

Abstract

Governing the growth of the Olympic winter programme: Analysing the IOC's impact on the competition between nations

Research Question: Since the early 1990s, the Olympic winter programme has changed notably in terms of new sports, disciplines or events being introduced by the IOC arguably to increase revenues from the top sponsor programme and the broadcasting rights (e.g., Chappelet, 2014; Kempf, Weber, Weber, & Suter, 2015). **In contrast to the Summer Games, the number of nations' winning medals at the Winter Games is largely limited to a small sub-set of competitive nations. This number has remained quite stable at around 24 since 1998. (Weber, Kempf, Shibli, & De Bosscher, 2016). The nations' competitiveness at the Winter Games is positively correlated with macro-level factors such as: squared GDP per capita, population size, being a (former) communist state, having a winter climate, the number of winter sports resorts, and hosting the Games (e.g., Andreff & Andreff, 2011; Johnson & Ali, 2004). Given that the number of medal winning nations at the Winter Games is limited due to macro-level factors and high, sport specific entry barriers for new nations (Weber et al., 2016). There is much evidence that these competitive nations allocate their resources for the upcoming Games by evaluating their performance at the previous Games (De Bosscher, Shibli, Westerbeek, & Van Bottenburg, 2015; Houlihan & Zheng, 2013; Sam, 2012; Zheng & Chen, 2016), the research question is: How does the growth of the event programme influence the outcome of competition between nations' at the Games? The aim of this paper is twofold: first, to detail the growth of the events programme by discipline, and second, to compare the impact of this growth on the resulting rank in the medal table over time. To date, the medal table is commonly used by the media and politicians as a benchmark to demonstrate the competitiveness of their nation.**

Research Method: The growth of the events programme is detailed per discipline from 1988 to 2014. We illustrate how the inclusion of different types of events (i.e. single, team, and mixed) influences the total number of contestable medals of each nation in every discipline. In a second step, the impact of this growth is exemplary analysed for selected medal-winning nations. We identify the selected nation's disciplines, in which they are most competitive. Therefore, the market share per discipline of each nation is calculated **between 1988 and 1998**. The share is based on the number of medals won in a discipline relative to the number of contestable medals in this discipline. Hence, the average market share (**i.e. market share₁₉₈₈₋₉₈**) demonstrates a nation's competitiveness in a discipline and indicates a competitive advantage. To evaluate the impact of the growth of the events programme on the nation's medal

performance, we compare the medal-winning possibilities of the selected nations in their most competitive disciplines over time.

Results and Findings: The most important growth was identified in snowboarding (from zero to 30) and freestyle skiing (from six to 30). Exemplarily analysing Switzerland and Canada, the most competitive disciplines of Switzerland were bobsleigh (market share₁₉₈₈₋₉₈ = 29%) and alpine skiing (market share₁₉₈₈₋₁₉₉₈ = 15%), while the most competitive disciplines of Canada were ice hockey (market share₁₉₈₈₋₁₉₉₈ = 60%) and short track (market share₁₉₈₈₋₁₉₉₈ = 28%). Between 1998 and 2014, the IOC increased the number of contestable medal in the “Swiss disciplines” by three, while in the “Canadian disciplines” by six. Hence, the IOC offered Canada to win three more medals than Switzerland in their most competitive disciplines of the 2014 programme, compared to 1998.

Implications: While the IOCs governing policy aims at optimizing the programme for spectators and broadcasters, their governing policy has an impact on the medal-winning possibilities for nations. Because the number of medal-winning nations is particularly limited in the winter disciplines (Weber et al., 2016), this research can raise the awareness of policy makers on the impact on the medal table. Furthermore, comparing the average market share₁₉₈₈₋₉₈ to the nations’ actual performance at the Games between 2002 and 2014 allows to identify changes in their competitiveness relative to their rival nations, and possibly indicates learning from best practice (e.g., Robinson & Böhlke, 2013). Finally, this research contributes to the discussion on measuring performance at the Games (e.g., Shibli, De Bosscher, & Van Bottenburg, 2013). While the ‘market share’ is preferred to measure the performance of a nation over time, using the ‘number of medals’ has some practical justification when nations allocate resources to those disciplines, which delivered the most medals at the previous Games.

Literature

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