

Article

Sustainable Financing of Elite Athlete Development: An Empirical Analysis of Winter Sports in Austria

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Abstract: This study examines the value of professional winter sports to the Austrian resident population in the context of three major sporting events (the 2017 World Championships in Alpine Skiing, the 2018 Winter Olympics, and the 2019 World Championships in Nordic Skiing). In nationwide population surveys ($n = 2289$), the contingent valuation method was employed, and the respondents were presented with two scenarios asking for their willingness-to-pay for live broadcasts and long-term athlete development. The aggregate willingness-to-pay amounted to €42 million (for live broadcasts) and about €800 million (for athlete development). However, only about 20% of the residents expressed a positive willingness-to-pay. The respondents' willingness-to-pay is not only determined by well-studied factors like consumption capital, intangible factors, and socio-demographics, but also by life satisfaction. The willingness-to-pay for live broadcasts is comparably higher for alpine skiing, while the willingness-to-pay for athlete development is higher for Olympic winter sports athletes. The findings have implications for sport policy and sport finance, highlighting the challenge of turning public sport consumption into a willingness to contribute financially to sustainable athlete development.

Keywords: contingent valuation method; elite sport; Olympic Games; skiing; willingness-to-pay; World Championships

1. Introduction

Many countries invest in elite sport with the aim of achieving sporting success in international competitions, such as World Championships and the Olympic Games [1,2]. International sporting success is desired because it generates a number of positive externalities and beneficial intangible effects. For example, sporting success produces public goods such as enjoyment, pride, happiness, and a feel-good factor in the population [3]. Moreover, elite athletes are considered to be role models because they demonstrate important traits—such as fairness, discipline, respect, performance, and endurance—which are worthy of imitation [1,4]. Furthermore, both sporting success and athlete role models have the potential to inspire especially the youth population to participate in sport [5].

For Austria, the research context of this study, sporting success in winter sports is particularly important, given its alpine location and its history and tradition of success in winter sports, which is accompanied by a history of much lower success in summer sports. The Austrian team won no medals at the 2012 London Games, and only one medal at the 2016 Rio Games (a bronze medal in sailing). Success in winter sports is important to Austria because it produces further positive externalities for the country [6]. For instance, national sporting success signals that Austria can be considered a recognized production site, creating positive image and advertisement effects for the whole sports industry, and even for firms outside that industry. Furthermore, sporting success in winter sports is