

“I love our country! Patriotism and an openness to the outside world are not opposites — they require each other.” – German President Horst Köhler

1. Introduction

International sport can serve as a unique vehicle to unite countries from all over the world, despite any political or cultural division. The World Cup is one of the largest international sporting events, and during this event the entire world is united in the spirit of sportsmanship and fair play, which leads to a massive surge in patriotism for participating countries.

In 2006, Germany played host to the World Cup and what made this a significant event from a German perspective was that it marked the first time that Germany competed as a united country on home soil. In 1974, West Germany hosted the World Cup, but at the time Germany was still divided and East and West competed against each other. It was during the 2006 World Cup that something very interesting took place in Germany. A renewed sense of patriotism gripped the nation, which up to this point was a controversial issue as many thought the idea of “German patriotism” would stir up memories of Hitler’s “nationalist regime” – Germany’s darkest period. However, these fears were quelled after Germany put on a fantastic event that showed German hospitality as being second to none and disproved the notion of Germans flying their flags in mass support for their football team as being seen to be “nationalistic.” Misconceptions and stereotypes of Germany still exist to an extent – even decades after the conclusion of war – but the psyche of the nation seemed altered after the end of the World Cup. It seemed some negative preconceptions were dissolved due to the successful hosting of this event. Perhaps Michael Faul, who was head of the UK’s Flag Institute summarized it adequately by saying, “There was a niggle in German patriotism - if they show the flag will they be seen as Nazis? If they can overcome it and show they can be patriotic in a positive way, that will help lay this ghost of Nazism.¹”

The idea of patriotism and how Germans see themselves is a unique paradox. There is reluctance within Germany to be outwardly patriotic and express a fondness for their country, yet the international community view Germany in an extremely positive light. A

¹ Herald, Clare . “*Germany Rolls Out Flag Of Pride*”. [British Broadcasting Corporation](#). 23 Jun, 2006.

2009 BBC survey found that Germany had the greatest positive influence on global affairs with 61% of those polled stating that Germany had a “rather positive” effect on international affairs². This poll shows how far Germany has come in rebuilding its reputation in the eyes of the world. If the rest of the world views Germany in such a positive light, why is there still hesitancy amongst the Germans to be patriotic?

This essay will examine and discuss how hosting the World Cup changed the attitude towards patriotism within Germany after the World Cup, and whether these attitudes have been sustained.

2. Historical challenges regarding patriotism within Germany

When one looks at German history, it's easy to understand why Germany has struggled with the idea of patriotism and establishing a national identity. In 1848, there was a social revolution amongst the people to unify Germany from a series of autocratic and autonomous states, which ultimately failed. It wasn't until January 14th, 1871 when a political agreement was reached amongst the German princes to elect Kaiser Wilhelm as head of the newly formed German state. Over the course of 74 years, Germany engaged in two world wars and the period following the Second World War was a tumultuous one as Germany sought to rebuild after their darkest hour following the fall of the Nazi regime. The denazification process, which began shortly after the war concluded, was a thorough and lengthy process, with the intent of ridding all remnants of the Nazi regime within Germany and Austria. As if this process was not difficult enough, the Berlin Wall was erected in 1961 to stop the massive flow of migrants coming from the East to the West after Germany was divided up among the Allies. The creation of this wall set the political tone for the next 28 years within Germany, and compounded an already difficult scenario at a time when Germany was extremely fragile. However, on November 9th 1989 East and West Germany were reunited after East Germany announced that its borders were open to everyone and this signified the reunification of Germany. Dr. Koschut, a professor of American studies at JFK University cites the fact there has never been a period of “consistency” within Germany's history in which Germans could develop a sense of patriotism. This is because there has been so much political unrest over the years, dating all the way back to the mid 19th century.

² Schraeder, Katharina. “*Germany is the most beloved country worldwide*”. [Welt Online](#). 10 Feb. 2009.

3. The 2006 World Cup in Germany

Fast forward to current day Germany and it's easy to see how much the country and mindset of the people has evolved since the "*Berliner Mauer*" came down. However, a national trepidation to show any outward signs of patriotism since the fall of the Nazi regime lingers as many Germans still view it as 'taboo'. What confuses this subject even further is that other nations seem more comfortable with Germans being patriotic than Germans do themselves. When President Horst Köhler declared during his inauguration speech: "**Ich liebe unser Land!**" (I love our land!) his comments were met with criticisms and shock within Germany. Yet, during the 2006 World Cup, Rabbi Israel Singer who was the chairman of the Policy Council of the World Jewish Congress was quoted as saying in response to the outpouring of patriotism in Germany, "I think this is a natural phenomenon. I think it's a very healthy thing³." These examples underscore the moral dilemma Germans seem to face when it comes to any displays of patriotism.

When asked if the 2006 World Cup played a big role in redefining how Germans viewed their country Finja Ruppert, a German student at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American studies, was quoted as saying:

"It didn't play a role in redefining how Germany saw itself, but it changed the way Germany viewed patriotism. The World Cup was the first step to show that patriotism wasn't a negative thing or something to be shameful about; it was to be celebrated among other nations, and something not exclusive to Germany, which was a positive thing."

Tobias Scholz, an associate professor of American sociology at the JFK Institute in Berlin, echoed these sentiments. "Germans view Germany the same way they did before the World Cup. It was a sporting and media event and they knew how it would be realized on an international stage."

³ Author, N.A. "*Jewish Leaders welcome German patriotism*". Expatica.com. 28 Jun. 2006.

The notion of flying the red, black and gold was virtually unheard of, but in the months leading up to the World Cup, Germany was awash in their national colours with a legitimate sense of pride leading up to the event. In spite of this, there was still a nation-wide moral debate on the idea of flag waving and patriotism within Germany. Up to this point, Scholz described Germans as being 'ambivalent' towards the idea of patriotism. He suggested that there was an omnipresent feeling of guilt associated with patriotism in Germany because it always came back to the issue of "Can I be patriotic, without feeling a sense of guilt over what has happened?"

4. Shifts in generational attitudes towards patriotism during the World Cup

There seemed to be an interesting dichotomy in regards to the generational attitudes towards the idea of patriotism during the World Cup as well. The younger generation seemed to embrace the idea of wearing the national colours because they sensed there was nothing wrong with it, yet the generation who had lived through the Second World War had mixed emotions regarding the surge in patriotism. Of this older generation, some were hesitant to embrace the flag-waving or any visual displays because the Nazis used flags and symbols to promote their dominance. On the other hand, Scholz stated that some members of this population did hang German flags out of 'curiosity' because it had been such a long time since they were able to show their patriotism without overwhelming feelings of remorse. Despite the difference in attitudes amongst the different generations, Germany's youth embracing the flag during the World Cup was something that was seen as very positive for Germany, and had the general support of the older generation. President Kohl opined that the flag bearing during the World Cup was "a sign of further normalcy."⁴ Gregor Gysi, a member of the Party of Democratic Socialism, was also quoted as saying "new generation that, when it comes to the German nation, is not as handicapped as my generation."⁵ Ruppert feels that the younger

⁴ Sontheimer, Michael. "How Germans learned to stop worrying and love the flag". [Spiegel Online](#).

⁵ Sontheimer, Michael. "How Germans learned to stop worrying and love the flag". [Spiegel Online](#).

generation feel some guilt, despite the fact that they were born decades after the war ended, but she suggests they are in the minority. Today, Germany's youth seem to feel more comfortable embracing patriotism, however Koschut feels that every German generation will feel somewhat "imprisoned" over what has happened in the past.

Scholz and Koschut both expressed the idea that Germans show patriotism, but in a very "muted" fashion. It's normal to see Michael Shumacher, Bayern Munich, or local city flags outside shops and houses, which are all distinctly German, yet other than outside of state buildings it is extremely rare to see the national colours being flown. Scholz also felt that the surge in patriotism and a showcase of the national colours was a one-time affair as a result of the World Cup. He went on to say that even at the time of the tearing down of the wall, which was a monumental moment for Germany, flag-waving was isolated to areas where television cameras were present. Yet in smaller villages and towns, away from the cameras, it was rare to see a German flag being shown in public during this time.

5. What is the future of German patriotism?

Four years on from the World Cup, it would appear that the patriotism felt during the World Cup has not been enduring, despite a "positive evaluation" from the international community following the World Cup. Perhaps this is an inherent part of Germany's ongoing identity crisis, and Ruppert, Scholz, and Koschut all agreed that the majority of Germans consider themselves more "European" than "German." Scholz also felt that the reunification of Germany happened so quickly, that it was difficult for a natural progression of patriotism to develop. Koschut agreed saying that despite Germany being unified for over twenty years now, it still remains a somewhat fractured nation in terms of identity, and for a sustainable sense of unified national pride, this has to be addressed. A recent poll conducted by the Allensbach Institute in Germany lends credence to this suggestion. The study showed that 70% of the people polled in what was once known as "West Germany" refer to themselves as "German" as opposed to "West

German”, while 50% of the people polled in what was known as “East Germany” consider themselves to be “East Germans.”⁶ Scholz believes that such displays of patriotism in the future will be reserved for sporting or international events in which media will be present. He also suggests that in a time where national identities are somewhat declining, it’s difficult to push forward the idea of ‘patriotism’ under these circumstances.

The future of German patriotism seems to be an enigmatic subject among the people of Germany. While the younger generation seems to be comfortable and willing to embrace the notion of patriotism, and proud of German accomplishments, the older generation that lived through war seem hesitant to adopt these new found feelings which emerged from the World Cup. These differences in generational attitudes add to the already complex subject matter. Koschut feels the future of patriotism within Germany faces more obstacles as Germany looks to take a larger role in socioeconomic policies. He suggests that, instead of being patriotic for your own country whether it be Germany, Spain, or Sweden, there will be more “European Patriotism.” Koschut believes it’s this lack of consistency that hinders any chance for a true sense of patriotism to evolve within Germany.

Scholz also discussed another hurdle for the evolution of patriotism, as he pointed to the immigration challenges that Germany is currently facing. Germany’s current population is approximately 81.8 million, 7 million of whom are immigrants. In such a multi-cultural society it can be challenging for patriotism to develop organically especially among the younger generation, and with Germany continuing to attract foreigners, intentionally or unintentionally. Scholz also added that patriotism would be expressed in other avenues besides sport, such as being a leader in the fight against global warming. Both Koschut and Scholz agreed that Germany’s economic standing within the EU and the global community as a powerhouse is a huge sense of pride for many Germans.

⁶ Bowen, Kate. “*Germans feel more accepted abroad, according to new survey*”. Deutsche-Welle. 5 Mar. 2010.

6. Conclusion

With the 2010 World Cup set to take place in South Africa, will that same wave of patriotism grip Germany like it did in 2006? Only time will tell, but the taboos towards patriotism have certainly changed following the World Cup in 2006 within Germany. The younger generation embraced the national colours, but more importantly displayed a willingness to show pride in being German among other nations, which was a big step towards integration among other nations when it comes to patriotism. Germany's history has been well documented, and it can be argued that its murky past has stunted any chance for a true sense of patriotism to develop. The 2006 World Cup was a catalyst in helping to galvanize the entire country and allowing Germany to feel a sense of national pride and be outwardly patriotic among other nations, something that up to that point was still seen as taboo. The slogan for Germany's 2006 World Cup was "Die Welt zu Gast bei Freunden" which translates to: "The World among friends." This seemed to be a fitting slogan as Germany was given top marks as hosts, and they were able to put on a fantastic event and celebrate alongside other countries in the spirit of the game.

The World Cup in Germany helped unite a country still searching for a national identity and brought together Germans from all backgrounds. It went a long way in changing the perceptions that Germans had through the "looking glass-self." German journalist Martin Wachtelborn assessed how perceptions were altered after the World Cup by saying: "The world community has celebrated the vital role Germany has played in the democratic world since 1945. Now, Germans themselves have cast off their dark past and, finally, feel free to take civic pride in their own democratic accomplishments."⁷

South Africa, host of the upcoming World Cup, is a nation that is still reeling from the after-effects of abolished apartheid. The country remains divided

⁷ Wachtelborn, Martin. "World Cup revives patriotism in Germany". SFGate.com. 12 Jul. 2006.

despite the fact that apartheid was abolished in 1994, and racial tensions and high crime rates continue to plague the state. The World Cup being held in South Africa serves a huge political statement, not only on a sporting level, but on a socioeconomic one as well. The event may be able to rebuild a fractured nation and serve as a platform to unite all African nations as the slogan for the event is “In Africa – For Africa” alludes. If the World Cup helped shape positive perceptions of patriotism leading towards a more united modern-day Germany, will it do the same for South Africa?

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