STAGING THE PAST, CREATING THE FUTURE

Heritage, power, and (counter-) narratives at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games

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Master Thesis
MA Tourism and Culture
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June 2025

Abstract

The 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics were shaped by a complex interplay of power structures, cultural and historical narratives, and media effectiveness, particularly concerning the official narratives versus the counter-narratives surrounding Brazil's heritage. The key power structures were the Olympic Movement, the Brazilian authorities, the media, and the city's citizens. Each of these actors presented different historical and cultural narratives in the context of the 2016 Olympics. The universalist ideals of the Olympic Movement and the Brazilian government's objective of modernity and development are challenged by counter-narratives highlighting omitted histories, such as the unearthing of the Valongo Wharf. The official narratives and the counter-narratives are amplified by the media, exposing organisational shortcomings and suppressed historical contexts. Overall, this research illuminates the use of heritage in the context of mega-events and the clashes between the historical and cultural narratives shaped by different power structures.

Keywords: Rio 2016 Olympics, heritage, power structures, historical and cultural narratives, counter-narratives, mega-events, media effectiveness.

Abstract

De Olympische Spelen van 2016 in Rio de Janeiro werden gevormd door een complexe wisselwerking tussen machtsstructuren, culturele en historische narratieven, en de effectiviteit van de media, met name wat betreft de officiële narratieven versus de tegen-narratieven rondom het Braziliaanse erfgoed. De belangrijkste machtsstructuren waren de Olympische Beweging, de Braziliaanse autoriteiten, de media en de burgers van de stad. Elk van deze actoren presenteerde verschillende historische en culturele narratieven in de context van de Olympische Spelen van 2016. De universalistische idealen van de Olympische Beweging en de doelstelling van moderniteit en ontwikkeling van de Braziliaanse overheid werden uitgedaagd door tegen-narratieven die gewezen hebben op weggelaten geschiedenissen, zoals de opgraving van de Valongokaai. De officiële narratieven en de tegen-narratieven werden versterkt door de media, waardoor organisatorische tekortkomingen en onderdrukte historische contexten werden blootgelegd. Al met al belicht dit onderzoek het gebruik van erfgoed in de context van mega-evenementen en de botsingen tussen de historische en culturele narratieven die door verschillende machtsstructuren werden gevormd.

Trefwoorden: Olympische Spelen Rio 2016, erfgoed, machtsstructuren, historische en culturele narratieven, tegen-narratieven, mega-evenementen, media-effectiviteit.

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Introduction

The 2016 Summer Olympics, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, marked a significant moment not only for the global sports community but also for the complex interplay of power, politics, and national identity. Beyond serving as a mere showcase of athleticism, these Games functioned as a global stage where the host nation meticulously crafted and projected a desired image of itself to an audience of billions of people. More specifically, the Olympic Games offer an immense opportunity for host nations and cities to strategically leverage their urban heritage. This use of heritage highlights a growing understanding that it is not solely a representation of a city's past, but also a potent tool for future development. By crafting specific historical and cultural narratives, heritage can be an instrument for generating economic revenue and presenting a city in a particular light to the rest of the world, thus allowing the city to cultivate a powerful global image.

When considering mega-events, particularly sporting mega-events such as the Olympic Games, the fundamental desire to host such competitions is profoundly driven by their potential for amplified global visibility and the momentum these events provide for urban transformations. This visibility is not merely utilised to attract tourists, but, more strategically, to position the city within the urban landscape. The 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics are a poignant example of the amplified global visibility that mega-events bring, with the city recognising that approximately half the world's population would be watching the coverage of the sporting events hosted in Brazil's second-largest city.

Alongside the enormous platform the Olympic Games provide, organising such an event involves intricate power dynamics. From the influential Olympic Movement to local authorities, and from the extensive reach of media outlets to the citizens of Rio de Janeiro themselves, a myriad of historical and cultural narratives are constantly at play. This research aims to analyse how these diverse entities strategically utilised the Olympics not only to showcase urban revitalisation and attract investment but also to reinforce national identities and global agendas. A key focus will be on the stark contrast between the carefully curated narratives presented by the Olympic Movement and political authorities, and the lived realities experienced by the city's citizens. Moreover, this thesis will further explore how official narratives might have omitted aspects that did not align with the desired image, thereby shaping a particular understanding for a global audience, and it will also examine the media's effectiveness regarding presenting these narratives to a broad audience.

This research will firstly carefully look at academic literature that has been written about the Olympic Games. With the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics as a case study, there are several aspects that must be considered. Within the high-stakes environment of the Olympics, distinct power dynamics come into play. The objective of the scholarly work that will be addressed is to offer a multi-faceted understanding of the Olympic Games as more than merely a sporting event. The importance lies in illuminating the layers of power, politics, historical and cultural narratives, economic aspirations, and media influence that shape the official Olympic message. It is thus crucial to highlight the inherent political dimension of the Olympics, demonstrating how it is a discursive space. Furthermore, the aim of Olympic opening ceremonies is often to project an ideal image of the host nation. Here, it is important to examine the ways nations can leverage this mega-event to project their self-image. Beyond that, the Olympics have a considerable impact on the host cities and nations. It requires a long-term commitment and the courage to take risks. During the Olympic period, the Games can be used for city branding and promoting specific values, all while being subject to counter-narratives and criticism.

Looking further than the scholarly work written specifically about the Olympic Games, it is also required to address broader theories. For this thesis, an exploration of the phenomenon "heritage" is indispensable. Additionally, the relationship between heritage and tourism, specifically the power dynamics, is important, because of the selective presentation of heritage and the marginalisation of certain historical narratives. Beyond this, there is a special focus on the role that heritage plays in constructing urban identity and driving development. Furthermore, the theory of "soft power" is incorporated, linking back to the ways in which sporting mega-events can influence the position of a nation on the global stage. Finally, the importance of the cultural and economic implications of hosting mega-events cannot be overstated.

As for the academic relevance of this research, it offers a multi-faceted understanding of mega-events like the Olympic Games beyond their sporting context. There is a holistic view of the Olympics as a complex phenomenon and it offers a critical examination of historical and cultural narratives. Furthermore, this research considers the strategic role of heritage and soft power, analysing how host nations can strategically leverage their urban heritage to cultivate a specific global image and exercise soft power. Lastly, this thesis examines the media's effectiveness in both reinforcing official messages and amplifying counter-narratives. This demonstrates the media's role in shaping public perception and bringing to light social and historical truths related to mega-events.

Building upon the contextual understanding of the Olympic Games as a platform for power dynamics, urban transformation, and the curation of cultural and historical narratives, the subsequent *status quaestionis* will define the existing academic discourse and possible gaps. It will outline how the Games fundamentally function as a potent cultural performance where the host nation can craft a narrative of itself, with all the risks entailed.

Status quaestionis

The Olympic Games. being an immensely popular celebration of athletic prowess, present a unique stage for nations to articulate and project their identities to a global audience. These events transcend being merely a sporting competition; they become potent cultural performances, rich in symbolism and historical significance. Within the context of hosting the Olympic Games, the power dynamics at play become pronounced. The Olympic Movement and host city hold power in constructing the overarching narrative of the Games, while the media acts as an amplifier. For this *status quaestionis*, the aim is to address the academic discourse surrounding the Olympic Games.

Power and politics at the Olympics

Starting off with the political aspect, Patrick Cottrell and Travis Nelson's academic work discusses the political protests that surround the modern Olympic Games. Cottrell and Nelson are both political scientists. They contend that major international sporting events, like the Olympics, frequently become significant stages for global political conflict. The 1936 Berlin Olympics, infamously known as the "Nazi Olympics", serve as a salient example. They note that every Summer Games since then has experienced some form of political incident (Cottrell and Nelson 729-730). Crucial to their analysis, Cottrell and Nelson emphasise that the Olympics act as a focal point for protest and provide a platform where diverse actors at various levels of global society can exert different forms of political power. Historically, the Olympics have even offered a means for the international community to sanction or pressure states and other entities. Over time, the Olympics have become a site for political struggles involving a range of actors, such as local groups, transnational advocacy networks, international institutions, and sovereign states (732).

Analysing the Olympics through the lens of political opportunity, four key characteristics explain their significance as a platform for contention. First, the Olympics are highly visible and accessible, receiving consistent global media coverage and engaging diverse audiences across the globe. Consequently, protests are likely to gain substantial media attention and reach a wide audience. Second, the high profile of the Olympics can attract influential allies and supporters. Activists can amplify their causes, thereby increasing domestic and international pressure on the host nation. Third, the Olympics can constrain a regime's ability to suppress collective protest actions. When nations are under the Olympic spotlight, the

potential costs of repression increase. While host states and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) still attempt to counter protest activities, Cottrell and Nelson argue that the very nature of the Olympics makes forceful suppression difficult, needing more subtle approaches. Fourth, the Olympics possess a unique symbolic significance that fosters collective protest actions and expands political opportunity. The Olympic Charter, which codifies the fundamental principles of Olympism and the IOC's rules, states that the aim of Olympism is to place sport at the service of humanity's harmonious development. It is this universal and humanitarian mission embedded in the Charter that gives protest within an Olympic context its meaning. In this regard, the Olympics function as a discursive space that enables deliberative processes (733).

Leveraging national identities in Olympic opening ceremonies

Shifting the focus to the influence of opening ceremonies, a poignant article about national identity by Jackie Hogan offers a detailed analysis of the narratives presented in Olympic opening ceremonies. Hogan is an anthropologist and sociologist who focuses mainly on gender, race, and national identity. She challenges the idealised notion of the Olympic Games as a purely egalitarian event. While the Olympic Movement champions principles like international goodwill, peace, and equality through fair competition, Hogan argues that the reality is more complex. Contrary to fostering the deconstruction of social barriers, sports in general and the Olympics in particular often play a role in reinforcing existing social inequalities (Hogan 100). A key takeaway of Hogan's argument is that international sporting events serve as crucial platforms for the discursive construction of a nation's identity. These global spectacles communicate messages about what it means to belong to a particular nation. Hogan argues that these carefully crafted discourses of national identity, which are often presented to a global audience, have the power to either reflect, perpetuate, or challenge the power dynamics within a nation.

Hogan further elaborates on Olympic opening ceremonies, which are structured around a combination of compulsory elements, mandated by the Olympic Charter, and interpretive cultural performances created and performed by the host nation. While ostensibly celebrating all participating nations, the ceremonies tend to reflect the values and self-image of the host nation. Therefore, the opening ceremony is not only a display of national identity but also a promotional opportunity for the host, aimed to attract tourists and investments (102).

Subsequently, Hogan underscores the significant economic dimensions intertwined with these narratives of nationhood. Hosting the Olympic Games is an immensely expensive venture, driven not solely by altruistic motives or patriotism, but mainly by the expectation of generating economic benefits for the host nation. The financial stakes associated with the Games have grown substantially, with marketing becoming a primary source of revenue. Additionally, the IOC mandates that all Olympic opening ceremonies include specific components: the parade of athletes, speeches by Olympic and local officials, the raising of the Olympic flag accompanied by the Olympic anthem, the host nation's anthem, the torch relay, and the lighting of the cauldron. While the Olympic Charter outlines these basic elements, host nations infuse them with nationally specific meanings, effectively "domesticating" these universal rituals (108).

Furthermore, Hogan highlights the concept of "winners" and "losers" within the context of Olympic ceremonies. Three primary categories of "winners" are identified, meaning those who gain from the constructed narratives of nationhood. First, there are capital interests, including service providers, broadcasters, and other for-profit enterprises that gain financially. These gains can either be direct or indirect, with the latter entailing increased sales for Olympic Partner corporations and increased tourism. Second, socially dominant groups, defined by factors like class, gender, ethnicity, national origin, and religion also benefit. Narratives of national identity that mirror existing power structures can legitimise and perpetuate long-standing hierarchies. Third, the state itself is a major beneficiary. The Olympic stage provides an opportunity to enhance the nation's international standing, strengthening its position in global negotiations, and to reinforce social control within its borders (119).

The effects of hosting the Summer Olympics

The specific effects of hosting the Olympic Games are described by Gold and Gold in an article about regeneration and city branding. John R. Gold is a professor of Urban Historical Geography and Margaret M. Gold is a Senior Lecturer in the area of cultural tourism. They argue that being chosen to host the Olympic Games is a very important long-term commitment for cities. This unwavering determination stems from the perceived advantages commonly related to the Olympics. Despite the considerable investments in possible new stadiums and facilities, a host city can typically expect a substantial financial gain from ticket sales, sponsorships, merchandise, and broadcasting agreements. Bid committees for the Olympic Games also often foresee a medium-term uplift for their construction industry, an increase in

tourism, and a short-term rise in employment at the venues and administrative roles (Gold and Gold 300-301). Beyond the predictable benefits, cities bidding for the Olympics often hope for less predictable yet highly desirable outcomes, such as economic growth, a lasting positive shift in their global tourism standing, urban renewal, improvements to infrastructure, the development of vibrant cultural areas, and the creation of high-quality facilities. The Olympic Games thus present great opportunities for strategic place promotion, using publicity and marketing to craft a specific image for the target audience. Major cities often compete for a greater status, and the hosting of the Olympic Games offers a unique chance for long-lasting global visibility. Additionally, while hosting the Olympic Games allows city administrations to undertake extended efforts to boost or transform their urban image, shifting the global perception of a city is far more difficult than rebranding a commercial product. However, the prestigious status of the Olympic brand as the pinnacle of sporting achievement often fails to positively influence the host city's reputation. The historical record shows examples where inadequate planning, flawed stadium designs, sponsor defections, political boycotts, budget overspends, forced removal of residents for Olympic construction, and unused facilities have left a trail of harming rather than enhancing the host city's public standing (301). In short, while the prestige of the Olympic brand and the global visibility offer unique opportunities for strategic place promotion and long-term advantages, the record shows the substantial risks involved.

Constructing an Olympic narrative

The branding of Rio de Janeiro during the 2016 Summer Olympics, more specifically the opening ceremony, is analysed by Radoslaw Sajna, journalist and political scientist. He describes that when Rio de Janeiro hosted the Olympic Games, it marked another instance of the city hosting a major international event, with the FIFA World Cup being hosted in Brazil just two years prior. Cities that welcome such globally broadcast sporting competitions gain a big opportunity to elevate their country's profile. Furthermore, it offers a chance to promote important values, such as the peaceful nature of sports and sportsmanship. The Olympic opening ceremony, broadcast worldwide, is the prime chance for this. The Rio de Janeiro opening ceremony was, according to Sajna, strategically employed as a tool to showcase the city and to highlight environmental concerns (Sajna 47).

Within the context of the world media, there was mostly praise regarding the opening ceremony in Rio. The Wall Street Journal praised the flair of the opening ceremony, though mentioning that it was less grandiose than the earlier ones. Even in Brazil, the media expressed their pride regarding the execution of the opening ceremony, underscoring the confidence and colourfulness of the country (BBC News). As a counter-narrative to this widely positive reception of the Rio opening ceremony, there was also a lot of criticism regarding the representation of the favelas. Rio on Watch outlined the backlash in a 2016 article. The opening ceremony was directed by film director Fernando Mireilles and it was praised by Time Magazine for its compelling portrayal of difficult historical themes like the enslavement of Afro-Brazilians and the violence against indigenous peoples. However, many marginalised communities experienced the narrative presented by the opening ceremony differently. They felt that the spectacle whitewashed their realities, which aligns with a pattern of presenting a palatable image of contested histories for the rest of the world to see (D. Robertson). This sentiment was particularly ardent with regards to the representation of Rio's favelas. The ceremony presented an overtly joyful tone against the backdrop of favela architecture, which was seen as insensitive to the long-standing suffering caused by societal stigma and neglect. Moreover, the reality of the 77,000 forced evictions connected to the Olympics further amplified this sentiment, creating a sense that the aesthetics and culture of the favelas were being appropriated for commercialised purposes. Meanwhile, the communities of the favelas themselves were not being valued enough for support and preservation.

The power of broadcasting

Lastly, a light will shine on an article about the impact of sporting mega-events in the context of soft power. This scholarly work provides a comprehensive understanding of the different aspects of sporting mega-events. This includes the role of soft power, urban transformation, tourism growth, media coverage, and an improved global image of the host city or nation. It is found that these aspects are at the core of how a sporting mega-event can be characterised and what its impact is. Scholar Tariq Alshikhy is specialised in the application of soft power in sporting mega-events and the article characterises mega-events as large cultural gatherings, with sporting mega-events acting as crucial displays of a nation's soft power on the global stage. The article explains soft power as a tool for building relationships and shared interests, contrasting it with coercion. Governments strategically host these sporting spectacles to enhance their international standing, and gain diplomatic and economic advantages. While the

concept of mega-events is not new, these sporting versions have become increasingly central to strategies for urban transformation, tourism growth, and improved global image. Despite potential difficulties, nations continue to pursue these events as drivers of long-term development and soft power (Alshikhy et al. 2). The authors also define mega-events by highlighting its fixed duration, wide appeal to visitors, extensive media coverage, and high cost with significant societal and environmental impacts. They point out that experiencing a mega-event, like the Olympic Games, has evolved beyond physical attendance. Now, broadcasting and digital platforms enable global participation in the events. This vast media reach is identified as being a key dimension of mega-events, with the authors arguing that travel is no longer a requirement for an event to be considered "mega" due to the influence of broadcasting. While media impact was not initially a primary consideration, the substantial media attention these events attract is now seen as fundamental to their evaluation (3).

Closing off this *status quaestionis*, the aforementioned scholarly articles have provided unique perspectives on the power dynamics, the effects, the narratives, and the media coverage of the Olympic Games. Firstly, Cottrell and Nelson's article presents the international political dimension and the visibility of the Olympics in the context of protest actions. Secondly, Hogan's work focuses on the Olympic opening ceremonies as carefully constructed narratives of national identity. Thirdly, Gold and Gold discuss the long-term commitment and complex outcomes of cities hosting the Olympics. Fourthly, Sajna analyses the branding of Rio during the 2016 Olympic opening ceremony. Finally, Alshiky et al.'s article discusses the role of sporting mega-events in projecting soft power, driving urban transformation, and enhancing global image, emphasising the crucial role of broadcasting.

Main research question and sub-questions

In essence, the Olympics provide a global stage where numerous power structures are at play, with all actors having different interests. While the Olympic Movement seeks to project an image of unity and shared values, host nations strategically leverage this platform to promote their own unique image and interests, sometimes leading to tensions and critiques regarding representation and inclusivity. The aforementioned information then leads to the main research question and the accompanying sub-questions of this thesis. The main research question will be: "How did the interplay of power structures, cultural and historical narratives, and media

effectiveness shape the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, particularly concerning the official narratives versus the counter-narratives surrounding Brazil's heritage?"

As a way to answer this research question, it is also fundamental to outline the sub-questions, which will be as follows:

1. "What power structures were at play during the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics?"
2. "What were the narratives surrounding the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics regarding Brazil's cultural and historical heritage?"
3. "What was the effectiveness of the media's coverage of the official narratives versus the counter-narratives at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics?"

The analytical chapters of this thesis will follow the order of the sub-questions, namely that the first chapter expands on sub-question 1, chapter 2 on the second sub-question, and the last chapter on the final sub-question. In the concluding chapter, the sub-questions will come together to form an answer to the main research question and provide a comprehensive understanding of this thesis.

The subsequent theoretical framework will discuss key concepts such as "heritage" and "soft power", and it will address the inherent power dynamics of these phenomena. It will also outline the impact that mega-events have and possible risks that hosting such events brings.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this research will explore the multifaceted concept of "heritage" by examining its evolving academic understandings, the inherent power dynamics within heritage tourism, and its strategic application in city branding and urban development. It then dissects the theory of "soft power" as a means of understanding how cultural influence can shape global perceptions. It concludes by analysing the significant impacts of mega-events on host communities, highlighting their transformative potential and possible challenges.

Defining heritage

In order to start off the theoretical framework, it is indispensable to provide an academic comprehension of the term "heritage". Considering the book *Tourism, Power and Culture: Anthropological Insights*, it is important to address the academic background of the two editors. Firstly, Donald V.L. Macleod is an anthropologist who specialises in tourism impacts, cultural change, globalisation, identity, and heritage. James G. Carrier is specialised in tourism, environmental conservation and economy. In the fourth chapter of the book, which was written by Macleod, multiple definitions of heritage are given and it becomes evident that the academic understanding has evolved significantly. Initially, it was broadly understood as property passed down through generations or a legacy that is inherited. However, by the late twentieth century, the definition was expanded and it took on a broader scope. For this definition, Macleod cites McCrone et al.: "It has come to refer to a panoply of material and symbolic inheritances, some hardly older than the possessor." (1). The expansion of the definition of heritage is further emphasised by Timothy and Boyd, who noted that heritage now applies "not only to the historic environment, both natural and built, but also to every dimension of material culture, intellectual inheritances, and cultural identities." (5). Browne then further categorises heritage into natural (i.e. landscapes, habitat, and seashores), built (i.e. prehistoric remains, monuments, and buildings), and cultural (i.e. literature, music, art, language, and folklore).

Tourism and the politics of heritage

Continuing with the importance of heritage, in his book *Cultural Heritage and Tourism: An Introduction*, Dallen J. Timothy, who is specialised in tourism management, outlines the politics and the power dynamics in the tourism industry. In chapter six, Timothy describes that heritage

tourism inherently represents a politicised form of tourism. He argues that one of its most common political manifestations lies in the deliberate suppression, omission, or collective amnesia of certain aspects of the past (Timothy 128). Because the selection of heritage sites and products for tourism is particularly selective, some historical elements and features are excluded, overlooked, or actively ignored. This can lead to the marginalisation of certain groups within society, effectively disinheriting them from their own history. This often occurs because a society or its leaders feel unease or embarrassment regarding particular elements of their heritage, a phenomenon known as "contested memory". Frequently, these erasures of the past carry racial undertones.

Timothy goes on to describe that the contested nature of heritage is an important political dimension within the tourism industry. "Heritage dissonance" is a term that describes the existence of conflicting perspectives on the past, including contradictory accounts of historical events and their significance (132). Aiming for a single, objective recount of history is practically impossible, since all interpretations of the past are subject to biases, which shape its presentation. The inherent inconsistency of historical narratives is a constant, Timothy argues. The recounting of the past varies depending on who is telling the story, who wields the power to influence historical narratives, and who is the intermediary. Consequently, historical sites often embody a multiplicity of voices rather than a singular, unified narrative. This can result in a crooked representation of the past, where certain aspects of heritage are privileged while others are marginalised.

The strategic use of heritage

Regarding the contribution of heritage for city branding and tourism management, Dai et al. argue that the strategic use of heritage tourism as a catalyst for urban regeneration has positioned the branding of historical cities as destinations to attract consumers and stimulate economic investments. Tianchen Dai holds a PhD in Architecture and researches how the cultural and social identity of urban landscapes are delivered to people. In the context of cultural heritage, it can serve as a foundational element for the construction of urban identity and the dispersion of a specific urban image. Concretely, sites that are designated as cultural heritage, such as those inscribed on the World Heritage List, are seen as crucial elements of place branding (Dai et al., 1). In other words, through cultural heritage, a city's identity can be formed in the face of city branding.

Shifting the focus from the practical benefits of cultural heritage in city branding, it is also fundamental to gain a deeper comprehension of what cultural heritage specifically entails. According to Purchla, cultural heritage inherently transcends its tangible outer representations, since it encompasses intangible dimensions as well, such as collective memory and identity, which are indispensable elements of societal cohesion. Jacek Purchla is known as an architectural historian and economist. As he argues, cultural heritage requires protection, while simultaneously representing potential for future development (Purchla 568). Furthermore, heritage is intrinsically linked to humankind, encompassing creators, interpreters, and users. Societal stakeholders can be seen as the figurative custodians of cultural heritage, while the determination of its meaning and value depends on their collective interpretation of said heritage (567).

Power through leveraging modernisation

Moving on to the way modernisation can be leveraged on a global stage, a concept that reshaped the understanding of international relations in the second half of the twentieth century is "soft power". This term was pioneered by political scientist and US Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye. He defines power as "the ability to do things and control others, to get others to do what they otherwise would not" (Nye 154). He observes that the traditional understanding of power was heavily reliant on military strength and conquest. However, this definition was becoming more and more outdated as the landscape of international relations began to change. Nye predicted a growing significance of factors such as technology, education, and economic growth in determining a nation's influence. In 1990, Nye foresaw that the sources of power in world politics were undergoing profound transformations, posing new challenges for nations. He emphasises that the demonstration of power would increasingly depend on the ability to shape behaviours rather than merely possessing resources (155).

Nye further elaborates on the diffusion of power, underscoring that modernisation, urbanisation, and enhanced communication in developing countries are transferring influence from governments to private actors. The importance of modern technology, particularly in communication and information, is another key driver of this diffusion (162). These developments contribute to a more complex global environment, where traditional power structures are being challenged. Additionally, an important takeaway from Nye's soft power theory is that power is becoming less transferable, less coercive, and less tangible. This shift

shows the necessity to move away from hard power, which relies more on military and economic coercion, towards soft power, which emphasises attraction and persuasion, as mentioned before. Nye points to diplomacy as a key manifestation of soft power, highlighting the importance of relationships and cooperation in international relations (167). In its essence, soft power is the ability for a nation or institution to co-opt rather than coerce. It involves shaping the preferences of others through appeal and attraction, rather than through force. This includes utilising cultural influences that are seen as desirable. By cultivating these sources of soft power, states can enhance their influence and achieve their goals on a global stage without resorting to coercion.

Mega-events and urban modernisation

In the context of influence and positioning oneself on a global stage, it is also crucial to shift the focus towards the hosting of mega-events, and more specifically the effects it can have on the host community. Alireza Elahi is a professor of sport sciences, specialised in sports management, and he has researched these aforementioned effects. Elahi et al. make the case that sporting mega-events are characterised by their grandeur, and their iconic and prestigious nature, attracting attention across diverse societal realms. These mega-events are acknowledged for their profound, yet often ambivalent, impact on host communities. Mega-events, due to their size, required investments, and effects, exert a considerable influence on the entire host community and, above all, receive widespread global media attention. In particular, sporting mega-events, due to their capacity to enhance tourist appeal, shape the destination image, instigate urban transformation, and generate extensive media coverage. The Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup are salient examples of this, due to the fact that they are renowned for their global prominence and the substantial interest they garner from visitors and audiences worldwide (Elahi et al. 14).

Furthermore, according to Elahi et al., the development of tourism infrastructure and the influx of international visitors are frequently considered to be the key advantages of hosting sporting mega-events. These factors contribute to the expansion of the hospitality sector, and they position the host nation or community positively within the ever changing global tourism landscape. This surge in tourism is acknowledged as a significant catalyst for attracting external investments and to compensate organisational costs associated with such events. Moreover, host cities can strategically leverage these events to redefine their cultural, economic, and urban

trajectories, aiming to generate economic benefits. With regards to social effects, sporting mega-events are associated with positive outcomes such as heightened national pride and prestige, increased public support for the event, elevated levels of community well-being, strengthened national integration, enhanced feelings of social cohesion, and improved social integration. As for the cultural impact of sporting mega-events, some positive outcomes are the promotion of cultural exchange, betterment of intercultural interaction, revitalisation of cultural traditions, better increased cultural visibility, and the fostering of global cultural awareness. Hosting sporting mega-events thus presents a wide array of benefits for host communities, primarily centred on tourism development, economic stimulation and job creation, and enhanced social cohesion and national pride. However, these impacts are often accompanied by significant social and economic challenges, such as increased costs of living and social disruption. Therefore, while mega-events offer a platform for urban and national advancement, it is crucial to gain a deep understanding of both the potential rewards and risks for host nations and communities.

Methodology

The research approach of this thesis is qualitative and descriptive, and it aims to dissect the power structures and the cultural and historical narratives that were at play during the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Olympics. The core objective is to identify and thoroughly analyse the actors and specific narratives that shaped the event. To achieve this, a case study approach is employed, focusing on the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics as the subject of an in-depth examination. The choice for this method facilitates a comprehensive exploration of power relations, and cultural and historical narratives within this specific context, allowing for a nuanced understanding rather than broad generalisations. The analytical framework is thus structured around the varying scopes of influence exerted by different actors and the narratives that shaped the Rio Olympics. This analysis progresses from the actor with the most widespread impact to those whose influence was more localised, and it also considers the effectiveness of the media in amplifying the specific narratives.

The data for the analysis is gathered primarily through a qualitative document analysis. This involves a careful review of several categories of sources. These include official organisational documents, such as those from the official Olympics website, providing insights, for instance, into the International Olympic Committee's role and detailed factsheets outlining the organisational entities. Secondly, academic literature and scholarly articles are utilised to contextualise findings within the established theoretical framework, introducing concepts such as soft power and the impacts of mega-events on host communities. Furthermore, media reports and public statements offer fundamental perspectives, and they help to capture diverse narratives. For instance, to illustrate the Brazilian government's ambitions and its strategic framing of the Olympic bid, a quote from former president Lula is incorporated. Moreover, articles presenting counter-narratives that reflect on the experiences of Rio's residents are included, which highlight issues such as human rights violations and forced evictions, that often challenge official portrayals. They are also vital for underscoring the lived experiences and critical issues. The selection of these documents and articles is with a clear purpose, directly addressing the roles and influences of the identified power structures.

Beyond the identified power structures and the cultural and historical narratives surrounding the 2016 Olympic Games, this thesis also analyses the effectiveness of the media coverage and its impact on the official narratives versus the counter-narratives. The methodological focus here is on examining the dynamics of media representation and its

effectiveness in shaping public perception. Therefore, the methodology of this thesis also includes examining how media outlets presented the historical and cultural narratives surrounding the Olympic Games and how these presentations either aligned with or challenged the official narrative curated by the Olympic Movement and the Brazilian authorities. The case of the Valongo Wharf, especially the media's coverage of its excavation, serves as a poignant example of a counter-narrative that effectively challenges the dominant discourse and advocates for the interests of marginalised communities.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this methodology. While there is an effort to incorporate a range of diverse perspectives found within documented sources, the scope of the analysis is confined to available textual information. The main reliance on document analysis means that the insights that are presented are interpretations of available texts. Consequently, direct empirical data, such as interviews or surveys with the involved actors, fall outside the methodological scope of this research. However, this focused approach allows for a deep textual analysis, leading to insights into the constructed narratives and their underlying power dynamics that would be challenging to achieve through other means.

Ultimately, this research approach enables the present thesis to move beyond simple generalisations and it allows for a comprehensive answer to the overarching research question by addressing each of its sub-questions. There is also a well-defined analytical framework that is supported by specific data collection and interpretive tools. The qualitative insights derived from this methodology proves an understanding of how power was exerted, which historical and cultural narratives were constructed, and how the media effectively influenced these narratives in the context of the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, thereby fulfilling the aims of the thesis.

Chapter 1: Power structures and dynamics

For the first chapter of this thesis, the aim is to dissect the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Olympics and try to answer the question of which power structures were at play and what their roles were. First and foremost, the Olympic Movement as a whole held significant authority. The Brazilian government and the city aimed to leverage the Games for national and urban development goals. The media acted as a crucial mediator and scrutiniser, transmitting information to the public and thus shaping public perception. Finally, the residents of Rio de Janeiro played a vital role in shaping the social and political realities of the event. The interaction and occasional clashes between these power structures defined the planning, execution, and legacy of the 2016 Rio Olympics. In order to structure this first chapter, the focus will first be placed on the Olympic Movement, then the Brazilian authorities, the media, and lastly the citizens of Rio de Janeiro.

The Olympic Movement

Starting off this chapter with the actor that yields the most power within the hosting of the Olympic Games, the Olympic Movement is addressed. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) selects a city to take on the prestigious task of hosting the Olympic Games and this decision is made by a vote of the IOC Session, bestowing both the honour and the significant duties of organisation upon the chosen host. The actual and execution of the Games is then carried out through a collaborative effort, a partnership established between the IOC and the local Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (OCOG). In order to further explain the role of the IOC, the following quote on the Olympics' website underscores the importance and the influence of the committee:

> The Olympic Games are the exclusive property of the IOC, which is the supreme authority for all matters concerning the Games. Its role is to supervise, support, and monitor the organisation of the Games; ensure that they run smoothly; and make sure that the rules of the Olympic Charter and the Olympic Host Contract are respected. It is also the IOC that issues the invitation to NOCs to participate. (International Olympic Committee, "What Is the Role").

To elaborate on this quote, the IOC offers a comprehensive document detailing the various roles and duties involved in staging the Olympic Games. This factsheet clarifies the different organisational entities that work closely with the IOC. According to this document, the Olympic Charter, which was addressed in the *status quaestionis*, identifies the three core components of the Olympic Movement: the IOC itself, the National Olympic Committees (NOCs), and the International Sports Federations (IFs). Furthermore, the OCOGs are also integral, and these four groups bear the responsibility for the planning and execution of each specific edition of the Games. The NOC is a key player in getting the Games ready. It is their job to guide the development of the Olympic project and ensure all involved parties are working together. Once a city is chosen to be the host, the responsibility for organising falls to both the host city and its NOC (International Olympic Committee, *Roles and Responsibilities*).

Continuing with the power structure that is the Olympic Movement, it is then important to explain the constellation of the different committees that comprise the Movement. As mentioned before, the responsibility for organising the Olympic Games is a collaboration between the IOC and the NOC of the host country and the host city itself. To facilitate this, the NOC then establishes an OCOG, which from the very beginning communicates directly with and receives instructions from the IOC. The OCOG's executive body is carefully composed to ensure representation. It includes the IOC member from the host country, the President and Secretary General of the NOC, and at least one designated representative from the host city. Additionally, this body usually includes representatives from public authorities and other influential figures. The OCOG must, at all times, adhere to the Olympic Charter and the directives issued by the IOC Executive Board (International Olympic Committee, "Olympic Games Organising Committees"). More broadly, the aforementioned IOC Session not only elects the host of the Olympic Games, it also serves as the supreme governing body of the IOC. It typically convenes at least once a year and during the Session, it elects the IOC President, Vice-Presidents, other members of the IOC Executive Board, and new IOC Members. Furthermore, it has the power to change the Olympic Charter (International Olympic Committee, "Session").

To further enhance the broadcasting of the Games, the IOC created the Olympic Broadcasting Service (OBS) in 2001. This entity acts as the host broadcaster for every edition of the Olympics, removing the need to continually rebuild the broadcast operation each time. This has led to a more efficient and streamlined process, ensuring consistently high-quality Olympic broadcasts across all Games. OBS is responsible for producing live television, radio,

and online content for the Media Rights-Holders (MRHs), enabling billions of viewers worldwide to experience the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Their coverage is impartial, favouring no specific nation or athlete, and encompasses the sporting events as well as the opening and closing ceremonies (Olympic Broadcasting Services).

This initial exploration established the IOC as the central and most influential actor in the Olympic Games. From selecting the host city and overseeing the entire organisational process to establishing key operational bodies like the OBS, the IOC exerts significant influence and sets the fundamental framework for each edition of the Games. The collaboration with the NOC and the OCOG, while vital for the execution on location, operates under the ultimate authority and guidance of the IOC, as underscored by the Olympic Charter and the IOC's inherent ownership of the Games. This comprehensive understanding of the IOC's power is essential for further analysing the complex dynamics at play in the hosting of the Olympic Games.

The Brazilian Federal Government and the city of Rio de Janeiro

Secondly, the Brazilian government and the host city bore considerable power and influence in shaping the execution of the 2016 Olympic Games. The government's ambition to showcase Brazil as an emerging global power aligns directly with Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, which was explained in the theoretical framework. Hosting the Games was strategically pursued as a means of enhancing national pride and gaining greater international recognition, which are key elements of attracting and persuading through cultural appeal and values, rather than coercion. The anticipated economic benefits, such as increased tourism and infrastructure development, further fuelled this ambition, with significant federal investment directed towards these areas.

Moreover, the Olympics provided a unique opportunity for the city government of Rio to advance urban renewal projects, upgrade infrastructure, and revitalise specific urban spaces, promising long-term advantages for the city. Circling back to the *status quaestionis*, this has been mentioned by Gold and Gold as being a key factor for nations and cities to bid to host the Olympics. Bid committees often foresee an uplift for their construction industry, an increase in tourism, economic growth, and urban renewal. Connecting this to the case of the Rio Olympics, despite the challenges of being the first South American host, Rio aimed to create a lasting positive impact in the realms of education, transportation, and sustainability. The repurposing

of sports facilities for public use, schools, and parks exemplifies an attempt to generate tangible benefits beyond the Games themselves. Brazil's economic growth in the early 2000s was also a motivating factor for the Olympic bid and it underscores the strategic intent to enhance the nation's image and stimulate Rio's economy, leveraging the Games as a tool for soft power projection. The core objectives of the candidature, including urban regeneration, social inclusion, youth development, and the acceleration of social, mobility, and environmental projects, demonstrate a clear intention to use the Olympics as a catalyst for positive national and urban transformation. The emphasis on urban regeneration and transport network overhaul as being central to legacy planning further exemplifies the government and the city's active role in shaping the Games' impact on Brazil's progress (International Olympic Committee, "Rio 2016: Shaping Urban Renewal")

Building upon the understanding of the Brazilian government and Rio de Janeiro's significant influence in shaping the 2016 Olympics, particularly through the lens soft power and the strategic pursuit of national image enhancement and economic benefits, it is important to connect this to the broader impacts of hosting mega-events on the host community, as explored by Elahi et al. in the theoretical framework. Their research underscores that sporting mega-events, like the Olympics, are grand spectacles with profound and often double-edged effects on the host. This aligns with the ambitions of Brazil and Rio, as they aimed for urban transformation and economic growth, echoing the perceived advantages of hosting highlighted by Gold and Gold. The anticipated rise in construction, tourism, economic growth, and urban renewal were central to their bid. Elahi et al.'s work emphasises that while tourism infrastructure development and the influx of tourists are perceived advantages, leading to a positive global positioning, these benefits often come with considerable organisational costs. Furthermore, Elahi et al.'s analysis of the social effects of mega-events resonate with Brazil's aim to project a positive image and foster national pride. In essence, the Brazilian government and Rio's strategic deployment of soft power through hosting the Olympics directly connects to the broader framework provided by Elahi et al. on the multifaceted effects of mega-events on host communities.

A compelling illustration of Brazil's ambition to host the Olympic Games is also found in the speech by former President Luiz Inácio da Silva ("Lula") to the IOC. In his address, Lula framed Rio's candidacy not just as Brazil's, but as South America's, suggesting that denying them the Games would perpetuate a historical injustice. Positioning Brazil as a representative

of the Global South, Lula aimed to correct perceived geopolitical power imbalances and elevate the prominence of the developing world. His direct quote conveys this sentiment:

> It's our time. Among the 10 largest economies in the world, Brazil is the only country that has not hosted the Olympic and Paralympic Games. … For the others, it would be just another Olympics. For us, it would be an opportunity without equal, increasing Brazilians' self-esteem, consolidating recent achievements, and inspiring new progress. … My friends, Brazil is living through an excellent time. We have worked hard in the last decades. We have a thriving economy, which smoothly confronts the crisis that plagues many nations. … Rio's candidature to the Olympic family takes into account this new scenario in which our country has found its place. (Barbassa)

Ultimately, the case of the 2016 Rio Olympics clearly illustrates the significant power and agency held by the host nation and city in shaping the Games to serve their strategic objectives. Driven by ambitions of influence, economic advancement, and urban revitalisation, the Brazilian government and Rio de Janeiro actively aimed to leverage the event for national and local transformation. This ambition exists within a landscape of potential benefits and challenges for the host community.

The media

Thirdly, the media played an important role in shaping the experience of the Games. Not only did they highlight successes, failures, and controversies, they also had the power to scrutinise the actions of the government, the organising committee, and even the Olympic Movement. This extended across various media forms: the written press, through investigative journalism, provided in-depth analyses, while social media platforms offered immediate reactions and allowed for the rapid growth of content made by the general public. Positive media coverage could enhance the image of Rio de Janeiro and Brazil, while negative coverage could undermine the nation's and city's aim for a better global positioning. The media also provided a platform for local residents, activists, and critics to voice their concerns and perspectives on the Olympic Games.

Circling back to the article by Alshikhy et al. on the power of broadcasting, it underscores the crucial role of intermediaries, particularly media organisations and the OBS in shaping perceptions and amplifying the soft power strategies of the host nation. Alshikhy et al. emphasise that modern mega-events, like the Olympics, transcend physical attendance due to the broad reach of broadcasting and digital platforms. This vast media reach positions broadcasters as powerful intermediaries who transmit the Olympic narrative to a global audience, supplemented by the widespread impact of the written press and the interactivity of social media.

The Brazilian government's ambition to project soft power through the Games relied on this media coverage. The images, stories, and overall representation of Rio de Janeiro and Brazil broadcast worldwide became central to achieving their goals of enhanced international standing and a positive image. OBS, as the permanent host broadcaster established by the IOC, acted as a key intermediary in producing and distributing this content to Media Rights-Holders. This centralised operation, as mentioned previously, aimed for consistent high standards and impartial coverage. However, the selection of what is shown, how to frame events, and the overall tone of the broadcast still held the power to shape global perceptions of the host city and nation.

In the context of soft power, the intermediaries of broadcasting held the power to amplify Brazil's predetermined message of being a rising global power, of urban transformation, and of cultural vibrancy. It could also undermine this by actually focussing on the negative aspects or controversies. The narrative constructed through the media became a crucial element in Brazil's soft power strategy. Therefore, understanding the role and influence of these broadcasting intermediaries is essential to a comprehensive analysis of the power of the media during the 2016 Rio Olympics.

Not only TV broadcasts shaped how people perceived the Rio Olympics. Newspapers and social media also played a significant role, making the overall media picture much more complex. Newspapers, from big international ones to small local papers, delved deep into the Olympic stories. They often questioned these official stories and shared detailed information about the Games' effects and any political problems. At the same time, social media sites allowed for everyday people, activists, and even athletes to share their own views. They could post immediate thoughts, criticisms, and different perspectives of the events. These posts can spread quickly without needing approval from traditional news outlets. This open sharing of

information holds the power to create a two-way conversation, making the impact of the general public on the Games' image much bigger.

Put simply, the media landscape surrounding the 2016 Rio Olympics bore significant power as an intermediary between the organising powers and the general public, shaping the global experience and perception of the Games. Beyond merely reporting events, the written press and broadcasting entities like OBS, and the social media realm held the capacity to amplify or undermine Brazil's soft power ambitions. Their framing, along with the selection of narratives presented to a global audience, directly influenced the international image of the host city and nation, making their role a critical lens through which the power dynamics are understood in the context of the 2016 Olympic Games.

The citizens of Rio de Janeiro

Fourthly and lastly, the role of the residents of Rio de Janeiro is addressed. Leading up to the 2016 Olympics, there were numerous civil society groups and local communities that protested against the high costs of the Games and the forced evictions. These movements sought to challenge the dominant power structures and advocate for the interests of marginalised populations, presenting a counter-narrative to the one exerted by the Olympic Movement and the Brazilian authorities. At the time of the Olympic Games in Rio, Letícia Osório, a human rights lawyer, wrote an article on the narratives that Rio did not want the world to see. As the Games neared its opening, the anticipated positive legacy for the city was already failing to become a reality. Being a mirror to the disorganisation that characterised the 2014 World Cup in Rio, the Olympics were also plagued by unfinished and inadequate infrastructure projects, worsened by Brazil's economic and political unrest. The promised improvements for Rio's residents had already gone largely unfulfilled and "instead ended up violating human rights, increasing public debt, and concentrating expensive infrastructure mostly in developed neighbourhoods." (Osório).

The author goes on to describe that a quarter of Rio's six million residents live in impoverished favelas and they were initially promised substantial benefits through the city government's "social legacy plan" for both the World Cup and the Olympics. The residents of the favelas were given hope, since they are historically disadvantaged of investments in public infrastructure. However, rather than fostering positive development of the favelas, these legacy plans further marginalised the city's poorest inhabitants. Controversial forced removals for the

Olympic development projects displaced thousands of families between 2009 and 2015, and 100 evicted families experienced human rights violations. Additionally, according to Osório, "fifty days before the opening of the Olympics, the governor of Rio declared a state of financial emergency and asked for federal support to avoid a collapse in public security, health, education, transportation, and environmental management." To exemplify how these measures harmed marginalised communities, 90% of the favela Vila Autodromo's residents were relocated for the Olympic Park, despite holding land titles, which led to violent clashes.

These experiences on behalf of the Rio de Janeiro residents underscore the imbalances inherent to the Olympic power structures. While the Brazilian government and Rio city officials held significant power in executing the Games and pursuing soft power gains, their actions prioritised infrastructure development aligned with economic interests, often at the expense of their own citizens. The emergence of a civil society network in Rio thus demonstrates a counter-power dynamic. These marginalised communities, excluded from the decision-making process of the government, the OCOG, and the IOC's overarching influence, aimed to challenge the established order. Their efforts yielded the power to advocate for their rights and to resist the top-down power structure. However, despite these efforts, these networks were unable to fundamentally alter the power dynamics that are so deeply rooted in the Olympic realm. The government's ability to bypass regulations and the violence affecting marginalised communities illustrate the limitations of local resistance against the combined power of the state and the IOC.

In other words, the experiences of Rio de Janeiro's residents strongly illustrate the unequal distribution of power in the context of hosting the Olympic Games. Despite promises of widespread benefits, marginalised communities frequently fell victim to displacement and negative consequences, highlighting a disconnect between the structures of the Olympic Movement and the host government, and the lived realities of the city's poorest citizens. While local resistance efforts emerged to counteract these imbalances, they ultimately were unable to overcome the deeply rooted power dynamics that prioritise economic interests above the rights of city residents. This underscores the critical need to consider the perspectives and experiences of host communities when analysing the power structures at play in hosting the Olympic Games.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this first chapter has laid the groundwork for understanding the web of power structures that shaped the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Olympics. Recapitulating the first sub-question, "What power structures were at play during the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics?", this chapter has identified four actors. The overarching authority and role of the Olympic Movement is analysed, demonstrating its enormous influence from the selection of the host city to the overarching framework for the Games' organisation and broadcasting. Subsequently, the analysis shifted to the ambitious objectives of the Brazilian government and the city of Rio de Janeiro, revealing how they strategically leveraged the Olympics as a means of soft power projection, economic advancement, and urban revitalisation, carrying with it a complex relationship between the perceived benefits and the considerable challenges for the host community. Then, the role of the media was addressed, underscoring its capacity to amplify or criticise narratives, thus shaping global perceptions of the event and the host nation. Finally, this first chapter highlighted the experiences of Rio de Janeiro's residents, whose protests and displacements poignantly illustrated the unequal distribution of power and the disconnect between Olympic regulations and the lived realities of local communities. It is in this context of official narratives, media framing, and lived realities that the reception of the general public was forged. Their perceptions were a direct consequence of the organisation of the Games, the problems encountered, and the portrayal of these dynamics by both traditional and new media. The interactions and clashes between these different, yet interconnected, actors defined not only the execution and legacy of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, but also how the world ultimately received them.

Chapter 2: Cultural and historical narratives

The 2016 Rio Olympics represented a complex intersection of ambitions, national aspirations, media portrayals, and the lived realities of the host city's citizens, as outlined in the previous chapter. This mega-event became a stage where multiple, often conflicting, historical and cultural narratives were not only presented but contested. Understanding these diverse perspectives is crucial to grasp the full impact and legacy of these Games. For the second chapter of this thesis, the objective is to get to the root of which specific narratives were present at the 2016 Rio Olympics. This chapter will follow the groundwork laid by the previous chapter, but it will diverge from the structure. Rather than focussing on the different actors, this second chapter will place the focus on the present historical and cultural narratives.

The intersection of Olympism and Brazilian culture

The Olympic Movement actively leverages the Games to promote a positive, universalist narrative deeply rooted in the Olympic Charter. This "handbook" begins by describing the seven fundamental principles of Olympism (International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter* 8-9). The charter, more than just a rulebook, lays the foundation for a comprehensive philosophy of life, emphasising the harmonious integration of sport with culture and education. It seeks to cultivate a lifestyle of effort, positive examples, social responsibility, and respect for human rights. At its core, Olympism aims to harness the power of sport for the advancement of humankind and the fostering of a peaceful society. Principles like political neutrality and the practice of sport as a fundamental human right are central to this overarching narrative.

The opening ceremony of the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics can be seen as a prime example of how this Olympic narrative was translated for a global audience. The narrative that is being presented by the Olympic Movement is crafted around the principles of the Olympic Charter, and this was visually amplified during the opening ceremony. It served, however, not only as an opportunity to showcase the Olympic Movement's core message of unity, but also as a sage for Brazilian history and culture. The opening ceremony, for instance, highlighted Brazil's biodiversity, its complex history of migration and cultural fusion, and its commitment to sustainability. Additionally, the opening ceremony intended to reinforce the idea of the Olympic Movement as a global endeavour uniting all individuals, and it underscored the value of solidarity, all while showcasing the host nation's identity.

In other words, the universalist narrative of Olympism is important for understanding the historical and cultural narratives at the 2016 Olympics because it highlights the Olympic Movement's deliberate construction of a specific, idealised narrative that it projects globally. When a host nation like Brazil steps onto the global stage, it must align its own cultural and historical narratives with these Olympic ideals. This can lead to a selective presentation of the host country's heritage, since it has to align with the aspects that fit with the Olympic philosophy. Furthermore, the opening ceremony becomes a curated event where the host nation's history and culture are presented fitting with the framework of Olympism. For the opening ceremony of Rio 2016, this meant focussing on Brazil's history of migration, cultural fusion, and its biodiversity. Understanding this Olympic narrative is a tool against which other narratives can be compared.

A nation on the rise

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the main narrative that the Brazilian government and the city of Rio de Janeiro were trying to convey was that of soft power and development. The federal government and the city's authorities aimed to use the Olympics to project Brazil as a rising global power, a cultural hotspot, and a modern nation. They foresaw urban revitalisation, economic advancement, and large-scale infrastructure projects. These would then serve as the tangible legacies of the Olympic Games that would benefit citizens and enhance Rio's and Brazil's international position.

The authorities' intended narratives became evident in the bid book that was presented to the IOC in 2009. An Olympic Bid is a file a city submits in order to officially bid to host the Olympic Games. Put simply, it serves as the city's detailed proposal and blueprint for how it intends to organise the Games. The Bid Book covers a wide scope of topics, such as accommodation, environmental and sustainability initiatives, and legacy plans (Runnersneed). The Bid Book presented to the IOC by Brazil starts off with a letter directed at the then president of the IOC, Dr. Jacques Rogge, underlining Brazil's readiness and commitment to host the 2016 Olympic Games. This letter is then signed by the then President of the Republic of Brazil, the Governor of the State of Rio de Janeiro, the Mayor of the City of Rio de Janeiro, and the President of the Brazilian Olympic Committee (Rio 2016 Bid Committee 8). This collective endorsement by the highest levels of federal, state, municipal, and national Olympic authority served as a direct demonstration of the unified political will and consensus behind the Olympic

bid. Therefore, by reinforcing the narrative of capability, commitment, and the future vision for Brazil, the aim is to elevate the country's global position through the Games.

Beyond the urban development narrative, the cultural and historical narratives prominently showcased during the opening ceremony were crucial to this projected image. The story of the opening ceremony starts with a shot of waves crashing on the golden sands of Rio de Janeiro, accompanied by the rhythms of bossa nova music. This opening scene showcases the duality of the city, where on the one hand there is the tranquillity of the beaches, and on the other hand the energy of its urban life. The narrative then delves into the core of Brazilian creativity, presenting "gambiarra", which is the art of resourcefulness and improvisation. What follows is the story of how the Europeans came to Brazil. It is explained that the Brazilian territory was almost entirely covered by a forest when the Europeans landed there 500 years prior and this scene is intended to honour the indigenous people. It is highlighted that nowadays, there are around 900.000 indigenous people in Brazil, divided into 305 ethnic groups speaking 274 different languages. The narrative then shifts to the arrival of the Europeans and the journey of the Portuguese across the ocean. For them, Brazil was the land where everything grows and the origin of the name "Brazil" is also mentioned, which is rooted in the valuable brazilwood. The ceremony acknowledges the colonisation of Brazil, showing that the arrival of the Europeans made an impact on the landscape. The story then introduces the arrival of Africans, a poignant segment marked by the imagery of wheels, sticks, and shackles. It is mentioned that the Africans would leave their footprint on the nation and the narrative emphasises their profound impact on Brazilian heritage (Olympics).

In short, the narratives constructed by the Brazilian government and the city of Rio de Janeiro for the 2016 Olympic Games were primarily centred around an image of a nation on the rise. The core message revolved around soft power and development, aiming to present Brazil as a modern and globally influential country. This aim was evidenced by the Olympic Bid book, a comprehensive proposal that detailed plans for urban revitalisation, economic advancement, and major infrastructure projects, all intended to serve as lasting legacies for the city. The political endorsement of the bid underscored a commitment to this ambition. Beyond the development of the city, the cultural and historical narratives were prominently showcased during the opening ceremony. It acknowledged Brazil's rich and complex past, ranging from its indigenous roots to the impacts of European colonisation and the profound contributions of African heritage.

Unearthing omitted histories through a counter-narrative

Circling back to the way the citizens of Rio de Janeiro challenged the dominant power structures and advocated for the interests of marginalised communities, which was mentioned in the previous chapter, there was also a counter-narrative presented regarding the dominant narratives of the Olympic Movement and the governmental authorities. This counter-narrative can be explained through the case of the Valongo Wharf. While the official narrative sought to project an image of urban revitalisation and modernity, the excavation of the Valongo Wharf exposed a deeply problematic aspect of Rio's history and its contemporary approach to heritage. During the Porto Maravilha project, construction was shaken up when it unexpectedly uncovered Rio's dark past with regards to slave trade. With Rio having been the largest entry point for African slaves to the Americas, due to the modernisation project, the Valongo Wharf was excavated. The wharf served as a major hub for slave trade between Africa and the Americas, with almost a million African slaves being trafficked there before the abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1831. Apart from the mooring place of the port, there was also a huge slave market where chains and shackles were sold, and where slaves were being displayed for sale in a multitude of shops. Moreover, near the wharf was also a cemetery located, where between 1770 and 1830 thousands of slaves were buried. It is thus evident that the excavation of the Valongo Wharf and the Porto Maravilha project for the 2016 Olympics showed that the area is a poignant reminder of Brazil's past and role in slave trade (Carneiro).

Cottrell and Nelson's work, which was cited in the *status quaestionis*, on the political dimensions of the Olympic Games provides an important framework for understanding the narratives pushed by the Olympic Movement and the Brazilian government, especially by highlighting the tension between official narratives and the reality of the political contestation on behalf of the citizens of Rio de Janeiro. The article by Cottrell and Nelson argues that the Olympics are not merely sporting events, but rather stages for global political conflict. The Olympic Movement and the Brazilian government's aim was to project a narrative of unity, spectacle, urban revitalisation, and national pride for the 2016 Games. However, this narrative was inherently challenged by multiple political struggles. It can be argued that the "political incident" at the Rio Olympics was the excavation of the Valongo Wharf during the Porto Maravilha project. The urban modernisation projects were presented as symbols of progress, but the discovery of the wharf during these construction efforts revealed that this revitalisation was being built upon obscured histories and suffering. For many citizens of Rio, especially

those from Afro-Brazilian communities, this underscored a gap in the official narrative, which prioritised a new image over the city's complex and dark past.

Summarising, the excavation of the Valongo Wharf exposed a powerful counter-narrative to the official governmental and Olympic Movement messages of urban revitalisation and modernity. While the organisers aimed to craft an image of progress and pride, the unearthing of the Valongo Wharf revealed Rio's deep roots of slave trade. This site, where nearly a million enslaved Africans were trafficked, served as a poignant reminder of Brazil's obscured history of suffering. This discovery created tension between the official narrative of a unified, modern Brazil and the reality of its painful past for the Afro-Brazilian communities. This counter-narrative highlighted that the promised urban renewal was built upon omitted histories, challenging the notion of progress.

Conclusion

To recapitulate the second sub-question, namely "What were the narratives surrounding the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics regarding cultural and historical heritage?", this chapter provides an overview of the conflicting narratives surrounding the 2016 Rio Olympics regarding cultural and historical heritage. The Olympic Movement aimed to convey a holistic philosophy rooted in the seven fundamental principles of the Olympic Charter. This narrative, centred on unity and political neutrality, was visually amplified during the opening ceremony, showcasing Brazil's culture. The Brazilian governmental authorities sought to project an image of soft power and development. Their narrative highlighted Brazil as a rising global power, to be achieved through urban revitalisation and economic advancement, as evidenced in the 2009 Olympic Bid Book. The opening ceremony also conveyed cultural and historical narratives, acknowledging colonisation and African heritage. Finally, the excavation of the Valongo Wharf presented a crucial counter-narrative. This discovery exposed Rio's dark past as the largest entry point for African slaves in the Americas and it highlighted the city's obscured histories of suffering. This incident underscored a gap between the official narrative and the counter-narrative of many citizens, especially Afro-Brazilian communities.

Chapter 3: Media coverage of official and counter-narratives

The third and final chapter of this research will look at the effectiveness of media in shaping the narratives versus counter-narratives of the 2016 Rio Olympics. There will be a special focus on the media's portrayal of the opening ceremony and how this intersects with the inherent power dynamics, which were described in the first chapter, and heritage, which was presented in the theoretical framework. Beyond the official narratives, this chapter will also examine the media's effectiveness in highlighting counter-narratives, specifically regarding the unfulfilled promises of the Games and the significance of the Valongo Wharf's excavation.

Heritage in the opening ceremony

As for the role of the media in amplifying the narratives surrounding the Rio Olympics, their influence cannot be overstated. Initially, a lot of the articles about the opening ceremony of the 2016 Olympic Games centred around the athletes of the country where the news outlet is based. For instance, a British outlet wrote about the athletes for Team Great Britain during the flag parade at the opening ceremony (Bhardwaj), and an African website about the Gambian delegation (Trawally). However, there is also an overarching theme regarding the news about the opening ceremony, namely that the articles often mention the aspects that were widely known. An example of this is that Brazilian Victoria's Secret supermodel Gisele Bündchen had her own moment during the opening ceremony. Bündchen walked the runway in the stadium to the rhythm of the song "The Girl from Ipanema", which is described as a moment of Brazilian glamour. According to the Media Guide of the opening ceremony, Bündchen is the world's most successful model and her walk during the ceremony would be her last catwalk, as she closed her modelling career in front of 60.000 spectators in the stadium in addition to the global audience (Rio 2016 Organizing Committee 21).

This focus on universally appealing elements, such as a famous supermodel, a well-known song, and also broader stereotypes of the beaches and carnival in Rio, demonstrates how the media often prioritised aspects that were already broadly familiar to a global audience. While providing localised content for national audiences, the international media amplified these easily recognisable symbols of Brazil. This meant that, despite diverse national reporting angles, the overall narrative of the media largely mirrored the official efforts of the Olympic Movement and Brazilian governmental authorities. Therefore, the media acted as a powerful, influential actor in solidifying the narratives that the organisers aimed to convey, without

straying far from the intended message of Brazil as a nation capable of hosting a major sporting event. Taking into account this information about the media coverage of the 2016 Olympic opening ceremony, it is evident that in this context, the media largely and effectively conveyed the official narratives at the Rio Olympics, with minimal evidence of counter-narratives. Media outlets consistently highlighted universally appealing elements alongside broader Brazilian stereotypes. This focus on familiar symbols served to amplify the positive portrayal of Brazil as a capable host nation.

This dominant media portrayal of the opening ceremony can also be linked to the power dynamics inherent in the definition and presentation of heritage. As Macleod and Carrier, whose ideas are explained in the theoretical framework, suggest, the concept of heritage is intertwined with power, initially implying inherited property and thus the transmission of authority. The shift to a broader definition opens up a space for contention, describing heritage as "material and symbolic inheritances" and "cultural identities" (Macleod and Carrier 64). The question that arises is who decides what constitutes these symbolic elements, and whose interpretations are favoured. In the context of the Rio Olympics, the media's focus of the opening ceremony on glamour and widely known aspects of Brazilian culture aligns with how those in positions of power, for instance the Olympic Movement and the Brazilian authorities, select and present heritage. This also aligns with Macleod's observation that heritage is often "deliberately oriented towards outsiders and visitors in order to be appealing or to underscore a specific image of the host community." (65). By amplifying elements like Gisele Bündchen's appearance at the opening ceremony, the media was effectively conveying the official, marketable image of Brazil curated by the Olympic Movement and the government. In other words, the media's effectiveness in covering the opening ceremony is in its active participation in solidifying a curated version of Brazilian heritage that serves the interests of the organisers.

Boost or sedative

In order to examine the effectiveness of the media's coverage of the Rio Olympics on the official narrative, it is also crucial to shine a light on the promised benefits on behalf of the Brazilian authorities. Firstly, the Olympic Movement painted the economic impact of the Games on Rio in a positive manner. In a 2019 article, the IOC argued that an independent study concluded that the Olympic Games had a positive economic impact on both the city and its wider metropolitan area. The article also mentioned that the Olympics helped mitigate the

consequences of Brazil's worst recession (International Olympic Committee, "New independent study"). Furthermore, IOC president Thomas Bach saw the Rio Olympics as a success story. In reality, however, it was chaos organisationally speaking, with many venues having empty seats and huge disparities between the projected number of sales and reality (Gibson). At the same time, Bach was already under scrutiny, with news outlets critiquing his weak leadership in light of the Russian doping scandal and his good relationship with Vladimir Putin. Because of this, Bach's credibility as leader of the Olympic Movement was severely damaged (Herbert).

It can be said that the Olympic Movement saw the Rio Olympics through rose coloured glasses, while the media often spoke of it differently. An article on the legacy of Rio 2016 spoke of the key goals behind the city's candidature as being the transformation of the city, social inclusion, and urban regeneration (International Olympic Committee, "Rio 2016"). The question that arises is if these promises came to fruition. The mood before the Games was described as gloomy, since many Brazilians had low expectations. The Rio Olympics were marked by corruption allegations, scandals, and debt, and the lower-income areas saw very little benefits from the Olympics (Phillips). It is said that the amount of debt of the 2016 Olympics soared, exceeding three times its reported amount (Morgan).

As for the tourism industry and the benefits the Olympic Games could bring to the city of Rio de Janeiro, the IOC argues that hosting the Games enables development in, among others, the tourism and events industry (International Olympic Committee, "Economic benefits"). It was projected by Rio's organising committee that the Games would bring roughly 350,000 to 500,000 additional visitors to Brazil. Moreover, the president of Brazil's tourism board hoped to leverage this increased visibility to bring in more tourists in the long run, due to the exposure of the Games. However, the city's tourism industry did not benefit greatly from the Games after they ended. The European Tour Operators Association even stated that there is no strong link between hosting sporting events and increased tourism (Duignan).

Another aspect that is worth considering is the different perspectives presented by news outlets of different countries. There was a mixed international media reception of the 2016 Olympics, considering the fact that some outlets praised the event, while many foreign journalists raised critical questions about the event's legacy and value. Despite the positive spins from Brazilian media and government, international reporters often questioned the long-term benefits and social costs of the Games. There were concerns raised about issues such as increasing poverty and a struggling state government. Furthermore, many articles emphasised

the exclusion of favela residents and the disproportionate social burdens, and they questioned whether the improvements made to infrastructure truly solved the underlying social problems (C. Robertson). A year after the Games' conclusion, the Dutch media reported on the economic and social state of Rio, wondering if the Olympics truly improved the conditions of Rio's citizens. Dutch news outlet NOS reported that Rio declared bankruptcy, a situation that was worsened by mismanagement and corruption. In addition to that, violent gang conflicts reignited and as a result, the military was deployed in an effort to restore order within the city's favelas (Houthuijs). It becomes evident, then, that the international media amplified the disconnect between the Olympic spectacle and the lived experiences of the inhabitants of the favelas. This stark contrast underscores how the celebratory narrative of the Games often overshadowed the challenges that plagued the favelas.

In short, the media's coverage of the 2016 Rio Olympics provided a counter-narrative to the official claims of economic success put forth by the Brazilian authorities and the Olympic Movement. While the IOC asserted that an independent study confirmed a positive economic impact, which mitigated Brazil's recession, the media often painted a different picture. The media highlighted the organisational chaos, empty seats at venues, and a disparity between projected sales and reality. Additionally, key promises, such as urban transformation and social inclusion, which were central to Rio's candidature, went mostly unfulfilled. The media reported on corruption, scandals, and soaring debt, with lower-income areas seeing minimal benefits. In essence, the media effectively challenged the official narrative of economic prosperity and a successful legacy, instead underscoring the financial and social shortcomings of the Rio Olympics.

Uncomfortable heritage

Taking into account the counter-narrative that was the excavation of the Valongo Wharf, it is clear that the media's coverage of it during the preparations for the 2016 Games influenced the narrative surrounding the site. The unearthing of the wharf in 2011 was a direct consequence of urban development for the Olympic Games and it brought a previously buried and frequently ignored aspect of Brazil's history to the foreground. The media reported on the unearthing of the wharf and it was identified as the largest disembarkation point for enslaved Africans to the Americas, which made this historical fact a counter-narrative to the projected image of the Olympic Movement and the Brazilian authorities. The media coverage of the excavation of the

Valongo Wharf thus made that the narrative shifted from urban development to historical acknowledgement. Furthermore, beyond reporting on the archaeological find, the media's attention for the Valongo Wharf raised awareness about its historical significance.

It is evident that the media played a crucial role in the increase of visibility of the unearthing of the Valongo Wharf. According to a booklet made by the Contested Histories Initiative in 2023, after its decommission in 1843, the Valongo Wharf was renamed the Empress Wharf, in commemoration of the arrival of Princess Teresa Cristina of Bourbon. This kickstarted the wharf's shift of focus from slave trade towards a more polished and sanitised image. At the start of the twentieth century, Rio de Janeiro saw a huge rise in white Portuguese immigrants, many of whom relocated themselves to the traditionally black neighbourhood of Little Africa. With a complete transformation of Rio, the Valongo Wharf became more or less abandoned and consequently, the wharf was landfilled and left untouched until its excavation in 2011 (The Contested Histories Initiative 3). Since the unearthing, there have been multiple proposals with the aim of establishing a memorial structure at the Valongo Wharf, but they were commonly met with slow progress and ineffectual decision-making. Due to the spotlight on the city of Rio de Janeiro leading up to the Olympic Games, the media attention for the Valongo Wharf was significant. This made that in 2012, the wharf was listed as an officially protected archaeological site and it was registered with the Institute for National Historical and Artistic Patrimony (IPHAN). In 2017, UNESCO added the Valongo Wharf to the World Heritage List, being a sensitive memory site (8). Then, in 2021, the Brazilian Senate approved a bill that recognises the Valongo Wharf as an Afro-Brazilian historical-cultural heritage site, essential to the formation of national identity (10). The booklet concludes by mentioning that the case of the Valongo Wharf underscores that "Brazil has historically refused to face questions of race." (11).

In other words, the media played an important role in highlighting the counter-narrative presented by the unearthing of the Valongo Wharf. The excavation was a direct result of urban development for the Games and this revelation stood in stark contrast to the sanitised image projected by the Olympic Movement and Brazilian authorities. The media's sustained attention increased the visibility of the Valongo Wharf, which was historically obscured and intended to be omitted for a polished image of the city of Rio. This heightened awareness contributed to the wharf's official recognition as an archaeological site and its addition to the UNESCO World Heritage List. Linking this back to the article by Dai et al., cultural heritage sites that are inscribed on the World Heritage List are crucial elements of place branding, through which a

city's identity can be formed (Dai et al. 1). Media attention amplified the excavation of the wharf, bringing the site to international awareness and challenging the image of a progressive Brazil that the authorities were trying to project. Thus, the media's role went beyond reporting the news and it shaped the narrative, contributing to the site's preservation and underscoring the importance of heritage.

Similar to the Valongo Wharf, the lived realities in the favelas were also largely omitted, as they present an inconvenient reality. Both the wharf's history and the favelas' realities served as poignant counter-narratives that challenged the idealised image of Rio. These cases, as highlighted by media coverage, underscored Brazil's historical reluctance to confront social issues of race and slavery, considering the fact that many of the residents of the favelas are Afro-Brazilian. The media coverage of the Valongo Wharf and the favelas brought these issues to the forefront. Making a clear connection to the politics of heritage, as described by Timothy, there is a deliberate omission of these aspects of Brazil's heritage. Given the selective process of choosing heritage sites for place promotion, certain historical elements are excluded and disregarded, which can lead to the alienation of marginalised groups. This often happens when there is a certain discomfort regarding aspects of heritage and these erasures carry racial undertones. Therefore, the Valongo Wharf and the favelas represented inconvenient aspects of Brazil's heritage. Highlighted by media coverage, they served as counter-narratives challenging the idealised Olympic image, exposing Brazil's reluctance to confront issues of race and slavery through the deliberate omission of such heritage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, answering the sub-question "What was the effectiveness of the media's coverage of the official narratives versus the counter-narratives at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics?", the media's influence on the narratives surrounding the 2016 Olympics was highly effective, shaping public perception of both official messages and counter-narratives. Initially, the media aligned with the official narrative, particularly regarding the opening ceremony. By focussing on universally appealing elements of Brazilian culture, news outlets mirrored the Olympic Movement's and Brazilian authorities' efforts to portray Rio as a capable host. This amplification on behalf of the media solidified the desired reputation of Brazil to a global audience. However, there were also instances where the media's coverage of the Games effectively provided counter-narratives. With regards to the economic aspects, media coverage

challenged the official narratives of positive impact. While the IOC projected economic benefits and recession mitigation, the media exposed the reality of organisational chaos, empty venues, huge debt, corruption allegations, and minimal benefits to the low-income areas of Rio. This pointed to the media's effectiveness to paint a critical, contrasting image to the official narrative. The emphasis on behalf of the IOC on benefits also serves as a reminder that highlighting Brazil's heritage was not a priority to them. Lastly, the media attention for the Valongo Wharf raised awareness about Brazil's dark past with slavery and this contributed to the wharf's addition to the UNESCO World Heritage List. Similarly, the lived realities in the favelas represented another inconvenient reality, with the favelas and the wharf serving as counter-narratives challenging the idealised Olympic image of Rio, underscoring Brazil's reluctance to confront uncomfortable aspects of its heritage. Therefore, the media's coverage of the Olympics was highly effective, not only reinforcing the official narratives, but more critically in amplifying counter-narratives that exposed organisational shortcomings and bringing forth suppressed historical narratives, providing a more complex understanding of the Rio Olympics legacy.

Conclusion

Recapitulating the aforementioned sub-questions and trying to formulate an answer to the main research question, the intent of this thesis was to illuminate the complex dynamics at play regarding the heritage of a host nation, the cultural and historical narratives, and the media's effectiveness when it comes to amplifying the official and counter-narratives. Circling back to the main research question, which was "How did the interplay of power structures, cultural and historical narratives, and media effectiveness shape the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, particularly concerning the official narratives versus the counter-narratives regarding Brazil's heritage?", this thesis has made it clear that the hosting of the 2016 Olympics went far beyond the sporting aspects.

This investigation first addressed the four key power structures, those being the Olympic Movement, the Brazilian Federal Government and the city of Rio de Janeiro, the media, and the citizens of Rio de Janeiro. Within these power dynamics, the Olympic Movement held the overarching authority, influencing the event's organisation and the global perception, from the host city selection to the broadcasting. The Brazilian authorities then intended to strategically leverage the Games for soft power projection, economic development, and urban revitalisation. The media played a crucial role in amplifying and criticising narratives, in the process shaping perceptions to a global audience. Furthermore, the lived realities of Rio's citizens, particularly with regards to forced evictions and protests, exposed the stark power imbalances and the disconnect between the Olympic Movement's objectives and the experiences of local communities, such as the residents of Rio's favelas.

Moreover, this research explored the cultural and historical narratives within the context of the Rio Olympics. The official narrative is traced back to the Olympic Movement. This power structure presented universalist ideals of Olympism that emphasised peace, unity, and human rights through sport. The Brazilian government's narrative aligned with this, hoping to achieve modernity and development, and leveraging the Olympics to present itself as a rising global power. These narratives were, however, challenged by poignant counter-narratives that underscored omitted uncomfortable histories, such as the excavation of the Valongo Wharf and the realities of favela residents. These counter-narratives powerfully exposed the selective presentation of Brazil's heritage to the rest of the world and they underscored that uncomfortable aspects of the country's past were deliberately suppressed and disregarded in favour of a more palatable image for a global audience. In this context, the Brazilian

government recognised that billions of people would be watching the coverage of the sporting events held in the city of Rio and it favoured the omission of the painful pasts of marginalised communities over tainting the sanitised image it had set out for itself for the Olympic Games.

Finally, this thesis also investigated the media's effectiveness in amplifying both the curated official narratives on behalf of the Olympic Movement and the Brazilian authorities, and the counter-narratives experienced by the residents of Rio. While many news outlets initially praised the opening ceremony and the overall spectacle of the Olympics, aligning with the official narrative, the critical media coverage took the upper hand overall. International sources brought the omitted histories of the Valongo Wharf and the realities of favela residents to the forefront narratively speaking. This media amplification underscored the organisational shortcomings and suppressed histories on behalf of the Olympic Movement and the Brazilian authorities, and it challenged the sanitised image Rio intended to project to a global audience. The media undoubtedly had a crucial role in shaping global perceptions and contributing to the recognition of the heritage of the Valongo Wharf and the favelas, which are historically marginalised.

In conclusion, to concretely answer the main research question, the interplay of power structures, cultural and historical narratives, and media effectiveness shaped the 2016 Rio Olympics by bringing to light the official narratives versus the counter-narratives regarding Brazil's heritage, and ensuring that the counter-narratives be impactful through the media amplification. The power structures were challenged by the lived realities and omitted histories brought forth by the citizens, particularly in the favelas and by the unearthing of the Valongo Wharf. The cultural and historical narratives were contested as a result: the sanitised Olympic image of Rio de Janeiro clashed with the uncomfortable truths of the past, with these hidden histories acting as critical counter-narratives to the official narratives. Finally, the media's role was pivotal. Although they initially aligned with the official narratives, they also highlighted the counter-narratives by exposing shortcomings and challenges, and more importantly, the suppressed nature of Brazil's heritage. This amplification reshaped international perceptions, which allowed for the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics to move beyond a mere sporting spectacle and create a more complex legacy.

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