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Dec 15, 2020 by [Nicholas J. Cull](#), [Simon Anholt](#)

Anholt and Cull, Part Three: Good News for Sweden, Canada, and the world... ^[1]

Having considered the latest Nation Brands Index measuring perception, Anholt and Cull turn their attention to the Good Country Index, which measures actual contributions to the global good across six categories, adjusted by the wealth of the country. Anholt introduced the index in 2014. The 2020 version placed Sweden in the top position.

ANHOLT In 2020's Good Country Index Sweden becomes the first country to come top twice. This is great news for Sweden. It shows real consistency, because you know the Good Country Index, as distinct from the Nation Brands Index, is fairly volatile. Remember that the Good Country Index is a measure of actual behavior: it's not a measure of perceptions. The Nation Brands Index uses opinion polls; the Good Country Index is a composite ranking of mostly UN statistics that measure the impact of each country on the world outside its own borders. So the headline is that Sweden is the 'goodest' country. I say 'goodest' in order to avoid saying best: it's the one that, relative to the size of its economy, does most good and

least harm outside its own borders.

CULL Who else did well this year?

ANHOLT Denmark is second; Germany third; Canada fourth, which is Canada's best position so far. And still this year, the top 20 is dominated by Western European countries. People often say, oh well, it's rigged. But why would I rig it favor of Europe? I think the EU is great but it doesn't pay me to produce the Good Country Index!

CULL Canada also did well in the Nation Brands Index this time around with the most admired people and most admired system of government. I think that's great and not just because I have a book out on Canadian public diplomacy.

ANHOLT These correlations are not at all surprising because in some years the Nation Brands Index and the Good Country Index correlate by more than 80 percent. Remember, that doesn't tell us anything about causality, but there's a strong suggestion that the most likely reason why people would admire one country more than another is because they perceive that it benefits the whole of humanity, outside its own borders. I often say the attempts that most countries make to burnish their own images via "nation branding" campaigns are completely off track because all they ever do is brag about how wonderful life is for the people who are lucky enough to live there. But if I don't live there, it's of no consequence to me. What I really want to know is, even though I don't live there, should I feel glad that it exists?

CULL And in the ideal situation the brand is based on good global citizenship and partnership for the collective benefit.

ANHOLT Yes. And one of the things I've noticed with great satisfaction in the last year or less, is that starting in Scandinavia, the discussions around nation branding are more and more about exactly that: exercising and demonstrating virtue rather than simply bragging about superiority. I've always said that if you want to be admired, be admirable.

CULL This bears out the argument that you make in your new book, *The Good Country Equation*.

ANHOLT Indeed. The equation states that all the problems facing humanity in the 21st century – from climate change to pandemics and everything in between – are caused by two factors. One is the behavior of countries: the fact that their culture is wrong. They don't cooperate and collaborate enough in order to solve these challenges. All they do is compete, and therefore, the challenges tend to get worse. The other cause is the behavior of people. And the reason why people keep on behaving in ways that makes the challenges worse is because of the way they've been brought up.

If we want to fix the world, the first thing we need to do is to explain to countries that if they cooperate and collaborate that actually brings direct, immediate economic benefits by improving their image, it gets them more trade, more tourism, more diplomatic leverage and more investment. And then we need to do something globally in education, to ensure that the next generation is brought up with values that make sense in the world that we live in today: to ensure that the next generation runs towards the global challenges instead of running away from them.

So on the one hand, there's the magic discovery that collaboration is the most competitive form of national behavior, and on the other hand, there's the good generation project which will bring up a new generation of kids with the right values, the right knowledge sets and the right virtues to tackle the problems of the world we live in today. Those two things have the power to eliminate the majority of the problems that humanity is currently facing.

CULL Well, you know I feel the same way. The election of Biden has been accompanied by promises of revived international cooperation and must be step in the right direction. Certainly, there is no way to fix the problems of this world without international cooperation.
