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# Sport, a gateway to international influence?

A study of Sweden's sport diplomacy

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# Abstract

Small states are vulnerable to disrupting occurrences in the international system, for example, conflicts. A way to counterbate this is by controlling the policy environment, which can be done by having a strong soft power. There are many ways one can gain soft power, one of which is via sports. Therefore, has this thesis set out to explain and examine Sweden's sport diplomacy role on soft power. With the concepts of credibility and soft power package, the reader gets an understanding of how sports play a role in a state's soft power. Qualitative textual analysis has been used to analyse sport diplomatic initiatives for underlying themes, such as culture and values. The researcher has created nine analytical questions for the material, which are divided in three different categories *Representation*, *Recognition* and *Reputation*. All to get a better understanding of the complex relationship between sports and soft power. The result of the analysis shows that sports do play a role in Sweden's soft power and that its sport diplomacy contains two major themes *Human rights* and *Sustainability*.

*Keyword:* Sweden, Soft power package, Sport diplomacy, Credibility

*Words:* 9647

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# 1. Introduction

In 1945 George Orwell wrote that sport is “*war minus the shooting*” (Orwell, 1945). This is a statement that is easy to understand when one thinks of sports connection to warfare. It was an effective tool for keeping the population strong and healthy during peace times and made sure that citizens knew how to handle weapons such as bow & arrow (Houlihan, 2000, p. 216; Hurcombe & Dine, 2020, p. 338; Murray, 2018, p. 44). In modern research, some researchers have even gone so far as to argue that sports competitions can be seen as surrogate war (D’agati, 2018). Sport as surrogate war can only be understood in the context of a liberal world order. Where the use of force is less accepted as it jeopardises post-industrial, particularly advanced capitalist, state’s economy (Grix & Brannagan, 2016, p. 253). Within the liberal world order, peace is achieved by states being connected with each other in a complex system of trade, democracy, development and participation in international organisations as well as security communities. It is constructed and maintained by liberal states, as it is within their best interest to be able to trade without the interference of conflict (Ramsbotham et al., 2016, p. 154). Rasmussen (2003, p. 174) sums it up pretty well “*peace is not a fact, it is a policy*”.

However, do not let the dark side of sport’s history dictate your perception of what sport can be. Sports have a long history with human society and can be seen in old cave paintings from c. 1700000 BCE (Murray, 2018, p. 39). Sports is something that we all have in common, even if we are separated by borders, language or religion. It can create a sense of unity and help bridge gaps between people (ibid, p. 122). In ancient times sports had social, cultural and diplomatic purposes. It created inter-group meetings where tension, prejudice and misunderstandings could be addressed and thus reduce the risk of conflict (ibid, p. 41). Sports also allows people to physically exert themselves and compete against each other without the risk of actual danger which can release tensions (Hurcombe & Dine, 2020, p. 338). Sports events can in themselves be a peace project, the most prominent example is the Olympic games. To ensure everyone’s safety the participating city-states decided to proclaim a month of peace,

so spectators and competing athletes could travel to and from the games without the fear of being harmed. This peace was called Ekecheria, the Olympic truce (Murray, 2018, p. 46-48).

Research regarding sports impact on international relations is now mostly done under the concept of *Sport diplomacy*. Sport diplomacy is a part of the New Public Diplomacy, in which states try to gain or increase soft power by creating bonds with foreign publics (Murray, 2018, p. 95; Nye, 2008, p. 95). There are many ways to conduct sport diplomacy. It can be by civil society actors, who by sports promote peace values such as human rights, development, gender equality and sustainability, creates a global peace culture (Ramsbotham et al., 2016, p. 416-417). An example of this is the organisation Right to Play who works with helping children to stay in school, resist exploitation, overcome prejudice and heal from the harsh realities of war and abuse (Right to Play, 2021). Or it can be on a government level, where they create sports exchange programs or hold big sports events in order to increase their soft power (Murray, 2018).

For states without a strong hard power, soft power gives them the opportunity to influence the international system (Nye, 2008). Sweden has relatively low hard power, especially when it comes to military power. For example, they are not a member of NATO nor are they among the top military spenders in 2019 (SIPRI, 2020; NATO, 2021). However, Sweden is one of those states that have for a long time focused on enhancing their soft power and thereby increasing opportunities to affect international policies. Sweden is a small country, and because of such is highly vulnerable to the effects war and conflict have on global economic trends and the stability in the international system (Ingebritsen, 2002). Therefore, is it in Sweden's best interest to promote peace (Carlson-Rainer, 2017, p. 81), which they can do if they control the policy environment (Pratkanis, 2009, p. 113-114).

## 1.1 Purpose and Research Question

This leads me to the purpose of this paper, which is to examine how sport diplomacy has affected Sweden's soft power. As established above, Sweden is very vulnerable to the effects that war and conflict have on the global economic trends (Ingebritsen, 2002). To be able to promote peace, which is in their best interest, Sweden needs to have a strong soft power as it allows them to control the policy environment (Carlson-Rainer, 2017, p. 81; Pratkanis, 2009, p. 113-114). Sports can be used not just as a way to gain soft power but also to promote peace

values (Ramsbotham et al., 2016, p. 416-417; Murray, 2018). Despite this, no one has examined Swedish sport diplomacy, its indication for Sweden's soft power and to an extent Sweden's possibility to promote peace. Therefore am I going to examine Sweden's sport diplomacy efforts between the years 2015-2020 and what effect it has had on Sweden's soft power.

All of the above leads me to the following research question:

*Which role do sports have in Sweden's soft power?*

## 2. Sport and Diplomacy: their Connection

One might wonder how sport and diplomacy are connected. As this might be puzzling, I decided to start this thesis with a background on how sports and diplomacy are similar as well as some empirical examples of when sports were a part of diplomatic practice. To start with their similarities, sports can mitigate conflict between and within groups, nations and states. It can be a healthy outlet for aggression and act as a pacifier. Sports is also something we all share no matter which language, religion or nationality we belong to. It can create unity and allows people to meet despite differences, which in other circumstances could create division (Murray, 2018, p. 53). These are traits that sport shares with diplomacy. Diplomacy is a meeting place where people from different religions and nations can meet and work together on issues. It allows people to meet and discuss their frustrations with each other and together comes to a solution that works for both parties (Pigman, 2018, p. 76).

When it comes to empirical examples there are many, one of the most famous ones is the 1970 table tennis match between the American and the Chinese national teams. At the time relations between the US and China were at a low point with no diplomatic relations between them. However, after the game, the two states started to initiate a diplomatic relationship, as they could see that the match did not stir public outrage. This was a sign that the populations in the two countries were positive towards new relations and the two states could initiate contact without losing their own public's support (Murry, 2018, p. 74-75). But it is not just sports games between professional athletes that can improve relations between estranged states. For example, political leaders in India and Pakistan have been known to play a game of cricket when tensions are high between the two countries, where afterwards the tensions between the states have decreased (ibid, p. 70-72).

Sports can also be a useful tool for diplomats, as they can play sports together with other diplomats or important people to create a stronger and broader network, which is important for

them in their work (Shearer, 2014, p. 53-54). States can also use sports in their diplomatic strategy by creating sport exchange programs. In these programs, states have the opportunity to teach foreign citizens about their values and culture. The USA is a good example of this, they have with these programs and scholarships allowed foreign citizens to study and live in the US, and at the same time learn more about their host state's culture (Murray, 2018, p. 100-102).

However, the most common way for states to conduct Sport diplomacy is by hosting sports events. This could be by first or second-order events, both allows states to showcase their values and culture to foreign publics albeit with different ranges (Murray, 2018, p. 97-98; Black, 2014, p. 15). First-order events, known as Sport Mega-Event (SME), would be the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup, while the Commonwealth games and the Rugby World Cup are second-order events (Black, 2014, p. 14). When states choose to host SME, they usually assume that the outcomes will be positive by for example gaining soft power and economic revenue (Grix et al, 2017, p. 204). Yet, hosting SMEs is very expensive and the outcomes a state wishes for, are often not the ones they end up with (Grix et al, 2017, p. 203; Chalip, 2014, p. 3). For example, it took 30 years to pay off the debt from the 1976 Montreal Olympics and it remains to be seen if the FIFA World Cup in Qatar will lead to soft empowerment or disempowerment (Nygård & Gates, 2013, p. 240; Brannagan & Rookwood, 2016).

However, sport does not just spread diplomatic messages it can also be used to spread anti-diplomatic messages. For example, sports events been used by terrorists to spread their agenda. One of the most famous examples of this is the kidnapping and killing of Israeli athletes and coaches during the Munich Olympics in 1972 by Palestinian terrorists (Murray, 2018, p. 239-240). This is far from the only occasion, between 1972-2005 there were 171 terrorist attacks related to sports events. After 2005 there have been some high-profile terrorist attacks as well. For example, the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Pakistan, the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013 and the attack of Stade de France Stadium in Paris 2015 (ibid).

Sport can also indirectly affect a state's diplomatic efforts. Here one can talk about the "English Disease", which refers to how the poor behaviour of English supporters reflects negatively on the UK. When supporters are abroad to support their national team, they become representatives of their country and if they behave poorly, it tarnishes the international image of their home country. In Europe, many relate the word hooligan, a drunk, shirtless, violent and tattooed skinhead, to the UK (Murray, 2018, p. 238). This can be problematic for UK's soft power as

their culture may not be seen as attractive for others, which could lead to a decrease in soft power and counter their public diplomacy and sport diplomacy efforts (Nye, 2008; Grix and Brannagan, 2016, p. 255).

### 3. Theoretical Framework

The literature concerning *Sport Diplomacy* is relatively new. From the beginning, it was mostly within the field of sport studies and sport sociology that research was conducted regarding sports effect on international relations. But in the last couple of years, even scholars of International Relations have started to take an interest in sports' effect on diplomatic practices. Sport diplomacy can be many things: a way for diplomats to expand their network (Shearer, 2014), for politicians to share their political agenda (Murray, 2018) or work as a peace project (Ramsbotham et al., 2016, p. 412-416). However, what they all have in common is that they are ways for states to gain soft power. There are different understandings of how a state can gain soft power from sports. The following section goes through the previous research regarding sport diplomacy to ebb out into my theoretical framework for analysis.

#### 3.1 Literature Review

Soft Power was first introduced by Nye in 1990 and means that states use attraction, instead of coercion, to get their political objectives through in the international arena (Nye, 1990). There are three sources to a state's soft power, *Culture*, *Values* and *Foreign Policy*. Culture can be both high culture, such as classical music and art, as well as mass consumption culture, such as reality tv and films. High culture is meant to appeal to the political elite while mass consumption culture is for the general public. The second source, values, regards a state's political values. These should be attractive to the foreign public and a state should live up to them both domestically and abroad. When it comes to a state's foreign policy, the third and final source, a state should be seen as legitimate and that they have a moral authority (Nye, 2008, p. 96).

Nye's concept of soft power has been criticised for several reasons, one of which questions what differs soft power from nation branding. Is soft power its own concept or is it something that can be gained by slick marketing and propaganda (Grix & Brannagan, 2016, p. 256)?

Nation branding as a field of research views international relations from a business perspective and focuses on how a state markets its nation brand. Here researchers often examine which products are associated with a country or a country as a tourist attraction (Dubinsky, 2019, p. 158). Dinnie (2016, p. 5) defines a nation brand as “*the unique, multidimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences*”. A nation brand is therefore what is viewed as unique about a nation by its audiences. However, even if a nation brand describes what is unique about a nation and how a state is recognised by others, it does not explain how states gain social influence.

Sport diplomacy has the same goals as public diplomacy (Murray, 2018, p. 95). It is about winning over the hearts and minds of foreign publics (Armstrong, 2009, p. 64; Pratkanis, 2009, p. 113-114). There are three ways states can change hearts and minds; *deception, raw power* and *social influence*. The first two options are not durable long term as raw power is very costly, and if people feel that they are being deceived they will turn against the state trying to deceive them (Pratkanis, 2009, p. 118). This also explains why nation branding and soft power are not the same. Soft power is not about persuasion, it is about attraction. A state cannot gain soft power if they market themselves in a way that is inconsistent with their previous actions or values. Nor can a state gain soft power if their culture, values or foreign policy in themselves are not attractive. For a soft power strategy to work successfully, it has to have credibility and be attractive to the foreign public (Grix & Brannagan, 2016, p. 256).

Social influence, on the other hand, changes people's minds on a psychological level and uses tactics that are appealing to our human nature, which is why it is more a long-term solution (Pratkanis, 2009, p. 118). This is done by cultural exchanges where foreign publics will gain knowledge and understanding of the other state, which will lead to a favourable image of that state. Having a favourable image gives states influence over other states, by being able to control the narrative and affect the behaviour of other states (Armstrong, 2009, p. 64-65). When states deploy a successful public diplomacy or sport diplomacy strategy, their soft power can increase. This leads to states being able to shape the policy environment, which means that they have more control over their national security. This can be done by either *landscaping* or *altercasting*. Landscaping means that state A structures the situation so that other states behave in a way that is desired by state A, for example by storytelling, framing the issue or by creating norms. Altercasting is when states A create relationships through social roles with the target to

influence. Once this relationship is formed state B will act in a way that is beneficial for state A. Altercasting is done by culture exchanges (Pratkanis, 2009, p. 113-114).

Another criticism of the soft power concept is that it does not give a clear description of how states accumulate soft power (Grix & Brannagan, 2016, p. 256). There are several that have explained how states can gain soft power through sports (Murray, 2018; Grix et al, 2017; D'agati, 2018; Grix & Brannagan, 2016). For D'agati, states use sports to conduct surrogate wars. He states that even though there has been a decline in direct military conflicts between states, states still showcase aggressive behaviour towards each other. However, instead of fighting each other on traditional battlefields states “fight” each other in other contexts, for example on the football field. Just as in traditional war states do not conduct surrogate war if they do not gain anything from it. In surrogate war, winning means an increase in soft power and international prestige (D'agati, 2018, p.452-453). In this concept one could also talk about athletes as “proxy warriors”, carrying the national pride with them when they compete in international competitions (Bowes et al., 2020) and a defeat could be a blow to the national identity.

One of the more common ways for states to use sports to gain soft power is by hosting SME (Murray, 2018, p. 97-98). Some have even researched if bidding for an SME can increase soft power (Bason & Grix, 2020). However, most research regarding SMEs is centred around the concept of legacy. One of the first conceptualisations of legacy and the most referenced one was made by Preuss. He defines legacy as “*Irrespective of the time of production and space, legacy is all planned and unplanned, positive and negative, tangible and intangible structures created for and by a sport event that remain longer than the event itself*” (Preuss, 2007, p. 211). In the beginning of the legacies framework, there was mostly talks about domestic structures, such as tourism, economic development and urban planning (ibid). However, over time the literature evolved and now legacies also focus on international structures. Grix et al. (2017), for example, added an international dimension when they added *International prestige and “soft power”* as one of their five legacies dimensions.

Further development of the legacy's literature is the concept of leveraging. Here the legacy framework is seen to be too passive because it assumes that legacies will be created by themselves (Chalip, 2014, p. 6-7). There is even an assumption by states that all legacies will be positive for the hosting state (Grix et al, 2017, p. 204). By having this mindset governments

let the event organisers control most, if not all of the planning of the SME. Which will lead to the state not having any control over the legacy. Instead, states should try to leverage SMEs by creating strategies on how to get as much out of the SME as possible (Chalip, 2014). This means that leveraging is limited to the conscious decisions made by stakeholders to create a positive outcome from the SME (Bason & Grix, 2020, p. 4). A state can do this by strategizing with the business sector on how to entice visitors to spend money or by strategizing with non-profit organisations on how to align the event with targeted social issues (Chalip, 2014).

### 3.2 Sports as a Resource in a Soft Power Package

Two big names in the literature regarding leveraging SMEs are Jonathan Grix and Paul Michael Brannagan. Within their work on leveraging SME, they have created an analytical framework for how states gain soft power by creating a soft power package. There are five soft power resources, that are components of a soft power package. These resources are *Culture*, *Tourism*, *Branding*, *Diplomacy* and *Trade*. Within these five resource dimensions, states will create and leverage different strategies. If these strategies are successful, they will accumulate into a soft power resource (Grix & Brannagan, 2016, p. 259-261). The combined soft power resources then create a soft power package, which will lead to increased international prestige, an improvement on tarnished images of a state and a higher likelihood for acceptance on the world stage (ibid, p. 252).

In the resource dimension *Culture*, states create strategies connected to, among others, its heritage, sports, values and morals to gain attractiveness and improve global standing. For *Tourism*, the purpose of these strategies is to incite people to come and visit their country. This can be done by developing good transportation opportunities to the country but also within it, as well as investing in different kinds of tourism, for example, cultural tourism or leisure tourism. The third resource, *Branding*, combines aspects of both *Culture* and *Tourism* but is unique because it tries to “sell” these aspects to foreign publics. Here the focus is put on, among others, a state’s uniqueness, national identity and governance (Grix & Brannagan, 2016, p. 259-261). *Diplomacy* is probably the broadest of the resource dimensions, as it can entail many different sets of practices and is highly complex and changing in the modern globalised world (Kerr & Wiseman, 2018, p. 1-11). Within Grix and Brannagan’s analytical framework, diplomacy is understood as bilateral and multilateral agreements with both traditional and new actors, national interests and social welfare. The last resource, *Trade*, combines all the previous

resources to increase a state's overall economic value via global trade and by increasing the size of their economy. This can be done by finding new markets for their products or services (Grix & Brannagan, 2016, p. 259-261).

However, merely having strategies in the different resource dimension will not be enough to gain soft power, the strategies also have to be seen as credible for them to work. If they are credible then all the different resources combined will lead to a soft Power Package (Grix & Brannagan, 2016).

### 3.3 The Credibility of Sport Diplomacy

A state's public diplomacy is dependent on its credibility (Nye, 2008), this is also true for sports diplomacy. The representation of the state needs to be genuine and credible for the foreign public. Otherwise, the foreign public will see through it and feel misled by the projecting state (Pratkanis, 2009, p. 118), something that won't give any soft power and in the worst-case scenario even led to soft disempowering (Brannagan & Rookwood, 2016). But what is credibility? First of all, credibility is a dynamic concept. It is viewed from the eye of the beholder, which means that it is the perceiver's view of the communicator's believability that is what is important. As a dynamic concept, it is neither something that can be constant. Something can be credible at one point in time and then not at another point in time. What is considered credible can also be different in different parts of the world. However, Gass and Seiter (2009) have constructed three primary dimensions of credibility, which gives a general view of what is needed for something to be considered credible. The first one is expertise, here the perceiver must see the communicator as qualified and competent enough to act in the way they do. It is about being knowledgeable about the issue at hand. The second dimension is trustworthiness. Trustworthiness can be helped by previous positive interactions with the communicator, trust is also a prerequisite for cooperation. The third dimension is goodwill, here the communicator needs to be perceived as caring for the perceiver's well-being (Gass & Seiter, 2009, p. 155-160).

## 4. Research Design

In the following chapter, I will go through the chosen methodology for this thesis, the qualitative textual analysis. There will be a motivation for why I perceive this as the most optimal methodological approach for answering my research question. Then there will be a discussion on the collection of material. The chapter ends with an insight into how I have operationalised sport's role on soft power, which later will be the backbone for my analysis.

### 4.1 The Qualitative Textual Analysis

Qualitative textual analysis is a method for textual analysis where the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning of something and the creation of that meaning (Esaiasson et. al., 2017, p. 211). Here, in contrast to quantitative textual analysis, researchers are interested in the material as a whole. There is a recognition that some parts of the material are more important than others, as those parts help to create meaning (ibid). In qualitative textual analysis, one wishes to analyse the material's latent content and then be able to conclude the meaning, motives and purpose of the material (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 346). To be able to do this one need to read the text thoroughly, but also examine the context in which the text has been produced. The context of the text is important as qualitative textual analysis understands that objects, phenomena and actors obtain meaning in a social context and that they do not have a meaning in themselves (Esaiasson et. al., 2017, p. 211-213).

Within the qualitative textual analysis, the researcher needs to precise about how they will make their analysis, this can be done with an analytical tool. I have done this by creating analytical questions for their material (Esaiasson et. al., 2017, p. 216). In this thesis, I have created three overarching categories *Representation*, *Recognition* and *Reputation* which constitute three meanings that I want to examine in my material. Within these categories I have written three theoretically driven questions to be able to answer my research question, you can find these in

table 1. In the operationalisation, you will see how I decide upon these questions and how they are theoretically driven.

The reason for choosing a qualitative study is that I can locate the underlying themes of my material, which will help me to better understand the complex relationship between sports diplomacy and Sweden's soft power (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 346-349). Another reason for choosing qualitative textual analysis is that it is used for analysing representations and narratives (Esaiasson et. al., 2017, p. 216-222). This is beneficial for me as I need to be able to examine the way Sweden represents itself in their sport diplomacy to understand which role sports plays in its soft power. Also, it is of interest for me to know how this representation turns into a narrative that later either is recognised by the international community or not.

## 4.2 Material

Sport diplomacy can be conducted by many different actors, therefore have I selected material from both public actors and civil society actors. The material for the qualitative analysis consists of a protocol from an interpellation in the Swedish parliament, videos from the public agency *The Swedish Institute* (SI) and guiding documents from the civil society organisation *The Swedish Sports Confederation* (SSC) (Swedish: Riksidrottsförbundet). By using this diverse set of material, I will get a broader understanding of Swedish sport diplomacy and creators of material that will reflect the current set of actors that are a part of public diplomacy.

One might argue that videos are not possible to do a textual analysis on. However, this is not the case, videos can also be considered as text (Boréus & Kohl, 2018, p. 56). Despite this, I have been careful when I analysed the material to treat the different material similarly so it would not affect my result. I have done this by only taking into account what has been said in the video or text that has been shown in the video. By doing this I have ensured that I have similarly analysed the material even though the medium for representing the content has been different.

To complement my material on Sweden's sport diplomacy I have used international indexes and an annual report about the foreign public's view of Sweden. The reason for me to add these in my analysis is to get a perspective on how the international community views Sweden, something I would not be able to get from the first set of material. The indexes and the report

will not be analysed in the same way as the other material. These I will rather use as empirical descriptions. I have also chosen to use the report and indexes from 2019 instead of the ones from 2020, as the ones from 2020 are affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic is an extraordinary circumstance and can therefore affect the data coming from this year, which can threaten the results by not giving a fair picture of the international view of Sweden.

The indexes that I have used are the Gender Inequality Index, the Global Gender Gap Index, the Human Development Index, the Global Rights Index, the Sustainable Development Goals Index, the Climate Change Performance Index, Nation Brands Index and Country RepTrak. Most of these indexes were chosen because they are the indexes that the SI uses to analyse the view of Sweden internationally. However, the Global Rights Index was chosen as it became clear in the initial reading of the material the workers' rights were important for the analysis and therefore there was a need for an index reflecting that.

### 4.3 Operationalisation

To operationalise sport's role on soft power can be a difficult task and requires input from several different yet connected theoretical perspectives. Such as nation branding, public diplomacy and national identity. After examining these theoretical perspectives, I have seen that three themes have emerged in explanations about sport's effect on soft power, which I have turned into three categories for analysing my material. These are *Representation*, *Recognition* and *Reputation*. Within these categories, there are three analytical questions, which you can see in table 1.

#### Representation

When it comes to the *Representation* category, it will be operationalised as a state's culture and values. Every nation has culture and values that they follow, these can broadly be understood as ideas, customs and social behaviour (Murray, 2018, p. 97-98). Both of these are a part of what constitutes a national identity (Dubinsky, 2019, p. 159). Through sport diplomacy, a state can broadcast these values and culture to foreign publics, which in turn will be a representation of themselves (Murray, 2018, p. 97-98). It should also be noted that culture and values are words that keep on being repeated in most of the sport diplomacy literature (Nye, 2008; Murray, 2018; Dubinsky, 2019; Grix & Brannagan, 2016). This is probably because a state's culture and

values are closely connected to its national identity. It constitutes what a country is and therefore is this what they communicate when they use sport as a diplomatic tool.

## Recognition

The second category is *Recognition* and regards a state's wish to be recognised by foreign publics in the same way as they represent themselves. A state wants to be recognised by the foreign public, "the international Other", the same way as they represent themselves, "the Self", or they feel ontologically insecure (Adler-Nissen & Tsinovoi, 2018, p. 4-5). However, there will always be a bit of discrepancy between a country's self-image and the image that "the international Other" sees (ibid, p. 5). And this discrepancy can be seen as misrecognition when states don't recognise themselves in the image that "the international Other" have of them. But one thing is certain, one's representation of one's country is always in relation to "the international Other" and recognition can be seen as a mirror reflection of the representation that the state itself broadcasts. For states, they can see these mirror reflections via different international indexes, where one can say that "the international Other's" view is collected (ibid, p. 6-7). Therefore, are these indexes good indications of recognition and will work as my operationalisation of recognition.

## Reputation

The third category is *Reputation*, which is a complex category as it combines many different theoretical understandings. One could say that it is a combination of public diplomacy, national branding and national identity, as they all affect a nation's reputation (Dubinsky, 2019, p. 157). Therefore, to operationalise it one needs to take all of these into account. A reputation can be interpreted as an image or a brand, something someone is known for. One way to define a national brand is as Fan did "*the total sum of all perceptions of a nation in the minds of international stakeholders [...] (As cited by Dubinsky, 2019)*". Some indexes are researching states' reputation and there is a Swedish public agency that combines all of these indexes with their own research and creates a report of Sweden's reputation. I will use this report as indicators of reputation.

Table 1:

Analytical questions:		
Representation	Recognition	Reputation

Which culture and values are present in Sweden's sport diplomacy?	What do international indexes say about Sweden?	What can be said about Sweden's reputation and sports after reading the 2019 SI report?
How are they represented?	How does this relate to Sweden's own representation of themselves via their sport diplomacy?	What does the relationship between their reputation and the culture/values that Sweden presents in their sport diplomacy look like?
What does this say about the Swedish national identity?	Is Sweden recognised or misrecognised and what does this mean for Swedish sport diplomacy?	How does the reputation affect Sweden's soft power?

## 5. Sweden's Sport Diplomacy

In this chapter, there will be a short description of Swedish sport diplomacy initiatives as well as a description of the actors behind these initiatives. The first one is an interpellation within the Swedish parliament on whether the Swedish government should support the Swedish Olympic committee bid for the 2026 Winter Olympics in Stockholm-Åre. And is so, what should the support look like. The two participants in this interpellation were Gabriel Wikström, part of the Swedish Social Democratic Party who at the time was sitting in the government, and Edward Riedl, part of the Moderate Party who was leading the opposition (Prot. 2016/17:83, 20§).

The second one is YouTube videos created by the SI. The SI is a public agency that works with building trust and interest in Sweden abroad, as well as analysing how Sweden is perceived by foreign publics and governments (SI, 2021a). In their work they assemble an annual report of the Sweden image abroad, within this report, they combine their research as well as international indexes that are of interest when it comes to analysing the Swedish image. Their research entails in which areas Sweden is mostly mentioned in different languages, which news are mostly reported and shared in different languages, and surveys in different countries about their view of Sweden (SI, 2021b).

In 2005 the SI also started their own YouTube channel called Sweden; on this channel they publish a series of short documentary videos called Stories of Sweden. The goal of this series is to reach an international audience and inform them about Sweden and what Sweden does in areas such as sustainability, innovation and social issues (SI, 2019a). On Sweden's official YouTube channel, they have three videos that are connected to sports. The first one is about Swedish football player Nilla Fischer, where she talks about being a woman in Swedish football. The second one is about Maya Henckel, a professional League of legends player where she talks about esports and what made it possible for her to start her career. The third and last

one is about the Somalia national team in bandy where they talk about why they started to play bandy and what it is like to be a Somali Swede.

The third one comes from the SSC which is a civil society actor and is the Swedish sports movements umbrella organisation. They lead, support, develop and represent the movement in mutual interests on both a national and an international level. They also cultivate the role sports play in society, nationally and internationally. Among their responsibilities, they represent the sports movement in their relationship with public agencies and politicians as well as society in general. They are also responsible for leading and developing the sport movement's stance in relevant policy areas (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2021). As a part of this work, they have developed and constructed three different guiding documents on how Swedish sports associations, teams and organisers should act internationally. These documents are “Mänskliga rättigheter: en handbok för idrott”, “Riksidrottsförbundets strategi för INTERNATIONELLT ARBETE 2018–2025” and “Internationella riktlinjer för svensk idrott”.

## 6. Analysis

### 6.1 Representation

#### 6.1.1 Which Culture and Values are Present in Sweden's Sport Diplomacy?

As culture and values are understood as ideas, customs and social behaviour (Murray, 2018, p. 97-98), we can see that Sweden's sport diplomacy is broadcasting several different of them. The main category would be human rights and everyone's equal treatment. Here values such as children rights, workers' rights and gender equality are communicated, as well as general human rights (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2015; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017a; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017b; SI, 2019b). Another category is sustainability, which contains economic, social and environmental sustainability (Prot. 2016/17:83, 20§; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2015; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017a; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017b). Some of the lesser themes mentioned are Sweden as a sporting nation, Sweden as a modern country and how sports are a neutral area where people from different cultures can meet (Prot. 2016/17:83, 20§; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2015; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017a; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017b; SI, 2020a; SI, 2016). There is also an underlying theme that Sweden wishes to be involved on the international stage and wants to collaborate with others internationally (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017a; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017b).

#### 6.1.2 How are they Represented?

The first theme, human rights, is represented via documents from the SSC and the video from the SI about Nilla Fischer (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2015; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017a; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017b; SI, 2019b). For the SSC, they focus on general human rights such as equal treatment no matter who you are or where you come from, but they also have a specific focus on workers' rights and children's rights. They give concrete guidelines on how everyone in the Swedish sports movement can uphold and guarded these rights (Riksidrottsförbundet,

2017a). The SI, on the other hand, do in their video with Nilla Fischer discuss women's rights, feminism and gender inequality within Swedish football (SI, 2019b). In this video, they show how Sweden is constantly working with these issues and that it is common for women in Sweden to consider themselves feminists. In this video Nilla Fischer also mentions that she is married to a woman (ibid), since this is not put under scrutiny and just blends in with the rest of the video, we can see that LGBTQ+ people's right to marry is normal in Sweden as well. Something that can be considered as both upholding human rights and as being a modern state. It should be said that the SSC also talks about gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights. However, they do not give it a separate section in their strategy for human rights, but rather include it under general thoughts of human rights. That everyone should be treated equally and that one should be discriminated against because of their gender or sexual orientation (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017a).

As for the theme sustainability, the material speaks of economic, social and environmental sustainability. When it comes to social sustainability there are talks about workers' rights and inclusion. This is shown by confirming that everyone should be able to play sports and how the sport movement should think when buying equipment or booking hotels to make sure that workers' rights and children's rights are followed. This has led the Swedish football association to never buy footballs from a company if they can't prove that there is no child labour when creating the football (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017a). When it comes to environmental sustainability the focus is on how to lessen the environmental impact of sports and sports events (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2015; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017a; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017b). In the documents, they do not give an exact strategy for how they should do that, but they all say that that is something they are striving for (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2015; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017a; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017b; Prot. 2016/17:83, 20§). And as for economical sustainability, they talk about how sports events should not cost as they do for the moment and how it is important to show everyone that one can follow a sports event budget (Prot. 2016/17:83, 20§).

As for the theme sports is a neutral meeting place, we can see that it is lifted in various degrees across the material. In the interpellation in the Swedish parliament, they talk about how sports is a meeting place for people of different religions, nationalities and social backgrounds. Here Edward Reidl, speaks of how sport creates bridges between people that might not speak the same language. How sport can be a tool for integration (Prot. 2016/17:83, 20§). The same is communicated in the video about the Somali national team in bandy. Here we see young

Somalian men that are either first- or second-generation Swedish citizens and how they have become a part of Swedish society by playing bandy (SI, 2016). However, the documents from the SSC are the clearest when it comes to sports as a neutral meeting place. According to them, sports should not be political. Therefore, are they against boycotts by Swedish athletes or sports associations. They mean that sports should be a meeting place where states can learn from each other, no matter their politics or governing (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2015).

The theme of Sweden as a modern country has already been spoken a bit about. Mainly on their stance on same-sex marriage, but other things also speaks of Sweden being a modern country. In the video about Maya Henckel, we can hear her say that Sweden as a state supports esports. This by having a good internet and a school system that has upper secondary school programs in esports (SI, 2020a). This shows that Sweden is a country that invests in technology as well as being a country that has a modern school system. When it comes to the theme of Sweden as a sporting nation, we can see this being brought up during the interpellation in the Swedish parliament. Both of the debaters talked about sports, in this particular case winter sports, as being a part of the Swedish culture (Prot. 2016/17:83, 20§). And for the theme that Sweden wishes to be a part of the international community, the SSC talks a lot about how they wish to represent Sweden in international sports organisations. We can also see that it is by this representation that they see Sweden's possibility to change sports' impact on the environment and human rights (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017b).

### 6.1.3 What does this say about the Swedish National Identity?

As a national identity is a combination of a nation's culture and values (Dubinsky, 2019, p. 159), we can say the following about Sweden's national identity. The protection of human rights is important. There is an underlying thought that everyone should be treated equal and fairly, no matter your sexual orientation, age or gender. This also entails how you should be treated in your work environment. It is also clear that sustainability is important, there is a sense that people should be mindful of how their actions affect the environment. There is also an identity trait of Sweden being a part of the international scene. There is a wish to be represented in different organisations, host different events and to be seen by other international actors. This ties into the concept of sports being a neutral meeting place. The thought of sport being neutral shows how Sweden wishes to talk to many international actors and that not everyone needs to fit in a certain mold to get along. The last thing we learn about the Swedish national identity is that Sweden likes sports in all shapes and forms.

## 6.2 Recognition

### 6.2.1 What do International Indexes say about Sweden?

In 2019 indexes connected to societal issues gave Sweden quite high ranking in these issues. They were best ranked in Gender Inequality Index by UNDP, where they 2019 was ranked third of 189 countries (UNDP, 2020). In the Global Gender Gap Index by WEF, they were ranked fourth of 153 countries (WEF, 2020). As for the Human Development Index by UNDP they were ranked eight of 189 countries (UNDP, 2019). When it comes to workers' rights Sweden is among the best countries in the world to protect these rights according to the International Trade Union Confederation in their Global Rights Index. Which means that there are sporadic violations of workers' rights, but it is not among the normal (ITUC, 2019).

In connection to sustainability Sweden ranked high compared to other states. In the Sustainable Development Goals Index by Bertelsmann Stiftung they are ranked second of 162 countries (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2019). While in the Climate Change Performance Index by Germanwatch they are ranked fourth out of 61. However, there is no country in the study that fulfils the requirements to be ranked in the first to third position, therefore Sweden is ranked as the best in the world in this index (Germanwatch, 2019).

### 6.2.2 How does this relate to Sweden's own Representation of themselves via their Sport Diplomacy?

If we start with the main theme of Sweden's representation, human rights, can we see in the international indexes that Sweden is quite good at following human rights. In both the Gender Inequality Index and the Global Gender Gap Index is Sweden ranked among the top five (UNDP, 2020; WEF, 2019), and in HDI Sweden was ranked in the top ten (UNDP, 2019). This indicates that Sweden's representation of itself as working and focusing on achieving gender equality is also reflected by the "international Other". When it comes to workers' rights, we can see in the Global Rights Index that Sweden respects labour unions and workers' rights (ITUC, 2019). This indicates that also this index is reflecting back to Sweden that their representation of themselves is recognised.

As for the second big theme sustainability, we can see that Sweden has a high ranking on both of the relevant indexes. In the Sustainable Development Goals Index, they show that the

“international Other” views Sweden as a country that works effectively with the implementation of Agenda 2030 (Bertelmann Stiftung, 2019). And in the Climate Change Performance Index, the “international Other” also reflects a picture of Sweden as one of the best in the world on working for the environment (Germanwatch, 2019).

### 6.2.3 Is Sweden Recognised or Misrecognised and what does this mean for Swedish Sport Diplomacy?

In the Swedish sport diplomacy, two themes are represented more than others, human rights and sustainability. As we can see in the international indexes presented above, Sweden has high rankings in both of these areas. This means that the “international Other” views Sweden similar to how Sweden views itself. Because of this, can we conclude that Sweden is recognised by the international community as they wish to be and therefore are not misrecognised.

Now, what effect does this have on Sweden’s sport diplomacy? After confirming that Sweden is recognised in these areas, we can conclude that Sweden’s sport diplomacy is credible. What I mean here is that for any public diplomacy strategy to be considered credible it needs to fulfil one of three primary credibility dimensions, either expertise, trustworthiness or goodwill (Gass & Seiter, 2009, p. 155-160). By being recognised in these areas by the international community it acknowledges Sweden’s expertise in the areas of concern e.g. human rights and sustainability. This gives Sweden credibility when it comes to tackling these issues in their sport diplomacy.

## 6.3 Reputation

### 6.3.1 What can be said about Sweden’s Reputation and Sports after reading the 2019 SI Report?

In general, we can see that the knowledge of Sweden is quite high abroad and the more a person knows about Sweden the more positive are their views of Sweden (SI, 2020b, p. 4). Two areas that are strengthening Sweden’s image abroad, is its governance and their work with sustainability (ibid). Other areas that Sweden has a strong reputation in are trade, investments and higher education. On the other hand, culture and tourism are not areas that Sweden often is associated with (ibid, p. 5-6). Despite culture not being associated with Sweden, sport and cultural events are the most common reason for Sweden to be mentioned in social media or news articles (ibid, p. 4-6).

Sweden is highly associated with its governance, here Sweden is known for being a democratic state that is run competently and honestly. In general, Sweden has the reputation for respecting its citizen's civil liberties and rights, where equality is a basic principle. Sweden is also known as a peaceful and safe country (SI, 2020b, p. 4). As for Sweden's reputation connected to sustainability, it is viewed as a country that takes responsibility for its international commitment to environmental issues. Something that goes well with foreign publics as it is one of the most important questions for many (ibid, p. 5). In the SI's research on Sweden's reputation in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, Sweden is strongly associated with human rights, as well as security and welfare issues (ibid, p. 8). In similar research but conducted in South America and North America, Sweden is associated with peace and security, but also sustainable development and higher education (ibid, p.7).

At the end of the SI report, there is also a presentation of different indexes. Here two are of importance: Nation Brands Index by Ipsos and Country RepTrak by Reputation Institute. In the Country RepTrak Sweden is ranked as number one out of 55 countries, mostly thanks to its effective government and appealing environment. In the Nation Brand Index, Sweden is ranked ninth of 50 countries (SI, 2020b, p. 31). One of the subcategories in the National Brand Index is nations' connection to sports and how successful they are in sports, in this subcategory Sweden was ranked 15th (ibid, p. 6).

### 6.3.2 What does the Relationship between their Reputation and the Culture/Values that Sweden Presents in their Sport Diplomacy look like?

As we can see under the previous question Sweden has a strong reputation abroad and is mostly known for its governance and work within sustainability (SI, 2020b, p. 4). This ties very well together with the culture and values that Sweden presents in their sport diplomacy. The main set of values that Sweden communicates is human rights and everyone's equal treatment, children's rights, workers' rights and gender equality (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2015; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017a; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017b; SI, 2019b). We can see that this is a part of their reputation as Sweden is known for protecting its citizen's rights and liberties as well as equality is seen as a basic principle (SI, 2020b, p. 4).

In the other category sustainability, we can see that Sweden has a strong reputation for caring about the environment and fulfilling its international commitments (SI, 2020b, p. 4-5). This is also something that is affirmed in the values they communicate in their sport diplomacy. That they are working hard on changing their way to be more sustainable and that sustainability is a goal of theirs (Prot. 2016/17:83, 20§; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2015; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017a; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017b). Culture vice, Sweden is trying to say that they are a sporting nation in their sport diplomacy (Prot. 2016/17:83, 20§). However, this is not something that Sweden is internationally known for as they are only ranked 15th in sports achievements (SI, 2020b, p. 6).

### 6.3.3 How does the Reputation affect Sweden's Soft Power?

We can see that Sweden's general reputation is very much in agreement with how Sweden represents themselves in their sport diplomacy. Sweden's commitment to human rights and sustainability are central parts of both its reputation and its sport diplomacy. The question is then if this is something that foreign publics find to be attractive? This is important as it determines the success of one's attempt to gain soft power (Nye, 2008). As we can see, the one question that foreign publics find the most important for the future is the environment. Here Sweden has the reputation of being very engaged in these kinds of issues and to be very good at fulfilling its promises (SI, 2020b, p. 5). This is good for both the attractiveness of Sweden's sport diplomacy as well as it gives credibility. Both of which are necessary for a successful public diplomacy strategy (Nye, 2008).

When it comes to Sweden's soft power package, we can see that sports are not a part of two soft power resource dimensions. The first one is the tourism resource dimension, here we can see that Swedish sports are not doing much for the attractiveness of Sweden as a tourist destination. There is no reputation of Sweden being a place for sport/leisure tourism. Here it is rather the Swedish nature that attracts tourists (SI, 2020b). The second one is the trade resource dimension. It is very little in Swedish sport diplomacy that is concerned with how to increase economic revenue. Therefore, are sports not adding anything to Sweden's soft power package in this dimension.

On the other hand, sports do contribute to the rest of the resource dimensions. The resource dimension that Swedish sports contribute most to is culture. Swedish sport diplomacy promotes values and morals such as sustainability and human rights (Prot. 2016/17:83, 20§;

Riksidrottsförbundet, 2015; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017a; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017b; SI, 2019b), which is also something they are known for internationally (SI, 2020b). Therefore, it is clear that Swedish sport diplomacy contributes to the resource dimension culture. This turns into a soft power resource when it is seen as credible. Under the recognition part of this analysis, we have concluded that Sweden is seen as experts in these areas (UNDP, 2020; WEF, 2019; UNDP, 2019; ITUC, 2019; Bertelmann Stiftung, 2019; Germanwatch, 2019). This means that they fulfil one of the primary credibility dimensions and therefore are a cultural soft power resource in Sweden's overall soft power package.

When it comes to the resource dimension branding, we can see that sports play a role here as well. This is because Sweden in their sport diplomacy is branding itself as a country that is sustainable and respects human rights (Prot. 2016/17:83, 20§; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2015; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017a; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017b; SI, 2019b). Sweden then follows through in these areas according to indexes (UNDP, 2020; WEF, 2019; UNDP, 2019; ITUC, 2019; Bertelmann Stiftung, 2019; Germanwatch, 2019), which means that representation that they are projecting to others is the same as how they are recognised by others. This leads to a successful nation brand as it represents Sweden as it is and not as some fantasy version of itself. To create a nation brand that reflects you as a country is what makes it appealing to others (Dinnie, 2016).

In the resource dimension diplomacy, can we see that Swedish sports wish to be represented internationally (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2015; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017b). There is a wish from the Swedish sports movement to have a diplomatic impact. They want to change norms and behaviour on the international level, regarding sustainability and human rights. However, one can question if this will lead to a soft power resource, mostly for how can they be seen as credible in this resource dimension? As we already have confirmed, Sweden is seen as having expertise in the issues that they wish to change on the international level which would give them credibility. However, this is not the only way that Sweden's efforts in the diplomacy resource dimension can be seen as credible. Sweden already has a role in international sports organisations and gets to take responsibility in different matters (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017b). As trust is a prerequisite for corporations (Gass & Seiter, 2009), we can conclude that Swedish sport in this resource dimension also fulfils the credibility dimension for trustworthiness. This leads sport to be a soft power resource in the diplomacy resource dimension.

## 7. Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis, I sat out to find out what role sports play in Sweden's soft power. After analysing the Swedish sport diplomacy I have concluded that sports do play a role in Sweden's soft power. Sports may not be a panacea that will solve everything, but this does not take away the things sport does for Sweden's soft power package. In the analysis, we can see that Swedish sports are a soft power resource in three of the five resource dimensions. Within culture, sports represent the values and morals that are important for Sweden. As for branding, these values and morals create a nation brand that is desired by foreign publics. And to finish it off, sport plays an important role in the diplomacy resource dimension as Sweden can further confirm their dedication to, together with other international actors, work actively within these areas.

For Sweden, it is important to gain soft power, as this is Sweden's strongest way to affect the international community. Sweden is a country with relatively low hard power as they are not part of NATO (NATO, 2021) nor do they have a high military spending (SIPRI, 2020). Therefore does Sweden need to have a strong soft power so they have the opportunity to affect the international system. If Sweden has a strong soft power then they can use their social influence to create a policy environment where most of the policies adopted are beneficial for Sweden (Pratkanis, 2009, p. 113-114). This means that Sweden could improve their security and economic situation. As mentioned in the introduction this can be done by promoting peace, since Sweden is dependent on a stable international system and stable economic trends which are threatened during conflict (Ingebrietsen, 2002).

In the analysis of Sweden's sport diplomacy, we can see that this thought already exists. The values and culture that Swedish sport diplomacy promotes, such as sustainable development and human rights, are peace values (Ramsbotham et. al., 2016 p. 416). By solidifying the view of Sweden as a fighter for these values, Sweden begins to look like an expert in these areas.

When you are seen as an expert in a certain area, your actions within that area are seen as credible (Gass & Seiter, 2009). Which in turn will lead to you being able to do more on an international level (Pratkanis, 2009, p. 113-114). This means that the Swedish sport diplomacy not only strengthens Sweden's soft power on its own accord, but it also strengthens Sweden's soft power by promoting a global peace culture.

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