

# The intended 1916 Olympic Games through the eyes of the German Sport University Cologne's historical collections - The archive project "Abgestaubt und neu erforschbar" (Dusted off and re-explorable) as part of the transmission of sport history

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## Abstract

Various institutions of the *German Sport University Cologne* (GSU Cologne) have high-quality, historically grown collections of documents, photos and three-dimensional objects that reflect the complete spectrum of sport and sport sciences. In particular, this concerns the *Carl and Liselott Diem* Archive at the *Institute of Sport History* and the *Central Library for Sport Sciences*. In its entirety, the historical collections extend over 1.000 shelf meters.

With the objective to present an overall view of the GSU Cologne's historical collections for the first time and to emphasize the value of primary evidence for hermeneutics in sport history, a research and publication project was started in 2013. Its work will lead to the publication of a four-volume book series entitled "Dusted off and re-explorable – The historical collections of the German Sport University Cologne". The first two volumes, richly illustrated with the help of primary evidence, were published in 2014 and 2018 and dealt with the topics "Personal collections" and "The Olympic Movement".

The article at hand aims to illustrate the work of the archive project group by presenting the conception and content of the book chapter about the intended 1916 Berlin Olympic Games from the book series' second volume.

## Keywords

German Sport University Cologne, Institute of Sport History, Carl and Liselott Diem-Archive, Archive project, Primary evidence / Hermeneutics, Olympic Games 1916.

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## Introduction

As the largest sport university in Europe, the German Sport University Cologne (GSU Cologne) holds a special position through its sports-related research, teaching, education and consulting activities, both nationally and internationally. Moreover, various institutions of the GSU Cologne have high-quality, historically grown collections of documents, photos and three-dimensional objects that reflect the complete spectrum of sport and sport sciences. In particular, this concerns the *Carl and Liselott Diem Archive* (CuLDA)<sup>1</sup> which is integrated into the *Olympic Studies Centre* (OSC) at the *Institute of Sport History* as well as the university's *Central Library for Sport Sciences*. In its entirety, the GSU Cologne's historical collections extend over 1.000 shelf meters. The extent of the collections and the fact that their storage happened to be decentralized over decades, however, made it difficult sometimes for researchers to develop an overview. Especially, this is true since it has not been possible to-date – due to limited staff resources in the archive – to create extensively detailed content lists of all collections.

Therefore, with the objective to present an overall picture of the GSU Cologne's historical collections for the first time and to invite the scholarly community to engage with the existing archival material, a research and publication project was initiated in 2013.<sup>2</sup> Emphasizing the value of primary evidence for research in sport history, this project has been based on a cooperation between staff members of the *Institute of Sport History/OSC* and the *Central Library for Sport Sciences*. It is financed by internal funds of the different institutions and will lead to the publication of a four-volume book series entitled “Abgestaubt und neu erforschbar” – Die historischen Sammlungen der Deutschen Sporthochschule Köln” (Dusted off and re-explorable – The historical collections of the German Sport University Cologne).<sup>3</sup>

1 The archive is named after Carl Diem (1882–1962), the university's founding director in 1947 and his wife, Liselott Diem (1906–1992), professor and the university's president from 1967–1969. To this day, there is a lively debate about Carl Diem because of his involvement in very different political systems – he was a leading sport official in the German Reich, the Weimar Republic, the Nazi Regime and the Federal Republic of Germany. Regarding Diem's biography and the latest “Diem-discussion”, see Becker (2009–2010) as well as Krüger (2012).

2 Already in 2009, on the instigation of Professor Stephan Wassong, Head of the Institute of Sport History and Director of the GSU's Olympic Studies Centre, together with the Central Library for Sport Sciences and the Press and Communications Department, a working group entitled “History of the GSU Cologne” was built.

3 In German, the phrase „abgestaubt“ has a double meaning. It stands for a) the dust is taken off, and b) to have gotten something for free/to have cadged a thing.

In order to structure the work with the archive's collections, four main topics – and thus also book titles – were defined: 1) Personal collections, 2) Olympic Movement, 3) 100th anniversary of the GSU Cologne<sup>4</sup> and 4) Development of different sports. The first two volumes, each of them being about 300 pages strong, were published in 2014 (Personal collections of in total 18 sport officials, scholars, journalists etc.) and 2018 (Olympic Movement) (Molzberger et al., 2014; Molzberger et al., 2018). The final stage of the project will see the third volume published in 2020 and the fourth in 2022.

The volumes, richly illustrated with the help of photos and different documents, are not intended to be textbooks about specific sport historical topics. In fact, by presenting “hidden treasures” from the different collections, they shall draw the reader's attention to the academic value of an archive as cultural heritage and as a valuable institution for material documents-based research. At the same time, the volumes are to promote the hermeneutical approach in sport history as they present several hundred examples of primary evidence in an attempt to comprehend these as products of their time.

By doing this, the research group mirrors the ongoing discussions in the academic field of sport history, as methodology on the whole and particularly hermeneutics have been picked out as central topics over the last years. As prime examples of this and which require emphasizing here are the introductory book *Sports History. A Practical Guide* by Martin Polley (2007) and *The International Journal of the History of Sport's Issue 15 Methodology in Sports History* (Vol. 32, 2015). Throughout the articles and discussions, the importance placed on the understanding and interpretation of primary evidence for research in sport history is stressed – as well as the problem that arises when one takes specific evidence out of its historical context and/or attempts to over-emphasize it (Polley, 2007).

In view of the above, the members of the GSU Cologne's project group are aware of the fact that specific primary evidence is depicted from the extensive archival material for illustrating the volumes. Furthermore, this selection of primary evidence was preceded by an editorial decision concerning which documents and photos would be most suitable for publishing. According to

4 The anniversary is related to the GSU Cologne's forerunner, the Berlin located German Academy of Physical Education which was established in 1920 with Carl Diem as deputy director from 1920-1933.

the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) and his magnum opus from 1960, “Wahrheit und Methode” (Truth and Method), the explanation of such an editorial decision cannot be reduced to the ambition of a hermeneutical understanding of a historical collection’s material. Moreover, according to Gadamer, if we seek to understand a historical phenomenon under the scope of historical distance, we are always subject already to the historically effected consciousness (“Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein”) (Gadamer, 2010). Or, as the US-scholar Jerome Veith puts it:

*“[...] and while there can indeed be an alienating temporal distance between ourselves and particular aspects of the past, we nevertheless always belong to the transmission of events in general [...]. To be conscious of this constant transmission and our belongingness to it means to encounter history as an undetermined and ongoing source, rather than as a medium or sealed container of past occurrences that merely have residual effects because of their erstwhile prominence or force.”*

(Veith, 2015, p. 3)

With this aspect of transmitting (sport) history in mind, this article’s intention is to offer an insight into the GSU Cologne archive project group’s work and its invitation to the scholarly community to engage with the existing archival material as well. As an example, the conception and content of the chapter on the preparations for the 1916 Olympic Games in Berlin – which could not take place because of World War I – from the archive book series’ second volume “Olympic Movement”, published in 2018, will be presented in detail.

This chapter was selected for the present article as publications about the intended 1916 Olympic Games are seldom on an international level and due to the fact that Carl Diem (1882–1962) was the General Secretary of the Berlin Organizing Committee. As his personal collection is kept exclusively at the GSU Cologne, the majority of the Organizing Committee’s documents can only be found at the CuLDA.

However, before illustrating the book chapter’s content in the context of hermeneutics, the historical background of the Organizing Committee’s work for the 1916 Olympic Games is set out. This structure follows the idea of the book series, as each chapter starts with information about the collection’s origin, its former owner and the historical era(s) where the material comes from.

## Historical background: The intended 1916 Berlin Olympic Games

At the beginning of the 20th century, the national gymnastic organization, the *Deutsche Turnerschaft* (DT) was still the main force in the field of exercise and training in the German Reich. Between 1910 and 1914, the number of gymnasts was three times greater than those of the civic sport movement (Krüger, 2005).

With their ideals of tradition, patriotism, and versatile physical education for the masses, the DT's hardliners stood in strong opposition to the international Olympic Movement with its core of Anglo-American record-seeking high performance sports. Therefore, the DT resisted the opportunity to participate in the 1912 Olympic Games and did not send a team to Stockholm, despite the fact that gymnastics had been part of the Olympic competition program since 1896.

Nevertheless, the Olympic Movement was becoming more and more popular in Germany during this time. In 1904, with the *Deutscher Reichsausschuss für Olympische Spiele* (DRAfOS), a permanent German National Olympic Committee was established and the German IOC members even began promoting Berlin as a future host city. This effort appeared to be materializing, but the death of the campaign head in 1909, Count Egbert Hoyer von der Asseburg (1847–1909), led to the withdrawal of Berlin's bid for the 1912 Olympic Games. Instead, Stockholm was selected to the host of the Olympic edition. However, the year of 1911 saw the Germans commence a new initiative. During the 1912 IOC Session, on 4 July, the 1916 Olympic Games were awarded to Berlin, with the DRAfOS being instructed to take over the organization of the event (IOC, 1912). Henceforth, the Berlin Olympic Games were the DRAfOS' primary concern. Its first course of action was to enlist a chief organizer. The most suitable person for this role was the young sports official, Carl Diem, who had been involved in the 1912 Olympic Games in varying positions and had become well known to Pierre de Coubertin (1863–1937). Diem officially began his work for the Games in March 1913 as the general secretary of the Organizing Committee for the 1916 Olympic Games (DRAfOS, 1912).

A principal issue in the upcoming Games was the role of top-level sports in Germany. Only five gold medals (in total: 24 medals) had been awarded to German athletes in Stockholm. This meant

the nation had placed fifth in the medals table behind Sweden, the USA, Great Britain and Finland (Bergvall, 1913). For Diem, these poor results were caused by a lack of sports promotion in his home country. Therefore, he was convinced that sport had to be strongly promoted throughout Germany if the nation's athletes were to be successful at the Berlin Olympic Games (Diem, 1990).

Above all, it was clear to both Diem and the DRAfOS that the DT, because of its role in German physical education, had to be drawn into the "Olympic project" if the officials wanted to organize a great event in 1916. Diem, already in late 1912, thus began to intensify efforts to promote peace between gymnastics and (Olympic) sport. He wanted the DT managing board to accept that the sports movement was getting stronger and therefore was required for elevating the overall position of physical education in Germany (Diem, 1914). Socialized in a German Reich with its Emperor Wilhelm II (1859–1941, German Emperor 1888–1918) and living in an era of New Imperialism, Diem strongly believed that sport and striving for top performances could boost both Germany's patriotic mentality and military power (Höfer, 1999) – an argumentation that, in the end, sounded convincing to the German gymnasts. A step towards closer cooperation between Olympic sports and German gymnastics was the inauguration of the *Deutsches Stadion* (German Stadium) in Berlin on 8 June 1913, in which some 10,000 gymnasts participated.

In addition, top level German sports representatives began to prepare. Alvin Kraenzlein (1876–1928), a German-American and former Olympic champion, took up his job as head coach of the German team on 1 October 1913. Plans were laid for a "National Olympics" in 1915, as a sort of Olympic trial. Already on 27 and 28 June 1914, the best German athletes competed in the so-called "Pre-Olympic Games". Even the DT participated in the event with a large group of gymnasts. However, on the second day of competition, far from Berlin, the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria-Este (1863–1914), in Sarajevo signaled the beginning of the end for the 1916 Olympic Games.

Consequently, the outbreak of World War I on 28 July 1914 brought about the cessation of the upcoming Olympic Games' preparations. The initial hope of the Organizing Committee, that a speedy conclusion of peace would allow the Berlin Olympic Games to take place, was dashed. By the time of the death of the DRAfOS chairman, Viktor von Podbielski (1844–1916), in January 1916, the failure of the Olympic Games had become a



certainty, even though they were never officially cancelled – in view of the hostile actions on the European battlefields, the failure of the Games was clear to everyone.

### **“War instead of Games” – The book chapter about the intended 1916 Berlin Olympic Games**

The “Abgestaubt und neu erforschbar” (Dusted off and re-explorable) book series’ second volume is 315 pages strong. The chapter about the planned 1916 Berlin Olympic Games extends over 18 pages and is based on the GSU Cologne’s archival material from the collection of Carl Diem, the CuLDA’s photo and Olympic press documentation collection and the collection of the German archeologist and sport official Alfred Schiff (1863–1939).<sup>5</sup>

In total, illustrations of 23 documents from the Berlin 1916 Organizing Committee, 9 photos and 7 newspaper articles were selected to be represented within the chapter, spanning a period from 1912 to 1917. With the help of the archival material, the following topics were illustrated: Germany and the Olympic Movement, the *German Stadium*, the relationship between German gymnastics and broader sport, the Organizing Committee’s preparations for the 1916 Olympic Games, the competition program of the 1916 Olympic Games and the failure of the Olympic Games.

Supported by the selected primary evidence, which was used for the book chapter, the archive project group’s conception of the chapter about the failed 1916 Berlin Olympic Games shall herewith be expounded and discussed in the context of hermeneutics. However, the author is fully aware of the fact that being German – and therefore being aware of the development concerning the historical conflict between gymnastics and sport – and, moreover, being familiar with Diem’s biography and his personal collection means that this article is characterized by a specific historically imprinted consciousness.

5 In the 1920s, Schiff became the director of administration of the German Academy of Physical Education. Because of being Jewish, he was dismissed in 1933 when the Nazis came to power. Nevertheless, Diem as the general secretary of the Berlin 1936 Organizing Committee continued to work with Schiff who had become Diem’s advisor in questions regarding ancient athletics at the beginning of the 20th Century. Schiff, who had extensively researched ancient fire cults, provided the historical basis for the premiere of the Olympic torch relay at the 1936 Olympic Games. His name did not appear in these contexts for racist reasons, however – the idea of the torch relay was attributed to Diem alone. See also Molzberger et al. (2014).

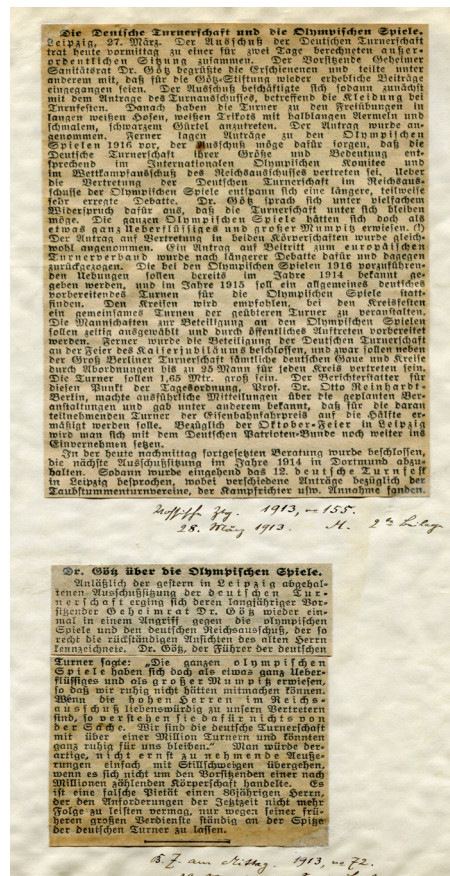
### Example 1 – The relationship between German gymnastics and broader sport

As mentioned above, the German sport officials were aware of the need to commence “peace negotiations” with the German gymnasts and their umbrella organization DT when the 1916 Olympic Games were awarded to Berlin at the 1912 IOC session in Stockholm. However, the mighty DT-chairman, Ferdinand Goetz (1826–1915), was still in clear opposition to the Olympic Movement and elite sports when Diem began his work as general secretary of the Organizing Committee for the 1916 Berlin Olympic Games in March 1913. After a DT-meeting in March 1913 in Leipzig, German newspapers quoted Goetz stating:

*“After all, the whole Olympic Games have proven to be something totally needless and a real balderdash [...]. We are the German Gymnast’s Confederation with more than a million members and could really stay on our own.”*

([Anon. 1], 1913)<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1. Newspaper articles about a meeting of the German gymnasts’ umbrella organization *Deutsche Turnerschaft* (DT) in Leipzig from the *Vossische Zeitung* and the *B.Z. am Mittag* (28 March 1913)



6 Translation of the German quotes by the author of the article.



Because of the fact that these newspaper articles explicitly illustrate the strong opposition of the “Hardliners” in the DT to the Olympic Movement, they were selected by the archive project group to be included within the book’s chapter. Additionally, the group selected to include alongside this an illustration of Diem’s writing *Friede zwischen Turnen und Sport* (Peace between gymnastics and sport), published in 1914 and reflecting his initiative to get the German gymnasts into the Berlin Olympic “project” (Diem, 1914).

The newspaper articles simultaneously demonstrate that the zeitgeist in Germany was shifting in terms of supporting the Olympic Games: Goetz is sharply criticized for being “old fashioned” in his opposition to the Olympic Movement. Of course, there were more “open minded” German gymnasts at the time, too. In fact, on the local level, gymnastics and sports often were performed together throughout the different clubs. Furthermore, there had previously been signs of rapprochement: The DT had joined the DRAfOS in 1907 and – for the first time – had officially taken part in the 1908 Olympic Games in London. However, as they had not been satisfied with the way they were treated in London, they decided to reestablish their negative attitude towards the Olympic Games thereafter. Nevertheless, the fact that the DT had remained a member of the DRAfOS following 1908 can be seen as a sign of accepting the fact that the German sport movement had become more powerful – or merely as an aspect of the DT’s tactics to keep an eye on their sporting opponents (Langenfeld, 1999). Diem, as general secretary of the Organizing Committee for the 1916 Olympic Games, definitely wanted “his” Berlin Games to be joined by the German gymnasts. In line with this attitude lies one of Diem’s typescripts for a promotion lecture in 1914, entitled *Die Olympischen Spiele der Neuzeit und Deutschlands Aufgaben für 1916* (The modern Olympic Games and Germany’s tasks for the 1916 Olympic Games). One page of this eight-page strong script was used for the book chapter, too, because of its appealing character:

*“[...] However, the Olympic Games of 1916 bring with them an especially important purpose for Germany, a purpose that might go over their general promotional effect. As one knows, we have been setting the tone for the world in a specific area of physical education. We have developed German gymnastics for a hundred years so that the whole world can learn from it. But German gymnastics stands in contradiction to German sport which came to mighty power, too. [...] The Olympic Games shall not only lead to a situation where gymnastics and sport are not hostile to each other or stand*

*to each other in an indifferent status [...]. In fact, the Olympic Games should rather lead to a situation where German gymnastics is steeped in German sport and German sport is steeped in German gymnastics – they shall cross-fertilize each other in order to become a unified wave which captures the whole nation [...].”*

(Diem, 1914, Typescript)

As one can read above, the quote does not only mirror Diem's patriotic attitude, which fits very much the pre-war era of the German Reich as a colonial power. It also reflects his self-consciousness regarding the national influence of the German sport movement – even if the gymnastic movement was still three times stronger at this time. In order to reach as many people as possible with his message regarding the national importance of the 1916 Olympic Games, Diem travelled a great deal in this period and held speeches across many different cities.

#### ***Example 2 – The Deutsches Stadion (German Stadium) in Berlin***

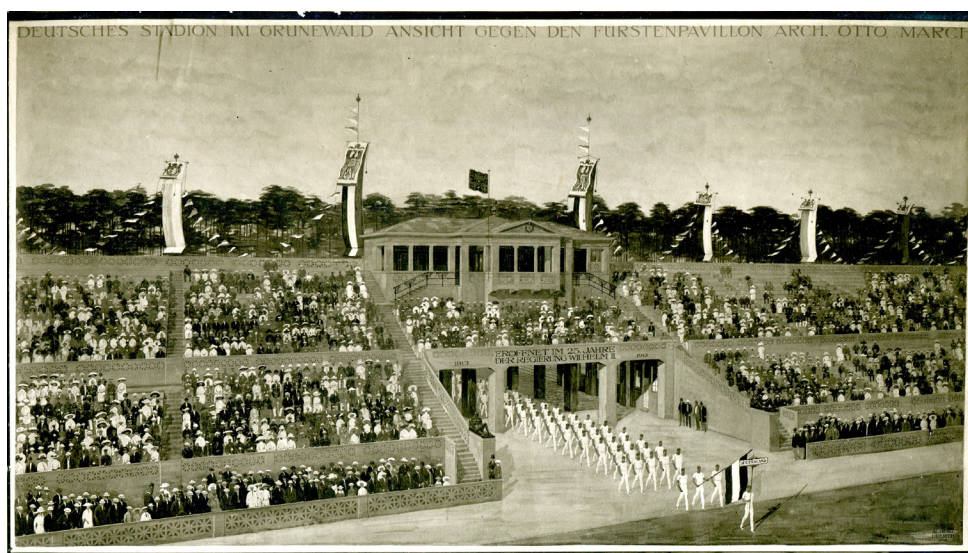
The *German Stadium*, designed by the Berlin architect Otto March (1845–1913)<sup>7</sup>, was built in only 200 working days. Just after the IOC decision of 1912 to award the 1916 Olympic Games to Berlin, German sport officials took up the task of building the arena. With its inner dimensions of 254 by 82 meters, it was much bigger than an ordinary football pitch – the stadium contained a pool, gymnastic fields around the football pitch and a running as well as a cycling track, too. Yet, it had a spectator capacity of only 30,000 people because it was constricted by the already existing horse track stretching around the arena; the planners had agreed to stick to preserving the free view of the horse races (Reinberg, 1914).

As already mentioned, the stadium's inauguration took place on 8 June 1913 and the ceremony was held in honor of the 25th anniversary of Wilhelm II as German Emperor. The patriotic event became a vital link in connecting the two divided parties – the German sportsmen and the German gymnasts – when about 10.000 gymnasts joined the sport community in order to take part in the ceremony.

<sup>7</sup> Twenty years later, Otto March's sons Werner March (1894–1976) and Walter March (1898–1969) designed the Olympiastadion (Olympic Stadium) and the Reichssportfeld (Reich Sports Field) for the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. In 1934, the German Stadium was demolished and the Olympic Stadium was built at the same place.

For designing the book chapter, two illustrations regarding this ceremony were chosen: A photo from the 8 June 1913 (not reproduced in this article) and a postcard from 1913, referring to the stadium's inauguration and the 25th jubilee of Wilhelm II.

**Figure 2. Postcard “Inauguration of the *Deutsches Stadion* / 25th jubilee of Wilhelm II”, 1913**



Even with the central motif of a German team marching into the arena behind its national flag, the postcard illustrates the connecting function of patriotism for the gymnasts and the sportsmen – and evokes an association for the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games.

In the sense of this patriotic connection, the DRAfOS-chairman von Podbielski neither mentioned sport nor gymnastics in his opening speech at the stadium's inauguration, but rather talked of a patriotic mission:

*“A day of rejoicing for Germany's youth. A day of joy for our fatherland. The German stadium has been built. A place has been made for peaceful competitions, the rising of physical strength, the steeling of will power, the fostering of the patriotic mind! Our motto may be: Always ready for the glory of the German Reich.”*

(Reinberg, 1914, p. 119)

It should become clear that the managing board of the DT could not remain in strict opposition to the Olympic Games against the background of this patriotic sentiment of the German sport

movement – and the German Emperor Wilhelm II being very open-minded about sport. Especially, this also concerned the Berlin organizers wanting to give gymnastics an important place in the 1916 competition program: Not only “pure” gymnastics were planned to be part of the 1916 Olympic competition program. Moreover, the organizers wanted to conduct a “German” combined six-piece event of three gymnastic and three athletic disciplines (Deutscher Sechskampf) as part of the gymnastic program (DRAfOS, [undated]).

Consequently, a large group of German gymnasts took part in the “Olympia-Vorspiele” (Pre-Olympic Games) in the German Stadium in Berlin on 27 and 28 June 1914.

### ***Example 3 – The failure of the 1916 Berlin Olympic Games***

As previously mentioned, the outbreak of World War I on 28 July 1914 brought an end to the preparations for the upcoming Olympic Games. In August 1914, Diem was drafted into the army and was required to serve the military until 1918 (Becker, 2009, Vol. 1). In January 1916, the failure of the Olympic Games became a certainty.

In the book chapter, the failure of the 1916 Olympic Games is illustrated with the help of an undated photo from the *German Stadium*: One can see the empty interior of the stadium overlooking the diving tower and diving pool. Note the sheep grazing on the lawn.

**Figure 3. Photo from the German Stadium, undated**



Even if the photo is undated, the picture – of the empty stadium with grazing sheep on the lawn – seemed, to the archive project group, to perfectly illustrate the failure of the 1916 Berlin Olympic Games. The photo of a sport arena not in use and “misused” as a grazing pasture stands in total opposition to the joyful postcard of the stadium’s inauguration with its powerful athletes and masses of spectators in the center.

As the book chapter’s end and “proof” for the failure of the German Olympic initiative, one more document is presented in the volume: An invitation to the General assembly of the DRAfOS on 25 January 1917 in Berlin. At this meeting, the DRAfOS-members voted for the proposed name change of the association. From 1917 on, the German umbrella organization for sports was called *Deutscher Reichsausschuss für Leibesübungen* (German Reich committee for physical exercises), the title part “Olympic Games” was left out – not only had the 1916 Olympic Games failed, but the Germans had also turned their back on the Olympic Movement.

## Conclusion

With the objective to present an initial overall view of the entire GSU Cologne’s historical collections, the research and publication project “Dusted off and re-explorable” was started in 2013. With the help of a richly illustrated, four-volume book series, the project group is successfully bringing the reader’s attention to the academic value of an archive as a form of cultural heritage. Furthermore, the volumes promote hermeneutics in sport history and should be seen as an invitation to the scholarly community to do further research supported by primary evidence. As the archive project group’s commitment to the transmission of history as well as this article reflects a specific – German – perspective, an international cooperation regarding this and further work with the archive material could lead to new and interesting research results.

In this present article, the work of the Cologne archive project group was illustrated by exemplifying how the book chapter about the intended 1916 Berlin Olympic Games – which could not take place due to World War I – from the book series’ second volume was conceived. The respective book was published in 2018 and presents selected documents from the GSU Cologne’s archival material about the Olympic Movement.



To date, about 45% of the GSU Cologne's archival material is digitalized. This digitalization process is to be continued over the next years and it is expected that this will greatly favor future research.

Another benefit that resulted from the project group's work over the last years is that of its contribution to daily university life: Primary evidence can successfully be used in seminars and other lectures in order to help the students grasp a better understanding of an historical era and the motivation behind its people acting in a specific way. The original style of language, the design of printed documents and further aspects can often deliver richer information about the history of sport as a cultural phenomenon than secondary evidence. Plus, a better understanding of historical developments should enable students to experience and analyze ongoing processes in nowadays sport in a critical way. In any case, the feedback of students from the GSU Cologne regarding their work with primary evidence and hermeneutics in sport history classes has proved to be on the whole very positive.



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