

Ethical Procurement in the 2026 FIFA Men's World Cup: Toronto's Efforts in Combating
Sweatshop Labour

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Abstract

The anti-sweatshop movement has long committed – through labour action, legislative change, protests, and other forms of advocacy – to abolishing sweatshop labour and ensuring liveable wages, safety standards, and workers’ rights for all. There is an established body of literature in the socio-cultural study on sport and the anti-sweatshop movement on the roles played by a range of state, government, and non-governmental actors/organizations in relation to the mega-sporting events which have routinely been plagued with continued abuses of workers’ lives in the name of the sport spectacle. In effort to move past this troubled history, FIFA, under the leadership of Gianni Infantino, has embedded internationally recognized human and labour rights into their 2026 bid process. This study evaluates how the City of Toronto, Canada Soccer Association, and FIFA have considered ethical procurement (defined as managing all processes to obtain needed materials and services from a set of suppliers in an ethical and socially responsible manner) and sweatshop labour as part of their bid for co-hosting the 2026 FIFA Men’s World Cup. Employing a qualitative research methodology and critical theoretical approach, this study finds that despite the varying levels of considerations given to ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement, the efforts remain insufficient. This is attributed to the unequal power dynamics that prioritize a discourse of (neoliberal capitalist) development to enhance soft power understood as “ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (Bianco & Sons, 2023, p. 94).

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List of Acronyms

Acronyms	Definition
BSR	Business Social Responsibility
CCC	Clean Clothes Campaign
CoT	City of Toronto
CSA	Canadian Soccer Association
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CT	Critical Theory
EDC	Economic Development & Culture
EPZ	Export Processing Zon
ETI	Ethical Trading Initiative
FIFA	Federation Internationale de Football Association
FLA	Fair Labour Association
FMF	Mexican Football Federation
FMWC	FIFA men’s World Cup
GN	Global North
GS	Global South
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOC	International Olympic Committee
KAHS 6030	Qualitative Research Methods

LOCOG	London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games
MA	Member Association
MSN	Maquila Solidarity Network
SEM	Sustainable Event Management
SMEs	Sport Mega-Events
TA	Thematic Analysis
TANs	Transnational Advocacy Networks
TNC	Transnational Corporations
UN	United Nations
UNGPs	Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
USAS	United Students Against Sweatshops
USSF	United States Soccer Federation
WRC	Workers Rights Consortium

Chapter 1: Introduction

In June 2022, then Mayor John Tory joined a group of soccer fans in a downtown Toronto bar to await the televised announcement by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) as to which city will host the 2026 FIFA Men's World Cup (FMWC). As reported by CBC News, the crowd erupted into cheers when it was announced that Toronto (one of only two Canadian sites named as part of the 2026 FMWC) would be one of the host cities for the matches as the tournament would play out across Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Tory effused to reporters that the opportunity to host matches "...is as much about the economy as it is about sports" and "...our opportunity to build this city up in terms of what is already a good reputation, to make a great reputation and get the best in the world to come and live and invest here in what I think is the single greatest place they could come in the world to do business" (CBC News, 2022, para. 16). Tory's glowing endorsement of the FMWC should come as no surprise given some of the resistance to even considering being a host city. In terms of costs alone, critics in 2022 were already concerned by the, at that time, the claimed price tag of \$290 million Canadian dollars for being a co-host. The outcry around the exorbitant costs of the games has since gotten louder as a more recent report updated the figure to nearly \$380 million Canadian dollars (Jabakhanji, 2024). What has remained much more unspoken in the media coverage of Toronto's role as host city is how city officials will navigate relations with an international sport governing body known to have a long history of human rights' violations, particularly around workers' rights. This absence of attention extends as well to other groups directly and indirectly involved in the 2026 FMWC including the Canada Soccer Association (CSA) and locally based non-governmental labour advocacy groups such as Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN).

Amid growing revenues and audiences (FIFA Annual Report 2022, 2023), FIFA has faced multiple controversies throughout the years, including most recently the deaths of migrant labourers involved in the building of the stadia in which Qatar 2022 matches were to be held (Pattison & McIntyre, 2021). In fact, it is disturbing to note that there is a dedicated Wikipedia page for just the known controversies associated with FIFA (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_2022_FIFA_World_Cup_controversies). Although recent attention has focused on migrant labourers in Qatar, the use of sweatshop labour in the production of branded sportswear/apparel and equipment has long been known to occur in the context of sports mega-events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup. Sweatshops refers to workplaces where workers engage in long, intense physical labour for extremely low wages under unsafe conditions, arbitrary discipline, and intimidation against speaking out and organizing (Bender & Greenwald, 2003; Heery & Noon, 2017; Radin & Calkins, 2006).

In line with Roche's definition of mega-events, *sports* mega-events (SMEs) are defined large-scale cultural *sporting* events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006). Since the 1980s, sports mega-events have attracted significant media attention and commercial partners with their ability to appeal to an expanding audiences as well as their ability to serve as exclusive marketing platforms for broadcasters (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006). The allure of corporations interested in associating themselves with the highly advertised economic, cultural, and social legacy of these sports mega-events brought about business alliances involved in sponsoring sport tournaments and producing branded merchandise (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006). The City of Toronto speaks to this legacy in their preparation for hosting the men's FIFA World Cup, they state "The games and their legacy are expected to generate significant economic, cultural and community benefits for

Toronto by creating thousands of jobs, welcoming visitors from across the globe and generating hundreds of millions of dollars in local gross domestic product.” (FIFA World Cup 26 Toronto™, n.d.). As a consequence of these shifts, commercialized and commodified sports mega-events have more profoundly contributed to a “routinization of harm to local populations...that tends to reinforce the existing power structure and patterns of inequality.” (Horne, 2018, pg. 11; see also Gruneau & Horne, 2017) in the name of profit accumulation.

Contemporary sport mega-events, such as the Olympics or the FMWC, have been focal points for the anti-sweatshop movement with much evidence compiled by labour rights’ advocates/activists in opposition to these multinational corporations and to these events (Biyawila, 2018; Timms, 2012). As discussed in further detail in Chapter 2, anti-sweatshop movements are not a new phenomenon and can be dated as far back as the Industrial Revolution (Powell, 2014). However, the contemporary anti-sweatshop movement regained prominence in the 1990s (Powell, 2014) through the actions and activities of various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international unions, and other labour organizations and renewed focus on the continued and increasing exploitation of workers in the Global South because of intensified neoliberal globalization. As a result, there is far greater awareness of impoverished and inhumane working standards in sweatshops producing goods for consumers in the Global North on sweatshops, as well as greater advocacy focused on unionizing and bargaining rights (“Who We Are”, n.d.), living wages (“Living Wage”, n.d.) erasure of gendered based violence (“Addressing Gender-Based Violence”, n.d.), and improved labour standards and compliance (“ILO Declaration of Philadelphia”, 1944).

Numerous NGOs have been committed to combatting sweatshop labour including the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC). The CCC, originally called De Schone Kleren Campagne

(SKC), was initially organized in 1989 by women in the Netherlands in solidarity with women in the Philippines fighting for a minimum wage (“A Selection of Successes of 20 Years CCC”, 2011). As of 2023, the CCC has now expanded to include over 235 partner groups and organizations in over 45 countries (“A Selection of Successes of 20 Years CCC”, 2011). These partners include local workers’ organizations, grassroots unions, women’s rights organizations and trade unions, and other activist groups. For decades, the CCC has been a key actor in highlighting the use of sweatshops and abuses of workers' rights in the Global South, including in the sportswear industry, and has mobilized different campaigns to draw attention to these abuses in relations to sports mega-events.

In the lead-up to the 2004 Olympic Games, and in coordination with other major international trade unions and workers’ rights groups, the CCC launched the Play Fair campaign which aimed to utilize the platform of the Olympic spectacle to protest the procurement of Olympics-branded merchandise from sweatshops in the Global South (Biyawila, 2018). This campaign mobilized many athletes, activists, and allies in over 35 countries and its petition garnered 500,000 signatures making it one of the largest efforts in the anti-sweatshop movement for sporting mega-events (“Play Fair Olympics”, n.d.). The Play Fair campaign has continued to draw attention to the sourcing of merchandise and garments from sweatshops in the Global South (e.g., see Geertjan, 2013; “Play Fair 2008 - No Medal for the Olympics on Labour Rights”, 2007; Timms, 2012) and the CCC has continued to be a key global advocacy group protesting the use of sweatshop labour as part of sports mega-events.

In particular, the CCC has commissioned or amplified the findings of several major reports highlighting abuses in the international sportswear manufacturing sector. In 2014, the CCC published a report titled *Tailored Wages*, which revealed that Cambodian workers

employed by Adidas, the official sponsor of both finalists in the 2014 FWMC, were earning only enough to fulfill half of their daily dietary caloric needs (Hoskins, 2014). In the 2016 and 2018 Foul Play reports (Foul Play I and Foul Play II, respectively), the continued turning of a blind eye to the ways in which sweatshops are employed in the production of sporting goods and clothes, particularly in the service of sports mega-events, was documented.

The two Foul Play reports elaborated on the links between sportswear corporations and mega-sporting events (*Foul Play II*, 2018; *Foul Report*, 2016); more specifically on the corporations' business ventures in sports mega-events for marketing purposes and the ways in which these marketing ventures have facilitated the procurement of apparel and gear from increasingly precarious sweatshop production in the Global South (*Foul Play II*, 2018; *Foul Report*, 2016). The Foul Play II, report would highlight the record-breaking sponsorship deals Adidas and Nike were securing with male star players in football, while neglecting to provide a living wage for their predominantly female garment workers in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Indonesia (2018). More recently, the CCC highlighted the poverty and exploitation of workers producing apparel and gear products for sportswear corporations involved in the 2022 FIFA men's tournament in Qatar ("Your Brand World Cup Exploitation Starts with the Kits", 2022).

The CCC has not been the sole NGO bringing labour rights violations in the sector to light. In a 2006 Workers Rights Consortium (WRC)-led investigation, the investigators found that the Indonesian factory 'PT Panarub'—specializing in 'high-end athletic footwear and cleats' by Adidas used in the 2006 FIFA men's World Cup—unlawfully terminated multiple union leaders (WRC, 2006). This report led the CCC to publish a newsletter entitled 'Adidas Drags its feet in Indonesia' summarizing the events that arose in hopes of spreading public awareness and pressure on Adidas (CCC, 2006). More recently, in the 2022 FIFA men's World Cup in Qatar,

the WRC played a critical role in reporting on garment workers' experiences and exploitation in multiple news outlets to bring attention to the lack of ethical procurement by transnational companies such as Nike and Adidas who profit from sales of their sponsorship deals with numerous national teams (Chua, 2022; Deeley, 2022; Paton, 2022; Sommerlad, 2022).

To return to this study's focus on Toronto's co-hosting of matches as part of the 2026 FMWC, there are two particularly noteworthy points to highlight in relation to the issue of sweatshop labour and opposition to the use of sweatshop labour. The first key point is that the City of Toronto (CoT) officially possesses and is required to observe an ethical procurement policy. Ethical procurement, as defined by Kim et al. (2016), involves managing all processes to obtain necessary materials and services from suppliers in an ethical and socially responsible manner. In August 2006, the CoT passed the Responsible Manufacturers (no-sweatshop) Procedure Policy with the purpose of ensuring garments purchased using municipal funds and for municipal purposes are not sourced from sweatshop manufacturers. This policy was enforced with bidders and corporate buyers who are required to provide the name and addresses of all manufacturing facilities used in the production of garments and to declare that goods are manufactured in accordance with all laws (*Responsible Garment Manufacturer (No-Sweatshop) Policy*, 2006).

Ethical procurement can be understood as an institutional policy in response to the anti-sweatshop movement, and Toronto's development of an ethical procurement policy is illustrative of this trend. The construction of this policy was initiated in 2002 in response to advocacy efforts and pressure by the No Sweat Campaign (*Toronto Municipal No Sweat Policy*, 2006). This campaign arose in response to public attention on issues related to sweatshop labour in the 1990s (Williams, 2020). Spearheaded by the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN), a Toronto-based anti-

sweatshop organization, the campaign aimed to promote the adoption of ethical purchasing policies by Canadian public institutions such as high schools, universities, and municipal and provincial governments (“No Sweat Campaign 2000-2008”, n.d.). The aim of ethical purchasing (i.e., procurement) policies is to set minimum labour standards for companies to meet in order to sell apparel products to the listed major public institutions to then pressure them into improving the labour standards of their subcontracted workers (“No Sweat Campaign 2000-2008”, n.d.).

The second key point is that, despite long-standing awareness of and attention to the use of sweatshop labour in the production of apparel and goods associated with sports mega-events, progressive and sustained change has been lacking to date and despite professed commitments to do better by such international governing bodies such as FIFA. For example, FIFA established its *Human Rights Policy* in 2017 with a stated aim of working:

...to avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts through its own activities and to addressing and remediating such impacts when they occur. In addition, FIFA seeks to prevent or mitigate adverse human rights impacts that are directly linked to its operations, products or services by its business relationships, even if FIFA has not contributed to those impacts. (Infantino & Samoura, 2017, pg. 5; emphasis added)

Within this policy, FIFA defined their commitment in accordance with internationally recognized human rights such as the *International Bill of Human Rights* and the *International Labour Organization’s Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work* (see *ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, 2022; International Bill of Human Rights, n.d.*) under the guidance of the UN Guiding Principles on Business Rights (UNGPs). A key point needs emphasis here: despite this supposed heightened focus on human rights, there is

just a brief mention of supply chains and no elaboration on such matters as ethical procurement and/or the labour rights of workers producing sports apparel and/or gear in this policy.

Little has changed despite the establishment of this policy in 2017. For example, in the 2018 men's World Cup that took place in Russia, FIFA took the initiative to establish a labour monitoring system in collaboration with the Klinsky Institute of Labour Protection and Working Conditions and even went so far as to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Building and Wood Workers International and the Russian Construction Workers Union ("Monitoring system strengthens working conditions on Russia 2018 stadiums", 2018). Despite these commitments, Human Rights Watch published a report highlighting the poor working conditions of workers during the construction of stadiums noting that, during the construction phase, workers often faced: payment delays by three to four months; nonpayment of wages; and mandatory work in unsafe weathers (Buchanan, 2017). The report noted that 17 workers died during the construction of facilities associated with the tournament.

In light of the same criticisms raised in the 2018 tournament, FIFA's Secretary General, Fatma Samoura, attempted to ease some of these concerns by committing to introduce 'strong mechanisms' to protect migrant workers' health and safety (Infantino & Samoura, 2022). And yet in the 2022 WC hosted in Qatar, Human Rights Watch reported on disturbing similarities around the violation of migrant workers' rights and the risk of workplace tragedies, noting that: "Unless the situation changes quickly, the 2022 [men's] World Cup will send a grim message for the millions of fans who attend, the more than a billion expected to watch" (Worden, 2016). As noted earlier, the 2022 men's World Cup did eventually 'send a grim message' when Patisson and McIntyre published their bombshell article exposing the death of more than 6,500 migrant construction workers (2021).

FIFA's human rights policy is intended to inform and encompass the bidding process for hosting the WC as well, as it has become critical for FIFA's credibility that a bidding process which thoroughly considers and protects human rights be established for their marquee event, the FMWC (66th FIFA Congress Minutes, 2016). To that end, FIFA now requires the prospective host cities (i.e., the cities attempting to secure rights to host matches within the countries already awarded the bid by FIFA) to publish a Human Rights Stakeholder and Partner Engagement report to ensure compliance with their own municipal-level human rights policy (*Bidding Registration*, 2017). For 2026, FIFA established the 2026 Bid Evaluation Task Force to evaluate the compliance of each bidding member association with the recent heightened focus on human rights issues in hosting the 2026 men's World Cup (*FIFA Governance report 2017*, 2018). These associations included the Canadian Soccer Association (CSA), the United States Soccer Federation, and the Mexican Football Federation, which joined forces in what was entitled as the United Bid to host the 2026 FIFA men's World Cup. And as already noted at the very start of this chapter, FIFA awarded the 2026 men's World Cup to the United Bid in 2018 with 80 matches to be staged across 16 cities in Canada (Toronto and Vancouver, specifically), the United States of America, and Mexico.

Given FIFA's (professed) commitment to enforcing compliance in human and labour rights in all levels of the tournament, Toronto's ethical procurement policy, and the direct and indirect roles played by other key actors in the sector such as the CSA and the MSN, it is an opportune time to explore how Toronto's bid to host matches for the 2026 FIFA men's WC attended to (or not) the question of the use of sweatshop labour in the production of sportswear and gear and addressed. As such, this study aims to examine these issues and its central research objective is to: **evaluate whether the issues of sweatshop labour and ethical procurement**

have been considered by FIFA, the City of Toronto (CoT), Canada Soccer Association (CSA), and the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) in the bid process for the tournament and, if so, in what ways. Utilizing a qualitative research methodology that incorporates documentary research and thematic analysis, this study reveals several key findings. It underscores a systemic neglect of ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement practices, highlights power dynamics that favor neoliberal capital for soft power purposes, understood as the ability to get what you want through attraction (Bianco & Sons, 2023). Additionally, it examines how the 2026 FIFA Men's World Cup (FMWC) is being leveraged to advance the City's local objectives and priorities to improve the “nation’s image, profiling and highlighting themselves globally” (Grix & Brannagan, 2016, p. 260) as part of a the municipality’s soft power strategy.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 explores the existing scholarship in the sociocultural study of sport examining the key themes of this research project, namely sweatshop labour/practices, SMEs, and transnational resistance efforts by global-local actors. Chapter 3 examines the theoretical and methodological approach taken in the project, including a discussion of critical theory, qualitative description, and thematic analysis. The specific twists and turns of data collection for this specific study are explored, as well as my own positionality in relation to the project and data. Results are shared in Chapter 4 with a key aim of this chapter being the mapping out of how the various documents collected articulate with one another and how they can be located temporally and contextually. Chapter 5 is the culminating chapter of the thesis and focuses on the analysis and discussion of the data highlighted in the previous chapter. Chapter 5 will also conclude the thesis by reiterating the important themes and takeaways of this research. The strengths and limitations presented are then followed by considerations for future research in relation to the findings.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The following chapter provides a review of related literature on sweatshop labour/practices, sport mega-events (SMEs), and transnational resistance efforts by global-local actors. As will be expanded on, TNC-driven sweatshop practices and the spectacle of SMEs have developed and proliferated within and against the backdrop of neoliberal globalization, and with waves of both symbolic and active opposition from a range of groups and organizations. Exploring the linkages between SMEs and TNC sweatshop practices, as well as the impacts of opposition on such international sport governing bodies, highlights the inhumane consequences of SMEs and TNCs ‘racing to the bottom’ in their constant search of high profits. The chapter concludes with focused attention on FIFA.

Sweatshop Labour and Sportswear TNCs

Numerous sport scholars recognize that contemporary sweatshop practices within the sportswear sector are systemically embedded within the turn to and consolidation of neoliberal globalization in the early 1980s (with its focused efforts to deregulate production systems and labour markets), and the subsequent offshoring of manufacturing responsibilities by TNCs to the lowest bidder in its effort to maintain profitability (Biyawila, 2018b; Sage, 2010). In relation to the production of sports garments and gear, the heightened under-restricted international mobility afforded to TNCs through the ascendance and entrenchment of deregulated neoliberal globalization paved the way and continues to direct greater foreign investment in the Global South (GS) (Biyawila, 2018b; Esbenshade, 2008; Merk, 2011; Sage, 2010). Numerous sportswear TNCs offshore their production through subcontracting manufacturers in the GS, particularly within export processing zones (EPZs) that offer incentives for foreign investment

such as deregulated un-unionized labour, little safety and environmental laws, and a barrier-free environment (Biyawila, 2018b; Enloe, 2004; Manzenreiter, 2013; Merk, 2011; Sage, 2010). It is important to note that these EPZs were often imposed by International Monetary Fund (IMF) onto indebted GS countries in efforts to promote export-oriented production meant to attract foreign investment (Esbenshade, 2008).

While most-to-all of the manufacturing production is outsourced to sub-contractors in the GS, many sport TNCs in the Global North (GN) still maintain the role and production of “research, development, marketing and management of production cycles” (Manzenreiter, 2013, p. 1304); a quote from a Nike representative exemplifies the ways in which TNCs frame ‘themselves’ versus the garment workers: “We’re about sports, not manufacturing” (Merk, 2023, p. 4). In other words, and as Merk (2011) emphasizes, TNCs were and continue to increasingly turn away from production of goods to the construction of commodity spectacles by *not* just selling an athletic shoe but a lifestyle, reputation, and image to their customers. The division of labour between GN and GS workers grew, as the former within the TNCs often retained skilled, white-collar, and highly compensated roles and the latter remained limited to the outsourced low-skilled/semi-skilled roles of production (Manzenreiter, 2013; Merk, 2011). This division of labour allows sportswear TNCs to: 1) reduce labour costs significantly and, in so doing, maximize profit; and 2) create social distance away from their subcontracted workers to avoid taking responsibility over the manufacturing of their products (Anner, 2019, 2020; Biyawila, 2018b; Donnelly & Petherick, 2004; Manzenreiter, 2013; Merk, 2011).

Sport sociologists have often applied Harvey’s concept of *spatial fix* to understand this phenomenon, which refers to capital’s restructuring of spaces to escape its tendency towards crisis (Beissel & Ternes, 2022; Jessop, 2006; Manzenreiter, 2013, 2014; Merk, 2011, 2015;

Taylor, 2011). By reducing the cost of labour through outsourcing production to the GS, sportswear TNCs temporarily alleviated the emergence of a profitability crisis from the strongly regulated and unionized GN labour market (Hauf, 2017). This mechanism of reducing costs and subcontracting labour-intensive manufacturing roles has resulted in the deterioration of working conditions for workers in the GS, where the employment of children and underaged youth, poverty-level wages, and extreme, inhumane working hours results in poor worker health and an absence of safety standards (Anner, 2019, 2020; Biyanwila, 2018b; Donnelly & Petherick, 2004; Enloe, 2004; Manzenreiter, 2013; Merk, 2011, 2015; Sage, 2010). However, to date, workers have pushed back against these developments whether through activism, which will be further discussed below, or through the formation of labour rights groups and unions in opposition to exploitation (Merk, 2011). The rise and, in some cases, the hard-won victories of union groups in certain GS countries have led to rising manufacturing costs through wage increases, resulting once more in a profitability crisis for sportswear TNCs (Merk, 2011). Often, to keep TNC shareholders satiated, profits high, and to maintain competitiveness within the sector, TNCs ‘pick up’ their operations to move to and invest in what they perceive as a less restrictive and/or cheaper GS countries where manufacturing firms allow for cheaper and more exploitable labour. This trend has come to be known as ‘the race to the bottom’ or ‘regime shopping’ (Bair & Palpacuer, 2012; Merk, 2011; Taylor, 2011).

As scholars note, the sportswear sector has benefitted from sweatshop labour. However, we would be remiss to not examine how there has been resistance to such exploitative practices among individuals and groups who convene together as part of various transnational advocacy networks (TANs). Furthermore, we would be heedless to not explore the scholarship on sports

mega-events (SMEs) as both sites for the reproduction of harmful labour practices and as strategic platforms for protest. The following sections examine these points in turn.

The Historical and Contemporary Anti-Sweatshop Movements

As noted in the introductory chapter, activists and labour advocates' highlighting and resistance of sweatshops in the (sportswear) manufacturing sector and the abuses of manufacturing workers' rights, particularly in the GS, is not a new phenomenon. The anti-sweatshop movement has a long history and dates to the 1800s following the Industrial Revolution (Powell, 2014). Both the historical and contemporary anti-sweatshop movements developed over time with various strategies, ideologies, and actors each playing their own respective roles in demanding the abolition of sweatshop labour and achieving better labour standards. Sweatshops in Britain first arose in the late 18th century and often persisted until the early 20th century while the US had its first sweatshops around the early 19th century (Powell, 2014). These sweatshops were often in textile sectors of industry, were often termed 'dark satanic mills,' and operated similarly to modern-day sweatshops subcontracted in the GS (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2005). The contractors would receive the orders from manufacturers and 'sweated' their predominantly young female and child workers to meet the demands. Due to the low wages, long hours, and poor overall labour standards, the term 'sweating' was often used to describe their employment – hence, the term 'sweatshop' (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2005). Due to these horrible conditions, economic demands by the workers were pushed forward through organized strikes, while garment workers and (middle-class) consumers organized themselves around ethical buying practices.

The contemporary anti-sweatshop movement has renewed the focus on the exploitation of GS workers within neoliberal globalized regimes in efforts to both bring attention to and educate

GN consumers, as well as to materially better working standards for GS workers. With the transformation of the garment industry into a globalized one, a renewed effort was invested starting around the middle to late 1990s in awakening GN consumers to high-profile and pervasive cases of sweatshops located in the GS being used by GN-based popular retail and manufacturing brands (Ambruster-Sandoval, 2005). With such examples cases in the public consciousness of GN consumers, the anti-sweatshop movement became salient once more and, this time, constituted a stream of the larger anti-corporate activism (Williams, 2020).

Much like its historical version, the anti-sweatshop movement consists of individuals and groups including garment workers, labour unions, consumer, faith-based, and feminist groups (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2005; Powell, 2014). Through various methods (e.g., passing leaflets, writing letters, organizing rallies, etc.), many actors within this movement work towards persuading the public at large, governments, and garment companies to end sweatshop labour (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2005) and to support companies who maintain 'sweat-free' conditions for workers—in essence, pressuring retailers, manufacturers, subcontractors, and governments to support ethical procurement.

The United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), based in the US with ties to Canada as well, was created in 1997 by a coalition of anti-sweatshop post-secondary education student groups which held protests, sit-ins and hunger strikes in hopes of pushing their colleges and universities to accept ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement policies in their licensing agreements with apparel firms (Ross, 2012). Within Canada, this strategy has managed to push many post-secondary institutions such as, but not limited to, the University of Toronto (Boyes, 2000), McMaster (Van Raay, 2004), York University ("Sit-In No Sweat For York University Students", 2008), Queen's University, and the University of Guelph ("Affiliate Institutions - Worker Rights Consortium",

n.d.) into upholding ethical procurement policies in their licensing agreements with transnational brands in support of workers' empowerment and struggle in the Global South (Powell, 2014; Williams, 2020).

It is important to acknowledge that the anti-sweatshop movement (i.e., as represented by various groups and entities from all over the world) is not itself without some critique. For example, the FLA, established in 1998 as a joint entity comprised of NGOs and TNCs with the facilitation of the Clinton administration, has been criticized for its far too close ties with TNCs and its ideology of 'class collaborationism' (Powell, 2014). The FLA has a corporate orientation, it maintains a voluntary monitoring system, and its auditors—primarily made up of commercial auditing firms—are chosen by a pre-approved list to conduct inspections (Esbenshade, 2008; Merk, 2023; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2005). The FLA has faced critiques primarily from USAS due to most of its funding being sourced from apparel firms and its members also representing apparel firms; clearly a conflict of interest (Williams, 2020). This has resulted in the FLA organization not monitoring apparel firms to hold them accountable to workers, but rather to the firms themselves that aim to maintain (whether deserved or not) a façade of legitimacy in their public image. This is illustrated by Aret van Heerden, President of the FLA, denouncing the idea of unionization proposed by the WRC and arguing that the USAS' Designated Suppliers Program, an ethical procurement program, would be imposed upon suppliers "in an undemocratic way without a minimum of consultation" (Ballinger, 2008, pg. 96 – 97). As part of the trend of conflicts between the FLA and anti-sweatshop NGOs that focus on worker empowerment, Lynda Yanz, a member of MSN, resigned from the FLA board when they refused to change the code of conduct to strengthen complaint procedures and provide greater labour unions and labour rights representation (Williams, 2020). Furthermore, MSN, with their close relations with trade unions

in the Global South have notified the WRC of complaints to be investigated ("First Update on Gildan El Progreso Case", 2006), and have often united in countless struggles for worker's rights for ethical procurement ("Labor rights organizations hail advent of the Pakistan Accord", 2022; "Worker Rights Consortium and Worker Representatives Secure \$1 Million Humanitarian Contribution from Barco Uniforms to Address Unpaid Severance at Closed Supplier Factory in El Salvador", 2021; "Surge in Garment Industry Transparency: Laws Needed to Ensure Companies Adopt Human Rights Practices", 2019).

Prompted by the corporate character of the FLA, the USAS created the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) in 2000 with the purpose of conducting "independent, worker-centered investigations; [issuing] public reports on factories producing for major brands; and [aiding] workers at these factories in their efforts to end violations and defend their workplace rights." ("About – Worker Rights Consortium", n.d, para. 2.; see also Esbenshade, 2008; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2005). Unlike the FLA, the WRC was completely independent from any corporate governance, funding, and participation and aimed to "set the bar higher than the FLA did [and then focus] on investigating worker complaints rather than certifying facilities as 'sweat-free'" (Powell, 2014, p. 15). While the FLA made progress on certifying the freedom of association as a code of conduct, the WRC went a step further in including living wages in their code of conduct rather than minimum wages (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2005). The resulting division between the WRC and FLA regarding the question of monitoring and enforcement has been understood in the literature as a consequence of differences in ideology. While the USAS and WRC are driven by *empowering workers* in the GS (Williams, 2020), the FLA hold more closely to the nascent anti-sweatshop movement's portrayal of sweatshop workers as passive victims rather than agents of their own struggle against sweatshop conditions (Brooks, 2002; Esbenshade, 2008). Due to this,

the FLA focuses on using corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs to *protect workers* as a substitution to labour unions. (Ballinger, 2008; Williams, 2020). However, anti-sweatshop activists and scholars have noted that CSR programs have rarely entailed significant improvements in workers' rights conditions (Anner, 2019, 2020; Esbenshade, 2008; Merk, 2015, 2023; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2005; Sage, 2010; Taylor, 2011; Wells, 2009). In contrast, USAS and WRC have focused their attention on enabling workers to struggle through their emphasis in freedom of association, collective bargaining, and freedom from discrimination (Williams, 2020).

Case Study: Nike's 'Race to the Bottom' and Opposition to Nike

Nike's 'regime shopping' strategy, under the leadership of then CEO Phil Knight, stands as an illustrative case of the emergence of sportswear TNCs and contemporary sweatshop labour. In the early 1980s, 90% of Nike's sport footwear was produced in South Korea and Taiwan in EPZs. In response to the exploitative working conditions faced largely by women workers, widespread unionization in South Korea resulted in the doubling of wages (Merk, 2011), as well as increased labour costs in Taiwan. The previous comparative advantage South Korea and Taiwan held as a cheap, unregulated, and docile labour markets dissipated, resulting in a crisis of profitability for Nike. Consequently, Nike engaged in 'spatial fixing' by transferring their production lines to China, Indonesia, and Vietnam to maintain their reduced labour costs and avoid unionized labour. By 2010, 65% of Nike's athletic footwear was produced in China and Vietnam, with the average worker making 50% the amount needed for subsistence (Sage, 2010). Nike's foresight to outsource manufacturing production and exploit the low-wages of workers in the GS resulted eventually in the dethroning of Adidas as the sector leading sportswear TNC

(Sage, 2010). Knight boasted: “We were ...good at keeping our manufacturing costs down ... Puma and Adidas were still manufacturing in high wage European countries. But we knew that wages were lower in Asia, and we knew how to get around in that environment” (Merk, 2011, p. 82).

As of the end of Q4 in 2023, Nike remains one of the largest suppliers of sportswear and holds nearly 39% of the market share around the world (Sher, 2024). However, throughout the years, its sector-leading position, image, and reputation have suffered various blowbacks as multiple investigative reports have highlighted its reliance on sweatshop labour in the manufacturing and production of its apparel and sports equipment (Manzenreiter, 2013, 2014; Merk, 2011, 2023; Sage, 2010). Triggering an anti-Nike (and anti-sweatshop) movement that encompassed organizations such as the Clean Clothes Campaign, the Global March, the Maquila Solidarity Network, and United Students Against Sweatshops. In response to the global anti-sweatshop movement, Knight himself acknowledged that the: "Nike product has become synonymous with slave wages, forced overtime, and arbitrary abuse" (Sage, 2010, p. 124).

Up until the later 1980s to early 1990s, the poor working conditions of Nike's subcontracted manufacturing lines in Taiwan and South Korea gained little attention and reactions in the GN (Merk, 2011, 2015, 2023; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2005; Sage, 2010). Once the second generation of GS manufacturers (i.e., based in Indonesia, Vietnam, and China) produced sportswear garments and gear at the behest of Nike and other sportswear TNCs, Indonesian local media reports of child labour, poverty wages, and overall poor working conditions spread rapidly. The viral local media reports sparked reactions and supplied evidence for transnational anti-sweatshop campaigns to rally against these corporations and practices (Merk, 2023; Sage, 2010).

Initial reactions by Nike (and other TNCs) to the public outrage was to defer responsibility to the legally independent subcontracted manufacturing firms in the GS (Sage, 2010). The social distancing created through the subcontracting of workers was illustrated when a Nike representative at the time stated: “They are our subcontractors. It’s not within our scope to investigate” (Merk, 2023, p. 4). Although Nike was right in strictly legal terms, they soon realized that this would not tame the growing negative reaction or the increasing mobilization among anti-sweatshop activists and recognized that such resistance would, in the end, harm their profits. As Taylor (2011) notes, Nike realized that an increasingly stained brand-image would allow other sportswear TNCs (even those engaging in similarly exploitative practices) to hold the ‘ethical high ground’ and capture some of Nike’s market share. In 1992, under pressure from anti-sweatshop activists, Nike adopted a code of conduct (i.e., an ethical procurement policy) and created an internal compliance team to monitor their supply chain (Merk, 2023). Furthermore, Nike participated in various initiatives created by transnational private governance (TPG) institutions attempting to advance CSR efforts; for example, the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Better Work program (Merk, 2023). CSR has been understood as a form of market-friendly form of private self-regulation and voluntary codes of conduct—or “soft laws” that don’t disrupt deregulation; flexible labour market; mobile capital (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2005)—and stand in contrast to more rigorous, state-driven regulation that was more prominent prior to the rise of neoliberal globalization. It was this mix of CSR and voluntary and private codes of conduct that, on the one hand, was used by Nike to fix its brand-image and, on the other hand, that which served “as the springboard” (Merk, 2023, p. 14) for the anti-sweatshop movement.

Nike's failure to monitor and enforce humane working standards in their subcontracted firms spurred the activities of anti-sweatshop movement groups. By 1998, Nike and other TNCs faced pressure from multiple anti-sweatshop groups (e.g., the Global Exchange, the National Labour Committee, USAS, MSN, CCC) who highlighted the gap between TNC's supposed commitment to CSR and their real lack of action or enforcement of ethical practices (Esbenshade, 2; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2005). As a result, Nike (and other TNCs) flocked to the FLA to receive a 'No-Sweat' stamp on their products which, much like a pressure relief valve, was intended to alleviate the significant damage anti-sweatshop activists brought to their brand-image (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2005). As of the time of writing, no scholarly literature has so far delved into Nike's current state of affairs in relation to sweatshops, ethical procurement, or corporate social responsibility. However, there has been considerable discussion on the considerable growth of voluntary codes of conducts spearheaded by Nike to mitigate unethical labour practices (see Oviedo, 2021).

Sports Mega-Events as Sites of Reproduction of and Resistance to Sweatshop Labour

There is a healthy body of literature in the sociology of sport on SMEs, particularly in relation to the ways in which these spectacles have developed and served as a vehicle for the (re)production of exploitative practices and sweatshop labour, have been sites for resistance against sweatshop labour by TANs, and have transformed in response to scandals and public opposition. This section precedes an examination of FIFA given the focus of this study, with specific attention paid to its efforts to mitigate damage from public outrage to numerous scandals through the creation and implementation of 'FIFA 2.0.'

SMEs are defined as a large-scale cultural, commercial, and sporting events that have mass-appeal and international significance (Gruneau & Horne, 2015; Horne, 2015, 2016; Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; Müller, 2017). They are often characterized as ‘discontinuous,’ meaning they are significant enough to be perceived as exceptional events—analogue to solar eclipses—that attract global media attention and have substantial impact for the host city or country (Gruneau & Horne, 2015). Since the 1980s, the prominence and audience of SMEs have increased to such an extent that some scholars have suggested categorizing the largest events, like the FIFA men's World Cup (FWMC) and the Summer Olympic Games, as 'giga-events.' (Gruneau & Horne, 2015; Wolfe et al., 2022). The accelerating growth of SMEs have often been attributed to three key reasons:

1. Breakthrough developments in communication such as satellite television resulting in the formation of global audiences;
2. Formation of the sport-media-business alliance, resulting in corporate partnerships for sponsorship rights, exclusive broadcasting rights, and merchandising; and
3. Promotional opportunities for cities to build world class ‘fantasy cities’ as urban entertainment destinations (Gruneau & Horne, 2015).

This growth is further evident by the rapid increase of international sponsorship revenue for SMEs (see Wolfe et al., 2022). Despite the routine touting of numerous (supposed) social, cultural, economic, political, and sporting ‘legacies’ of SMEs, such forecasted benefits have nearly always been wrong and there is ample research demonstrating that “... ‘economic benefits are the prime” motivator (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006, p. 9) for those involved in hosting them. Consequently, local politicians have often prioritized the interests of developers, property owners, and middle-class consumers in the context of hosting SMEs (Gruneau & Horne, 2015).

This is certainly in line with broader sociopolitical and economic patterns made evident since the turn towards neoliberal globalization as governments have increasingly shifted their attention and policy-making away from social redistribution and public services, and towards deregulation and privatization in the name of improving economic competitiveness for private investment and new tax revenues (Broudehoux, 2015; Gruneau & Horne, 2015; Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006). Many governments around the world and at various levels have embraced entrepreneurialism and as a consequence have routinely utilized SMEs for soft power (i.e., promotional) purposes (Broudehoux, 2015) in order to attract new investors, tourists, and taxpayers. As Gotham (2015, p. 34) notes the: “production, consumption, and socio-legal regulation of [sports] mega-events” has been understood within the literature to have “developed in a context of neoliberal economic ideology and globalization.” Moreover, in typical-entrepreneurial fashion, these cities exploit the enticed public opinion and promotion of ‘legacy’ to impose an increasingly normalized “state of exception” (Gruneau & Horne, 2015, p. 12) to bypass regulations and democratic measures in order to introduce policies that typically would not have been possible to enact (Beissel & Kohe, 2022). These often include the implementation of neoliberal-friendly initiatives or policies such as the creation of enterprise zones (i.e., tax exemption to FIFA and their corporate partners, labour laws, and full tax-payer resourcing of safety and security costs) (Gotham, 2015).

Given the considerable—and frequently negative—impact of such place-building efforts by national and municipal governments, scholarly literature in the sociology of sport has extensively focused on the consequences of these SME-driven shifts on host nations and cities (Broudehoux, 2015; Gaffney, 2015; Gotham, 2015; Gruneau & Horne, 2015; Horne, 2015, 2016; Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; Wolfe et al., 2022; Zimbalist, 2020b, 2020a). Much of the existing

literature has focused on the heightened pressures on host nations/cities to transform their urban environments—often framed in the rhetoric of supporting ‘modern’ and ‘safe’ ‘urban revitalization’—to meet the expectations of “local economic and political elites, international sporting federations and their global sponsors” (Broudehoux, 2015, p. 113; see also Gotham, 2015; Gruneau & Horne, 2015; Wolfe et al., 2022). National governments and sport governing bodies have regularly utilized SMEs as a tool for ‘development’, where development is defined as “organized intervention in collective affairs according to a standard of improvement” and has often underpinned urban revitalization promises of “enhancing, upgrading, and expanding social capacities and resources for more people and communities” (Darnell & Millington, 2015, p.66). As Darnell & Millington argue, achieving such goals calls into question the political, economic, and social relations of power as well as the dominant understanding of development. With the ascendancy of global neoliberalism, SME-driven development is set to the dominant neoliberal standard of “entrepreneurialism and wealth creation” (Darnell & Millington, 2015, p.69), encouraging a logic of neoliberalism to support “deregulation, privatization, accumulation and the opening of new markets” (Darnell & Millington, 2015, p.69).

Given the focus of this study on SMEs and sweatshop labour, it will be sufficient to just highlight that this body of scholarship makes clear that such efforts are deeply rooted in the politics of visibility and exclusion and often result in the forced eviction of poor, the unhoused or underhoused, and racialized peoples (Broudehoux, 2015; Zimbalist, 2020b) to make way for what is considered value-producing space (entertainment and tourist destinations, white elephant stadiums, transportation networks, venues, and water and energy infrastructure) that generate profit for the private sector while being built nearly completely through the public tax dollars (Broudehoux, 2015; Gotham, 2015; Gruneau & Horne, 2015; Wolfe et al., 2022).

In relation to the anti-sweatshop movement and SMEs, and as noted in the previous chapter, SMEs have long been focal points for the anti-sweatshop movement activism and advocacy. The creation of large-scale spectacles designed to attract extensive audiences coupled with elaborate systems for licensing and procurement, as well as partnerships established with sportswear TNCs such as Nike, Adidas, and Puma, have made SMEs a target of interest for the anti-sweatshop movement. The Play Fair campaign has been particularly successful in highlighting and focusing attention on SMEs' role in supporting (and, at times, stimulating) the exploitation of subcontracted workers by sportswear TNCs. Launched in 2004 by a coalition that included Oxfam, the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, and the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF), the Play Fair campaign's focus on raising public awareness through reports on factory investigation, protests, and negotiations with sports governing bodies has been described as "perhaps the biggest-ever crusade against sweatshops" (as quoted in Timms, 2012, p. 359; see also Biyanwila, 2018b; Timms, 2012, 2015).

The Play Fair campaign originated with the 2004 Athens Olympics but continued to occur in the following 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012 Olympics. Sport scholars have especially focused on the 2012 Play Fair campaign given host city London's emphasis on sustainability and ethical practices, including the safeguarding of workers' rights, as part of its winning bid to host the Olympics (Biyawila, 2018a; Timms, 2015). As Timms highlights, the trending "global discourses of corporate social responsibility (CSR) [that has become] standard practice amongst TNCs" (2012, pg. 361) was reflected in the ethical promises made by the 2012 London Games' organizers. Similarly to Nike, the engagement of the 2012 London Olympics with CSR suggested the concession of responsibility over the subcontracted workers facing poor working

conditions. However, the engagement with and introduction of CSR as explained above brought about the question of monitoring and enforcement to the forefront because of the lack of improvement in working conditions (Anner, 2019; Esbenshade, 2008; Merk, 2015; Merk, 2023; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2005; Sage, 2010; Taylor, 2011; Wells, 2009).

The issue of monitoring and enforcement of CSR was demonstrated with the mandatory adoption of the Ethical Trading Initiative's (ETI) codes of conduct for Olympic suppliers after negotiations between Play Fair and the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) (Timms, 2012). The ETI was a tripartite body involving companies, trade unions, and NGOs working to promote ethical procurement standards, such as ensuring a guaranteed living wage, the right to freedom of association, and safe working conditions. However, the lack of disclosure of factory locations, complaint mechanisms, and safeguards meant to protect workers remained unverifiable. Through Play Fair's pressure, the LOCOG eventually conceded to disclose the factory locations and to creating a complaint system; however, workers were not informed of its existence or of how to engage with this system (Timms, 2012, 2015). Yet, IOC and LOCOG officials took their engagement with CSR rhetoric—and their concessions to Play Fair—as proof of SMEs' benefits despite the continued gap between CSR/ethical discourse and the actualization of ethical practices on the ground (Timms, 2012, 2015).

Focusing on FIFA

Given this study's focus on the 2026 FMWC, it is important to draw focused attention to FIFA's own role and history in relation to SMEs and exploitative labour practices. To be clear, FIFA has a long history of criminal conduct both within the organization and outside of just its major events. However, the scale and volume of controversies throughout the years associated

with the FMWC is noteworthy. For example, amid growing revenues and audiences, the most recent global tournament held in Qatar in 2022 was heavily scrutinized for the deaths of thousands of migrant labourers involved in the building of the stadia in which matches were to be held (Dunbar, 2022; INSIDEFIFA, 2022; Patisson & McIntyre, 2021). As another example, during the 2014 FMWC, the construction and privatization of stadiums under private-public partnership initiative that siphoned money out of the public into private hands was extensively documented (Castilho et al., 2017), including the forced relocation of poor residents and workers from favelas (some at gun point) to make way for stadia construction or as part of efforts to superficially ‘clean up’ the areas for tourists (Castilho et al., 2017; Zimbalist, 2020b). The displacement of residents of favelas only intensified the housing deficit in Brazil, resulting in many “displaced residents ... re-housed in the far periphery, away from job opportunities and basic services, or without fair compensation ... [resulting] in a net impoverishment” (Broudehoux, 2015, p. 119). Prompted by these repressive measures taken by the state more than a million Brazilians spontaneously poured into the streets, carrying signs stating, “Death to the World Cup” and “We Want a FIFA Level Education System.” (Zimbalist, 2020b, p. 107). This opposition highlights the World Cup tournament as a contested site, where ideological claims are not so readily accepted but actively engaged with and often resisted (Broudehoux, 2015; Gotham, 2015).

FIFA 2.0 and FMWC as Contested Sites

As noted earlier, FIFA has a history of corruption that eventually resulted in the indictment of 27 FIFA officials for fraud, racketeering, and money laundering by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2016 (Beissel & Ternes, 2022). Facing one of their largest scandals as well as the mounting public opposition over the displacement of local communities, human rights abuses,

and militarization, FIFA—in efforts to improve their public image—began to undertake deep reform (Beissel & Ternes, 2022). These reforms included the creation of new bidding procedures and regulations designed to resist corruption, and the evaluation of FMWC bids to assess their technical, human rights, and sustainability risks. Beyond these procedural reforms, Gianni Infantino—then FIFA’s newly elected president—introduced the ‘FIFA 2.0’ policy aimed at increasing world cup revenue and decreasing operating expenses/inefficiencies (Beissel & Ternes, 2022). With the goal of increasing revenue in mind, this policy has aimed to further grow the tournament by increasing the national teams and match count to 48 and 80 for the 2026 FMWC, respectively (Beissel, 2023). Consequently, increasing the number of teams and matches corresponds with greater fan engagement, which necessitates even more infrastructure to support the tournament. Most countries are not able to develop nor sustain such infrastructure, therefore procedural changes within bid selections have allowed for multiple countries to share hosting rights of the FMWC (Beissel, 2023; Beissel & Kohe, 2022).

As understood by Beissel and Kohe, the 2026 United Bid was designed to reflect these procedural reforms in FIFA as well as its reimagined ethos of “sustainable practices and robust organizational ethics” (2022, pg. 11). Moreover, the United Bid built itself on geopolitical ‘legacy’ discourse, and leveraged FIFA’s commitment to the usage of pre-existing infrastructure, and untapped commercial opportunity (Beissel, 2023; Beissel & Kohe, 2022). The bid leveraged the symbolic politics of transnational unity, arguing that shared hosting rights would enhance global inclusivity (as well as, although less audibly declared, unprecedented profitability given the use of existing infrastructure). This rhetoric was supported by FIFA’s supposed commitment to global peace-making—since 2018, Infantino himself has joined multiple peace and diplomacy-related events including, but not limited to, the World Economic Forum, G20

Summit, the Peace to Prosperity event, the UN General Assembly, and UN international Day of Peace event (Beissel & Ternes, 2022). It is important to note that, despite Infantino's and FIFA's declarations, the legacy of transnational unity "lacked measurable outcomes for its diplomatic ambitions. More critically, the [bid] ignored deeply entrenched cultural differences, problematic histories, and the growing contemporary geopolitical divides" (Beissel, 2023, pg. 195). The United Bid and FIFA 2.0, as understood by Beissel's & Ternes (2022), was a "strategic and immediate [response] to events driven, above all else, by securing profit motive advantages" (p. 6). FIFA's image shift towards global peace-making represented a re-branding of FIFA as a political partner meant to bridge the gaps between countries to ensure free trade (Beissel & Ternes, 2022). In this sense, FIFA is envisioned as a global unifying force, however as highlighted by Beissel & Ternes there is "scant evidence FIFA has facilitated any meaningful and substantive peace promotion aside from the protection of global markets under threat" (2022). FIFA instead aims to consolidate its geopolitical influence over commercial interests in the global football market primarily, and preserve the global flows capital as well as the growth of their corporate partners (Beissel & Ternes, 2022).

Nonetheless, since the 2026 FMWC is still in its early development phase, the literature exploring the ideological conflicts within FIFA – as a global peace-making force - has yet to be explored. The scholarly literature has yet to investigate the procurement processes associated with FIFA, such as the 2026 FMWC. Particularly concerning its preparations for the FMWC and its reliance on sweatshop labor. This question can elucidate a critical contradiction between FIFA's public image of promoting peace and global unity as highlighted by Beissel and Ternes (2022), and the reality of its economic practices, which may involve poor working conditions and labor rights violations.

As stated above, within the SoS literature, SMEs are understood as contested sites; people are not passive agents when facing gentrification, displacement, and increased policing in result of the city's imposed 'modern' image (Broudehoux, 2015; Gotham, 2015). As highlighted by Gotham "people are dynamically involved in the construction of meaning and, indeed, produce and communicate meanings that are typically resisted intensely by the promoters of mega-events" (2015, p. 37). SMEs are understood as instruments of hegemonic domination that serve to reinforce the status quo; however, the SME's platforms are often used by people to protest their discontent with the status quo. This was exemplified by the Play Fair anti-sweatshop campaign as originally highlighted by Timms (2012) and reaffirmed by Horne (2016). The activists used the Olympic platform to protest for greater enforcement of ethical procurement policies. Similarly, anti-gentrification campaigns protested against the sacrifice of nearly 250,000 homes to the alter of capital in Brazil's 2014 FMWC (Horne, 2016; 2012, 2015; Zimbalist, 2020b). Moreover, the literature on SMEs have highlighted the poor working conditions of migrant construction workers, as well as workers in the supply chains producing gear and garments in sweatshops in prior World Cups, (Gruneau & Horne, 2015; Horne, 2016; Zimbalist, 2020b). However, "Few researchers have looked at this aspect of sports mega-events in detail" (Horne, 2016, p. 336), in other words the literature has yet to orient its focus on labour concerns within SMEs, even more so, on analyzing the role of SMEs in facilitating poor working conditions within hosting municipalities and - more importantly to this study - abroad in sweatshops. This brings me once more to this study's objective; to evaluate whether the issues of sweatshop labour and ethical procurement have been considered in the bid process for the event and, if so, in what ways.

Chapter 3: Theory, Methodology, and Methods

The following chapter elaborates on the theoretical and methodological approach of this study, as well as the data collection methods and data analysis employed. As detailed in the following sections, a critical theoretical approach was employed to evaluate the bid process; in particular, key actors' attention to ethical procurement and sweatshop labour. Following a shift in data collection methods (to be discussed below), the study drew on qualitative description methodology in analyzing documents associated with the bid process for the 2026 FMWC. Publicly available documents from FIFA, the CoT, CSA, and the MSN were collected and thematic analysis helped to inform the coding of data. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the role of reflexivity in the interpretation of documents, an acknowledgement of the limitations of study stemming from the study's reliance on documents, as well as the sharing of the one interview with a key informant that did ultimately occur during the study.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Theory

This study employed a critical theoretical approach in its overall orientation to the topic and to the ways in which data analysis unfolded throughout the course of the project. Critical theory (CT) can be understood as an approach that aims to comprehend social and systemic relations in society. It aims to illuminate on social actions by interpreting people's engagement with particular dialogue(s), and the power relations and socio-economic conditions it reflects (Creswell & Poth, 2016). CT has informed a great deal of scholarship on SMEs. For example, and as noted in the preceding chapter, both Broudehox (2015) and Gotham (2015) have conceptualized individuals and communities situated in host-cities of SMEs as active agents for transformation. In this sense, the promoters of SMEs do not unilateral impose ideological claims

onto people but interact with people's engagement with and/or resistance to such mega-events. In understanding SMEs and their host-cities as *contested sites* with conflicting meanings and ideas, these scholars pull from the critical theoretical tradition to shed light on such phenomena.

CT seeks to better understand power relations and social domination, and how they operate to serve as barriers (or facilitators) to human possibilities (Morrow & Brown, 1994). CT scholars draw on an interpretivist perspective in their unpacking of the social world, a perspective that is ontologically oriented towards positioning norms, ideas, and concepts not as a reflection of reality but as mediated by our consciousness and interactions with one another, suggesting that 'facts' are not discovered but rather socially constructed. Consequently, CT scholars' epistemology focus centres on understanding the particularities of the consciousness of actors, including their intentions, meanings, and subjectivity (Morrow & Brown, 1994a, 1994c). However, Morrow & Brown (1994a, 1994c) argue that this epistemological orientation risks failing to account for the social forces acting upon individuals. For example, Morrow and Brown (1994) highlight Geertz' (2000) research on Balinese cockfighting which aimed to explore the social relations formed (such as community and status) and the meanings created within and through this activity. But Geertz's research did not elucidate on the social forces that may have brought about cockfighting to begin with. CT acknowledges the 'double environment' of human activity which is both *shaped by society and shapes society* (Morrow & Brown, 1994)—individuals and their social practices are influenced by socioeconomic structures and power dynamics, they also have the capacity to influence and transform these structures.

In this sense, this study simultaneously maintains an interpretive understanding of the discursive practices within and among individuals while also holding the necessary distance to weave in the socio-economic and power-relational structures that presuppose them (cf., Strydom,

2011). More specifically, such an approach begins with an interpretative analysis of discursive practices that are sign-bearers of a deeper structures and which are conceptually linked by the researcher to generative social structures (Strydom, 2011). Within this approach, and within this study, the primary researcher was and is not a detached neutral observer. Rather, I was engaged with and affected by the reality I studied, taking efforts to consistently and reflexively acknowledge my own role and presence in the linking together of ideas and meanings gleaned by the discursive practices of actors contained within key documents related to the 2026 FMWC bid process to my own growing understanding of power relations and social/political/economic structures that frame and are framed by SMEs. From a CT perspective, I endeavoured to first interpret the different perspectives of each key actor on such topics as sweatshop labour, ethical procurement and the bid to host matches in the 2026 FMWC as communicated through their discursive practices in written and published documents. Subsequently, this theoretical approach guided my analysis as I sought to find patterns and create connections between the discourse conveyed in the written materials and the social, political, and economic systems/structures and power relations that frame and are framed by this SME.

In his exploration of CT and its methodological implications, Strydom notes how this framework draws out an emergent “pre-theoretical knowledge” (2011, p. 137) quality that is not grounded by substantive theories of reality. Due to this, a qualitative descriptive methodology will be employed for its aim in generating rich straight descriptions of experiences or events (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2017; Neergaard et al., 2009), as well as its low-inference approach that depends on the “perceptions, inclinations, sensitivities and sensibilities of the describer” (Neergaard et al., 2009, p. 2). This will be discussed further in the following section.

Methodological Framework: Qualitative description

Qualitative description is a methodological approach that summarizes in detail events or experiences (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). Unlike phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography, this methodology focuses on the ‘who, what, and where’ of experiences (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). This approach aims to provide a “straightforward depiction of the experiences as described *by the participants themselves*” without any deep theorization (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024, p. 2; emphasis added; see also Bradshaw et al., 2017; Chafe, 2017; Kim et al., 2017; Stanley, 2014). This methodology does not use pre-selected analytical or descriptive variables, allowing for a high degree of flexibility, versatility, and application in various fields of research; it is no wonder that it is an appealing choice for many first-time, nascent qualitative researchers (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Hall & Liebenberg, 2024).

As stated by Chafe, due to qualitative description’s low-inference, the methodology often resembles a “journalistic” (2017, p. 14) account of what describers (i.e., document or participant) report. Some suggest that the ‘journalistic’ quality characteristic of this approach could be understood as a weakness as it may be deemed superficial or lacking rigor (Neergaard et al., 2009). To overcome this, researchers are encouraged to utilize other strategies to assist with triangulation such as multiple data collection methods (e.g., documentary analysis plus interviews or focus groups), member-checking, reflexive journaling and audit trails (Bradshaw et al., 2017). While qualitative description is not a theory-driven framework, its inductive capacity to draw out rich descriptions yields data that is ripe for the building of broader, theoretically informed conclusions from specific points of observed data (Kim et al., 2017; Stanley, 2014). As noted, publicly available documents from the four identified entities (FIFA, the CoT, Canada

Soccer Association, and MSN) pertaining to the bid process for the 2026 FMWC were collected and examined using qualitative description as a methodological approach.

The Shift to Documentary Research

Prior to discussing the data collection and analysis methods employed in this study, it is important to acknowledge that the research design for this study originally involved collecting data through semi-structured interviews with participants from the CoT, Canada Soccer Association and MSN. Unfortunately, a new approach to data collection was necessitated by challenges in recruiting participants and time constraints. Originally, following ethics approval from York's REB, recruitment emails were sent out to multiple individuals identified in the public domain as having some relation to Toronto's bid; this included CoT public servants, CSA officials, and members of the MSN executive board. Follow-up emails and reminders were sent over the span of several weeks. However, my efforts to recruit participants was met with either complete silence (i.e., no response at all) or by rejection for a variety of reasons. For example, an individual with the City of Toronto declined to participate as they were no longer part of the FMWC file despite having worked on the bid process and in spite of clarification that I was, in fact, interested in learning more about their very experiences as part of the bid team. As another example, representatives from MSN declined to participate noting that they are short-staffed and unable to assist with research requests such as mine. As weeks went by, my supervisory committee and I felt it appropriate to pivot and modify the research design away from data collected through interviews to data collected from publicly available documents. It is important to note that, a few weeks following the decision to shift to documentary research, I did finally manage to secure an interview with one CoT public servant involved with the City's preparations

for hosting the 2026 FMWC; more about this interview will be offered later in this chapter. The following sections will discuss documentary research, outline the data collection, and discuss the approach undertaken in analysis: thematic analysis (TA).

Qualitative researchers have long recognized documents as social artefacts that enable the sharing of information, for a particular purpose, according to a standard (Bowen, 2009; Coffey, 2013; Grant, 2018, 2018; Karppinen & Moe, 2012; Lee, 2012). As a result, to understand how organizations such as the CoT or FIFA functions, documentary research and the analysis of text functions as a very valuable tool and has been utilized as the primary source of data collection in this research process (Bowen, 2009; Coffey, 2013).

Documents are social facts meant to be produced, circulated, read, and stored in social organizing ways that may inform structures and the interactions between individuals and organization within a certain context (Coffey, 2013; Grant, 2018; Lee, 2012). In this vein, Coffey (2013) elaborates on the analysis of documents by delineating three key questions to be posed of them by the researcher during the research process: 1) what does the document look like (standardization); 2) what does the document do (function); and 3) how does the document relate to other ones (intertextuality). The standardization of documents speak to the format it holds which establishes a uniformity that documents require to produce shared knowledges within an organization (Coffey & Atkinson, 2004). Commonly this standardization emerges via the usage of a specialized language, narrative style, textual organization, and how the document is constructed overall (Coffey, 2013; Grant, 2018; Lee, 2012). In relation to the function of the document, researchers aim to better understand what a document seeks to accomplish, as, how it constructs reality, persuades (via specific rhetoric), and/or intends to be read to reach that goal (Coffey, 2013). Lastly, in effort to fully understand the document, it is critical for a researcher to

explore its context and relational quality to other documents. Documents are not created in isolation, but rather are contextualized within systematic relationships and possess an intertextual quality (Bowen, 2009; Coffey & Atkinson, 2004, 2004; Grant, 2018; Lee, 2012). They are constructed in relation and in reference to other documents, and therefore are constituted by them. As a result, these relational qualities can help illustrate documentary hierarchies within an organization as well as the temporal sequences that further contextualize it (Coffey, 2013). Additionally, these relational qualities can help highlight the general qualities of the documents and their own particularities which, in turn, illuminate the function of a particular document and give some degree of insight to their authorship and intended readership in relation to the organization (A. Coffey & Atkinson, 2004). Accordingly, this relational quality of documents builds a semi-autonomous documentary reality which the document analysis aims to interpret.

While this documentary reality is the basis for interpreting the documents, researchers must always be cognizant of the ways in which documents may flatten or even suppress time or chronology of events, and how the fixed quality of the written text may decontextualizes the lived experiences of the authors (whether individuals or groups) of the document(s) as merely a record following a specific stylistic language and format separate from the original site of production (Coffey, 2013; Coffey & Atkinson, 2004). Due to the separation between the record and original event, we cannot lose sight of the drawbacks of documentary research in that documents cannot be questioned or asked follow-up probes like participant in an interview; therefore, the document(s) may not hold sufficient details to allow for in-depth analysis or data saturation and, consequently, can only provide a limited understanding of the phenomenon (e.g., day-to-day operations, informal relations between individuals or groups, etc.) under study (Bowen, 2009; Coffey, 2013). However, we cannot lose sight of the strengths of documentary

research either as the patience of documents affords a researcher unlimited opportunity to visit and revisit the data in ways that may not necessarily be available to them in other data collection formats; for example, an interview between a researcher and a study participant is bound by both individuals' time and energy (Bowen, 2009). Furthermore, documents are not reactive to the presence of researcher (e.g., there is no risk of a document producing a socially desirable response to a researcher's question), are much more efficient for analysis than semi-structured interviews and provide a greater coverage depending on their availability (Bowen, 2009).

Methods

Data Collection

Once the decision was made to shift from interviews to documentary research, I proceeded to collect publicly accessible documents that pertained to the bid process for the 2026 FMWC from FIFA, CS, the CoT, and the MSN. The official websites for each of the four entities were extensively scoured. However, it must be noted that the amount of information posted to each website by the respective organization varied widely as some entities simply had more documents and information that met the inclusion criteria (see below) for this study posted—for example, FIFA (<https://inside.fifa.com/>) and the Council and Committee Meetings' webpage for the CoT (<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/council/council-committee-meetings/>). In many ways, this was anticipated and expected. For example, I expected that FIFA's website would possess the most information on the process for bidding to host the FMWC, and I expected that the CoT would have a great deal of information and lots of available documents on their bid for the 2026 games. However, I did not anticipate the complete lack of any publicly available documents related to the 2026 FMWC from the MSN. Despite their long

history of involvement in anti-sweatshop activism and in utilizing SMEs as platforms for protest (in collaboration with other labour advocacy groups such as CCC), they do not have posted (or perhaps have not yet made available) in the public domain any texts or documents regarding the 2026 FMWC. Therefore, no MSN-developed or MSN-centric document analysis could have been conducted to better understand their perspectives regarding the 2026 United Bid and the CoT's preparations for hosting the FMWC. The implications of this imbalance of available documents for our understanding of the 2026 FMWC bid process will be further explored in Chapter 5.

Between February 6 2024 and March 30 2024, I used the Google search engine and limited the search to only those documents that were in the public domain. In addition to the names of the four actors, the following keywords were also used in my search process: FIFA men's World Cup; World Cup; Updates for FIFA World Cup; ethical procurement; supply chain; workers' rights; bid regulation; bid procedures; and stakeholder engagement were employed to search the website for relevant documents. The criteria for inclusion were twofold: 1) the documents needed to be self-generated (i.e., created by the organization/group of interest) and relevant to this study's focus; and 2) the documents needed to relate to the 2026 FMWC.

Collected documents included policies, official statements, media releases, annual reports, and publicly available internal correspondence (e.g., circulations sent to member associations in FIFA). My identification and selection of the documents aimed to capture the perspectives and approaches towards ethical procurement as understood by (or not) by key actors in the context of the bid process and preparations for hosting the FMWC. As a result of this data collection process, I amassed a dataset of 14 documents from FIFA totalling more than 1,100 pages; five documents from CoT totalling more than 110 pages; three webpages from CSA with

an unidentifiable number of pages due to the format; and zero documents from the MSN. When I contacted the MSN, the reasons for their lack of documents were not explicitly made clear. However, their archived website indicates that their Canadian campaign and public education programs ended (“Welcome to the MSN Archive (1994-2014)”, n.d.). Table 1 below lists the retrieved documents, their date of publication, and the authoring organization. Additionally, the interview was utilized to help strengthen themes through triangulation and expand the scope of some themes to a limited extent.

Data Analysis

Once data was collected, formal data analysis began and followed the tenets of thematic analysis (TA), an inductive process where raw data from documents are abstracted and interpreted to produce systematic categories of patterns within their context (Bowen, 2009; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). In contrast to TA, content analysis typically has a pre-determined set of codes that are anticipated in the data and therefore requires little interpretation (Stanley, 2014). The conclusions of content analysis are then often derived from counting the frequency of codes, and often applying statistical analysis to the codes (Wesley, 2014). On the other hand, the inductive process of thematic analysis is neither guided nor limited by pre-determined variables of any theory, therefor providing it “considerable advantage” (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 2) in its flexibility. Furthermore, this study employs a qualitative description methodology, therefore it aligns well with the qualitative description’s low-inference approach by remaining close to the language of the documents collected (Kim et al., 2017) and "yield a rich description of views on the topic being explored [in the documents]" (Stanley, 2014, p. 29). Furthermore, unlike content analysis, TA distinguishes two levels of themes in its analysis, those being: 1)

semantic themes, and 2) latent themes (Byrne, 2022; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Semantic themes, as described by Braun & Clarke (2006), identify surface level meanings constructed in the data. While latent themes go beyond the surface level, and analyze the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualization that documents or participants may evoke (see also Byrne, 2022; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

In this study, I followed Braun's & Clarke's (2006) six-phase step-by-step process for conducting TA, in which I would: 1) become familiar with data; 2) generate initial descriptive codes; 3) search for themes; 4) review themes; 5) define themes; and 6) report the themes. While the steps are numbered, the guide does not move linearly; rather it is expected that researcher will move back and forth between the steps when dealing with many complex themes (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Following this guide, I began the coding process by immersing myself in the documents as I read and re-read the documents to locate the 'who, what, and where' dimensions of the data in as organic a manner as possible. Following this immersive phase, I then proceeded to the coding stages where I more intentionally examined the data through a CT lens and attempted to generate open codes that stayed close to the original language of the documents. These open codes were then categorized and formed into themes, which aimed to capture important concepts relevant to the study's research objectives (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). This was not a linear process as throughout the coding process the constructed themes were consistently reviewed and critiqued to ensure a robust interpretation of the documents was achieved. To be clear, my immersion in the existing scholarship as well as my own lived experiences at the time (more shared just below) made me more receptive to specific excerpts within the documents that were then used to code, describe the code, and the eventual convert the code into themes. While I will delve into my own lived experiences later in this chapter, the literature on anti-sweatshop

resistance—in particular, those published by such academic-activists as Esbenshade (2008), Merk (2023), Rodríguez-Garavito (2005), Williams (2010) and others—has significantly informed my approach to coding and analysis. In many ways, I was able to hold space for the perspectives of resistance actors in this area despite the absence of documents from them. Thus, rather than discovering codes buried in the documents, I actively constructed them through my own interpretations that have been shaped by the experiences, knowledge, values, and biases I hold.

Interview

As previously discussed, the initial plan for data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews with participants from the CoT, CSA, and the MSN. However, due to the challenges I faced during participant recruitment, the data collection method was adjusted in late Fall 2023 to shift to documentary research. However, in early 2024, I received a message from a CoT public servant, given the pseudonym Kevin in this thesis, who agreed to participate in an interview. Kevin had been forwarded my recruitment letter and study information sheet by one of the individuals I had reached out to in earlier rounds of recruitment. As my ethics approval from York's REB had not expired, I decided to talk with Kevin to not waste an opportunity to interview someone with insights on the bid process. I subsequently came to learn, during the course of the interview, that Kevin was not part of the bid process but rather is involved in the legacy-building preparations for the 2026 FMWC, therefore most of the discussion surrounded their preparations for procurement and human rights efforts.

The interview took place online through the Webex application and lasted about an hour. As a nascent researcher and one who was in deep into reading, note-taking, and writing, I was particularly worried about managing the informed consent process as the interview was being

conducted virtually. Thankfully, it was not as challenging as I anticipated and, after obtaining informed consent, the interview commenced. Up to that point, my only experience with interviewing had been as part of a class assignment in KAHS 6030 (Qualitative Research Methods) taken at York University, and some support I provided a Postdoctoral Fellow in a research assistant role. As this research assistant, I transcribed the interviews and also was able to observe a more experienced researcher navigate interviews and the care they took to ensure it went about smoothly. For instance, the pre-interview introduction and reminder of the interviewee's rights were something that was consistently used by the Postdoctoral Fellow and was something I ensured was utilized in this interview with Kevin as well.

I am grateful that the interview opportunity popped up after I had already engaged in the collection of data from documents and was already immersed in their coding. As such, and as I reflect on the content of the interview, many noteworthy points and themes emerged from Kevin's insights. As I only completed but one interview, I am hyper-cautious about inferring too much from this one interview. However, it would be remiss of me to not acknowledge that I saw and felt many points of connections between Kevin's insights and my emerging analysis of the documents; in many ways, I came away from the interview with Kevin feeling reassured that I was on the right track in recognizing patterns of framing and discourse.

For example, in the interview, Kevin began to discuss the CoT's legacy plans for the 2026 FMWC and spoke to the five categories that inform the legacy plans: 1) sport/active living; 2) environmental sustainability; 3) human rights, equity, diversity, and inclusion; 4) economic impact and tourism; and 5) arts and culture (*Update on Hosting FIFA World Cup 2026*, 2024). In reflecting on the City's stated commitments to human rights, Kevin reiterated the five categories noted above but as framed through the lens and discourse of development:

So, the legacy that we're looking at is a little less tangible for people, and like and how we measure the benefits is more challenging. So like, *youth participation in soccer...what does that mean? How do we measure that? How do we drive that? What is a reasonable goal? Or economic development like...community benefit programs are great for subways or for housing projects where there is these multibillion-dollar multi-year projects* and people can get local jobs, they learn the skills, apprenticeships stuff like that. You have that sort of legacy. (emphasis added)

He continued:

And so the opportunity aren't what people are used to seeing, and so some of the things that we're are looking- we know the hospitality sectors is going to ramp up, how do we support that? How do we make it a lasting benefit for the City? We know we're gonna have to put our Fan Festival, *how do we take that and work with the rest of the industry so that we are developing a pipeline of qualified equity-deserving local hires* that can have other opportunities (emphasis added)

For me—given the theoretical orientation of the study, my immersion in the existing scholarship on this topic and the data from the documents—the tethering together of human rights with multi-billion-dollar subway and housing projects as well as increasing participation in youth football—was provocative in how transactional it rendered human rights.

As another example of how the conversation with Kevin sparked a connection with my analysis of the documents, I feel it noteworthy to point out that, overall, the issue of ethical procurement and sweatshop labour was notable in its (frankly) complete absence of discussion. It just wasn't brought up by Kevin even though my recruitment materials clearly stated the focus of

my study. What Kevin did bring forth though was a readiness to distance Toronto from other cities/nations and from other FIFA controversies, specifically Qatar. When asked about the City's engagement with organizations that have advocated for workers' rights and ethical procurement, he shared:

A number of the more lobbying-advocacy focused stakeholders are trying to push a narrative that says there was a whole bunch of human rights abuses and Russia and Qatar and FIFA is coming to town and it's just gonna be just like that all over again and that's ridiculous, frankly. 'Cause we have a very different legal structure, we're...the City of Toronto is not the government of Qatar, and so... there has been a lot of that rhetoric in the media and from some of the stakeholders which is really unfortunate because it's just not accurate, we're going to have very different issues that are very unique to Toronto. And the more that they try and invoke the spectre of Qatar, the more it takes away from us being able to focus on what the uniquely Toronto issues are. ... because we have our challenges. *We are not using slave labour to build our stadiums and having all kinds of workers dying in horrible conditions, so let's not put a bunch of energy into that. Like lets put energy into Indigenous Reconciliation and the sorts of issues that are more unique to Toronto* (emphasis added)

Although this is but one interview with one public servant, I find their organization of priorities and concerns noteworthy including the distancing from Qatar, the minimization of any possible workers' rights violations in the service of the FMWC, and the highlighting of Indigenous Reconciliation as something that is somehow most specific or "unique" to Toronto and therefore more worthy of attention. I am not suggesting that Reconciliation is not worthy of attention, but pointing out the disconnect of workers' rights from human rights more broadly in Kevin's

comments, and the disconnect of workers' rights to ethical procurement through the absence of attention to ethical procurement.

In reflecting on his words, I was struck by Kevin's quick falling back onto us-versus-them characterizations between Toronto and Qatar, and their desire to emphasize how supposedly different Toronto is than Qatar (i.e., that the types of workers' right violations and harms wouldn't and couldn't happen here). Again, I am cautious to not magnify but one interview at the expense of the thousands of pages of collected data; however, I felt thematic resonance in Kevin's positionality and in what I was seeing from the documents as they too, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, speak around the issue of workers' rights in many instances and not to the issues.

I cannot deny that the interview enriched my analysis of the documentary data but, again this was only one interview with one public servant from the CoT. Therefore, the amount of the information that could be analyzed thoroughly to create an understanding of the nuanced and potentially contradicting perspectives, beliefs, and actions is very limited. This limitation in data collection was further highlighted when Kevin referred me to FIFA officials who they felt could speak further to the considerations of ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement for the 2026 FMWC.

Reflexivity

As stated above, I consistently took efforts to engage in self-reflexivity as a student-researchers and to intentionally acknowledge my role and influence in co-creating or connecting ideas within and across the documents that I had collected. Researchers do not unlearn the knowledge and experiences they have acquired throughout their lives; whether implicit or explicit, researchers use the knowledge, values, biases they hold to interpret observations and

from here (co-)create knowledge. In so doing, I attempted to understand and respect being “ethically and politically self-aware, [and making myself] part of [my] own inquiry” (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 387). To maintain self-reflexivity throughout the study and to be conscious of my values, experiences, and biases, I made effort to: 1) connect the discourses of groups and individuals back to the set of historical/structural/economic relations that situated them and me/myself; 2) avoid decoupling myself from the interpretation of these actors’ messages via a passive voice; and 3) acknowledge my own experiences in my past and during my study in shaping my interpretations of the phenomenon under study (Creswell and Poth, 2016). With this in mind, I kept a journal and recorded my reflections throughout the whole data collection and analysis process, including observations that interested me and ‘hunches’ in relation to what I felt and thought I was seeing in the documents (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In addition to constantly discussing my interpretations and process with my supervisor, I also made efforts to return to my journals often as a mechanism by which to check in and check myself on how my positionality, values, and experiences emerged and actively played a constitutive role in the data analysis.

It is important to note that my data collection and analysis process took place during a time when my own lived experiences about researching workers’ rights and being an active member of a workers’ protest collided. In Spring 2024, CUPE 3903 (the union representing graduate students and contract faculty members at York) engaged in a seven-weeks long labour disruption in efforts to secure a suite of measures. Although I had read about strikes and union-based struggles both for my research project and my own pleasure, this was the first time I was involved in one *as a worker*. In the past, I had joined labour activists that rallied alongside picketing workers and provided them with aid; however, it did not compare to being part of the struggle.

As a participant on of the ‘sides,’ I was on the frontlines of seeing and feeling a myriad of things including confusion, resignation, frustration, teamwork, a sense of solidarity, camaraderie, organization, disorganization and much more. I was ‘on the ground’ in witnessing how the university campus, student spaces, and various meetings became contested sites, where ideological claims were declared or retracted, where different perspectives on where power lay bubbled up in conflict, where some sought out to *prove their facts* of a situation, and where others focused on preserving and protecting (and, in some cases not) lines of communications among those with differing viewpoints. I became acutely aware of and interested in the union’s and university administration’s use of language in their documents (e.g., press releases), paying close attention to how incidents or situations were being framed. Being involved in these sites became apparent during the strike that the struggle for soft power and the hold of who to trust for information became critical not only for students but also for the striking workers. Speaking to my lived experiences as a supporter of this struggle, I witnessed the rhetorical tools used by both the university and union, how their framing of the strike acknowledged and excluded pieces of information, and their corresponding actions. One particular instance that came to mind was the arrest of workers in Sentinel Road in March 4th 2024. According to my coworkers, Sentinel Road at York University has been a standard picket line for the past 23 years therefore it came as a shock to everybody when the police took down the picket line. Not only did it come as a shock, but to many it illustrated a form of police brutality. After taking down the Sentinel Road picket line, many CUPE 3903 held an informal meeting (in which I was a part of) to march to the now ‘police-occupied’ picket line and establish our presence there. During the meeting, a discussion formed regarding the appropriate chants to use and at one point a graduate student spoke about her experiences being assaulted by the police officer while showcasing the bruises she received

as a result of it. To digress, the relationships I built that day, which itself is its own story, expanded my horizon further on the various interactions occurring that otherwise would have been missed or seemed of no significance that day. For example, at one point I was informed that Desmond Cole¹ was present in the march and came to support CUPE 3903 due to the police crackdown of workers, and that day he interviewed many coworkers in Sentinel Road. Ironically, I was introduced to the works of Desmond Cole through my Bachelor's degree in Kinesiology at York University, and it is this knowledge that I was equipped with that allowed me to understand the significance of these interactions. Nonetheless, on March 11th 2024, York University published a community update that did reaffirm the safety of our community as a top priority but did not include the events that transpired with many of the picketers (Wallace, 2024). In this respect, I directly lived through and experienced the discursive interactions between the CUPE 3903 union and the university administration, in particular, how power relations may facilitate a certain discursive construction that may acknowledge and bring to light certain self-perceived 'facts of the situation', while also excluding others.

In keeping a journal, consistently checking in with my supervisor, and making efforts to intentionally be self-reflexive, I could see and feel how my own analytical radar was turned on and how attuned I became to certain issues over time including power relations between individuals and groups/organizations and, more significantly, the impact of an individual's or group's ability to have their words captured in key documents. I will return to these issues in Chapter 5.

¹ Desmond Cole is an anti-racist activist based in Toronto who has focused on police brutality towards racialized communities in Canada (See Cole, 2015)

Limitations

The study has relied mostly on document analysis to construct the themes. Consequently, the reliability of the constructed themes was significantly limited due to the inability to triangulate most of the data. However, as mentioned above, the primary research did include one interview with a CoT public servant involved in preparations for the 2026 FMWC. The data from this interview helped partially mitigate the lack of triangulation by enriching and sometimes confirming the themes from the documents. It also provided some necessary context for the day-to-day operations and informal behaviours that may not have been captured in the documents. Following the recommendations of Bradshaw et al. (2017), reflexive journaling and audit trails were also incorporated to enhance the rigour of the data and partially address the triangulation issue. Furthermore, it is important to note that the preparations for the 2026 FMWC is still ongoing and therefore provides room for different interpretations. Many of the themes that have developed speak to a discursive absence by FIFA and the CoT and therefore can at any moment become outdated with more documents published after the completion of this study.

In elaborating the theoretical and methodological approach underpinning this study, the following chapter details the findings derived from the thematic analysis of FIFA's, the CoT's, and CS' documents. This chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of the key themes that emerged from the analysis, highlighting how these organizations addressed (or not) issues of sweatshop labor and ethical procurement within the preparation for the 2026 FMWC. This analysis is enriched by the data provided through the single interview conducted, offering a more nuanced perspective on the day-to-day operations and informal behaviors not captured in the documents. In subsequent chapters, the implications of the themes constructed, and their implied impacts will be elucidated.

Table 1*List of the Retrieved Documents*

Title of Publication	Date of Publication	Authoring Organization
Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup	January 18 th 2018	CoT
Executive Committee consideration: EX30.14 - Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup	January 24 th 2018	CoT
City Council consideration: EX30.14 - Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup	January 31 st 2018	CoT
City of Toronto FIFA World Cup 2026™ Candidate Host City Human Rights Stakeholder and Partner Engagement Report*	June 24 th 2021	CoT
Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026	March 16 th 2022	CoT
Guide to the Bidding Process for the 2026 Fifa World Cup	February 20 th 2018	FIFA
Independent Report Human rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the context of a potential FIFA 2026 World Cup competition	March 7 th 2018	FIFA
United Bid: EIA – Executive Summary	March 16 th 2018	FIFA
Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy - United 2026	March 16 th 2018	FIFA

Bidding process for the 2026 FIFA World Cup™ - Overview of the scoring system for the technical evaluation of bids	March 25 th 2018	FIFA
Executive Summary - Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™	March 26 th 2018	FIFA
UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™	March 26 th 2018	FIFA
Evaluation Report of the Human Rights Strategy Submitted by 2026 FIFA World Cup Bidders	June 1 st 2018	FIFA
Bid Evaluation Report – 2026 FIFA World Cup	June 1 st 2018	FIFA
Circular no. 1634 - Bidding process for the 2026 FIFA World Cup™: Bid Evaluation Report	June 6 th 2018	FIFA
Evaluation of Toronto’s Human Rights Stakeholder Engagement Submission to FIFA	July 1 st 2022	FIFA
Update on FIFA’s human rights due diligence for the FIFA World Cup 2026™	July 19 th 2022	FIFA
Update on FIFA’s human rights due diligence for the FIFA World Cup 2026™	July 20 th 2022	FIFA

United Bid Selected to Host the 2026 Fifa World Cup™	June 13 th 2018	CSA
United Bid to Host the 2026 Fifa World Cup™ Wins	January 7 th 2019	CSA
Fifa World Cup 2026™ Host Cities Making Rapid Progress on Road to Biggest Fifa World Cup™ Ever	September 29 th 2023	CSA

NB. This table demonstrates the documents collected from FIFA, Canada Soccer Association (CSA), and the City of Toronto (CoT) that were utilized for thematic analysis under the methodology of qualitative description.

*The following document was not retrieved through searches on the website of their respective organization but rather forwarded by the primary researcher's supervisor.

Chapter 4: Results

As noted already, the research objective of this study is to: **evaluate whether the issues of sweatshop labour and ethical procurement have been considered by FIFA, the CoT, CS, and the MSN in the bid process for the tournament and, if so, in what ways.** In this chapter, data from the collected documents will be shared to outline and describe the process involved in the development of the CoT's (as part of the United Bid group) bid for the 2026 FMWC. As noted in Chapter 3, qualitative description aims to summarize events or experiences in detail with a focus on the 'who, what, and where' of those events or experience (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). This approach aims to provide a "straightforward depiction of the experiences as described by the participants themselves" (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024, p. 2; emphasis added). As I aim to demonstrate below, findings suggest that issues of ethical procurement and sweatshop labour were considered within the bid process to some degree, but the considerations are inconsistent across the key groups.

In Chapter 5, the depictions highlighted and mapped out in this chapter will be analyzed through a critical theoretical lens. A critical theory-informed evaluation of the published documents highlights significant points of misalignment and discontinuity between the key actors, sites of absences regarding ethical procurement and human rights, insufficient transparency in engagement with anti-sweatshop and labor rights organizations, and a discourse of development embedded within the legacy of human rights.

This chapter is organized into two major parts. The first part focuses on documents published by FIFA but that which are not specific to the 2026 FMWC. Rather, in Section 1, I share information from and framed by FIFA that summarizes their reformation efforts and events leading to the installation of, now FIFA President, Gianni Infantino and the development of

FIFA's Human Rights Policy in 2017. I draw from FIFA's published documents on the reform committee, FIFA 2.0, and bid regulations. This section serves as the backdrop to the data shared in Section 2, which focuses on the 2026 FMWC and the materials pertaining to the bid process for this specific tournament. It is crucial to note that the results are skewed towards FIFA (which incorporates the perspectives of the CSA) and the CoT due to the absence of published documents from the MSN. The lack of data from the MSN influences the analysis and subsequent implications laid out in Chapter 5.

Part 1: Context

According to FIFA-produced and published reports, FIFA's incorporation of human and labour rights considerations into the bid selection process emerged as a response to their "worst crisis in its history" (*2016 FIFA Reform Committee Report*, 2015, p. 1). Following numerous charges of corruption, fraud, and self-dealing leveled against FIFA's leadership, the association acknowledged their own sense of pressure to undertake significant reform to their organization, in what they saw as steps towards improving transparency and accountability. Their overture to engage in and commit to reform was aimed at helping them to regain their "restore its reputation" and commercial partner "confidence in FIFA" (*2016 FIFA Reform Committee Report*, 2015, p. 1) as football's global governing body.

Faced with what FIFA called an existential crisis, Sepp Blatter—then FIFA's president—laid down his mandate for the presidency in 2015 and appointed Domenico Scala, the Independent Chairman of the Audit and Compliance Committee at the time, to bring about transformative reforms to FIFA (FIFA, 2015). Following this, the Reform Committee was established by the Executive Committee, and guided by Domenico Scala's proposed reforms, focused on three principles: 1) improved governance; 2) increased financial transparency; and 3)

greater participation of member associations [MAs; a MA is the football federation for each country] and stakeholders (*Proposals of the 2016 FIFA Reform Committee*, 2015, p. 2). The proposal on improved governance advocated for several measures including the replacement of the Executive Committee with the FIFA Council to segregate FIFA's political (i.e. a strategic and supervisory role) and managerial (i.e., an executive role) functions. It also recommended the establishment of a Chief Compliance Officer responsible for overseeing audit programs, ensuring internal compliance, implementing corporate codes of conduct for commercial partners, and conducting employee training (*Proposals of the 2016 FIFA Reform Committee*, 2015).

The proposal on increased financial transparency called for greater control by a fully independent Audit and Compliance Committee that would oversee the generation of revenue and allocation of it to MAs (*Proposals of the 2016 FIFA Reform Committee*, 2015). Finally, the proposal on increased participation of MAs called for creating a conference to discuss and debate “strategic issues of high relevance for the football world such as football development, integrity, social responsibility, governance, human rights, racism, match-fixing, gender equality, protection of clean athletes, youth football and security” (*Proposals of the 2016 FIFA Reform Committee*, 2015, p. 10; emphasis added). A particular emphasis was placed on expanding participation of MAs in FIFA World Cups and enhancing funding for football development by optimizing the tournament’s operational expenses (*Proposals of the 2016 FIFA Reform Committee*, 2015).

On February 26 2016, the FIFA Congress voted to implement the proposed reforms and elected Gianni Infantino as the new President of FIFA (*FIFA Minutes Extraordinary Congress*, 2016). In aiming to restore “FIFA’s credibility” (*FIFA Minutes Extraordinary Congress*, 2016, p. 16), Infantino called for the 2026 bidding process to be “bulletproof” (*FIFA Minutes Extraordinary Congress*, 2016, p. 16). Due to the criticism that plagued the 2018 and 2022

FMWCs, he advocated for the introduction of “human rights, sustainability and environmental guarantees” (*FIFA Minutes Extraordinary Congress*, 2016, p. 17) in the bid process. By November of that same year, Infantino expanded on this commitment by integrating human rights into the statutes of FIFA and by requesting international human rights expert Dr. John Ruggie (a Professor in Human Rights and International Affairs at Harvard Kennedy School at Harvard University) to assist FIFA in developing a human rights policy and practice (*Fact Sheet: FIFA’s Work on Human Rights*, 2016).

In May 2017, *FIFA’s Human Rights Policy* was published with the aim of “defining a standard of conduct for FIFA and all its bodies and employees ... including all events organised by, or under the auspices of, FIFA. These groups include FIFA subsidiaries, FIFA-recognised regional football confederations, FIFA member associations, entities tasked with organising FIFA competitions, FIFA’s commercial affiliates, service providers and suppliers, as well as other entities that are linked to FIFA through its business relationships.” (Infantino & Samoura, 2017, p. 4). The policy guides FIFA and its MAs in upholding human rights, aligning with the UNGPs. This includes embracing all internationally recognized human rights, such as those outlined in the *International Bill of Human Rights* (comprising the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*), as well as adhering to the ILO’s *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work* (Infantino & Samoura, 2017, p. 5). Following the UNGPs, FIFA claimed that their *Human Rights Policy* committed them to avoiding, causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts through direct operations or business relationships (Infantino & Samoura, 2017). For example, within the policy, labour rights—particularly supply chain labour rights—was acknowledged as a salient human rights

risk to be protected “in relation to [FIFA’s] own staff and seeks to ensure respect for labour standards by its business partners and in the various activities directly linked to its operations” (Infantino & Samoura, 2017, p. 6). Therefore, FIFA’s policy required business relationships involved in “organising FIFA competitions, confederations, member associations, commercial affiliates and entities in its supply chains” (Infantino & Samoura, 2017, p. 8) to do the same with respect to their commitments. Additionally, the policy followed four pillars in its approach to addressing human rights: 1) Committing and embedding human rights into FIFA; 2) Identifying human rights risks; 3) Protecting advocates of human rights and remedying affects of adverse impacts; and 4) Engaging and communicating with external actors and the public on efforts (Infantino & Samoura, 2017).

It is critical to point out that, prior to the publication of FIFA’s *Human Rights Policy* in 2017, Infantino published *FIFA 2.0* which drew out the roadmap for the development of football globally and where Infantino called on FIFA to “champion human rights” (Infantino, 2016, p. 62). The primary goal of *FIFA 2.0* is to establish a roadmap to grow the game by: increasing recreational participation; boosting investments to MAs for the international development of football; and optimizing the profitability of FIFA World Cups, partly by minimizing costs (Infantino, 2016). Of note, the launch of *FIFA 2.0* prompted the establishment of a working group to reform the World Cup’s bidding process to ensure efficiency, increase profitability, and ultimately invest in football’s development as it clearly points out the growing constraints to its business model: “while FIFA’s revenues associated with the FIFA World Cup™ have grown considerably, so, too, have the costs of producing the event” (Infantino, 2016, p. 41). Within this roadmap, Infantino stated that countries hosting a World Cup must engage regularly with NGOs and political institutions to protect and improve on human rights and “matters related to

discrimination evidenced during FIFA World Cup™ qualifying matches, to the application of ethical standards on child labour, forced labour and working conditions, as well as matters related to gender equality” (Infantino, 2016, p. 63).

In November 2017, FIFA took steps towards concretizing these recommendations by publishing a guide for the bidding process of the 2026 FMWC. These guidelines highlighted transparency, participation, commitment to human rights and sustainability, and objectivity as key principles within the bidding process (*Guide to the Bidding Process for the 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2017). Moreover, the new bid process mandated key documents in specific formats that any interested MA or prospective hosts must address in their bid. For instance, the guidelines stated that a Bid Book required the following five chapters: 1) hosting vision & strategy; 2) hosting country information; 3) technical matters; 4) other related matters; 5) and sustainable event management (SEM), human rights, and environment protection (*Guide to the Bidding Process for the 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2017). With regards to human rights, MAs interested in hosting also had to submit a separate human right strategy proposal discussing how they aimed to identify and address “human rights and labour standards” risks (*Guide to the Bidding Process for the 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2017, p. 33). This *Proposed Human Rights Strategy* was to be informed by an independent study conducted by human rights experts who were required to assess how the national context of the prospective host nation, including its legal practices and legislation, may impede or facilitate MAs’ ability to host the World Cup while respecting internationally recognized human rights. (*Structure, Content, Presentation, Format and Delivery of Bid*, 2017).

Following the submission of the Bid Book and proposed human rights strategy from each prospective host, three assessments were to be conducted by FIFA’s 2026 Evaluation Task Force

on the submitted documentation focused on: 1) a compliance assessment; 2) risk assessment; and 3) technical evaluation (*Guide to the Bidding Process for the 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2017), these components will be elaborated later on in this chapter. Due to the need to minimise costs, FIFA proposed core minimum requirements which included existing stadiums, team facilities, accommodations, and transportation infrastructure (Infantino, 2016). The results of the assessment conducted by FIFA’s 2026 Evaluation Task Force be made publicly available and, with regards to human rights, the 2026 Evaluation Task Force would go so far as to hire human rights experts to independently assess the strategies brought forth in the bid books developed by prospective MAs (*Bidding Registration*, 2017; *Guide to the Bidding Process for the 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2017)

As prospective MAs are national bodies, each Bid Book was also mandated to provide a list of the cities within the country expected to host matches; in particular, the technical information around stadiums, accommodation, airports, transport infrastructure, and safety and security (*Bidding Registration*, 2017). It was also required that host cities provide a report on their engagement “with local stakeholders” in each hosting country to develop and implement “develop detailed human rights plans” (“Human Rights – Key Focus for FIFA World Cup 2026™”, 2022, para. 3) Subsequently, FIFA then commissioned independent human rights experts to conduct a qualitative assessment of the report produced to measure “stakeholder engagement, risk assessment, mitigation measures, opportunities, and remedy” (*Evaluations of FIFA World Cup 2026 Host City Stakeholder and Human Rights Submissions*, 2022, p. 2) of host cities and provide feedback.

Part 2: The Bid Process

It is now opportune to shift attention to the documents associated with the bid process and preparations for the 2026 FMWC. The section will highlight considerations regarding ethical procurement and sweatshop labour in the supply chain raised in documents authored and/or published by CoT, FIFA, and CSA. Paying particular attention to the consideration of ethical procurement and anti-sweatshop labour—hereafter referred to as ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement—findings will be shared that detail the United Bid and the proposed United Human Rights Strategy of the CSA, Mexican Football Federation (FMF), and United States Soccer Federation (USSF), collectively referred to as the United Team in this study. Following this, findings from FIFA’s 2026 Evaluation Task Force’s assessment of the United Team’s *Bid Book* and *Proposed Human Rights Strategy*, as informed by Ergon Associates, will be highlighted. This section will end with more focused attention on what followed the FIFA Congress’s vote for the *United Bid*, namely Toronto’s bid as a candidate host city and the information included in the bid documents outlining what the City claims it will do as part of its preparations to host the 2026 FMWC.

Ergon Associates’ Independent Study on Human Rights Risks

As noted earlier, each prospective host nation was required to develop a *Proposed Human Rights Strategy* that was to be informed by an independent assessment of the national context, laws and practices of the prospective host nation in comparison to internationally recognized human rights. On March 7 2018, the United Team commissioned an independent study from Ergon Associates, an international consultancy firm focused on business and human rights, as part of FIFA’s stated requirements (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018).

The primary goal of the report was to “look at relevant national legislation and legal practice and map them against international-recognized human rights ... that helps inform the development of the United Bid 2026 human rights risk assessment” (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 13). Within their assessment, Ergon Associates identified five vulnerable groups whose rights may be impacted by hosting the 2026 FMWC: 1) “communities and citizens” in host cities; 2) “players, coaching staff, support teams, and match officials”; 3) “journalists and human rights defenders”; 4) “spectator and fans, who may attend the games”; and 5) “workers” connected to the competition (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 16). Ergon structured its evaluation by these categories in order to highlight issues that could arise with each, and also noted cross-cutting issues that could not readily be categorized underneath one identified group, such as “freedom of expression and assembly ... protection for journalists and human rights defenders ... trafficking ... safety and security” n (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 98 - 117).

When discussing the issues workers may face, the report from Ergon highlighted what they identified as key rights that need to be protected, and potential gaps in each host country in protecting those rights. These rights include “right to adequate wage” “freedom of association and collective bargaining” “non-discrimination in employment” “occupational safety and health” and “working hours” (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 19). In the proceeding bullets, I will expand on what was captured in the assessment related to the above. However,

before doing so, it is important to note upfront that, while the Ergon report highlights many salient workers' rights that may be infringed upon during the hosting of the 2026 FMWC, it did not explicitly discuss or address sweatshop labor issues directly. The Ergon Associates' report considered features that are central to the exploitation of workers in sweatshops—such as labor trafficking, excessive working hours, inadequately paid wages, discriminatory environments, and the absence of safe and healthy workplaces—but it did not meaningfully or directly connect those to the sourcing of tournament merchandise from sweatshops as its own category in relation to within these identified risks.

Furthermore, it is also important to note that the independent study “[reviewed] and, where appropriate, [incorporated] the comments and analysis provided by stakeholders during the stakeholder engagement process” conducted by the United Team (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 14). However, despite this statement, the names/identities or perspectives of the stakeholders who participated in the assessment were not transparently communicated within the documents, making it unclear as to who was involved and whether (and which) stakeholders included those from human rights organizations. In a foreshadowing of Chapter 5, insufficient transparency and clarity in terms of engagement with human rights organizations—whether related to anti-sweatshop advocacy or otherwise—is a key theme in the United Bid process and United Human Rights Strategy

As noted, the following bullets summarize the findings of the Ergon assessment:

- With regards to the right to adequate wages, Ergon utilized the ILO and UN; for example, they referred to UN Declaration Article 23 to: “recognize the right of everyone to ‘just and favourable remuneration’” (*Independent Report: Human*

Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition, 2018, p. 28). In their assessment of Canada's legal framework, the study highlighted Toronto's "passed ordinances providing for a living wage for city employees and employees of their contractors" (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 28). Additionally, they highlighted Toronto's Fair Wage policy which obliges contractors to pay a specific minimum wage to certain workers such as "construction workers, security guards, maintenance workers and cleaners" (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 19).

- With regards to the right to association and collective bargaining, Ergon's assessment drew on the international standards of both "the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural and the "ILO Conventions 87 and 98" Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)" (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 31 - 32) as these contain provisions for trade union membership and formation. In Ergon's assessment, "potential gaps with international standards were identified in relation to limitations in coverage of the right to associate for certain categories of workers (Canada and United States)" (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup*

Competition, 2018, p. 31). Focusing on Canada, Ergon highlighted the exclusion of certain categories of workers from labour relations, “for example, managerial employees” and highlighted the demands of unions to address “penalization and violence against unionised workers” (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 32- 33).

- Collective bargaining rights in Canada were considered as well in light of the ILO Convention 98 which requires appropriate measures to be taken to encourage and promote voluntary negotiation between trade unions and employers (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018). In their assessment of Canada, Ergon Associates noted this has been “largely respected” (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 34).
- In terms of the right to non-discrimination in employment, the Ergon report highlighted salient issues facing the many low-skilled and temporary jobs expected to be created by the 2026 FMWC. Ergon drew on the ILO Convention on Discrimination which states that “States should promote equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of employment and occupation, with a view to eliminating any discrimination in respect thereof” (as quoted in *Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a*

Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition, 2018, p. 33). In their assessment of the Canadian legal framework, Ergon found that “discrimination in employment on the basis of social origin or “social condition” and political opinion are not explicitly covered by the Canadian Human Rights Act” (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 42), highlighting it as a significant risk.

- When assessing the regulation of working hours, Ergon Associates noted that SMEs are often hosted and organized in a specific and inflexible timeline and, as such, “workers may be asked to work additional hours in order to finish all the preparations in time for the opening of the competition”(*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 55). Utilizing the internationally recognized standards of ILO Conventions 1 and 30, which advocate for a cap of a 48-hour work week, Ergon's assessment noted that the Canadian legal framework contains “some potential gaps in relation to international standards on overtime and weekly rest”(*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 58). For example, the Canada Labour Code that caps working hours to eight hours per day and 40 hours per week excludes “truck drivers, architects, dentists, engineers, lawyers, and medical doctors.” (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 56).

It is critical to note that, within the Ergon Associates' assessment of workers and workers' rights/protections, no meaningful or in-depth attention was paid to sub-contracted workers; this is a particularly salient group for consideration given the issue of sweatshop labour. There was a reference to "individuals...directly or indirectly employed" in the report's discussion of the right to a safe and healthy workplace (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 48); however, Ergon only identified such workers as "security personnel, retail workers, food services workers, stadium staff, as well as a vast range of ancillary services employees" (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 48). Within the assessment, Ergon highlighted additional key points such as: 1) verifying that each country has a "good framework for [occupational safety and health] management ... which largely aligned with international standards"; 2) that the "use of significant volunteers will raise an issues, as they are not covered by many health and safety laws"; 3) that FMWC organizers will need to adopt "a clear commitment that they cover all those performing activities related to competition"; and 4) that "all employment contracts and sourcing codes should include" requirements for a safe and healthy workplace (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 48; emphasis added). Using the international framework of the ILO's Occupational Safety and Health Convention, Ergon highlighted that Canada has "strong locally managed OSH safety enforcement mechanisms" (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 49). Furthermore, explicitly noting Ontario's *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, they acknowledged that "coverage predicated on

‘employee’ status may attract a narrower sphere of application insofar as that term is generally understood to apply to more ‘standard’ employment relationships” (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 48).

Ergon’s assessment continued to highlight the human rights risks faced by vulnerable groups noted above, some of which are relevant to ethical procurement. While they did not categorize certain protected rights specifically under the workers’ group, they acknowledged their relevance. For example, when addressing the risk of human trafficking as a cross-cutting issue, they highlighted that trafficking risks encompass both “labour and sexual exploitation” (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 110). This assessment utilized the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its supplementary protocols, such as the Trafficking Persons Protocol (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018). Evaluating the Canadian legal framework, Ergon noted the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018). However, they also highlighted Canada’s heightened risk in labour trafficking in such sectors as particularly in “agriculture, food processing, construction, hospitality, and domestic work” (*Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition*, 2018, p. 112). It is noteworthy to point out that the Ergon Assessment did highlight California’s *Transparency in Supply Chains Act* as a measure to monitor goods in the supply chain that may be involved in human labour trafficking, but the assessment makes no mention of Toronto’s

Responsible (No-Sweatshop) Manufacturer Procedure—an absence of mention that was apparent throughout the United Bid and United Human Rights Strategy

United Bid and Proposed United Human Rights Strategy

On March 26th of the same year, the United Team published their *United Bid* and *Proposed United Human Rights Strategy*. Informed by Ergon Associates and the perspectives of other stakeholders, ethical procurement was considered within the United Team’s bid-related documents. As will be detailed below, the United Team proposed developing a procurement policy that adheres to internationally recognized human and labour rights, with comprehensive plans to enforce these standards at multiple levels. They also highlighted sweatshop issues in the supply chain as significant risks for hosting the 2026 FMWC. It is important to note that while the term ‘ethical procurement’ and ‘sweatshop’ are not explicitly used in the documents, terms such as ‘supply chain labor rights,’ ‘human rights,’ and ‘labor rights’ are used interchangeably to refer to sweatshop labor and policies for ethical procurement at various points in the document.

Understandably, in efforts to impress FIFA, the United Team boasted that the legacy of their hosted games would be exceptional: “Our greatest legacy as hosts of the 2026 FIFA World Cup™ will be to support FIFA and the global football community to achieve ongoing success and growth in the next century” (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018, p. 7). The United Bid grounded its bid for hosting the 2026 FMWC in the slogan of Unity, Certainty, and Opportunity (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018). The slogan signified “a strategy that can help the vision of FIFA 2.0 become reality” (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018, p. 7). In its pitch, the United Team unpacked its slogan by stating that: unity represented the sharing of hosting rights

between the United States, Canada, and Mexico; certainty represented the usage of existing sports infrastructure to host the FMWC; and opportunity represented the commercial potential to maximize the growth of football. With no need for major infrastructure projects, the *United Bid* team focused their legacy promised for the 2026 FMWC on developing football, upscaling infrastructure, increasing participation, and ensuring human rights (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018). It follows then that in aiming to persuade FIFA to grant them the hosting rights, a running discourse within the United Bid has been its emphasis on football development to concretize FIFA 2.0. As will be elaborated in Chapter 5, this emphasis of football development takes priority and embeds itself within the considerations towards improving human rights.

Following the format required by FIFA, the United Bid included a Sustainable Event Management (SEM) and Human Rights and Labour Standards section (*Structure, Content, Presentation, Format and Delivery of Bid*, 2017). In the SEM section, the “Sustainability+” approach, guided by the UNGPs, aimed to go beyond FIFA’s human rights, environmental protection, and ethical behaviour requirements (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018, p. 446). Sustainability+ emphasized the need to continuously engage with human and labour rights organization, FIFA, host cities, and MAs in constructing its goals, scope, procedures, policies, and compliance mechanisms (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018).

As part of the phase of planning for Sustainability+, the United Team proposed an ethical procurement process that ensures “United 2026, its subsidiaries, and the member associations address requirements with contractors, sub-contractors, and third parties, [and] integrate our overarching sourcing program with our compliance measures” (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and*

the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™, 2018, p. 452). The process to establish this included the following steps: 1) “establish a sourcing working group including human rights and sustainable procurement experts”; 2) “integrate sustainable purchasing best practices and innovation”; 3) “prepare sourcing plans, processes, and specifications, and align with recognized sourcing standards”; 4) “create contracting as well as code of conduct procedures”; 5) “develop partnerships and capacity building”; and 6) “review procurement performance” (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018, p. 452). To strengthen this process, the United Team proposed to engage “with stakeholders” (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018, p. 452) to identify numerous elements critical to the successful implementation of their sustainability strategy. This has and will be expanded on below when discussing the details of the *Proposed United Human Rights Strategy*.

Given the limitations imposed by FIFA on what can be included in the report (i.e., FIFA limits the Social and Environmental Management (SEM) and Human Rights and Labour Standards section in the bid application to only 20 pages), the United Bid Proposed Human Rights document serves as the expanded report that delves further into this strategy (*Structure, Content, Presentation, Format and Delivery of Bid*, 2017). The *United Human Rights Strategy* aligns with the UNGPs, and focuses on key risks in business relationships and activities linked to hosting the 2026 FMWC, as well as outlining a regular and public reporting system (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018). The pillars of the *United Human Rights Strategy* “in line with the UNGPs” (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 19) include:

1. Embed commitment: “embed respect for internationally recognized Human Rights and Labor Standards into operational policies and procedures and into the activities of business relationships”
2. Take action: “directly or indirectly associated with the 2026 FIFA World Cup, and in consultation with over 60 human rights experts and stakeholders ... the United Bid offers ... detailed proposals to embed, identify, prevent, and account for impacts on human rights” these proposals would be termed an “action plan”
3. Monitoring: with “partner and stakeholders” the United Team would work with FIFA and “the hosting entity to monitor progress of the implementation of the human rights strategy and human rights issues related directly or indirectly with preparing and hosting the competition”
4. Grievance mechanisms: establish a “range of grievance channels” that are able to respond to a “diversity of” potential complaints such as “supply chain labor grievances”; and
5. Response to grievances raised: they proposed to “develop an integrated framework of grievances and remedy to complement existing routes” (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 16 - 21).

As part of FIFA’s Human Rights Policy, the United Bid therefore also committed to engaging with “external stakeholders in a structured manner and ... communicate regularly and transparently with its stakeholder and the general public about its efforts to [ensuring] respect of human rights” (Infantino and Samoura, 2017, p. 11). The consulted would include “a wide range of stakeholders potentially, including potentially affected groups and individuals and their legitimate representatives” (Infantino and Samoura, 2017, p. 9). In line with “the UNGPs and the

FIFA requirements on human rights” (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 62), the United Human Rights Proposal is divided into five sections: 1) Introduction, 2) Human Rights Protection and Opportunities, 3) Identifying and Assessing Risk, 4) Our United Human Rights Strategy; and 5) Action Plan for Our Human Rights Strategy (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018). This document was also attached with five annexes, those of relevance being “ANNEX 1: Salient Human Rights Risks”, “ANNEX 3 List of Stakeholder Engaged”, “ANNEX 4: Stakeholder Engagement (AA 1000 SE report)”, and “ANNEX 5: Social Legacy: Minutes from Football” (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 2). The introduction highlighted several UNGPs that have been incorporated in the *United Human Rights Strategy*. Those principles included: focusing on salient risks to people in relation to the activities and business relationships that will arise in the preparations for the 2026 FMWC; creating leverage through the tournament by developing a scorecard for cities to assess their progress to address human rights risks addressed listed in this strategy; and engaging with “stakeholders in the human rights community, such as “governments, international organizations, civil society, organized labor, and businesses;” and finally through collaboration with other ‘stakeholders’ ensure a systematic review is conducted to assess the effectiveness of their Proposed Human Rights Strategy (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 7).

In the Identifying and Assessing Risk section, the salient risks to human rights relevant to hosting the 2026 FMWC were determined by the following four perspectives: 1) “mapping activity associated with preparing and hosting the event and the different locations in which activities take place” (e.g. borders, factories in supply chain, stadiums); 2) mapping the risks through the context of the “federal, state, and municipal laws and practice”; 3) focusing on how the activities “[pose] human rights risks” in the context of the “identified activities in defined

locations” (i.e., state, province, and municipalities); and 4) using an “independent study” (i.e., Ergon Associates’ independent study) to assess “the legal practice and national legislation” in all three countries and how they may impede or enable hosts to respect human rights (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 62). With this methodology, the United Team identified several categories of risk relevant to the 2026 FMWC including, but not limited to: “Corruption and interference in civil and political rights and local democracy”; “Discrimination, including based on gender, ethnicity, nationality, disability, religion and sexual orientation”; “Labor, including wage levels, freedom of association, health and safety”; “Supply Chain Labor, including child labor, forced labor and trafficking, freedom of association, wage levels, health and safety, and migrant labor”; and “Human Trafficking” (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 13 - 14).

In the Action Plan sections, the United Team summarized the findings of Ergon’s independent study and mapped out the results in a table (see Figure 1 below). However, unlike Ergon’s assessment, the United Team explicitly addressed sweatshop labor by highlighting “labour and supply chain” (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 25) as a salient risk to incorporate into the preparation for the 2026 FMWC. In their summary, they emphasized that “some jurisdictions in the United States have reporting and/or due diligence requirements regarding labor and human rights in the supply chains” (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 25). However, it failed to mention any existing or absent policies in Canada or Mexico.

The United Human Rights Strategy highlighted five action plans to address labour and supply chain issues: 1) “equality of opportunity & inclusivity”; 2) “labor”; 3) “supply chain labor”; 4) “procurement”; and 5) “safeguarding children” (*Proposal for a United Human Rights*

Strategy, 2018). I will focus more specifically on two of the above five plans given the focus of this study: procurement and supply chain labor. Although these two action plans were categorized separately, there was significant overlaps between them in addressing supply chain labor concerns and I have merged both action plans in my elaboration of the United Team's efforts. The action plans to protect supply chain labor, developed through collaboration with unnamed human rights organizations, aimed to enforce an ethical procurement policy that ensured the following "minimum" standards: 1) "commitment to respecting internationally recognized human rights" such as "the 4 ILO Core Labour Standards" related to "human trafficking and modern slavery"; 2) "compliance with domestic laws regarding maximum hours of work, minimum legal wage levels, workplace health and fire and building safety"; 3) protecting women workers framed as "maternity and harassment"; 4) defined "inspection mechanism", and possible "remedies and penalties for non-compliance" with the procurement code; 5) "identified evaluation factors and minimum standards for suppliers"; 6) "transparency obligations that apply in the selection process and as performance obligations of the signed contract"; 7) "capacity building and specific training for suppliers and service providers on embedding human rights" (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 54).

The United Human Rights Strategy, highlights how they aim to identify, prevent, mitigate, and account for human and labour rights risks in their supply chain. They propose a sourcing code that can: 1) assess "all potential suppliers or service providers in the negotiation phase"; 2) mandate that suppliers "have a human rights policy and due diligence procedure in place"; 3) mandate "potential suppliers to disclose any past human rights violations and material issues"; 4) require suppliers to "conduct due diligence and commit to ongoing due diligence to identify adverse human rights impacts", and take steps to "prevent or mitigate any adverse

impacts”; and 5) subject all suppliers to workers-driven, independent, and credible audit of their labour and human rights practices (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 55).

Figure 1

The United Team’s Findings on Labor and Supply Chain As Salient Risk and Proposed Mitigating Action Plans (Source: Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy, 2018)

Key findings from independent report	Elements in United Human Rights Strategy & Action Plan addressing these issues
Labor and supply chain	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Varied picture across countries and jurisdictions but basic labor rights protections in all three countries. Main gaps relate to coverage of anti-discrimination protections (all three), alleged restrictions on trade union formation and collective bargaining (Mexico and the United States), enforcement of minimum wage legislation (Mexico and the United States) and lack of protections for volunteers, particularly on safety, including minors (all three). ■ In all three countries, there are reports that minimum wage levels do not correspond to a ‘living wage’ for the typical family. ■ Risks in practice relate to the effective application of labor laws to workers not directly employed by the Bid (i.e. employees of contractors and subcontractors), especially in a range of typically low-skilled and low-pay occupations. ■ Some jurisdictions in the United States have reporting and/or due diligence requirements regarding labor and human rights in supply chains. 	<p>Section IV: 1 – Embed Commitment 4 – Grievance Mechanism</p> <p>Section V: A – Equality of Opportunity & Inclusivity E – Labor F – Supply Chain Labor I – Procurement J – Safeguarding Children</p> <p>Other: United Commitment Statement (23.1)</p>

As stated above, the United Team committed to engaging in capacity building through educating suppliers on human rights and raising awareness on the needs to implement the safeguards that are required. Such safeguards included mapping their chains, “publishing the names/locations of all suppliers”, and “partnering with human rights and supply chain specialists to support the implementation of responsible” procurement standards (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 55). The United Team also proposed a strategy to address any grievances that may arise in the supply chain and how they remedied them, possibly tackling an issue that has been pervasive in SMEs (see Timms, 2012). The strategy: 1) “required complaints and dispute resolution to be used/established”; 2) required that “grievance mechanism apply to all suppliers and subcontractors”; 3) ensured that that all mechanisms are “responsive to investigating serious claims by the media and civil society”; 4) required that “suppliers make grievance and remedy results public”; 5) required that “suppliers are subject to and engage with an overarching grievance mechanism established by FIFA” (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 56).

Additionally, as part of their overarching strategy to improve procurement standards the United Team aimed to raise awareness and promote ethical procurement on multiple levels. They committed to ensuring that host cities adopt their sourcing codes of conduct for their routine procurement, building upon existing procurement policies they may already have. Moreover, they pledged to engage in open dialogue with all hosting MAs on procurement processes and provide a platform for the sports industry to convene around embedding human rights into procurement practice

Although it is encouraging that the bid documents from the United Team do speak to ethical procurement, the action plans proposed by the United Team did not clearly identify which

labour rights and/or human rights organizations were consulted or collaborated with to aid in the development of the procurement policies created. This lack of clarity is highlighted when United Team states:

Through the stakeholder engagement process, the United Bid consulted with several experts on sustainable procurement. These experts could form the basis, to be supplemented by additional stakeholders, for the United 2026 sustainable sourcing program, along with other experts on the subject of sustainable procurement. *This group* could be tasked with advising on the development of a sustainable sourcing code for the 2026 FIFA World Cup™ which included labor human rights requirements, a risk assessment process, and monitoring and grievance mechanisms. As it is developed, the code would then be shared with a larger group of labor, human rights, business, and procurement stakeholders to develop and finalize into a procurement policy (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 53; emphasis added).

In the above, we see the United Bid team highlight that human and labor rights organizations and experts were consulted in proposing this procurement policy. However, they did not specify throughout this process who, from the list provided in the third annex, was consulted, how the consultation influenced the development of the proposal, and therefore why certain experts and organizations were chosen (and perhaps others not chosen) and certain specific suggestions were incorporated (and perhaps some others not incorporated).

Nonetheless, in fourth annex of the document titled “Stakeholder Engagement,” the United Team again highlighted their “robust stakeholder engagement process in line with the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard” (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p.82). They explained that the purpose of the engagement with human rights organization

was to help develop their key aspects of the United Human Rights Strategy, as mandated by FIFA's requirements (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018). Although the names of the organizations were specified in the third annex, the United Team did not identify the influence and perspectives of the consulted human rights organizations on relevant human rights risks that may be adversely impacted due to the 2026 FMWC. These human rights risks included "security, land rights and usage, labor rights, including human trafficking, the rights of children, protections against discrimination in all its forms, and ensuring freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and right to privacy" (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p.82). In effort to highlight their methodology, the United Bid located each consulted human rights organizations by: 1) "Engaging with individuals, groups and organizations active in human rights globally and in particular the international Mega Sporting Events (MSE) Platform for Human Rights"; 2) "Engaging with human rights experts, groups and organizations at the national level for Canada, Mexico and the USA referred to by those active in the MSE Platform"; 3) "Engaging with leadership in each of the Candidate Host Cities"; and finally 4) "Identifying any gaps in representation in the 3 countries and seeking referrals" (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 82).

United Team's consultation with the identified human right organizations included one-on-one consultations which provided unspecified "positive outcomes" (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 83). The sole exception, noted as a singular example, in the proposal was the ILO's referral to AFL-CIO, a US-based union. Moreover, these consultations were also with candidate host cities to "inform them of human rights requirements, answer questions or concerns they have, and to solicit specific information from them with respect to current human rights risks". (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 83).

Bearing in mind the United Team's engagement with candidate host cities, a forthcoming outline of the CoT's engagement with the bid process will highlight if the consultation has been acknowledged in their public documents and seek out if this had any impact on a development of an ethical procurement policy, as part of this study's focus. Lastly, the United Team facilitated two multi-'stakeholder' forums in January 2018 in which over 30 unspecified human rights organizations and governments officials participated. The meeting's agenda was noted as an: "(1) Evaluation of human rights risk assessment; (2) Discussion on standards and best practice to address gaps or risks; (3) Ongoing due diligence processes; (4) Procurement policy; (5) Effective grievance mechanisms and best practice; (6) Opportunities for human rights legacy; and (7) Next steps and roadmap ahead." (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 83). Despite these critical points of discussion, particularly regarding the procurement policy, none of the discussion from the meeting nor its outcomes were specified. To elaborate further, a table was constructed outlining the outcomes and resulting action plans from each engagement activity. However, consistent with the highlighted trend, the descriptions were not specific and raised more questions than they answered (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2*The United Team's Outputs and Action Plans After Engaging with Human Rights Organizations**(Source: Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy, 2018).*

Engagement	Outputs	Action Plans
<p>Involvement and collaboration via multi-stakeholder workshops.</p> <p>Workshop 1: Washington, DC 14 NGOs, 3 governments</p> <p>Workshop 2: New York City 14 NGOs, 2 UN Agencies, 2 universities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluation and addition to Human Rights risk assessment ▪ Discussion on standards and best practices to address gaps and risks ▪ Ongoing Due Diligence processes ▪ Procurement policy ▪ Effective grievance mechanisms and best practices ▪ Opportunities for human rights legacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Incorporation of information and recommendations into Bid risk assessment and Human Rights Strategy ▪ Identification of best practices

Returning to the United Bid document, the Human Rights and Labour Standards section reaffirmed United Team's commitment in embracing all internationally recognised human rights, as well as committing to stating that "to taking measures, based on in-depth due diligence, to avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts through our own activities and those of partners and to remediate such impacts when they occur" (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World CupTM*, 2018, p. 455). In this light, they listed out their identified salient risks that included: equality of opportunity and inclusivity; child safeguarding; freedom of expression and assembly; labour rights; land acquisition and

housing rights; international travel and movement; privacy rights; and security (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018). Notably, sweatshop labor, termed as supply chains labour in the United Human Rights Strategy, was excluded from the list of identified salient human and labour rights. This omission is further illustrated when discussing the salient risks present in each hosting country, where supply chain labor was omitted (see Figure 3 below) (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018).

Figure 3

The United Bid's Summarization of Legal Protection of Identified Salient Risks Present in Each Hosting Country, from The United Bid (Source: UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™, 2018).

Human rights risks indentified	Canada	Mexico	US
Right to life, liberty and security of the person	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Right to due process	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Freedom of expression and assembly	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Freedom of movement and travel	✓✓	✓✓	✓
Non-discrimination	✓✓	✓✓	✓
Disability access	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Privacy	✓	✓	✓
Labor rights	✓✓	✓	✓
Land and property rights	✓	✓	✓✓
Housing	X	✓✓	X
Participation in conduct of public affairs	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Trafficking	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓

NB. The identified salient risks do delineate between labour rights and supply chain labour rights, with the former focused on domestic employment.

As part of the general strategy towards human rights, the United Team proposed the Minutes from Football initiative that aims to embed “[their] commitment to human rights and the development of the sport” (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018, p. 462). In their efforts to prioritize “underserved communities” (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018, p. 462), the United Team identified physical and mental health, general equality, inclusion, and education as key areas of to be addressed. Working closely with FIFA, the aim of this initiative is to encourage and enable the development of mini-pitches in and “invest [their] energy and resources towards improving existing and to-be-developed spaces” (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018, p. 463) to promote inclusivity and well being in all host countries. Moreover, the United Team pledged 20 million USD as well as unspecified “various public/private financing concepts” (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018, p. 463) to fund this initiative. While this does not speak to their consideration for sweatshop labour and ethical procurement, it does highlight the general orientation of the strategy as embedded in a discourse of development. This point will be further elaborated on in Chapter 5 and become salient in the forthcoming outline of Toronto’s engagement with the bid process.

Evaluation of United Bid and Proposed United Human Rights Strategy

FIFA emphasized their responsibility for ensuring “an impeccable selection process to choose the country or countries” to host the tournament (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 6)—ironically, this was often rationalized as necessary due to their own decision to expand the FMWC from 32 to 48 teams and from 64 to 80 matches. As noted above,

FIFA claims to underpin the bid process with four key principles: 1) objectivity, ensuring evaluations are “precise and unbiased”; 2) participation, making the tournament “as broad and open as possible”; 3) transparency, requiring that the “content of the Bid Books and the hosting requirements are all publicly available”; and 4) a full “commitment to human rights and sustainability “which includes “labor standards according to the [UNGPs]” (Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup, 2018, p. 33). In ensuring these principles, the FIFA Council appointed a Bid Evaluation Task Force comprised of “members of the FIFA administration with technical, legal and commercial expertise in the relevant areas, along with the chairman of FIFA’s Audit and Compliance Committee, the chairman of FIFA’s Governance Committee and a member of the Organising Committee for FIFA Competitions” (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 37). The appointed Bid Evaluation Task Force was responsible for ensuring that the information provided by all bids were clear and accurate and sought out for any clarification necessary. Furthermore, as mandated by FIFA (*Bidding Registration*, 2017), the Bid Evaluation Task Force was responsible for constructing and publishing a Bid evaluation Report that comprised three key components:

1. Compliance assessment: compliance to the “requirements of the bidding process”, “hosting documents” (e.g., Bid Agreements), and “hosting requirements”;
2. Risk assessment: evaluating the “risks and benefits of the bid”, such as human and labour rights, and costs/revenue projection; and
3. Technical evaluation: assessment of whether the bid covers “key infrastructural and commercial components necessary” for hosting. (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 38)

Notably, the technical evaluation report takes precedence over all other components. If, for any reason, the Bid Evaluation Task Force found that a bid did not meet the minimum infrastructure and commercial requirements (e.g., existing stadiums, accommodations for referees and teams, and venues), that bid would be eliminated automatically (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018).

Upon the release of bid-related documents, the 2026 FIFA's Evaluation Task Force embarked on an assessment of the United Bid and its Proposed United Human Rights Strategy, as well as the bid from Morocco. On June 1 2018, they published their Bid Evaluation report for the 2026 FMWC. The sources of information that were to be assessed from each bidder, included the Bid Book, unilaterally executed Hosting Documents (i.e., binding Bid Agreements signed by governments, stadium authorities, and airports), the Proposed Human Rights Strategy, and the Global Report Initiative-based (GRI) report (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018). Furthermore, per the obligations of the Bid Evaluation Task Force, inspection and verifications of information was conducted. The primary purpose of each official inspection was to review the proposed sites, as well as requesting more information regarding aspects of the bid-related documents. In relation to the sections on human and labour rights (and thus their proposed procurement policies), the Task Force contacted unspecified human rights experts to verify the information regarding the human and labour rights (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018).

The Bid Evaluation Report for the United Bid encompassed various critical sections including: "Vision, Legacy and Host Country Information," "Security, Medical and Event-related Matters," and "Sustainability, Human Rights and Environmental Protection" (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 4). Within the Sustainability, Human Rights and

Environmental Protection section of the Risk Assessment component, the Task Force's evaluation was divided into SEM and Human Rights and Labour Standards subsections. In the former, they underscored the United Team's goals for a "responsible procurement process, including consultation with external experts, compliance and recognised sourcing standards, integration of best practices, and the development contracting procedures for workforce members" (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 175). However, the report did not expand past this description, in particular the specifics of the consulted external experts and their influences, the 'best practices' incorporated, or the details of the proposed contracting procedures. Nonetheless, the 2026 Bid Evaluation Task Force rated the procurement procedures as part of their Sustainability+ procedure a low-level risk (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018).

In the Human Rights and Labour Standards subsection, the Task Force highlighted that, irrespective of the independent human and labour rights assessment conducted, the most salient risks included: 1) human and labour rights in the supply chain (i.e., sweatshop labour) in relation to the products produced in an international supply chain; 2) human and labour rights in construction in relation to training sites and municipal upgrades related to the event; 3) discrimination in and around the tournament venues; and 4) other salient risks related to the security of tournaments, freedom of expression and assembly, land use and housing rights (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018).

Guided by input from Business Social Responsibility (BSR; <https://www.bsr.org/>), an international consultancy group focused on creating businesses based on equity and sustainability (see <https://www.bsr.org/en/>), the FIFA Task Force evaluated the United Team's Proposed Human Rights Strategy. They praised the United Team's Proposed Human Rights

Strategy, noting that the “documents reflect the bidder’s strong stated commitment to human and labour rights, which is fully in line with the requirements” (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 177). The Task Force also highlighted the United Team’s “proposed plan of action sets out a comprehensive list of initial measures to mitigate risks. In particular, the bidder commits to implementing a strong management system to integrate respect for human and labour rights within the tournament operations...the bidder engaged with a serious of international civil society organisations that have substantive knowledge on human and labour rights” (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 178).

However, the Task Force highlighted two potential risks that are of concern: 1) a lack of discrimination-free entry in the United States given the, at the time, recent Muslim travel ban imposed by then President Donald Trump (see <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/02/01/2017-02281/protecting-the-nation-from-foreign-terrorist-entry-into-the-united-states>); and 2) a concerning absence of commitments relation to security and human rights from the governments of Canada and the United States. This was as a result of the both countries not submitting FIFA’s “Government Guarantees and the Government Declaration” documents which bind governments to “upholding human rights, including workers’ labour rights, in connection with the hosting and staging of the Competition and any legacy and related post-event activities” (*Government Declaration Template for Joint Bid*, 2017, p. 2) Additionally, the Task Force noted the ongoing “need to protect labour rights in supply chains” (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 179). Consequently, the human and labour rights of the United Team was rated a medium-level risk (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018). Despite these considerations for ethical procurement and

sweatshop labour (highlighted through supply chain risks), many of BSR's criticisms were not included in the Bid Evaluation Report.

On April 1 2018, FIFA published BSR's independent assessment of the *Proposed United Human Rights Strategy* to inform and complement their evaluations. The aim of BSR's assessment was to provide corrective measures as well as suggest improvements on the *Proposed Human Rights Strategy (Evaluations of FIFA World Cup 2026 Host City Stakeholder and Human Rights Submissions, 2022)*. BSR's criteria of assessment included: 1) the "quality of the human rights risk assessment"; 2) "meaningfulness" of the engagement with human rights organizations; and finally 3) the "quality of the proposed measures to address and remediate identified risks" (*Evaluations of FIFA World Cup 2026 Host City Stakeholder and Human Rights Submissions, 2022, p. 2*). Following standards set by the UNGPs, BSR's assessment responded positively to each criterion. In evaluating human rights, BSR found that the United Team detailed a comprehensive range of human rights risks related to the 2026 FMWC. The assessment of the meaningfulness of engagement with human rights organizations showed clear indications of incorporated feedback. Lastly, in assessing the quality of addressing human rights risks, BSR found clear alignment with UNGP expectations and evidence of engagement with human rights organizations (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup, 2018*). BSR also highlighted the pervasive lack of transparency with human rights organizations by the United Team. In assessing the meaningfulness of the engagement with human rights organizations, BSR found that there was "limited supportive documents that could justify the level of interaction and feedback presented by stakeholders and how that feedback has been incorporated." (*Evaluations of FIFA World Cup 2026 Host City Stakeholder and Human Rights Submissions, 2022, p. 24*). Moreover, despite indications that voices of the vulnerable groups facing salient risk were

incorporated, BSR noted that the bid-related documents did not illustrate systematic direct engagement with these groups (*Evaluations of FIFA World Cup 2026 Host City Stakeholder and Human Rights Submissions*, 2022).

Candidate Host City Bid Process

On June 13 2018, the 68th FIFA Congress convened and voted for the United Team to host the 2026 FMWC. Following this decision, FIFA initiated the selection process for host cities and stadiums (Update on FIFA's Human Rights Due Diligence for the FIFA World Cup 2026TM, 2022). Each candidate host city was required to sign onto the human rights declarations, thus committing to protect human rights in all activities associated with hosting the 2026 FMWC (Update on FIFA's Human Rights Due Diligence for the FIFA World Cup 2026TM, 2022). Additionally, candidate host cities were mandated to align with the UNGPs. As part of this mandate, candidate host cities engaged in a "stakeholder engagement process," (Update on FIFA's Human Rights Due Diligence for the FIFA World Cup 2026TM, 2022, p. 2). This process resulted in a report outlining the human rights organization engagement, its results, and the City's human rights plans concerning hosting the competition. With the CoT named as a candidate host city, it published three reports relating to their engagement with the host city selection process: 1) Authority to Enter into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup; 2) FIFA World Cup 2026TM Candidate Host City Human Rights Stakeholder and Partner Engagement Report; and an 3) Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026.

Toronto's Authority to Enter into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup

On January 18 2018, and as proposed by the Economic Development and Culture (EDC) General Manager, the CoT agreed to sign the Authority to Enter into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup (*EX 30.14: Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, 2018*). With the passing of this agenda item, the following contracts were activated: the Host City Agreement; the Stadium Agreement; and the Airport Agreement (*EX 30.14: Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, 2018*). Given the focus of this study, I will highlight that the Host City Agreement binds the City to commit the following declarations: 1) the City supports the hosting of the 2026 FMWC; 2) the City supports the presence of FIFA and any other MA, and guarantees no discrimination; 3) the City complies with host city agreements; 4) the City supports efforts to stage the tournament to contribute to the development of football; 5) the City fully supports FIFA's and MAs' legacy efforts; 6) the City commits to respecting and fulfilling human rights, including labour rights, in staging the FMWC; and finally 7) the City adopts all measures and enact all necessary laws or regulations to ensure full compliance to the above mentioned declarations (*Template for Host City Declaration Joint Bid, 2017*).

In rationalizing their support for the initiative, the EDC's General Manager raised numerous claims about what the 2026 FMWC would bring to Toronto and Torontonians. Such claims included projections that the tournament would generate an estimated \$210 million for the City, alongside unprecedented global media exposure which could provide over \$4 million in global advertising values (*EX 30.14: Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, 2018*). Another claim argued that hosting the matches would "create benefits and legacies for all Torontonians" (*EX 30.14: Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026*

FIFA World Cup, 2018, p. 5). In the CoT documents, it is noted that the General Manager stated that “the City can consider how to leverage the FIFA World Cup to advance key city-building priorities” (*EX 30.14: Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 5), which was then framed as improvements to health and fitness, the City’s globally leading multicultural mosaic, and strengthening community ties. The fact that no major infrastructure or event facilities needed to be constructed was foregrounded, particularly to reinforce the point that operational and financial risk were significantly limited (*EX 30.14: Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 5). However, it was also made clear at the time that neither the federal nor provincial governments had yet to commit to providing financial support. Lastly, the EDC General Manager emphasized that hosting matches in the 2026 FMWC would illustrate the “successful track record of Toronto in hosting global events and the small impact hosting would have on the daily lives of Torontonians” (*EX 30.14: Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 6).

To highlight the priorities of the City in hosting SMEs, the EDC General Manager highlighted the Mayor’s Advisory Panel on International Opportunities’ five key principles for considering participation in a bid process. These principles included:

1. Start from a position of strength: ensuring “shared commitment by all orders of governments and private sector”
2. Optimizing Toronto as a host city and region: ensuring “strong hosting capacity”, “responsible financial plan”, and “meaningful engagement with communities”
3. Advance key City-building priorities: leveraging major event to advance “civic infrastructure”, “community soccer facilities”, “job creation”, and “tourism”

4. Responsibly manage hosting costs: “minimizing the City’s financial” risks
5. Generating benefits and legacies for all Torontonians: ensuring “positive impact” for “communities across the City” (*EX 30.14: Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 9 - 10)

Assessing the 2026 FMWC through this framework, the General Manager determined that the bid opportunity “scores highly” (*EX 30.14: Authority to Enter into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 6) according to these criteria. With this in mind, the EDC General Manager recommended that that City Council request the “the Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario provide financial support” and “authorize the City Manager to negotiate and execute the Bid Agreements” (*EX 30.14: Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 2) to be included in the United Bid as a candidate host city and “prepare and finalize the bid proposal”(EX 30.14: Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, 2018, p. 11). On January 31st 2018, the City Council adopted the following recommendations officially including the CoT as a candidate host city for the 2026 FMWC (*2018.EX30.14 City Council Consideration*, 2018).

Toronto’s Candidate Host City Human Rights Stakeholder and Partner Engagement Report

On June 24 2021, the CoT published their Human Rights Stakeholder and Partner Engagement Report as part of the selection process for host cities. Primarily developed by Dan Surman, at the time a Supervisor of the Art and Culture Services in the EDC, the report was divided into six parts : 1) Toronto: A Hyper-diverse City, 2) Important Considerations, 3) Stakeholder and Partner Engagement Process, 4) Description of Identified Risks and Opportunities, 5) Description of Planned measures to Address Risks and Capitalize on

Opportunities, and lastly 6) Stakeholder and Partner Engagement Plan (Surman, 2021). To fully immerse the reader in the relevant data presented, each part of the bid will be elaborated on under in the following subsections, enabling for deeper understanding and reflection on the strategic orientation of the City's human rights strategy.

Toronto: A Hyper-diverse City. This section “presents Toronto as a hyper-diverse city based on the demographic data” (Surman, 2021, p. 9), highlighting its unique status compared to other cities with “a large immigrant population arriving from one or two main countries” (Surman, 2021, p. 10). Instead, Toronto's population is 80% are first- and second-generation immigrants. This diversity extends past cultural backgrounds and is inclusive of people of different abilities, sexual orientation and gender identities (Surman, 2021). Notably, Toronto is highlighted as “being remarkably peaceful” (Surman, 2021, p. 10), with Surman attributing this not despite diversity, but due to it. Moreover, diversity is attributed as a “key factor in the city's livability, prosperity, and dynamism.” (2021, p. 11). Despite these positive aspects, this section briefly highlights the “disproportionate weight of poverty, racism, and lack of social and economic opportunity” in Toronto as key issues needing to be addressed (Surman, 2021, p. 11). Due to this, the 2026 FMWC provides risks and opportunities for Toronto to enforce its “values of diversity, inclusion and equity.” (Surman, 2021, p. 11). To summarize, this section highlights Toronto's hyper-diversity, the benefits that they espouse have come from it, the inequities vulnerable groups may face, and how they aim to protect these groups through Toronto's values of equity, inclusion, and diversity. Notably, there is an absence of mention of vulnerable communities outside of Toronto.

Important Considerations. Due to the EDC's designation as lead planner for the City's participation in the 2026 FMWC, Surman gives attention to their commitments to fostering

inclusion and equality. The EDC implemented the values of inclusion and equity as guiding principles in all their activities as part of their Five-year Equity Plan (2020-2024). To expand, the Equity Plan has “seven strategic goals” (Surman, 2021, p. 13), these goals includes: 1) “increase diversity in EDC’s workforce”; 2) “foster divisional culture committed to equity”; 3) “integrate equity and diversity” into EDC programs; 4) “use partnerships, grants, and competitive programs for equity”; 5) “play a leadership role in promoting equity”; 6) “engage with Indigenous and equity-seeking communities”; and finally 7) “ensure progress” in advancing “equity” (Surman, 2021, p. 13). The Equity Plan framed inequity as barriers to “the participation of some groups in society” (Surman, 2021, p. 13). Due to this, the goal of the EDC is to ensure the planning of the 2026 FMWC is inclusive of Toronto’s ‘hyper-diverse’ communities (Surman, 2021).

Within this section, the inclusion of the City’s People & Equity Division in the bid proposal is justified due to its role in developing and monitoring corporate policies in the areas of “equity, inclusion, human rights, occupational health and safety...” (Surman, 2021, p. 13). As a result, Surman engaged with them “in numerous occasions to support the preparations of this report” (2021, p. 14) to align with their corporate guidelines, and make use of their terminology and equity impact statements (Surman, 2021). With respect to this, special attention is given to Toronto’s Priority Communities as recommended and termed by the People & Equity Division, which include but is not limited to: 1) “Women”, 2) “Persons with Low Income”, 3) “Racialized Group(s)”, “Racialized Group (Black)”, and “Indigenous Peoples” (Surman, 2021, p. 14). The complete list of these Priority Groups is provided in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4

Identified Priority Communities as Recommended by the People & Equity Division, from Toronto's Host City Human Rights and Partner Engagement Report. (Source: Surman, 2021)

Table 1: Terminology used in this Report

City of Toronto – Priority Communities
Women
Persons with Low Income
Indigenous Peoples
Immigrants, Refugees & Undocumented Individuals
LGBTQ2S+
Persons with Disabilities
Racialized Group(s)
Racialized Group (Black)
Vulnerable Seniors
Vulnerable Youth

Moreover, the Equity Impact Statement, a tool used by the People & Equity Division, is utilized to “support staff in planning, developing and evaluating policies, programs, services and budgets” (Surman, 2021, p. 15). In the context of the 2026 FMWC, equity efforts are described as integrating this tool at every stage of preparation. As of June 2021, Toronto's Equity Impact Statement for the 2026 FMWC is:

The potential of Toronto being a host city for the FIFA World Cup 2026™ has been analysed at the conception stage for potential impacts on Indigenous, Black and equity-seeking groups of Toronto to be considered in the planning, preparation and delivery of the tournament. Communities potentially affected are: women, persons with low income, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ2S+ communities, persons with disabilities, racialized group(s), racialized group (Black), vulnerable seniors and vulnerable youth and children. The conditions inherent to hosting any Major International Sporting Event may

negatively impact access to City information, access to City services, access to City spaces, access to public transit, access to shelters, experience of discrimination and prejudice, sense of identity and belonging, and safety and security. As this report precedes the Host City selection, it aims to support future steps, including the identification of planned measures to address key human rights and equity issues that may emerge; as well as strategies to mitigate these negative impacts, reduce systemic barriers and to leverage opportunities for positive equity impacts – all to be co-developed through extensive engagement with stakeholders and partners. Access to economic development opportunities, access to training and or/employment, civic engagement and community participation, in turn, will be positively impacted if Toronto becomes a host city for the FIFA World Cup 2026™ (Surman, 2021, p. 15; emphasis added)

To summarize, the EDC and People & Equity Divisions' role in anchoring the City's actions on the values of inclusivity, diversity, and equity. Inequity was be defined as a barrier to participation, and this was be exemplified by the language of '*access to*' in the generated Equity Impact Statement. Lastly, because of engagement with the People & Equity Division, the EDC identified Priority Communities that was given special attention to in this report. This section's emphasis on its definition of equity as key value that anchors the City's bid has implications of which will be elaborated in Chapter 5.

Stakeholder and Partner Engagement Process. As required by FIFA, the CoT needed to provide a list of all the relevant 'stakeholders' they have engaged with between July 2020 to June 2021, while illustrated what format the engagement took, the entity that led this engagement, the list of names that organizations and their expertise, and a "brief description" (Surman, 2021, p. 16) of the topics discussed and the relevant outcomes. In this report, Surman

divided the engagement with organizations into internal and external ones. The internal consultations involved engaging with the City's Divisions to elucidate on "human rights and corporate equity functions" (Surman, 2021, p. 16). These Divisions and Units included the Indigenous Affairs Office, the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit, and the People & Equity Division, and provided "expertise on diversity, equity barriers, human rights, and develop plans and strategies grounded on extensive consultations with Toronto residents" (Surman, 2021, p. 16). Apart from the Sex Crimes Unit in the Toronto Police Service and Ontario Provincial Police, the outcomes of each consultation with internal City Divisions was vaguely listed. For example, the consultation with the Human Rights Office in the People & Equity Division and Toronto Public Health, summarized the outcome as "received robust feedback on draft of internal stakeholder survey" (Surman, 2021, p. 20). A much more relevant example are the outcomes from meetings with the "Centre for Sport and Human Rights and UNICEF USA, Canada, and Mexico", "Human Rights Office, People & Equity", and "Toronto Public Health, Child Friendly TO" (Surman, 2021, p. 21) were summarized as:

1. Focus on "both government and commercial aspects"
2. Think of unspecified areas to explore for "procurement/supply chain"; and
3. Ensure "diverse youth and overall voices are considered" (Surman, 2021, p. 21; emphasis)

Consultations with external organization totaled around 80 and were "invited to provide input and feedback through a survey regarding ... risk areas and planned measures ... whether and how COVID-19 may impact risk and mitigation measures ... opportunities for long-lasting positive legacy in terms of inclusion, equity, and human rights" (Surman, 2021, p. 17). The organizations consulted worked with or represented the identified Priority Communities such as

“Indigenous peoples, women, human trafficking, immigrants and refugees, Black and racialized communities, children ... human rights and sports in general” (Surman, 2021, p. 17). The outcomes were not specific, in a summary of their consultation they only stated that the “feedback was embedded in final report” (Surman, 2021, p. 21). Moreover, the report did not elucidate on the viewpoints of the 80 organizations, which are to be later specified in a table. Lastly, the aforementioned candidate city consultation by the United Team was not acknowledged in this report (Surmna, 2021). To summarize, this section illustrated the EDC’s process in engaging with internal and external organization. Although the engagement was largely extensive, the outcomes of such processes and how specific organization may have influenced decision making was not made clear, especially in regards to the topic of procurement.

Description of Identified Risks and Opportunities. As required by FIFA, the CoT needed to provide a list of the potential human rights-related risk areas identified and discussed through their engagement; making sure to provide a description of the risk area; and the regulations and programs that exists in the host city to address the risk (Surman, 2021). Informed by the CoT-specific Ergon Associates’ report, which has not been made public, and the engagement with internal and external organization 12 relevant risk were identified for the Canadian context. These risk areas include: 1) “Displacement and/or evictions”; 2) “Public perception of/and unfair treatment”; 3) “Restricted use of space”; 4) “Increase in mental health issues”; 5) “Unfair working conditions”; 6) “Harassment and discrimination”; 7) “Security and safety”; 8) “Inequitable social legacy”; 9) “Increased policing”; 10) “Exclusion of Indigenous voices”; 11) “Inequitable practices by grant and permit recipients”; 12) “Environmental Racism” (Surman, 2021, p. 23). Per FIFA’s requirements, the report provided a description of the

identified risk, highlighted the potential impact it has on specific Priority Communities, and the existing tool that can be utilized to mitigate the risk (Surman, 2021). Two examples relevant to the broad research themes encompassed in this study include:

- The risk area of unfair working conditions was described as “unfair working conditions and contracts, particularly concerning temporary foreign workers” (Surman, 2021, p 27). The report highlighted impacted Priority Communities, including but is not limited to, Women, Persons with Low Income, Indigenous Peoples, Immigrants, Refugees and Undocumented Individuals (Surman, 2021). The CoT’s *Fair Wage Policy* was identified as the mechanism by which to mitigate this risk area as it “investigates complaints and takes enforcement action when it is determined that a contractor has failed to pay its workers the prescribed hourly wage rates, vacation and holiday pay, and applicable amount for fringe benefits shown in the current fair wage schedule.” (Surman, 2021, p 27).
- The risk area of inequitable social legacy was described as “intensified gentrification in some areas as a social legacy, making them less affordable/accessible to low-income residents” (Surman, 2021, p 31). The report highlighted impacted Priority Communities that are impacted, including but not limited to, Women, Persons of Low Income, Indigenous Peoples, Racialized Group(s), and Racialized Group (Black). The City’s Community Benefits Framework was identified as the risk area mitigating tool as it “focuses on ways to maximize the use of City of Toronto levers (such as procurement, real estate transactions, or financial incentives for specific sectors and uses) to create inclusive and equitable economic opportunities through community benefits initiatives” (Surman, 2021, p 31). The City’s Social Procurement Program was also identified as it

“supports diverse suppliers, which are 51% owned, managed and controlled by an equity-seeking community or social purpose enterprise” (Surman, 2021, p 31).

To summarize, this section outlined the relevant risk areas impacting identified Priority Communities as well existing City policies and/or frameworks that can be leveraged to mitigate these risks. Notably, there is no mention of subcontracted workers nor the City’s Responsible Garment Manufacturer (No-Sweatshop) Policy.

Opportunities for a Lasting Positive Human Rights Legacy. As required by FIFA, the CoT needed to provide evidence of where the host city engaged with organizations to explore opportunities for a lasting “human rights legacy” (Surman, 2021, p. 34), including the description of the area of opportunity and of how the hosting of games would be linked to this opportunity. As illustrated in the previous section, Toronto framed their efforts for mitigating identified risk areas through the utilization of “existing tools” (Surman, 2021, p. 34) to support Priority Communities. In this section, it listed “how [Toronto] can collectively foster a policy legacy by establishing a common practice for stakeholder and partner engagement” (Surman, 2021, p 35). The opportunities identified through engagement with external organizations included: 1) adding gender equity in sport as a theme, and 2) developing projects with organizations to address issues related to inclusion and diversity (Surman, 2021). The drive for inclusion and diversity projects was anchored to such goals as: “increase accessibility to sport; enhance physical literacy; improve participation in sport; and achieve social goals through the intentional use of sport” (Surman, 2021, p. 35). The report also identified other opportunities that “may lead to long-lasting legacy in terms of inclusion, equity and human rights” (Surman, 2021, p. 35), such as: exploring opportunities for quality jobs; developing policies to combat harassment and bullying; providing specialized equity focused training (e.g. coaching

workshops); developing a sport legacy fund for marginalized youth; and directing grants to service business owned and/or operated by Indigenous, Black and equity-seeking communities (Surman, 2021). To summarize, this section elucidates the opportunities developed through engagement with organizations and their own initiatives for the 2026 FMWC, aiming to facilitate a long-lasting social legacy based on inclusion, equity, diversity, and human rights for the City. Despite, unfair working conditions identified as a risk area, no opportunities relevant to this study was highlighted. Instead, the City anchored its leveraging of the FMWC for human rights on equity.

Description of Planned Measures to Address Risks and Capitalize on Opportunities.

As required by FIFA, the CoT needed to provide a list of planned measures they commit to implementing to prevent and mitigate risks. More specifically, they needed to provide: specific measures planned by the City; concrete time frames for the planned measures; and how the City plans to work with external organizations to develop and deliver measures “including for example the type of involvement, the frequency of meetings, provisions to ensure accessibility for disabled people and people with limited mobility” (as quoted in Surman, 2021, p. 40). The report highlighted the City’s involvement with organizations to help co-develop (unspecified) measures in ways that “reflect how communities prefer to be engaged and to express themselves based on their lived experiences” (Surman, 2021, p. 40), and timelines for each planned measure to address the identified risk areas. In collaboration with the City’s Divisions, the report identified ways they can be embedded into “equity-advancing initiatives” that will assist in the prevention and mitigation of the identified risk areas. While none of the areas of opportunity were relevant to sweatshop labour/supply chain labour rights, the “Poverty Reduction Strategy Office, Social Development, Finance Administration (SDFa)” proposed “Support Social

Purpose and Not-for-Profit Community Agencies” which would utilize “social enterprises” and “community co-ops” to “supply the event and create local economies” through programs “like Toronto’s Social Procurement Program” (Surman, 2021, p. 37; emphasis added) Additionally the Purchasing and Materials Management Division (PMMD) proposed to continue implementing the Social Procurement Program and the Community Benefits Framework to “Scale up Social Procurement” and have “Indigenous, Black or other equity-seeking communities” be involved as part of “the supply chain or hiring those groups” (Surman, 2021, p. 38; emphasis added).

To summarize, this section elucidates the EDC’s proposed opportunities arising from hosting the 2026 FMWC, along with the existing measures and the internal/external organizations they plan to engage with to leverage equity efforts as part of their human rights strategy; notably, opportunities to improve supply chains are mentioned however not in relation to sweatshop procurement.

Stakeholder and Partner Engagement Plan. As required by FIFA, the City needed to describe their plans in integrating external organization in their preparations for the FMWC “with respect to human rights-related aspects” (Surman, 2021, p. 50). As part of the plan to engage with human rights organizations, the report outlines the EDC Division’s commitment to fostering inclusion and equity as well as their “best practices...identified for successful community engagement initiatives” which includes: 1) “focus on relationship-building”; 2) “consult early and often”; 3) “go where people are”; 4) “consistently involve community leaders”; 5) “avoid overreliance on specific organizations and individuals”; 6) “recognize skepticism and acknowledge painful histories”; 7) “equip those facilitating engagement with cultural competency”; 7) “consider lived experiences as an asset” (Surman, 2021, p. 51). To ensure human rights in the context of the 2026 FMWC, the EDC commits to “co-development

aspects [that] will ensure...the City of Toronto and residents/organizations work together to identify key challenges in the arena of human rights, and for mutually agreed solutions and potential positive legacies to be adopted” (Surman, 2021, p. 52).

In this section, the City outlines which internal and external organizations they aim to engage with for specific issues. In relevance to the study, the report addresses risks related to human trafficking particularly “procurement supply chains and potential exploitation of migrant workers”, however the report does not expand further on this nor the organizations they have engaged with to explore this issue (Surman, 2021, p. 56). A table of the additional other community and human rights organizations considered is provided as well, notably unfair working conditions or human trafficking was not given its own category (see Figure 5 below). In sum, this section elucidates on the EDC’s guiding principles in engaging with the external human rights and community organizations that ensure impactful outcomes to their aims to mitigate risks. Furthermore, while the report does acknowledge procurement issues in the supply chain, it does not expand on how it will be given “special attention” nor which organizations will be consulted in addressing this risk (Surman, 2021, p. 56).

Figure 5

A Table of the Community and Human Rights Organizations Considered, from the Toronto's Candidate Host City Human Rights Stakeholder and Partner Engagement Report (Source: Surman, 2021)

Table 8: Additional Stakeholders Considered for External Stakeholder & Partner Engagement

Community	Organization
Indigenous Peoples	Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre
	Native Child & Family Services
	Native Women's Resource Centre
	Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres
	Native Canadian Centre of Toronto
	It Starts With Us
	Aboriginal Legal Services
Women	Toronto Women's City Alliance
	Collaborative Network to End Exploitation (Human Trafficking)
Immigrants and Refugees	FCJ Refugee Centre
	Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)
	Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (MWAC)
Black and Racialized communities	South Asian Women's Centre
	Urban Alliance on Race Relations
	Black Health Alliance
	Jamaican Canadian Association/CAFCAN
	Black Lives Matter Toronto
Children	Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA)
	Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children
	StepStones for Youth
	Toronto Child and Family Network
People with Disabilities	Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board
	ARCH Disability Law Centre
Human Rights Defenders	Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS)
	Amnesty International Canada
	Human Rights Watch Canada
LGBTQ2S+	Human Rights Watch Toronto
	The 519 Community Centre
	EGALE
	Pride Toronto
	Toronto PFlag
	Black Queer Youth at Parkdale Queen West Community Centre

LGBTQ2S+	The 519 Community Centre
	EGALE
	Pride Toronto
	Toronto PFlag
	Black Queer Youth at Parkdale Queen West Community Centre

Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026

On March 16 2022, following the publication of the bid proposal and before FIFA's selection of Toronto as an official host city, the City Manager sent an update of Toronto's participation in the bid process to the CoT Executive Committee. The report aimed to update the Executive Committee members on any "financial implications, risks and opportunities, and [recommend] that Toronto accept the host city nomination" (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026, 2022*, p. 1), as well as preliminary themes on the human rights legacy plans. While the preceding sub-sections of Part 2 summarized data relevant to the bid proposal, this section highlights the post-bid proposal updates of the City's relevant efforts towards ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement or lack thereof.

When discussing the benefits the 2026 FMWC can provide to the CoT, the City Manager argues "the World Cup presents an opportunity to create bridges between communities in Toronto, strengthen civic engagement and advance inclusive local economic development as Toronto residents and visitors experience the 'collective joy of celebration' as identified in the report "Bringing the World to Toronto"" (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026, 2022*, p. 8; emphasis added). To elucidate, they categorize the anticipated benefits of the FMWC to Toronto, which include:

- Driving recovery and support inclusive economic development: the tournament would bring about a "significant local economic boost" (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026, 2022*, p. 8), with nearly \$307 million in GDP. This can increase "prospects for investment, tourism and immigration" (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026, 2022*, p. 8).

- Leveraging outside investment for City Priorities: being a host city will leverage the amount of investment the City receives from the provincial and federal governments, enabling them to “invest in people and neighbourhoods through enhanced civic engagement, inclusive economic development and improved recreational infrastructure” (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026, 2022, p. 8*).
- Strengthening ties between residents: Toronto’s diversity and multiculturalism would be strengthened due to the event.
- Promote Toronto on the world stage: the FMWC brings about “high global visibility” (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026, 2022, p. 8*), enabling Toronto to “profile, advance and champion” (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026, 2022, p. 8*) itself as a global leader of diversity and inclusion.
- Inclusive growth for amateur sport: the FMWC can potentially drive the growth of local participation in football through “role models, better playing facilities, and improved coaching” (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026, 2022, p. 8*).
- Volunteering and civic engagement: the event can enhance grassroots engagement allowing for wide local collaboration across all communities.

Furthermore, the City manager, in reference to the City’s bid proposal, speaks to the “preliminary engagement” with “24 well-established organizations in Toronto working with Indigenous Peoples, women, immigrants and refugees, Black and racialized communities, children, 2SLGBTQ+ communities, persons with disabilities, policing, human rights and sports in general” (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026, 2022, p. 11*).

In summarizing their strategy, he adds that City has created “the Toronto City Building Legacy Roundtable” (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026*, 2022, p. 11) with the purpose of identifying a full legacy program. With this roundtable they proposed “preliminary themes and action to further” (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026*, 2022, p. 12) explore, such as:

1. Environmental Sustainability: establishing long-term sustainability strategies for stadiums, training sites, and FIFA’s Fan Fests.
2. Human Rights, Inclusion and Diversity: developing grant competition for communities to develop programs for gender equity in sport, as well as advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples through Call to Action # 91 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (see <https://www.indigenouswatchdog.org/cta/call-to-action-91/>).
3. Infrastructure and Public Spaces: upgrading Exhibition Place, which can strengthen public transit, improve the aesthetics of the site, and develop a training facility.
4. Arts and Culture: showcase Canadian talent and culture in the global stage as well as advancing careers of local Toronto artists (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026*, 2022).

Lastly, in this report the City Manager outlines future steps for “reconciliation and equity” (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026*, 2022, p. 5) impact. Aligned with the aforementioned definition of inequity, these steps for equity aim to “reduce systemic barriers and to leverage opportunities for ... access to economic development opportunities and access to training and/or employment will be positively impacted through supportive hiring practices” (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026*, 2022, p. 5). Furthermore, with an estimated \$150 million in procurement of goods and

services for the FMWC, the report emphasizes the City's commitment to equity through the implementation of the Social Procurement Program. This program prioritizes the inclusion of "small businesses owned and/or operated by Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving communities" (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026*, 2022, p. 5), which is framed as fostering a sense of identity and belongingness among these vulnerable groups. As part of the City's commitments to advancing the Call to Action #91, the City Manager emphasizes reconciliation through ensuring "territorial protocols will be respected and promoted throughout the event, and governance will aim to ensure ongoing partnership and engagement with Indigenous communities, setting an important precedent for megaevents and sports events in general across Canada." (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026*, 2022, p. 5).

Summative Remarks

This chapter has attempted to exhaustively examine the key aspects of each document analyzed from the CoT, CSA, and FIFA. It is crucial to note once more that the results are skewed towards the perspectives of FIFA, the United Bid team (which includes the CSA) and the CoT due to the absence of published documents from the MSN. Therefore, the following analysis will be limited in scope. With this in consideration, the following chapter delves into the themes generated from the collected data, explores their implications, and situates them within the broader context.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

As Chapter 4 focused on presenting key findings from the documents collected, Chapter 5 focuses on delving into an analysis of those findings through a critical theoretical (CT) lens. As noted in Chapter 3, CT aims to grasp social and systemic relations between individuals and groups in society with a goal of illuminating the interconnections between power relations and broader socioeconomic structures and systems that inform and are informed by peoples' decisions and actions. In this study, I take as point of departure the understanding that the language contained in the collected data reflect and offer insight into how the bid process for the 2026 FMWC was framed for audiences (i.e., the reader, the public at large, etc.) by key actors, and how such framing works to shape and organize one's understanding of events or experiences. As noted by Kitzinger, texts (e.g., documents) contain frames that "manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (2007, p. 135). The key point to emphasize is that the producers of the text possess great capacity to construct and control information through the ways in which they frame the discourse (cf., Reese et al., 2001).

Given this point of departure, this chapter aims to highlight how the framing of the bid process by FIFA, the CoT, and the CSA reinforces a power imbalance that operates in near-exclusive favour of their goals that are well aligned with neoliberal capitalism and neoliberal image-building (cf., Broudehoux, 2015). As will be demonstrated below, despite professed claims otherwise, issues such as ethical procurement and commitments to anti-sweatshop labour are treated in a haphazard manner among the FIFA and the CoT. Further, claimed commitments to human rights are framed so as to underscore Toronto's efforts to consolidate soft power,

defined here as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (Bianco & Sons, 2023, p. 94). The absence of anything material or substantial from the MSN will be highlighted to show the skewed analysis of the documents, and its implications on how I have understood the discursive practices present.

This chapter is organized into three key thematic areas: 1) the notable sites of absence regarding ethical procurement and anti-sweatshop labour and misalignment between actors in the documents; 2) insufficient transparency in engagement with human rights organizations; and 3) a discourse of development embedded in efforts for human rights. The following sub-sections will delve into each theme, elaborating on the interpretation of the data in relationship to the extant literature, as well as their connections to one another. Following this, concluding thoughts on this study are offered including a discussion of the study’s significance and potential contributions to scholarship on SMEs and workers’ rights, as well as a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the study.

Prior to delving into the themes, I feel it important to acknowledge once more that these themes were not constructed with a *tabula rasa* as my background knowledge, lived experiences, and sensitivities informed the very ways in which I collected, saw, read, and interpreted the documents that underpin this research project. As previously noted, the labour disruption at York prompted me to pay greater attention to the ways in which issues are framed by different groups. Furthermore, my engagement with critical sociological works on sweatshop procurement, anti-sweatshop activism, and SMEs drew my attention (my radar) to certain details in the data that resonated with the literature and my own radar of what I interpreted as germane and significant. I made consistent effort to journal and record my reflections throughout the data collection and analysis process in order to maintain and sustain critical self-reflexivity, making me aware of

how my positionality has influenced my interpretation in hopes of ‘checking’ myself and attempting to hold a sense of detachment to the data. Constant discussion with my supervisor assisted in this process as she consistently pushed me to ensure rigour. Additionally, the interview with the key informant reassured me that my analytical radar was attuned to the themes explored in this chapter; while one interview does not make triangulation, I felt it underlined a sense of alignment between the data and my interpretation of the data.

1. The Significance of Absence

As shared in Chapter 4, I was not able to collect an equal number of documents from all four key groups (FIFA, the CoT, the CSA, and the MSN) about the bid process for the 2026 FMWC. In fact, the disparity between the number of documents among these four entities was stark. Thus, the analysis of the discourse within the documents was punctuated by my own awareness of missing perspectives and voices. As such, the first theme of note is one of absence—the absence of the perspectives of human rights’ and labour rights’ advocates and the absence of meaningful reference to, and therefore consideration of, ethical procurement and commitment to the purchase of products that do not draw on sweatshop labour. Given that these bid process documents give us insight into how SME plans and planning were framed for future actioning, these absences suggest a systematic exclusion of consideration regarding ethical procurement.

With regards to the absence of the perspectives of human rights’ and labour rights’ advocates, I would be remiss to not acknowledge the elephant in the room: the complete absence of anything from MSN about the bid process. With SMEs serving as contested sites for power relations, the absence of documents from the MSN effectively erases resistant discourses concerning ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement. This undoubtedly slants the analysis of the

discourse in this study towards organising actors such as FIFA, CSA, and the CoT. In particular, the analysis about the bid process invariably is centred on their effort, beliefs, and conceptualization of human and labour rights in ways that may align with their positionality as organisers of the FMWC. In contrast, the MSN, as an anti-sweatshop organisation, does not have commercial partners to maintain nor a SME to organize for soft power purposes. As a result, their understanding of key topics related to this study and their focus on them would vary greatly. As highlighted in Chapter 2, anti-sweatshop organisations have focused on publicly pressuring SMEs and TNCs into acknowledging their role in sweatshop production. With the absence of the Toronto-based MSN from the public discourse, as least as far as can be determined by the dataset generated for this study, there is no evidence to suggest that the CoT and/or the other organisers meaningfully engaged with human rights' organizations focused on workers' rights. Furthermore, it is important to point out that the CSA's engagement with the bid process has consistently been in collaboration with the US (USSA) and Mexican (FMF) football governing bodies as part of the United Bid; as such, there were no CSA-exclusive documents collected. With the lack of CSA-specific documents, the points of divergence and convergence between the MAs, as well as what may be prioritized by USSA and FMF in contrast to the CSA, is obscured. Consequently, there's little insight as to how the CSA's strategic orientation may have affected the *Bid Book*, *Proposed Human Rights Strategy*, and the CoT's *Human Rights Stakeholder and Partner Engagement Report*.

The missing voices of MSN (or comparable interest groups) mirrored the notable absences in the CoT's *Human Rights Stakeholder and Partner Engagement Report* which did not identify or discuss workers, let alone supply chain workers, as a Priority Community group. Although the CoT did identify unfair working conditions as a risk area to be addressed in order

to protect the Priority Communities that they did name (i.e., Women, Persons with Low Income, Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQS+, Persons with Disability, Racialized Group(s), and Racialized Group (Black)), and expressed a commitment to attend to this risk through the existing CoT Fair Wage Policy, the Fair Wage Policy does not directly or explicitly attend to sweatshop labour among apparel or merchandise contractors or sub-contractors in the international supply chain. This is exceptionally noteworthy given that Toronto has an existing policy specific to address ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement: the Responsible Manufacturer (Anti-Sweatshop) Procedure (https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/9572-garments_29aug2008.pdf).

To be clear, certain types of workers were prioritized in the CoT's documents, but not all types of workers or those working in sweatshops in the GS. In the CoT documents, unfair working conditions and the risks they posed were associated with temporary foreign workers and this may have been informed in part by the Ergon Associates' report which identified temporary foreign workers as a vulnerable population facing discrimination within Canada: "In Canada, fear of reprisals has been underlined as a vulnerability for temporary foreign workers, especially when complaints processes are delayed and the worker has already been repatriated"

(Independent Report: Human Rights in Canada, Mexico and the USA in the Context of a Potential FIFA 2026 World Cup Competition, 2018, p. 51). The absence of fulsome attention to workers at risk of being exploited in sweatshops continued in an update of the CoT engagement with the bid process; notably, the preliminary themes of "long-term legacies" for the City excluded the risk area of unfair working conditions altogether (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026, 2022, p. 12*). As noted in Chapter 4, in a published update, the City Manager outlined five themes, one of which was dedicated to human rights, inclusion and diversity (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026,*

2022). However, there is nothing stated in the document about workers' rights. And as for ethical procurement more broadly, the primary reference was the City's attempt to frame the 2026 FMWC as a positive opportunity for social procurement among equity-denied communities in Toronto:

Through the procurement of upwards of \$150 million of goods and services to support the World Cup, small businesses owned and/or operated by Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving communities will potentially benefit from the application of social procurement policies to those procurements. Economic activity generated by the event will ... feature significant involvement of entrepreneurs and workers from Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving communities (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026*, 2022, p. 5; emphasis added).

In this respect, any attention to procurement by the CoT is geared towards 'Torontonians'. This is understandable to a degree in that it is the CoT's responsibility to safeguard and advance the lives of Torontonians where possible in relation given the social and economic impact of the games. However, we cannot ignore the negative implications of the localized focus of the CoT for workers in other parts of the world who labour will go to produce the very sports merchandise and equipment associated with the 2026 FMWC.

Keeping in mind the United Team's principle of "transparency ... and complete communication about plans and decisions associated with staging the FIFA World Cup" (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World CupTM*, 2018, p. 448), it was proposed that host cities would "commit to [adopting] sourcing codes of conduct for their own routine procurement" as well as having cities "showcase human rights innovations in procurement" (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 54).

Nevertheless, Toronto's engagement with the bid process was absent of any of innovation or commitment to any procurement policies. This ongoing lack of follow through highlights a significant and persistent gap between the United Team's rhetoric in the *Proposed Human Rights Strategy* underscoring sites of absence regarding ethical procurement.

Again, I aim to highlight how the absence of meaningful attention to sweatshop labour and ethical procurement in the bid process documents evaluated in this study may give us insight into the possible ways—or lack thereof—in which tournament proponents and organizers are attending to this known problem. Yes, we can see there is some attention being paid to the needs of vulnerable and marginalized individuals and groups through reference to such issues as social procurement; however, issues such as sweatshop labour and ethical procurement (which is not same thing as social procurement) are, simply put, not on their radar. In some ways, it may be helpful to remind readers of Kevin's positioning of Toronto as 'not' Qatar and 'not' Russia, as though issues about workers' exploitation are a matter for 'those' countries and not Toronto's worry. In the absence of meaningful attention to ethical procurement and sweatshop labour, the CoT's bid process documents operate to deny (much like Kevin) the very real possibility of GS workers' exploitation at the hands of sportswear TNCs who stand to profit from the 2026 FMWC. This denial, as understood by Horne (2017), secures "the maintenance of social worlds in which an undesirable situation (event, condition, phenomenon) is unrecognised, ignored or made to seem normal" (p. 332) discursively. In maintaining the status quo and its problematic effects, the CoT reaffirms SMEs as a site/tool of the dominant "local economic and political" groups (Broudehoux, 2016, p. 113) As will be expanded, "without the opposite of denial, acknowledgment" (Horne, 2017, p. 332), any potential engagement with CSR discourse that address sweatshop related issues cannot occur.

In a similar vein, the absence of attention to supply chain workers was also notable in FIFA's evaluation of the CoT's engagement report. In their evaluation of the CoT's bid, FIFA noted the city's lack of engagement with trade unions; however, FIFA's evaluation excluded any comments on supply chain workers' rights which they have highlighted in the *FIFA's Human Rights Policy* and their *Bid Evaluation Report*. Considering FIFA's regulatory role in ensuring host cities attend to their human rights policy requirements, this intertextual neglect reinforces a collective neglect of sweatshop labour, the exploitation of workers in sweatshops and the need to materially and operationally commit to ethical procurement. In this sense, the sequence these documents are published in (i.e., the CoT's bid and its subsequent evaluation by FIFA) elucidate on a systematic denial present in the documentary reality that functionally maintains the status quo. As Coffee (2013) argues, the relationship between documents is usually based on principles of sequence and hierarchy which form a constitutive part of the present documentary reality. In similar fashion to the relationship between federal and provincial legislation, FIFA discursively legitimizes the absence of sweatshop-related risks in the City's bid, as they summarize:

The submission includes some detail on other key areas such as an inequitable social legacy, exclusion of indigenous voices, environmental racism, inequitable practices by grant and permit recipients, increase in mental health issues, restricted use of space, public perception of/and unfair treatment. The submission also identifies additional rightsholders that may be negatively impacted by hosting the tournament, including women, persons with low income, indigenous peoples, immigrants, refugees & undocumented individuals, LGBTQI+ groups, persons with disabilities, racialized group(s), vulnerable seniors, and vulnerable youth. (*Evaluations of FIFA World Cup 2026 Host City Stakeholder and Human Rights Submissions*, 2022, p. 6)

Despite FIFA's *Human Rights Policy* and the *Bid Evaluation Report* clarity on the risk of labour and human rights in the supply chain "irrespective of where [the tournament] is hosted" (*Bid Evaluation Report 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 178), FIFA's evaluation of the CoT's bid does not note this absence, instead they limit their criticism of the above mentioned assessment to the lack of clarity of the "stakeholder views and how they were incorporated" (*Evaluations of FIFA World Cup 2026 Host City Stakeholder and Human Rights Submissions*, 2022, p. 6). As an actor, that produces documents that are "superior" (Coffee, 2003, p. 69) and regulative of their MAs, FIFA reinforces the absence of attention to sweatshop labour and ethical procurement.

It is pivotal to underscore the significance of these gaps or absences of reference in the documents as we must recognize the relationship between discursive framing and interpretation that feeds into practice. In the context of SMEs, scholars and activists have long identified and critiqued sport governing bodies and SMEs for both their turn to corporate social responsibility (CSR) "industry" and rhetoric for public relation purposes and the gap between discourse and their actual practices (see <https://cleanclothes.org/news/2012/05/07/abuses-still-exist-in-olympic-supply-chains-says-playfair-2012>; Timms, 2012). We can see similar trends within such bid-related documents as the *United Human Rights Strategy* and *Bid Evaluation Report*, where a discursive embrace of anti-sweatshop CSR, with no indication in Toronto's rhetoric in their *Human Rights Stakeholder and Partner Engagement Report* will follow through in tangible and concrete plan.

Bearing in mind the absence of MSN in the discourse, Timms (2016) argues that minimizing the gap between CSR rhetoric and practices is dependent on the continuous pressure on governing bodies from advocacy and activist groups including those committed to the anti-sweatshop labour movement; the maintenance of ethical procurement gains in SMEs becomes a

“continual relay race” (p.124) for anti-sweatshop activists. For example, while the 2016 Rio Olympics would carry the ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement policies developed in the 2012 London Olympics, the gains achieved in the struggle to effectively implement these policies would not transfer over (Timms, 2016). With the PlayFair campaign no longer active to pressure host cities and sports governing bodies at an international level, and with nothing in the public domain from a local entity such as MSN, the pushback from workers’ right groups may have previously exerted pressured on past SMEs into considering and implementing ethical procurement are not as prominent today. While the vibrant anti-sweatshop movement of the past generated significant publicity, enough to pressure the “Clinton administration, in conjunction with a coalition of unions, apparel companies, and human rights groups,” into developing the Fair Labor Association (FLA) (Powell, 2014, p. 12), which ultimately led them to split with the FLA and form a worker-driven alternative. The current predicament, absent of any pressure by resistant anti-sweatshop groups, would no longer produce widespread brand-damaging shock that could hurt the bottom line (Sage, 2010). With the lack of a subversive discourse that pressures an acknowledgment of sweatshop procurement by SME-organisers, the dominant discourse will continue to impose itself absent of any contestation. As will be expanded on below, the lack of follow-through on a CSR discourse that addresses ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement from the United Team to the City of Toronto highlights a misalignment of organizing actors.

The misalignment and discontinuity between FIFA, the United Team, and the CoT present in their bid and bid-related documents, particularly with regards to the identification of the human rights priorities and differing understandings of procurement. FIFA’s *Human Rights Policy* recognizes responsibility towards workers in the supply chain, mandating that “FIFA

competitions, confederations, member associations, commercial affiliates and entities” protect their labour rights (Infantino & Samoura, 2017, p. 8). The United Team’s *Proposed Human Rights Strategy* also identified a goal of respecting “human rights in the supply chains associated with the 2026 FIFA World Cup” (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 46). The proposed procurement policy in the *United Human Rights Strategy* is discursively framed to reiterate a supplier’s obligations to adhere to domestic labour laws, protect women workers from ‘maternity issues and harassment’, and uphold the four ILO Core Labour Standards (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018). However, as noted in the first theme explored in this chapter, Toronto’s *Human Rights Stakeholder and Partner Engagement Report* ignored or excluded sweatshop-related issues, despite already having its own ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement policy, as a risk area to be attended to (Surman, 2021). Instead, the CoT discursively framed their procurement policy in terms of social procurement and as a means to diversify their suppliers and foster workforce development with ‘equity-deserving’ groups for all good and services related to the 2026 FMWC (Surman, 2021).

In efforts to better understand why there exists such misalignment between these three key groups, Chalip’s (2014) work comes to mind, particularly his highlighting of the ways in which SMEs must be integrated into and synergized with a host city’s development and branding goals. Although the CoT does aim to produce a long-term legacy, the primary goal of SME-organisers is the “event to stage” (p. 7), for primarily economic benefits (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006). In this sense, the responsibility for legacy merely adds “... a distraction ... expense and impediments” (p. 6). Produced as a counterbalance to the publicized negative effects of SME (summarized in Chapter 2), Chalip proposes to understand the legacy framework as a “strategic leverage” that aims to justify the hosting of tournaments. In this sense, legacy cannot be

understood as a standalone tool that produce SME, but rather one that is part of the City’s tool cabinet to “optimize desired economic, social, and/or environmental outcomes” (Chalip, 2014, p. 24).

Holding on to this thought, the engagement with human rights organizations as mandated by FIFA, was done so within the framework of the City’s pre-existing established strategies and priorities. The City’s human rights efforts serve as a catalyst for its inclusive development plans, prioritizing Black, Indigenous, and other ‘equity-deserving’ suppliers. In Toronto’s bid, the constructed “opportunities for lasting positive human rights legacy” (Surman, 2021, p. 34) guides their subsequent legacy plan in alignment with existing their pre-existing policies and initiatives, as Surman (2021) states:

The previous and following sections outline a large range of existing tools and planned measures that the City of Toronto has developed to mitigate risk to and support vulnerable populations in Toronto, tools like Streets to Homes to counter displacement; inclusive ceremonies and proclamations and the #TorontoForAll campaign to support a sense of belonging; the Social Procurement Program, AnchorTO, and Fair Wage Policy to promote inclusive economic growth; City of Toronto Accessibility Design Guidelines to provide accessible services; Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism to address anti-Black racism; and policy papers and strategies like the MoU on Immigration, The Toronto Newcomer Strategy, Access T.O Policy, and Refugee Capacity Plan to promote the well-being of immigrants, newcomers, refugees and undocumented Torontonians, among others. It is important to note that many of these existing tools, and many of the City Strategies,” (p. 34; emphasis added).

Consequently, legacy is not an independent external intervention, but rather an integrated tool produced by the City. The leverage of legacy is created with “a vision for the way that total trade and revenue will be optimized” and “how host community’s image will be benefited” (Chalip, 2014, p. 28), as a result of the political and economic elites’ interest in “potential [sources] of new tax revenue and private investment (Gotham, 2015, p. 4). Similarly, the City leverages the 2026 FMWC as a means for advancing the “profile [of] Toronto as a global leader of diversity and inclusion” as well as increasing prospects of “investment, tourism and immigration” (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026*, 2022, p. 8 - 9). As a result of this, while tools from the City’s toolkit such as the Social Procurement Program are incorporated as part of this plan, policies addressing ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement remain absent. The deeper implications of this to the broader societal context will be elaborated in later sections.

2. Insufficient Clarity and Transparency with Human Rights Organizations

As described in Chapter 4, as part of FIFA’s bid process requirements, bidders were mandated to engage with human rights organizations to ensure adverse impacts to human and labour rights were prevented, monitored, and remedied (*Bidding Registration*, 2017). However, the CT-informed analysis highlights the insufficient clarity and lack of transparency surrounding the solicitation of groups or the feedback and perspectives from these organization were widespread during the bid process for the 2026 FMWC.

Neither the United Team’s *Proposed Human Rights Strategy* nor the CoT’s *Human Rights Stakeholder and Partner Engagement Report* provided clear details on what the input of selected human rights organizations were, and how they influenced and were incorporated into bid-related documents. Consequently, it also not made clear how both the CoT and the United Team made decisions regarding which perspectives to integrate, how to integrate them, and the

rationale behind these decisions. In the latter's case, the United Human Rights Strategy summarized a multi-stakeholder workshop of unspecified "14 NGOs, 2 UN Agencies, 2 universities" in which the outcomes were described as "Evaluation and addition to Human Rights risk assessment" and "Discussion on standards and best practices to address gaps and risks" with no details about how these outcomes were developed; what the rationale behind key decisions were, what these outcomes involve, and the specific list of organizations and experts they engaged with in this workshop (*Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy*, 2018, p. 85). This would be similarly noted by the BSR's evaluation of the *United Human Rights Strategy* when they state, "the level of interaction and feedback presented by stakeholders and how that feedback has been incorporated" (*Evaluation Report of the Human Rights Strategy Submitted by 2026 FIFA World Cup Bidders*, 2018, p. 23). The City's bid proposal provided greater clarity at clarifying which organization were engaged with, as well as illustrating to an extent how each organization related to particular issues. Nonetheless they provided little clarity to human rights organizations' viewpoints and how these viewpoints were incorporated into their strategy. When discussing the outcomes of the survey sent out to "over 80 organizations" the outcome only listed as "collected feedback and recommendations concerning human rights risk areas and other key aspects identified in the report" (Surman, 2021, p. 21).

This opacity obscures which perspectives were incorporated, which were excluded, and the reasoning behind these decisions. In this respect, the lack of transparency of the engagement process, incorporation or rejection of perspectives raised by human rights organization may obscure the power relations that dictate certain decisions and approaches regarding human and labour rights. While the absence of ethical procurement is a product of the lack of resistant anti-sweatshop activists in the public domain, the insufficient clarity of human rights organizations'

viewpoints masks the potential contested site, and how the CoT and United Team may have engaged with subversive discourses. Due to this, actors who hold greater power are better able to deflect any recommendations against their interests. Particularly any interests that are costly and an impediment to staging the event and run counter to the synergistic legacy plan of SME-organisers (Chalip, 2014). As noted by Darnell & Millington (2015), not all “stakeholders are on equal footing and so some enjoy the ability to set the development agenda and solidify notions of what development is, and what it is not” (p. 75). Development, as understood in this study, involves an “organized intervention in collective affairs according to a standard of improvement.” (Pieterse, 2010, as cited in Darnell & Millington, 2015, p. 2). This understanding prompts a critical examination of the historical, political, economic, and social power relations that define development within a hegemonic paradigm (Darnell & Millington, 2015). This will be elaborated on in the next section.

Consequently, where subversive discursive practices may have arisen within the engagement process, they may have been “incorporated into a hegemonic system” (Darnell & Millington, 2015, p. 75) and ‘assimilated’ to reinforce the dominant forms of development. While this process cannot be confirmed due to the opacity present, the CoT did receive recommendations by “Centre for Sport and Human Rights and UNICEF USA, Canada, Mexico” and the City’s Human Rights Office and Toronto Public health Unit to “think of procurement/supply chain as area to explore” (Surman, 2021, p. 21). The process of what ideas, strategies, possible policies explored during and after the meeting were unspecified. However, their efforts in procurement have been framed in alignment with their Social Procurement Program indicating a potential assimilation to reinforce dominant forms of development (Surman, 2021). Therefore, the CoT has utilized pre-existing tools and strategies to address

identified risk areas in part informed by their “engagement process” which consisted of “multiple public and consultation meetings and gatherings” (Surman, 2021, p. 52) which has functionally further entrenched dominant forms development. This development framed by Toronto’s “local power interests” (Gotham, 2015, p. 8) ultimately aims to increase the prospects for “investment, tourism, and immigration” (Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026, 2022, p. 8), in doing so aligning with the dominant neoliberal capitalist drive for wealth creation above all else (Darnell & Millington, 2015).

3. The Discourse of Development and Image Building

The discourse of development is the final theme to be discussed in this chapter as it informed the bid documents analyzed in this study and was more deeply entrenched due to the two prior themes. As stated earlier the study’s understanding of development prompts a critical examination of the historical, political, economic, and social power relations that define development within a hegemonic paradigm (Darnell & Millington, 2015). In this case, the discourse of development approach to human rights broadly, with no pressure to ‘relay’ gains otherwise, has resulted in the exclusion of ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement. As highlighted in the prior sections, the absence of ethical procurement/misalignment of key actors and the lack of clarity on human rights organization themes may have reinforced power imbalances to the benefit of the political and economic elite resulting in a legacy framed for wealth creation (i.e., neoliberal capitalism) (see Figure 7 below). Darnell and Millington (2015) further argue that SMEs often embody promises of development to inject a dominant ideal of modernity. As will be illustrated in this section, while this modernity in the past prioritized statist policies, under neoliberal capitalism the ideal of modernity focused on attracting foreign investment to the host country for the pursuit of private and corporate wealth creation (Darnell & Millington, 2015).

Within the bid process for the 2026 FMWC, both the CoT's and the United Team's human rights approach can be seen as framed by a discourse of development aimed at addressing workers' rights and human rights through: 1) football development; and 2) City-building priorities.

Bearing in mind FIFA 2.0's focus on "[developing] and [promoting] the game of football worldwide" (Infantino, 2016, p. 19), the United Team would argue their strategy "can help the vision of FIFA 2.0 become reality" (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World CupTM*, 2018, p. 7). As a result, the United Bid concentrated boosting participation and enhancing football infrastructure to advance the growth of the sport. This is exemplified in their discussion of priorities:

Our over-arching priority is to help ensure that everyone, and especially children, have full and equal access to and opportunity through football ... we will invest our energy and resources towards improving and scaling existing and to-be developed spaces and programming, and directly impacting the lives of millions. (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World CupTM*, 2018, p. 10; emphasis added)

In so doing, the United Team merges "human rights and the development of the sport" (Proposal for a United Human Rights Strategy, 2018, p. 86). The CoT also embedded a focus on human rights through the discourse of development and with lots of reference to "equity, inclusion, and diversity" through development (Surman, 2021, p. 40). Under the framework of "inclusive local economic development the CoT committed to "reduce systemic barriers and leverage opportunities for equity impact" (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026*, 2022, p. 8). Keeping in mind Toronto's concept of equity as recognizing the need to provide "different supports and identifying and removing barriers to access", the discursive construction of development frames this drive for access as the access to inclusive

economic development (Surman, 2021, p. 13). The issues of procurement, when discursively approached as advancing access to SME-driven development, fails to accommodate for ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement. The issue of ethical procurement is not a lack of access as the formation of the sport-media-business alliances for sponsorship rights, broadcasting rights, and merchandising (Gruneau & Horne, 2015) has ensured subcontracted workers are already included and in-part responsible for the accelerating growth of SMEs (Timms, 2012). The issue of sweatshop labour lies in how these subcontracted workers in the GS have been included in the TNC-driven ‘race to the bottom’ (Merk, 2011), resulting in workers’ rights being squeezed out for the sake of profitability (Anner, 2019, 2020). Consequently, this discourse functionally aims to merely integrate Toronto’s “hyper-diversity” (Surman, 2021, p.1) into its business processes ignoring how powerful classes that control these processes may systematically adversely impact labour and human rights.

The existing scholarship on SMEs makes clear that they have long been understood as a means to fund development processes and objectives (Horne, 2017). In addition to above-noted observation from Darnell and Millington (2015) that not all opinions from stakeholders and communities have equal influence in determining how the SMEs will be utilized to bring forth positive development to a region or to improve the state of affairs for a host country or city, Horne emphasizes that neither will the development necessarily universally benefit the host city (2017). Typically, the tangible (i.e., material) legacies of SMEs are selective to the “powerfully political and economic positions in society” (Horne, 2017, p. 334). As a result, the discourse of development as an intervention for the improvement of the state of affairs calls into question the power relations at play. A particularly salient consideration given the shifts from state-driven social redistribution to entrepreneurialism and the growth of “entrepreneurial [cities]” (Gotham,

2015, p. 17) that compete globally as a destination for investment, tourism and entertainment. In line with this trend, the CoT argued that hosting the 2026 FMWC will:

The successful track record of Toronto in hosting global events and the small impact hosting would have on the daily lives of Torontonians: Toronto has the demonstrated capacity to successfully host major sporting events of a global scale (PanAm Games, Invictus Games) and can do so once again for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Further, given that there are only a few games and some practice facilities in operation, the disruption to the city will not on the scale that it was for the PanAm Games. ...in this light, the City argues that that the unprecedented visibility in the world stage would increase the prospects for “investment, tourism, and immigration” (*EX30.14: Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 6).

With the ascendancy of neoliberal globalization, the production systems and labour markets were deregulated enabling for increased foreign investment, this facilitated the outsourcing of manufacturing to the GS resulting in sweatshop production (Biyawila, 2018b, 2018a; Merk, 2022). As a result, the global division of labour would transform and turn the GN towards “cultural industries” (Gruneau & Horne, 2015, p. 9) focusing on the production of spectacle commodities. As a part of this, “fantasy cities” become destinations for “spectacular architecture, vast entertain complex of theatres ... and sport stadia” (Gruneau & Horne, 2015, p. 10). These trends, as part of the process of creative destruction described in Chapter 2, would aim to convert spaces to intensify capital accumulation. Consequently, development-driven efforts for human rights are conceptualized within neoliberal capitalist discourses that employ policies to their advantage, such as public-private partnerships—including those between a private entity like

FIFA and a public partner such as the CoT (Broudehous, 2015; Gotham, 2015; Gruneau & Horne, 2015; Silk, 2014).

In this sense, SMEs are seen as a strategy to parcel out spaces for the purpose of encouraging consumption for capital accumulation (Silk, 2014). This market-driven approach characterizes much of the preparations for hosting SMEs; for example, there is sadly a long history of host-cities funding the construction of stadiums, security, transportation, and venues for SMEs with tax-payer money, with little to no financial investment from or risk-sharing with private sector and corporate partners (Zimbalist, 2020). While these efforts in creating spectacles employ a politics of placemaking for urban regeneration, where the tournament materially and symbolically enhances host cities and nations for market expansionism, the lack of major infrastructural projects for the 2026 FMWC signifies a strategic shift (Beissel & Ternes, 2022). This shift re-imagines the FMWC tournaments as a "principal agent for promoting symbolic values" (Beissel & Ternes, 2022, p. 1) as a means of capital accumulation. In line with this logic, the CoT utilize "human rights, equity, and inclusion" (Surman, 2021, p. 42) as key drivers of their participation in the 2026 FMWC. As a result, the market-driven human rights approach to procurement aligns with Toronto's goal of inclusive development (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026*, 2022). The Social Procurement Program serves, in this case, as a guide for public-private partnerships, mandating bids to either hire 'equity-deserving' workers or to be privately owned by 'equity-deserving' groups (i.e., Women, Persons with Low Income, Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQS+, Persons with Disability, Racialized Group(s), and Racialized Group (Black)). As highlighted above, the approach would frame equity as recognizing and addressing "barriers to access" (Surman, 2021, p. 13). Thus, with subcontracted workers in the GS included in the processes of merchandising, efforts for ethical (anti-

sweatshop) procurement are excluded and workers' rights are further eroded (Anner, 2019, 2020; (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; Merk, 2011).

This neoliberal conceptualization of development caters to global expectations of certain values. To consolidate soft power, host cities and countries aim to embody these values to expand political and economic influences and to attract transnational investors and tourists for wealth creation (Brannagan & Rookwood, 2016). According to Grix & Brannagan (2016), soft power strategies routinely involve the leveraging of five key resources: 1) culture; 2) tourism; 3) branding; 4) diplomacy; and 5) trade. In relation to the focus of this study, the CoT leverages the 2026 FMWC to improve their cultural standing by highlighting and promoting a particular set of cultural values and norms for inclusion, equity, and diversity. In doing so, the City promotes a specific brand in efforts to improve tourist satisfaction which, in turn, may “act as multipliers” when visitors to the city relate their positive experiences to others in their home countries (Grix & Brannagan, 2016, p. 260). Moreover, by hosting the 2026 FMWC, Toronto signals to that it has the required “infrastructure and logistic expertise” to attract foreign investors (Grix & Brannagan, 2016, p. 261); for example, “...Toronto is recognized internationally for its top-tier sporting facilities and hosting capacity” (*EX 30.14: Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 8). This “global visibility” is seen as a factor that could lead to “strong ... prospects for investment” (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026*, 2022, p. 8).

It would be remised to not acknowledge that while SMEs are used as a strategy for soft power, it does not “replace the utilization of hard power” (e.g., coercive social policies, military force, repressive economic sanctions); rather, “national leaders ... endeavour to combine the soft dimension of attraction with the hard dimensions of coercion” (Grix & Brannagan, 2016, p. 253).

For instance, as a result of the sharing of hosting responsibilities, Toronto acknowledges the “opportunities for collaboration with FIFA members states” (*EX 30.14: Authority to Enter Into Bid Agreements for the 2026 FIFA World Cup*, 2018, p. 8), which presents a potential avenue to improve diplomatic relations between host countries as part of a broader strategy for soft power. However, as highlighted by Beissel and Ternes (2022), the increasing sentiments for unity and cooperation have primarily aimed to reduce the “bureaucratic and nationalistic barriers to the flow of global wealth” with “scant evidence” of “any meaningful and substantive peace promotion aside from the protection of global markets” (p. 25). This is reaffirmed when the United Team highlights that “Canada, Mexico, and the United States have long collaborated as continental partners” in which “this collaborations rests on shared democratic values, respect for the rule of law, and free market principles” (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018, p. 101; emphasis added). In posting credibility through the listed shared values for attraction, the market-oriented collaboration between host countries does not eliminate the need for ‘hard’ economic-coercion and violence of sweatshop labour. Instead, the United Team discursively framed the existing sweatshop procurement of goods from Mexico to Canada (see Brown, 2004) as part of their shared commitments to “inclusive economic growth” (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018, p. 101). Ultimately, the United Bid team and the CoT—through its efforts to champion Toronto’s global image—engage in an exclusionary image-building process that highlights efforts in advancing human rights that, in reality, only truly benefit the few (cf. Horne, 2017). As Broudehoux shares, host cities impose a homogenous worldview and image upon society, shaped by the interests of local economic and political elites (2015). This process of constructing a unified image—one that portrays the city as

modern, vibrant, safe, and exciting—from a heterogeneous and stratified society, results in a highly exclusive process that aims to expel differences within. Thus, “the process of urban image construction is...deeply rooted in a politics of visibility and exclusion, as selective visualizations of place and space” (Broudehoux, 2015, p. 2), where those with power determine who and what deserves to be visible. Thus, Toronto not only promotes itself as a “global leader” in human rights, equity, inclusion and access but also leverages this perception to enhance its global standing and economic opportunities (*Update on Toronto's Bid to Participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026*, 2022, p. 9). However, as Broudehoux (2015) argues, any discursive practices that highlight Toronto’s ‘modernity’ works to silence or exclude its ‘unmodern’ aspects (cf., Horne, 2017), which without subversive activism of anti-sweatshop activists and groups excludes ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement.

The United Bid also speaks to a continent-wide ideal of “free-market” (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018, p. 101) shared by the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Through selective visualization of the North American continent, the United Bid discusses how the continent has “prospered” due to the “tightly integrated markets” where “factories in Mexico produce goods for its neighbors to the north”, particularly highlighting the advantage of each respective country, such as Canada’s “innovation-led economy”, Mexico’s “abundant supply of young workers” and “the United States ... middle and high- wage industries” (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, 2018, p. 104; emphasis added). This description of the continent discursively constructs an image of the continent as “open for business” (Horne, 2017, p. 334) which biases towards “neoliberal economic ideology and globalization” (Gotham, 2015, p. 34) and benefits TNCs engaged in these processes (Merk, 2011, 2022, 2023). Moreover,

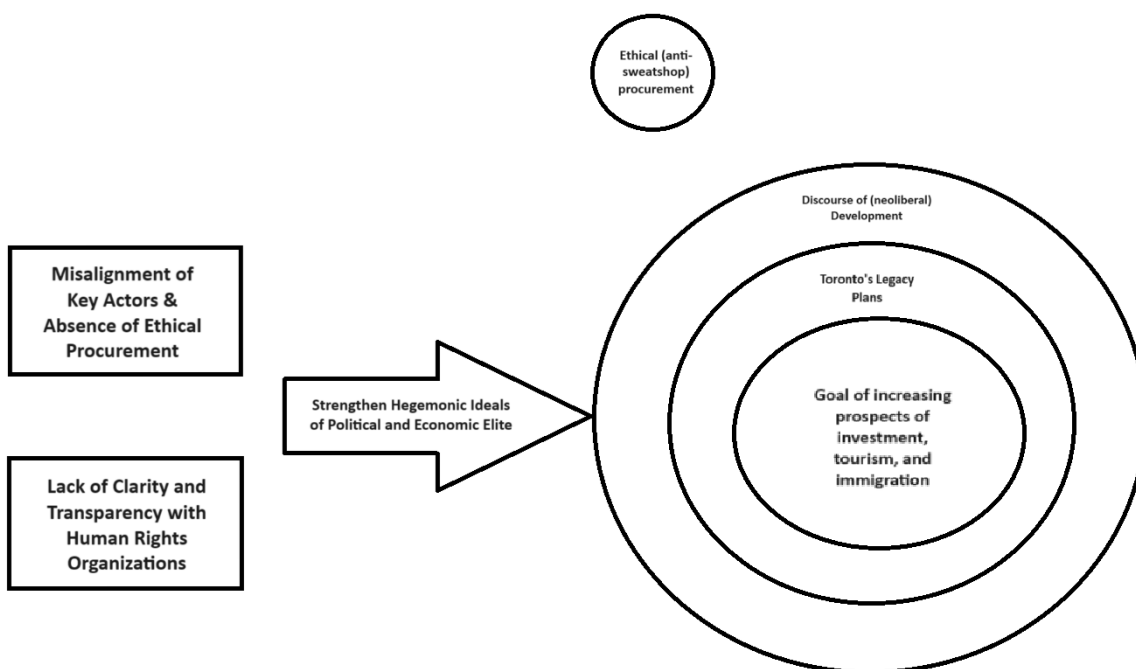
by omitting the IMF-backed policies that have promoted the outsourcing of manufacturing from the GN to EPZs in the Global South, the discourse reinforces the notion that the ‘comparative advantage’ of each country is a natural and pre-existing characteristic that the free market has simply capitalized on (Biyawila, 2018b; Esbenshade, 2008). Consequently, Canada and the US are portrayed as socially distant from the production processes in Mexico which merely “send goods to its neighbors up north” (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World CupTM*, 2018, p. 104), reinforcing the notion that the GN is responsible for “design, innovation and R&D” not the manufacturing of their branded products (Merk, 2011, p. 73). As highlighted by Merk (2023), anti-sweatshop activists have resisted this “social distancing from the world of mass labour” (p.2) and have drawn attention to the growth of the manufacturing sectors and young labour workforce as a product of the ‘race to the bottom’ by TNCs resulting in a deterioration of workers’ rights in the GS. In this sense, anti-sweatshop activists have resisted the dominant neoliberal economic ideology and problematized its effects on the GS. For example, while the United Bid positively highlights NAFTA (North America Free Trade Agreement) for its valuation of 1 trillion USD in trade and large public support (*UNITY: Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World CupTM*, 2018), anti-sweatshop activists, particularly the MSN, have previously drawn attention to the sweatshop procurement practices involved in this trade agreement (see Brown, 2004). This process of constructing an exclusive unified image shaped by the interests of local economic and political elites, not over just Toronto, but the whole North American continent, excludes the ‘unmodern’ elements. Without the pressure of subversive actors, the United Team imposes a simplified image of the continent and argues the FMWC would “deepen their integration and cooperation” with “the potential to improve the standards of living” (*UNITY:*

*Canada, Mexico, and the United States United Bid to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup*TM, 2018, p. 126). Therefore, aligning the FIFA's strategic shift in promoting symbolic values as a means of capital accumulation (Beissel & Ternes, 2022).

These findings highlight the dominant discourse of human and labour rights as a façade. The neoliberal-driven human rights approach continues to maintain business-as-usual, helping to deflect public scrutiny and facilitate capital accumulation. This issue is particularly relevant in the context of FIFA's commitments to address supply chain labour rights within their business relationships and MAs. While the MAs in the United Team demonstrated some degree of consideration for ethical procurement policies, the CoT's focus was markedly different as the 2026 FMWC has become a vehicle for their city-building policies and priorities in diversity, development, and equity efforts.

Figure 6

An Illustration of The Three Themes Interactions With Each Other, Resulting In The Exclusion Of Ethical (Anti-Sweatshop) Procurement.



Concluding Thoughts

The focus of this study was **to evaluate whether the issues of sweatshop labour and ethical procurement have been considered in the bid process for the 2026 FMWC and, if so, in what ways.** Drawing on Critical Theory and Qualitative Description, this thesis highlights findings from documents developed by the CoT, FIFA, and CSA pertaining to 2026 FMWC's bid process. The tenets of thematic analysis guided the coding of data which, in combination with the qualitative descriptive approach, prioritized the grounding of data in the language used in the documents.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the topic of sweatshop procurement, ethical procurement, and CoT as an official host city for the 2026 FMWC. Setting the stage for the study, in Chapter 2, I reviewed the current literature on sweatshop practices, the anti-sweatshop movement, and their relation to SMEs. In Chapter 3, I outlined the theoretical and methodological approach taken, elaborated on my positionality, its influence on me, and the detachment I will aim to hold to ensure rigour. In addition, I also summarized my experiences in interviewing Kevin and notable points he made during our meeting. In Chapter 4, I summarized all the relevant data in the documents from key actors. As noted in that chapter, MSN has published no documents pertinent to the 2026 FMWC. In Chapter 5, I outlined the three themes constructed using a CT approach. As well as connecting the relevant literature to the themes constructed.

Key Takeaways

In answering the study's research objective plainly, it is clear that sweatshop labour and ethical procurement were considered within the bid process to some degree. However, as explored above, an in-depth analysis of the documents (or lack thereof) of these four entities makes equally clear: the absences, gaps and misalignment in considerations of ethical procurement and anti-sweatshop labour; the murkiness of the process, particularly with regards to ways in which human rights organizations were involved (or not) in the bid process; and the relentless drive of neoliberal capitalist ethics in framing development (to the advantage of the few) and image building (again, to the advantage of the few) as necessary and immune to change or reimagining. As noted above, the first two themes operate to reinforce power-imbalances in the bid process to the advantage of the political and economic elite. These imbalances lend themselves to the dominant discourse of neoliberal capitalist development

where SMEs are positioned as the ultimate goal of investment, tourism, and immigration. In other words, for the wealth creation above all else.

What my analysis illustrates is that the efforts for human and labour rights, particularly efforts in procurement, have been informed by this discourse resulting in the exclusion of ethical (anti-sweatshop) procurement policies. This is a particularly salient point, when considering the lack of publicly accessible documents from resistant groups and activists pressuring the CoT, FIFA, and the United Team in embracing sweatshop-related CSR discourse. With the current discourse of development, an ideal of modernity is injected into the brand-building process of the CoT for soft power purposes to attract investments, tourism, and immigration. However, as Broudehoux (2015) elucidates, this process is an exclusive one that is simplified to the respectabilities of local economic and political elites. Contemporary image-building efforts of ‘modern’ host cities, countries, and regions exclude resistant discursive practices that, if acknowledged, would destabilize the status quo (Broudehoux, 2015). This exemplifies FIFA’s own shift from placemaking efforts for urban regeneration towards promoting symbolic values (and their regeneration through the tournament) as a means for capital accumulation (Beissel & Ternes, 2022).

The absence of ethical procurement within Toronto’s human rights efforts—at least as far as can be ascertained by the publicly available (or lack thereof) documents to date—illustrates this exclusive dynamic, as its successful implementation would confront the ‘race to the bottom’ pursued by TNCs in their goal of capital accumulation (Anner, 2020; Merk, 2011; Williams, 2020). The anti-sweatshop discourse challenges the discursive practices of human rights driven by neoliberal capitalism. Williams (2020) argues that the movement rejects the paternalistic view of sweatshop workers as passive victims and criticizes the inclusion of TNCs in monitoring

processes solely based on their reputational concerns. Instead, it emphasizes workers' empowerment and advocates for fundamental changes in the global economic system. By promoting independent and democratic labor unions in sweatshops, the anti-sweatshop movement seeks to address systemic issues rooted in profit motives, contrasting sharply with neoliberal approaches that prioritize market-driven approaches to address adverse impacts to human and labour rights (Gruneau & Horne, 2015). Due to this, the anti-sweatshop discourse, without presence of resistant groups and activists, would then be excluded from the image-building process of Toronto to attract foreign investors and tourists.

Significance and Limitations

These findings contribute to the literature by highlighting the inadequate attention being paid to ethical procurement and sweatshop labour in the bid process of the 2026 FMWC. This study contributes to existing scholarship on SMEs in the sociocultural study of sport with heightened attention to the emerging literature on FIFA 2.0, noting its transition from a global placemaking strategy for urban revitalization to a global peacemaking strategy that leverages symbolic values for capital accumulation (Beissel & Ternes, 2022), with a particular focus on human rights. In the evaluation of consideration of sweatshop labour and ethical procurement by the organising key actors, the study found that the extent of considerations varied but ultimately was insufficient in addressing the widespread sweatshop procurement. When considered, the implementation of proposed policies was not made apparent and synergized into the host city's pre-existent priorities and strategies. Therefore, any potential leverage utilized in the 2026 FMWC would not aid the sports garment workers in the GS who overwhelmingly face "poor working conditions, child labour, poverty wages, union harassment and worker-driven discontent" (Merk, 2023, p. 5).

To illustrate a comprehensive understanding, it is crucial to acknowledge and discuss the limitations of this study for future research to address and overcome. As the FMWC is still in the preparation phase, themes and dynamics may evolve, potentially rendering some of the current findings outdated. The study largely depends on documents from FMWC organizers, which may obscure the discursive practices of resistant actors that I may have not been made aware of, and thus presents a biased narrative. For instance, due to the lack of involvement and documentation by the MSN, no analysis of their discursive practices could be made in how they view the coming 2026 FMWC, including their perspectives on labour rights and the supply chain. As Maillo and Pasquinelli (2015) explain, the image building of a host city is often a dialectical dynamic between the imposed hegemonic brand by organising actors and the counter-hegemonic resistant local actors. Rarely have the official (hegemonic) branding of SMEs been imposed on with little to no resistant by local actors (Broudehoux, 2015; Gotham, 2015), instead usually the discourse is constructed by both the official narratives and the symbolically resistant meanings and symbols constructed (Maiello & Pasquinelli, 2015). In a sense, despite this study's CT approach the absence of subversive actors to collect data from and analyze. As a results, I was limited in my ability to elucidate on the power-relations at play due to the limited discursive antagonistic interactions between documents from organising actor and resistant actors. Instead I often had to read between the lines, and rely heavily on the relevant literature to highlight persistent trends that indicate imbalanced power dynamics. As a result, the analysis of the resistant discursive practices pertaining to the bid process of the 2026 FMWC is underdeveloped and limited in scope.

Moreover, the analysis primarily relies on documentary sources, capturing only the documentary reality of the FMWC and missing out on the lived experiences of individuals and

groups and unpublished realities may not be reflected in the documents. Although I benefited from conducting one interview to help better contextualize my understanding of the City's perspective on the tournament, my analysis remains bound to one set of documents that may be incomplete or may rub up against with other data sources. Future research on this topic must incorporate a wider array of documents and interviews that incorporate various actors such as anti-sweatshop activists and subcontracted workers in the GS involved in the production of garments and gear for the 2026 FMWC to provide a more robust analysis, and to expand on any overlooked points.

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