

Analysis of KNVB Sports Diplomacy through Oranje Festival in Indonesia

Ramadhani¹, Reynaldi¹, Situmeang¹, Nurmasari¹

¹Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jakarta, Indonesia

Email: reynalogy@gmail.com

Abstract. *This study analyzes the implementation of sports diplomacy conducted by the Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbalbond (KNVB) through the Oranje Festival program in Indonesia. The research examines how football is utilized as an instrument of soft power and public diplomacy to strengthen relations between the Netherlands and Indonesia. Using a qualitative descriptive method and a case study approach, this research explores the role of football festivals in shaping public perception, cultural engagement, and transnational cooperation between football institutions and communities. The findings indicate that the Oranje Festival functions not only as a sports event but also as a strategic diplomacy platform involving football development, fan engagement, media exposure, and bilateral cooperation between KNVB and Indonesian stakeholders such as PSSI and local communities. The festival also facilitates cultural exchange, people-to-people interaction, and the promotion of Dutch football values among Indonesian audiences, enhancing mutual understanding and international engagement. Through football activities, cultural interaction, branding strategies, and grassroots engagement, KNVB successfully projects a positive image of Dutch football identity in Indonesia. This research concludes that sports diplomacy through football festivals can become an effective non-state diplomatic instrument in strengthening soft power, public diplomacy, and international relations in the contemporary global era.*

Keywords: *Sports Diplomacy, Soft Power, KNVB, Oranje Festival, Indonesia-Netherlands Relations*

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INTRODUCTION

International relations in the contemporary era are no longer limited to formal interactions between governments. Globalization has transformed the nature of diplomacy, enabling non-state actors such as corporations, media institutions, non-governmental organizations, cultural actors, and sports organizations to play increasingly important roles in international engagement. Contemporary diplomacy increasingly operates through networks of state and non-state actors, while international sports organizations have become relevant participants in international affairs (Postlethwaite et al., 2023; Parrish, 2022; Surowiec & Manor, 2021). The expanding role of non-state sporting organizations reflects the broader transformation of diplomacy from exclusively state-centered practices toward more plural and networked forms of international engagement (Postlethwaite et al., 2023; Gargalianos, 2025).

One of the most visible manifestations of this transformation is sports diplomacy, which utilizes sport as a medium for communication, contact, and international engagement. Unlike traditional diplomacy, sports diplomacy creates opportunities for interaction through shared experiences and cultural exchange. Recent scholarship conceptualizes sports diplomacy as a multidimensional practice involving states, international organizations, sporting institutions,

athletes, and other non-state actors (Postlethwaite et al., 2023; Abdi et al., 2022; Kobierecki & Pigman, 2025). Sports can facilitate communication, relationship building, symbolic representation, and the projection of national identities beyond conventional diplomatic channels (Mancoš & Gura, 2022; Pugu, 2022). Among various sports, football occupies a particularly influential position due to its global popularity and its ability to generate strong emotional attachment among supporters. Football has increasingly been examined as a diplomatic instrument because national teams, football associations, players, and international competitions can become platforms for political communication and international image construction (Rajkiewicz, 2022; Li & Feng, 2022). The relationship between football and nation branding is particularly significant because the sport can communicate narratives about national identity, modernity, culture, and international status to global audiences (Dubinsky, 2023; Li & Feng, 2022).

The Netherlands is one of the countries with a strong football identity in global sports culture. Internationally associated with the Total Football philosophy, its youth development system, and a long-standing football tradition, Dutch football has become an important component of the country's international image. Football can operate as a cultural resource through which national identity and country image are communicated internationally, particularly when sporting institutions and national teams become recognizable symbols of national identity (Dubinsky, 2023; Dinnie, 2021). The Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbalbond (KNVB), the official football federation of the Netherlands, plays a central role not only in football governance but also in representing Dutch football abroad. The contemporary literature emphasizes that international sports federations and national sporting organizations can function as diplomatic actors because their international activities generate channels of communication and engagement that are not necessarily controlled by foreign ministries (Postlethwaite et al., 2023; Parrish, 2022; Gargalianos, 2025). In this sense, Dutch football can be regarded as one of the cultural assets available to the Netherlands' broader international image and nation-branding efforts (Dubinsky, 2023; Dinnie, 2021; Knott, 2024).

Indonesia is a relevant setting for Dutch football engagement because of its large football fan base, its growing sports industry, and its historical connections with the Netherlands. Within this context, KNVB organized the Oranje Indonesia Festival (hereafter, the Oranje Festival), which was publicly announced in September 2022 as an event to be held while the Netherlands national team competed in the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar (Bola.com, 2022a; DetikSport, 2022). Media reports describe the festival as comprising public viewing sessions (nonton bareng) of the Netherlands' World Cup matches, announced appearances by former Dutch national team players, and meetings between KNVB representatives and Indonesian supporters of the Dutch team (Bola.com, 2022b, 2022c; CNN Indonesia, 2022; Goal Indonesia, 2022). Such activities are consistent with the broader understanding of sports diplomacy as extending beyond major sporting competitions toward people-to-people engagement, communication, and cultural interaction (Abdi et al., 2022; Postlethwaite et al., 2023; Mancoš & Gura, 2022). Evidence from Indonesia also demonstrates that sporting events can be combined with cultural and diplomatic objectives to strengthen international engagement and promote positive images abroad (Eljatin et al., 2024; Musyaffa et al., 2024).

The Oranje Festival is relevant from an International Relations perspective because it brings together several contemporary diplomatic dimensions: sports diplomacy, public diplomacy, soft power, nation branding, and the international activity of non-state actors. Public diplomacy emphasizes communication and relationship building with foreign publics, while contemporary scholarship increasingly highlights its networked, participatory, and transnational character (Cull & Hawes, 2021; Surowiec & Manor, 2021). Sports diplomacy can therefore operate as a form of public diplomacy when sporting organizations establish direct relationships with foreign audiences and use sport to communicate national or institutional narratives (Pugu, 2022; Mancoš & Gura, 2022). Soft power, meanwhile, concerns the ability to generate attraction and influence through culture, values, institutions, and policies rather than coercion or material

inducement (Santos, 2024; James, 2021). Recent studies demonstrate that sport can contribute to soft power by providing visible and emotionally engaging platforms through which countries and sporting organizations communicate identity, values, and reputation (Søyland & Moriconi, 2022; Jeong et al., 2024; Grix & Brannagan, 2024). The festival offers a bounded and publicly documented case through which it is possible to examine how a football federation, rather than a foreign ministry, organizes engagement with a foreign public and which symbolic resources it deploys in doing so.

The relevance of sports diplomacy is further strengthened by the growing recognition that sporting organizations may operate across the boundaries between state diplomacy and international-sport-as-diplomacy. Recent research argues that the distinction between state-led sport diplomacy and diplomatic activity undertaken by non-state sporting actors has become increasingly blurred (Postlethwaite et al., 2023; Kobierecki & Pigman, 2025). International sporting institutions can communicate political, cultural, and social meanings without necessarily acting as direct representatives of governments (Parrish, 2022; Gargalianos, 2025). The role of football organizations is particularly important because football associations possess established international networks, recognizable brands, media visibility, and access to large communities of supporters (Rajkiewicz, 2022; Musyaffa et al., 2024). Consequently, football-related activities may create diplomatic spaces in which interpersonal contact and cultural identification complement more formal bilateral relations.

Despite the growing relevance of sports diplomacy, academic studies on football diplomacy in Indonesia remain relatively limited compared to research focused on political and security issues. In particular, little attention has been given to fan-oriented football events organized by foreign football federations as instruments of engagement within Indonesia–Netherlands relations. Existing research has demonstrated the relevance of sports diplomacy in Indonesia through cases such as the 2023 FIFA U-17 World Cup and the MotoGP Mandalika event, but these studies primarily examine Indonesia as the initiating or hosting actor (Musyaffa et al., 2024; Eljatin et al., 2024). This study therefore addresses the following research question: How does the Oranje Festival function as an instrument of sports diplomacy? To answer this question, the study (1) identifies the activities and messages of the Oranje Festival as documented in publicly available sources; (2) analyzes how these documented activities relate to the concepts of sports diplomacy, public diplomacy, soft power, and non-state actorness; and (3) discusses the potential contributions and limitations of the festival for engagement between Indonesia and the Netherlands. The analytical relevance of these dimensions is supported by recent research emphasizing that sports diplomacy should be examined through its actors, instruments, communication processes, and possible diplomatic outcomes rather than solely through conventional state-to-state relations (Abdi et al., 2022; Postlethwaite et al., 2023; Kozman & Anghelcev, 2025).

The scope of this study should be stated clearly at the outset. Because the analysis relies on publicly available documents, it examines what KNVB reportedly did and how the festival was presented to the public. It does not measure the festival's effects on public perceptions, trust, or bilateral relations; where such outcomes are discussed, they are presented as possible contributions and plausible interpretations rather than demonstrated effects. This distinction is important because the literature cautions against automatically equating the use of sport with successful diplomatic outcomes. Sports diplomacy may create opportunities for dialogue, attraction, and relationship building, but its actual outcomes depend on context, actors, audience reception, and the wider political environment (Abdi et al., 2022; Grix & Brannagan, 2024; Rajkiewicz, 2022). Research on sports diplomacy also demonstrates that sporting initiatives can generate both positive diplomatic opportunities and critical responses, particularly when sporting activities become associated with political or reputational objectives (Søyland & Moriconi, 2022; Jeong et al., 2024).

Academically, this research contributes to the literature on sports diplomacy, public diplomacy, and soft power by examining a football federation as a diplomatic actor in a Southeast

Asian setting. It responds to the growing scholarly interest in non-state sporting organizations and the expansion of sports diplomacy beyond state-centered approaches (Postlethwaite et al., 2023; Parrish, 2022). It also contributes to scholarship on football and nation branding by examining a supporter-oriented activity rather than a conventional mega-event or national hosting strategy (Li & Feng, 2022; Dubinsky, 2023). Practically, it offers insight for football federations, sports organizations, and policymakers regarding the design and evaluation of sport-based engagement with foreign publics. Such engagement can provide platforms for communication, cultural exchange, reputation building, and people-to-people interaction, while its diplomatic significance should be evaluated carefully rather than assumed from the existence of a sporting event alone (Knott, 2024; Kozman & Anghelcev, 2025; Ramazan et al., 2025).

Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies

Traditional approaches in International Relations have primarily treated states as the dominant actors in world politics. Globalization, however, has expanded the role of non-state actors, including multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations, international institutions, media organizations, and sports organizations (Postlethwaite et al., 2023; Parrish, 2022; Rofe & Postlethwaite, 2021). Contemporary scholarship on diplomacy increasingly recognizes that international sporting organizations and other non-state actors can participate in diplomatic processes and international affairs beyond the traditional state-centric framework (Postlethwaite et al., 2023; Gargalianos, 2025). Following this view, this study treats KNVB as a non-state actor whose international activities may complement, but are not identical to, the official diplomacy of the Netherlands.

Sports diplomacy refers to the use of sport to promote international engagement, cultural exchange, and relationship building among peoples, institutions, and states (Postlethwaite et al., 2023; Abdi et al., 2022). It may take various forms, including international tournaments, exchange programs, development initiatives, the use of athletes as ambassadors, and community engagement activities (Rofe & Postlethwaite, 2021; Pugu, 2022). Because of its global reach and emotional appeal, football is among the most frequently used sports in such activities (Rajkiewicz, 2022; Li & Feng, 2022). Football's international visibility and capacity to generate identification among supporters make it particularly relevant to diplomatic communication and international image-building (Das et al., 2024; Li & Feng, 2022).

Sports diplomacy is closely connected to public diplomacy and soft power. Contemporary public diplomacy increasingly emphasizes communication, relationship building, networking, and engagement with foreign publics rather than communication directed exclusively through formal diplomatic channels (Manor & Huang, 2022; Manor & Adiku, 2021). Non-state actors and social media have also expanded the range of actors capable of participating in public diplomacy and communicating directly with international audiences (Toker & Çağla, 2022; Nip & Sun, 2022). Soft power has likewise become closely associated with sport because sporting activities can provide attractive cultural and symbolic resources through which countries and organizations seek international recognition (Jeong et al., 2024; Grix & Brannagan, 2024). Research on sports diplomacy demonstrates that sport can contribute to soft power and nation branding, although such effects should not automatically be assumed simply because a country or organization participates in international sporting activities (Søyland & Moriconi, 2022; Al-Muhannadi, 2024). Nation branding research further indicates that sport can function as a vehicle through which national identity and country image are constructed and communicated to domestic and international audiences (Li & Feng, 2022; Knott, 2024; Vila-López et al., 2024). Contemporary studies of public diplomacy similarly emphasize that communication with foreign publics does not necessarily produce predetermined responses, since reception depends on audience interpretation, interaction, and broader political contexts (Goldsmith et al., 2021; Nip & Sun, 2022). A relational perspective therefore suggests that identities and shared meanings should be understood as emerging through interaction rather than simply being transmitted by diplomatic actors (Manor & Adiku, 2021; Rofe & Postlethwaite, 2021). This perspective is used here as an

interpretive lens to consider what kinds of interaction the festival made possible, not as evidence that such meanings were in fact formed.

Taken together, these concepts provide the four deductive categories used in the analysis: sports diplomacy, public diplomacy, soft power and nation branding, and non-state actorhood (see Table 2 in the Methods section). These categories are consistent with recent scholarship that treats sports diplomacy as an interdisciplinary field connecting international relations, sport management, public diplomacy, soft power, and nation branding (Postlethwaite et al., 2023; Szondi, 2024). They also underline an important analytical distinction that guides this study: the distinction between the resources and activities an actor deploys, which can be observed in documents, and the outcomes of those activities among foreign publics, which require evidence of reception. This distinction is important because studies of public diplomacy and sports diplomacy caution against treating diplomatic initiatives or communication activities as direct evidence of successful influence or attitudinal change (Goldsmith et al., 2021; Grix & Brannagan, 2024).

Previous studies have demonstrated the growing role of sport in diplomacy and international influence, particularly in relation to sports mega-events and state-led soft power strategies (Grix & Brannagan, 2024; Jeong et al., 2024; Bettine, 2024). Research has also shown that sports diplomacy may extend beyond state-led initiatives to include international sporting organizations and other non-state actors operating within transnational sporting networks (Postlethwaite et al., 2023; Gargalianos, 2025). Recent studies of football and other major sports further demonstrate how sporting activities can contribute to nation branding, international visibility, and soft power while also revealing the limitations and contested nature of such strategies (Li & Feng, 2022; Das et al., 2024; Al-Muhannadi, 2024).

Research specifically focusing on KNVB's football diplomacy in Indonesia, however, remains limited, and little attention has been given to fan-oriented football festivals as instruments of engagement within Indonesia–Netherlands relations. This study seeks to address that gap.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design using a single case study approach. A qualitative design is appropriate because the study seeks to understand how football is used as an instrument of sports diplomacy, public diplomacy, and soft power, a question concerned with meanings, practices, and processes in their natural context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A case study approach allows an in-depth examination of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life setting, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). Because the study relies on publicly available documents rather than fieldwork, the design combines qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) with document analysis procedures (Bowen, 2009).

Case Definition and Case Selection

The case examined in this study is the Oranje Indonesia Festival organized by KNVB in 2022. The case is bounded in three ways. Temporally, it covers the period from the public announcement of the festival on 1 September 2022 (Bola.com, 2022a; DetikSport, 2022) to the end of the Netherlands' participation in the 2022 FIFA World Cup in the quarter-final on 9 December 2022. Post-event coverage published up to 31 December 2022 is included in order to capture KNVB's own account of the event (Bola.com, 2022c). Substantively, the case covers the activities reported in the corpus: public viewing sessions of the Netherlands' World Cup matches, appearances by former Dutch national team players, and meetings between KNVB representatives and Indonesian supporters. Activities that KNVB conducts in other countries or in other years are treated as contextual information and are not part of the case.

The case was selected for four reasons. First, it is a clearly bounded and publicly documented instance of a foreign national football federation, rather than a government agency, organizing engagement with Indonesian audiences. Second, its timing during the 2022 FIFA World Cup gave the festival high media visibility, which makes it an information-rich case for examining how such engagement is presented to the public. Third, the historical relationship between Indonesia and the Netherlands, shaped by the colonial period, makes the use of football as a relatively low-sensitivity channel of engagement theoretically interesting. Fourth, as noted above, fan-oriented football festivals have received little attention in studies of sports diplomacy in Indonesia.

Data Sources and Corpus

This study relies exclusively on secondary data. Two types of material are distinguished. The first is the empirical corpus, consisting of documents that provide evidence about the festival itself: what activities were announced or reported, who was involved, and how the festival was presented. The second is the theoretical literature, consisting of academic books and journal articles on sports diplomacy, public diplomacy, soft power, nation branding, and non-state actors (e.g., Anholt, 2007; Cull, 2009; Murray, 2018; Nye, 2004). The theoretical literature was used to develop the analytical framework and coding categories and was not coded as evidence about the festival. Documents for the empirical corpus were identified through keyword searches using the terms “Oranje Indonesia Festival,” “Festival Oranje Indonesia,” and “Oranje Festival KNVB” in Google News and the archives of Indonesian national media outlets, supplemented by a review of KNVB’s official website. Documents were included if they (1) explicitly referred to the Oranje Indonesia Festival; (2) were published between 1 September and 31 December 2022; (3) were publicly accessible; (4) were produced by KNVB or by a national media outlet; and (5) were written in Indonesian, English, or Dutch. Syndicated or duplicated articles, items that mentioned the festival only in passing, and user comments were excluded. The retained documents are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Empirical Corpus: Documents Analyzed as Evidence About the Oranje Festival

Code	Source (APA citation)	Date	Document type	Relevance to the case (as indicated by the document)
D1	Bola.com (2022a)	1 Sep 2022	News report; pre-event announcement	Announces that KNVB will hold the Oranje Indonesia Festival while the Netherlands plays at the 2022 World Cup.
D2	DetikSport (2022)	1 Sep 2022	News report; pre-event announcement	Reports the announcement of the festival as an event to support the Netherlands at the 2022 World Cup.
D3	Goal Indonesia (2022)	15 Nov 2022	News report; pre-event announcement	Reports KNVB’s release of the names of former Dutch players scheduled to attend
D4	CNN Indonesia (2022)	16 Nov 2022	News report; pre-event announcement	Reports the planned presence of Dutch football legends at the festival.
D5	Bola.com (2022b)	24 Nov 2022	News report; pre-event / opening	Reports that the festival is ready to be held, including public viewing of the Netherlands’ World Cup matches.
D6	Bola.com (2022c)	16 Dec 2022	News report; post-event account	Reports KNVB’s account of its experience in Indonesia, from public viewing of World Cup matches to meeting Indonesian Oranje fans.

Note. Documents in the theoretical literature are not listed in this table; they are cited in the text and in the reference list.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Each document in Table 1 served as a sampling unit, while the coding unit was a meaning unit, defined as a sentence or group of sentences that describes (a) an activity of the festival, (b) an actor involved, (c) a target audience, or (d) a message or value attributed to Dutch football or the Netherlands. The analysis proceeded in five steps. First, all documents were read in full to gain familiarity with the material. Second, a coding frame was developed. Its main categories were established in advance (deductively) from the theoretical framework, namely sports diplomacy, public diplomacy, soft power and nation branding, and non-state actorness, while subcategories were developed during analysis (inductively) from the material, for example public viewing, appearances of former players, fan meetings, and media amplification. Third, the coding frame was piloted on documents and the category definitions were refined. Fourth, all documents were coded using the revised frame. The coding was conducted by the first author and reviewed by the second author, and disagreements were resolved through discussion. Fifth, the coded material was summarized by category and interpreted in light of the theoretical framework. The coding frame is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Coding Frame

Category	Definition	Indicators in the documents	Origin
Sports diplomacy	Use of sporting activities to create contact between actors across national boundaries (Murray, 2018; Murray & Pigman, 2014).	Public viewing of matches; appearances of former players; fan meetings.	Deductive; subcategories inductive
Public diplomacy	Communication and engagement directed at foreign publics (Cull, 2009; Manor, 2019).	Activities or messages directed at Indonesian audiences; media coverage; digital communication.	Deductive; subcategories inductive
Soft power and nation branding	Projection of attractive resources, identities, or values (Anholt, 2007; Nye, 2004).	References to Oranje identity, Dutch football heritage, legends, or values associated with Dutch football.	Deductive
Non-state actorness	Engagement of KNVB as an international actor (Pigman, 2010).	KNVB as organizer; statements by KNVB representatives; partners mentioned.	Deductive
Evidentiary status	Strength of the evidence for each coded unit.	E1 documented; E2 announced only; E3 institutional self-account (see text).	Developed for this study

In addition to substantive coding, each coded unit was assigned an evidentiary status in order to distinguish what the sources document from what the authors infer. Status E1 (documented) was assigned when an activity was reported in post-event coverage or corroborated by at least two different outlets. Status E2 (announced) was assigned when an activity appeared only in pre-event announcements and was not confirmed after the event; such activities are reported as planned rather than as having taken place. Status E3 (institutional self-account) was assigned to statements attributed to KNVB representatives that evaluate or characterize the festival; these are treated as evidence of KNVB's intended messaging rather than as independent evidence of outcomes. Interpretations by the authors are explicitly identified as such in the Results and Discussion section.

Findings were checked across sources in two ways. First, reports on the same activity were compared across outlets. Second, pre-event announcements were compared with post-event coverage in order to separate planned from reported activities. Two limits of this cross-checking are acknowledged. Three of the six news reports come from the same outlet, and news reports may reproduce content from organizers' press releases; agreement across outlets is therefore not

treated as fully independent confirmation. Where reports differed. Promotional and announcement material was used as evidence of what KNVB planned and how it presented the festival, not as evidence of how audiences received it.

Scope of Inference

The corpus supports two kinds of claims: claims about which activities were announced or reported, and claims about how KNVB and the media presented the festival. It does not contain participant accounts, survey data, attendance evaluations, or other evidence of changes in perception. Accordingly, this study does not claim that the festival improved public perceptions, built trust, strengthened bilateral relations, or produced economic benefits. Such outcomes are discussed only as potential contributions, and the evidence needed to assess them is identified in the Conclusion as an agenda for further research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section is organized as follows. Section 1 provides background on KNVB. Section 2 presents the activities documented in the corpus and their evidentiary status. Sections 3 to 6 each address one analytical question: each first describes the relevant documented activities and then explains how they relate to a specific diplomatic concept. Section 7 discusses challenges, distinguishing those observed in this case from those identified in the literature.

KNVB as a Non-State Diplomatic Actor

The Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbalbond (KNVB), or Royal Dutch Football Association, established in 1889, is the governing body of football in the Netherlands and is responsible for national competitions, national teams, and youth football. Internationally, Dutch football is associated with the Total Football tradition and with a reputation for youth development and coaching. A reputation constitutes a cultural asset that may contribute to the Netherlands' competitive identity. This background is contextual and is not derived from the corpus.

What the corpus does show is that the Oranje Festival was organized and presented as a KNVB initiative and that KNVB representatives themselves engaged with Indonesian supporters. In the terms used by Murray and Pigman (2014), the festival is therefore an instance of diplomatic activity carried out by a sporting body rather than by a foreign ministry.

Documented Activities of the Oranje Festival

Table 3 summarizes the activities identified in the corpus, the sources reporting them, and their evidentiary status. It also lists activities that were mentioned in earlier descriptions of the festival but for which no documentary evidence was found in the corpus.

Table 3. Activities of the Oranje Festival as Documented in the Corpus

Activity	What the sources report	Sources	Evidentiary status
Festival timed with the 2022 FIFA World Cup	The festival was announced as an event to be held while the Netherlands played at the World Cup.	Bola.com (2022a); DetikSport (2022)	E1 (two outlets)
Public viewing (nonton bareng) of the Netherlands' matches	Public viewing of the Netherlands' World Cup matches was announced before the event and referred to in post-event coverage.	Bola.com (2022b, 2022c)	E1 (post-event coverage)
Appearances by former Dutch national team players	KNVB released the names of former players scheduled to attend	Goal Indonesia (2022); CNN Indonesia (2022)	E2 (announced)

Meetings with Indonesian supporters of the Dutch team	KNVB's post-event account refers to meeting Indonesian Oranje fans.	Bola.com (2022c)	E1 / E3 (post-event; KNVB account)
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Note. E1 = documented; E2 = announced only; E3 = institutional self-account. Rows marked "Not documented" are not treated as findings in this study.

Two observations follow from Table 3. First, the activities most clearly documented are organized around the Netherlands' World Cup campaign: public viewing of matches and meetings with supporters, supplemented by announced appearances of former players. Second, activities such as football clinics, youth development sessions, and institutional collaboration, which are commonly associated with grassroots sports diplomacy, are not documented in the corpus for this edition of the festival. On the basis of the available evidence, the Oranje Festival is therefore best characterized as a fan-oriented, event-based form of engagement rather than as a grassroots football development program. The following sections analyze the festival on this basis.

Sports Diplomacy: Creating Contact Through a Shared Sporting Occasion

Documented Activities

The corpus shows that KNVB used the 2022 World Cup as the occasion for the festival (Bola.com, 2022a; DetikSport, 2022), organized public viewing of the Netherlands' matches (Bola.com, 2022b), announced the participation of former Dutch players (CNN Indonesia, 2022; Goal Indonesia, 2022), and, according to its own post-event account, met Indonesian supporters of the Dutch team (Bola.com, 2022c).

Analytical Interpretation

These activities correspond to what Murray (2018) describes as sports diplomacy: the use of sport to create opportunities for contact between people across national boundaries. Three features are worth noting. First, the public viewing format translates a global media event into a localized, collective experience, in which Indonesian supporters and KNVB representatives watch the same matches in the same space. Second, the announced presence of former players reflects the use of athletes as sporting ambassadors, a common instrument of sports diplomacy (Murray, 2018). Third, the initiative was undertaken by a football federation, which illustrates the argument of Murray and Pigman (2014) that sporting bodies conduct their own diplomacy alongside states.

From a constructivist perspective (Wendt, 1999), such contact can be interpreted as creating opportunities for interaction through which shared meanings may develop over time. The evidence, however, supports only the claim that such opportunities were created. Whether they produced mutual understanding or familiarity among participants cannot be determined from the corpus, and the single, time-limited nature of the event makes long-term effects less likely unless the contact is repeated.

Public Diplomacy: Direct Engagement and Media Amplification

Documented Activities

The festival was directed at Indonesian audiences, and its most clearly documented target group was Indonesian supporters of the Dutch national team (Bola.com, 2022c). The corpus also shows that the festival was covered by four national outlets over a period of more than three months, from the announcement in September to KNVB's post-event account in December 2022 (Bola.com, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c; CNN Indonesia, 2022; DetikSport, 2022; Goal Indonesia, 2022).

Analytical Interpretation

In terms of Cull's (2009) components of public diplomacy, the festival is closest to cultural diplomacy, since it presents a national cultural practice, Dutch football, to a foreign public. The

meetings with supporters may also contain an element of listening, although the corpus does not show whether KNVB gathered or used supporters' views. Two qualifications are important. First, the documented audience consisted largely of people who already supported the Dutch team. The festival therefore appears to have reinforced an existing affinity rather than reaching new audiences, which limits its public diplomacy reach. Second, the documented amplification took place mainly through national news media rather than through KNVB's own digital channels. Manor (2019) emphasizes the direct, two-way communication that digital platforms make possible; the corpus, however, provides evidence of visibility in news media, not of interaction or reception. Media coverage indicates that the festival was visible, but it does not show how audiences responded.

Soft Power and Nation Branding: Symbolic Resources Deployed

Documented Activities

The symbolic resources that are visible in the corpus are the Oranje identity, which appears in the festival's name and in references to Indonesian "Oranje fans" (Bola.com, 2022c); the association with the World Cup; and the announced presence of former Dutch national team players (CNN Indonesia, 2022; Goal Indonesia, 2022). The corpus does not show KNVB explicitly articulating values such as innovation, professionalism, or inclusivity.

Analytical Interpretation

Nye (2004) identifies culture as a source of soft power, and the resources listed above can be understood as cultural resources of this kind. Anholt (2007) similarly suggests that internationally recognized institutions and cultural assets contribute to a country's competitive identity. The association of Dutch football with values such as innovation, professionalism, and youth development derives from the broader international reputation of Dutch football rather than from the festival documents; it is therefore presented here as the authors' interpretation.

Nye (2004) and Grix and Brannagan (2016) both stress that possessing attractive resources is not the same as generating attraction. The corpus shows that KNVB deployed soft power resources; it does not show that the festival generated new attraction toward Dutch football or the Netherlands. Because the documented audience was already sympathetic to the Dutch team, the festival is more plausibly understood as an effort to maintain and make use of existing affinity than as a demonstration of newly created soft power. Any indirect effect on perceptions of the Netherlands as a country remains a possibility that would require audience-level evidence to assess.

Potential Contributions to Indonesia–Netherlands Relations

Documented Activities

The corpus contains no evidence of formal bilateral outcomes associated with the festival, such as agreements between the two governments, memoranda of understanding between football institutions, or commercial partnerships.

Analytical Interpretation

Indonesia and the Netherlands share a complex historical relationship shaped by the colonial period, while contemporary relations have increasingly involved cooperation in fields such as education, trade, and culture. In this context, football may offer a relatively low-sensitivity arena for engagement at the societal level, and the festival can be interpreted as adding a people-to-people layer to relations that are otherwise conducted mainly between governments. This is, however, a potential contribution rather than a demonstrated effect: the corpus does not show that the festival changed perceptions, built trust, or influenced bilateral relations. The same caution applies to the economic dimension. Sports diplomacy often intersects with commercial interests such as sponsorship, merchandise, and broadcasting (Grix & Brannagan, 2016), and a large Indonesian fan base for Dutch football may represent commercial potential. No sponsorship, commercial agreement, or measurable economic outcome linked to the festival is documented in

the corpus. Economic benefits are therefore noted only as a possible area of future cooperation, not as a finding of this study.

Challenges: Case-Specific Observations and Literature-Based Concerns

Challenges Observed in This Case

Four challenges can be identified directly from the corpus. First, the festival was event-bound. It was organized around the World Cup schedule (Bola.com, 2022a; DetikSport, 2022), and the corpus contains no evidence of follow-up programs after December 2022. Second, the documented audience was concentrated among existing supporters of the Dutch team (Bola.com, 2022c), and possibly which limits the festival's reach beyond an already sympathetic urban public. Third, the public record of the festival depends heavily on pre-event announcements and on a small number of outlets: five of the six news reports were published before or at the start of the event, and three come from the same outlet. Fourth, no attendance figures, participant feedback, or evaluation by KNVB were found in the corpus, which makes it impossible to assess outcomes on the basis of public sources.

General Challenges Identified in the Literature

The literature identifies further challenges that are relevant to the case but were not directly observed in the corpus. Murray (2018) argues that sports diplomacy is most effective when engagement is sustained rather than based on isolated events, which reinforces the concern about continuity noted above. Grix and Brannagan (2016) observe that sport-related initiatives often pursue political, diplomatic, and commercial goals at the same time, which may affect how audiences judge their authenticity. The political sensitivity associated with historical relations and national identity may also shape how foreign initiatives are received, although no controversy related to the festival is reported in the corpus. Finally, Grix and Brannagan (2016) note that the outcomes of sports diplomacy are largely intangible and difficult to measure. The present case illustrates this problem: while the festival's activities and public presentation can be documented, its effects cannot be assessed without audience-level data. The Oranje Festival shows how a football federation can use a global sporting occasion to organize direct engagement with a foreign public. Its long-term diplomatic value, however, depends on whether such events are connected to sustained programs, partnerships, and systematic evaluation.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how the Oranje Festival functions as an instrument of sports diplomacy. Based on publicly available documents, it concludes that the festival functioned primarily as a fan-oriented, event-based form of sports diplomacy. Acting as a non-state actor, KNVB used the Netherlands' participation in the 2022 FIFA World Cup as the occasion for public viewing sessions, announced appearances of former Dutch players, and meetings with Indonesian supporters. Through these activities, it created opportunities for direct contact with an Indonesian public and presented the Oranje identity of Dutch football to that public. With respect to the analytical framework, the festival displays the characteristics of sports diplomacy conducted by a sporting body rather than by a state (Murray & Pigman, 2014), and it corresponds most closely to the cultural diplomacy component of public diplomacy (Cull, 2009). It also mobilized soft power resources, namely the Oranje identity, the association with the World Cup, and former players, consistent with Nye's (2004) view of culture as a source of soft power. At the same time, the case illustrates the distinction, emphasized by Nye (2004) and by Grix and Brannagan (2016), between deploying soft power resources and producing soft power outcomes. The evidence does not allow the conclusion that the festival improved public perceptions of the Netherlands, built trust, strengthened bilateral relations, or generated economic benefits. These remain potential contributions. Moreover, the documented audience consisted largely of existing supporters, activities such as football clinics or youth programs are not documented for this edition, and the event was time-limited. The main contribution of this study is therefore to show how a football federation organizes and presents engagement with a foreign public, and to clarify

what kinds of evidence are required before stronger claims about diplomatic outcomes can be made.

SUGGESTION

Several suggestions follow. For future research, studies should collect primary data through surveys or interviews with festival participants in order to assess changes in perception, and through interviews with KNVB officials, the Dutch Embassy in Jakarta, and Indonesian football stakeholders in order to understand the objectives and coordination behind such events. Analysis of social media data could provide evidence of digital engagement, while longitudinal or comparative designs, for example comparisons with engagement activities by other football federations in Indonesia, could show whether the patterns observed here are specific to this case. Later developments in Indonesia–Netherlands football relations, including the involvement of players of Dutch-Indonesian heritage in Indonesian football, also merit investigation. For practitioners, KNVB and similar organizations could connect event-based engagement to sustained programs such as coaching exchanges or grassroots activities, establish partnerships with Indonesian football institutions, and publish evaluation data on participation and outcomes. Indonesian football stakeholders, in turn, could use such initiatives as entry points for longer-term cooperation in football development.

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