

Haut, Jan

**Working Paper**

## International prestige through sporting success? Searching empirical evidence

Diskussionspapiere des Europäischen Instituts für Sozioökonomie e.V., No. 17

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

European Institute for Socioeconomics (EIS)

*Suggested Citation:* Haut, Jan (2016) : International prestige through sporting success? Searching empirical evidence, Diskussionspapiere des Europäischen Instituts für Sozioökonomie e.V., No. 17, Europäisches Institut für Sozioökonomie e. V., Saarbrücken, <http://dx.doi.org/10.22028/D291-27040>

This Version is available at:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10419/230867>

**Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:**

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

**Terms of use:**

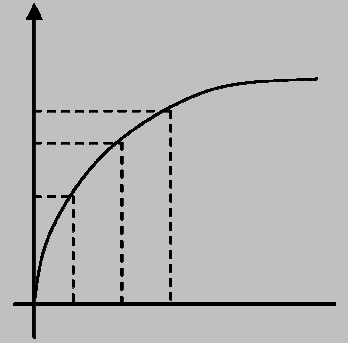
*Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.*

*You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.*

*If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.*

Diskussionspapiere des  
Europäischen Instituts für Sozioökonomie e. V.

Working Papers of the  
European Institute for Socioeconomics



# **International Prestige through Sporting Success? Searching Empirical Evidence**

Jan Haut

Nr. 17

Jahr 2016

**Dr. Jan Haut**

Fachbereich: Sportpädagogik

Adresse: Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main  
Institut für Sportwissenschaften  
Ginnheimer Landstraße 39  
60487 Frankfurt am Main

Tel: 0049 (0)69/798-245 63

E-Mail: [haut@sport.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:haut@sport.uni-frankfurt.de)

© 2016

Europäisches Institut für Sozioökonomie e. V. / European Institute for Socioeconomics

c/o Universität des Saarlandes

Sportwissenschaftliches Institut  
Arbeitsbereich Sportökonomie und Sportsoziologie  
Campus, Gebäude 8.1

66123 Saarbrücken

<http://www.soziooekonomie.org>

**Jan Haut**

**International Prestige through Sporting Success? Searching Empirical Evidence**

Discussion Paper, April 2016

A central argument for public funding of elite sport is the claim that success at Olympic Games or world championships would lead to increasing international prestige for the country as a whole. While this assumption seems plausible in general, it clearly lacks specification. Therefore, in a first step several theoretical approaches are discussed, in order to unpack which forms of prestige can be sought by states in which kind of sports and events. Subsequently, the (rather limited!) state of empirical research on the topic is summarized. The few available results already reveal that the formula “the more success, the more prestige” is all too simple. As a consequence, possible methodological approaches and available indicators for sport-induced changes in international prestige are presented and discussed. The paper concludes by suggesting concrete steps towards a more systematic analysis of the questions at stake.

Keywords: elite sport, prestige, international relations, nation brands

**Jan Haut**

## **International Prestige through Sporting Success? Searching Empirical Evidence**

Discussion Paper, April 2016

### *1. Benefits of Public Investment in Elite Sports?*

Governmental investments in hosting sport mega-events and in the continuous funding of promising athletes (coaches, facilities, scientific advice etc) are legitimized with certain social aspirations. Sports policy makers in many countries claim that public investment in elite sports would pay off in terms of economic revenues, but also in terms of sociopolitical benefits such as increasing national pride, stronger social cohesion, the provision of role-models imparting social values and inspiring mass sport participation – and last but not least a contribution to the country's international prestige (Grix and Carmichael, 2012; Grix, 2014a). Both strategies, investing in events and investing in success, are in fact often interwoven – as countries tend to spend more on sports when hosting an event in the near future – but can be separated analytically.

While recent academic research has devoted more attention to sport mega-events and their legacies (e.g. Grix, 2014b; Holt and Ruta, 2015), here I shall rather focus on effects of investing in international sporting success. In this respect, several aspects discussed as event legacies such as incoming tourism or infrastructure investments in the host city are less important. Rather, research is focused on three key topics (for an overview see Haut, 2014): effects of success on feelings and attitudes of a country's own population (pride, identity, "feel-good factor"); effects of successful athletes on the diffusion of sport activity (trickle-down, pyramid or demonstration effect) and of sporting values (role-model function) in the population; effects of success on the international perception of a country (image, prestige, reputation). Only few empirical studies address a broader range of these aspects (Breuer and Hallmann, 2011; Haut, Prohl and Emrich, 2014). Many scholars have studied effects of sporting success on the attitudes – especially on national pride – of several populations (e.g. Evans and Kelley, 2002; Van Hilvoorde, Elling and Stokvis, 2010; Denham, 2010, Doczi, 2012; Hallmann, Breuer and Kühnreich, 2013; Mutz, 2013; Van Hilvoorde and Elling, 2014; Emrich, Gassmann, Haut, Pierdzioch and Prohl, 2015). Also effects of elite sport success and of sporting stars as role-models on mass sport has been analyzed (and mostly refuted) in many different countries with different methodological approaches (for a summary see Payne, Reynolds, Brown and Fleming, 2002; more recently De Bosscher, Sotiriadou and van Bottenburg, 2013). Compared to these rather extensively addressed aspects, the possible effects of sporting success on international prestige are clearly under-researched. The topic is

discussed from different perspectives, resulting in a number of theoretical assumptions – for which empirical evidence is scarce hitherto.

## 2. *Theoretical Concepts*

That success in sports can increase a country's international prestige seems to be a trivial notion. Elite sport, especially the Olympic Games, were an important stage where capitalist and socialist countries struggled for supremacy during the Cold War. Young and small nations can put themselves on the international map by taking part, and even more so by excelling at major competitions in globally recognized sports (e.g. for the case of African states see Allison and Monnington, 2002: 124-132). However, these examples do not provide sound answers for all current cases. For instance, who shall be impressed by Germany's sporting prowess after the GDR as main rival has disappeared? What exactly does it tell about the Netherlands when they are aiming for a Top-10 rank in the Olympic medal count? Why does Great Britain feel the need to reassure its reputation as a sport country?

### 2.1. *Soft Power*

Analyses of the role of sport in international relations provide several starting points to address such questions. While the topic was still considered as rather neglected at the beginning of the 21st century (Allison and Monnington, 2002; Levermore and Budd, 2004), more recently "a modest increase in academic interest" (Grix and Houlihan, 2014: 574) has been observed. The impact of sports in international affairs is described as multi-layered, as already the broad range of topics covered (e.g. in Jackson and Haigh, 2009) indicates. Sports can be an occasion for diplomacy in the narrow sense (e.g. Murray and Pigman, 2014) or for fostering foreign policy goals like development and human rights. These strategies, aiming at rather specific issues and pursued via traditional political institutions, have to be differentiated from – although they are tending to overlap with – strategies of nation branding (Grix and Houlihan, 2014: 575-578). The latter are aiming at international prestige in a broader sense, as they do not address a specific actor, but want to shape the image of a nation in the whole world.

In an earlier attempt to grasp the changing relevance of sport in international relations, Allison and Monnington assumed a difference between power and prestige:

“We must surely allow that there can be benefits in status or prestige which are distinct from those in power. If the distinction is allowed, it would also follow that in the absence of ‘great games’ like imperialism and the cold war, the importance of prestige would increase at the expense of power. A less state-oriented international society might contain many states and regions whose interests lay primarily in their brand image rather than in any sense of ‘power’ or ‘control’ they might seek to exercise over the rest of the world.” (Allison and Monnington, 2002: 111)

Meanwhile, these tendencies in foreign policy have been described in greater detail, especially with reference to the concept of soft power (Nye, 2004). According to that perspective, what Allison and Monnington coin “prestige” or “brand image” is not entirely different from power, but a special form of power. It is soft power, aiming at attracting and co-opting others “to want what you want” (Nye, 2004: 2), instead of traditional hard power based on coercion. Without regard to differences in concepts, it is agreed that prestige or soft power has become increasingly important, and that it has also contributed to the growing attendance to sport in international relations.

“The evidence suggests that international sporting success, whether by national teams and athletes competing abroad or by the effective staging of a sports mega-event, provides arenas for deployment of soft power through which states seek to ‘attract’ others with their values and culture and persuade them to want what they want by projecting a specific ‘image’ to foreign publics...” (Grix and Houlihan, 2014: 576)<sup>1</sup>

## 2.2. *Performance Prestige*

Although it is certainly correct that both the staging of sports mega-events and achievements of athletes are potential means to deploy soft power, it is a bit confusing to subsume both aspects under the term sporting success. As the success of an event can be ascribed to entirely different causes (e.g. scenery of the country or city, hospitality of the people) then success in a competition (stamina, training methods, momentum etc.), the prestige gained should be partly different, too (of course there are also qualities imagined as relevant in both respects, e.g. a certain mentality, organizational skills, infrastructure). Furthermore, considered strategically, hosting an event can be a one-time investment which can be

---

<sup>1</sup> In this respect sports could also be considered as part of the soft power strategy of foreign cultural policy (“Außenkulturpolitik”) (Auer, Srugies and Löffelholz, 2015), which is aiming at shaping a country’s image abroad (especially via promoting culture, language, academic exchange etc). In future, systematic comparisons between impact of sports and culture would be interesting, but for the latter systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of policies is lacking yet, too (Maaß, 2013).

planned much better (though not completely) than sporting success in the narrower sense: In many disciplines, championships, medals or whatever is considered as success require more continuous efforts of an entire, well-developed system (scouting and funding of athletes, coaches, scientists, infrastructure etc.). But still this kind of investment is much more insecure – in sports you can always lose (see also Allison and Monnington, 2002: 130). So why do states keep up investing in sporting success and what specific kind of prestige do they expect?

With an approach that combines insights from International Relations with Elias's sociological theory of civilization, Reicher (2013, 2014) provides further explanations. In line with the soft power concept, he observes a growing importance of sports in international relations, in times when the importance of military power relatively declines (Reicher, 2013: 254-271). But further he argues that dominance in elite sport is different from soft power, exactly because of the mentioned incalculability of success (Reicher, 2013: 263-264). Rather he emphasizes that the open outcome of sporting competitions allow for a more specific form of prestige: a performance prestige ("Leistungsprestige"), which is – different from traditional "cultural prestige" (Max Weber) sought by emphasizing particularities and differences – achieved by gaining merits according to mutually accepted standards and in compliance with rules of international competition (Reicher, 2013: 303-307).<sup>2</sup> While this struggle for prestige in internationally recognized competitions meanwhile can be observed in other cultural fields, too – Reicher (2013: 307-318) names the Eurovision Song Contest and the Oscar Awards, other examples might be added – sport may be considered as a forerunner in terms of setting globally accepted rules and standards (see also Werron in Reicher, 2014). Accordingly, staging sport mega-events – which only have to meet certain standards concerning organization and facilities – seems more suitable to gain traditional cultural prestige by showcasing unique qualities of the host country. Sporting success in the narrower sense can only be gained under globalized rules limiting opportunities to display particularities (e.g. a Brazilian or other 'national style' in football), but in turn are promising a performance prestige which is accepted nearly globally.

---

<sup>2</sup> In terms of figurational sociology these tendencies are understood as "diminishing contrasts, increasing varieties", and are considered as typical for civilizing processes. The application of the concept to the globalization of sports by Maguire (1999: 207-216) is well-known. Not too surprising, similar tendencies are also acknowledged by colleagues inspired by the soft power concept: States have to differentiate themselves from others, "even if, ironically, states use increasingly similar strategies (for example, membership of international organisations and participation in, and the staging of, the Olympic Games and football World Cup) to demonstrate their distinctiveness." (Grix and Houlihan, 2014: 578)



### 2.3. *Nation Brand and Image*

Other relevant impulses for the study of international images derive from economic practice, more specifically from discussions in marketing, corporate communication and public relations. For PR and communication research, Ingenhoff (2013: 22) states that nations would be professionalizing their public relations, but if and how these measures are successful has not been addressed in greater detail. Research on country-of-origin effects and destination or place branding has developed more specific attention to strategies of nation branding (e.g. Fan, 2006). Meanwhile, different providers have designed indices (including aspects of sport) based on survey data (Anholt GfK Nation Brands Index, Portland Soft Power 30; see below), which are interesting but liable to pay costs. However, as usually only headlines or short essays (e.g. Anholt, 2014) are published, not many contributions to a theory of international prestige have been made – apart from arguments that long-term engagement and an individualized strategy would be required for successful branding.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.4. *Specifications*

The general assumption that sporting success does have a positive effect on a country's prestige has not often been specified theoretically. It seems clear, and that is completely in line with Reicher's notion, that performance prestige can only be gained when international rules and standards are respected. That needs to be put more precise in some respects: Firstly, to gain prestige might not only require that athletes comply with the written rules, but also with the unwritten standards of fair play. To commit a minor infringement to get an advantage may be considered as clever in one country, but as dirty in another; or vice versa, extraordinary acts of fair play may lead to additional prestige. Secondly, given doping and corruption, compliance with rules refers not only to athlete's behavior in competition, but also to the whole system behind the scenes (Emrich, Pierdzioch and Pitsch, 2014). For instance, by the time of writing, athletic associations of several countries have to prove their compliance with anti-doping laws to be allowed to start at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Even if they won't be banned, it is doubtful if potential victories will increase prestige in other countries.

Further it is obvious that not every sport is equally important in all countries. Reicher (2014: 25) states that performance prestige would not be, like gold, coveted everywhere in the world. He suggests to differentiate circles of competition ("Wettbewerbskreise"), which tie different nations to each other and which award prestige according to specific performances

---

<sup>3</sup> It might be mere chance that this theory implies that every nation or other potential clients need to buy a customized report every year.

in different events, tournaments, places etc. in every sport (Reicher, 2013: 108). The competition between Dutch, German and British (or English) teams or athletes in football is evaluated differently from the one in speed skating, gymnastics or rugby; in tennis, winning the Grand Slam (or even Wimbledon alone) counts more than winning the World Championship title; a four times Kitzbühel winner is a star in winter sport nations, but won't get much attention in tropical countries.

Surely, if one event could claim to assemble all nations in most sports and thus promise to enable world-wide prestige, that could only be the Olympic Games. And if something like a globally accepted currency of performance prestige in sports existed, it would be Olympic medals. At least this is the position of many governments and sports policy makers, and from this perspective the medal index appears to be *the* sports competition between all nations. However, it has been objected that the conversion of medals into international prestige is certainly not a linear transformation. Firstly, it can be asked if the imagined major competition for the medal index (which is not even an official ranking by the IOC and thus calculated differently in different countries) really is the main interest of people following the Olympics. Secondly, according to Van Hilvoorde et al. (2010), not only mere results – medals alone – do impress people, but rather the stories unfolding in sporting competitions. They underline this notion with the telling example that after Beijing 2008, hardly any of the hundred Chinese medals would be remembered internationally,<sup>4</sup> but many people recalled that 110m hurdler and defending Olympic champion Liu Xiang had to withdraw because of an injury (Van Hilvoorde et al., 2010: 94-95). And thirdly it must be noted – although it seems self-evident – that success is relative to expectations: „...oftentimes for a small, poor or recently independent country, doing significantly better than expected in an international competition can be more important than winning an expected match for a large, sportintensive state.“ (Murray and Pigman, 2014: 1109) Not only the national, but also the international public has expectations towards a country. Will China's image be damaged if its table tennis players do not win all possible medals in Rio 2016? Will the world be more impressed if France finishes 4th in the medal count (instead of 7th in London 2012)? Apparently the question is: to what degree expectations have to be excelled or missed in order to have an impact on international prestige?

---

<sup>4</sup> That is indicated already by the fact that not all Olympic Champions are necessarily famous in their own countries: According to a survey representative for Germany, three years after Beijing 2008 only 7.5% of the population still remembered one of the sixteen German gold medalists (Breuer and Hallmann, 2011: 20-21).

### 3. Empirical Evidence

Only few empirical studies have tried to assess effects of sporting success on international prestige explicitly. Breuer and Hallmann (2011) included some items referring to that in a study on attitudes towards elite sport among the German population. According to that, about half of the respondents considered sport as one of the three most important areas for the representation of the country (slightly less important than science and the environment, slightly more than culture and economy) (Breuer and Hallmann, 2011: 19-20). Concerning success, 78.2% stated that it would be “important for Germany’s reputation that German athletes win medals at Olympic Games or world championships”, and 55% also agreed that medals would be “important for the reputation of German companies” (Breuer and Hallmann, 2011: 11). However, it is important to note that this is not what other nations think about Germany – but these are only German beliefs about the international opinion.

In 2012 Haut, Prohl and Emrich (2014) included some questions about international prestige in an open online survey (N=899) on the significance of Olympic medals among the German population. Asked what they think about countries ranking high in the medal table, only 17.2% of the respondents stated that such a country would be “sympathetic” for them; 31.3% agreed that it would be “highly regarded in the world”, but 60.9% thought it would be “neither better nor worse” than other countries (Haut, Prohl and Emrich 2014: 9-10). Furthermore it was included an open question if, at the last Olympics,<sup>5</sup> any athletes or nations were remembered particularly positive, and if so, for which reasons: Foreign (i.e. non-German) athletes or teams were mentioned by 38.1% of the respondents, most frequently Usain Bolt (N=46), Michael Phelps (19) and Great Britain (15). As for the reasons, respondents referred mostly to performances, for Great Britain also the qualities as host were mentioned. It was also asked if any athletes or nations were remembered particularly negative: The share of foreign athletes was significantly higher (53.8%) in this respect, with China (N=59), Lance Armstrong (22), Russia (11) and Usain Bolt (11) secondly or teams were mentioned. The most frequently stated reason for these negative images was doping or doping suspicions, in some cases also concerns about the treatment of young athletes in China (Haut, 2014: 59-61).

However limited, these initial findings already allow considering some of the theoretical assumptions a bit more precise: Firstly, it can be confirmed that, also within the population, sporting success in general is considered important for international prestige. Secondly, that successful athletes and countries are also regarded as suspicious, underlines the importance of compliance with rules and standards as prerequisite of prestige. Thirdly, several results reject the notion that more medals do equal more prestige. Rather, the impact of Olympic success can be somewhat specified: a) The medal table as assumed “overall performance” of

---

<sup>5</sup> This could refer to Beijing 2008, Vancouver 2010 or London 2012, as the survey was conducted before, during and after London 2012, and no differentiation between Summer and Winter Games was undertaken.

a country only seems to have an impact on the views of a minority of the public; b) Certain disciplines indeed seem to have a greater impact than others (e.g. British track cyclist Chris Hoy, who has won as many gold medals as Usain Bolt, was not mentioned).

#### 4. *How to analyze changes in prestige?*

It suggests itself to take into account those methods and indicators to analyze international prestige through success, which have also been suggested by research on the legacies of sport mega-events. With methods of *media research* such as – qualitative and quantitative – content analysis of newspapers, several studies have tested if and how images of host countries are changing when staging sport-mega events (e.g. Brauer and Brauer (2008) on Germany and the Football World Cup 2006, Bieber (2011) on China and the Beijing Olympics 2008; see also Ingenhoff, Lais and Zosso (2013) on the cultural dimension of country images). There is no reason why such studies should not be conducted to evaluate the impact of success, but the general restrictions of the approach must be taken into account: Results of former studies on media response to sports-mega events showed “...that their assessment of the Games was filtered by domestic considerations, broader diplomatic concerns and longer established diplomatic relationships.” (Grix and Houlihan, 2014: 589) In this sense Reicher points to differences between media coverage on TV, radio or in newspapers and those in social media, where the atmosphere would be more hostile and images of other nations would be less friendly (Reicher, 2014: 21). Accordingly, analysis of such less controlled forums in social media could be interesting as well (e.g. Reicher 2013: 205-236), maybe not to find representative but extreme or ideal types of images.

As academic research has not delivered many empirical studies yet (see above), quantifiable data is often provided only by commercial *market research* or public relations consultancies. Several providers offer annual rankings for national images or soft power, which also include aspects concerning sports. In general, the problem with such reports is that they are not designed primarily for academic debate, but usually for customers paying for data and / or consultancy. That means, first of all, that often only few results are published, while the greater share of the data is only accessible for customers, but may not be reused for scientific purposes. Furthermore information about data acquisition, data processing and other methodological details are often scarce. However, some headline results seem interesting and the methodological approaches might be worth consideration. Some examples:

The first “Soft Power Index” was created by Institute for Government and Monocle magazine in 2010. Basically, it provided a ranking calculating several sub indices (e.g. “government”, “diplomacy” or “business”), which again were based on a number of different indicators (e.g. United Nations Human Development Index, Freedom House Index, “number of languages

spoken by the head of government” or “foreign direct investment as a percentage of gross fixed capital”) (McClory, 2010: 8-13). These “objective” factors were complemented by a “subjective side”, for which an expert panel rated the countries in question for aspects like the cuisine or “quality of the national airline” (with a ratio of 70 to 30 percent in favor of the “objective side”) (McClory, 2010: 4-5). Apparently the validity of this approach is doubtful, as potential input factors are added up without knowing if they are effective. By definition, power – be it hard, soft or smart – is not power if it does not have an impact. In order to learn about and measure soft power, the potential effects seem much more important and are clearly not sufficiently addressed by assessing expert opinions. This has also been admitted by the author, who has tried to strengthen this aspect in a new index (“Soft Power 30”). Now polling data is included, for which participants (N=7.250) from 20 countries rated 50 countries concerning their cuisine, culture, technology products etc (McClory, 2015: 18-23, see also 47-50). However, perceptions of sporting performances are not included in this polling data, but sport aspects are only addressed as input items: “Gold medals at last Olympics” and “position in (men’s) FIFA ranking” are counting for the “culture” sub index – so here again the impact of certain forms of sporting success is taken for granted, but not tested.<sup>6</sup>

Marketing company Sportcal is focusing particularly on sports, especially on the reach and impact of international events.<sup>7</sup> A Global Sports Cities Index and a Global Sports Nations Index are calculated by the number and characteristics (e.g. frequency, number of athletes and nations, attendance etc) of events hosted. More recently, a Global Sports Impact Project and a Global Sports Impact Report have been launched, which shall also take into account effects on sport participation and the “social impact” of sport (Sportcal, 2015: 4-7). However, problems are similar to those the Soft Power Index: Calculation of input factors is elaborate, but when it comes to outputs, especially “social impact”, evidence is limited. For instance, impact on mass participation is addressed only by few numbers on triathlon participants and secondary information from the Active People Survey<sup>8</sup> (Sportcal, 2015: 10-11); the question of international prestige is not explicitly addressed.

The Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Index seems to be exceptional in this respect, as it is, firstly, focusing on the output side of soft power strategies by assessing the image of (50) nations in (20) other countries via online surveys (total N>20.000), and secondly, it includes explicitly the perception of a country’s sporting performance. Therefore changes in this ranking have been treated as indicator for improving the international image through sport, especially the example of Germany climbing from 7th position in 2004 to the top rank in 2007, i.e. after

---

<sup>6</sup> An which has already been tested

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.sportcal.com/Impact/default.aspx> (accessed 18.03.2016)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.sportengland.org/research/about-our-research/what-is-the-active-people-survey/> (accessed 18.03.2016)

hosting the 2006 Football World Cup (see Grix and Houlihan, 2014: 580-582; Körber, 2015: 165-167). However, the problem is that such interpretations can only refer to bits of headline data from press releases of the company<sup>9</sup> or short comments by the founder of the index (e.g. Anholt, 2014). But as the detailed data on sport are not freely accessible and may not be reproduced extensively, they cannot be a subject of scientific discussion.

According to information from company staff and a blinded trial copy (GfK Public Affairs and Corporate Communications, 2014), at least one item on sporting performance “[Country xyz] excels at sports”, counting for the culture sub index, is continuously assessed (at least since 2008). Some results for this item can be gathered from the German Tourism Board, which is including NBI scores for several items in its market information on incoming tourism. According to that, in the 2015 NBI Germany scored 5.40 (on a seven-point scale where 1 is lowest and 7 highest agreement) on the item “excels at sports” on average from all countries; but was rated somewhat lower by respondents from the UK (5.37), France (5.12), USA (5.03) and especially Japan (4.77) (Deutsche Zentrale für Tourismus, 2015a: 19-21; 2015b: 18-19; 2015c: 20-21; 2015d: 22-24). That might give an indication that such data on international reception of sporting success might reveal some interesting insights.

Finally, potential effects of hosting sport events have often been supported via *indirect indicators*. That means changes in continuously collected data are interpreted as an impact of an event, although the connection is not entirely clear. Especially concerning the economic impact it is often heavily disputed what can be calculated as added value of an event (on economic aspects of sport events in general, see Maennig and Zimbalist, 2012). An example that is frequently used are tourism figures (e.g. Grix and Houlihan, 2014: 580), which can in fact be considered as direct indicators only if it was controlled if tourists were really attracted by the sport event or came for other reasons. However, if it is already difficult to analyze such factors as output of events, that is even more the case when considering the possible impact of success: For instance, it is imaginable that sporting success affects the international reputation of a country in a way that e.g. tourism might benefit (“Boris Becker wasn’t too bad, so let’s go to Germany for holidays this year...”). But for a start that seems too speculative, in the first instance possible effects on the perception of a country have to be analyzed. Further data which is worth consideration in this respect is provided by the PEW research centre, specifically its Global Attitudes and Trends Question Database.<sup>10</sup> It does not provide sport-specific information, but has frequently surveyed opinions of the population of many countries towards other countries (2002: six countries, since 2010: > 20 countries each year; representative telephone and online surveys with N>800 respondents per country). As an example, Table 1 shows results for the opinion of Germany in several countries for spring 2006 and spring 2007, i.e. the before and after Germany hosted the Football World Cup.

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gfk.com/en-in/insights/press-release/usa-regains-position-as-top-nation-brand-from-germany-1> (accessed 18.03.2016)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.pewglobal.org/category/datasets/> (accessed 21.03.2016)

While the Nation Brand Index headline data indicated an image improvement and tourism figures were rising, a positive effect on the general view of Germany in the world cannot be confirmed. Opinions in Russia and France remained stable, those in the United States and in Britain were even a bit worse – only the Germans had a somewhat better opinion of themselves. For China instead, moderate improvements of the perception in many countries (including e.g. the USA, Britain, France, Germany, Japan or Argentina) could be revealed from the survey before and after the Beijing Olympics (spring 2008, spring 2009). Both examples should make the possibilities and limits of the data clear: in the case of China, the hypothesis that hosting the Olympics might have contributed to the improved international opinion can be kept up and investigated further; for Germany the impact of hosting the Football World Cup was at least not so strong that it had changed its overall image permanently.

Table 1: General opinion of Germany in selected countries

Please tell me if you have a (...) opinion of...Germany						
Country	Survey	Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Somewhat unfavorable	Very unfavorable	Don't Know / Refused
<b>Britain</b>						
	Spring 2007	14	60	8	4	13
	Spring 2006	20	54	9	3	14
<b>France</b>						
	Spring 2007	21	69	7	3	0
	Spring 2006	20	69	8	3	0
<b>Russia</b>						
	Spring 2007	22	55	10	2	11
	Spring 2006	22	55	10	4	9
<b>Spain</b>						
	Spring 2007	11	65	12	3	8
	Spring 2006	14	58	11	4	13
<b>United States</b>						
	Spring 2007	15	46	11	5	23
	Spring 2006	20	46	9	4	21
<b>Germany</b>						
	Spring 2007	17	56	21	6	1
	Spring 2006	12	53	25	8	2
Source: Pew Global Attitudes & Trends Question Database						

## 5. *Suggestions for Future Research*

Certainly, any empirical study on sporting success and international prestige has to address both input and output aspects, but that does not mean that both have to be fully operationalized in advance. Given the all too broad assumptions, for a start it would already be an advance to take up existing indicators for the one side, but to try to specify the other one. For a specification of the input, it has to be analyzed what specific kind of success is really appreciated internationally; for a specification of the output, the contribution of such sporting prestige to the overall image of a country needs to be scrutinized.

As shown above, it is unlikely that sporting success is sufficiently operationalized by the number of Olympic (gold) medals or by a country's rank in the medal index. Alternative indicators might lead to different results. Especially the Elite Sport Index by De Bosscher et al. (2013: 324), which has already been tested in a study on the trickle-down effect, provides a more differentiated approach. It takes into account not only the Olympics, but also world championships and European championships – and not only medals, but also positions four to eight are calculated. However, still there are sports which do not fit into such a pattern, as they are not Olympic or their world championships are not the most prestigious events or they do not have continental championships at all. So, apart from constructing suitable global indices for a nation's sporting success, the more specific task is to figure out in which sports, at which events and under which conditions (story-telling, compliance with rules etc) different amounts or forms (convertibility is a question of its own) of sporting prestige are generated. In this respect, some data provided by sport market research, e.g. on attendances or media coverage (Sportcal, 2015), can reveal insights about the reach of particular events and can help to estimate if and how success in certain sports is recognized internationally or globally. But if the old myth that “there is no such thing as bad publicity” shall not be taken for granted, an analysis of the international reach of certain sports and events is only one step – the other one is to analyze the concrete impact of different forms of success on prestige and images in detail.

However, with the available data on international prestige (as described above), insights into its relation to sporting success are quite limited. For a start, it might give some clues to check if different prestige indicators “react” differently on sport performances when compared simultaneously (e.g. Nation Brands Index, PEW Global Attitudes data, and tourism and media indicators). However, as those indicators cannot reveal causal relationships, and as the only existing dataset (i.e. detailed NBI reports including sport-specific items) which promises to allow a preliminary estimation of sports' contribution to the image of nations seems not usable for scientific purposes currently,<sup>11</sup> original studies generating specific data are inevitable.

---

<sup>11</sup> Even if funding would be secured that allows purchasing the data, the current terms of business set too strict limitations for publication.



Firstly, as changes of prestige are focused, it seems necessary that any study of this kind has to take a time-trend perspective. Secondly, as bi-national approaches run the risk of revealing too specific relations between two countries, studies should be multi-national and involve at least three different countries. In this respect, cross-national media studies seem to be an approach which can be applied more easily (in terms of data collection and financial resources) – but these only reveal the “published opinion” about other countries and their sporting performance. For the analysis of the “public opinion” – which should be even more interesting when soft power and public diplomacy, implying a certain shift away from traditional actors and institutions, are guiding theoretical concepts – there seems to be no alternative to population surveys.<sup>12</sup> These should cover the perception of sporting success as detailed as necessary, but also address international prestige as an independent dimension, i.e. it shall not be presupposed that the former does affect the latter.

### References

- Allison L and Monnington T (2002) Sport, prestige and international relations. *Government and Opposition* 37 (1), 106-134.
- Anholt S (2014) Soft Power. *Internationale Politik* (1), 48-53.
- Auer C, Srugies A and Löffelholz M (2015) Schlüsselbegriffe der internationalen Diskussion: Public Diplomacy und Soft Power. In KJ Maaß (Ed) *Kultur und Außenpolitik* (pp.39-46). Wiesbaden: Nomos.
- Bieber L (2011) *China in der deutschen Berichterstattung 2008. Eine multiperspektivische Inhaltsanalyse*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Brauer S and Brauer G (2008) *Was ist bloß los mit den Deutschen? Die Fußball-WM 2006 und das Deutschlandbild in der Welt*. Available on [http://resources.fifa.com/mm/document/afmarketing/marketing/sport3\\_57408.pdf](http://resources.fifa.com/mm/document/afmarketing/marketing/sport3_57408.pdf) (Accessed 03.03.2016)
- Breuer C and Hallmann K (2011) *Die gesellschaftliche Relevanz des Spitzensports in Deutschland*. Köln: Strauß.
- De Bosscher V, Bingham J, Shibli S, Van Bottenburg M and De Knop P (2007) *The Global Sporting Arms Race. An International Comparative Study on Sports Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success*. Aachen: Meyer and Meyer Sports.
- De Bosscher V, Sotiriadou P and Van Bottenburg M (2013) Scrutinizing the sport pyramid metaphor: an examination of the relationship between elite success and mass participation in Flanders. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 5 (3), 319-339.
- Denham B (2010) Correlates of pride in the performance success of United States athletes competing on an international stage. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 45 (4), 457-473.
- Deutsche Zentrale für Tourismus (2015a) *Marktinformation. Incoming-Tourismus Deutschland 2016. Vereinigtes Königreich*. Frankfurt: Deutsche Zentrale für Tourismus e.V.
- Deutsche Zentrale für Tourismus (2015b) *Marktinformation. Incoming-Tourismus Deutschland 2016. Frankreich*. Frankfurt: Deutsche Zentrale für Tourismus e.V.

---

<sup>12</sup> Analyses of social media platforms can be an “intermediate” approach in this respect, but of course they bear the problem of missing representativeness.

- Deutsche Zentrale für Tourismus (2015c) *Marktinformation. Incoming-Tourismus Deutschland 2016. USA*. Frankfurt: Deutsche Zentrale für Tourismus e.V.
- Deutsche Zentrale für Tourismus (2015d) *Marktinformation. Incoming-Tourismus Deutschland 2016. Japan*. Frankfurt: Deutsche Zentrale für Tourismus e.V.
- Dóczy T (2012) Gold fever (?): Sport and national identity – The Hungarian case. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 47 (2), 165-182.
- Emrich E, Gassmann F, Haut J, Pierdzioch C and Prohl R (2015) Medaillen für die nationale Repräsentanz? Zur Bedeutung von Medaillenerfolgen bei Olympischen Spielen. *Sport und Gesellschaft* 12 (1), 39-67.
- Emrich E, Pierdzioch C and Pitsch W (2014) Die „Marke“ Olympia und die besondere Bedeutung von Vertrauenskriterien – Eine Geschichte von Markt, Macht und Moral. In J Haut (Ed) *Leistungssport als Konkurrenz der Nationen* (pp.85-112). Saarbrücken: Universaar.
- Evans M and Kelley J (2002) National pride in the developed world: Survey data from 24 nations. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 14 (3), 303-338.
- Fan Y (2006) Branding the Nation: What is Being Branded? *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 12 (1), 5-14.
- GfK Public Affairs and Corporate Communications (2014) *The Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Index 2014 Report*. Blinded Version, not publicly available.
- Grix J (2012) 'Image' leveraging and sports mega-events: Germany and the 2006 FIFA World Cup. *Journal of Sport and Tourism* 17 (4), 289-312.
- Grix J (2014a) Warum investieren Regierungen in den Leistungssport? Nachfragen an Jonathan Grix. In J Haut (Ed) *Leistungssport als Konkurrenz der Nationen* (pp.36-44). Saarbrücken: Universaar.
- Grix J (Ed) (2014b) *Leveraging Legacies from Sports Mega-Events: Concepts and Cases*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grix J and Carmichael F (2012) Why do governments invest in elite sports? A polemic. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 4 (1), 73-90.
- Grix J and Houlihan B (2014) Sports Mega-Events as Part of a Nation's Soft Power Strategy: The Cases of Germany (2006) and the UK (2012). *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 16 (4), 572-596.
- Hallmann K, Breuer C and Kühnreich F (2013) Happiness, pride and elite sporting success: What population segments gain most from national athletic achievements? *Sport Management Review* 16 (2), 226-235.
- Haut J (2014) Gesellschaftliche Funktionen des olympischen Leistungssports. In J Haut (Ed) *Leistungssport als Konkurrenz der Nationen* (pp.45-67). Saarbrücken: Universaar.
- Haut J, Prohl R and Emrich E (2014) Nothing but Medals? Attitudes towards the Importance of Olympic Success. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. DOI: 10.1177/1012690214526400
- Holt R and Ruta D (Eds) (2015) *Routledge Handbook of Sport and Legacy. Meeting the challenge of major sport events*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.
- Ingenhoff D (2013) Forschungsdesiderate zur internationalen PR-Forschung. In D Ingenhoff (Ed) *Internationale PR-Forschung* (pp.11-33). Konstanz: UVK.
- Ingenhoff D, Lais C and Zosso J (2013). Länderimages und die Rolle der Kultur. In D Ingenhoff (Ed) *Internationale PR-Forschung* (pp.183-206). Konstanz: UVK.
- Jackson S and Haigh S (Eds) (2009) *Sport and Foreign Policy in a Globalizing World*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.
- Koerber S (2015) Imagepflege als Daueraufgabe. Das vielschichtige Deutschlandbild. In KJ Maaß (Ed) *Kultur und Außenpolitik* (pp.160-168). Wiesbaden: Nomos.
- Levermore R and Budd A (2004) Sport and International Relations: Continued Neglect? In R Levermore and A Budd (Eds) *Sport and International Relations: An emerging relationship* (pp.6-15). London / New York: Routledge.
- Maaß KJ (2013) Rolle und Bedeutung von Evaluation in der Auswärtigen Kulturpolitik Deutschlands. In V Hennefeld and R Stockmann (Eds) *Evaluation in Kultur und Kulturpolitik. Eine Bestandsaufnahme* (pp.35-52). Münster: Waxmann.

- Maennig W and Zimbalist A (Eds.) (2012) *International Handbook on the Economics of Mega Sporting Events*. Cheltenham, Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Maguire J (1999) *Global Sport. Identities, Societies, Civilizations*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- McClory J (2010) *The New Persuaders. An international ranking of soft power*. London: Institute for Government. Available on <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk> (accessed 17.03.2016)
- McClory J (2015) *The Soft Power 30. A Global Ranking of Soft Power*. London et al.: Portland Communications.
- Murray S and Pigman G (2014) Mapping the relationship between international sport and diplomacy. *Sport in Society* 17 (9), 1098-1118.
- Mutter F and Pawlowski T (2014) Role models in sports – Can success in professional sports increase the demand for amateur sport participation? *Sport Management Review* 17, 324–336.
- Mutz M (2013) Patrioten für drei Wochen. Nationale Identifikation und die Fußball Europameisterschaft 2012. *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 22 (4), 517-538.
- Nye J (2004) *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Payne W, Reynolds M, Brown S and Fleming A (2002). *Sports Role Models and their Impact on Participation in Physical Activity: A Literature Review*. University of Ballarat.
- PEW Global Attitudes and Trends Question Database: <http://www.pewglobal.org/> (accessed 18.03.2016)
- Reicher, D. (2013). *Nationensport und Mediennation. Zur Transformation von Nation und Nationalismus im Zeitalter elektronischer Massenmedien*. Göttingen: V and R unipress.
- Reicher D (2014) Historische und aktuelle Entwicklungen nationalstaatlicher Konkurrenz im Sport. Eine Diskussion mit Dieter Reicher und Tobias Werron. In J Haut (Ed) *Leistungssport als Konkurrenz der Nationen* (pp.12-35). Saarbrücken: Universaar.
- Sportcal (2015) *The Global Sports Impact Report 2015. Executive Summary*. Available on [http://www.sportcal.com/Impact/GSI\\_Report2015\\_details.aspx](http://www.sportcal.com/Impact/GSI_Report2015_details.aspx) (accessed 18.03.2016)
- Van Hilvoorde I, Elling A and Stokvis R (2010) How to Influence National Pride? The Olympic Medal Index as a Unifying Narrative. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 45 (1), 87-102.
- Van Hilvoorde I and Elling A (2014) Zum Zusammenhang von sportlichem Erfolg und Nationalstolz – am Beispiel der Niederlande. In J Haut (Ed) *Leistungssport als Konkurrenz der Nationen* (pp.68-88). Saarbrücken: Universaar.