024 Olympic Games seem to have sparked wonder and enthusiasm, as evidenced by the spontaneous reactions of the press and television viewers”⁴⁴ (EY, 2025, p.38), a finding derived from post-Games surveys in 15 countries, where 67% of respondents stated that the IOC was right to select Paris as host city (EY, 2025,p.38). Foreign spectators also praised France's ability to organise the event, and 84% of those surveyed by EY (nearly 113,379 ticket holders) said they wanted to return to France. In Île-de-France, tourism increased relative to 2023 (+7.6% French visitors in November 2024 and +7% international tourists), a trend expected to continue at least until mid-2025 based on airline bookings (EY, 2025, p. 40).

However, EY noted that tourism legacies of Olympic Games “do not always benefit in the long term”⁴⁵ (EY, 2025, p.41). Comparative research by Drapkin, Ivan and Zverev (Journal of Sports Economics) showed that since 2000, only Beijing 2008 experienced a significant positive long-term effect, while the Games in Australia, Greece, Great Britain and Brazil displayed neutral or negative outcomes in the medium and short term (EY, 2025, p. 41). While

⁴³ « L'objectif de Top 5 pour tous à Los Angeles imposera de tirer tous les enseignements de cet été et de faire de nouveaux choix pour l'olympiade qui s'ouvre. Tout en préservant la force universaliste du modèle sportif français, il renforcera la volonté de favoriser l'émergence de champions et championnes de tout premier plan ».

⁴⁴ « A l'international, les JOP de Paris 2024 semblent avoir suscité émerveillement et enthousiasme, en témoignant les réactions spontanées de la presse et des téléspectateurs ».

⁴⁵ « La littérature montre que la fréquentation touristique ne bénéficie pas toujours à long terme des Jeux Olympiques et Paralympiques ».

early indicators for France were encouraging, the long-term effects of Olympic tourism will require analysis over a longer period, as mentioned in Section 1.2. Nonetheless, high levels of visitor satisfaction and positive global perception aligned with France's nation-branding objectives, positioning the country as a as a festive and culturally rich destination.

Paris 2024 also used ceremonies as a cultural and diplomatic showcase. The Opening Ceremony on the River Seine required major logistical and security coordination (MSJOP, 2024b, p. 3). It attracted 360,000 spectators on site and 24.4 million television viewers, setting a historic audience record in France. The Paralympic Opening Ceremony, also held outside the stadium, attracted more than 50,000 spectators and 10.2 million television viewers, ten times more than Tokyo 2020 (MSJOP, 2024b, p. 16). The MSJOP framed these ceremonies as showcases of "French artistic and creative audacity and genius"⁴⁶, constructing a narrative of cultural excellence and innovation (MSJOP, 2024b, p.16), constructing a narrative of cultural excellence and innovation.

The Opening and Paralympic Opening Ceremonies provide a particularly clear illustration of Rofe's (2021) multidimensional understanding of sport diplomacy. As global media events, they functioned as instruments of communication (extensive broadcasting, press coverage and public reactions), representation (the Seine as the central symbol of the Games and of Paris's environmental and cultural ambition), and negotiation (between state authorities, the IOC, Paris 2024, cultural actors and security services, through a mix of formal arrangements and informal coordination).

The competitions themselves showcased France's heritage through iconic venues such as the Grand Palais, Versailles, Teahupo'o and the Marseille Marina. These choices illustrated a desire to combine cultural influence, feasibility and budgetary control, supported by more than one hundred administrative decisions facilitating the necessary facilities and authorisations (MSJOP, 2024b, p.4).

Events held on the Seine, made possible by a vast clean-up plan co-financed by the State, symbolised the environmental ambition of the Games and were presented as a highly visible legacy achievement, reinforcing international perceptions of France as a leader in sustainability and becoming an international symbol of the Games's success (MSJOP, 2024b, p.4).

Infrastructures delivered by SOLIDEO, 70 Olympic facilities including the athletes' and media villages, were completed on time and within budget, financed by the State through an

⁴⁶ « l'audace et le génie artistique et créatif français ».

investment of €1.13 billion. These facilities were framed as durable legacies for Seine-Saint-Denis, constructed according to high environmental, accessibility and social-responsibility standards (MSJOP, 2024b, p.4).

The Paris 2024 Games were presented as a celebration for the wider public. The Games mobilised the entire country through popular programmes such as the Torch Relay, which included 68 Olympic and 37 Paralympic stages, passing through more than 450 towns and cities and reaching nearly 9 million people, highlighting the diversity of French heritage, both in mainland France and overseas territories (MSJOP, 2024b, p. 16). In the spirit of Pierre de Coubertin, 124 years after its creation, Paris 2024 made the Cultural Olympiad a central component of its Games. With the support of the State and the involvement of the Ministries of Culture, Education and Sport, 2,437 projects were certified throughout the country, mobilising France's major cultural institutions around events combining art and sport. The Ministry of Culture invested €9 million and coordinated more than 200 projects through its regional directorates (MSJOP, 2024b, p.16).

Ticketing figures likewise contributed to the diplomatic narrative of popular success and accessibility. Paris 2024 sold 9.5 million Olympic tickets (surpassing the 8.3 million record set by Atlanta) and more than 2.5 million Paralympic tickets. In total, 12.1 million spectators attended the Games, surpassing London 2012's record of 11 million. Finally, the State's 'Billetterie Populaire' programme distributed over 400,000 free tickets, including 193,000 for schoolchildren through 'Ma Classe aux Jeux', and 300,000 free tickets for the Paralympic Games, constituting the largest public ticketing initiative in Olympic history, complemented by community initiatives (MSJOP, 2024b, p. 17).

2.2.1 International engagement and diplomatic mobilisation

Several flagship initiatives of the Paris 2024 national engagement strategy were extended internationally, to take advantage of the momentum created by the Games and to function as platforms for diplomatic outreach. These programmes sought both to include French citizens living abroad while strengthening the global reach of the event (Paris 2024, 2025, p. 46).

In June 2021, the French diplomatic network joined the 'Terre de Jeux 2024' community, alongside local authorities and sports federations. This unique network supported international legacy initiatives and mobilised diplomatic posts across five continents. The initiative aimed to engage French nationals, French-speaking communities and Francophiles in the Olympic project, to strengthen France's economic and cultural attractiveness, and to create lasting links

between embassies, local sports authorities and the international sports movement. Nearly 150 embassies participated, taking part in key events such as Olympic and Paralympic Day, Olympic and Paralympic Week, the Flag Tour, the volunteer campaign and digital exhibitions linked to the Cultural Olympiad. Four embassies, Benin and Eritrea in 2022 followed by Italy and Fiji in 2024, were awarded a 'Terre de Jeux 2024' trophy for their exceptional mobilisation (Paris 2024, 2025, p.47).

Among these initiatives, the 'Relais Autour du Monde'⁴⁷, launched by Paris 2024 and the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, emerged as a central diplomatic mechanism and a key highlight of international mobilisation around the Games. Organised over a 24 hour period, this initiative involved embassies and overseas territories labelled 'Terre de Jeux' 2024, each organising a one-hour sporting event before passing the baton to the next time zone via social media. The first edition took place on 6 April 2022, on the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace and brought together 44 embassies and attracted nearly 8,000 participants. The second edition was organised 5,000 days before the Games and a third edition took place in March 2024. Across its three editions, the initiative recorded increasing participation, bringing together up to 20,000 people and involving more than 80% of the French diplomatic network. The relay also highlighted thematic commitments, including gender equality in sport through the 'Sport and Gender Equality' programme, amplifying France's advocacy on global social-policy issues (Paris 2024, 2025, p.48).

These mobilisations align closely with Schneider's definition of cultural diplomacy as "the exchange of ideas, information, art and other cultural expressions among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding" (Cummings, 2003, p.1 cited in Schneider, 2005, p.147).

2.2.2 Digital innovation promoting the cultural influence of the Games

Paris 2024 made a significant commitment to digital technology. In line with its objective to organise environmentally responsible Games, Paris 2024 committed to ensuring a second life for 100% of its digital equipment, notably by renting around 75% of it (Paris 2024, 2024a, p. 108). The Organising Committee measured the digital footprint through three dimensions: carbon, equipment materials and social aspects, estimating that digital technology accounted for between 4% and 6% of the total carbon footprint of the Games, largely due to equipment

⁴⁷ Translated by Relay around the world

manufacturing. Universal accessibility was embedded throughout digital services, including, for example, systematic subtitling and text alternatives (Paris 2024, 2024a p.108).

Post-Games report emphasised that this was the first time that an organising committee had integrated a fully responsible digital strategy into the Olympic delivery model. This is particularly noteworthy, as Paris 2024 framed the Games as an opportunity to “accelerate the transition to a more sustainable digital world”⁴⁸ (Paris 2024, 2024a p.109). This approach was recognised by the IOC and integrated into the sustainability requirements of the ‘Technology Games Guide’, meaning that future Olympic organisers will be expected to implement similar responsible-digital standards (Paris 2024, 2024a, p. 109).

Paris 2024 therefore positioned itself as a pioneering and innovative edition, responding to contemporary environmental challenges and setting new benchmarks for digital sustainability in Olympic governance. This innovation, now embedded in IOC guidelines, reinforced France’s image as a true pioneer and a model for future host cities (Paris 2024, 2024a p.109).

In pre-Games reports, the focus of Paris 2024’s digital diplomacy was primarily placed on how technology and digital innovation were used to engage audiences worldwide. Emphasis was given to tools such as broadcasting strategies, digital platforms and creator programmes. By contrast, post-Games reporting shifts the focus towards legacy and institutional impact. Digital innovation is framed as a structural contribution to the future of the Olympic Movement, particularly through the integration of sustainability standards into IOC guidelines. Post-Games narratives also highlight Paris 2024 as an opportunity to use the momentum of the Games to support a transition towards a more sustainable digital world. Digital innovation is diplomatically relevant both domestically and internationally as it supports France’s own objectives of digital transformation while simultaneously setting new benchmarks for the Olympic Movement and future host cities.

Cultural and sporting legacies were framed in post-Games narratives as key tools of sport diplomacy and soft power. Through high-performance sport and the ‘Ambition Bleue’ strategy, large-scale cultural programming, international engagement initiatives and digital innovation, the Games were presented as a platform for projecting French values, governance models and international influence while setting new benchmarks for future Games. At the same time, these narratives portrayed France as a highly competitive sporting nation, while the

⁴⁸ « les Jeux comme une opportunité unique d’accélérer la transition vers un numérique plus durable ».

ceremonies and iconic venues and programmes of the Games reinforced the country's cultural significance, creativity and symbolic visibility on the international stage.

3. Urban diplomacy

3.1 Security

Organising the Games poses a significant security challenge for all host countries, including Paris 2024 due to the scale of the Games but also because of the urban layout, as the opening ceremonies were held on the Seine, outside the stadium, and many of the competition venues were in the city centre (MSJOP, 2024b, p.4). Post-Games reports highlighted that the event was delivered without major incidents and with relatively smooth operations, attributing this outcome to the exemplary mobilisation and coordination of public and private actors (MSJOP, 2024b, p.4; Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 210; Paris 2024, 2025, p. 193).

Security governance depended on close coordination between the State, local authorities, the Organising Committee and private operators (DIJOP, SGDSN, ANSSI⁴⁹, Ministry of the Interior and Overseas Territories, Ministry of the Armed Forces, Paris and Bouches-du-Rhône Police Prefectures, State administrations, host local authorities and Paris 2024) (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 210). Responsibilities were clearly divided: Paris 2024 oversaw competition and non-competition venues, the State secured public space, people and property while retaining the ability to assume full control in the event of major risk and local authorities ensured safety within celebration zones. This distribution enabled a coherent response to security issues (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 210).

The figures testify to the scale of the effort. Around 30,000 police officers and gendarmes were mobilised daily during the Olympic Games and 25,000 during the Paralympic Games; 18,000 military personnel, including 10,000 from 'Operation Sentinelle' and 5,000 specialised personnel (MSJOP, 2024b, p.4); 23,000 private security guards during the Olympic Games and 12,000 during the Paralympic Games (Paris 2024, 2025, p.193); 1.2 million administrative investigations carried out ahead of the Games, leading to 6,800 exclusions from the organisation of the Games (MSJOP, 2024b, p.4); and 227 km of barriers installed around the sites (Paris 2024, 2025, p.193).

⁴⁹ DIJOP : Délégation interministérielle aux Jeux Olympiques et Paralympiques (Interministerial Delegation for the Olympic and Paralympic Games); SGDSN : Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale (General Secretariat for Defence and National Security); ANSSI : Agence nationale de la sécurité des systèmes d'information (National Agency for the Security of Information Systems)

While post-Games reports framed these efforts as markers of French expertise and of the diplomatic value of France's security model for international events, it is important to acknowledge that the analysis in this thesis draws exclusively on official sources. The Games were accompanied by significant public debate and contestation around security measures. Early academic work and journalistic investigations highlight concerns linked to the use of administrative exclusions and advanced surveillance technologies. Zatsepina and Ludvigsen (2025) argue that Paris 2024 illustrates how the Olympic Games increasingly function as a testing ground for new security technologies, notably AI-based surveillance, while also revealing ethical, legal and societal tensions surrounding their use. Human-rights organisations such as the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2025) as well as media investigations (Leicester, 2025) similarly raised concerns about the breadth of administrative investigations and movement restrictions imposed in the name of Olympic security, particularly regarding civil liberties. These debates underscore the contested nature of the security legacy, even as official post-Games narratives emphasise success and expertise.

Faced with recruitment pressures, exacerbated by the pandemic, and by a lack of attractiveness in the security sector, Paris 2024 and the State implemented an ambitious plan to reinforce this field (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 210). A new 'Major Event Security professional card' (*Sécurité des Grands Événements*, SGE) and a dedicated 'Professional Qualification Certificate' (CQP) entitled "Participating in private security activities for major events" were created, and later used for the 2023 Rugby World Cup (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 210). The State financed 26,500 training places, including €68 million invested to support security professions in Île-de-France through the regional council's skills programmes and 'France Travail' (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.210).

In parallel, around 1,600 job fairs were organised, targeting students, job seekers and new entrants to the job market (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.210). Since 2022, France Travail introduced nearly 200,000 job seekers to security-sector careers. Nearly 26,000 individuals were trained, 30% of whom were women, significantly exceeding previous levels in a sector where women represented only 11% in 2017. A total of 22,000 recruitments were recorded (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 210). This scheme helped to structure the sector in a sustainable way, creating a pool of qualified professionals for future sporting and cultural events and renewing the attractiveness of this sector of activity (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.210).

Cybersecurity also constituted a major component of the security legacy. ANSSI supported 550 entities before the Games and handled more than 550 cyber-incident reports during the event, none of which had major consequences (MSJOP, 2024b, p.5). This successful protection of critical infrastructure strengthened France's reputation for technical diplomacy, especially in cyber-security governance (MSJOP, 2024b, p.5).

Across these domains, the Paris 2024 security model was framed as a diplomatic asset. France positioned itself as capable of delivering a high-risk global event through coordinated public-private governance. As post-Games reports noted, this expertise could be mobilised for future international events as it was the case with the Rugby World Cup. Mobility management was similarly highlighted as a logistical and diplomatic achievement (MSJOP, 2024b, p. 6). These interactions positioned the French security model as both exportable and emblematic of national competence, reinforcing France's diplomatic credibility.

3.2 Transports development as urban diplomacy

Transport constituted one of the most enduring and inclusive legacies of the Paris 2024 Games. Post-Games reports stressed that public transport and active mobility had become the central pillars of a sustainable and inclusive transport strategy. This choice was already anticipated during the bidding phase, allowing Paris 2024 to meet the requirements of a SME with ambitions for territorial, social and environmental transformation (MSJOP, 2024a, p. 12). Although these goals were first presented during the bid phase, the post-Games narrative framed transport as both a long-term benefit for local residents and a tool of international diplomacy, showing France's ability to create urban systems that are innovative and inclusive (MSJOP, 2024a, p. 12).

Patrice Vergriete, Minister Delegate for Transport, noted:

“The Games are a tangible legacy for users and local areas. The priority given to public transport and active mobility is a legacy for more sustainable mobility, whether through new public transport infrastructure, the creation of cycle paths or the greening of the boat fleets on the Seine. The Games will also improve the accessibility of our transport system. Our goal has been to make this event a catalyst for concrete change for people with disabilities”⁵⁰ (MSJOP, 2024a, p.12).

50 « Les Jeux sont un héritage concret au service des usagers et des territoires. La priorité donnée aux transports en commun ainsi qu'aux mobilités actives constitue un héritage pour des mobilités plus durables que ce soit par les nouvelles infrastructures de transport en commun, la création de pistes cyclables, ou le verdissement des flottes de bateaux sur la Seine. Les Jeux permettront également de gagner en accessibilité pour nos transports. Notre objectif a été de faire de cet événement un accélérateur de changements concrets pour les personnes en situation de handicap ».

All Olympic and Paralympic venues were served by public transport, with three-quarters of venues in the Paris region located less than 500 metres from a stop, often with multiple lines ensuring network resilience. According to Paris 2024's December 2024 report: "87% of spectators used public transport (62%) or various means of active mobility (bicycle, scooter, walking) (25%) to get to the events" (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.170). A dedicated bus network was deployed to transport accredited persons efficiently and limit vehicle use (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.170).

To expand soft mobility, Paris 2024 deployed a 415 km Olympic cycle network, including 120 km created specifically for the Games, and installed 27,000 temporary bicycle parking spaces, 20,000 of which were guarded in 38 car parks (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.174). The MSJOP presented the Games as the first Olympic Games to be fully cycle-friendly (MSJOP, 2024b, p.6).

Valerie Péresse, President of Île-de-France, framed the development of soft mobility as a historic milestone for Île-de-France:

"The Île-de-France region has made history by delivering, alongside Île-de-France Mobilités and its operators, the first Olympic and Paralympic Games to be entirely served by public transport. With this major revolution now complete, in line with our ambition, the Games will not be a mere interlude. They have been an unparalleled catalyst for the "transport revolution" initiated in 2016, particularly in terms of the development of new infrastructure, the modernisation of the network and its accessibility. These efforts and the resulting momentum are one of the main pillars of the Games' legacy, both for the daily lives of the people of the Paris region and for hosting future international events in our territory" (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.170).⁵¹

Accessibility was integrated throughout the transport system. Among these measures were 240 accessible stations, covering 95% of passenger flows and 100% of stations serving Olympic sites; 100% accessible buses, trams, RER intramuros and line 14; 2,700 RATP agents mobilised to assist passengers with disabilities; dedicated shuttles for wheelchair users from major Parisian stations and additional support measures, including accompanying tickets, PRM parking, adapted taxis and assistance for the last few kilometres' journeys

⁵¹ « La Région Ile-de-France a su être au rendez-vous de l'Histoire en livrant, aux côtés d'Ile-de-France Mobilités et de ses opérateurs, les premiers Jeux Olympiques et Paralympiques entièrement desservis en transports en commun. Cette révolution majeure désormais achevée, conformément à notre ambition, les Jeux ne seront pas une simple parenthèse. Ils ont été un accélérateur sans commune mesure de la « Révolution des transports » initiée en 2016, notamment pour le développement de nouvelles infrastructures, la modernisation du réseau et son accessibilité. Ces efforts et la dynamique qui en découle, constituent l'un des principaux piliers de l'Héritage des Jeux, pour le quotidien des franciliens, comme pour l'accueil de futurs évènements internationaux sur notre territoire ».

(Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 138). These measures were presented in post-Games reports as a major step forward.

Finally, upgrades to road, port and cycling networks reduced the environmental footprint of the Games and left a tangible legacy for host regions. Carbon-impact indicators were integrated into the application used by accredited personnel to encourage low-carbon travel and promote the use of public transport and active mobility (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.170). Several territories invested heavily in environmental mobility infrastructure, such as the Aix-Marseille Metropolis, highlighted in post-Games assessments as an example of territorial mobilisation (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.172).

The success of the mobility system was presented as a diplomatic benefit for France. It demonstrated the country's ability to coordinate a complex, multi-level institutional set of actors, bringing together the State, the Île-de-France Prefecture, the Police Prefecture, relevant ministries, Paris 2024 and transport agencies (MSJOP, 2024b, p.6). The Strategic Mobility Committee was identified as a key coordination actor, whose functioning was presented as a lasting outcome of the Games.

3.3 Transformation of territories

The Olympic Games played a decisive role in accelerating territorial transformation in the Paris region, particularly in Seine-Saint-Denis, the centre of the events and celebrations and main area benefiting from investment. These investments were framed as addressing long-term needs in development, housing, transport and public facilities (MSJOP, 2024b, p.20). As a result, 70 local public facilities were constructed or renovated, and new neighbourhoods were created alongside an ambitious programme of urban crossings intended to reconnect an area long affected by fragmentation, as already mentioned in pre-Games reports and reaffirmed in post-games assessments (Paris 2024, 2025, p. 83).

Two eco-neighbourhoods illustrated this physical legacy for Seine-Saint-Denis: the Athletes' Village and the Media Cluster. Already emphasised in pre-Games reports as an emblematic legacy project, the Athletes' Village was delivered on an accelerated timeline and framed post-Games as a major outcome of Paris 2024's territorial transformation. Scheduled for completion in 2025, it was presented as combining housing, public facilities, green spaces and sustainable construction principles, designed with the climate conditions of 2050 in mind and made possible by the 2018 Olympic Law and SOLIDEO's unified governance model (Paris 2024, 2025, p. 85).

The Media Cluster in Dugny, Le Bourget and La Courneuve followed a similar dynamic. The site was transformed into a mixed-use neighbourhood containing 1,300 housing units, two school complexes, a new sports park and 13 hectares of green space following the decontamination of the Essences site. The project enabled the extension of the Georges-Valbon departmental park and the creation of new biodiversity areas. A wooden footbridge for cyclists and pedestrians now connects Dugny and Le Bourget, contributing to improved local mobility (Paris 2024, 2025, p. 86).

In addition, six major urban crossings were developed to connect or reconnect neighbourhoods separated by heavy infrastructure. The Pleyel Urban Crossing, a central element of the Olympic legacy, linked the Athletes' Village and Saint-Denis Pleyel station to the Stade de France and the Olympic Aquatic Centre, offering spaces for walking, relaxation and services for residents, employees and travellers (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.8). Other footbridges, over the Saint-Denis Canal, the A1 motorway and across the Île-Saint-Denis, completed this network, as noted in pre games reports (Chapter 5, section 5.4), and supported soft mobility, contributing to territorial cohesion (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.8).

As Mathieu Hanotin, Mayor of Saint-Denis, stated:

“The legacy of the Games is accelerating the transition that has begun in our region. It is helping to redesign our cities, as with the athletes' village, at the heart of the revitalisation of the Pleyel district. From footbridges to urban crossings, the Games have helped to make our region more connected and accessible. The legacy of the Games is, of course, a massive sporting legacy, which includes the Aquatic Centre and the renovation of our existing facilities. Finally, and above all, it is a rare opportunity to claim pride in belonging to Plaine Commune, a moment to promote our cities in a sustainable way, in France and around the world”⁵² (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.8).

The legacy in Seine-Saint-Denis also resulted in a significant improvement in sports facilities, meeting the needs of both elite athletes and local residents. Historically underserved in aquatic facilities, the department benefited from a large construction and renovation programme: 17 swimming pools were created and one renovated, spread across multiple municipalities. The Olympic Aquatic Centre (CAO), the only permanent competition venue built specifically for the Games, embodied the dual ambition of providing elite-level training space and accessible

⁵² « L'héritage des Jeux est un accélérateur pour la transition entamée sur notre territoire. Il contribue à redessiner nos villes, comme avec le village des athlètes, au cœur de la revitalisation du quartier Pleyel. De passerelles en franchissements urbains, les Jeux ont contribué à rendre notre territoire plus connecté et praticable. L'héritage des Jeux, c'est bien sûr un héritage sportif massif, qui passe par le Centre Aquatique, et la rénovation de nos équipements existants. C'est, enfin et surtout, une occasion rare de revendiquer la fierté d'appartenir à Plaine Commune, un moment pour faire rayonner nos villes durablement, en France et dans le monde ».

public swimming facilities. From 2026, the CAO will host the European Swimming Championships and become the new training centre for the French diving team (Paris 2024, 2025, pp.84-85).

In addition to aquatic facilities, numerous sports facilities were modernised, with improved energy efficiency and universal accessibility, for example, the Pablo Neruda gymnasium in Saint-Ouen and the Guy Môquet gymnasium in Aubervilliers (Paris 2024, 2025, p.85) . The State invested €82 million in the CAO and €16.5 million in co-financing for additional sports renovations in the department (MSJOP, 2024a, p.9)

The Paris 2024 Games created opportunities for major urban and infrastructural transformation in Seine-Saint-Denis, accelerating long-term development plans and illustrating how territorial legacy, social inclusion and sport-for-development intersected as well as how domestic and international ambitions coexisted. Urban regeneration supported elite sport while improving daily life for residents, reducing territorial inequalities and making the region more attractive for future international competitions such as the European Swimming Championships. At the same time, this urban regeneration promoted community access to sport and improved connectivity in a region that was previously isolated, a point emphasised repeatedly in post-Games reports. These themes build on pre-Games analyses while providing more precise examples and updated data. While earlier sections highlighted how community access to sport could function as a form of ‘Track-Two diplomacy’, another diplomatic dimension can be applied to the post-Games reports: the role of competition venues and elite training infrastructures. By developing facilities capable of hosting international competitions and supporting high-level training, urban transformation becomes a diplomatic stake. Diplomacy operates through athletes, who travel, compete and represent their country within these spaces. Urban transformation therefore functions as a vehicle for people-to-people and city-to-city interaction, extending France’s influence after the momentum of the Games.

3.4 An expanded urban heritage: facilities, mobility and the environment

While Seine-Saint-Denis formed the territorial heart of the Paris 2024 legacy, the effects of the Games extended well beyond this department. Across Île-de-France and other French regions, the Games acted as a catalyst for urban development, renovation and environmental transformation, guided by principles already outlined of sustainability, accessibility and reusability.

3.4.1 Sustainable and reusable facilities

As mentioned in the pre-Games reports, the organisation of Paris 2024 relied on an overarching commitment to minimising new construction by prioritising the reuse of existing and temporary sports infrastructure. This approach made it possible to optimise the use of existing facilities while ensuring a concrete legacy with new permanent construction framed as a response to territorial needs, particularly in Seine-Saint-Denis (Paris 2024, 2025, p.83). Several high-profile sites were renovated or repurposed with long-term sustainability in mind. For example, the Arena Porte de la Chapelle, although initially planned prior to the Games, had its construction accelerated by Paris 2024. Designed as a modular facility, it hosted the badminton, rhythmic gymnastics, para badminton and para powerlifting events. Post-Games, the Arena became a new anchor for the revitalisation of northern Paris, incorporating two gymnasiums, commercial and leisure spaces, an underground car park and a varied cultural and sports programme open to residents. Environmentally, the facility stood out for its bio-based materials, a 6,900 m² green roof and a heating and cooling system powered exclusively by renewable or recovered energy (Paris 2024, 2025, p. 87). As post games reports emphasised, the construction of all Olympic and Paralympic venues were aligned with the Paris Agreement and with the objective of halving carbon emissions compared with previous editions to reach carbon neutrality by 2050 (Paris 2024, 2025, p. 87). While several emblematic competition venues were already discussed in earlier sections, the urban legacy of Paris 2024 also unfolded across a wider set of territories.

3.4.2 A legacy beyond the Île-de-France region

Pre-Games documents identified several territories beyond Île-de-France as beneficiaries of Olympic-driven urban and infrastructural investment. Post-Games reports confirm the delivery and conversion of these projects, illustrating how planned legacies were materialised across different territorial contexts. In Marseille, post-Games assessments confirmed the completion of the Marina redevelopment, which modernised port infrastructure and enhanced its capacity to host water-sports competitions alongside leisure activities (MSJOP, 2024a, p. 13). In Lille, the Olympium district, initially designed to accommodate delegations during the Games, was converted into a residential and student complex, contributing to the diversification of housing supply in the city (MSJOP, 2024a, p.13). In Châteauroux, two sites were refurbished, renovated and made accessible, with lasting benefits for residents and sports users (MSJOP, 2024a, p.13). Finally, the case of Teahupo'o (Tahiti) received particular attention in post-Games reporting due to the environmental and governance challenges associated with

hosting Olympic surfing and led to an exemplary mobilisation of local authorities and Paris 2024 to reconcile sporting organisation and environmental preservation. The site, was selected in 2020 and the work carried out has respected four priorities:

“the desire to promote the Teahupo'o wave, consideration for the site's exceptional environment, the smooth organisation of competitions in compliance with safety standards, and the legacy for future sporting events organised in Teahupo'o” (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.108)

A biodiversity monitoring mission was established, and concerns around a new judges' tower led to a revision of the project. The final version, more environmentally respectful, was assembled and dismantled without incident and is now stored for reuse. Fibre-optic deployment and enhanced infrastructure constituted lasting benefits for the community and the region (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 108).

3.4.3 Environmental diplomacy and urban regeneration

One of the most emblematic legacies of Paris 2024 was the environmental restoration of the Seine and Marne rivers, made possible through a long-term effort coordinated by the State and local authorities. Through the 'Plan Baignade', launched eight years before the Games, €700 million was invested to restore water quality, reduce bacteriological pollution by 75% and enable the opening of 30 supervised swimming sites from 2025 (compared with 20 announced in pre-Games reports). Biodiversity indicators also improved significantly. According to the MSJP, since August 2024 “40 species of fish live in the Seine today, compared to only 3 in the 1970s” (MSJP, 2024b, p.20).

As Marc Guillaume, Prefect of the Île-de-France Region noted:

“This is one of the most beautiful legacies of the Games: it involves both preserving a unique ecosystem, known throughout the world, and imagining a new bathing area in the heart of the city, with the possibility of having a place to swim close to home. The Seine connects territories, and its swimmability strengthens those ties”⁵³ (MSJOP, 2024a, p. 11).

Eco-design also remained central to the environmental framing of the Games, especially for temporary infrastructure. Paris 2024 produced two key reference documents to guide the environmental impact of temporary infrastructure: the *Guide to Eco-design Applied to*

⁵³ « Celle-ci [la reconquête de la baignabilité de la Seine et de la Marne] est l'un des plus beaux héritages des Jeux : c'est à la fois préserver un écosystème unique, connu du monde entier et imaginer un nouvel espace de baignade au cœur de ville, avec la possibilité d'avoir un lieu de nage près de chez soi. La Seine relie les territoires, sa baignabilité en resserre les liens ».

Temporary Architecture, presented as the first of its kind, providing operators with strategic and technical guidance adapted to different types of sites, aiming to advance the entire events sector by positioning itself as a reference tool (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 146); and the *Responsible Event Construction Charter*, committing all providers to five pillars: circular economy, carbon reduction, environmental preservation, social innovation and territorial value creation (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.146).

These documents structured the construction of Olympic facilities. Paris 2024 was in charge of the temporary facilities for the Games, while SOLIDEO was responsible for building the permanent Olympic and Paralympic infrastructure that will remain as part of the long-term legacy (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.244). According to post-Games assessments, 95% of sites were existing or temporary, and 100% of materials used for temporary structures were reused, repurposed or recycled (figures confirmed in post-Games reporting and consistent with pre-Games projections) (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 144). Iconic venues embodied these principles. The Grand Palais Éphémère, described as “neither entirely permanent nor entirely temporary” (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 147), was designed to be fully dismantled and reused after the Games depending on the needs of the local areas. At Versailles, temporary facilities were carefully integrated into the landscape and fully dismantled afterwards (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 152).

It is important to note that, while the Seine was framed in post-Games narratives as an emblematic sustainability and legacy achievement, these transformations were accompanied by public debate and contestation that are largely absent from official reporting. Academic work by Sesa et al. (2024), for example, highlighted concerns surrounding water-quality governance during the Games, pointing to a lack of transparency in decision-making processes, adjustments to health indicators for competition, and delays in the public communication of water-quality data. Drawing on the case of a Belgian triathlete who was hospitalised during the Games, the authors emphasise broader ethical tensions between athlete safety, governance accountability and the pressure to preserve the symbolic value of the Seine as an Olympic showcase. It is important to note, however, that the Belgian Olympic authorities did not attribute the team’s withdrawal to water quality, instead emphasising the need to clarify competition conditions, scheduling and event formats for future Olympic competitions (Team Belgium, 2024). While such controversies fall outside the scope of this thesis, their relative absence from post-Games institutional documents underlines the selective nature of official narratives and points to important avenues for further research.

The Paris 2024 Games accelerated urban, social and environmental transformation across multiple territories. Seine-Saint-Denis, historically under-resourced areas benefited from

renovated public facilities, the development of soft mobility and improved accessibility framed as part of a lasting urban strategy. Nationally, the Games supported investments in sustainable infrastructure, modernised venues and environmentally respectful redevelopment projects, from Marseille to Tahiti, considering eco-responsibility in all phases of regional development and across different territorial contexts. The ecological restoration of the Seine and Marne, made possible by massive investment and inter-territorial coordination, demonstrated the capacity of the Games to drive structural change, and integrate environmental transition into urban policy. These outcomes were framed in post-Games narratives as evidence of Paris 2024's ambition to deliver a replicable development model capable of informing future sporting mega-events in France and beyond.

4. Social legacy and diplomacy

The Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games were designed to act as a catalyst for profound social change. The organisers framed the Games as a means of mobilising sport for social innovation, inclusion and environmental awareness. This ambition was structured through the 'Legacy & Sustainability strategy', built around two pillars. The first aimed to deliver 'responsible and innovative Games' by limiting their environmental impact while placing them at the service of the economic and social development of host regions. The second sought to 'build a social and environmental legacy' by positioning sport at the heart of issues such as health, equality, solidarity and environmental preservation (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.7).

Complementing this strategy, universal accessibility was embedded as a central strategic pillar from the bidding phase onwards. It rested on three objectives: to ensure full participation and a barrier-free experience for everyone, to leave a lasting impact for people with specific needs, and to create long-term change by encouraging best practices and a mindset of universal accessibility for future events (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.7).

In this context, Paris 2024 placed social inclusion at the heart of its legacy commitments, targeting specific groups such as people with disabilities, women, refugees and individuals distant from the job market. This approach was articulated around three objectives: promoting inclusion (especially through universal accessibility), fostering equality and combating discrimination and supporting professional integration (Pluricité et al., 2025, p. 119). This section examines how these objectives acquire diplomatic significance in post-Games framing.

4.1 Universal inclusion and diplomacy

Hosting the Paralympic Games in Paris for the first time offered an opportunity not only to celebrate para-athletes but also to generate broader societal awareness. Paris 2024 adopted a comprehensive approach designed to make the Games an inclusive and meaningful, while contributing to a transformation of perceptions surrounding disability. This ambition was structured around three priorities: “promoting access to sport for people with disabilities; making the Games accessible and contributing to the transformation of the region towards universal accessibility [and] changing perceptions of disability”⁵⁴ (Pluricité et al., July 2025, p.121).

Whereas these priorities were extensively articulated during the preparation phase (see Chapter 5), post-Games reports focused on their operationalisation and immediate effects. Regarding the first objective, Paris 2024 mapped barriers to participation in sport, particularly health-related obstacles, through a preliminary study by the ‘Observatoire Régional de la Mobilité des personnes en situation de handicap’ (*Regional Observatory for the Mobility of Persons with Disabilities*, ORME). This analysis informed a structured action plan developed with the CPSF to expand opportunities for participation (Pluricité et al., 2025, p. 122).

Universal accessibility, already central to pre-Games planning, was reinforced to a central operational principle during the Games delivery. It aimed to guarantee barrier-free participation in the Games, leave a tangible legacy for the host territory and promote an intangible legacy benefiting the population. As defined in the Pluricité report:

“It is important to recall that universal accessibility is a concept that promotes the right to equitable and barrier-free access to all aspects of society for all individuals, whether or not they have a disability. Universal accessibility is considered a fundamental right, as it is essential to ensuring equal opportunities, dignity, and social participation for everyone. It is often recognised as a key component of human rights”⁵⁵ (Pluricité et al., 2025, p.129)

This principle was integrated into Olympic infrastructure, including the Athletes’ Village and the Porte de la Chapelle Arena, which were designed to be fully accessible. Accessibility was

⁵⁴ « Favoriser l'accès au sport pour les personnes en situation de handicap ; Faire des Jeux accessibles et participer à la transformation du territoire vers une accessibilité universelle. Changer le regard sur le handicap ».

⁵⁵ « Il convient ici de rappeler que l'accessibilité universelle est un concept qui promeut le droit à un accès équitable et sans obstacle à tous les aspects de la société pour toutes les personnes, qu'elles aient ou non un handicap. L'accessibilité universelle est considérée comme un droit fondamental car elle est essentielle pour garantir l'égalité des chances, la dignité et la participation sociale de toutes les personnes. Elle est souvent reconnue comme un aspect clé des droits de l'Homme ».

expanded through transport strategies improving services for people with reduced mobility and sensory disabilities, as discussed in Chapter 5 (Section 4.2).

Paris 2024 also engaged in close collaboration with public and private partners, contributing to the dissemination of a shared culture of accessibility. While structural limitations persisted, particularly within the Île-de-France transport network, this shared culture represented a step forward in the gradual and sustainable evolution of accessibility standards for major events (Pluricité et al., 2025, p. 131). Obstacles were nonetheless identified, notably regarding the accessibility of the Île-de-France transport system, highlighting ongoing tensions between stated ambitions and the concrete conditions of implementation, as documented in the 2025 Pluricité report (Pluricité et al., 2025, p.131).

The diplomatic legacy of Paris 2024's accessibility strategy operated on two levels. First, France positioned itself as a promoter of inclusive norms around inclusion in international sporting events. Second, these investments enhanced the country's capacity to welcome global visitors, including people with disabilities, more equitably in the future, strengthening France's credibility as a host of inclusive SMEs.

4.2 Promoting values internationally and international cooperation

“The Olympic and Paralympic Games are historically an exceptional moment of encounter between all nations. Beyond the sporting events, the Games are a popular and multicultural highlight that appeals to the whole world, bringing people together around the values of respect, tolerance and cooperation”⁵⁶ (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.268).

This emphasis on values underpinned France's ambition to mobilise the Games as a vehicle for sustainable development and international influence, in line with the IOC's Agenda 2020, Agenda 2020+5 and the Olympism 365 strategy. Sport's recognition by the United Nations as a lever for sustainable development, formalised in the 2030 Agenda and reaffirmed in the 2024 Pact for the Future, provided an international framework within which Paris 2024 articulated its global legacy. Paris 2024 therefore developed a unique international-legacy strategy based on two principles: extending domestic priorities (health, education, environment, inclusion, equality and civic engagement) through sport and building sustainable and innovative partnerships with key actors (CNOSF, *Agence Française de développement* (AFD), *Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères* (MEAE) to promote the impact of the Games in and beyond France and make the Games accessible to all (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 268).

⁵⁶ « Les Jeux Olympiques et Paralympiques sont historiquement un moment exceptionnel de rencontres entre toutes les nations. Au-delà des épreuves sportives, les Jeux constituent un temps fort, populaire et multiculturel qui s'adresse au monde entier, en se rassemblant autour des valeurs de respect, de tolérance et de coopération. »

Within this context, international cooperation and the dissemination of values emerged as a central diplomatic theme and proved particularly important in relation to the social legacy of the Games.

In 2023, Paris 2024 launched an exploratory programme on sport's contribution to peace and fraternity, rooted in the Olympic Truce, an ancient tradition, aiming to suspend armed conflicts during the period of the Games, from the week preceding the Olympic Games to the week following the Paralympic Games (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 268). A two-stage educational project brought together more than 600 secondary-school pupils from Seine-Saint-Denis and Paris to simulate negotiations surrounding the UN Olympic Truce resolution. Sixteen students later travelled to New York to attend the General Assembly, where the resolution for Paris 2024 was formally adopted in the presence of the IOC President and the President of Paris 2024. This project sought to raise awareness among young people of the role of sport as a vehicle for peace, equality, education, climate action and inclusion. This initiative illustrated how the Games served as a platform for diplomatic storytelling around peace, civic participation and youth engagement while positioning France as a key actor in the promotion of peace through sport (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 268).

Paris 2024 also played a major role in supporting the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) in Dakar in 2026, the first Olympic event to be held on the African continent. Cooperation agreements signed in 2019 and renewed in 2020 enabled the sharing of expertise, joint communication initiatives and an observation programme allowing Dakar teams to gain experience of Games delivery (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 268). This cooperation was part of a broader initiative launched by the IOC, in line with Agenda 2020+5, aimed at promoting more efficient and innovative organisational models. Paris 2024 also exchanged practices with other international events, such as the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, indicating that cooperation extended beyond the Olympic family to the broader SMEs ecosystem. As Samuel Ducroquet, Ambassador for Sport, summarised:

“The enthusiasm of the sporting community around the world, thanks in particular to the efforts of the French diplomatic network, demonstrates the ability of the Paris 2024 Games to bring people together. This international enthusiasm also stems from the fact that these Games reflect France's image on the international stage: bold, responsible and united”⁵⁷ (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.268).

⁵⁷ « L'engouement de l'écosystème sportif partout dans le monde, notamment grâce à la mobilisation du réseau diplomatique français, témoigne de la capacité des Jeux de Paris 2024 à fédérer. Cet enthousiasme international vient aussi du fait que ces Jeux sont à l'image de ce qu'est la France sur la scène internationale : audacieuse, responsable et solidaire ».

4.2.1 Development cooperation through sport

A groundbreaking agreement between Paris 2024 and the AFD in 2020 marked an unprecedented alignment between the sports movement and the development sector. This initiative aimed to demonstrate the potential of sport as a lever for social impact in terms of health, environment, education, inclusion, equality and civic engagement. Two initiatives followed from this agreement. The first was 'Impact 2024 International', a call for projects that provided funding and support for 45 initiatives across 19 African countries, placing sport at the service of development. Through €1.4 million in co-financing, these projects reached 77,469 direct beneficiaries, 41% of whom were girls and women.

The second was the 'Impact 2024 - Athlete Entrepreneurs' programme, which supported the professional retraining of 83 athletes by accompanying their social entrepreneurship projects in France and Africa (Paris 2024, 2024a, p.270).

Support for 'Impact 2024 International' projects continued beyond the Games. An agreement was signed between the AFD, the IOC and Paris 2024 to finance 10 additional projects in the consolidation phase, as part of the Olympism 365 strategy, ensuring the lasting impact of sport for development initiatives (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.270).

In line with this strategy of using sport to promote development, a summit entitled "Sport for Sustainable Development" was organised on the eve of the Games, on the initiative of President Emmanuel Macron and IOC President Thomas Bach. This event brought together nearly 500 participants, including 55 heads of state and government, as well as representatives of international organisations, the sports movement, civil society and the private sector. Participants made concrete commitments around five major areas: education and employment, health and nutrition, equality and inclusion, funding and impact measurement, and sustainability and legacy. Remy Rioux, Director General of the AFD, emphasised that this mobilisation would not have been possible without the work of Paris 2024 (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.270)

Another example of an international development project was the contribution of Paris 2024 to the "Sport and Decentralised Cooperation" programme, led by the *Délégation pour l'action extérieure des collectivités territoriales* (Delegation for the External Action of Local Authorities, DAECT) of the MEAE, by supporting the funding of 35 projects in 22 countries through €3.5 million in co-financing. These initiatives, led by French local authorities and their international partners, aimed to make sport a vehicle for sustainable territorial development and inclusion. This momentum continued after the Games with the launch of a new call for projects designed

to strengthen international partnerships, support the integration of sports practices into local life, integrate sport into regional public policies, mobilise local authorities around Olympic values and SDGs, and promote French expertise in sport (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.270).

4.2.2 Education and ‘values legacy’

Olympic values formed a recurrent theme across legacy reports. The Paris 2024 Endowment Fund aimed to “embed Olympic values in local communities and social practices in a sustainable manner”⁵⁸ (Pluricité et al., 2025, p.26). As outlined in the Pluricité et al. report, Paris 2024 aimed to use sport and its associated values to “support people with educational difficulties and combat school dropout, promote Olympic and Paralympic sports and values, and raise awareness of the Games among the ‘Generation 2024’”⁵⁹ (Pluricité et al., 2025, p.44). Since 2017, more than five million students were introduced to Olympic and Paralympic values through the Olympic and Paralympic Week, illustrating the scale of this educational mobilisation (Pluricité et al., 2025, p. 53).

The report on the Paris 2024 Education and Youth programme (Paris 2024, 2024d, pp.14–15, 20) likewise highlighted a range of initiatives combining physical activity, civic education and Olympic values. These included, for example: ‘Pédagogie en mouvement’, developed with Play International, which used movement to engage students in inclusion and citizenship and trained 270 professionals in Seine-Saint-Denis through twenty sessions; the IOC’s ‘PEVO’ programme, downloaded more than 500 times, which introduced young people to the values of friendship, respect and excellence and the IPC’s ‘I’mPossible’ programme, which reached more than 1,500 schools and focused on Paralympic values and disability inclusion.

These initiatives represented a practical application of the evolving philosophy of Olympism. While Olympism is not the central analytical focus of this thesis, its role in France’s legacy strategy is nonetheless significant. As Chatziefstathiou (2012) argues, Olympism is not a fixed ideology. The values of Olympism have evolved in response to historical, political, and social changes. While early Olympic ideals reflected elitist and exclusionary views, the movement has gradually embraced values of inclusion and diversity. Despite ongoing criticisms, such as Eurocentrism and commercialisation, new concerns, such as sustainability and corporate responsibility, demonstrate the capacity of Olympism to adapt (2012, p. 385). Paris 2024

⁵⁸ « conçu pour inscrire durablement les valeurs olympiques dans les territoires et les pratiques sociales ».

⁵⁹ « d’utiliser le sport et ses valeurs à des fins pédagogiques pour accompagner les publics en difficultés éducatives et lutter contre le décrochage scolaire, de promouvoir les sports et les valeurs olympiques et paralympiques et de faire connaître les Jeux à la « Génération 2024 » ».

explicitly aligned itself with this modernised interpretation, presenting the Games as a catalyst for lasting social change.

Chatziefstathiou further emphasises that Olympism extends beyond sport to encompass culture and education and should be understood as a flexible philosophy adaptable to various contexts, rather than being limited to formal Olympic education. Paris 2024's initiatives, ranging from civic service to school-based and community programmes, reflected this understanding. They extended beyond formal education and the school environment, as Paris 2024's legacy initiatives integrated civic engagement, inclusion and international cooperation.

This approach is consistent with the concept of 'value legacies' as defined by Chatziefstathiou (2012, p.396). She precises about value legacies that they:

"extend beyond education and can include 'learning through practice' and through active projects, e.g. on how to lead a more active lifestyle or how to maintain a thriving natural environment" (Chatziefstathiou, 2012, p.396).

She further argues that Olympic learning processes should:

"(1) reflect the broad range of educational opportunities outside the strict environment of school in everyday life, (2) focus beyond young people to the wider community, (3) express the complexities of Olympic practices which should also be reflected in an understanding of what Olympism means today, and (4) demonstrate the importance of partnerships for generating value legacies linked with Olympism and the Olympic Games" (Chatziefstathiou, 2012, p.396).

Paris 2024's approach broadly mirrored these four principles, positioning Olympic and Paralympic values not only as educational tools but also as instruments of social transformation. Through civic-engagement programmes, youth initiatives and community-based educational tools, Paris 2024 embedded these values within everyday social practices. By integrating Olympic and Paralympic values into civic service, school programmes, and community-based education, Paris 2024 positioned itself as a driver of social transformation through sport and this 'values legacy' became part of France's broader diplomatic strategy.

These educational and value-driven initiatives also supported France's soft-power ambitions. As Grix and Lee (2013) argue, sport can serve as a powerful vehicle for projecting national

identity and values internationally. By promoting Olympic and Paralympic values, France sought to position itself as a progressive host and a leader in the governance of SMEs.

Finally, these initiatives align with Schneider's definition of cultural diplomacy as "the exchange of ideas, information, art and other cultural expressions among nations and their people to foster mutual understanding" (Cummings, 2003, p.1 cited in Schneider 2005, p.47). The exchanges between France and Senegal and the dissemination of Olympic values through the Youth Olympic Games in Dakar 2026, exemplified such exchanges, using sport as a transnational channel of value transmission, mutual understanding and international cooperation.

5. Green diplomacy and contemporary challenges

WWF France, an independent nature conservation organisation, entered a strategic partnership with the Paris 2024 bid committee in 2016 with the ambition to use the Olympic and Paralympic Games as a lever for ecological transformation of territories and lifestyles. Convinced that the Games could embody a new way of thinking about cities and lifestyles, WWF France issued a series of recommendations, including aligning the Paris 2024 Games with the Paris Agreement. These recommendations were largely included in the bid dossier, which stood out for, according to post games reports, setting some of the most ambitious environmental objectives ever defined for the Games (Paris, 2024, 2024c, p.42).

To translate these ambitions into practice, Paris 2024 established a dedicated organisational structure in 2018. The objective of alignment with the Paris Agreement was operationalised through the definition of a carbon-footprint target and the implementation of a series of measures to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. In addition, the Organising Committee provided financial support for high-quality climate-contribution projects corresponding to the residual emissions of the Games (Paris, 2024, 2024c, p.42). According to the sustainability report, the majority of WWF's 80 recommendations were implemented, reinforcing Paris 2024's positioning as an innovator in sustainable event delivery (Paris, 2024, 2024c, p.42). One of the most notable contributions was the development of the 'Coach Climat Évènements' tool, designed to support French event organisers in reducing emissions over the long term. At the international level, the Organising Committee was a founding signatory and active member of the UNFCCC's Sports for Climate Action initiative, contributing to a legacy that was both technical and political (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 42).

Paris 2024 pursued the cross-cutting principles established in its bid, with a particular focus on methodology, exemplarity and appropriate governance, what post-Games reports described the “highest level of environmental performance ever recorded for the Games” (Paris, 2024, 2024c, p.42). Athlete involvement was supported through the Athletes’ Commission and dedicated training programmes for those interested in environmental issues. Measures included the exclusive use of renewable electricity, biodiversity protection for temporary sites, and a circular-economy programme with a 90% circularity rate for material assets. Some achievements, such as the first fossil-fuel-free Olympic cauldron, exceeded even WWF’s initial expectations (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 42).

As the post-Games sustainability and legacy report observed:

“The numerous methods and guides for more responsible events make it possible to leave a lasting legacy for many issues such as the circular economy, the social and solidarity economy, digital technology, signage and merchandising”⁶⁰ (Paris, 2024, 2024c, p.42)

Paris 2024 also obtained ISO 20121 certification in 2022, recognising its commitment to the highest standards in terms of economic, environmental and social impact. This certification, issued by AFNOR, was confirmed in 2023 and 2024, making Paris 2024 the first major international sporting event to be certified under the revised version of the standard.

Taking a proactive approach, Paris 2024 also led the evolution of the ISO 20121 standard, in collaboration with the IOC, AFNOR and the French events industry. This accelerated international process led to the publication of the new ISO 20121:2024 standard, approved by voting countries in March 2024 and published in early April 2024. This revised version introduced major advances such as the simplification of formalisation requirements to make it more accessible, the integration of impact and legacy measurement, alignment with the SDGs, and a framework for responsible procurement (Paris, 2024, 2024c, p.70). This contribution illustrated Paris 2024’s ambition to create enduring environmental and social standards for future SMEs.

These strategic choices were mobilised in post-Games reports to project France as an innovative and environmentally responsible host capable of responding to contemporary global challenges, positioning itself as a leader in the increasingly competitive landscape of

⁶⁰ « Les nombreuses méthodes et guides pour des événements plus responsable permettent de laisser un héritage durable pour de nombreux enjeux comme l’économie circulaire, l’économie sociale et solidaire, le numérique, la signalétique ou le merchandising. »

global event hosting and asserting its soft power profile. Across these initiatives, a consistent pattern emerged. Paris 2024 was framed as having delivered a series of “firsts”, reflecting a deliberate effort to redefine what hosting the Olympic Games could represent.

6. Paris 2024 and the creation of new standards for organising SMEs

“There is no doubt that Paris 2024 hosted what is likely the most sustainable Games in history, setting new standards for all future Olympic and Paralympic organizing committees, as well as for upcoming sporting events”⁶¹ (Paris 2024, 2024c, p.1)

Post-Games reports framed Paris 2024 as a transformative edition of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, redefining expectations for sustainability, inclusion and governance. Paris was presented as the first to fully align with the Olympic Agenda 2020, the first to launch the Olympic Creator Programme (IOC, n.d., p. 33), and the first to host 100% cycle-friendly Games (MSJOP, 2024b, p. 6). It also introduced the first social charter in Olympic history (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 27) and integrated a responsible digital strategy for the first time (Paris 2024, 2024a, p. 109). It was also the first edition of the Games to be entirely served by public transport (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 170). Further innovations included the *Guide to Eco-design Applied to Temporary Architecture*, the first of its kind, and the first fossil fuel-free Olympic cauldron. Paris 2024 also became the first major international sporting event to obtain ISO 20121 certification under the revised standard.

As the first Summer Games in France in a century, and the first Summer Paralympic Games in the country’s history, Paris 2024 was widely portrayed as an organisational, popular and sporting success. Through coordinated efforts involving the Organising Committee, the State, local authorities and the sports movement, the Games were presented by the IOC and IPC as “the new benchmark” for global event hosting (MSJOP, 2024b, p. 2).

Thomas Bach emphasised that Paris 2024 marked a turning point in the history of the Olympic Movement, embodying a new era in line with the IOC's Agenda 2020. With a reduced carbon footprint, full gender parity among athletes, and 95% of venues either existing or temporary and supplied with renewable energy, Paris demonstrated that a mega-event could be spectacular, environmentally responsible and sustainable. The impact was framed as extending beyond the Games themselves, with measures such as the introduction of

⁶¹ « Il ne fait aucun doute que Paris 2024 a organisé sans doute les Jeux les plus durables de l'histoire, établissant de nouveaux standards pour tous les futurs comités d'organisation olympiques et paralympiques, ainsi que pour tous les événements sportifs à venir ».

30 minutes of daily physical activity in primary schools, the creation of 181,000 jobs, support for the social and solidarity economy, and major urban regeneration projects including the Athletes' Village and the clean-up of the Seine. These elements reinforced the framing of Paris 2024 as a Games designed to act as a catalyst for societal transformation (Paris 2024, 2024c, p. 8).

Holger Preuss, chair of the Paris 2024 Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, echoed this assessment. Paris 2024, he argued, set new standards in the organisation of SMEs by placing sustainability, social change, environmental responsibility, regional economic renewal and legacy at the core of the project (Pluricité et al., 2025, p.6). In his words: “at a time when major sporting events are increasingly met with scepticism, Paris has succeeded in organising much more than just a sporting celebration”⁶² (Pluricité et al., 2025, p.6). Among the symbolic initiatives, the introduction of daily physical activity in primary schools, supported by the Ministry of Education and now incorporated into national public policy, illustrated how legacy measures were embedded structurally rather than symbolically. Similarly, economic outcomes, including the creation of thousands of jobs and contracts awarded to local actors, generated long-term structural value beyond the one-off effects of event delivery (Pluricité et al., 2025, p.6).

One year after the Games, early results confirmed this trajectory: sports facilities were in active use, school playgrounds had been redeveloped, and several businesses reported sustained growth. Paris 2024 was thus presented as laying the foundations of a legacy model based on innovation, inclusion and sustainability, integrating measures from the design phase onwards and developed in partnership with institutions such as the IOC and the OECD (Pluricité et al. 2025, p.6).

By aligning with Agenda 2020+5 and Paralympic Games reforms, Paris 2024 was framed as demonstrating that sporting excellence, popularity, and social and environmental responsibility could be combined. France was presented as redefining SME standards along five dimensions: first, the implementation of responsible infrastructure; second, exemplary gender parity among Olympic athletes, accompanied by calls to extend this commitment at the Paralympic level; third, a reduction in the carbon footprint, presented as having been halved, with an official assessment underway by the Ministry of Ecology; fourth, a strong social commitment illustrated by the creation of the first Social Charter in Olympic history; and finally,

⁶² « À une époque où les grands événements sportifs sont de plus en plus accueillis avec scepticisme, Paris a réussi à organiser bien plus qu'une simple fête sportive ».

enhanced inclusion through initiatives such as the 'Billetterie Populaire' and increased accessibility for people with disabilities (MSJOP, 2024b, p.27). These elements contributed to Paris 2024 being presented by the IOC and IPC as "the new benchmark"⁶³ (MSJOP, 2024b, p. 2).

This momentum extended into future SME hosting. According to the MSJOP report, France is set to host multiple major events, including the 2025 World Badminton Championships, the 2026 European Swimming Championships, the 2027 UCI World Cycling and Para-Cycling Championships, the 2028 Ice Hockey World Championships, and the 2029 Men's Handball World Championships, while additional bids, especially in parasport, are already underway. Notably, the IOC's decision, taken during Paris 2024, to award the 2030 Winter Games to the French Alps reinforced France's positioning as a leader in sustainable Olympic hosting, while opening discussions on the future of winter sports and the sustainable transformation of mountain regions (MSJOP, 2024b, p. 27).

Finally, for the first time in the history of the Games, the French State launched a coordinated programme of 14 impact studies on the Games. Conducted alongside evaluations by Paris 2024, SOLIDEO, local authorities and the Court of Auditors, these studies aimed to enrich public debate and legacy policies with objective and transparent data, while informing preparations for the 2030 Winter Games (MSJOP, 2024b, p.30).

As the Minister for Sport concluded:

"The Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games brought immense joy to our citizens, fostered cohesion, and instilled a deep sense of pride in our nation, while significantly enhancing France's image abroad. 'Make it iconic', that is precisely what our country achieved. These Games showcased the strength of the collective effort of the 'Team France', mobilized across all sectors to ensure their success, and highlighted the exceptional quality of French expertise. They revealed the talent, resilience, and determination of our national teams, as well as the unparalleled power of sport to inspire and unite. These Games must now reinforce our country's confidence in itself. France is capable, with its unique boldness, of achieving great things when it sets ambitious goals, and when it stays the course, driven by men and women who, beyond their differences, work together in the higher interest of the nation"⁶⁴ (MSJOP, 2024b, p.30).

⁶³ « la nouvelle référence ».

⁶⁴ « Les Jeux Olympiques et Paralympiques de Paris 2024 ont apporté une joie immense à nos concitoyens, de la cohésion et une vraie fierté à notre nation, tout en faisant rayonner pour longtemps l'image de la France à l'étranger. « Make it iconic », c'est ce que notre pays a fait. Ces Jeux ont démontré la force du collectif de « l'Équipe des Français » mobilisé dans tous les secteurs pour leur succès et la qualité exceptionnelle des savoir-faire français. Ils ont montré le talent, la force et la détermination de nos Equipes de France, ainsi que la capacité à nul autre pareil du sport à inspirer et rapprocher. Ces Jeux doivent maintenant renforcer la confiance de notre pays en

7. Conclusion

Post-Games assessments presented Paris 2024 as a multi-dimensional diplomatic project. Economic diplomacy was reframed from pre-Games ambitions to observed outcomes, with procurement, employment, tourism and governance mechanisms presented as evidence of an inclusive and sustainable economic model supporting France's international positioning and soft power.

More broadly, post-Games narratives highlighted the Games' role as a catalyst for urban, social, environmental and cultural transformation across multiple territories, from Seine-Saint-Denis to other regions and overseas contexts. Initiatives in urban regeneration, sustainability, accessibility, education, culture and high-performance sport were framed as interconnected legacies contributing to France's attractiveness, competitiveness and ability to shape international norms.

Across these domains, a consistent narrative emerged in which Paris 2024 was portrayed as having delivered new benchmarks for the organisation of sport mega-events, reinforcing France's image as an innovative, responsible and capable host. While the long-term durability of these legacies remains to be fully assessed, post-Games reporting illustrates how Paris 2024 sought to translate the Olympic moment into lasting diplomatic value.

lui-même. La France est capable, avec une audace qui lui est singulière, de grandes choses lorsqu'elle se donne de grandes ambitions. Et qu'elle en garde le cap, avec des hommes et des femmes déterminés et capables d'œuvrer, par-delà leurs différences, dans l'intérêt supérieur du pays ».

**PART III – LEGACY, DIPLOMACY, AND SOFT POWER.
LESSONS FROM LONDON AND PARIS. CONCLUDING
COMMENTS.**

1. Conclusion

The central question guiding this research was: How can the diplomatic legacy of SMEs be mobilised to enhance soft power for host countries, while aligning with local and international development strategies, as examined through the London 2012 and Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games?

This research demonstrated the importance of framing legacy through a diplomatic lens to understand how countries leverage legacy initiatives across both domestic and international contexts, reinforcing their soft power. The analysis focused not on evaluating delivery success, but on how legacy was framed, communicated and mobilised diplomatically by host states.

Chapter 3 examined pre-Games documentation relating to London 2012. It showed that legacy was strategically framed as tool of economic, urban, environmental, cultural and social diplomacy. Economic diplomacy focused on trade promotion, inward investment and the international projection of British expertise in a context of economic crisis. Urban and environmental ambitions were concentrated in East London, framed as a model of sustainable regeneration, inclusive infrastructure and state capacity. Cultural and social legacies emphasised creativity, volunteering, disability inclusion and civic participation, positioning the Games as a vehicle for national renewal and social change.

Chapter 4 analysed post-Games reporting on London 2012, most of which was published several years after the Games and provided substantial data. It showed how pre-Games ambitions were consolidated and reframed as delivered outcomes. Post-Games narratives emphasised realised economic benefits, tourism and trade initiatives supported by strategic programmes, and sustained volunteering initiatives. Cultural visibility and advances in disability inclusion were highlighted as central diplomatic outcomes. The establishment of the NCSEM positioned the UK as a global leader in sport medicine and health innovation, following its designation by the IOC as a global Research Centre for the Prevention of Injury and Protection of Athlete Health, one of only nine worldwide. Initiatives such as National Paralympic Day, the Rio 2016 Carnivals and the National Paralympic Heritage Trust promoted inclusive values, while Channel 4's coverage amplified Paralympic ideals and reinforced the UK's leadership in disability rights. Urban and environmental legacies were embedded in infrastructure planning, with venues such as the Velodrome, Aquatics Centre and East Village designed for sustainability and later transformed into accessible community hubs. Regional

sites across the UK extended the legacy beyond London, promoting national cohesion and decentralisation of the Olympic experience.

Chapter 5 focused on pre-Games legacy planning for Paris 2024, the first Games organised under Olympic Agenda 2020. It showed how France framed legacy around sustainability, inclusion and innovation, notably through responsible procurement, SME and SSE mobilisation, cultural diplomacy, elite sport reform and territorial development. Economic, environmental and social objectives were designed from the bidding phase as mutually reinforcing diplomatic resources aligned with national and international agendas. Paris 2024 also marked a new start for France's sports governance, with reforms such as 'Ambition Bleue' and the creation of the National Sports Agency, aimed at enhancing high performance and equity. France's broader diplomatic strategy was reinforced through hosting multiple SMEs, strategic partnerships, particularly with African nations, and initiatives such as 'French Sport Touch', which promoted cooperation and the export of French expertise.

Chapter 6 examined post-Games reporting for Paris 2024. Given the recency of the Games, available reports remained limited. However, as previously stated, the focus here was placed on diplomatic framing rather than delivery evaluation. Post-Games narratives presented procurement, employment, tourism, environmental standards and urban regeneration, particularly in Seine-Saint-Denis, as evidence of an inclusive and sustainable economic model. The mobilisation of SMEs and SSE organisations, the integration of CSR criteria and the creation of employment opportunities were framed as exportable governance models. Tourism prospects were presented as promising, with Paris 2024 described as having "sent a postcard to the rest of the world for summers to come". Urban and environmental transformations were framed as long-term and inclusive, while a series of 'firsts', including alignment with Olympic Agenda 2020, the Olympic Creator Programme, 100% cycle-friendly Games, the Social Charter, the fossil-fuel-free cauldron and ISO 20121 certification, positioned France as a pioneer in sustainable and diplomatically engaged SME hosting. With 14 state-led impact studies underway and the 2030 Winter Games awarded to the French Alps, Paris 2024 was framed as an innovative model of sustainable, inclusive and diplomatically strategic Olympic legacy.

While official government and institutional reports largely emphasised positive outcomes, this thesis also acknowledged the existence of more critical academic literature. Studies highlighted modest or uneven employment effects, displacement linked to urban redevelopment, and governance challenges surrounding security and surveillance in both

cases. The limited presence of these contestations in official narratives underlined the selective nature of legacy representation and pointed to important avenues for further research.

Overall, this analysis demonstrated that the diplomatic significance of SMEs lay in the ability to connect economic, social, cultural, environmental and sporting legacies into coherent diplomatic narratives. By translating pre-Games ambition into post-Games validation, both London 2012 and Paris 2024 illustrated how SMEs functioned as diplomatic infrastructures capable of aligning domestic agendas with international influence and enhancing host-country soft power.

2. Lessons learned

This thesis has demonstrated how the diplomatic legacy of SMEs can be mobilised as a source of soft power by host countries. Through an analysis of London 2012 and Paris 2024, it has shown that legacy functions as a diplomatic framing actively constructed, managed and promoted by host states. By examining how different types of legacy intersect with diplomacy, this research contributes to the field of *sport and diplomacy*.

In both London and Paris, economic legacy was framed as a core diplomatic resource. Each host used the Games to project economic competence, strengthen domestic industries and enhance international credibility. London 2012 deployed economic diplomacy primarily through trade promotion, inward investment strategies and the international marketing of British expertise, notably via the GREAT campaign and UKTI-supported initiatives. Procurement and supply chains were mobilised to prepare companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, for international markets, framing the Games as a catalyst for economic recovery during a period of financial crisis.

Paris 2024 pursued a similar objective of economic positioning, but through a more explicitly sustainability-driven model. Responsible procurement, small and medium-sized enterprises mobilisation and the integration of SSE actors were placed at the centre of economic diplomacy. Rather than focusing on post-crisis recovery, Paris framed economic legacy around sustainability, inclusivity and long-term competitiveness. In both cases, economic legacy functioned as a diplomatic instrument by reinforcing national credibility, exporting expertise gained through the Games and strengthening comparative advantage in the global event-hosting market.

Urban regeneration emerged as one of the most powerful shared diplomatic legacies. Both Games used territorial transformation as a visible symbol of state capacity, planning competence and social investment. In London, the regeneration of East London was framed as a model of inclusive urban renewal and green innovation, transforming a historically deprived area into a showcase of sustainable infrastructure and community engagement. In Paris, Seine-Saint-Denis played a comparable role, with investments in public facilities, accessibility and soft mobility framed as part of a long-term territorial strategy. These interventions were also framed as responses to local needs, such as the lack of swimming facilities in Seine-Saint-Denis or the formerly enclaved spaces of East London being better connected.

Environmental diplomacy was closely intertwined with these urban transformations. Both London and Paris sought to deliver the “greenest Games ever”, embedding waste management, carbon control and environmental governance into their legacy strategies. London pioneered several sustainability innovations in design and energy infrastructure, while Paris extended this logic further by explicitly codifying environmental norms through initiatives such as eco-design standards and the evolution of ISO 20121. In both cases, environmental ambition functioned as a diplomatic signal, positioning the host country as a leader in sustainable SME governance.

Elite sport played a central diplomatic role in both cases. London and Paris equally sought to enhance national prestige through medal performance and high-performance sport systems. In London, elite success was closely linked to sport tourism and broader economic benefits, reinforcing the UK’s image as a global sporting nation. Paris 2024 similarly attached diplomatic importance to sporting excellence through ‘Ambition Bleue’, positioning elite sport as a marker of international competitiveness. France also reshaped its sporting model through the Olympics to consolidate its objective of being a leading sporting nation, an ambition shared with the UK.

At the same time, both hosts invested in infrastructures designed to serve both elite performance and grassroots communities, reinforcing the idea that performance diplomacy and social inclusion could coexist. London’s venues were converted into accessible community hubs, while Paris addressed structural gaps such as unequal access to swimming facilities across French territories. In both cases, elite sport governance became a diplomatic asset, projecting competence, ambition and long-term vision.

Social legacy constituted another key area of convergence. Both Games mobilised volunteering, employment and skills development as tools of diplomacy that operated largely through track-two channels. London's Games Maker programme, Team London and Join In, and Paris's extensive volunteering and civic-engagement initiatives, created large-scale people-to-people mobilisation. Some of these programmes were government-supported but carried by citizens, embedding values locally while signalling inclusion, participation and social cohesion internationally.

Employment and skills development were also central in both contexts. London emphasised employability and skills transfer at a time of economic downturn, while Paris integrated job creation, responsible employment and training within a sustainability-focused economic model. In both cases, volunteers and workers acquired expertise that could later circulate beyond the Games, contributing to diplomatic effects through human capital and professional mobility.

Cultural legacy played a diplomatic role by projecting national identity and values. London used the Cultural Olympiad, Festival 2012 and International Inspiration to showcase creativity, diversity and openness, while Paris expanded cultural diplomacy through venues, redefined ceremonies, global creator programmes and digital diplomacy more broadly and engagement with new audiences. In both cases, culture functioned as a soft-power asset, reinforcing symbolic visibility and international appeal and showing the importance of cultural events, occurring alongside sporting events, which is often the case in the organisation of SMEs.

Olympic and Paralympic values were also strategically mobilised. Education through sport, youth-focused programmes and value-based initiatives were common to both Games, positioning sport as a tool for health promotion, social cohesion and civic engagement. These "values legacies" extended diplomatic influence beyond elite governance, embedding symbolic norms and Olympic values into everyday practices and transnational exchanges, notably through youth-oriented international cooperation.

A key distinction between the two cases lies in norm-setting diplomacy. While London pioneered sustainability and inclusion ambitions, Paris 2024 transformed these ambitions into formalised international standards. Through ISO 20121 reform, responsible procurement frameworks and sustainability metrics, Paris sought to shape the governance of future SMEs directly. Importantly, both cases illustrate a broader trend: each Olympic edition builds on lessons from previous Games, introduces new innovations aligned with contemporary challenges, and contributes incrementally to the evolution of global SME governance.

Across all legacy dimensions, the findings demonstrate that legacies of SMEs function as diplomatic networks. They enable states to communicate identity, represent values, negotiate relationships and project governance capacity through interconnected economic, social, environmental, cultural and sporting legacies. Importantly, this diplomacy extends beyond formal state action, mobilising athletes, volunteers, enterprises, institutions and communities in forms of 'track-two diplomacy' as defined by Rofe (2021).

The two cases illustrate complementary models of diplomatic legacy. They also underline the importance of learning, knowledge sharing and continuity between editions, suggesting that cumulative innovation and shared frameworks can strengthen the diplomatic potential of SMEs.

Ultimately, this comparative analysis shows that considering legacy through a diplomatic lens is essential for understanding how SMEs operate as instruments of strategic transformation. When legacy is deliberately framed, coordinated and communicated at an early stage, SMEs become powerful tools for aligning domestic development with international objectives and for enhancing host countries' soft power in the long term.

3. Limitations and possible further research

This thesis focuses on two Western European countries, France and the United Kingdom, through the case studies of Paris 2024 and London 2012. This geographical focus was a deliberate choice, grounded in the significance of these two Games in the evolution of SME legacy. As outlined in the Introduction, London 2012 was the first Olympic Games to explicitly embed legacy within its bid, while Paris 2024 was the first to benefit fully from the reforms introduced under the IOC's Olympic Agenda 2020. Together, these cases offer particularly rich material for analysing how legacy is framed and mobilised as a diplomatic tool. However, future research could extend this analysis to hosts in the Global South or to non-democratic contexts to assess how diplomatic legacy is framed under different political, economic and institutional conditions.

This study does not seek to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Olympic Games through the lens of the IOC, nor does it evaluate the effectiveness of legacy delivery as its primary objective. Rather than focusing on Olympism or the Olympic Movement, the thesis concentrates on how legacy is presented, narrated and framed in official pre- and post-Games documentation produced by host countries, using the Olympics as a case study. While

outcomes are discussed, the analysis does not aim to determine whether legacy initiatives 'succeeded' or 'failed'. Research explicitly assessing the effectiveness of those diplomatic legacy outcomes would therefore represent a valuable complementary approach.

Methodologically, the thesis relies largely on official pre- and post-Games reports, which are selective and it must be acknowledged that Games evaluations are often partial and tend to privilege success narratives and under-represent contestation or unintended effects. Further research drawing on independent evaluations or alternative sources could provide a more critical and balanced perspective.

Consistent with this focus, the thesis does not assess long-term impacts or ground-level effects of legacy initiatives. This limitation is particularly relevant in the case of Paris 2024, where many outcomes remain recent, incomplete or still subject to ongoing assessment. Additional reports, audits and impact studies are expected to provide a richer empirical basis in the years ahead.

Finally, while the two case studies are complementary rather than directly comparative, the selection of documents was necessarily selective, prioritising examples most relevant to diplomatic interpretation. This approach limits the scope of perspectives included.

These limitations point towards several avenues for future research. Further studies could broaden the geopolitical scope to include non-Western host nations and examine how diplomatic legacy is constructed across diverse political and cultural settings. Research could also explore other types of SMEs beyond the Olympic Games, including regional or recurring events, to assess how legacy is mobilised across different formats.

This framework also invites reflection on the role of athletes as diplomatic figures. Future research could analyse more explicitly how athletes contribute to diplomatic legacies and act as agents of soft power. In addition, revisiting Paris 2024 over time, once further legacy reports become available, would enable more robust longitudinal analysis.

Finally, studying legacy outcomes beyond official reporting could support more critical and outcome-oriented research, while examining how SMEs respond to political contexts, including protest or social tension, could shed light on the conditions under which mega-events function as platforms for national unity or contestation. Comparative research across different event types would further enhance understanding of the diversity and limits of diplomatic legacy strategies.

4. Contribution to the literature

This thesis contributes to the growing field of sport and diplomacy, by offering a focused analysis of Olympic legacy through a diplomatic lens. It contributes to the ongoing development of this academic field by applying diplomatic theory to two Olympic editions: London 2012 and Paris 2024, both of which benefit from substantial legacy literature and data. These case studies serve as starting points, providing a deeper understanding of how host countries define and implement their legacy strategies, aligning them with national and international objectives while also serving as a form of diplomacy.

1. The first contribution involves interpreting SMEs legacy from a diplomatic perspective, rather than through traditional interpretations. This approach offers a deeper understanding of how legacy serves as a tool of soft power and can be viewed as an integral component of a country's diplomatic strategy.
2. The second contribution consists of studying two major Olympic editions within the same analytical framework, not as opposing comparative studies but as complementary readings. This approach considers London 2012 and Paris 2024 as having each shed unique light on the notion of the diplomatic legacy of the Games.
3. The third contribution is to link empirical findings to existing theoretical work in sports and diplomacy, drawing on key scholars in the field to situate the analysis within broader academic debates.
4. The fourth contribution builds on work initiated by researchers such as Rofe and Murray, by emphasising that diplomatic legacy also involves and engages non-state actors. These non-state actors play an increasingly important role in the diplomatic legacy of SMEs and therefore merit greater scholarly attention.

This research contributes to the growing body of work on sport and diplomacy and legacy examining how host countries strategically frame legacy to serve diplomatic objectives. Rather than centring on the IOC, it focuses on how the Olympic Games are organised and presented by host nations, specifically the UK and France, to align legacy initiatives with their diplomatic agendas. Building on the cases of London 2012 and Paris 2024, this thesis also offers insights into diplomatic legacy and soft power that may inform both future SME hosts and ongoing

academic debate, contributing to the development of research in the field of sport and diplomacy, as well as to reflections on practical legacy policy-making.

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I acknowledge the use of CoPilot <https://m365.cloud.microsoft/chat> to verify the accuracy of translations from French to English throughout this work, to check tense consistency and to assist with the alphabetical organisation of selected references and reports.

Appendix A - List of reports

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