

Imaging the Sport of Golf – Envisioning Communities
An Examination of Recent Developments in the Status of Golf in Hungary
Emese Ivan (Ball State University)

Abstract

Hungary also has seen a tremendous increase in quality golf facilities in the last decade. The sport of golf – including golf tourism – in Hungary also makes its first moves to be officially (re)unified with its historical partners in Western Europe and in the USA. This paper looks at developments in the Hungarian Golf community in the last decades. While focusing on the ongoing economic, financial, and political changes surrounding the Hungarian National Golf Federation, this study also poses some questions. To what extent mushrooming of golf communities could be seen as a result of Europeanization of the country? Is it just a new achievement in PGA America's global explosion? Can we see it as the benefit of the European Team's astronomical success at the Ryder Cup tournaments?

Introduction

Statistics show that over two million people start playing golf worldwide annually. Most of these new golfers are Chinese and Eastern European.¹ This paper will focus on economic, financial, and political changes surrounding the Hungarian National Golf Federation, and at the same time, will look for reasons for the rapid growth in the popularity of golf in Hungary. We will try to evaluate to what extent mushrooming of golf communities in Hungary could be attributed to the Europeanization of the country, or rather to a new achievement of the Professional Golfers' Association (PGA).² Finally, can it be related to Team Europe's success at the Ryder Cup tournaments?³ To answer these questions we will look at the history of the sport both in Europe and the USA, followed by the history of golf in Hungary. This paper argues that despite the ongoing global intervention and influence on sport policymaking process, the growth and financial success of the Hungarian golf community depends heavily on institutional features of the domestic environment.

Brief History of Golf in Europe

Golf is one of the most venerable of modern sports, the rules having been established in Scotland in 1754. The reputation of St Andrews as the home of golf, and the stability and growth of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews (The Royal and Ancient), gradually led to a general acceptance that this small society, formed by 22 golfers in 1754, became the game's leading authority. This acceptance was formalized in 1897 when the senior clubs throughout Britain gave authority to The Royal and Ancient to formulate and administer a common code of rules. The success of the Open Championships has enabled The Royal and Ancient to contribute funding to a wide variety of golf activities. In fact, The Royal and Ancient, being a private members' club, distributes most of the profit generated from championship events. Millions of dollars are distributed annually to fund coaching, to promote junior golf, and to award grants to organizations in the 28 countries associated with The Ancient and Royal worldwide. The Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) also receives funds from this source, as does the PGA Europe, Women's PGA Europe, and the Challenge Tour – the training ground for the next generation. In fact, the Royal and Ancient plans to give away ^50 Million between 2004 to 2010.⁴

The European Tour started in 1971 with five tournaments, which grew to 47 events by 2005. In the 1980s two important events occurred in Europe which impacted the sport world. To create a more unified Europe, the Adonnino Committee (1984)⁵ proposed the use of sport, and unified European sport teams, to aid in transferring national identity to a supranational European identity.

At the same time, in mid-1980s, in most Western European countries, the state monopoly of TV channels were divested. The sale of broadcasting rights and sponsorship became the primary sources for financing of professional sport, accounting for around 65-85% of the funding for sport events in Europe.⁶ Golf competitions were broadcast on a regular basis promoting the game all around the continent. Spain, Germany, and Sweden developed into “Golf Empires.” Adonnino’s vision of sport as a political tool to promote European integration nicely met with the golf authorities’ practical suggestion to collaborate on the field of sport. Recently, the Ryder Cup became the only competition where one collective European Team represents the whole continent. Professional golfers of Europe compete under a European flag and a European hymn, regardless of their nationality – giving the EU high visibility not only among its own member countries’ citizens, but also among citizens of its largest economic competitor, namely of the United States. In this regard, there is no surprise that the EU has tight collaborations with the PGA Europe, promoting and financially supporting the European Team, the Ryder Cup competition, and indirectly, the golf community all around the world.⁷

Brief History of the US Golf Association and the US PGA

John Reid, a Scotsman, is often credited as the “Father of American golf.” In 1888, living just north of New York City, he decided to try out a gift from a fellow Scotsman, who had just returned to the United State from Saint Andrews. He invited five friends and later that year, November 14, they organized the Saint Andrews Golf Club, one of the five founding members of the US Golf Association.⁸ By 1900 the United States had over one thousand golf courses, more than the rest of the world combined.

The Professional Golfers Association of America (PGA) was formed in 1916, in New York, by businessmen and golfers, most notably Rodman Wannamaker, for whom the PGA Championship trophy is named. The US PGA, like its British counterpart, was concerned mostly with promoting the interest of professional golf and increasing playing standards while the US Golf Association also became an umbrella organization for promoting athlete development, amateur championships, and organizing the playing rules of the game. With the exception of the United States and Canada, all the other countries accept the authority of the Royal and Ancient in governing the rules and regulations on amateur status.⁹ The United State Golf Association (USGA) and The Royal and Ancient agreed upon a uniform code in 1952.¹⁰

Television broadcasting also played a significant role in increasing golf’s popularity. Although golf matches are expensive to telecast – more than double of an NFL football game – and the size of the television audiences were consistently below that of major team sports, sponsors believed that televised golf attracted an ordinarily difficult-to-reach affluent, male clientele.¹¹ TV was mainly responsible for altering the economics and governing structure of professional golf. From 1974 on, the value of PGA Tournament purses increased. US PGA assets grew from \$730,000 in 1974 to over \$200 Million in 1993, with a total revenue growth from \$3.9 Million to \$229 Million.¹² By 1987 the leading money winner garnered more than a million dollars a year.

In 1992 the PGA European Tour and the International Management Group Inc, a Cleveland based sport promotion company, formed a joint venture. In doing so they aimed to acquire over 20 courses all around Europe. The PGA European Tour has also undertaken a joint

venture with Trans World International, a subsidiary of IMG, to form the PGA European Tour Production.¹³ This company provides coverage of the events to the Tour broadcasters, namely to BSkyB and the BBC in Britain, and to NBC in the United States. In the USA, the US PGA signed a new broadcasting agreement with CBS in 2006 allowing that TV station to remain the dominant broadcasting partner until 2012 with the coverage of 19 events.¹⁴ Also, from 2007 the Golf Channel will have exclusive cable rights.¹⁵ Golf became a consistent money maker for the broadcasters. The success is furthered also with the growing number of golfers in the United States. At a growth rate of 2.7 % a year in 2001 the US had over 31 million golfers playing 519 million of rounds of golf a year.¹⁶

The Ryder Cup

The US PGA initiated an international competition between the US and British teams of professional golfers in 1921. In 1926, among the spectators of the British Open was Samuel Ryder, a wealthy English seed merchant. Watching the competition between Britain and America's best, he thought it was a good idea to propose a trophy for the winner of the competition. The deed of gift called for competition every two years. The first Ryder Cup took place in June of 1927 at the Worcester Country Club in Massachusetts. Because of World War II, there was no Ryder Cup play from 1939 through 1945, but the matches resumed in 1947 at Pinehurst, North Carolina. The US dominated the competition from 1959 through 1977.¹⁷

In 1977, Jack Nicklaus proposed to the PGA a change in the structure of the Ryder Cup competition, namely, to include players from continental Europe in order to improve the quality of the competition. The British PGA got the approval of Samuel Ryder's decedents and in 1979, Ballestaros and Garrido, both from Spain, joined the British golfers on the first European Team to play in Ryder Cup competitions. Since European golfers entered the game, the score has changed dramatically. Since 1985, the European Ryder team has won the Cup seven times, with the US managing only three victories. The success has seen the number of golfers in Europe more than double from 1.3 million to 2.7 million in 1997.¹⁸

Politically, the European Union's collaboration with the European golf community in the formation of the European Ryder Cup Team followed Adonnino's vision of sport as a political tool to promote European integration. This matched very well with Jack Nicklaus's and the US PGA's practical suggestion to widen the selection process of the Ryder Cup competition from a US versus Great Britain, to a US versus EU Team. Although in broadcasting and sponsoring efforts the companies of the two continents have formed joint ventures, earning profit together from the growing success and popularity of the game, the US and European Team competition on the golf courses has been turned into a competition of identity, prestige, and regional interests.¹⁹

The History of the Hungarian Golf Community

The first golf tournament in Hungary was organized by Baron Géza Andrássy – member of the International Olympic Committee – at the Budapest Horse Race Course in 1902. The first golf course was designed in Tátralomnic, where the first competition took place in 1909.²⁰ The construction of the course was envisioned and supervised by Dezsö Laubner, a multiple Hungarian golf champion and secretary of Hungarian Olympic Committee through 1906-1915. His name is also connected with the foundation of The Budapest Golf Club in 1911, later renamed the Hungarian Golf Club - the organizer of Hungarian National Championships until 1951. At the beginning of the 1920s Laubner also encouraged the design of the golf course on the Széchenyi hill.²¹ In 1936, on the 25th Anniversary of the Hungarian Golf Club, Bobby Jones, one of the most famous amateur golf players ever, played in Budapest at the competition.²²

Hungarian golfers were very successful internationally as well. Laubner became “Munich Champion” – one of the highest ranked European titles – three times. Laubner, together with Béla Gyurkovics and Jenő Kovács, also formed one of the best teams in Europe.²³

Another great golf success was achieved by Mrs. Szlávy. She was the Hungarian champion 19 times, Austrian champion 5 times, and Bohemian champion 4 times between 1920 and 1944. After winning the German Championship in 1926 she was named “The best European Player,” and furthermore, the fifth “Best Women Player in the World.”²⁴

This enormous achievement of Hungarian golfers should be partly, credited to Malcolm Goodwill, a dedicated coach from England, who had been living and working in Hungary for decades. In addition to his exceptional coaching work, he was also deeply involved in design, construction, and operation of the Széchenyi Hill golf course. Although the Englishman’s contribution to the development of golf in Hungary is undeniable, we must also commemorate the name of József Stammel, a longstanding assistant coach of Mr. Goodwill. He was faithful to the game of golf even after World War II, in the so called “discrimination period,” when golf was seen as a “sport non grata” by politicians and the authorities. During all those years, and under very difficult circumstances, he kept on training Hungarian junior golfers. He remained active in teaching and coaching golf up to 1995.²⁵

The last championship organized by the Hungarian Golf Club was in 1951. From 1952 to 1971 the sport of golf was a real victim of political discrimination in Hungary. For the new political elite the sport represented the social and political privileges of the former aristocracy. Being tagged as “white sport,” along with others such as tennis and skiing, golf was seen as inherited from a capitalist society, something that had to be forbidden and forgotten. In this political atmosphere the very existence of golf became questionable. Analyzing the official data and documents of that period, it is no surprise that one cannot see even an officially existing “Hungarian Golf Federation” – while skiing and tennis, were allowed.²⁶ Golf was able to survive during those decades only because of the enthusiasm of individuals, lovers of golf, and men such as the above mentioned Stammel or Dr. Ferenc Gáti.

Gáti, an agriculturist, returned to Hungary in 1974, after working long years abroad, and tried to revitalize the Hungarian golfing community. In 1979 he established the Blue Danube Golf Club and also started to build and design a golf course in Kisoroszi. As the result of his tremendous efforts, knowledge of the sport, experience in agricultural and landscape developments, and political connections, in 1982 he was able to re-establish the Hungarian Golf Federation. This new governing body was established as an affiliate with the Hungarian National Field Hockey Federation under the direction of Rezső Mindner.²⁷ Although Gáti was not able to succeed in fulfilling his dream, namely, the establishment of an independent National Golf Federation, the existing affiliation structure was able to give golf a fresh start for development. Becoming institutionalized in the official Hungarian sport community, golf could receive some, although very limited, state funding; it was invited to general meetings and assemblies, which gave golfers’ the capacity to raise their voices – although not to vote – in official decision making processes. This quasi-official status of golf existed until 1989. The changing political and social conditions were then suitable enough to make the next move: to establish an independent Hungarian Golf Federation. Dr. Ferenc Gáti was elected as the first President. The Federation immediately applied for membership in the European Golf Association and the World Amateur Golf Committee – today known as the International Golf Association.²⁸ New golf courses were developed throughout the country: Birdland Golf & Country Club in Bükfürdő²⁹ was one of the first established in 1991. In the 1990s altogether six new 18-hole golf courses were developed. The sixth, the Old Lake Golf & Country Club was opened in the historic landscape of Tata castle in September, 1998.³⁰ Since 2004 this course is

the home for one of the competitions in PGA Ladies European Tour, which represents the first professional womens golf competition being held in Central Eastern Europe.³¹

Besides the 18-hole full golf courses, there are 11 driving ranges all around the country.³² Anyone interested in the game of golf can nowadays find a place and opportunity to engage in the sport from Nyiregyháza to Békéscsaba, and from Héviz to Monor. As the newest trend in golf is the building of indoor courses, giving year round playing opportunity for fans of the sport, new courses have been designed to be an integral part of newly opened shopping malls all around the country.

At the competitive level, national championships have been organized since 1990, senior championships since 1995, and junior championships since 2001. Since 2003 the National Golf Federation is responsible for the selection and management of national teams on elite, junior, and senior level. Additionally, in 1992, PGA Hungary was founded with about 40 members.³³ The PGA Hungary encompasses professionals of different nationalities, who work in Hungary, or came to Hungary with the goal of becoming fully accredited members of the Association.³⁴ The membership is made up of both “teaching professionals” who earn their living mainly through giving golf lessons and “playing professionals” who are largely dependant on competitive golf. In December 2006 PGA Hungary rejoined PGA Europe: the governing body of professional golfers on the European continent. PGA Europe devoted its January 2007 Newsletter to welcoming Hungary as an old/new member of the Association.³⁵

The large rise in participation, the enthusiastic and energetic work of the sport’s administrators and managers, and the visible financial and economic capital, beyond the developments mentioned above, draws an even brighter picture for the future.

Social, Economic, and Political Developments Surrounding the Hungarian Golf Federation

As one can see, golf in Hungary has a rich history and impressive organizational development. The number of registered golfers in 2006 was around 1,400.³⁶ This data is even more impressive knowing that the number was doubled between 2004 and 2006; while the percentage of male players in the age category between 35 and 55 remained the same (56-57%) the, participation of women and youth in all categories increased. Between 2004 and 2006 the number of women participants grew from 85 to 174, women seniors from 21 to 56, male seniors from 68 to 124, and juniors from 69 to 122.³⁷ Most participants belong to the 31-45 age-group, followed by the 46-55 year-olds, and then those over 55.³⁸ This demographic data underlines the social and health significance of golf, namely that this game can be played regardless of the participant’s age.³⁹ Yet, golf is in its infancy. If we compare the numbers of golfers to the overall population, the ratio in Hungary is 0.011 while in Slovenia 0.249, in Poland 0.003, in the Czech Republic 0.156, and in Slovakia 0.027. The same ratio in Germany is 0.569 while in Sweden it is 6.69!⁴⁰

The National Development Plan of Hungary, which draws strategies for the country’s future development in line with EU requirements, underlines the importance of building a healthy and physically active population.⁴¹ The Hungarian population has been decreasing and aging for the last decades. The level of physically active Hungarians – only 16% participate in any kind of physical activity three times a week – is below the European average, which is around 26-30%.⁴² The National Sport Strategy, published in 2005, also focused particular attention on the importance of sport and physical activity and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle as a preventive measure to reduce overall health costs in the country.⁴³ Golf provides sportsmen with the opportunity of a lifelong, outdoor physical activity, which can be practiced and even encourages its practice in a social setting, involving friends and family initiatives of all ages.

Golf is a relatively expensive sport. Data estimated by the Hungarian Golf federation

shows that the average expenditure of a golfer on a yearly basis is around HUF 630,000.⁴⁴ The operational budget of the Hungarian Golf Federation in 2004 was HUF21 Million, in 2005 HUF29 Million, and in 2006 HUF40 Million. The Federation is devoted to promoting and spreading the sport throughout the country using different business strategies to achieve its target, namely to have 15,000 members by 2014.⁴⁵ Its goal is to engage ten percent of the membership in competitive and ninety percent in amateur golf. The Federation's focus is to promote golf through two very important initiatives. These are highly appreciated by national and European sport authorities, namely: "Education through Sport" and "Local Governments and Sport."⁴⁶ The Golf Federation works closely with the Ministry of Education to incorporate golf as a chosen sport to be taught in elementary schools' physical education classes. Building a real grassroots approach meets well the Federation's interest, while also fitting well into the European Union's long term goals: the use sport as a tool of educate the next generation.⁴⁷

The other way to achieve higher participation rate can be fulfilled by taking the sport to participants. Putting it differently, building new golf courses can help to promote and spread the sport all around the country. In this regard the Federation is devoted to work together with local, county and municipal authorities and governments.

Currently, in Hungary, each national sport federation is entitled to receive state funding. This financial support depends on the sport's achievement in international competitions, number of members, popularity of the sport, and the costs associated with the sport.⁴⁸ Hungarian golfers are not really ready to compete on an elite international level; the membership numbers compared to such sports as soccer, basketball, or European handball is extremely low; while the level of costs associated with golf are very high. Golf has never been and never will be on any priority list of Hungarian sport officials.⁴⁹ Thus, the Golf Federation will be able to turn its plans into reality only with a market-based approach: growth in membership and attractiveness to corporate sponsorship. The Federation has been successful in this, as in 2006 it was able to attract HUF90 Million in advertising and corporate sponsorship!⁵⁰ This revenue channel itself gives sport administrators the opportunity to dream big. In addition, managers occupying leading positions in recent Hungarian golf society are very well known in the business community. The President of the Hungarian Golf Federation is András Sugár, former CEO of T-Mobil Hungary, while the Diamond Level Sponsor of the Federation is the OTP Bank. The Head Coach of the Hungarian National Team is Aron Makszin, a well known sport administrator, who became famous for taking part in the successful implementation of grassroots programs of the Ministry of Sport in elementary and secondary schools, while being the secretary of Hungarian Track and Field Federation between 1998 and 2002.⁵¹

Why is all this important? Unfortunately, the Hungarian sport community, even after 16 years of democratization, liberalization and marketization, relies heavily on national and local governments' financial and managerial support.⁵² The debts of the Federations, numerous bankruptcies, several outcries of unfair tax exemptions, have generated a negative attitude among Hungarians towards elite sport. That said, we have to admit that the example shown by the Hungarian Golf Federation is appreciated and refreshing: a Federation having a clear focus to operate effectively; compete on the sport market with others for involving a maximum of corporate partners; building international connections in order to involve foreign financial support; while also trying to promote the sport of golf for Hungarians as a whole. The mission of the federation is well summarized in the motto of its strategic plan: "The everyday game that keeps you fit, gives you fun, and can be enjoyed by all!"⁵³

Politically speaking, the golf community has never been well connected in Hungary. There is no history of dependence on state financing, no existence of "old nomenclature" Hungarian elite – economic and/or political – deeply involved in lobbying "on behalf of the sport

of golf.” There exists no evidence to show a historically embedded institutional connectedness between golf and the recent paternalistic state. Interestingly enough, the historical past of golf, being treated as a stepchild during the communist years, works for the best of the sport in recent years. The absence of socialist type of state financed sport setting gives the golf community, especially sport managers, an opportunity to develop a different path for golf from the general Hungarian sporting landscape. It can become really business oriented, open minded, and highly effective.

Conclusion

Lastly, the question remains to be answered, how and to what extent the changes and developments surrounding the Hungarian golf community could be attributed to different forces of international influences? There is no doubt that the first demand in Hungary to create golf communities came from the new business elite in the 1980s, and expats who relocated with the multinational companies from the USA and from Western Europe.⁵⁴ What is the role, if any, of the two main actors of the international golf community – US PGA and PGA Europe respectively – in the evolving popularity of Hungarian golf? To what extent can “Americanization” and “Europeanization” be found “responsible” for these trends?

No doubt, golf became a global entertainment, generating millions in revenue for players, sponsors, apparel manufacturers, broadcasters, and agriculturalists worldwide. Joined by their efforts in the business of golf, corporations have endorsements and promotional contact with different national golf federations. For example, the Ryder Cup established its Trust Fund in 2005 to promote golf’s development specifically in Eastern Europe.⁵⁵ Although Golf Federations of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Russia have already received moneys from this Fund, Hungary has not. However, the Hungarian Golf Federation received funds from the PGA Europe to support grassroots developments, teaching and coaching the sport among the younger generations. At the same time, the Hungarian Golf Federation is also considering applying for funds from the EU’s Regional Reconstruction and Development Funds.⁵⁶ The Funds that the EU allocated to Hungary, between 2007 and 2013, specifically for sport related development exceeds \$30-35 Million annually.⁵⁷ This amount can be used for reconstruction of sport facilities, sport sciences, outdoor leisure programs, and park developments. This provides an excellent example of how the Hungarian Golf Federation’s development plan can find its partial funding through agencies, such as the EU Regional Reconstruction and Development funds. Another source of funds can come from broadcasting rights. The Golf Channel, with its growing worldwide audiences, serves as a good example of this indirect influence.

The adaptive capacity of domestic golf institutions to deal with different influences of the outside world lies in the heart of the existing and positive developments surrounding the Hungarian Golf Federation. The Hungarian Golf Federation provide us with an excellent example showing that global and national aspirations are not necessarily competing principles of organization, rather that they can be, and indeed in many ways are, complementary.⁵⁸

ENDNOTES

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- 2 Since its formation in 1916 the United States Professional Golfers' Association has been one of the most influential organizations worldwide.
- 3 The Ryder Cup is a biannual competition played between the best American and European players.
- 4 For more information see World Golf Foundation, or www.randa.org.
- 5 *A People's Europe: Report on Future Developments towards Strengthening European Culture and Identity*. Brussels: European Community, 1984.
With stagnating economic and political situation, and the low turn-out in the 1984 European Parliament elections, the member states needed to re-launch the European idea. As a result of the 1984 Fontainebleau Summit, a Committee was established under the leadership of Mr. Adonnino for measuring possibilities towards bringing the EU closer to its citizens.
- 6 *The Development and Prospects for Community Actions in the Field of Sport*. Brussels: European Union, 1998.
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- 8 Feinstein, J., *The Majors*. Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1997.
- 9 The USGA was initiated in 1894 and aims to organize the USA Amateur Championships as well as administer the rules of the game.
- 10 Bramley, C., *Golf*. Northampton: Cheltenham, 2007.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Information retrieved from www.worldgolf.com/wglibrary/history/epgatour.html
- 14 See www.pgatour.com
- 15 *Ibid*
- 16 *Ibid*
- 17 Concannon, D., *Complete Illustrated History of the Ryder Cup*. London: Aurum Press, 2001.
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- 19 See www.epgatour.com
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Golf Kincseskalendárium. Budapest: Magyar Golf Szövetség, 2005.
- 21 *Ibid*
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- 26 Boskovics, J., *The History of Hungarian Sport*. Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1983.
- 27 *Ibid*
- 28 *Strategy for Development of Golf in Hungary*. Budapest: Magyar Golf Szövetség, 2005.
- 29 For more information on the history and development of this Golf Course, see www.birdland.hu/main.php

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- 30 For more information on the history and development of this Golf Course, see www.oldlakegolf.com
- 31 Information retrieved from www.epgatour.com
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- 33 *Strategy for Development of Golf in Hungary*. Budapest: Magyar Golf Szövetség, 2005.
- 34 *Ibid*
- 35 *PGA's Europe's Newsletter*. (www.pgae.com/IMAGES/PGAsE%20News5.pdf)
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- 38 *Ibid*
- 39 *Hungarian National Sport Strategy*. Budapest: Ifjúsági, Gyermek és Sport Minisztérium, 2005.
- 40 *Strategy for Development of Golf in Hungary*. Budapest: Magyar Golf Szövetség, 2005.
- 41 *Hungarian National Development Plan*. Budapest: Nemzeti Fejlesztési Hivatal, 2004.
- 42 *Ibid*
- 43 *Ibid*
- 44 *Strategy for Development of Golf in Hungary*. Budapest: Magyar Golf Szövetség, 2005.
- 45 *Ibid*
- 46 *Nice Declaration on Sport*. Brussels: European Union, 2000.
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