

Study the Role of Culture in the Design of World Cup Mascots with Emphasis on the Mascots from 2006 to 2022¹

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ABSTRACT

One of the significant global events that, beyond the sporting arena, has a cultural and social impact is undoubtedly the FIFA World Cup, which was first held in 1930. Nearly 95 years after the inaugural event, its audience has grown to a level where its cultural, social, and economic dimensions are just as prominent as the sporting aspect. Hosting the World Cup is perceived not only through an economic lens but also as a platform to showcase the culture of the host countries. The visual identity of the tournament, which began with the design and selection of a mascot (Willie) in the 1966 World Cup, has become the most important avenue for promoting the host culture. The mascot's identity—including its species, skin color, clothing color, and name—reflects the symbolic images or concepts of the host countries. Therefore, this study aims to analytically and descriptively examine the relationship between World Cup mascots and the culture of the host nations, using the mascots from 2006 to 2022 as case studies. This research highlights key findings, including the predominant use of national colors (colors from the flag) and the symbolic choice of animal or object that captures the essence of the host culture, offering insights into how these mascots serve as a bridge between sports and cultural representation on a global stage. In the 2006 World Cup, a lion was chosen as the mascot; in 2010, it was a cheetah; in 2014, an armadillo; in 2018, a wolf; and in 2022, a keffiyeh. Among all these animals, only the keffiyeh, a cultural item, represents the Qatar World Cup. With the exception of the 2006 World Cup in Germany, where the selected animal had no connection to the local culture and environment, the remaining mascots reflect the identity and wildlife of their respective host nations.

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Introduction

One of the most significant, impactful, and popular events in the world is the FIFA World Cup, held every four years, capturing the attention of football and non-football enthusiasts alike from around the globe. The host country of this tournament makes extensive preparations long before the scheduled date to ensure that this global event is conducted with grandeur, including the visual design of the matches, which is crafted by prominent designers and revolves around the emblem of the tournament, expanding and developing from it. The emblem of the tournament was first utilized at the 1966 World Cup in England, and since then, it has become a consistent tradition in hosting this event. The emblem is a representation of the host nation's culture and history, making each tournament unique and special. For instance, the emblem for the 1998 World Cup in France was "Footix," a rooster that is one of the national symbols of France. The phrase "France 98" is inscribed in white on the navy-blue rooster, Footix. The color scheme is inspired by the flag of the host country and the uniform of the French national team. The host nation is making an effort to seize the opportunity to showcase its culture and history through a symbol, thus paying particular attention to the design process.

Research Background

An analysis of the indigenous symbols of the mascots from the Summer and Winter Olympics in Japan, South Korea, and China, a Master's thesis in Visual Arts, Higher Institute of Art (Hamidi, 2021). The findings of this study indicate that the three mentioned countries have significantly incorporated their national signs and symbols into the design of their mascots. Additionally, the culture and identity of each country have played a critical role in shaping each mascot, using the major Olympic event as a medium to reflect the style and culture of the host country.

An Examination of the Cultural and Social Dimensions of Mascots, Master's Thesis, Department of Visual Arts, Al-Zahra University (Khodaei, 2009). One of the advertising methods is the use of mascots. A mascot is a symbol chosen for a product or event to facilitate more effective promotional and commercial activities. Mascots encompass advertising, commercial, and cultural-social aspects; however, since mascots are considered a novel phenomenon in advertising and graphic art in our country, it is essential to understand their impact on society and culture. A mascot is not merely a representation of a product; it can also symbolize a culture, a belief, or a value system. Furthermore, it can be asserted that mascots influence societal culture while also being shaped by it.

The design of the brand personality model for the Iranian Premier League, doctoral dissertation, Graduate School of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, Sports Management Research Institute (Tabatabaiyan, 2018). The results of this research indicated 11 main categories

organized within a paradigmatic model, including the characteristics of the league's brand personality as the core category. It also encompassed causal conditions (organizational characteristics, team characteristics, performance, fans), contextual factors (product-related and non-product factors), intervening conditions (external environment), strategies (direct and indirect resources), and outcome factors (communications and the league's brand personality).

If the Premier League can design a persona that aligns with its objectives and effectively communicate it to its audience, this persona will enhance preferences, increase loyalty, and strengthen customer relationships. A study examining the visual characteristics of sports club logos in Iran and their influence from European clubs (Fallahzadeh Abraghu, 2014) reveals that the design of Iranian club logos incorporates features such as an emphasis on form and the use of shapes like circles and triangles, the inclusion of Persian and Latin letters, and the presence of symbols such as balls, trophies, shields, and human or plant motifs. Furthermore, there is a variety and richness in color usage in these logos, alongside the observation of traditional motifs and historical artifacts derived from national identity, which play a significant role.

Methodology

The present research is qualitative, utilizing a descriptive-analytical approach. The information collection method employed in this study is library-based, utilizing tools such as note-taking from books and articles, as well as drawing on relevant visual resources associated with the topic. The case studies examined in this research are the mascots of the FIFA World Cup from 2006 to 2022.

Culture

Definition of Culture

Linguistically, culture refers to knowledge, virtue, literature, and intellect (Moein, 1981: 2538). Culture has been termed a national heritage. In general, the meanings and concepts derived from culture in Persian encompass a collection of knowledge, beliefs, arts, ethics, laws, customs, and acquired habits of all human beings (Mansouri, 1995: 6). The precise application of the term "culture" was first used by Taylor, an English anthropologist. In his book titled "Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization," published in 1865, he occasionally refers to the term culture, yet he predominantly employs the term civilization.

In 1871, the name of primitive culture was assigned to his main book, and in its opening sentence, he provided the first official and clear definition of culture. This date can be regarded as the birth of this scientific concept, although its foundations had been laid in the German language prior to this (Ashouri, 2002: 76). Taylor states: Culture is a complex whole that includes

knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and habits that an individual inherits from their social environment (Taylor, 1871: 96).

General Characteristics of Culture

A collection of commonalities constitutes the general and overarching traits of the cultures of various peoples and nations, as described below:

Acquisition: Culture is not an inherited legacy passed on instinctively to individuals; rather, it is a series of habits and experiences learned by humans throughout their lives.

- **Transferability:** Cultural issues are transferred from one generation to another based on the talents and interests of individuals.
- **Social Nature:** All customs and habits that constitute the culture of a nation have a social aspect, rather than being individual.
- **Meeting Basic Needs:** The primary and subsequent needs of human life are fulfilled within the framework of culture, and the means of responding to major natural events and transformations, or conquering and reshaping nature to meet human needs, is attained through culture.
- **Constant Change:** All cultures in the world are perpetually evolving. Research indicates that cultures are created, exert dominance and influence, and ultimately fade away, making room for new cultures.
- **Stability:** Although culture is relatively stable, it is also subject to change, with transformation being a hallmark of cultures. However, such change occurs gradually.
- **Political, Cultural, and Economic Standards:** Culture often evaluates and positions itself concerning its characteristics and context regarding relevant issues. Politics seeks to acquire power, while culture is diverse and borderless, often conflicted with the self-serving intentions of politicians and economists (Ghafouri, 2002: 132-134).

Cultural geography

Cultural geography examines the spatial differences and changes in language, economic systems, forms of government, relationships, perceptions, environmental interpretations, and various other cultural components. Cultural geographers believe that the entirety and form of culture cannot be accurately understood without considering the environment in which it has developed. Additionally, these geographers engage in environmental analysis, such as studies on climate, vegetation, soil, and wildlife, and incorporate these elements into their research, as they significantly influence culture and aid in elucidating cultural patterns.

Cultural geography is devoted to describing and analyzing the ways in which differences and similarities in language, religion, economy, governance, and other cultural phenomena manifest from one location to another. Rather than focusing solely on the human environment, it emphasizes human culture. Thus, cultural geography is a branch of geography that investigates culture in its broadest and most general sense, encompassing human and social achievements.

In geography, culture includes a vast range of knowledge, art, values, economy and livelihood, religion, customs, and ideology, which is perceived as a systematic and holistic framework, with relatively extensive discussions on these aspects. From its definitions, it is evident that cultural geography is an interdisciplinary field that examines how differences, patterns, and the distribution of cultures form under a cultural system in the context of space and in relation to time. Its aim is to recognize and explain cultural homogeneities and heterogeneities, or, in other words, the spatial uniformity or diversity of cultures.

Mascots

The Persian term "mascot" has been suggested to be equivalent to "good luck charm," yet this lexical equivalence is not particularly illuminating, as the term carries a connotation that is significantly broader than that of a simple good luck charm. Consulting reputable dictionaries, the conventional meaning of "mascot" is closer to: "a person, animal, or object that brings good fortune." This symbolic figure is commonly employed by organizations and groups, such as sports teams (Oxford Dictionary, 2010). Another definition of "mascot" considers its graphical application: in graphics, it serves as a fusion of performance art, painting, and graphic design aimed at creating an appropriate context to highlight the identity of what is to be presented, whether human or non-human in form. In graphic design, these structures can also manifest as elegantly designed promotional packages. Often, this type of personalized identity representation must pursue a specific objective; in a way, the graphic designer, by acknowledging reality, endows the depicted character or structured package with a quasi-human life, utilizing aesthetic sensibility and purposeful creativity to evoke and reinforce the impermeable beliefs and mentalities of viewers, compelling them to unwittingly fall under the allure and temptations of the mascot's beauty (Arwahi Azar, 2016: 49).

Mascot Classification

Educational Mascots: Educational mascots are symbols that schools, colleges, and universities adopt. These mascots are utilized during formal ceremonies and sporting events to represent these educational institutions. Their use in sports is confined to college and school competitions, specifically targeting student groups. Currently, nearly every school, college, or university in the United States and Canada has a mascot (Mirkarimi, 2008: 79).

Among the most well-known educational mascots is the University of Minnesota's Golden Gopher, which has a history spanning over 150 years. The most popular category of mascots in American educational institutions is animal mascots, with the most frequently used animals being eagles, various types of felines, and bulldogs (Hubpages, 2010).



Figure 1. University of Minnesota Mascot (Golden Gopher) (Source: <http1>)

Commercial Mascots: Commercial mascots are symbols utilized by businesses, manufacturing plants, restaurants, and others. Through these mascots, the names of these commercial entities are popularized, and their products become widely recognized among the public. Every manufacturing company faces hundreds, if not thousands, of competitors producing similar products at comparable prices, while their consumer bases remain constant. In this intense competition for attracting new customers, mascots play a crucial role in retaining the company's clientele. Mascots facilitate easier recall of each company's name and its products for consumers. Consequently, a significant portion of advertising and customer engagement is achieved through commercial mascots, allowing restaurants, factories, or any other business to establish connections with the community and the media (Mirkarimi, 2008: 97).



Figure 2. Cheetos Monkey, the brand mascot of Cheetos (Source: <http2>)

Military Mascots: A military mascot is a domesticated animal that an army maintains for ceremonial purposes, serving as a symbol (ibid, 101). Many British military regiments use live animals as mascots, showcasing them in public displays alongside the regiment during parades. For instance, the live mascot of the 95th Derbyshire Regiment is a ram; the Irish Guard has an Irish setter; the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders have a Shetland pony for their mountain units; and the Royal Welsh has a goat. The Bengal tiger of the fifth battalion of the Australian Army, known as W. O. Quintus, is also a live mascot but is kept at the Taronga Zoo in Sydney due to the danger it poses to spectators and fans, and does not participate in parades. The Royal Guard of Norway has a live mascot, an emperor penguin named Nils Olav, as well as the Nazi army mascot, which was an eagle.



Figure 3. Mascot of the Nazi German army (Source: <http3>)

National Mascot: The totem was a symbol chosen by humans in ancient times, which held profound significance for them. Throughout history, totems have gradually evolved and been depicted on the flags or insignias of nations. Social science informs us that the primary society, although the simplest form of gathering, is indeed a familial, economic, political-religious, and cultural community. The collaboration, coordination, and cohabitation of the individuals gathered is based on their similarity and shared needs. Ultimately, they are all akin to one another because they all partake in the totem, which is a special symbol of the clan. A totem can be a living or inanimate entity, often represented by an animal or plant that the collective perceives as their ancestor. They identify themselves by this entity, adopt it as a symbol of their identity, and hold it in reverence.



Figure 4. National Mascot of the United States of America (Source: <http4>)

Sports Mascots: Sports mascots symbolize teams and major sporting competitions such as the Olympics, Paralympics, World Championships, Continental and National events, etc. In significant sporting events, mascots play a pivotal role (ibid, 17). Each tournament of the World Cup, while promoting and elucidating the history, culture, and even geography of the host nation, creates a joyful and energetic atmosphere. Each edition of these competitions conveys a specific message to the world. Mascots are important media for transmitting the message of competitions to human societies, especially to children and youth globally. The foremost characteristic of World Cup mascots is that they must express the philosophy and deep spirit of the games while simultaneously showcasing the unique attributes of the host countries.

Physical Characteristics and Traits of Mascots

Mascots typically embody one of five physical traits, and since they are crafted from human thought, they universally possess a structure that aligns with human movement.

- An animal appearance with human movement.
- The appearance of plants and vegetation with human movement.
- The appearance of objects with human movement.
- A human appearance with movements beyond human capabilities, or with the same human essence.
- A combination of two or more appearances (objects, imagination, animals, etc.).

It is evident that a mascot does not need to possess the structural features that have become a style and culture in our modern world. Rather, the way materials are utilized in their construction, akin to the use of wood in the simulated structure found in the children's story of Pinocchio, is entirely innovative and based on personal taste (Arwahi Azar, 2016: 55).




By examining successful mascots, one can observe the following characteristics:





- They define the identity of a specific group or profession.
- They are often changeable.
- They have a childlike structure.
- They feature vibrant colors.
- They exhibit exaggerated appearances and hold a human nature.




World Cup Mascots

Sports mascots first showcased their presence in the realm of athletics during the World Cup. From the first mascots to the latest ones, we observe a gradual evolution in design.

Table 1. Gradual evolution in design

Mascot image	Descriptions	Mascot name	Tournament Host	Year of Holding
	For the first time at the World Cup 1996 in England, a mascot was designed for the tournament. It was a lion named Willie, who played football. Willie's message was that football competitions are meant to be entertaining and that the contests are friendly in nature. His shirt was designed in the shape of the English flag, with the words "World Cup" inscribed on it. The lion is an important symbol of England.	Willie	Uk	1996
	At the World Cup 1970, a cheerful little boy named Juanito, dressed in the colors of the Mexican national team, became the mascot for the tournament.	Juanito	Mexico	1970
	Two German boys named Tip and Tap, who have "WM74" on their chests. "WM" stands for Weltmeisterschaft, meaning World Championship, while the number 74 indicates the year this tournament was held. Their facial features are inspired by typical German children, and they are wearing the German national team's jersey.	Tip & Tap	West Germany	1974

	<p>A native American boy dressed in the Argentine national team's outfit, wearing a blue hat with "Argentina 78" inscribed on it. Gachito carries a yellow scarf and a typical gaucho's poncho; these accessories are commonly associated with gauchos, the skilled horse riders known for their bravery, and serve as a national symbol of Argentina.</p>	Gauchitto	Argentina	1978
	<p>Naranjito is a smiling orange. Oranges are a popular fruit in Spain. Naranjito wears the uniform of the Spanish national team, and his name is derived from the Spanish word for orange.</p>	Naranjito	Spain	1982
	<p>A spicy jalapeño pepper sporting a mustache and a sombrero, dressed in athletic wear. The people of Mexico use this spicy pepper in their dishes.</p>	Pique	Mexico	1986
	<p>The symbol of this era is a tricolor figure with a head resembling a soccer ball and is actively playing. Its body is adorned in the three colors of green, white, and red, which are the colors of the Italian flag. "Chao" in Italian means healthy and is a form of greeting.</p>	Ciao	Italy	1990

	<p>Striker is a cheerful dog who is the second mascot observed in the World Cup. He wears a sports outfit in red, blue, and white, inspired by the colors of the American flag and the uniform of the U.S. national soccer team. His jersey features the inscription "94 USA."</p>	Striker	United State of America	1994
	<p>Footix is one of the national symbols of France. On Footix, the colors of the emblem bear the phrase "France 98" in white. The color scheme is inspired by the host country's flag and the uniform of the French national team.</p>	Footix	France	1998
	<p>The three mascots of this tournament are depicted in orange, purple, and blue, and all three are digital creatures. These three members form a fictional team named Atom Ball, resembling a soccer team. Ato serves as the team's coach, while Kazu and Nik are the players. Their names were selected through a public voting process.</p>	Ato, Kaz & Nik	Korea and Japan	2002

Analysis of World Cup Mascots from 2006 to 2022

World Cup Mascot of 2006

Goleo derived his name from his father, who always encouraged him during football games with the phrase "Go, Leo, go!" The name is a blend of the English word "goal" and the Latin word "leo," meaning lion. FIFA added the number VI (six) because he was the sixth candidate to receive the title of World Cup mascot, coincidentally corresponding to the year 2006. Goleo stands at 2.5 meters tall, and his shoe size is 58. This character's costume is designed to house a performer inside. The movements of his mouth and arms are controlled by the puppeteer's hands. An onboard camera in the lion's eye transmits images to a display inside the costume, allowing the performer to navigate. The lip movements of his sidekick, a ball named "Piele," are controlled externally by another puppeteer.



Figure 5. Goleo, the mascot of the World Cup / Germany 2006 (Source: <http5>)

Goleo stands like a human on two legs and is capable of performing human activities. He wears a white shirt with the number 6 and sports shoes. His friend and companion is a ball named Pille. In the selected mascot for the 2006 World Cup in Germany, there are fewer signs related to the host country's culture. The chosen animal (lion) has no connection to Germany because if an animal were to be selected as a mascot, an eagle would have been a better option. The white outfit, although reminiscent of the German team's kit, does not reflect the colors of the country's flag. The only black strips on the shirt and the shoes of this mascot allude to one of these colors. The choice of a ball as the lion's sidekick also has no cultural ties with the host country and is merely a ball that speaks in German. Perhaps Goleo's tall stature references the average height in this country. This mascot lacks any other noteworthy elements or symbols to lean upon. Overall, Goleo and Pille have not been a successful mascot throughout different World Cup tournaments, and there is no deep connection between them and the culture of the host country. This can be observed from the numerous criticisms directed at this symbol.

World Cup Mascot 2010

One of Africa's felines, the African cheetah, is found in southern and eastern Africa. This beautiful and swift animal became the inspiration for designing the mascot for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, leading to the creation of a charismatic character named Zakumi. Zakumi is a cheerful, confident, adventurous, and energetic mascot. He loves football and always follows his instincts and intuition. Additionally, he is always playing tricks and joking with people, which brings them joy. This warm-hearted trait is a common characteristic among the people of South Africa. The people in this region are lively and joyful, which is why they embrace bright colors and music.



Figure 6. Zakumi; Mascot of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa (Source: <http5>)

On the one hand, the swift nature of the African cheetah has contributed to Zakumi becoming a speedy football player. Zakumi is an energetic teenager who loves football. This character can easily be found in the streets and alleys of South African cities, where children and adolescents transform into football players with just a T-shirt and sports shorts. Unlike the mascot of the 2006 World Cup, Zakumi does not wear sports shoes, which reflects his instinctual and intuitive spirit, drawn from the people and pure culture of South Africa. The colors used in this mascot draw inspiration from the South African flag: green and yellow. The writing on Zakumi's white shirt is in black, and these two colors are also present in the country's flag.

Mascot of the 2014 World Cup

The term "Fuleco" is actually derived from the combination of two words: "futebol" (football) and "ecologia" (ecology). The name Fuleco garnered 48 percent of the vote and was chosen as the name of this symbol, which prominently features the colors yellow, green, and blue. Among all national symbols of Brazil, only the colors of the flag were used in the 2014 World Cup mascot. Fuleco is inspired by a rare animal called the armadillo, which has a hard shell on its back. Fuleco's shell is blue, its body is yellow, and its outfit is white and green. In the design of the hard shell, it is composed of hexagonal pieces resembling a football's outer layer, extending over its face between its two eyes. Few people would associate Fuleco with Brazil upon first sight (if we disregard the text on its outfit), and one can only guess that this mascot pertains to a football tournament. A notable theme in the design of this mascot is the emphasis on environmental support over other objectives.

Brazil is country rich in culture and abundant visual symbols. The flag of this nation is one of the few flags that features pictorial signs and is not limited to color representation. Its national emblem, as previously discussed, is filled with cultural and indigenous symbols of the land; however, the Fuleco mascot does not incorporate any of these subtle signs, rendering the character superficial and lacking identity. Furthermore, Brazil has always been among the foremost nations in football, and the Fuleco mascot does not adequately represent the country's

esteemed position in the sport, becoming a design that is aesthetically pleasing yet ultimately devoid of identity.



Figure 7. Fuleco; Mascot of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil (Source: <http5>)

Mascot of the 2018 World Cup

Zabivaka, the mascot of the 2018 World Cup in Russia, was designed by a 22-year-old student and was chosen as the official mascot through a public vote, surpassing two other designs (a cat and a tiger) with 53% of the votes. Zabivaka is a brown wolf with white paws and face, wearing red sports shorts and a white t-shirt with blue sleeves that reads: Russia 2018. The combination of white, blue, and red reflects the colors of the Russian flag. He wears orange glasses, which he often positions on his forehead. These glasses are meant to protect his eyes as he moves quickly on the football field, serving as a shield against the wind while he plays.



Figure 8. Zabivaka; the mascot of the 2018 World Cup in Russia (Source: <http5>)

The selection of the wolf as the mascot is appropriate given the cold, snowy climate of Russia and the perpetually frigid region of Siberia, as wolves typically inhabit snowy highlands and mountains. Zabivaka is from the Eurasian wolf species, which is one of the largest native wolf breeds found throughout Europe and Asia, particularly abundant in Russia. Thus, this type of wolf can be considered emblematic of the Russian landscape.

Mascot of the 2022 World Cup

La'eeb, inspired by the traditional Arab keffiyeh and agal, serves as a bright symbol of Arab nations, including Qatar, reflecting the cultural attire of the host country's inhabitants. The intricate Islamic patterns on the keffiyeh are derived from designs traditionally used by Arab women as tattoos. Essentially, La'eeb is a keffiyeh that has gained life and, like Arab men, bears an agal on its head; due to its fabric identity, it appears to float in the air. This levitating characteristic allows La'eeb to move swiftly and transition freely from one point to another like a bird. Consequently, some consider this mascot to resemble a spirit more than a mere keffiyeh!



Figure 9. La'eeb; Mascot of the 2022 Qatar World Cup (Source: <http5>)

Alongside the 1982 mascot (Naranjito), La'eeb is the second World Cup mascot inspired by objects, with the notable difference that La'eeb lacks arms and legs. This absence of limbs can be seen both as a characteristic and a limitation of the design. However, since the design is intended for a football tournament where physical suitability for the game is essential, La'eeb cannot serve as a fitting representative for a football festival. If we were to remove the "Qatar 2022" inscription, there would be no visual connection to the identity of football; it would merely represent an element for introducing an Arab country. Furthermore, La'eeb does not specifically represent Qatar and could be associated with all countries in the Persian Gulf region. Additionally, Qatar, as the World Cup host, does not have a notable reputation in the realm of football, nor does it stand among the top three teams in Asia, making it, so to speak, handicapped in football. Thus, La'eeb truly embodies the Qatari football team, which, despite its attractive appearance, lacks any fundamental capabilities (physical talent) in playing football. It merely claims to have been influential in many past World Cup goals, a statement that is solely a figment of its imagination. In conclusion, it can be said that the mascot La'eeb is not a suitable representative of the culture of not just Qatar, but of all Arab countries, and simultaneously, it is an inadequate symbol for a football festival.

Table 2. Mascots of the World Cups from 2006 to 2022 (Source: Author)

Indigenous Symbols Used in Mascot Design	Identity of the mascot	Meaning of the Name	Name of Mascot	Year of Holding	Host Country
The colors of the German flag (black and white) are utilized.	Animal	A fusion of the words "Goal" and "Leo," meaning "lion."	Goalie of the Sixth and Cocoon	2006	Germany
The colors of the South African flag (green, gold, white) are incorporated. The cheetah, a native animal of South Africa, is featured. The character, Zakumi, possesses a cheerful and engaging personality that reflects the spirit of the South African people. -The absence of sports shoes in this mascot signifies the country's love for soccer and the intuitive spirit of its people.	Animal	"Za" indicates the name of South Africa, and "kumi" means 10	Zacumi	2010	South Africa
The colors of the Brazilian flag are employed in the design.	Animal	A combination of the terms "futebol" and "ecologia," which translates to "ecology."	Fulko	2014	Brazil
A wolf is depicted as a cold climate animal. The colors of the Russian flag are integrated into the mascot design.	Animal		Zabivaka	2018	Russia
Arabic headdresses and agals are included in the mascot design. Designs inspired by traditional Arab women's tattoos are utilized.	Objects	A highly skilled player.	La'eeb	2022	Qatar

Conclusion

Mascots, irrespective of their type and classification, represent a human group and their cultural showcase. This group can be a university, fans of a brand, or the people of a nation. What is important is that the success of a mascot necessitates the presence of a cultural aspect. Football, with its strong cultural background at both club and international levels, has created an arena for cultural exchange among different countries, facilitated by events such as the World Cup. In designing the mascot for World Cup tournaments, the designers first utilize visual-cultural elements from the host country, such as national colors (derived from the flag), as well as animal, plant, or object symbols and national emblems. Subsequently, the name of the mascot can reflect its local identity, and finally, its character and biography are drawn from the temperament, lifestyle, and customs of the host population. In designing the mascot for the 2026 World Cup, which will take place jointly in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, the designer has based the work on various symbols associated with these countries and has created the final design through their integration. The table below lists the different symbols of each country that represent their culture, geography, and customs separately.

Table 3. Cultural Symbols of the 2026 World Cup Hosts (Source: Author)

Country Name	Color Item	Animal Item	Plant Item	Object Item
United States of America	Blue, Red & White	White-headed eagle		
Canada	Red & White	Beaver	Maple Leaf	
Mexico	Green, White, Red	Golden Eagle	Cactus	Semblem hat

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization of the article and writing of the original and subsequent drafts.

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Ethical considerations

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Conflict of interest

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