**SPORT AS THE SOFT POWER OF THE STATE:**

**THE IMPORTANCE OF SPORTS DIPLOMACY ON THE EXAMPLE OF CROATIA**

**ABSTRACT**

Sport has always been associated with international politics and diplomacy, as well as with culture and national identity. Information and technological advances have spurred changes in international political and economic relations. We are witnessing accelerated changes in social formations in the national and global environment. In the context of these developments, sport and sports diplomacy are a significant factor in the redistribution of political and economic power. The paper explains how countries effectively expand their international influence through success and recognition in sports. Despite the importance of sports, especially sports diplomacy in contemporary international relations, scientific research in sports diplomacy is still in its infancy in Croatian academic circles, as evidenced by the very scarce number of papers and books. Therefore, following the examples of other countries and understanding the intertwining of sports and diplomacy in the global world, this paper analyzes sport as a phenomenon of soft power and the potentials and possibilities of Croatian sports diplomacy. The preconditions and specifics of the further development of sport in Croatia as an important source of soft power are also considered.

Keywords: public diplomacy, soft power, promotion, sport, sports diplomacy