International Prestige through 'Sporting Success': an evaluation of the evidence

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Abstract: A central argument for public funding of elite sport is the claim that success at the Olympic Games or world championships leads to increasing international prestige for cities and states. While this assumption seems plausible in general, it clearly lacks specification. Given this, we first discuss here several theoretical approaches in order to unpack which forms of prestige can be sought by states in which kind of sports and events. Second, we summarize the (rather limited) state of empirical research on the topic. Third, secondary data, offering possible indicators for sport-induced changes in international prestige, are presented and discussed. The resulting picture reveals that the formula 'the more success, the more prestige' is too simple. The paper concludes by suggesting methodological approaches towards a more systematic analysis of states' use of sport to acquire international prestige.

Keywords: elite sport, prestige, international relations, nation branding, soft power

1. Introduction

Government investments in the hosting of first- and second-order sport mega-events (SMEs) (Black, 2008) and in the continuous funding of promising athletes (coaches, facilities, scientific advice, etc.) are legitimized through the materialization of certain social and political outcomes. National sport federations are interested in highlighting their assumed contributions to the public good, and their arguments are frequently adopted by governmental policy makers in many countries, from democratic states such

as the UK and Germany, to autocratic states such as Qatar: It is argued that state – and in many cases public – investment in elite sport will pay off in the short- and long-term via increased economic revenues, amplified national pride and 'feel-good factors', urban regeneration, 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 and 'soft power' (cf. Grix & Brannagan, 2016; Preuss, 2007). Such political claims are often presented as self-evident and are based on rather broad assumptions, so that they usually lack theoretical specification and coherence (Grix & Carmichael, 2012). However, a recurrent argument is the allegedly symbiotic relation between elite sport and "sport for all", which suggests benefits for a majority of the population from rather specific investments. Of Ffurther of note is that both investing in SMEs and in athletic success are in fact often interwoven, as countries tend to spend more on sports when hosting an event in the near future, or vice versa are more motivated to host an event when they are successful.

While recent academic research has devoted more attention to sport mega-events and their legacies (e.g. Girginov & Hills, 2008; Grix, 2014; Holt & Ruta, 2015; Weed *et al.,* 2012), here we seek to focus solely on the effects of investing in international athletic *success*. In this respect, previous research has focused on three key topics (for an overview see Haut, 2014), of which we thus seek to build upon: effects of success on feelings and attitudes of a country's own population (pride, identity, the so-called 'feel-good factor'); effects of successful athletes on the diffusion of sport and physical activity participation (trickle-down/pyramid/demonstration effect) and of sporting values (role-model function); and, effects of success on the international perception and soft power of a country (image, prestige, reputation). To date, only a few empirical studies address a broader range of these aspects (see: Breuer & Hallmann, 2011; Breuer, Hallmann & Ilgner, 2017; Haut, Prohl & Emrich, 2016). Many scholars have studied effects of sporting success on attitudes – especially on national pride – of several populations (e.g. Denham, 2010; Doczi, 2012; Emrich, Gassmann, Haut, Pierdzioch & Prohl, 2015; Evans & Kelley, 2002; Hallmann, Breuer & Kühnreich, 2013; Meier & Mutz, 2016; Van Hilvoorde, Elling & Stokvis, 2010). Additionally, sporting stars as role-models (Meier, 2010) and effects of elite sport success on mass sport participation have also been analyzed in many different countries with different methodological approaches (see: De Bosscher, Sotiriadou & van Bottenburg, 2013; Frick & Wicker, 2016; Payne, Reynolds, Brown & Fleming, 2002; Weimar, Wicker & Prinz, 2015). Thus, compared to these rather extensively addressed aspects, the possible effects of sporting success on international prestige are clearly under-researched. In this respect, not only the political, but also the academic debate seems dominated by rather general assumptions.

Therefore, the aim of our paper is to develop a more differentiated and fact-based perspective on the relation of sporting performances and international prestige, which shall serve as a baseline for future research. Theoretically, we build on existing approaches on sport and soft power, and try to specify the prestige that can be gained by success in different sports and events. According to our knowledge and extensive literature research, empirical studies explicitly focusing on our question do not exist. Thus, we take into account broader data provided by a) academic (sport) studies with a broader or different focus, and b) market and opinion research, in order to deliver an overview of empirical results on sport and prestige. Our paper shows some interesting

findings, but a distinct gap between the assumptions taken for granted and the actual evidence. This shall be addressed by discussing different methodological approaches to study our question at stake.

In seeking to achieve the above, the paper is separated into three main sections. First, we review the literature and discuss relevant theoretical concepts and empirical findings which underpin our contribution. Second, we present market and opinion research data on sport and international prestige, and discuss whether it provides suitable indicators and potential for re-analyses. Finally, we offer some recommendations for future research in analyzing the perceived materialization of prestige through athletic success.

2. Conceptual Approaches to Elite Sport Success and International Prestige

That success in sports can increase a country's international prestige seems to be a taken-for-granted notion. Already in the early years of the modern Olympic Games, different nations considered the competition as an opportunity to shape their international image (Krueger, 1995; see also Freeman, 2012, 1268-1270; Reicher, 2013, 115-144). The British press worried about a 'worthy representation of Great Britain' and that the 3rd place in the medal count of the 1912 Stockholm Games might be regarded internationally as 'evidence of England's decadence' (Krueger, 1995, 187). Later, as is well known, elite sport was an important stage where capitalist and socialist powers struggled for supremacy during the Cold War. However, not only superpowers, but emerging and small nations too, have tried to put themselves on the international map by taking part, and even more so by excelling, at major competitions in globally recognized sports ever since (see Krueger, 1995, for the case of Germany before World War I; or Allison and Monnington, 2002, 124-132, for the case of African states after decolonization). It seems that these historic examples have been reproduced continuously, with ever more nations joining the 'Global Sporting Arms Race' (De Bosscher, Bingham, Shibli, Van Bottenburg & De Knop, 2007). While continuity and changes concerning both the motives (Grix & Carmichael, 2012) and the strategies (De Bosscher, Shibli, Westerbeek & van Bottenburg, 2015) of the nations involved have been analyzed thoroughly, the outcomes in terms of prestige – and possible changes in the last decades – have not been scrutinized similarly. For instance, who is impressed by Germany's sporting prowess after the main rival, the GDR, has disappeared? Does Great Britain's strategy to reassure its reputation as a sport country really pay off? What exactly would it say about the Netherlands if they were in the Top-10 of the Olympic medal count?

Sport and International Relations

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 & Monington, 2002; Levermore & Budd, 2004), more recently 'a modest increase in academic interest' (Grix & 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 indicates (cf. Jackson & Haigh, 2009). Sports can be an occasion for diplomacy ('sports diplomacy') in the narrow sense

of the term, or for fostering various foreign policy goals, as evidenced by the now famous 'ping-pong diplomacy' which helped break the ice in U.S.-China relations (Xu, 2006); or Japanese and South Korean authority's decision to co-host the 2002 FIFA World Cup, which in-part looked to lay the groundwork for future internationalism and cooperation between the two nations (cf. Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006). These strategies, aiming at largely specific issues and pursued via traditional political institutions, have to be differentiated from – although commonly they tend to overlap with – broader strategies of nation branding (Grix & Houlihan, 2014, 575-578). The latter are aiming at international prestige in a wider sense, as they do not address a specific actor, but want to shape the image of a nation on the global stage. Recent examples here include the UK's staging of the London 2012 Olympic Games, Brazil's hosting of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympic Games, and the forthcoming 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar (cf. Almeida et al., 2014; Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2014; 2015).

In an earlier attempt to grasp the changing relevance of sport in international relations, Allison & Monnington (2002, 111) 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.

Meanwhile, these tendencies in foreign policy have been described in greater detail, especially with reference to the concept of soft power (Nye, 2004).[1] According to that perspective, what Allison & Monnington term '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' through attraction as opposed to coercion and/or force (Nye, 2004, 2). Nye (2008) argues that such attraction can be acquired by national leaders by demonstrating their state's seductive culture, innovative ideologies and/or credible and commendable institutions and policies. 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, as Grix & Houlihan (2014, 576) argue:

> 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…

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 somewhat

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) than 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 planned much better (though not completely) than sporting success in the narrower sense: in many disciplines, championships and 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.). The latter is a long-term investment, necessary over at least 10 years; hosting an event is a very expensive, one-off cost without the need for the complex infrastructure behind elite sport success. Both, investment in the staging of sports mega-events and athletic success can, of course, also generate reputational damage or 'soft disempowerment' for state authorities, as evidenced by the international scrutiny of Qatar's broader human right issues since the countries awarding of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, or through the Brazilian national team's humiliating 7-1 defeat to the hands of the Germans during the 2014 World Cup semi-finals (cf. Grix et al., 2015; Brannagan & Rookwood, 2016; Grix & Brannagan, 2016). Nonetheless, we may argue that athletic success creates more opportunities for risk and reputational damage to state leaders than the staging of sport events – after all, the margins for ensuring success on the field/track are always more minimal than off it (cf. Allison & Monnington, 2002). 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) perhaps provides some explanation here. In line with Nye's understanding of the international system, Reicher observes how sport's political value has increased as the importance attached to military power has declined. 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 allows 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). While this struggle for prestige in internationally recognized competitions meanwhile can be observed in other cultural fields – such as the Eurovision Song Contest and/or the Oscar Awards – sport may be considered a forerunner in terms of setting globally accepted rules and norms (cf. Reicher & Werron, 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/city. Sporting success in the narrower sense, however, 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.

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 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, gaining 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, in relation to 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 & Pitsch, 2014). Further, it is obvious that not every sport is equally important in all countries. Reicher states that performance prestige would not be, like gold, coveted everywhere in the world (Reicher & Werron, 2014). He suggests to differentiate circles of competition ('Wettbewerbskreise'), which tie different nations to each other and which award prestige according to specific performances 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, for example, than in speed skating, gymnastics or rugby; in tennis, winning the Grand Slam (or even Wimbledon alone) counts more than winning the World Championship title; and a four times Kitzbühel winner (e.g. Franz Klammer) is famous in winter sport nations, but won't get much attention in tropical countries.

Nonetheless, if one event could claim to assemble all nations in most sports and thus promise to enable world-wide prestige that would surely be the Summer Olympic Games, with an audience of more than 3.5 billion people in more than 200 countries (IOC, 2016, 18-27). Indeed, if something like a globally accepted 'currency' of performance prestige in sports existed, it would be Olympic medals (although in many sports other titles are more prestigious, e.g. winning the Tour de France in cycling). 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 questioned whether 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), it is not necessarily the athletic results alone that impress populations, but also the stories unfolding in sporting competitions. Van Hilvoorde et al. (2010, 94-95) underline this notion with the telling example that after the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, hardly any of the hundred Chinese medals would be remembered internationally, but many people recalled that 110m hurdler and defending Olympic champion Liu Xiang had to withdraw because of an injury. 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, sport-intensive state' (Murray & Pigman, 2014, 1109) (cf. Iceland beating England in football at Euro 2016). Indeed, not only the national, but also the international public has expectations towards a country. In that sense it would be

interesting, in turn, to study effects of (actual or perceived) international prestige on developing national identity or fostering national pride (Freeman, 2012, 1265-1268; Cha, 2016, 141).

Empirical Studies

Only few empirical studies have tried to assess effects of sporting success on international prestige explicitly. Breuer & Hallmann (2011) included some items referring to international prestige in a study on attitudes towards elite sport among a representative sample of 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 & Hallmann, 2011, 19-20). Concerning success, 55% stated that it would be 'important for the reputation of German companies abroad that German athletes win medals at Olympic Games or world championships', and 78.2% said medals would be in general 'important for Germany's reputation abroad' (Breuer & Hallmann, 2011, 11). Similarly, in surveys before and after the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, Humphreys, Johnson, Mason & Whitehead (2016, 10-12) found that 67% (before) and 83% (after) of the Canadian population considered the medal count important for Canada's standing in the world. In a follow-up study in 2016, Breuer et al. (2017) replicated some of the items used in the 2011 survey: According to that, the share of those considering medals as important for the reputation of Germany abroad or for the reputation of German companies abroad had decreased significantly to 60.9% and 48.5%, respectively (Breuer et al., 2017, 12-13). However, it is important to note that this is not what other nations think about Germany – but these are only German beliefs concerning international opinion. That there may be strong discrepancies between national and international perception is also indicated by Breuer et al. (2017, 17-19), who find that their respondents trust much more in moral integrity, fairness and incorruptibility of their compatriot athletes (81.3%) and national associations (62.7%) than in international athletes (39.3%) and associations (33.4%). These results also seem to confirm that the confidence in international sports competitions – an assumed prerequisite for prestige as mentioned above – has been shaken currently, at least among the German population.

Haut et al. (2016) 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 et al., 2016, 340-341). Additionally an open question was included asking if, at former Olympics (2008-2012), 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) most frequently 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).

Obviously, empirical findings concerning effects of performances on prestige are quite limited. There seems a strong belief that success of compatriot athletes is considered important for the image abroad, but in turn people seem not very impressed by other countries performances. At least, the notion that medals alone might awake sympathies is considered skeptically. The form of success – especially if it has been achieved fair – does matter apparently.

3. Market and Opinion Research Data as Indicators (for Effects of Sporting Success)

As academic research has not delivered many empirical studies to-date, arguments are often based on data collected by commercial market research or public relations consultancies. Several providers (see below) 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 paying customers. That means, first of all, that often only few results are published, while the greater share of the data may not be reused for scientific purposes. Furthermore, information about data acquisition, data processing, and other methodological details are often scarce. However, as some of the data seem interesting, we discuss whether the data might be used for secondary analyses, in order to learn more about international prestige through sports, or maybe even test some of the theoretical assumptions.

First, the 'Soft Power Index' provided a ranking calculating several sub-indices (e.g. 'government', 'diplomacy' or 'business'), which 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 (with a ratio of 70 to 30 percent) 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' (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 McClory, who has tried to strengthen this aspect in a new version of the 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 on 'soft power' is taken for granted, but not

tested. Problems are similar for the 'Global Sports Impact Project' and the 'Global Sports Impact Report' launched by marketing company Sportcal.[2] Calculation of input factors is elaborate, but when it comes to outputs in terms of 'social impact', evidence is scarce (Sportcal, 2015, 10-11). The question of international prestige is not explicitly addressed, but the information on the reach and impact of international sport events (e.g. frequency, number of participating athletes and nations, attendances etc.) might be useful for differentiating the potential prestige of different sports and different competitions.

The most prominent source of this kind is the Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Index, which is frequently quoted by policy makers, but sometimes also in the academic context. Indeed, it seems to be exceptional, as it is, firstly, focusing on the output side of branding 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 hosting the 2006 Football World Cup (see Grix and Houlihan, 2014, 580-582; Koerber, 2015, 165-167). However, the problem is that such interpretations can only refer to bits of headline data from press releases of the company or short comments by the founder of the index (e.g. Anholt, 2014). But the detailed data on sport are not freely accessible and may not be reproduced in a public academic 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 could 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 NBI data could be useful if it were affordable for universities, and first of all, if it could be used for academic purposes without restrictions. Particularly interesting in this respect appears the possibility to compare effects of sporting success to other, e.g. political or economic aspects, which seem likely to be even more important for a country's overall prestige.

This brings us directly to the question of whether the impact of sport on international prestige can be clarified further by secondary analyses of available data. For instance, in the 'legacies debate' rather global, 'macro-level' indicators are often used to underpin supposed effects of hosting sport events - although the assumed connection is not clear. Especially, concerning the economic impact it is often heavily disputed what can be calculated as added value of an event (on economic aspect of sport events in general, see Maennig & Zimbalist, 2012). An example that is frequently used are tourism figures, which can in fact be considered as a direct output indicator only if it was controlled whether 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 possible effects on international prestige.

This can be demonstrated with data from the Global Attitudes and Trends Question Database, provided by the PEW research center.[3] Is 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). Table 1 shows results for the opinion of Germany in several countries for spring 2006 and spring 2007, i.e. before and after Germany hosted the Football World Cup. While, as mentioned above, 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. This example should make the possibilities and limits of such kind of data clear: For Germany, we would have to conclude that the impact of hosting the Football World Cup was at least not so strong that it had improved the overall opinion in all other countries. However, that does not mean that there was no effect at all: maybe the international opinion would have worsened without the event, or maybe other (political?) factors intervened and thus prevented an improvement of the general international opinion. Certainly some 'effects' cannot be directly measured, but nonetheless do affect wider international developments. As long as such relations between sport and other factors influencing prestige are not somewhat clarified, secondary analyses of global data do not reveal that much. Therefore, first of all, basic research is needed to clarify the relevant aspects affecting success and prestige. Concluding, we will offer some according suggestions – after having summarized evidence and assumptions deriving from the literature and data review.

Insert table 1 about here!

4. Summary and Suggestions for Future Research

However limited, the findings from the literature and other data already allow considering some assumptions on sporting success and international prestige a bit more precisely. Generally, it can be confirmed (at least with evidence from Canada and Germany) that success is considered important for a country's reputation abroad by large sections of the population (Breuer at al. 2017; Humphreys et al., 2016). But this seemingly simple connection is in fact much more complex in detail, and both sides of the equation – success and prestige – need specification: First of all, it is important to note that there is no international standard currency for sporting success which would guarantee prestige. Neither is the medal table as assumed 'overall result' accepted as a reason to consider a country as better than others, nor does every single gold medal have the same impact. Firstly, it must be noticed that the perception of a nation's sporting performances may vary from country to country, as the few available NBI results on the different estimation of Germany's sporting performance (see above) indicate. Secondly,

considering the global average, different sports will be of different importance. For instance, while the stars of track and field or swimming like Usain Bolt or Michael Phelps are quite often positively remembered, equally successful athletes from less prominent disciplines, e.g. British track cyclist Chris Hoy, are not (Haut, 2014). In line with the assumption by van Hilvoorde et al. (2010) that medals alone do not affect national pride, but that the 'stories behind' are important, it can be confirmed that only specific forms of success may lead to international prestige. Apart from the somewhat trivial notion that some sports and some events are more and some others are less prestigious, a very striking finding is that the compliance with rules and standards is indeed very important (Breuer et al., 2017; Haut et al., 2016) as a prerequisite of performance prestige (Reicher, 2013, 303-307). Vice versa, not only losing, but also winning by unfair means – or even only being suspected of that – may well damage the international image of a nation. Altogether, the relativity of success makes it clear that the competition for sporting prestige is not a zero-sum game: The prestige at stake is not equaled by the number of Olympic medals that can be won. There are, apart from the Olympics, many more sports and events belonging to international 'cycles of competition' which are prestigious in many countries. And, maybe even more important: a fourth place, a gesture of sportsmanship, or other 'stories' can affect a nation's image, too.

Considering the many open theoretical questions, the most striking seems to be: *to what degree* can the prestige of a country be influenced by sporting success? Some of the opinion research data discussed above indicates that sport's impact on the overall image of a nation might be rather limited. Altogether, we do not know the specific contribution of sport compared to other, e.g. political, economic, or cultural aspects. Neither do we have data enabling us to test if the theoretical differentiation between performance prestige and the (cultural) prestige ascribed to hosting events is tenable and useful. Moreover, existing evidence stems from rather few countries, thus a much broader comparative perspective is needed.

In order to overcome these shortages, a broad range of studies with different perspectives and methods may provide useful contributions. One important aspect would be to develop a more differentiated approach towards the question which sports, which events, which results, and under which preconditions, are really prestigious internationally. 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 certain sports are recognized internationally or globally. Then of course we know that some events like the Football World Cup and the Olympic Games are crucial, but for these competitions success seems not sufficiently operationalized by the number of titles or by a country's rank in the medal table. On the one hand, it should not be forgotten that success is relative to expectations. On the other hand, more differentiated indicators (e.g. the Elite Sport Index by De Bosscher et al., 2013) might be helpful. But a more detailed perspective on the performances is only one step – the more important one is to analyze the impact of such different forms of success on prestige and images in detail.

The problems of using indirect *global indicators* have been discussed in detail above. *Media studies* are frequently applied to evaluate the international perception of sport events in TV or newspapers, and thus might be an approach to study performance

prestige, too. However, these only reveal the 'published opinion' about other countries and athletes, which is often '…filtered by domestic considerations, broader diplomatic concerns and longer established diplomatic relationships' (Grix & Houlihan, 2014, 589). These considerations would apply less to social media, where the images of other nations might be less friendly or maybe even hostile (Reicher & Werron, 2014, 21; see also Reicher, 2013, 205-236). Accordingly, analyses might not reveal representative images, but certainly additional aspects. But eventually, when we are discussing sport and prestige in terms of soft power and public diplomacy, which are aiming less at traditional actors and institutions but rather at the 'public opinion', there seems to be no alternative to *population surveys*. These should cover the perception of sporting success as detailed as necessary, but also address other possible dimensions of international prestige such as political, economic or cultural aspects. As changes of prestige are focused, it seems necessary that studies of this kind should try to develop a time-trend perspective. And finally, studies should be multi-national in order to allow for a comparative perspective.

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Notes

[1] Freeman (2012) has also suggested to adopt the concept of (military) 'swaggering' for the analysis of sport. However, apart from the important notion that struggle for international success in sports is often rather driven by individual ambitions of (sport) policy leaders, this theoretical approach does not seem to add much to the soft power approach. Freeman (2012: 1263-6) emphasizes a close connection between the concepts, but the differences, advantages and disadvantages are not made quite clear.
[2] http://www.sportcal.com/Impact (accessed 21.02.2017)
[3] http://www.pewglobal.org/category/datasets/ (accessed 21.03.2016)

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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
Britain						
	Spring 2007	14	60	8	4	13
	Spring 2006	20	54	9	3	14
France						
	Spring 2007	21	69	7	3	0
	Spring 2006	20	69	8	3	0
Russia						
	Spring 2007	22	55	10	2	11
	Spring 2006	22	55	10	4	9
Spain						
	Spring 2007	11	65	12	3	8
	Spring 2006	14	58	11	4	13
United States						
	Spring 2007	15	46	11	5	23
	Spring 2006	20	46	9	4	21
Germany						
	Spring 2007	17	56	21	6	1
	Spring 2006	12	53	25	8	2
Source: Pew Global Attitudes & Trends Question Database						