

# A sport-oriented place branding strategy for cities, regions and countries

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – How could a city, a region or a country succeed in its attempt to use sport to (re-)define, position and promote itself? Consequently, what do jurisdictions and brand managers need to consider when using sporting events as a leverage to market themselves abroad? The paper aims to discuss these issues.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper draws from a combination of an extensive literature review and secondary data collection in order to build a conceptual framework, entitled the “diamond” of place branding through sport.

**Findings** – Managers and politicians of cities, regions and countries should espouse a holistic approach when developing their place branding strategy through sport. This holistic approach can be articulated around four dimensions: sport, economic, commercial and social.

**Research limitations/implications** – Drawing mainly from a literature review, with the support of concrete examples, this is a first step within the confines of an exploratory research. A future study could analyze the specific cases of jurisdictions and how these fit within the conceptual framework articulated in this paper.

**Originality/value** – A place branding strategy through sport should be translated into a socio-economic legacy, with private and public benefits for the community. Ultimately, place branding through sport is one of the components of the overall place branding strategy of a jurisdiction.

**Keywords** Sport, Mega-events, Non mega-events, Place/Nation/Destination branding, Sport diplomacy

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

Branding is everywhere and everything is a brand. Though this leitmotiv may qualify as populist or, at the very least, unconventional within the confines of academia, it very much reflects a trend. Throughout the years, “brand” and “branding” have become so pervasive in the literature and business strategy discourse, it seems that everything, even everybody, has become a brand in its/their own right (Bastos and Levy, 2012). Beyond the usual products and services, the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Juventus Turin, Madonna, Tom Jones, Helene Fischer, Don Cherry, Donald Trump, even the Pope, not to sound blasphemous, have entered the realm of branding (Bendisch *et al.*, 2013; Mirza, 2016; Richelieu, 2014; Salzman, 2013). Hence, places or jurisdictions, by which we mean cities, regions and countries, define, position and promote themselves as brands on the world stage (Aitken and Campelo, 2011). As a case in point, the city of Berlin spends 5m Euros a year to market itself via a place branding strategy (Zenker, 2014).

While different contexts and platforms can feed a place branding strategy, such as architecture, diplomacy, gastronomy, geography, history, etc., sport has become a significant leverage for many jurisdictions. This is due to the emotional resonance of sport, its ability to engage a conversation with a large audience and the possibility of establishing a bond of trust between the messenger, in this case the place or jurisdiction, and its potential customers (i.e. tourists, entrepreneurs, investors and residents; Anholt, 2003; Dos Santos and Campo, 2014; Herstein and Berger, 2013; Misener and Mason, 2009; Rein and Shields, 2007; Ruhanen and Whitford, 2011; Taks, 2013).

In recent years, place branding, in general, and more specifically place branding through sport, has replaced, or at least complemented what used to be known as “diplomacy branding.”



To the point where a new concept, called “sport diplomacy” has been introduced to illustrate how certain countries use sport to establish their legitimacy, gain international respectability, increase their influence in world affairs and build a “soft power” (Campbell, 2015). For Nauright (2013, p. 23): “diplomacy has evolved in the post-Cold War era into shaping international views of nations as sites for business development and tourism. Thus, marketing the ‘national brand’ has become increasingly important in a world becoming economically integrated.” The most prominent example of this sport diplomacy approach would be Qatar which aims at capitalizing on sport by organizing major sporting events (FIFA World Cup 2022), investing in foreign sport clubs (Paris Saint-Germain) and acquiring star players (Mbappé, Neymar).

Moreover, sport is one of the fastest growing industries worldwide. According to Price Waterhouse Coopers (2011), the industry was projected at US\$145bn in 2015. Likewise, the tourism industry grew at an annual rate of 3.3 percent between 2012 and 2017, and is estimated to generate over US\$2tn a year globally (Ibis World, 2018). Roche *et al.* (2013) underline that tourism is the largest industry worldwide; travel undertaken for the purpose of sport or physical activities is its fastest growing segment. In Canada, the sport tourism industry exceeded 6.5bn Canadian dollars in 2015 (about US\$5.2bn[1]), a 13 percent increase over the 2014 total of 5.8bn (US\$4.64bn) (Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance, 2017).

Thus, it appears relevant to combine sport and tourism in this research. The main objective is to reflect on the effectiveness of place branding strategies through sport and identify what jurisdictions and brand managers need to consider when attracting sporting events. In other words, how could a city, a region or a country succeed in its attempt to use sport to (re-)define, position and promote itself? To answer this question, we begin by presenting the methodology. Second, we shall briefly describe the concepts of place, nation and destination branding and underline the importance of sport as a driver of place branding. Third, the prime contribution shall come in the form of a conceptual framework resulting from the analysis of the literature. Fourth, conclusions, limitations and avenues for future research will be discussed.

## Methodology

This is a conceptual paper. It draws from a combination of an extensive literature review and secondary data collection in order to build an argument, make a demonstration in favor of a fundamental idea, leading to a conceptual model (Cossette, 2016). From this perspective, the purpose of the paper is to propose a conceptual framework for understanding place branding via sport, based on an exhaustive literature review.

The review of the literature began by searching the following academic databases: Abi/Inform Complete; Business Source Complete; Scopus; and Web of Science. The idea was to analyze an extensive, yet targeted selection of articles and, as such, the following keywords were combined: “Place Branding”; “Nation Branding”; “Destination Branding”; “Tourism AND Branding”; “Diplomacy Branding”; “Soft Power”; “Sport AND Place Branding”; “Sport AND Nation Branding”; “Sport AND Destination”; and “Sport AND Tourism.” The starting date for our search in the databases was set in the year 2006, in order to collect the most relevant articles and take stock of the recent developments in the field over the last eleven complete years.

Furthermore, based on the articles assembled through the initial round of search, the suggestion to “go backward by reviewing the citations for the articles identified [...] to determine prior articles you should consider” (Webster and Watson, 2002, p. 16) was applied. This helped expand the search in order to select other reference papers, some seminal ones, on the subject that could have initially been left out, including some prior to 2006 and others from 2017–2018. Following this search method, over 100 articles, book chapters and books were collected. Among all the papers found, 71 academic references

were used in this manuscript, as well as 29 references specifically focusing on examples. These 100 references represent the most pertinent ones, as well as the most closely related to the topic and the objective of this paper. They also reflect a saturation threshold that ends up being reached in this type of research.

In addition, the database search was complemented by identifying, on the internet and in newspapers, strategies employed by cities, regions and countries to market their location outside of their boundaries, in general, and through sport, as an activity or as an event, in particular. The search for these examples was very much structured, as we were diligently looking for strategies to showcase some examples, be they positive or negative, connect theory with practice and ultimately introduce the conceptual framework.

### **Place branding through sport**

#### *Place branding and related concepts*

Different terminologies surround the concept of place branding: place branding, nation branding, diplomacy branding, destination branding, city branding, etc. Before even starting the discussion on place branding through sport, it was important to clarify the concepts that shall be used moving forward. Hence, Table I was built with the objective to define the main characteristics, differences and similarities of three key strategies that intertwine with one another: place branding, nation branding and destination branding.

Place, nation or destination branding is a process of image communication and brand image changes of a city, region or country, to a target market (Braun *et al.*, 2014). Stereotypes are dynamic and can be changed into or replaced with a positive image (Campbell, 2015; Fan, 2010). Consumers make decisions based on place image formation agents (culture, information and information sources (internet, media, tour operators, travel agents); Frias *et al.*, 2012; Gartner, 1993; Gartner and Bachri, 1994; Govers *et al.*, 2007; Gunn, 1972), as well as on the symbols, beliefs and impressions they have of a particular place (Rojas-Méndez *et al.*, 2013). By developing a unique positioning (or Unique Selling Proposition (USP); Garcia *et al.*, 2012), this process or strategy can serve different purposes. The latter include encouraging foreign investment, welcoming tourists, attracting residents, staging cultural events, favoring exports and easing diplomatic efforts (Zenker and Beckmann, 2013; Zenker *et al.*, 2013).

As underscored in Table I, “place branding” can be used as the generic formula, as well as the main nomenclature. “Nation branding” specifically applies to a country’s brand strategy. “Destination branding” primarily deals with the touristic positioning and promotion of a jurisdiction (city, region or country). It also involves bringing in businesses, investors, individuals and families, as exemplified by the marketing campaign European members have laid out to attract British-based companies, brokers and people, most of whom are seemingly worried about the consequences of Brexit in the UK (Bearne, 2017).

However, beyond the respective case and the short-term objective of the jurisdiction, it should be mentioned that multiple stakeholders (residents, entrepreneurs, investors, tourists, politicians, community groups, etc.) can contribute to the co-creation of a place brand. A collaborative and participatory approach to place branding is thus paramount to the success of any place branding strategy, which should start with how people identify with the place: place branding should aim at adjusting and enhancing the meaning and perception of the brand (Green *et al.*, 2016). This is because the brand is cemented by the authenticity and consistency of the respective jurisdiction’s actions (Anholt, 2003; Hakala and Lemmetyinen, 2011). This means, on the one hand, being true to what the jurisdiction represents in different marketing campaigns that place officials launch on its behalf. On the other hand, place officials and civil servants should act according to the identity and core values of the jurisdiction in their interactions with local and external stakeholders.

Strategy	Characteristics
Place branding (PB)	<p>PB has three objectives (Zenker, 2014): build brand awareness (i.e. people know about the place); improve the place's image in the mind of target consumers and stakeholders (i.e. "what people think of you when they think of you"; Richelieu, 2014, p. 406); and promote the location to different target markets</p> <p>Cities, regions and countries compete with one another for tourists, entrepreneurs, investors and residents (Zenker <i>et al.</i>, 2013; Zenker, 2014)</p> <p>Place branding is the generic wording for a jurisdiction's strategy to (re-)define, position and promote itself</p>
Nation branding (NB)	<p>NB specifically applies to a country's brand strategy</p> <p>NB is "The unique multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all its target audiences" (Knott <i>et al.</i>, 2015, p. 47)</p> <p>Seven dimensions are shaping the national brand (Rojas-Méndez, 2013):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economy, tourism, geography and nature, culture and heritage, society, science and technology, and government</li> </ul>
Destination branding (DB)	<p>DB primarily deals with the touristic positioning and promotion of a jurisdiction (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1998), by leveraging an authentic brand that connects customers, employees and a network of stakeholders (Dos Santos and Campo, 2014)</p> <p>Building a destination brand (DB) that incorporates the unique set of attributes of a jurisdiction can help deliver a coherent place branding strategy (Garcia <i>et al.</i>, 2012). It can also lead a jurisdiction with a bad reputation to reinvent and reposition itself, such as in the case of Thailand, plagued for a long time by sex tourism (Nuttavuthisit, 2007)</p> <p>DB can be used to attract businesses, investors and individuals in a period of uncertainty, as observed during the Brexit transition</p>
Place branding through sport (PBS)	<p>Managers of jurisdictions can leverage sport in order to make a place branding strategy successful</p> <p>Sport can be used as a place branding platform in four ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A sport event platform (major (e.g. Olympics) or minor (e.g. cycling race within the city limits))</li> <li>A sport team platform (private (e.g. Manchester United) or national (e.g. New Zealand All Blacks))</li> <li>A sport participation platform (e.g. running a marathon) or as</li> <li>A sport place platform (sport complex (e.g. Dubai Sports City or Singapore Sports Hub complex) (Delpy, 1998; Gibson, 1998; Rein and Shields, 2007; Roche <i>et al.</i>, 2013)</li> </ul> <p>A holistic approach is best suited for leaving a socio-economic legacy (Leopkey and Parent, 2015). This shall be undertaken with a collaborative and participatory mindset from all stakeholders who co-create the jurisdiction's brand (Green <i>et al.</i>, 2016)</p>

**Table I.**  
Place, nation and destination branding and the relevance of place branding through sport

After laying the foundations of the key concepts pertaining to place branding, we shall now detail and analyze place branding through sport, which will begin by introducing sport tourism.

### *Sport tourism*

Sport tourism occurs when people travel to watch sport (event or game), visit a sport attraction (stadium or sport complex) or participate in a sport competition (Delpy, 1998). As such, sport tourism can be divided into three segments that define tourists' motivations and needs: watching sporting events or sport teams; visiting sport attractions; and taking part in active sport activities (Gibson, 1998; Roche *et al.*, 2013).

The first category of sport tourists is comprised of spectators. In this instance, the game represents the main product the spectators are consuming, either to enjoy the game in itself

or to support a specific team (Fullerton and Mertz, 2008). Undoubtedly, more affordable travel options have largely contributed to both the growth of spectator sport tourism and the flow of supporters traveling worldwide (Roche *et al.*, 2013).

The second category includes people who intend to visit a sport attraction. It can be divided into two types: celebrity and nostalgia sport tourists. Celebrity sport tourism involves meeting or watching famous sporting legends or traveling on tours for fantasy sport (Fairley and Gammon, 2005). Nostalgia sport tourism can take two forms: nostalgia for the sport place or some artifacts, and nostalgia for the social experience (Fairley and Gammon, 2005). The Ajax Experience Museum in Amsterdam combines both forms of nostalgia sport tourism by offering visitors the opportunity to relive the history of the club, while honing their football skills and interacting with other fans of the Dutch club[2].

The third category revolves around active participants. This relates to leagues and tournaments where individuals compete formally or informally, such as running at a city marathon (Roche *et al.*, 2013). However, some observers consider that “running a marathon [...] may leave you feeling accomplished, but you will be too tired to fully appreciate the sights. [...] it won't be tourism – it will be a voluntary act of self-torture” (Hammond, 2018, p. 15).

This segmentation of sport tourism falls in line with Rein and Shields' (2007) analysis where sport can be a place platform under three circumstances: a sport event platform (major (Olympic Games) or minor (a cycling race within the city limits) event); a sport team platform (private (New York Yankees) or national (New Zealand All Blacks)); or as a sport place platform (a sport complex (Dubai Sports City complex) or a stadium (Arsenal Emirates Stadium)). Because tourist destinations are often seasonal, sport can help a destination extend its tourist period by offering regularly scheduled league games during the off-season. This is the case of cities hosting professional sport teams, which often try to capitalize on the attractiveness of the respective clubs in order to seduce visitors: this applies to matches but also to stadiums which can become iconic museums, such as the Camp Nou in Barcelona, the city's second most visited stadium after the Picasso Museum, with an average of 1.2m visitors each year (Corneanu, 2017).

Yet, collaboration and strategic planning among stakeholders are essential to sport tourism success (Gibson, 2005). A striking example not to replicate is the Formula E (electric) race, held in July 2017 in downtown Montreal, Canada. Several major streets were shut down to businesses and citizens for weeks prior, as well as during the weekend of the event. Not to mention the construction noise in residential areas that went on 24/7 for months in order to complete the infrastructures on time, the non-disclosure of the number of tickets sold and of those distributed for free to fill in the stands, and the cost overruns which forced City Council to approve an additional 5.3m Canadian dollars. Despite complaints from citizens about the nuisance caused by the event and the lack of transparency, the Montreal City Hall considered them to be sacrifices the population had to make in order to boost the city's international profile (CBC, 2017a, b).

With this being said, the discussion shall now focus on sporting events, both major and minor ones, as these represent an increasingly popular platform used by jurisdictions to attract a large spectrum of visitors (Agha and Taks, 2015; Taks *et al.*, 2016).

#### *Major vs minor sporting events*

*Major sporting events.* Major sporting events, also called sport mega-events, are defined as “exceptional sporting events with an international scale that are hosted in a particular city” (Caiazza and Audretsch, 2015, p. 1). The Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup of football and Formula 1 races would be prime examples of mega sporting events. According to some authors, sport mega-events offer outstanding branding opportunities for nations (Berkowitz *et al.*, 2007; Campbell, 2015).

Sporting events are all the more attractive and effective since they evoke strong imagery and trigger powerful emotional responses from spectators (Nauright, 2013). Indeed, sport can be a vigorous catalyst in the imaging, re-imaging and branding of places (Knott *et al.*, 2015). Sporting events also have the potential to build strong brand associations between people and places (Higham and Hinch, 2009). Even though, in some instances, few positive attributes are actually transferred and some negative associations do remain after the event took place (Bodet and Lacassagne, 2012), such as in Brazil, Greece and South Africa which experienced massive cost overruns and abandoned infrastructures once the sun set on the events they organized (Flamer, 2017; Knott *et al.*, 2015; Stinson, 2017).

*Minor sporting events.* Small-scale, non-mega sport(ing) events or second-tier sporting events are: “smaller in size, scale, scope and reach than their mega counterparts, [and] have received less scrutiny, both on the economic and social levels” (Djaballah *et al.*, 2015, p. 49). A football championship tournament organized by a city district for kids, as well as a local cycling tour or a regional swimming competition, would fall into that category.

In terms of benefits, small-scale or second-tier sporting events can lead to intangible outcomes which might generate a deeper identification and sense of belonging to the community, because of the extent of local involvement. This should not be overlooked as the number of minor sporting events outnumber mega events and are not limited to bigger cities (Djaballah *et al.*, 2015). Kerwin *et al.* (2015) also bring to the fore the positive impact of small-scale sporting events for volunteers within a community: the sense of community for volunteers increases when a small-scale sporting event is staged, as local volunteers can take on higher responsibilities and feel empowered.

The question, thus, becomes: how can a jurisdiction capitalize on an event? To provide an answer, the concept of leveraging shall be introduced. This shall lead to a reflection on the social impacts of place branding through sport.

#### *Leveraging: how to capitalize on sporting events*

For certain authors (Chalip, 2004; Dickinson and Shipway, 2007; Jago *et al.*, 2010; Smith, 2014), a new focus on leveraging is necessary in order to assess the impact of sporting events. According to Smith, (2014, pp. 15-16), leveraging is “an approach which views mega-events as a resource which can be levered to achieve outcomes which would not have happened automatically by staging an event”; and where “mega-events are reconceived as windows of opportunity within which to undertake initiatives.” Leveraging underlines the key role of stakeholders in the nation branding process via sporting events, be they minor or major, and the importance of legacy.

Jurisdictions are looking for the best combination of strategies in order to make sport initiatives effective; all the more so since, there is competition for limited resources, and jurisdictions must identify and rank their priorities accordingly (Rein and Shields, 2007). Within the ecosystem of people and organizations associated with or impacted by sporting events, there is a need for more involvement and contribution from local stakeholders in articulating a place branding strategy (Green *et al.*, 2016). In this regard, as demonstrated by Roche (2000), the elite as well as the ordinary citizens can contribute and gain from sporting events: elites can promote their vision of the society and shape its future, whereas ordinary citizens can connect and (re-)define their collective identity, as we shall illustrate later on with the Singapore example.

Sporting events, especially major ones, offer business leaders and politicians a catalyst for economic and urban (re-)development, helping them shape the legacies they envision for themselves (Nauright, 2013). This last point helps emphasize the legacy issue of sporting events, in particular major ones, and indicates what is required to promote good governance and reassure both internal and external stakeholders: accountability, participation, performance and transparency (Leopkey and Parent, 2015). Nauright (2013, p. 26)

states that: “Governments that have been most successful have carefully thought out long-term strategies that focus on the creation of legacies. [...] smaller-scale recurring events [...] maximize local participation, involvement of local and regional producers, and use existing resources, facilities and landscape.” In other words, a sporting event should not be seen as an end in itself, but rather as a leverage for socio-economic development and legacy.

### *The benefits of sporting events*

Sporting events can potentially trigger two types of consumption benefits: private and public ones (Choe *et al.*, 2017, p. 2): “A public consumption benefit is generally explained as intangible benefits from hosting a team and the economic concept of public goods caused by a specific sport team, a stadium, and event, whereas a private consumption benefit accrues to only event visitors who actually visited a stadium and attended the game and directly connected to individual visitors’ perception.” Both private and public consumption benefits include tangible and intangible benefits. Among the tangible benefits derived from hosting a sporting event, the following are often mentioned: an increase in the standard of living of the population and of the domestic product, as well as the growth in the local economy and employment, which would all lead to a higher quality of life. Intangible benefits of major sporting events relate to a “feel-good” factor among the population for hosting the event, a renewed national pride and an improved image of the host jurisdiction, which could make the destination more attractive for visitors in the future (Wicker *et al.*, 2012).

Public consumption benefits are strongly associated with what Preuss (2007a) identified as soft and hard related changes in a host city, which he called “event-structures.” The latter impact the quality of location factors of the host city over the long-term and, as a result, are susceptible to enhance the socio-economic legacy of a sporting event. Hard event-structures include primary structure (sport infrastructure, training sites), secondary structure (village for athletes, technical officials and media) and tertiary structure (security, power plants, telecommunication networks and cultural attractions). Soft event-structures encompass knowledge (organizational, security and technological), networks (political and sport federations) and cultural goods (cultural identity and common memory).

However, there is no consensus on the extent to which sporting events generate economic benefits, let alone on how to calculate the impact of sporting events for the community (Djaballah *et al.*, 2015; Gibson, 2005; Preuss, 2004). In this regard, a study conducted on the Formula 1 Grand Prix for the city of Montreal underlined three items that should be taken into account in the calculation of the economic impact of such an event (Fillion, 2016). These are: the operating expenditures associated with the event; the investment required for the event to take place; and the expenses made by tourists who visit the city, region or country with the specific purpose of attending the event. The latter item is in line with the definition of private and public consumption benefits provided earlier by Choe *et al.* (2017).

Furthermore, there is an emerging body of literature on the negative perception locals have of sporting events. Indeed, marketing activities can influence the disparity between pre- and post-event perceptions, altering both resident perceptions of sporting events and their future behavior toward hosting these events (Tosun, 2002). Once the sporting event is over, residents might realize that the benefits generated were significantly less than what was initially forecasted. Consequently, local residents may consider the overall outcome of a sporting event as a loss and a waste of public money because benefits were not significant enough to justify the expenses, despite a contribution of the event to the image of the respective jurisdiction. That is why policymakers should realize that local residents are often times more concerned about the daily problems and challenges they encounter with work, public transport, infrastructures, than how an outsider perceives their city, region or country (Caiazza and Audretsch, 2015). This is probably the misjudgment politicians make when hosting sporting events.

There is also the social costs related to sporting events and the impact on the residents' quality of life (Kaplanidou, 2012). Among the social costs to daily life of major sporting events, the nuisances include traffic congestion and overcrowding, rising potential criminal activity, disruption to daily activities and pollution (Nauright, 2013); urban degradation and anti-social behaviors caused by hooligans, among others (Fredline and Faulkner, 2002); inflation in the prices of goods and services because of the surge in demand for food, gas and lodging (Tavakkoli, 2016); and increase in sex trade (Dolinsek, 2014). This is notwithstanding the threat posed by terrorist attacks which, for instance, forced France to deploy 90,000 police, soldiers and private security agents across the country during the 2016 UEFA European Championship (Eurosport, 2016). Nauright (2013) also mentions the costs of complying with the requirements of sponsors and international federations for certain infrastructures that end up being left unused after the event, such as in Brazil, Greece and South Africa, as stated earlier (Flamer, 2017; Knott *et al.*, 2015; Stinson, 2017).

### *Social impacts of place branding through sport*

How can a jurisdiction maximize the social impacts of place branding through sport? Djaballah *et al.* (2015) and Preuss (2007b) have identified five potential social impacts which trigger positive or negative social outcomes that may persist after the sporting event. These are: social capital; well-being and collective identities; sport participation; human capital; and urban regeneration. We shall now focus on all of them.

*Social capital.* Social capital can be defined as: "social relationships and conditions including trustworthy and diverse networks, social proactivity and participation in community conducive to cooperation for mutual success in society" (Djaballah *et al.*, 2015, p. 51). Social capital incorporates dimensions such as local citizenship, neighborhood connections and intercultural dialog (Kellett *et al.*, 2008; Misener and Mason, 2009). Social capital can be vertical or horizontal.

According to Taks (2013), mega sporting events often produce a vertical social capital, which means the event only benefits a limited number of individuals and economic agents (fans, international federations, multinational corporations, organizers, politicians), even leading to increasing social inequalities among the population. On the contrary, smaller scale sporting events may favor a horizontal social capital, generating benefits across the society, facilitating stronger community bonding and producing lasting effects. Consequently, smaller sporting events would serve the community better and have a higher predisposition at leaving a socio-economic legacy (Agha and Taks, 2015; Djaballah *et al.*, 2015; Taks, 2013; Taks *et al.*, 2016). This was demonstrated by Ruhanen and Whitford (2011) on how an indigenous sport festival in Australia contributed to nurturing the reconciliation with Aboriginal Australians.

*Well-being and collective identities.* Lee *et al.* (2013, p. 27) define well-being as the "harmonious life quality in both psychological and economic aspects for human function and development." This definition includes sociocultural impacts, among others the benefits derived from sport participation, which leads to a "feel good" effect (or well-being; Kavetsos and Szymanski, 2009; Wicker *et al.*, 2012). This "feel good" effect is also associated with hosting an event, attending it or being involved as a volunteer (Djaballah *et al.*, 2015).

Yet, the success of a local or the national team would fall under "collective identities" (Kavetsos and Szymanski, 2009), which refer to "the sense of belonging to a social group or community reflecting self-categorization with positive attitude and important self-concept in a social context" (Lee *et al.*, 2013, p. 27). Sporting events, including smaller ones, would have the capability to instil a sense of togetherness, community and national identity, especially in a multi-ethnic population (Belgium, Canada, Singapore, Switzerland, USA) (Djaballah *et al.*, 2015). Sport success potentially increases the confidence of a country in its abilities,

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as demonstrated by China's pride following the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games (VanderKlippe, 2016).

*Sport participation.* It is presumed that hosting a sporting event on home soil would encourage sport participation among the population. The rationale behind this assumption is that watching athletes perform at an event would inspire people, who would then start emulating their idols by practising a sport, in particular, or being more active in sport, in general (Frawley and Cush, 2011). Yet, for either mega or non-mega sporting events, the impact on sport participation behavior is questionable: the strength of the inspiration effect appears to significantly differ based on age, location, ethnic origin, sport participation profile and whether or not the individuals had received information about opportunities to do sport (Ramchandani *et al.*, 2014).

A similar conclusion was presented at the 2013 Play the Game Conference, which brought together sport stakeholders in order to discuss major issues in this industry (Sparre, 2013). The trickle-down effects of hosting sporting events are very dubious and should they ever materialize, these effects would mostly be visible in the short-term. In this regard, in England, 80 percent of London sport clubs proclaimed that they did not see the Olympic Games as an opportunity to increase participation in their activities; moreover, 21 out of 26 types of sport did not benefit from a membership increase following the 2012 Olympic Games. In Denmark, elite sport appears to inspire certain groups to some extent, in particular teenage girls and boys, as well as men up to 29 years old. This seems to be the case of the most popular sports that are highly covered by the media, such as handball, table tennis and football.

Likewise, also in England, a study released by the BBC (2017) reveals that there has been no significant increase in sport participation among the population between 2005 (the year London won the bid to host the 2012 Summer Olympic Games) and 2016. In 2005, the proportion of all people aged over 16 years old who played sport for at least 30 minutes each week in England was 34.6 percent; by 2016, this rate was 36.1 percent. Among the persons aged 16 to 25 years old, the participation rate was 56.2 percent in 2005 and 55.5 percent in 2016. Among 14–15 year old children, the rate dropped from 71.8 percent in 2012 to 69.5 percent in 2016.

A notable exception would be Australia. On the one hand, citizens were already positively predisposed to outdoors and sport activities, prior to hosting the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games (Veal *et al.*, 2012). On the other, Australia has invested in practice facilities and grassroots initiatives with the objective of making Australia the most active sport nation, in conjunction with the planning of stadiums for elite sport and international events (The Boston Consulting Group, 2017). As a result, in 2016, Tier 1 high performance sport generated an estimated 11.8bn Australian dollars of benefits to society from \$2.2bn of spending, or \$5.36 of value created for each dollar spent (11.8 / 2.2); participation in sport lead to an estimated \$66.9bn of benefits for society from \$9.2bn of spending, or \$7.27 of value created for each dollar spent (The Boston Consulting Group, 2017). A word of caution, though: as the methods and sampling techniques vary from one study to the other, the results and, thus, the conclusions on the impact that sporting events have or have not on sport participation need to be drawn carefully.

*Human capital.* Human capital is defined as “the attributes of individuals in terms of knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes conducive to personal development and societal wellbeing” (Lee *et al.*, 2013, p. 27). Sporting events, through the volunteer opportunities they offer, encourage social interactions, knowledge exchange, leadership skills, mutual assistance and capacity building (Nicholson and Hoye, 2008). From a local community point of view, mega sporting events' volunteer programs may not be very effective in stimulating human capital because they mostly involve volunteers from

other cities, regions or countries, leaving less gratifying tasks for local volunteers that may, as a consequence, not develop marketable competencies. On the contrary, smaller sporting events often have the advantage of addressing primarily local residents and giving them the opportunity to assume bigger responsibilities (Djaballah *et al.*, 2015; Kerwin *et al.*, 2015).

*Urban regeneration.* While bigger sporting events often lead to major work and potential transformation of cities, smaller ones have less ambitious infrastructure plans. This being said, urban regeneration outcomes are not necessarily better for mega events because the facilities built to host mega events do not always meet the present and future needs of the host jurisdiction, often leaving behind “white elephants,” such as in Rio de Janeiro or Sochi. In the case of non-mega events, the latter tend to accelerate previously planned construction or upgrading of sport facilities. This is why smaller cities may be able to make a more rational use of non-mega sporting events than bigger cities do with mega events (Djaballah *et al.*, 2015).

However, Poland seized the opportunity of hosting the 2012 European Football Championship by investing more in peripheral infrastructures, such as local and national transportation projects, than in stadium construction or renovations. This approach appears to have boosted the economy, improved Poland’s touristic appeal, while fostering national pride (Euronews, 2012). This is an example of positive urban regeneration triggered, in large part, by hosting a sporting event.

*How to maximize social impacts: the Singapore example.* An example of a project which appears to maximize the five social impacts discussed above (social capital; well-being and collective identities; sport participation; human capital; and urban regeneration) is the Singapore’s Sports Hub. It was constructed around the new National Stadium. The latter has replaced the original arena on the same ground, in an area in need of revitalization (Geylang, eastern part of the island; “urban regeneration” dimension).

The Sports Hub, opened in 2014 at a cost of over US\$1bn, is a multi-purpose sport, entertainment and lifestyle complex and, as its name says, a convergence point for Singaporeans. It combines infrastructures for both spectacle and the practice of sport, as well as a shopping mall (Defterios, 2014; Sport Singapore, 2018). The Sports Hub is one of the cornerstones of the “Vision 2030” initiative which is aimed at promoting a healthier and better life (“well-being”) by inviting Singaporeans to do sport (Sport Singapore, 2018).

Overall, the Singapore Sports Hub is contributing to positioning the country as an international destination of choice for cultural and sporting events (“social” and “human capital”). But it also nurtures national pride and brings Singaporeans together by playing sport (“sport participation” and “collective identities”) inside the infrastructure that protects them from the scorching heat and humidity which are the norm most of the year in the city state (Defterios, 2014). We should also mention that Singapore seems to aim at maximizing social impact and legacy in other sport endeavors, as illustrated by the Singapore Formula 1 Grand Prix: the infrastructures used for this event are public roads surrounding the Marina Bay area that Singaporeans otherwise use for their transportation (Formula 1, 2018).

## **A successful place branding strategy through sport**

### *Taking stock*

Up to this point, some noteworthy items emerge. First, sport is a potential asset that managers can leverage through a place, nation or destination branding strategy (Campbell, 2015; Gibson, 2005; Heslop *et al.*, 2013; Nauright, 2013; Roche *et al.*, 2013; Smith, 2014). Second, sport can be used as a place branding platform in four ways (Table I): a sport event platform; a sport team platform; a sport participation platform; or a sport place platform (Delpy, 1998; Gibson, 1998; Rein and Shields, 2007; Roche *et al.*, 2013). Third, there are five social impacts associated with sport and sporting events: social capital; well-being and

collective identities; sport participation; human capital; and urban regeneration (Djaballah *et al.*, 2015; Taks, 2013). These impacts, though challenging to materialize, should be pursued by all place, nation or destination branding initiatives through sport, as was illustrated by the Singapore example. Fourth, both event organizers and place, nation or destination branding managers should focus on horizontal social capital, which implies generating lasting benefits across the society for all stakeholders and facilitating stronger community bonding (Agha and Taks, 2015; Taks, 2013). Fifth, place, nation or destination branding through sport is not only about the visibility and awareness of the jurisdiction involved (Knott *et al.*, 2015); conversely, sport is not an end in itself but rather a leverage for socio-economic development and legacy building (Leopkey and Parent, 2015; Ruhanen and Whitford, 2011).

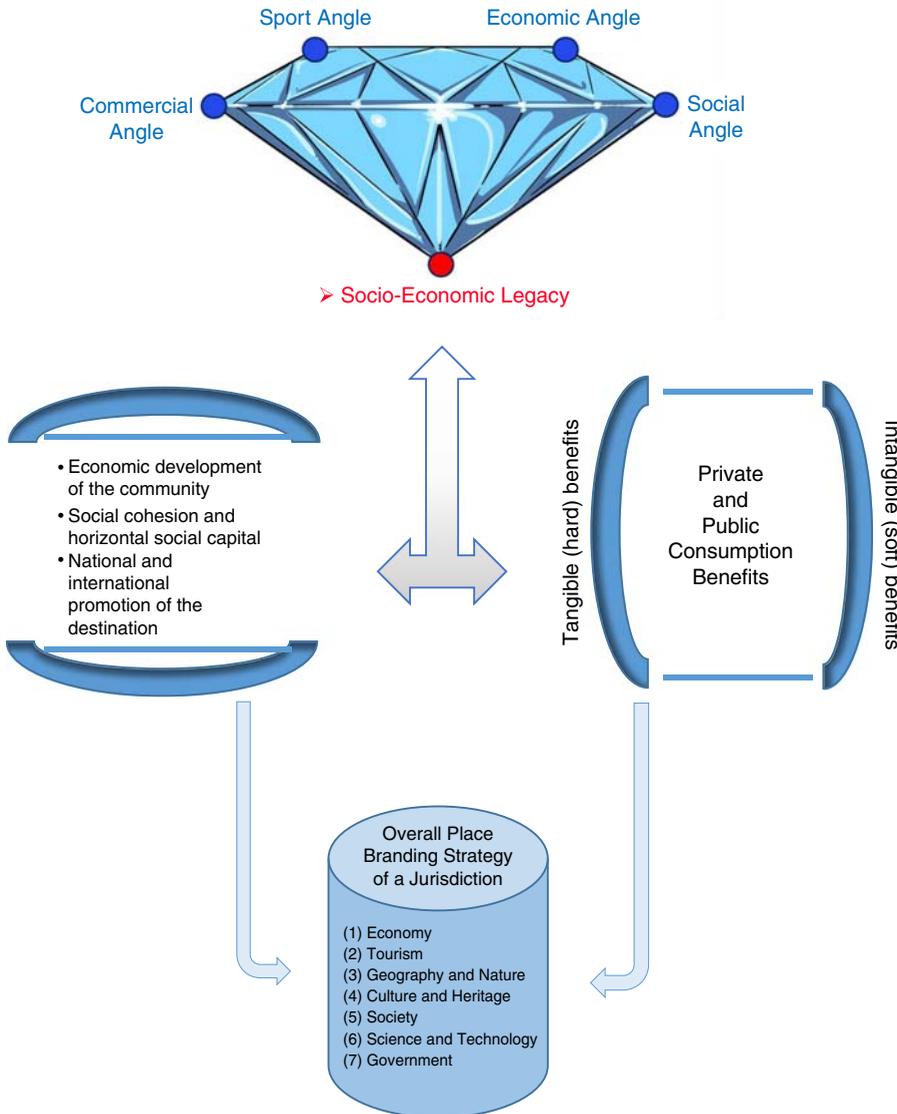
Hence, brand managers of cities, regions or countries should espouse a holistic approach when developing their respective place branding strategy through sport, in order to differentiate their destination from others and establish their Unique Selling Proposition (USP; Garcia *et al.*, 2012). Truly, the world watches a specific jurisdiction because of sport but it sees much more in that place than a sport arena. By following a holistic approach, managers and politicians should make the effort to be inclusive, integrative and comprehensive in elaborating and implementing a place branding strategy alongside stakeholders, among others at the grassroots level, who co-create the jurisdiction's brand and take ownership of it, as underscored earlier (Green *et al.*, 2016; Knott *et al.*, 2015).

#### *How to shape a holistic approach to place branding through sport*

In the context of place, nation or destination branding through sport, this holistic approach could be articulated around four dimensions or angles (Figure 1): sport; economic; commercial; and social. Under the sport angle, managers' goal should be to organize an event that is memorable from a spectacle standpoint, as this could trigger positive imagery and brand associations (Berkowitz *et al.*, 2007; Higham and Hinch, 2009; Rein and Shields, 2007) to the benefit of the jurisdiction (sense of pride, identification and achievement; Knott *et al.*, 2015). This spectacle, known as "sportainment," or the merger of sport and entertainment (Richelieu, 2014), becomes a valuable strategic tool for sporting events. This is exemplified by the 2018 Super Bowl half-time show featuring Justin Timberlake, the pre-game showcase at a playoffs hockey game in the National Hockey League or the Kontinental Hockey League with laser and video display, or the Stade Français rugby team experience concept with elephants and parachutes.

As far as the economic dimension is concerned, managers should ensure that the event is successful and financially viable, with infrastructures that are sustainable and converted for the benefit of the community, once the festivities are over (Campbell, 2015; Gibson, 2005; Nauright, 2013). As discussed earlier, this could be easier to achieve for smaller-scale events because, in these instances, the existing infrastructures of the jurisdiction can often be reused, even though they might require some improvements. As far as mega-events are concerned, they involve new infrastructures that do not always find a regular vocation once the curtain has fallen. Most of South Africa's football stadiums built for the 2010 FIFA World Cup sit empty today (Knott *et al.*, 2015), and Rio's Olympic installations are in ruins, just two years after the event.

From the commercial angle, managers need to maximize the revenues from sponsorships, traditional broadcasting and streaming rights, as well as from merchandising (Nauright, 2013). A note, here, as we are in the midst of a transition from broadcasting to streaming: with the continuous development of technology and changing consumer habits, the sport business model built on colossal TV rights could be altered, with the sporting event gradually becoming a commodity watched on a computer, a tablet, a phone or a Smart TV, at a fraction of today's cost. This would fall in line with the business models of Alibaba's Alisports



**Figure 1.** The diamond of place branding through sport (developed for this study by the author)

for sport, Netflix for movies and series, Spotify for music and Stingray for entertainment, among others. In 2016, Twitter paid the National Football League US\$10m for the streaming rights of all 15 Thursday Night games. Also, according to Statista (2017), the daily average content downloaded on a mobile phone worldwide, in 2016, was of 185 minutes by Millennials, 110 minutes by the members of Generation X and 43 minutes by Baby-Boomers. Meanwhile, 190,000 Canadian households canceled their cable subscription in 2015; 220,000 in 2016; and an estimated 247,000 in 2017 (CBC, 2017c). Consequently, streaming will most likely impact how place branding managers leverage and cash in on sporting events in the future (Desbordes and Richelieu, 2018).

The social dimension is about gaining the support of the community by being transparent (Leopkey and Parent, 2015). This comes with a willingness from managers and politicians to communicate, collaborate and find a consensus for the benefit of the local population (Misener and Mason, 2009). The social dimension also implies a focus on the post-event legacy (Campbell, 2015; Gibson, 2005; Nauright, 2013; Preuss, 2004). Furthermore, there should be a clear layout of the indicators of success and the method used to calculate the economic impact of the event, as different methods can lead to contradicting results (Choe *et al.*, 2017; Djaballah *et al.*, 2015; Fillion, 2016; Gibson, 2005; Preuss, 2004). An illustration of the latter controversy came prior to Super Bowl LII, held in Minneapolis in February 2018, as the local economic impact estimates of the Super Bowl ranged from US\$500m to as little as US\$30m (Nelson, 2018). These discrepancies could be explained by how the operating expenditures and investments required for the event were taken into account, as well as how the expenses made by tourists, who visited the city with the specific intention of attending the event, were calculated (Fillion, 2016).

As a result, a holistic approach of place branding through sport, that takes into account the four dimensions or angles we have just presented, has the potential to leave a socio-economic legacy. This legacy implies the creation of value for external but also, and especially, local stakeholders, (Caiazza and Audretsch, 2015; Gibson, 2005; Green *et al.*, 2016; Nauright, 2013; Knott *et al.*, 2015; Preuss, 2007b).

#### *Three priorities when organizing a sporting event*

Sport, in general, and the sporting event, in particular, should be organized around three priorities. The first one is the economic development of the community, with sport and the sporting event being a true leverage (Chalip, 2004; Dickinson and Shipway, 2007; Jago *et al.*, 2010; Smith, 2014). The second is social cohesion by creating a sense of community around sport and horizontal social capital (e.g. Chalip, 2006; Djaballah *et al.*, 2015; Taks, 2013). The Singapore Sports Hub example showcased earlier appears to fall in line with this aspect of social cohesion. The third priority is national and international promotion of the destination (Rojas-Méndez, 2013; Zenker, 2014) that should lead to an effective place branding strategy through sport (Campbell, 2015; Knott *et al.*, 2015). This would help drive: a new or improved brand image of the jurisdiction that is authentic (e.g. Dos Santos and Campo, 2014; Gibson, 2005; Heslop *et al.*, 2013); foreign investments and tourists (Gibson, 2005); the country's exports (Zenker, 2014); the foreign policy (Beau and Bourget, 2013); as well as cultural and sporting events hosted by the respective jurisdiction (Beau and Bourget, 2013; Campbell, 2015; Nauright, 2013).

#### *The "diamond" of place branding through sport*

This brings us to our conceptual framework (Figure 1): the "diamond" of place branding through sport, with its four angles (sport, economic, commercial and social) and one key objective (socio-economic legacy; bottom angle of the "diamond"). On the one hand (as it is shown on the graph, on the left side of the arrows, underneath the "diamond"[3]), a socio-economic legacy should materialize with the economic development of the community, social cohesion and horizontal social capital, as well as with a national and international promotion of the destination. On the other hand (right side of the arrows, below the "diamond"), a socio-economic legacy can materialize with private and public consumption benefits generated for the community (Choe *et al.*, 2017), with both tangible (hard) and intangible (soft) benefits resulting from the sporting event (Preuss, 2007a).

The drive for a socio-economic legacy shall feed, (illustrated by the two arrows in the lower section of Figure 1, leading to the cylinder), not only an effective place branding strategy through sport, but also the overall place branding strategy of a jurisdiction. As depicted at the bottom of Figure 1, place branding through sport is one pillar, among seven, of the overall

place branding strategy developed and implemented by a jurisdiction. These seven pillars are (Rojas-Méndez, 2013) economy, tourism (including sport tourism), geography and nature, culture and heritage (with sporting events and sport participation), society, science and technology and government (alongside public diplomacy).

By engaging diverse stakeholders with authenticity and transparency, managers and politicians would be able to develop and implement a holistic place branding strategy through sport, which could very well gather support from the local population because the latter would be involved, feel empowered and have a greater sense of ownership of their place. Consequently, the respective jurisdiction might be in a better position to balance its socio-economic priorities and transcend sport in order to become, eventually, an established place brand. Managers might then build a place brand that is not only known (“brand awareness”) but also attractive to individuals, entrepreneurs, investors, tourists. This could be done thanks to the jurisdiction’s quality of life that stands out from other places, alongside a “package” that is not limited to sport, though the place branding initiative might begin with sport. This is how a city, region or country could leverage sport to build its USP in an increasingly competitive place branding market, as well as a strong brand equity (Florek and Kavartzis, 2014). This is also how a place or jurisdiction can achieve the economic development of the community and social cohesion, notwithstanding national and international promotion of the destination, which we underlined moments ago.

## Conclusion, limitations and future research

### *Conclusion*

Considering the economic importance of the sport and tourism industries, the main objective of our conceptual paper was to reflect on the effectiveness of place branding strategies through sport and identify what jurisdictions and brand managers need to consider, strategically, when attracting sporting events under the umbrella of place branding. In other words, how could a city, a region or a country succeed in its attempt to use sport to (re-) define, position and promote itself? Drawing from a synthesis of the literature and our analysis, we conclude that brand managers of cities, regions or countries should espouse a holistic approach when developing their respective place branding strategy through sport, in order to differentiate their destination from others (Knott *et al.*, 2015) and establish their USP (Garcia *et al.*, 2012). The holistic approach can be articulated around four dimensions: sport, economic, commercial and social.

This approach should help leverage sport (Smith, 2014) and leave a socio-economic legacy for communities. Furthermore, for a socio-economic legacy to take shape, sport, in general, and the sporting event, in particular, should be organized while focusing on three priorities: the economic development of the community; the social cohesion and horizontal social capital; and the national and international promotion of the destination. This enabled us to introduce the “diamond” of place branding through sport, which is linked to the overall place branding strategy of a jurisdiction. This approach was illustrated in Figure 1.

In this regard, local governments have to comprehend the diverse social impacts sporting events might generate; appreciate the expectations of their local constituents; and communicate these expectations to the organizers in order to enhance positive and minimize negative impacts (Djaballah *et al.*, 2015), including cost overruns, nepotism and corruption (Campbell, 2015). These tasks are part of the holistic approach emphasized before, namely an inclusive, integrative and comprehensive blueprint in elaborating and implementing a place branding strategy (Green *et al.*, 2016; Knott *et al.*, 2015). Ultimately, value is created for external but also internal (local population) stakeholders (e.g. Caiazza and Audretsch, 2015; Donner *et al.*, 2014; Leopkey and Parent, 2015). Within this mindset, we could say that the strategic objectives of place branding through sport are aligned with the needs of the population and the impact of sporting events on the community.

*Limitations and future research*

In this paper, our goal was not to gage the economic impact of sporting events or their relevance *per se*, even though we discussed them, but rather to identify what jurisdictions and brand managers need to consider, strategically, when attracting sporting events under the umbrella of a place branding strategy. Drawing mainly from a literature review, with the support of concrete examples, this is a first step within the confines of an exploratory research. Though we should be careful in making generalizations, we nonetheless believe that the paper makes two key contributions. First, in articulating a thorough synthesis of the literature on place branding, in general, and on place branding via sport, in particular. Second, in laying down the foundations of a framework that could help nurture the reflection on place branding strategy in sport.

In this regard, future steps could include the study of specific cases of jurisdictions and analyze how these fit within the proposed conceptual framework (the “diamond”). For instance, could other items and sub-items be considered? Do non-mega and mega sporting events differ in how these items are combined within a holistic approach? To which extent do developed and emerging countries diverge in regards to the conceptual framework? That is why, developing a typology highlighting the main profiles of jurisdictions which use place branding through sport could prove very valuable, from both a theoretical and managerial standpoint.

In addition to these questions, we could propose the following research topics. One of them relates to how certain countries use sport to establish their legitimacy, gain international respectability, increase their influence in world affairs and build a “soft power” through sport. We introduced the case of Qatar when we mentioned the concept of “diplomacy branding.” Another example is Russia. Indeed, following the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Russia faced deep socio-economic and political changes, alongside the humiliation of losing its super power status. Now, Russia is back on the world stage, including in sport, as the host of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games and the 2018 Football World Cup. For both Westerners, in order to better understand this country, and for Russians, from a socio-economic legacy and strategic leverage perspective, it might be very interesting to analyze how Russia could articulate an effective place branding via sport, within the framework we proposed in this paper. China is another potential example to study. In 2022, Beijing shall host the Winter Olympic Games and China plans on having 300m new winter sport practitioners by then (McGran, 2017). Besides, China aims at being sacred football world champions by 2050 and host the FIFA World Cup by that time.

But what if the jurisdiction does not have the resources China, Qatar and Russia have dedicated to or plan on investing in sport? Yet, the place still wants to define, position and promote itself on the world stage through sport. For either developed (Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Norway, South Korea, etc.) or emerging countries (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Colombia, India, Malaysia, Senegal, etc.) which have shown signs of using the strategic leverage of place branding via sport, there is ground for valuable insights for both academics and managers in studying their respective case; especially in how these countries can balance international promotion objectives with socio-economic legacy imperatives.

Another avenue would be to analyze the socio-economic legacy of sporting events and sport infrastructures by taking into account the five social impact (social capital, well-being and collective identities, sport participation, human capital, and urban regeneration). Case studies comparing different events, infrastructures and countries could be very informative and help us draw further lessons for managers and policymakers. In fact, we already plan on looking at the Sydney Olympic Park 2030 initiative, in Australia[4], which could represent an example of the convergence lifestyle hub of the future, similar to the Singapore Sports Hub, but at a larger scale.

Moreover, in line with Agha and Taks (2015), a research might look at how important intangible benefits are in comparison with economic/financial impacts when organizing a

sporting event. Is there, in this instance, a difference between non-mega and major sporting events? How can sport be further leveraged by generating synergies between sport and the overall place branding strategy of a jurisdiction?

Adding to this reflection, is the impact of sporting events, especially bigger ones, a positive one if and only if the economy of the respective jurisdiction is already doing well, as illustrated by London 2012? Are sporting events worth the resources committed by jurisdictions? Or are they simply, especially in the case of mega sporting events, an exercise in “ego massaging,” with a chronic tendency to incur massive cost overrun (Reguly, 2015)? In the end, how can we create value with and for local stakeholders, thanks to a place branding strategy through sport? And how can this be documented in a systematic way to prove, not only its worth, but also the relevance of investing millions, if not billions, of dollars of public funds in the name of sport?

### Notes

1. Exchange rate of 1 US\$ = 1.25 Canadian\$.
2. Please, refer to: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=sacqRFwgsYI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sacqRFwgsYI)
3. These details are provided to clarify the explanations surrounding the “diamond”.
4. Please, see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhBQgIT7T7k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhBQgIT7T7k)

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