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To cite this article: Jan Andre Lee Ludvigsen & Nicholas Wise (13 Feb 2024): Re-activating “feel-good” effects as an intangible hosting vision, Managing Sport and Leisure, DOI: [10.1080/23750472.2024.2314563](https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2024.2314563)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2024.2314563>



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Published online: 13 Feb 2024.



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# Re-activating “feel-good” effects as an intangible hosting vision

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This article connects conceptual discussions of “legacies” and intended “feel-good” effects in the case of the men’s UEFA 2024 European Championship (Euro 2024) that Germany will host.

**Approach:** The article draws upon insights from the existing literature, bid documents, and other web sources to explore the re-activation of feel-good effects and social impacts of hosting.

**Findings:** Euro 2024 helps us understand how feel-good effects from the standpoint of mega-events offer insight into propositions of collective pride, passion, and joy. Event promoters then can focus on re-activating this notion of feel-good for socio-political effects. This remains crucial because the pre-event discourse which facilitates a celebration and festivity takes up a political and social significance.

**Practical Implications:** The article can provide lessons for event stakeholders and organizers on the ideas of “legacies” and “feel-good”.

**Research Contributions:** The article contributes with new insight into the persuasive use of promoting social and intangible impacts. It speaks to considerations event organizers are taking to make efforts to socially engage people during the pre-event phase. It launches a number of future considerations that help us think about the intended event experience as destinations seek to deliver events that are more meaningful for locals and visitors.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 9 December 2022

Accepted 1 February 2024

## KEYWORDS

Sport mega-events; feel-good; legacies; European Championship; social impacts; mega-event

## Introduction

In October 2021, a spectacular light show at the famous *Olympiastadion* in Berlin marked – with just under three years to go – the launch of the official logo for Germany’s Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) men’s football European Championship 2024 (“Euro 2024”) (The Independent, 2021). The 2024 edition of the European Championship (or the “Euros”) not merely symbolizes the tournament’s return to Germany (as *one* of the 11 Euro 2020

hosts), it marks the return to a single-country hosting style for large-scale sporting events in Europe. Euro 2020, the last edition of the event (postponed to the summer of 2021) took up a “pan-European” hosting style to mark the 60-year anniversary of the competition (Ludvigsen, 2022). However, Germany is no newcomer when it comes to hosting sport mega-events.

It is important to note that mega-events referred to in this paper are “large-scale cultural

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(including commercial and sporting) events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance" (Roche, 2000, p. 1). Germany has previously hosted three Olympic Games, West Germany hosted the Euros in 1988, whereas Germany staged the 2006 FIFA Men's World Cup and 2011 Women's World Cup. Germany's record of mega-event hosting – coupled with the extremely limited research offering insights into Euro 2024 – despite the recent academic interest in other football mega-events hosting visions and bids (Beissel et al., 2022; Beissel & Kohe, 2022) – justifies the event as an important case to assign scholarly attention and examine. It concurrently presents the backdrop for this conceptual paper, which is supplemented by bid books and other available documents, seeking to help us think about intended "feel-good" experiences through the lens of mega-events.

This paper examines sport mega-event-related concepts of legacies and feel-good effects, focusing on Euro 2024 as a case study. Euro 2024 event organizers seek to establish an event that will be a future benchmark for social sustainability and intangible legacies (UEFA, 2023). The notion of "feeling-good" and the "feel-good factor" in sport is two-fold, from both active and passive stances. From the active stance, participation in sport has positive benefits for health; whereas from more of a passive stance, the presence of sports has emotional well-being effects (see Kerr, 1997; Lundqvist, 2011). Sport science and psychology literatures touch on feel-good factors, but more attention on the hosting of events, especially at the conception, or bidding stage. One factor of feeling good is a quality experience, and sport as a uniting mechanism is a way to enhance quality and extend a legacy that connects people (Leal et al., 2020). The literature on social leveraging stresses participation (Chalip, 2006; Taks et al., 2013), but with events, participation is not always necessarily active, but the focus on observation and being around sport in terms of feeling good needs more attention,

especially to help us think about how larger-scale events offer feel-good legacies.

Specific to this conceptual paper, and within the post-2006 World Cup era, the article explores two key questions. First, how is an intangible sport mega-event legacy like hosting experience framed by organizers in pre-event communications? Second, how is *re-activation* of feel-good effects (see Cornelissen & Maennig, 2010; Maennig & Porsche, 2008) desired before 2024 and directing us to focus on socio-political effects? An exploration into the prospects of Euro 2024 remains important because this offers insight into wider social processes at stake, including the broader global political economy of sport and culture in an epoch where mega-events are "among the costliest and most transformative human projects" (Müller et al., 2022, p. 1) in global, "post-pandemic" societies. Consequently, this renders a continued and committed social scientific investigation into mega-event and their bids significant and timely. Mega-events propose and promise intangible legacies, but often fail to deliver on them (see Rojek, 2013; Stell, 2014; Wise, 2019). Euro 2024 is taking more initiative-taking measures. Instead of proposing legacies they are focusing on developing an experience early on to engage people and seek ways to initiate intangible legacies as opposed to offering what might happen.

In contemporary societies, sport mega-events are inherently "complex affairs [...] which have political and social corollaries that usually extend far beyond the event itself" (Cornelissen & Swart, 2006, p. 108). World Cups, Olympic Games, and European Championships are aspirations (or promises) by governments, local authorities, and sports federations regarding positive, healthy, and long-lasting post-event legacies within the host countries or cities (Grix et al., 2017; Preuss, 2007a). So, in the context of Euro 2024, the first key argument this article elucidates holds that Germany's Euro 2024 bid, in distinct ways, served as an intangible legacy of the 2006 World Cup. Second, this

article argues that Euro 2024 represents a vehicle through which we can understand how a re-activation of sport mega-events' "feel-good" effects is desired. With its arguments and analysis, this article therefore advances the academic literature in a twofold manner. First, there is little – if any – existing research on Euro 2024 published ahead of the event. Thus, this article is one of the first to offer fresh insights into the socio-political dynamics surrounding this sport mega-event. Moreover then, this article opens future event-specific research avenues for studying Euro 2024 and offers scope and consideration for research related to mega-events. Secondly, this article provides an extension to the extant research on mega-event "legacies" (Boykoff & Fussey, 2014; Garcia, 2004; Preuss, 2007a; Smith, 2014) and then to the less developed literature on "feel-good" effects (Cornelissen & Maennig, 2010; Maennig & Porsche, 2008) as two co-existing concepts situated in the broader mega-event world.

In terms of structure, the next section offers a synthesized conceptual framework around the concepts of "legacy" and "feel-good" effects. Following this, we briefly revisit the cultural politics of the "Euros". Then, this conceptual article draws upon insights from the literature, web sources, and newspaper articles. It also complements this with publicly available documents related to Germany's bid, and UEFA's bid evaluations (DFB, 2018; UEFA, 2018b, 2021) as it turns towards the inter-relationships between mega-event housing experience (representing one intangible legacy) and Euro 2024's organization and planning. Following this, the article shows how a re-activation of a "feel-good" factor lies central to Euro 2024, before providing concluding remarks.

### **Conceptual framework: (In)tangible legacies and "feel-good" effects**

This section will unpack how we may understand "feel-good" effects as an intangible

mega-event legacy. Event legacy refers to the value that an event brings to a place and people (Ganga, 2022). Since the late 1990s, many studies from the social sciences addressing mega-events have focused on their legacies (Boykoff & Fussey, 2014; Garcia, 2004; Kassens-Noor et al., 2015; Lopez et al., 2022; Preuss, 2007a). Mega-events represent high-profile transformative projects with a global broadcasting reach (Müller et al., 2022). According to Preuss (2007a), scholars discuss legacies around hard and soft structures. While hard structures are observed, soft structures that involve intangible legacies can be more difficult to achieve and gain traction due to social implications and societal connections to the event (Richards et al., 2013). Simultaneously, a mega-event *per se* is short-lived: typically, it lasts for approximately one month, so attempts to build appeal and legacy are communicated in a fairly brief period.

The wider appeal of hosting mega-events followed persuasive ways to position the development of a country in relation to others (Nye, 1990), in terms of increasing destination competitiveness and using events as a competitive advantage to attract visitors, businesses, and extend political influence. The *aftermath* of a specific mega-event, however, far exceeds this limited time. However, countries are drawn to hosting as a means of showing their power and presence – and this has been observed especially among emerging nations who seek to extend political influence by hosting events, especially BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) nations over the past several decades (Chatin & Gallarotti, 2018; Wise, 2020).

Kassens-Noor et al. (2015, p. 665) note that mega-events have been attractive for cities and countries that aim to develop their infrastructures or promote a country's/city's brand or destination image. An extended market appeal involves leveraging opportunities to encourage resident participation and build a new visitor economy by hosting a mega-

event, but this can lead to over-spending or even event/sports washing (see Fruh et al., 2022; Ribeiro et al., 2022; Saberi et al., 2018). In a nutshell, mega-events are not uncommonly hosted in order to accomplish specific political goals (Cornelissen & Swart, 2006; Grix et al., 2021) whilst they are “sought for their legacies” (Kassens-Noor et al., 2015, p. 666) which have socio-political intentions which range from increasing national pride and showcasing economic prowess (see Al-Emadi et al., 2022; Wise and Maguire, 2022; Shimokubo, 2022). Hence, the prominent emphasis on legacies is central to justify the public investment going into sport mega-events (Grix et al., 2017).

Whereas grand promises of multifaceted legacies are often made to justify the pursuit of mega-event hosting rights, and the associated urban changes or development, it is concurrently crucial to acknowledge that legacies remain diverse, and a highly contested concept in the academic literature that remains hard to measure. The fluidity tied to soft and social impacts is subjectively proposed, and impressions and attitudes differ (Wallstam et al., 2020). Furthermore, there has also been a tendency in the literature to conflate “legacies” with “impacts”, though the latter is predominantly “used to describe a short-term impulse” (Scheu & Preuss, 2018, p. 377). Acknowledging the multiplex nature of legacies is necessary to capture the structural changes that extend a mega-event’s short duration. It can refer to “all planned and unplanned, positive and negative, tangible and intangible structures created for and by a sport event that remains longer than the event itself” (Preuss, 2007a, p. 211).

Especially relevant to this article is the conceptual distinction between *tangible* and *intangible* legacies (Horne, 2017; Preuss, 2007a; Rocha, 2020; Wise, 2019). Concerning the former, tangible legacies are those substantial legacies that emerge (as planned or promised) speaking to infrastructures, urban changes, stadiums, sports or leisure facilities, security-

related technology, or transport hubs (Roche, 2000; Toohey & Taylor, 2012). Then, intangible legacies may capture the experiences, knowledge, and institutional memory that emerge from specific events, which collectively inform the organization of future events (Ludvigsen, 2022). Further, intangible legacies refer to those more emotional aspects – both collective or individual – which include socio-cultural changes to beliefs, behaviours, or perceptions (Preuss, 2007a; Scheu & Preuss, 2018), or changes to the host’s political image or reputation. In contemporary societies, sport mega-events are consumed and experienced both “offline” (stadiums, fan zones, and across host cities) and “online” (television, streaming, and social media), and the individual and collective experiences of mega-event rituals mark the “passing of time and thereby [generate] time structure among individuals and groups” (Roche, 2003, p. 110). In this vein, the “intangible legacies of sport mega-events refer predominantly to popular memories, evocations and analyses of specific moments and incidents associated with an event” (Horne, 2017, p. 334).

### ***Feel-good factors and mega-events***

With regard to intangible legacies, we argue that one important exemplar of this relates to the concept of a “feel-good” factor. Here, however, it is crucial to acknowledge that “[t]here is much talk of a ‘feelgood’ factor generated by the communal consumption of sport, but little in the way of explanation of what this actually is” (Grix et al., 2021, p. 3). Important to note is the notion of “feeling good” may be firmly situated within the cubicle of intangible sport mega-event legacies (cf. Preuss, 2007a, p. 211). Indeed, “*national pride/feel-good factor*”, is one specific legacy category – together with economic, urban regeneration, increased sport participation, and international prestige/soft power – in Grix et al.’s (2017) recent unpacking of mega-event legacies. However, as juxtaposed to the work on

legacies, less attention focuses on the concept of “feel-good” effects in the sport mega-event literature (for exceptions, see Cornelissen & Maennig, 2010; Grix, 2012; Grix et al., 2017; Kavetsos & Szymanski, 2010; Maennig & Porsche, 2008). The two concepts, however, share similarities. Not only is the concept of “feel-good” hard to define, but it is also notoriously hard to measure. Commonly, it relates to ideas of happiness, well-being, and utility (Cornelissen & Maennig, 2010).

As such, sport mega-events can produce “psychic income” deriving from the euphoria surrounding an event, which again leads to a sense of national pride (Grix et al., 2017) and a national identity resembling Benedict Anderson’s (1983) “imagined communities” (see Grix & Houlihan, 2014). Thus, it represents a far more *intangible* element than other legacies (e.g. consider a new stadium or the redevelopment of transport systems). Fundamentally, whereas this sense of pride, happiness, and communal well-being evokes under diverse circumstances; *one* of these circumstances includes mega-events.

Following Cornelissen and Maennig’s (2010, pp. 98–99) lead, there are primarily three ways through which feel-good effects of sport mega-events are conceived, summarized as follows:

- First, feel-good can be generated through economic offshoots stemming from the feeling of “social contentment and cheerfulness” (p. 98) by attending or being involved in the sport spectacle.
- Second, at sport mega-events, feel-good can be evoked through “socio-cultural contingencies”, e.g. by buying into or expressing fandom in relation to the event, which may convey images of national pride and community.).
- Third, feel-good is significant as a political instrument: mega-events can evoke “mass feelings of pride and passion” (p. 99), which can give momentum to a political transition,

nation-branding of gain influence in the international system.

Drawing from this, feel-good is *one* key rationale for the staging of a mega-event. It can represent a political goal or an instrument to accomplish social development or other political aims, and not solely from attendance. Moreover, volunteering, being in proximity to an event and to general national pride (Kavetsos & Szymanski, 2010) impact various stakeholders, residents, and event visitors differently (Cornelissen & Maennig, 2010). Further, each stakeholder can shape and interpret impacts based on inclusion and exclusion (Postma & Schmuecker, 2017; Wise, 2019).

Overall, the Euros, as the third largest sport mega-event, compose an interesting case study for examining further the manifestation of “feel-good” as an intangible legacy. More specifically, given the historical record and experience of Germany *vis-a-vis* mega-event housing, Euro 2024 represents a case that allows researchers to examine how intangible legacies are framed, and how a re-activation of feel-good – which plays political and socio-cultural roles – may be desired in order to get people involved and invested in the event through connectivity and communications seeking to push the “feel-good” factor.

### ***The cultural politics of the Euros***

To fully grasp the role of mega-events as catalysts for political projects and benefits, it is necessary to revisit the significance of the Euros. Horne (2017, p. 331, original emphasis) reminds us that: “There is a politics *in*, and a politics *of*, sports mega-events”. Here, the former refers to the internal politics of sport’s governing bodies, whereas the latter relates to “corporate interests and global forces in combination with, or confrontation with, local interests” (Horne, 2017, p. 331). Albeit the two sometimes overlap (Włoch, 2020), it is primarily the politics *of* sport mega-events this article acknowledges. In that



respect, the Euros, administered and owned by UEFA (Włoch, 2020), represent a culturally and politically significant mega-event, which has consistently increased in its scale and significance since the 1950s (Mittag & Legrand, 2010).

Within a political frame, the Euros – staged every four years – can be analysed in the context of “contemporaneous process of European integration”, and has the potential to generate a European consciousness (Mittag & Legrand, 2010, p. 719, see also Ludvigsen and Petersen-Wagner, 2022). Similarly, Horne (2010) holds that the tournament has mirrored wider developments speaking to the European economic “common market” and the political union and impacts the generation of European identities. Like the World Cup and the Olympics, the Euros are consumed locally and globally and provide millions of football supporters, tourists, and consumers – physically and meta-physically – a ritualistic experience packed with meanings and narratives that individuals and collective groups construct or buy into (Ludvigsen and Petersen-Wagner, 2022). Further, host countries use the Euros to boost their position and integration into the international system through soft power and sports diplomacy (Martin & Hernandez, 2021).

Moreover, following Horne (2010), the Euros – when staged across different countries – are also intricately linked up to (in)tangible legacy discourses speaking to ritualistic, material, symbolic, and communal legacies. As he maintains:

even in the midst of the vastly increased commercialization and global media presence of the [Euros], the representational dimensions of the Euro remain an important consideration. “Legacy talk” has been increasingly incorporated into the validation of the event by organizers, as it has by organizers of all other sports mega-events. Legacies have thus become the battlefield on which boosters and sceptics engage in semiotic struggle. *Future research will therefore need to examine the discursive resources utilized in more detail.*

(Horne, 2010, pp. 863–864, emphasis added)

Over the previous decade, Euros editions have manifested themselves as fruitful sites for social research (e.g., Curran, 2021; Ludvigsen, 2022; Ludvigsen and Petersen-Wagner, 2022; Horne, 2010; Martin & Hernandez, 2021). Hence, by connecting with Horne’s (2010) call for research above, this article now turns to Euro 2024 more specifically. This will be the seventeenth edition of the European Championship in men’s football (staged between 14 June–14 July). However, as mentioned, Germany has strong traditions *vis-à-vis* football mega-event hosting. The country has, in addition to the 2006 World Cup (Grix, 2012), hosted or co-hosted the Euros in 1988 and 2020 and the FIFA Women’s World Cup in 2011.

### **Germany and hosting Euro 2024**

This subsection zooms in on the Euro 2024s context. Germany was awarded hosting rights for Euro 2024 by the UEFA Executive Committee on 27 September 2018 when Germany won with twelve votes to four over Turkey (UEFA, 2018a). Ten different stadiums in Berlin, Cologne, Dortmund, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Gelsenkirchen, Hamburg, Leipzig, Munich, and Stuttgart will host Euro 2024 fixtures. Interestingly, these stadiums apart from Düsseldorf were also deployed for the mentioned 2006 World Cup. Whilst the stadiums, as such, represent *tangible* legacies from 2006, the next sections remain principally concerned with those *intangible* legacies embedded into the 2024 bid, speaking to experience and feel-good. Here communicating the appeal of feeling good to decision-makers as an intangible benefit reinforces the intent of this as a social impact. Despite semblances of power, as guided by event organizers and decision-makers (i.e. destination development and tourism marketers), experiences will be subjective based on how people feel involved, united, and inspired by hosting the sport in Germany.

## Experience as an intangible legacy: organizing Euro 2024

This section examines the framing of Germany's experience ahead of 2024 and advances our understanding of how this constitutes an intangible legacy. As demonstrated, the availability of an existing foundation for mega-events plays a key role in countries' pursuit of hosting rights. Moreover, the requirements set out by the event owner which bidders must address and adhere to typically stress the importance of drawing upon existing "good" or "best practices" from past major events (e.g. UEFA, 2017). Thus, it is apparent that the organization of Euro 2024 builds upon the country's experience from the 2006 World Cup. This was highlighted by *Forbes'* Steve Price (2018), who suggested that the German bid was a blueprint for the 2006 bid:

And Germany's bid for Euro 2024 looks almost like a carbon copy of that 2006 bid. Most of the stadiums that will be used in 2024 are the same as those used in 2006, have had little renovation work since and only require minor upgrades for 2024. The only 2024 host city that didn't host World Cup games is Dusseldorf.

(Price, 2018)

Notwithstanding, above we primarily see a reference towards the *tangible* legacy from the 2006 World Cup (the nine stadiums). Indeed, upon analysing the legacies from the 2006 World Cup, Preuss (2007b, p. 93) suggested that one of this event's infrastructural legacies related to how this event "generated world class football stadiums for Germany". However, beyond the tangible infrastructural elements, and the majority of stadiums being deployed in 2006, the "*Bid Book*" of the *Deutscher Fußball-Bund* (DFB, the governing body of German football) also highlights that: "[the nine stadiums] are familiar with the *specific nature of such a task* [high-profile games], having all been host stadiums of the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany" (DFB, 2018,

p. 112, emphasis added). This suggests that the *familiarity* of staging mega-event fixtures constitutes a legacy before Euro 2024.

Additionally, the importance of "experience" in the 2024 bid comes to the fore as DFB (2018, p. 806) emphasizes that, with regards to event promotion: "Importantly, all the Host Cities have immense experience in organizing major events and major football events. Week in week out, thousands of football fans flood city centres and stadiums on matchdays, where event promotion is prevalent". Moreover, concerning past experiences, the bidding book also provides a list of ten sporting and cultural events "of a similar dimension" as Euro 2024 (*inter alia*, 2006 and 2011 World Cups, Carnival of Cultures, Berlin Marathon) (p. 808). Hosting events is a form of soft power that decision-makers use to persuade people, may it be to get behind an initiative or encourage people to visit or attend activities (Wise et al., 2019). Decision-makers then rely on people to disseminate how they feel, as this strikes a balance between intended benefits and reality. Organizers will thus rely on people and fans to make use of social media outlets to display their experiences. This helps transcend policy and offers new insight into relationships that people have as they anticipate a future event. Bid documents and communication channels as mediums then become powerful intermediaries that display intention and anticipation, and a semblance of how people feel good in places that will host the events. Here, again, communication is the enacted soft power, based on what an ideal "feel-good" experience will seem like. As Wise et al. (2019) argue, this becomes another way of connecting people and places while framing, creating, or confirming popular imaginations. What is also important are political intentions, as soft power can still produce fertile ground for the intensification of inequalities, and, worse, as we have seen in international football, discrimination.



Acknowledging that there are discrepancies between bid books and eventual realities, it remains apparent that experience emerges as one intangible legacy. Indeed, as UEFA's (2018b) evaluation of the German bid maintains, the existing structures in Germany both politically and with regard to football culture remained central in the 2024 bid:

All political and football structures are in place in Germany with a long and stable history of successful events. There is a well-documented climate of widespread support for European football in Germany, helped by the positive "fairy tale" experience of the FIFA World Cup in 2006

(UEFA, 2018b, p. 15)

Beyond this, and in a time where environmental initiatives and sustainability compose key pillars of most mega-events' planning and organization, UEFA also notes in their *Event Social Responsibility Strategy* (2021) that Germany's experience with applied sustainability initiatives in relation to events reinforced the sustainability aspect of the 2024 bid:

in the UEFA EURO 2024 bidding process, the DFB harnessed the power of this extensive network and gave pride of place to sustainability in its application, referring to remarkable environmental initiatives from the FIFA Men's World Cup 2006 and FIFA Women's World Cup 2011

(UEFA, 2021, p. 4)

Moreover, when considering intangible legacies speaking to the experience of hosting a mega-event, it is necessary to consider security-related governance and planning which – similarly to environmental strategies – "remains at the top of the mega-event agenda" (Baasch, 2011, p. 116). As noted by Giulianotti (2013, p. 98), the acquired security-related knowledge and expertise from an event compose what he calls a "security legacies", and thus "[a] robust security track record also places the host city or nation in a stronger

position when bidding to stage future events". Indeed, researchers have examined the securitization of Germany's 2006 World Cup (Baasch, 2011; Eick, 2011) and in this article's context, Cornelissen and Maennig (2010, p. 103) have maintained that "[a] well developed and efficiently implemented security plan was a major component of the positive atmosphere that reigned at the 2006 World Cup".

Ahead of Euro 2024, UEFA required the bidders to develop integrated security concepts that "take into account the Host Country's and relevant Host City's security-related experience from previous major events" (UEFA, 2017, Sector 5, p. 2). Here security protects the notion of ensuring people will have a seamless feel-good experience before, during, and after the event – or as a reinforcement of soft power persuasion. Thus, returning to the Euro 2024 bid book, it becomes visible how the existing experiences from past events (i.e. 2006 and 2011) come to constitute intangible (security) legacies:

Throughout the planning and organization of UEFA EURO 2024, safety and security has been at the core of things [...] By combining its extensive experience of hosting major international events, including the recent hosting of the 2006 FIFA World Cup and the FIFA Women's World Cup 2011, Germany is optimally placed to ensure that all safety and security issues are thoroughly considered and acted upon

(DFB, 2018, p. 108)

Taken together, this section shows that a country's mega-event housing experience and knowledge constitute intangible legacies that sport federations, authorities, and other stakeholders can build upon and capitalize on in their event bids. As shown, past experiences (i.e., 2006 World Cup) are brought forward in Euro 2024's bidding and pre-event stage by the event owner and bidder. Whereas the selected examples above speak to the experience of (1) staging large-scale fixtures, (2)

environmental initiatives, and (3) security governance this, when synthesized, serves to underline a hosting vision that builds upon experience-based know-how and networks (Preuss, 2007a) that is embedded into the preparation phases of Euro 2024.

### **Constructing “feel-good”: festivity and spaces of fandom and consumption**

This section explores further how spaces of festivity, fandom, and consumption are imagined before Euro 2024. As such, it discusses how “feel-good” factors are sought in a pre-mega-event context. Cornelissen and Maennig (2010, p. 114) suggest that, following the 2006 World Cup, the “feel-good effect was among the largest overt effects”. Further, whilst this widespread psycho-social sentiment can emerge in unpredictable manners, “it is also possible to anticipate and channel its stimulation” Cornelissen and Maennig (2010). As stated, host countries and local organizers may intend to construct a feel-good effect, choreographed through, *inter alia*, event-related activities in spaces of consumption and fandom, that revolve around festivities. Such spaces are not exclusive to match-goers. As stated, feel-good refers to the well-being and happiness pertinent to an event’s social euphoria (Grix et al., 2017). Considering the 2024 bid, it becomes clear that discourses that emphasize themes that contribute towards such euphoric conditions – such as atmospheres, collective experiences, and celebration – emerge.

In September 2018, at the bid presentation, where Germany’s status as Euro 2024 host was confirmed, the ambassador of the bid, ex-Germany player Phillip Lahm, expressed that: “We have amazing stadiums, fans who love football, first we have people who love celebrating with other Europeans. We will organise a huge football party in Germany” (quoted in BBC, 2018). Such comments reinforced the event’s hosting vision which comes to the

fore in the bid book, which maintains that one benefit of Euro 2024 would be that:

Younger generations of Germans, no matter what their background, will be inspired through a collective festival atmosphere to see the true power of football. Through Germany’s grassroots infrastructure, which includes more than seven million members and 25,000 amateur clubs playing in more than 80,000 matches every week, Germany will be able to capitalize on such an effect and ensure that the short-term inspiration of the European Championship turns into long-term enthusiasm and commitment to the game, stimulating a collective mentality of volunteerism and cooperation for generations to come

(DFB, 2018, p. 20)

From this quote, one of the envisaged results of a successful bid would be the inspiring effects and enthusiasm that Euro 2024 potentially could give citizens. Promoting enthusiasm requires strategic communication and awareness (Camacho et al., 2019); in this case the use of social media interactions. However, such discourses are not unique in themselves. For example, as Beissel and Kohe’s (2022, p. 9) argue in their analysis of the 2026 World Cup bidding book, sport mega-event bids typically romanticise the “potential for football to bring people together and transform lives and communities by invoking clichés about the sport as a global unifier”. Such a point is illustrated by emphasising Euro 2024’s plan to set aside spaces for a fan-centred and cosmopolitan celebration:

Ultimately, football is about the fans, and UEFA EURO 2024 in Germany will be the biggest celebration ever for football fans. Through a combination of easy access to and within the country, and Host Cities welcoming fans of all backgrounds, Germany will be a home for everyone throughout the tournament.

(DFB, 2018, p. 18)

If we consider the 2006 World Cup, Grix (2012, p. 307) noted that the 2006 World Cup had

fostered sociability between fans, non-fans, Germans, and visitors across official and unofficial fan zones, where feel-good effects are provoked. Others observe how different activities including fan festivals “expanded participation opportunities could limit feelings of exclusion from those who did not receive tickets, and/or those who could not afford them” (Cornelissen & Maennig, 2010, p. 115). This provides a context for enhancing our understanding of how this desired widespread celebration and festive atmospheres – as contributors towards feel-good – are desired in the above excerpts.

Beyond the stadiums, it is also clear how fan zones, as spaces where fans without match tickets can gather to watch live games and participate in a range of consumption-focused activities (Ludvigsen, 2021), are framed as spaces that will ensure a “nationwide” party. At the same time, fan zones are also heavily branded spaces that serve as an extension of the event’s commercialisms and where sponsors and official partners can display their products or services in a controlled environment (Eick, 2011). As DFB (2018, p. 20) maintains: “As the birthplace of the Fan Zone, cities all over Germany will ensure a nationwide UEFA EURO 2024 party, where fans are able to enjoy the action in an open and fun environment”. Thus, in the years leading up to an, one may observe the discursive construction of a socio-cultural festival within documentary discourses:

In all ten Host Cities, the proposed Fan Zones are very centrally located and extremely easy to reach. This ensures that all those fans who didn’t get tickets will have an opportunity to follow the matches close up and enjoy the football party along with the staunch fans (DFB, 2018, p. 806).

In addition to this, the facilitation for feel-good clearly emerges from Euro 2024’s official Twitter and TikTok pages, illustrating the digital edge of event-related festivity. With over 3.1 and 6.8 million followers respectively, the official Euro 2024 Twitter and TikTok accounts share,

almost daily, defining and spectacular moments in the history of the European Championships, as well as conveying images of football parties resembling that event consumers will seek to participate in, in 2024 (<https://twitter.com/euro2024> and <https://www.tiktok.com/@euro2024?lang=en>). In the case of social media use, user experiences are based solely on their encounters and then align with their desired outcomes. The link back to soft power is then the ability of platforms such as Twitter and TikTok to persuade future event-goers of a desired reality of this event, while also encouraging users to convey a similar message. If decision-makers and organizers can encourage users of these social media platforms to promote position and feel-good messages, this reinforces a desired experience and puts the users at the forefront of marketing the event and destination marketing to encourage tourism opportunities alongside the sporting event activities (Wise et al., 2019).

All this is viewed in the context of how promises and the facilitation of festivity remain crucial for mega-events and their feel-good effects. As aforementioned, notions of feeling good are both individual or collective, by partaking in a sporting spectacle and buying into the images of fandom expressed throughout an event (Cornelissen & Maennig, 2010). Thus, festivity lies central to the event visitor experience. As Getz (1989, p. 131) puts it, “[p]eople expect to have fun at most special events. Their expectations can be met through the fostering of a general atmosphere of festivity”. As Collins (2004) points out, events with large crowds can generate strong emotions among spectators and interactions within the crowds. Therefore, the idea of festivity reveals social dimensions, whereas the festival experience and a “festival” that occurs *around* the relevant mega-event – both in temporal and spatial terms – are desired by visitors, event owners, and planners alike. Semblances of soft power persuasion were not necessarily used as points of interpretation, but it could be

argued this was an approach taken at past mega-events when for instance considering slogans such as “A Time to Make Friends” (Frew & McGillivray, 2008) and “Expect Emotions” (Pearson, 2012) were used to promote the 2006 World Cup and Euro 2008 respectively. Indeed, these reinforce an “imagined community” as well. Thus, returning once again to the concept of “feel-good”, and the bid and hosting vision of Euro 2024 clearly reveals that a central pillar of this sport mega-event is the spaces of consumption and fandom characterized by inclusive, festive, and celebratory atmospheres. Yet, the political strategy extracted from this, is the image of how a mega-event can serve to improve the country’s standing on the international stage. In 2006, “the global media witnessed a well-run, *carnivalesque* festival of sport enjoyed by a variety of cultures with very few problems” (Grix & Brannagan, 2016, p. 266). As such, the re-activation of such a festival could lead to similar outcomes – as soft power concerns relationships bonded through political, economic, and socio-cultural influence (Wise and Ludvigsen, 2023).

## Concluding remarks

14 June 2024 marks the return of the third biggest sport mega-event, the UEFA Men’s European Championship in football, to Germany. By deploying this sport mega-event as a case, this article has explored the concepts of “legacy” and “feel-good” in relation to the hosting vision, bid, and the socio-political context of Euro 2024. Whilst the concept of legacy possesses a central position in the perpetually developing mega-event literature, feel-good effects related to, or evoked from mega-events have, to date, received less attention from scholars. Further, while past studies explore the prospects and bids for football mega-events in the 2020s (Beissel et al., 2022; Beissel & Kohe, 2022; Desjardins, 2021), Euro 2024 remains under-researched. Taken

together, this provided the main rationale for this article, which, in the context of Germany’s Euro 2024 bid, aimed to examine (1) the framing of Germany’s mega-event hosting experience and (2) the prospects for “feel-good” re-activation ahead of 2024.

Overall, by drawing from existing literature, bidding documents, and web sources, this paper advanced two primary arguments. First, with regards to bidding for, and organizing Euro 2024, Germany’s experience emerges as an intangible legacy from previous event encounters (i.e. the 2006 World Cup) that is discursively promoted and embedded into the housing and hosting vision of Euro 2024. Second, it is contended that Euro 2024 serves as a vehicle that helps us understand how feel-good effects – speaking to the collective feelings of pride, passion, and joy (Cornelissen & Maennig, 2010) – are desired by promoters of sport mega-events and then, how a re-activation of feel-good is sought for socio-political effects. This remains crucial because the pre-event discourse which facilitates ideas of celebration and festivity takes up a political and social significance. Moreover, this speaks to wider processes of how sport mega-events relate to wider socio-cultural and political goals (Cornelissen & Swart, 2006) and touches upon wider “festivalization” processes inherent to modern-day mega-events.

With its discussion, this article has not only contributed towards an improved social and political understanding of Euro 2024. This article contributes to the existing literature on the cultural politics of sport mega-events (cf. Horne, 2017). It also ties into and attaches a novel case study (Euro 2024) to the emerging literature that explores the discourses, rhetoric, and visions of the bids of other mega-events in the 2020s. This includes the 2023 women’s World Cup (Beissel et al., 2022; Desjardins, 2021) and the 2026 Men’s World Cup (Beissel & Kohe, 2022). Finally, the article has consciously slid into, and

contributed to, the existing research focused on mega-event legacies at sport mega-events (Boykoff & Fussey, 2014; Garcia, 2004; Preuss, 2007a) and particularly the strand of research concerned with more intangible legacies such as experience, knowledge and, lastly, “feel-good” effects as the individual and communal experiences that promoters of mega-event aim to (re)construct. Thus, this paper links together conceptual discussions and perspectives speaking to the political and social impacts of mega-events.

As argued elsewhere, the 2020s represents a decade that “consists of exciting, revealing and defining sport mega-events that have taken place or will take place across global cities like Tokyo, Beijing, Paris, Los Angeles, and Milano, only to name a few” (Ludvigsen et al., 2022, p. 710). Situated within this period, Euro 2024 also promises intriguing areas for further research. At the time of writing, the staging of Euro 2024 is still two years away. Hence, there is still a need for inter-disciplinary research on the political and social implications of Euro 2024. One obvious question relates to whether the event produced notions of “feel-good” and, moreover, future studies should for example examine – in the German context – the public opinion on Euro 2024. Although the size and scale of the two events differ, this is particularly interesting given the public opposition against Hamburg’s (eventually cancelled) bid for the 2024 Olympics (see Lauer-mann & Vogelpohl, 2017). Then, as this article discussed stadiums and fan zones as primary spaces of consumption and fandom, it also remains important to capture the digital consumption of Euro 2024, particularly considering how the COVID-19 pandemic which has altered the ways through which fans consume sports events (Parnell et al., 2022). Finally, of course, the *actual* staging of Euro 2024 provides researchers with an opportunity to explore how (or, indeed, if) feel-good effects materialized and the ways mega-events are imagined during the bid phase.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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