A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ANHOLT'S COUNTRY BRAND INDICES WITH A FOCUS ON THE CURRENT POSITIONS OF THE VISEGRAD COUNTRIES

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INTRODUCTION: THE COMPETITION OF COUNTRIES IN OUR MINDS

Let us face it: we often compare our own country to others. Some countries occupy a lower rung on the imaginary ladder in our minds, while others are above us. This could be related to our own feelings of superiority or inferiority, but there is also a marketing-based explanation. The position of a country – or its "country brand" – on this ladder essentially depends on the values we associate with it and the thoughts and emotions that arise when we hear the country's name. As Kotler and Keller (2012) point out, brands exist in the minds of consumers. The strength of a brand depends on what customers have seen, read, heard, learned, thought, and felt about it over time. In other words, a brand's strength exists in the minds of existing or potential customers, shaped by their direct or indirect experiences with the brand.

The question is whether this value can be quantified and scientifically validated. Even for traditional products and services, this is not straightforward, but brand rankings such as Interbrand's Best Global Brands and Kantar BrandZ's The Most Valuable Global Brands attempt to do so. According to Interbrand's 2023 list, the top five brands are Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, Google, and Samsung (Interbrand.com, 2024). Likewise, the Kantar BrandZ 2024 ranking lists the top five most valuable brands as Apple, Google, Microsoft, Amazon, and McDonald's (Kantar.com, 2024). Similar rankings for country brands are also published periodically. While some of these rankings can be debated, others have gained acceptance in recent years, to the extent

that foreign ministers and prime ministers make decisions based on the results.

These rankings include examples that are not specifically about country brands but about countries in general and are noteworthy due to their frequent citations, such as the IMD Competitiveness Report and the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report. As Péter Ákos Bod (2009: 32) notes in his article, "In a professional sense, we can consider these lists as beauty contest rankings with which we do not have to agree, and – as it often happens in beauty contests – a high ranking does not always reflect real values. However, a significant drop in these rankings negatively affects the global perception of the country." Other rankings are regularly published by renowned journals such as The Economist, Forbes, or Euromoney. Rankings by credit rating agencies like Moody's Investors Service, Standard & Poor's, Fitch-IBCA, or the Japan Credit Rating Agency can be also considered thematic rankings of countries.

However, this article aims to stay focused on country brand rankings specifically, not the aforementioned lists. It is important to note that nearly every year, a new ranking is introduced and then updated annually. These include the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index, Anholt Good Country Index, FutureBrand Country Brand Index, Bloom Consulting Country Brand Ranking (Tourism Edition and Trade Edition), Young&Rubicam Best Countries, Reputation Institute Country RepTrak, and Global Soft Power Index (Papp-Váry, 2019). It is impossible to cover all these rankings in a single article, and not all of them provide recent rankings for 2023 and 2024. Therefore, this study focuses only on the first two: the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index and the Anholt Good Country Index.

The comparison focuses on these two indexes because they represent two fundamentally different approaches to evaluating country brands. The Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index assesses countries based on public opinion surveys, while the Good Country Index relies exclusively on hard data from international organizations. This dual focus offers a unique opportunity to explore how perception and reality intersect in country branding. Other indexes, such as the FutureBrand Country Brand Index, were excluded because they either lack recent updates or do not provide data for the Visegrad countries,

which are the primary focus of this study. Additionally, due to word and character count limitations, it was not feasible to include and thoroughly analyze more than two indexes in this article.

The article will describe the methodologies, dimensions, and factors/attributes of these indices. Besides the comparative analysis, it will examine the positions of Hungary and the other three Visegrad countries (Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic) in these lists. This will help determine whether the country brands (or general country image, country reputation) of these countries are similar and identify which one has the best country brand according to these rankings.

THE ANHOLT-IPSOS NATION BRANDS INDEX

The Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index was the first attempt to rank countries as brands. Launched almost twenty years ago, in 2005, it has since evolved into one of the world's largest social science research projects. Over the years, the index has had several names: initially called Simon Anholt's Nation Brands Index, it later became known as the Anholt-GMI Nation Brands Index. From 2008, it was referred to as the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index, and in 2017, it was renamed to its current title, the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index.

All these names include "Anholt", referencing Simon Anholt, the creator of the concepts of nation brand and country brand, and a leading international authority in the field. Anholt has authored several books on the subject (Anholt 2005, 2009, 2020), and many governments have invited him as an advisor to help polish their country's reputation, solidifying his influence and expertise.

Regarding the research methodology, the index is based on surveys conducted in 20 countries, using a representative sample from these countries to assess the influence and attractiveness of 60 countries. This methodology has been a common point of criticism: on one hand, only 60 countries are evaluated, even though the United Nations has 193 member countries. Additionally, some of the 60 are not independent countries. For example, the images of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales are measured separately;

however, England is not included. On the other hand, the survey is conducted exclusively in 20 major advanced and emerging economies. This means the ranking is based on the opinions of people living in these 20 countries. However, as we cited Bod (2009) earlier, if a study maintains consistent parameters over time, the changes observed can still be meaningful and comparable. Additionally, the sample size is relatively large, with a total of 60,000 participants now. The most recent survey was conducted from June 27th through August 3rd (Ipsos.com, 2023). The measurement framework is based on six dimensions, or competence fields, known as the Nation Brands Hexagon. These six dimensions encompass a total of 23 attributes, which are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. The Six Dimensions of the Anholt Nation Brands Hexagon and Their 23 Attributes

Dimension	**Attributes of the specific dimension**
Tourism	Visited Website: I have visited a website or social networking site from or about this country. Natural Beauty: This country is rich in natural beauty. Historical Buildings: This country is rich in historic buildings and monuments. Vibrant City Life: This country has a vibrant city life and urban attractions.
Exports	Science and Technology: This country makes a major contribution to innovation in science and technology. Buy Products: Buying products made in this country. Creative Place: This country is a creative place with cutting-edge ideas and new ways of thinking.
Governance	Competent & Honest: This country is competently and honestly governed. Rights & Fairness: This country respects the rights of its citizens and treats them with fairness. Peace & Security: This country behaves responsibly in the areas of international peace and security. Environment: This country behaves responsibly to protect the environment. Poverty: This country behaves responsibly to help reduce world poverty.

Investment and immigration	Work & Live: Willing to live and work for a substantial period in this country. Quality of Life: This country is a place with a high quality of life. Education: This country is a good place to study for educational qualifications. Purchased Product/Service: I have purchased a product or service from this country. Equality in Society: This country cares about equality in society.
Culture	Sports: This country excels at sport. Cultural Heritage: This country has a rich cultural heritage. Contemporary Culture: This country is an interesting and exciting place. for contemporary culture such as music, films, art and literature.
People	Welcoming: If I visited this country, the people would make me feel very welcome. Close Friend: I would like to have a person from this country as a close friend. Employability: How willing would you be to consider a well-qualified person from the following country?

Source: Papp-Váry (2019) and Ipsos.com (2023)

It is important to mention that starting in 2023, there are 11 new attributes being measured that are not yet included in the final index. These new attributes are listed in Table 2. Five of the new common interest attributes focus on sustainability, measuring perceptions of a country's efforts to combat climate change or support affordable and clean energy. The other six attributes cover a range of topics, including global economic leadership and feelings of safety in the country. For example, the latter aspect can be very important when deciding (or at least having the desire) to visit a country. Natural beauty is the top driver of the desire to visit a country, while "Work and Live" and "Close Friend" are the second and third most important factors, respectively, with "Safe" being the fourth.

Table 2. Newly added attributes in the Anholt Nation Brands Index

Dimension	**Attributes of the specific dimension**
Sustainability	Combat Climate Change: This country is taking action to combat climate change.
	Affordable & Clean Energy: This country is working hard towards affordable and clean energy.
	Protecting Wildlife: This country is focused on protecting wildlife and restoring habitats.
	Clean Water & Nutrition: This country is focused on access to clean water and nutrition for all.
	Responsible Industries: This country encourages more responsible industries that do not damage the environment.
Other new (mixed) topics	Trust Products: I trust the products that are made in this country.
	Global Economic Leader: I think of this country as a global economic leader.
	Food: This country's food is good.
	Honest About Past: This country is honest about its past.
	Safe: I would feel safe in this country.
	Unlike Anywhere Else: This place is unlike anywhere else.

Source: Ipsos.com (2023)

It is crucial to highlight again that these 11 new attributes are not yet included in the final index. Therefore, the following results are based on the original 23 attributes. According to the 2023 survey results, Japan ranked as the top country brand for the first time. This marks a significant shift, as Germany, which had held the top position for six consecutive years, moved to second place. The top 10 continues to be dominated by European countries: Germany (2), the United Kingdom (4), Italy (5), Switzerland (7), France (8), and Sweden (10). However, the list also includes Japan (1), Canada (3), the United States (6), and Australia (9). Although some countries changed positions within the top 10 from 2022 to 2023, the same countries re-

mained in the top 10. If we look at the 60 countries examined, nearly half – 27 in total – are European. The survey covers the following countries in alphabetical order:

- North America: Canada, the United States
- Western Europe: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Wales
- Central/Eastern Europe: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Turkey/Türkiye, Ukraine
- Asia-Pacific: Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam
- Latin America and the Caribbean: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru
- Middle East/Africa: Botswana, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Kenya, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Tanzania, United Arab Emirates

The predominance of European countries can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, Simon Anholt, after whom the research is named and who leads the surveys, is European himself (a Brit with an Italian wife) and therefore might favor these countries. Secondly, as we have seen, European countries dominate the top 10, even though the first place is not currently held by a European country. Thirdly, in previous studies, there have occasionally been "guest appearances" by countries or broader regions whose image or brand was not regularly measured but was included on a one-off basis. For example, in the second quarter of 2006, the European Union was one such "guest". It was revealed that the respondents perceived the "EU brand" to be stronger than that of any individual country worldwide (Anholt, 2007). It is important to note that respondents living outside Europe likely understood the term "European Union" to mean Europe in general when filling out the questionnaire. In contrast, those living in Europe perceived it as the Union itself, with its institutional system, operations, and all its pros and cons. Regarding the positions of the four Visegrad countries on the list of 60, the results show that all of

them are in the mid-range. Poland is ranked 28th, the Czech Republic 30th, Hungary 33rd, and Slovakia 35th. It is interesting to note which countries have similar positions on the list: Singapore (26th), Brazil (27th), Argentina (29th), China (31st), Taiwan (32nd), Mexico (34th), Egypt (36th), and Turkey/Türkiye (37th). It is also important to note that all four Visegrad countries are included in the list of 60. This inclusion alone indicates a certain level of reputation, as many countries from the Central-Eastern European region are not part of the 60 countries examined.

THE ANHOLT GOOD COUNTRY INDEX

Simon Anholt introduced a new ranking in 2014: the Good Country Index. The main difference between this index and the Nation Brands Index is that it ranks countries not based on public opinion (or at least the opinions of people in 20 countries), but rather on hard data from the United Nations. This makes it more reflective of reality than perception.

For the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index, the overall rank is determined using a weighted scoring system, where each of the six dimensions of the Nation Brands Hexagon contributes equally to the final score. Within each dimension, individual attributes are aggregated using an arithmetic mean. Conversely, the Good Country Index calculates rankings using a simple arithmetic mean of scores across the seven categories, with each indicator normalized and adjusted relative to GDP to ensure fairness.

Additionally, the Anholt Good Country Index focuses on how much good countries contribute to the world. This represents a significant philosophical shift for Anholt, who had been emphasizing the importance of brand image since the late 1990s.

Initially, Anholt's work focused on the concept of nation brand and nation branding, but his attention shifted to evaluating what actions by governments could be considered good or bad – not just for the countries themselves, but for the world as a whole. The challenges that individual countries face are, in fact, global issues such as cli-

mate change, migration, terrorism, deep poverty, inequality, war, and the enforcement of human rights. Anholt also highlighted another global issue – pandemic and biosafety – during his first major speeches on the topic in 2014, several years before the COVID-19 pandemic struck. He emphasized that these global problems can only be tackled through collective action, stating, "We've got to start collaborating a bit more and competing a bit less" (TEDx Talks, 2014).

Thus, it is not enough for countries to simply be attractive and have a good image; they must also strive to do good for other countries and the world as a whole. This is why Anholt's latest book, published in 2020, is titled "The Good Country Equation: How We Can Repair the World in One Generation". Interestingly, several years earlier, British comedian Danny Wallace, known for his book and film "Yes Man", reached a similar conclusion. In 2005, Wallace produced a six-episode documentary comedy for the BBC titled "How to Start Your Own Country". In the series, he researched the topic extensively, interviewed various EU officials and leaders of small states, and then declared his own country within his apartment. He designed a flag, composed a national anthem, and recruited citizens. At an event in London that drew thousands of people, he announced the name of his micronation: the "Kingdom of Lovely." More relevant to our discussion, however, is the fact that he summarized the constitution of his country in just two words: "Be good."

As a British citizen, Anholt was likely aware of Wallace's series "How to Start Your Own Country", but even if he was not, the Good Country Index is fundamentally based on the principle of "Be good." It measures what each country does for the global community. Anholt explained the essence of the Good Country Index in his TED talk in 2014, which has since become the most viewed TED talk on governance, with over 12 million views (Ipsos.com, 2023). In this presentation, he stated that the idea of the Good Country Index is straightforward: it measures how countries contribute to the common good of humanity and what they take away from it. A wide range of data from the UN and other international organizations is used for this purpose, allowing us to see whether a country is a net contributor to humanity or, conversely, a burden on the planet, or somewhere in between.

Unlike the Nation Brands Index, the Good Country Index does not have a dimension for country image (country brand), nor does it use opinion polls to assess a country's reputation. Instead, it relies on 'hard numbers': complex statistics derived from 35 data points, many of which are provided by the UN. It is worth noting, however, that when the Good Country Index for a specific year is published, the available statistics used for analysis are often a few years old. These 35 data points are divided into seven categories, as shown in Table 3. It is important to note that, in the final analysis, the absolute numbers are not used directly; instead, they are expressed in relation to each country's GDP. This approach ensures a fairer comparison by accounting for differences in economic size, allowing smaller or less economically developed countries to be evaluated on an equal footing with larger ones.

Table 3. The Seven Categories of the Anholt Good County Index and Their 35 Indicators

Category	Indicators
Science & Technology	The number of international students The export of scientific journals The number of international publications The number of Nobel Prizes (cumulated value) The number of patents
Culture	Creative goods exports Creative services exports UNESCO dues in arrears as % of contribution (negative indicator) Freedom of movement, i.e. visa restrictions Freedom of the press (based on mean score for Reporters without Borders and Freedom House index as a negative indicator)
International Peace & Security	Number of peacekeeping troops sent overseas for UN missions Dues in arrears to financial contribution to UN peacekeeping missions as percentage of contribution (negative indicator) International violent conflicts: Attributed number of casualties of international organised violence (negative indicator) Exports of weapons and ammunition (negative indicator) Internet security: Global Cybersecurity Index score

World Order	Percentage of population that gives to charity Number of refugees hosted Number of refugees overseas (negative indicator) Population birth rate (negative indicator) Number of UN treaties signed
Planet & Climate	National ecological footprint (negative indicator) Environmental agreements compliance Hazardous pesticides exports (negative indicator) Renewable energy share in total energy consumption Ozone: consumption of ozone-depleting substances (negative indicator)
Prosperity & Equality	Open trading: The situation of trading across borders UN volunteers abroad Remittance cost (negative indicator) Foreign direct investment (FDI outflow) Development assistance: Development cooperation contributions
Health & Wellbeing	Food aid Pharmaceutical exports Voluntary excess donations to the WHO Humanitarian aid donations International Health Regulations Compliance

Source: Papp-Váry (2021)

The latest version of the Good Country Index, known as version 1.5, examined 169 countries based on various global contributions. Nations are ranked in each category, and an overall winner is announced. However, Anholt emphasized in his 2014 TED presentation on this topic that the ranking is not about "good," "better," and "best" countries but rather about "good", "gooder", and "goodest" countries. More importantly, it is advisable to avoid interpreting the rankings as identifying "bad", "worse", and "worst" countries; these countries are not bad but rather more self-interested, focusing mainly on themselves and not on the global community's welfare.

Based on the latest rankings from 2023, Sweden continues to hold first place overall, performing well across all dimensions. Sweden ranks in the top 10 out of 169 countries in five categories, making it a net contributor to humanity by doing much more good for the

planet than harm, according to Anholt. One category where Sweden lags behind is International Peace & Security, where it is ranked 39th. This lower ranking is likely due to Sweden's involvement in arms exports: Swedish weapons, aircraft, and other military vehicles are used in conflicts around the world.

It is also notable that the top 10 countries in the overall ranking are all European, except for Canada. The top ten countries are, in order: Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, Canada, Belgium, Ireland, France, and Austria. According to Anholt, this is because these countries are genuinely doing a lot of good for other countries, especially within Europe and within the European Union as well. Anholt frequently emphasizes in his speeches that one of the most remarkable initiatives to make the world a better place is, in fact, the European Union itself.

What happens if we examine the top 10 countries in each category? Looking at Table 4, some interesting findings immediately stand out. One of these is that the United States only makes it into the top 10 in a single category: it is ranked 10th in Health and Wellbeing. Additionally, in the Prosperity & Equality category, the top 10 is dominated by European countries. In the International Peace & Security category, many smaller and lesser-known countries make it into the top 10. One possible reason for this is that the ranking is adjusted for GDP per capita rather than being an absolute measure.

However, the most interesting category for Hungarians is likely Science & Technology, where Hungary finished in 2nd place out of 169 countries. The reason behind this is that, relative to its GDP and population, Hungary performs very well in attracting foreign students, producing international publications, and contributing Nobel laureates to the world. This ranking considers not only the country where the Nobel laureate lived and worked when receiving the award but also where the laureate was born. It's exciting to think that Hungary might just clinch 1st place in this category in the next updated version (1.6) of the Good Country Index, especially because, in 2023, we saw the announcement of two new Hungarian Nobel laureates: Katalin Karikó and Ferenc Krausz.

Table 4. The Seven Categories of the Anholt Good Country Index and the Top 10 Countries in Each Category

Position	Overall Ranking	Science & Technology	Culture	International Peace & Security	World Order	Planet & Climate	Prosperity & Equality	Health & Wellbeing
1	Sweden	Ukraine	Belgium	Morocco	Australia	Finland	Sweden	Germany
2	Denmark	Hungary	Estonia	Republic of Moldova	Chile	Sweden	Norway	Sweden
3	Germany	United Kingdom	Switzerland	Kazakhstan	Luxembourg	Switzerland	Denmark	United Kingdom
4	Netherlands	Czech Republic	Austria	Kyrgyzstan	Norway	Slovenia	Belgium	Denmark
5	Finland	Latvia	Portugal	Malaysia	Netherlands	Canada	Finland	Norway
6	Canada	Palestine	Republic of Korea	Malta	Austria	Norway	Montenegro	Canada
7	Belgium	Austria	Netherlands	Egypt	Bulgaria	Denmark	Luxembourg	Netherlands
8	Ireland	Denmark	Latvia	Mongolia	Denmark	Cyprus	France	Switzerland
9	France	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Denmark	Uruguay	Sweden	Estonia	Netherlands	Luxembourg
10	Austria	Australia	Slovenia	Singapore	Germany	Ireland	Spain	United States of America

Source: The Good Country Index 1.5 (2024)

Regarding the positions of the Visegrad countries, the Good Country Index, like the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index, shows that their rankings are similar to each other. The good news is that all the Visegrad countries are among the top 32 out of the 169 countries, placing them in the best 20% overall. However, it is important to remember that there are no "good", "better", and "best" countries in this index, only "good", "gooder", and "goodest" countries. Still, these results indicate that the Visegrad countries, like other European nations, contribute significantly to the world and are net contributors.

Looking at Table 5, it is interesting to note that, according to the ranking, the Visegrad countries perform best in the Science & Technology category, with Hungary ranked 2nd, the Czech Republic 4th, Poland 16th, and Slovakia 52nd out of 169 countries. On the other hand, the area that seems to need the most improvement is Health & Wellbeing, where the Czech Republic is ranked 45th, Slovakia 60th, Hungary 72nd, and Poland 97th.

Overall, these results suggest that the performances of the four countries are quite similar, which is why their positions on the Good Country Index are also close to each other. As observed in the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index, the overall image and rankings of the Visegrad countries are also quite similar. However, one important distinction should be noted: in the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index, the Visegrad countries are in the mid-range, ranked between 27th and 33rd out of 60 countries. In contrast, in the Good Country Index, the Visegrad countries are ranked between 25th and 32nd out of 169 countries. This latter result suggests that reality may be better than perception, as the Good Country Index is based on hard data, while the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index is based on public opinion. This suggests that the Visegrad countries should do a better job of promoting their attributes, performance, results, and values to the world.

Table 5. The Positions of the Four Visegrad Countries in the Anholt Good Country Index

Country	Overall Ranking	Science & Technology	Culture	International Peace & Security	World Order	Planet & Climate	Prosperity & Equality	Health & Wellbeing
Hungary	25	2	34	21	67	21	30	72
Poland	27	16	36	20	21	37	49	97
Czech Republic	28	4	14	119	48	32	19	45
Slovakia	32	52	24	18	64	17	61	60

Source: The Good Country Index 1.5 (2024)

CONCLUSION: "ONE THING IS IMPORTANT: TO BE GOOD NOW"

It may sound strange at first that the lyrics of Napoleon Boulevard, a Hungarian pop band, offer one of the most important pieces of advice in country branding, but the Good Country Index presented in this study proves that it is indeed true. Moreover, if we examine the original version of the lyrics, we may discover another interesting connection. The music is from the Italian film "State buoni se potete" ("Be Good If You Can"), which was released in 1984 but only presented in Hungary in 1989. In the film, a child (later an adult) is frequently tempted by the Devil, while his patron, St. Philip Neri, tries to guide him onto the right path – much as the saint did with street children and criminals in the 16th century. The main message of St. Philip Neri is not only "Be good if you can", but also "Stay good if you can", another translation of the original Italian title, which is also suggested by the film itself.

This advice is more important now than ever, as we live in an increasingly interconnected world (Parrag, 2016; Orbán, 2023) where global perception and international contributions significantly influence a country's brand. As we have seen, the Visegrad countries are in the top 20% in terms of their contributions to making the world a better place. However, these contributions must be better communicated to strengthen the country brands of Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia – both individually and collectively as the Visegrad countries.

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APOSZTRÓF

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