

The Sochi Predicament

The Sochi Predicament:
Contexts, Characteristics and Challenges
of the Olympic Winter Games in 2014

Edited by

Bo Petersson and Karina Vamling

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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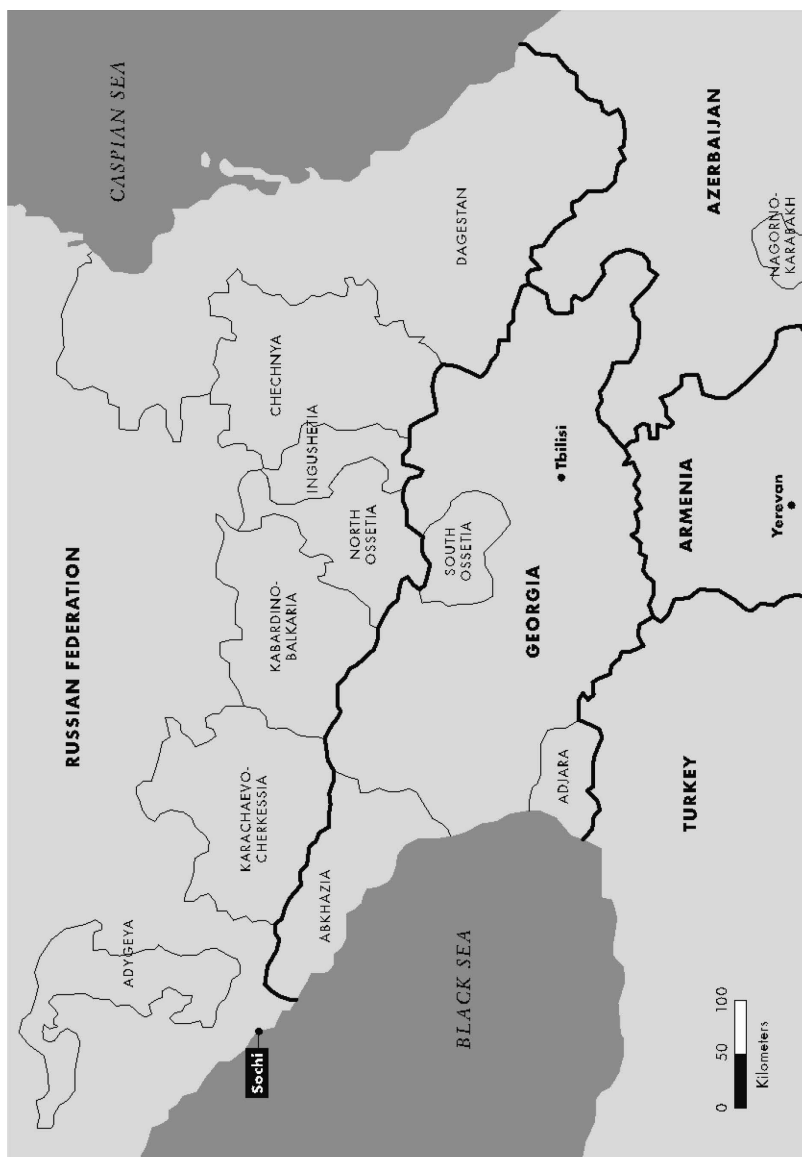
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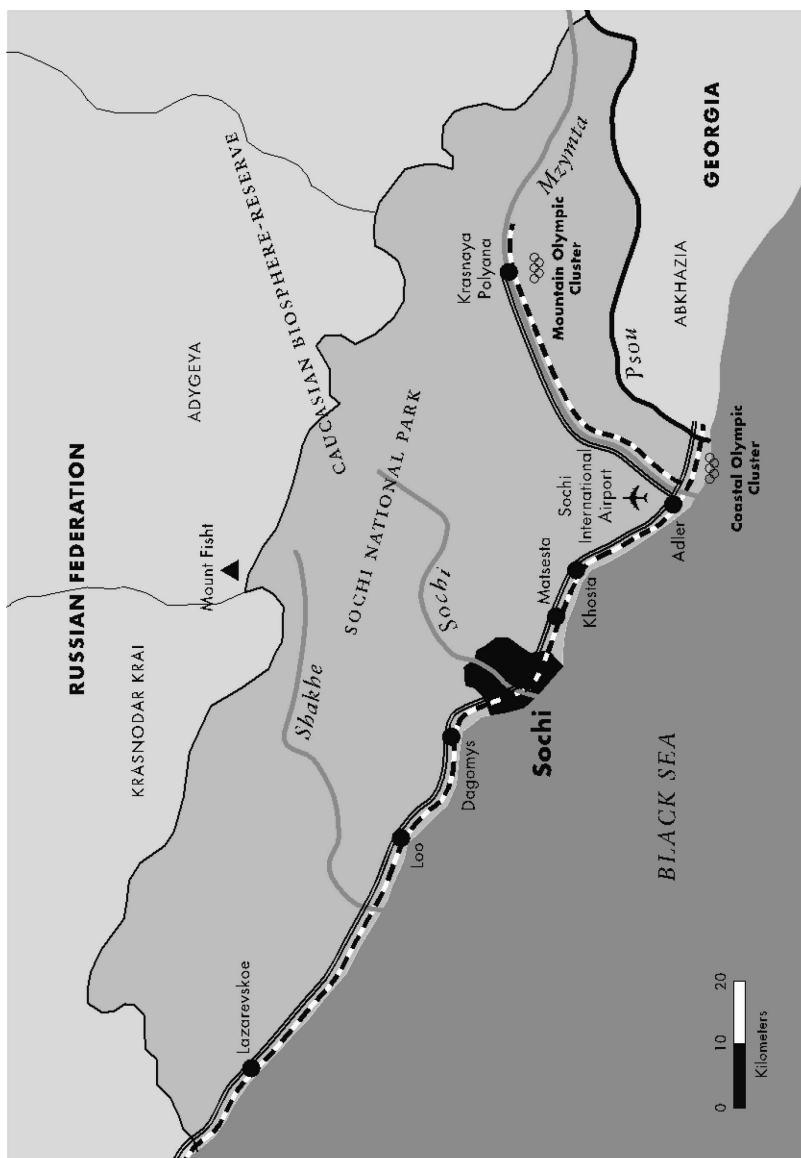
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Map 1. Regional Map



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INTRODUCTION

THE SOCHI WINTER OLYMPICS: WALKING A TIGHTROPE?

BO PETERSSON AND KARINA VAMLING

In spite of all solemn declarations and vows to the contrary, sports and politics belong together, always and everywhere, one is tempted to say. With the terminology coined by Michael Billig (1995) in his seminal book on *Banal Nationalism* sport is a prime area for the manifestations of everyday, seemingly innocuous nationalism. Sport has certainly come to be regarded as a “vent for national sentiment and open flag-waving” (Hedetoft 1999, 9). Nationalism expressed on such occasions has often mistakenly come to be regarded as harmless, at least in comparison with the overt manifestations of hot, conflict-seeking nationalism which have pitted different in-groups against castigated and othered out-groups. In this sense, international sports have even been viewed as a rather benevolent surrogate for war, a way to let off steam that might otherwise prompt an explosion later on. The way that sports have a kinship with war, albeit with benign connotations, is corroborated by the martial metaphors customarily used in the reporting of sports events where words like “conquer”, “vanquish” or “surgical strike” frequently pop up (King 2008).

However, opinions diverge on whether the manifestations of such banal sports nationalism are in fact harmless or not, and one may for instance point towards the obvious counter-example of the so-called soccer war between Honduras and El Salvador in the late 1960s to disprove their inherent peacefulness. One may indeed pursue the line of the potential hazards of sports nationalism further and go on to argue that had it not been for the everyday, seemingly banal manifestations of nationalism that firmly entrench subdivisions between Us and Them, malignant forms of nationalism would have found it harder to fester and ultimately develop in conflict-ridden situations (Billig 1995; Petersson 2006). The two variants of nationalism could indeed be argued to

constitute two sides of the same coin. According to this argument, they are not different in kind, just in intensity and nuance.

On the whole, there seem to be no obvious winners in the debate on whether banal nationalism is a benign or malignant force, but regardless of which side wins the day, the outcome would seem to prove the point of the intimate link between sports and politics. Nowhere does this connection appear more clearly than in the mega events known by the name of Olympic Games.

With regard to the display of nationalism, banal or otherwise, the Olympic Games are ridden with contradictions. One of the most fundamental thoughts underlying the Olympic ideals is that the Games will bring together the best athletes of the world so that they can for a couple of weeks engage in just and fair competitions on equal terms across all international barriers, thereby promoting conditions of international peace. On the other hand, as witnessed not least during the years of the Cold War, the scramble for gold medals has often turned into a struggle of prestige between great powers, trying to prove the superiority of their social systems. The winner of the greatest number of gold medals simply scored high points in the omnipresent struggle between the opposing blocs. Also in the contemporary world the nexus persists between feats achieved at the Olympic sports arenas and the boosting of national pride—or its opposite if the glorious achievements are not attained to the extent hoped for. Hardly anywhere is the waving of national flags and the display of other national symbols more intense than at the Olympic arenas, and even in countries such as the traditionally peaceful Scandinavian ones the successes of one country may serve as irksome irritants among sizable segments of the population in the neighbouring countries, especially if one's own country seems to fall short in the competitions.

Over the years and across widely diverging political contexts there is a long series of events proving the linkage between sports and politics in the history of the Olympics (Hill 1992; Senn 1999). The most infamous of them all is of course the Olympic Games of Berlin in 1936, which constituted throughout a large-scale and ferocious propaganda event for Nazi Germany. Whereas all subsequent contentious events have proved innocent in comparison, the examples of the 1980 Summer Games in Moscow and the 2008 Summer Games in Beijing present themselves as cases where authoritarian regimes have used the Olympics to showcase great power and to shore up their international reputation and legitimacy through the organization of prestigious mega events on their home ground. Likewise, the Summer Games in Mexico City in 1968, Munich in 1972 and Los Angeles in 1984 have all shown that the Olympic Games easily

become hostage to political manifestations, sometimes symbolic like in the black power salute on the podium in 1968, sometimes bloody and tragic like also in 1968 when hundreds of civilians were killed in political protests ten days before the Summer Games opened, and, of course, in 1972 when terrorism for the first time entered the Olympic setting.

In comparison with the Summer Games, the Olympic Winter Games have for a long time gained considerably less attention, being somewhat less extravagant with regards to expenditure, scale and magnitude and therefore perhaps also more focused on sport itself. This may well, however, be a story of the past tense, and it might be that the Winter Games which will take place in Sochi in the Russian Federation in 2014 will mark a watershed in the history of the Winter Games. If so, no more will these Games connote low politics and focus on sports alone, if indeed that has ever been the case. No more will they stand out as less contentious than their bigger brothers, the Summer Games. For the decision to arrange the Olympic Winter Games of 2014 in Sochi off the Russian Black Sea coast is a highly controversial one, and at the time of writing this (about ten months prior to the inauguration of the Games), it seems very likely that the Games will be ridden with protests of different kinds and magnitude and that they will provide the stage for high-profile political shows of strength, symbolic and otherwise, by the political leaders of Russia.

There are many facets to the stories that are likely to be told about Sochi. The endeavor of this book is to analyze the preconditions of some of those that are most likely to be recounted. The authors brought together in this book will not be able to provide a full inventory of all problems and challenges facing the Sochi Winter Games, but by focusing on some of the most demanding they will go on to show that the decision to award the Winter Games to Sochi was probably not the wisest one that has been taken in the history of the International Olympic Committee. Even though the situation is prone to change the closer we get to the Sochi Olympics, two observers of the field concluded as late as in the autumn of 2012 that “hardly any scientific work relevant to the Olympic Games 2014 is yet in existence” (Scharr & Steinicke 2012, 1). Thus there seems to be a gap to be filled in the scholarly literature, and it is a natural endeavor of the authors to contribute to its overcoming.

The Winning Bid for the Winter Olympics of 2014

It was on July 4, 2007, that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) at its meeting in Guatemala City took the decision to let Sochi host the Winter Olympics of 2014. The small, internationally little-known city

was selected in competition with the candidate cities of Salzburg in Austria and Pyeongchang in South Korea.

Political high profile involvement and campaigning has become increasingly commonplace when determining the location of prestigious international sports events (Markovits & Rensmann 2010; Alekseyeva 2012). The Russian campaign for Sochi was no exception. President Vladimir Putin's support and engagement has often, and rightly so, been noted as a key factor for the success of the Sochi candidacy. Indeed, the Sochi Games have been characterized as his "pet idea" (Müller 2011, 2095) and the pulling through of the project would have seemed inconceivable without him. Putin headed the Russian delegation to the Guatemala City meeting. His address to the IOC—delivered in English and French—is believed to have played a crucial role in the process, not least his demonstration of highest-level political commitment to the project. Putin's speech included a powerful state financing guarantee of 12 billion US dollars (YouTube 2007). This made, already at this stage, the Sochi Games the most expensive ever in the history of the Olympic movement (Müller 2011, 2095).

Apart from the state guarantees, the financial platform of the Games has been bolstered by private initiative. From early on there has been a keen interest among Russia's wealthiest business circles to make private investments in the Sochi region. The billionaire Vladimir Potanin, head of the Interros holding company, promised that the company would invest \$1.5 billion into different projects in the region (Ivanov 2007). Oleg Deripaska, the owner of the Russian investment fund Basic Element and a personal friend of Putin's, bought 100% of the state-owned Sochi International Airport in 2006 (RIA Novosti 2006). Roman Abramovich is a third Russian tycoon who helped to fund the bid for the Sochi Olympics. While the backing by these financial forces and interests go a long way towards providing the necessary financial guarantees, it also sets the stage for allegations about shadowy commercial interests which relegate sports to the back seat, and also about murky business deals, covert handshakes and corruption.

The Great Power Dimension

Vladimir Putin has on numerous occasions shown himself to be keenly interested in personally promoting mega events organized in and by Russia. When Russia was hosting the Eurovision Song Contest in 2009 he made a point of appearing on site to make personally sure that preparations were in order (Avellan 2010). As it will be argued in subsequent

chapters, the Sochi Winter Games are, just like other mega events to be hosted by Russia, such as the FIFA World Cup in football in 2018, prone to provide a stage for the delivery of the message that Russia has once again resumed its rightful role of great power in the contemporary world. Indicatively, commenting on the follow-up of the successful Sochi bid, Dmitrii Medvedev, the bracketed president between 2008 and 2012, remarked:

We still have much to do, but I am confident that we can show the world, and prove to ourselves, above all, that the choice made in Guatemala in 2007 was indeed the right choice. It is our chance to show our country's strength and power, our winning spirit, our ability to offer excellent conditions for the Olympics, our people's hospitality, our love of sports, and our determination and ability to do everything possible to ensure that the 2014 Olympics will stand out for their memorable sporting performances, excellent results, and simply for the fine impressions people will take with them (Medvedev 2010).

The Russian Federation is back with a vengeance, and it is likely to be demonstrated that the come-back president Vladimir Putin plays no small part in this. With his domestic legitimacy rapidly dwindling, as was amply demonstrated during the long series of urban protests in connection with the parliamentary elections of 2011 and the presidential polls of 2012 (Sakwa 2012; Shevtsova 2012), the Sochi Winter Games may actually prove to be among his last chances to show strength and resolve and demonstrate that his is the strong hand at the helm which according to widespread popular sentiments Russia dearly needs. As it has been suggested in the scholarly debate, Putin may otherwise run the risk of, rather than being associated with strength and dynamic power, being compared to his Soviet-time successors during the Brezhnevite period of stagnation in the 1970s and early 1980s (Petersson 2012; Goscilo 2013:182).

For all these reasons the Sochi Games will therefore most likely be the occasion for assertive nation branding of Russia as an indisputable great power, capable of organizing strong, secure and maybe even brilliantly staged Games, and at the same time of course delivering great performances at the sports arenas. The Games will be intended to mark and symbolize the comeback of Russia at the supreme world stage, and will underline the importance of the leadership of Putin himself in this endeavor. The Games will therefore merge nation branding and person branding into one, rendering the borderline between the two fuzzy and diffuse.

According to a theme frequently adhered to by Dmitrii Medvedev in his speeches as president there is a correlation between the power and

might of the state and its achievements in sports arenas. While the results obtained and the medal harvest reaped by the Russian athletes in the Winter Games of Vancouver in 2010 were clearly seen as underwhelming, there are evident expectations that the Sochi Olympics on Russia's home ground will bring successes of quite another caliber. The sportive weight of the Russian bid was emphasized by the presence in Guatemala of prominent Russian of former Soviet Winter Olympians such as the skaters Evgenii Plyushchenko and Svetlana Zhurova, as well as the hockey stars Vyacheslav Fetisov and Vladislav Tretyak. Their presence also underlined that Russia, despite its great achievements in winter sports, had not yet hosted the Winter Olympics, a further argument mentioned in Putin's speech.

Sochi: History and Contemporaneity

Sochi is the major city in the Black Sea district of Greater Sochi. The city, with its population of 343,000 (2010), is located in the Krasnodar region (Krasnodar krai), and it has become known as the Russian Riviera. It used to be the traditional summer resort of the aristocrats of Imperial Russia, and later of Soviet and Russian elites. Sochi started to develop as a resort already in pre-revolutionary times, in the beginning of the 20th century (Krinko, Romanova & Cherkasova 2011). For instance, in 1909 the fashionable hotel Caucasian Riviera opened there (Sochi.com). In Matsesta south of Sochi, as in several other places of the Caucasus, health treatment spas developed on the basis of mineral springs and baths. Sochi experienced a boom in the 1930s and developed into a spa resort for elite groups from the whole of the Soviet Union. Indeed, it was in Sochi that Joseph Stalin had his favorite dacha. For his part President Putin has built a summer residence in the mountains outside the city. He has also hosted several foreign leaders there: George W. Bush, Jacques Chirac, Silvio Berlusconi, to mention but a few, and this too could be seen as part of his campaigning to bring the Games to Sochi (Müller 2011). Again, one can see the personal investments and stakes that the Russian president has brought into the project.

In his address at Guatemala City in July 2007 Putin dwelled upon the uniqueness of the location:

On the seashore you can enjoy a fine spring day, but up in the mountains, it is winter. I was skiing there six or seven weeks ago, and I know, real snow is guaranteed (YouTube 2007).

The warm subtropical climate along the seashore stands in stark contrast to the adjacent snowy slopes of the Caucasus Mountains. Earlier geographic studies show that Greater Sochi, paradoxically, is a region suitable for the development of winter tourism (Rybak, Rybak & Zasedatelev 1994). Even so, the Sochi region has undergone rapid transformations in recent years—from a Russian seaside resort to an international top-level winter sports center, getting ready to host the Winter Olympics. Between 2009 and 2012, 27 billion US dollars were invested into Sochi's urban regeneration and infrastructure development, and the project of transforming Sochi has been described as an emblem of Putin's modernization of Russia at large (Alekseyeva 2012, 2–3). It can actually be argued that the infrastructural development taking part in this part of Russia serves to embed and calm a region of the Russian Federation long known to be troublesome and unruly (Petersson 2013).

The Olympic objects are divided between two sites, one on the Black Sea coast and one in the mountains. The so-called Coastal Olympic cluster has been built outside of central Sochi. It is located in the Imereti Valley between the mouths of Mzymta and the border river Psou in the southernmost part of Greater Sochi. It is here that the opening and closing ceremonies will take place at the Fisht Olympic Stadium. Other newly constructed objects are the Bolshoi Ice Dome, the Skating Palace, the Curling Center, Shaiba Arena, the Olympic Village, hotels and other facilities. From the Coastal Olympic Cluster trains take participants and spectators along the river Mzymta up to the outdoor winter sport sites in the Olympic Mountain Cluster around Krasnaya Polyana: Roza Khutor Alpine Center, Russkie Gorki Jumping Center, Laura Cross-country Ski and Biathlon Center, to mention some of the sites that have been built in the mountains surrounding Krasnaya Polyana.

Sochi: A Turbulent Past Affects the Present

The Caucasus has long been well-known for its high ethnic diversity. In his speech in Guatemala Putin pointed out that “the ancient Greeks lived around Sochi lots of centuries ago” (Youtube 2007). Actually, the ancient Greeks did establish trade colonies on the Black Sea coast line such as, for instance, Dioscuria (present-day Sukhumi), not far from Sochi. However, Putin failed to mention the Circassian population that lived in the area before the Russian conquest. The predominantly Muslim Circassians speak different dialects of Circassian, a Northwest Caucasian language. Circassian is not an Indo-European language but belongs to the indigenous Caucasian languages.

In the 18th and 19th centuries the Russian Empire expanded to the south in an attempt to reach the Black Sea and gain control over the Caucasus Mountains, strategically located between the Black and Caspian Seas. In the Western part of the Caucasus and the Caucasian Black Sea coast the Russians met fierce resistance from indigenous Circassian tribes. After decades of fighting, the Circassians were in 1864 finally defeated close to Sochi, actually in Krasnaya Polyana, a central site of the Sochi Olympics. Most Circassians were forced into exile after the defeat and many perished before they reached their destination. The areas in Western Caucasus from which the Circassians had been forcibly evicted were colonized by Cossacks and other groups from the Russian Empire.

Descendants from the Circassian exodus are now found in Turkey, the Middle East and the United States. Scattered groups of Circassians still live in the North Caucasus. In the republics where they are titular nations their numbers amount to 490,000 in Kabardino-Balkaria, 107,000 in Adygeya and 57,000 in Karachai-Cherkessia. According to the 2010 census (*Vserossiiskaya perepis naseleniya* 2010), the total number of Circassians (Adyghe, Cherkess and Kabardians) in the Russian Federation is 715,000.

It is a central argument of this book that the “Circassian question” has become an issue of increasing concern in connection with the Sochi Winter Olympics. Krasnaya Polyana, where the last Russo-Circassian battle took place in 1864 and where the Russians celebrated their victory, will in 2014 be the site of the Olympic ski slopes. The Circassians have been given scant attention by the official organizers as well as by the International Olympic Committee. Indeed, there is a revealingly minimalist reference in the IOC Evaluation Commission Report:

The Commission received requests to meet with representatives of certain groups during its visits to Sochi and Salzburg, to which it agreed. The Commission noted that none of these groups were against the Olympic Winter Games but, rather, that their concerns related to specific sites and were mainly of an environmental, financial and social nature (IOC 2007).

The way the Circassians see it, the Olympic objects are being constructed literally on the graves of their fallen ancestors. Also, the year of 2014 marks the 150th anniversary of the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, adding as it were insult to injury. These facts have had a mobilizing effect on the Circassian diaspora, which has organized protests against the carrying out of the Winter Olympics on their sacred lands. Paradoxically, the actual staging of the Winter Games in Sochi, an event that the Circassian organizations in the diaspora claim that they wish to

stop, may amount to their fifteen minutes of fame; the Circassians will own the limelight as seldom before and as they will certainly not do again for a long time to come. This is the chance that they will get to make the world listen and to better their lot; once the Games are over they will risk returning to the status of an internationally little-known minority that they have basically had until just a few years ago. This is in itself an angle worth looking into in future research: what will happen after the visit of the circus to town? What is the aftermath of a mega event and how can the host city of such an event adapt to the relative oblivion which will follow mercilessly soon after the end of the show?

Sustainable Development and the Future of the Region

The development of Sochi is a prestigious project of national importance for the hosting nation, a showcase for what a strong and united Russia is capable of achieving. The sensitive and unique environment in the Western part of the Great Caucasus Range is listed as a UNESCO World heritage site, including the Caucasus State Biosphere Reserve and the Sochi National Park (UNESCO World Heritage Centre). The building of the infrastructure for the Olympic Games has required extensive construction work of sports arenas and slopes, roads and tunnels in the sensitive mountainous terrain, prompting geological risks such as land slides and flooding as well as damage to unique forests and parks.

Rhetorically, the aim has certainly been to make the Sochi Games a green Olympics. Ever since the Winter Olympics in Lillehammer in 1994 the hosts of all subsequent Games have tried to argue that they are arranging the greenest and most environmentally-friendly Games in history (Müller 2013). Sochi has of course continued this rhetorical trend. The protection of the environment and sustainable development of the Sochi region were given much attention in the bidding process for the Games, and the hosts' arguments were based on the Federal Target Programme for the Development of Sochi. The organizing committee formulates its understanding of sustainable development as "creating long-term positive change in the social, economic and environmental spheres, based on effective use of the resource potential for all Russians both today and tomorrow" (Sochi 2014, 2012) and has invested great efforts into promoting environmental activities according to the official "Program of action in the field of sustainability within the Olympic project for 2011–2014". The most spectacular activity is probably the revival project to reintroduce the almost extinct Caucasian leopard. This project has been

encouraged by President Putin personally, who has even promoted the leopard as one of the Olympic mascots (RIA Novosti 2011).

The intentions and efforts in the areas of environmental protection and sustainable development were initially positively evaluated by environmental organizations such as WWF Russia and Greenpeace. However, it did not take long for critical voices to be articulated. Already in December 2009 environmental organizations declared that they would suspend cooperation with the Russian Olympic construction organization “Olimpstroï” due to serious violations of environmental protection (BBC 2010).

Embedding Sochi, Embedding the North Caucasus?

Sochi is situated in Russia’s south. However, it is also included in another context: the Caucasus. This is a region that has for long been at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, of Christianity and Islam, and historically it has been an arena where regional great powers—Russia, Turkey, Persia and others—have competed for political influence and dominance. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the three independent South Caucasian states of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, territorial disputes and ethno-political conflicts, including several separatist ones, have broken out. The most violent and internationally well-known conflicts to date are the two protracted and violent Chechen wars 1994–1996 and 1999–2009, as well as the short-lived but consequential Russo-Georgian war of 2008.

As a consequence of the Chechen wars, instability has increased on a general scale in the area and spread to other republics of the predominantly Muslim and ethnically diverse North Caucasus. Bombings, armed attacks and other forms of violence, not only against the authorities, have become a part of everyday life. Consequently, the risk of terrorist attacks against the Sochi Olympics has been highlighted by many observers. Devastating bomb attacks of recent years in sites such as the Domodedovo Airport and the Moscow metro have been attributed to the Chechen connection. Likewise, the terrorist bombing of the Boston marathon in 2013 was found to involve perpetrators of Chechen origin. If spectacular bombings can be carried out in sites as remote from the Caucasus as Moscow and indeed Boston there is reason to fear such acts also in adjacent Sochi and its surroundings.

Moreover, only some 30 kilometers from the city of Sochi lies Abkhazia, an autonomous republic of Georgia during Soviet times but now a *de facto* state recognized by Russia after the Russo-Georgian war in 2008. The proximity of the Games to this volatile area, and the fact that

Abkhazian territory has been used as a supply route for building material for the Olympic facilities has been interpreted by the Georgian government as a provocative move. Critical arguments have been heard that the Russian policy in this regard amounts to a step-by-step annexation of Abkhazia and only serves to increase tension in an already conflict-ridden region.

From the official rhetoric surrounding the Games it seems that one prominent reason for the choice of location is to improve the infrastructure of the region and to give the area an economic boost, not only up to and during the Games as such. This is thought to provide a sustainable basis for development and relative affluence afterwards. One can here discern the rationale of achieving sustainable development and stability in a region long regarded as unruly. Krasnodar Krai, the region where Sochi is located in administrative terms, is situated close to secessionist and violence-prone areas in the Caucasus and has seen a fair share of violence in recent years. Through decisive action on infrastructural development, the tandem Putin-Medvedev has sent a message to ardent Russian nationalist actors who in recent years have been demanding an end to “the feeding of the Caucasus” through federal subsidies, suggesting instead that this region be left to its own devices. The heavy investment in infrastructural development in the Sochi area could be read as an attempt to silence this loud segment of public opinion. This way the region will certainly be fed, and efforts are made to create preconditions for nurturing a sustainable economic basis and development in the area.

Thus, the basic logic seems to be that if the economy could be boosted through the Olympic project, if jobs could be provided and the regional infrastructure in Krasnodar Krai and the North Caucasus in general considerably improved, the region would become more thoroughly embedded in the federation structure. Massive economic investments would then finalize what military operations originally set out to achieve, and money could buy what arms failed to enforce. If the calculus proves to be right Putin will be able to live up to his image as a strong and resourceful leader. But what if it fails, and what if the Games amount not to a “mega event but to a mega fiasco” (Trubina 2013)? As this volume is being finalized the jury is still out. It will continue to be out even after the Games, and this is an area where a post factum study would be extremely valuable.

All in all, it is hard to reach any conclusion other than that there is a very specific rationale behind the determination of the Russian authorities to organize the Games in Sochi in spite of all problems, security-related and others. The hosting has to be interpreted as a show of force by the

Russian authorities to demonstrate firmly to the world who is in control. Seen in this context the choice of location is symbolic. If the Russian Federation can host Olympic Games in a region that has for so long been ridden by conflicts, violence and secessionist sentiments, then internal order can certainly be said to have been successfully restored. Still, even if the rationale does seem clear, the undertaking appears to be like walking a tightrope without a proper safety net. The stakes are high to say the least.

Introducing the Volume

As the editors we are proud to introduce the contents of the present volume. In addition to this introductory Chapter there are 12 Chapters in the book. The volume is organized into four thematic sections: *Olympic Perspectives*; *Identity Matters*; *Internal Order and Security*; and *Caucasian Knots*. Given the complexity of the field and the substantial interlinkages between the issue areas, the reader will find that there is frequent overlap between the sections and also between the Chapters.

Olympic Perspectives

First in this section, Raymond Taras (Tulane University, USA) provides in his Chapter One, “Snow, Ice, and Vertical Drops: What is Different about the Sochi Winter Games?”, a vivid and rich account of the history of the Olympic Winter Games from the IX Games in Innsbruck in 1964 onwards. He provides an overview of the politics of hosting a Winter Olympics and reviews the controversies surrounding them during this period. The Chapter examines what is different about controversies and critiques targeting the Sochi Games, concerning climatic, political, financial, environmental and other aspects. He concludes that the Sochi Games are much like the preceding ones—nationalistic, corrupt, commercialized, securitized, and unfortunately rather insensitive to local cultural and physical environments.

Chapter Two is written by Karin Book (Malmö University, Sweden). The title of her Chapter is “The Sochi Winter Games: Marketing and Sustainable Development—Or Neither Nor?”. Book elaborates on the general phenomenon of international place marketing and the uses and practices of the slogan of sustainable development in connection with marketing of mega events. The Sochi Games serve as an illustrative case in her analysis. She finds that sustainable development can be used in place marketing but may also, if having negative outcomes, be counter-productive. With regard to the Sochi case she is not optimistic and

believes that the 2014 Winter Olympics will be remembered not for their economic and symbolic achievements but for the political, social and environmental damage they have done. However, she concludes, the negative marketing impact will probably not be lasting since international attention will soon be transferred to the host of the next mega event.

Chapter Three has been written by Kutte Jönsson (Malmö University, Sweden) under the title of “Environmental Ethics and the Olympics: On the Reconstruction of Nature for Sport”. Jönsson discusses the moral aspects of the reconstruction of nature for sporting events, of which the 2014 Sochi Games is a glaring example. In his philosophical discussion on the pros and cons of such an extreme makeover Jönsson contends that the Olympic Games in Sochi confirm and strengthen the Olympic ideology since the latter favors the conquering of nature in all its forms. Indeed, he warns, the reconstruction of Sochi’s surrounding natural environment is an example of human hubris, epitomized by the authorities’ ambition to re-introduce the near-extinct Caucasian leopard. However, he argues that reconstructions of nature may also improve the competitions, for instance by making them fairer. His Chapter is a reminder that the moral considerations prompted by sports in general and the masculinized Olympic ideals in particular must never be ignored.

Identity Matters

In Chapter Four, “Olympism and Empire: The Olympic Myth in the Contestation of the Caucasus” Emil Persson (Malmö University/Lund University, Sweden) discusses the discursive battle over the meaning of the Sochi Olympics as an expression of the interethnic contestation of North Caucasus. Using examples from social media, Persson analyses how the Olympic myth, i.e. Olympism and the values connected to it, has been used in connection with the Sochi Olympics. In the Russian state narrative the Sochi Olympics are framed as part of a project of making, by means of infrastructural development and anti-terrorist measures, the North Caucasus a “normal” part of the great power of Russia. In the oppositional Circassian counter-narrative the positive values connected to Olympism are contrasted with repressive policies of the Russian state. In different ways, both the Russian central authorities and the Circassian diaspora therefore use the Olympic myth for their purposes.

Chapter Five is written by Lars Funch Hansen (University of Copenhagen, Denmark) under the title of “Sochi as a Site of Circassian Long-Distance Memorialisation”. He brings in the history of the expansion of the Russian Empire into the North Caucasus, and dwells upon the sig-

nificance of past violence and bloodshed for present-day conflicts. With theoretical inspiration from Pierre Nora, Hansen finds that the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics significantly contribute to the acceleration and spread of the process of memorialisation and mobilisation within the Circassian diaspora in Russia and abroad. He also underlines the key importance of social media in this process. As pointed out above, the Sochi Olympics amount to the Circassians' fifteen minutes of fame in the global media spotlight, and activists have prepared for how to use it best.

Chapter Six is written by Sergei Akopov and Vitalii Volkov (St. Petersburg North-West Institute of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, Russia), and is titled "The Symbols of Sochi 2014: Searching for the Visual Signs of New Russian Political Identity". In the Chapter the authors explore to what extent Russian national identity has evolved into a more broadly defined transnational identity. In order to investigate this they analyze the Russian government's symbolic policy on the Sochi Winter Olympic Games, particularly the short-listing of the official mascots of Sochi 2014. The authors conclude that the symbolic policy on the Sochi Olympics can be seen as relatively balanced between nationalism and transnationalism. However, they do discern some signs that Russia is actually moving towards an identity based less on nationalism and more on transnationalism.

Internal Order and Security

Andrei Makarychev (University of Tartu, Estonia) has written Chapter Seven: "Russia's Olympic Discourses: Effects of Unification and Diversification". He addresses to what extent the sports mega projects held in Russia—the Olympic Games, the Universiade 2013 in Kazan and the FIFA Football World Cup in 2018—can foster further de-centralization and pluralization in the Russian Federation. This policy direction is considered in terms of territorial, social, cultural, ethnic, and other identities that diverge from the unitary discourses imposed from the top of the political system. Or will, Makarychev asks, a different trend prevail, driving Russia towards a more hierarchical, top-down society, as advocated by President Putin? In his analysis the author shows the delicate balance between the two trends, but he does point out a risk that the Sochi Olympics will eventually show a Russia split along ethnic and religious lines.

Chapter Eight, "Securitization in the North Caucasus on the Eve of the Sochi Games", has been written by Uliana Hellberg (Kyiv-Mohyla Acad-

emy, Ukraine) who uses the theoretical insights provided by the so-called Copenhagen School of International Relations. Relying on these, she warns against exaggerating the religious nature of the security threats purportedly destabilizing the region. Many other problems of military, societal, economic, political, and ecological nature constitute part of the security context. Indeed, the over-articulation of certain threats and the use of emergency measures in combating them only serve to entrench the conflict and make peace unachievable, she warns. Such an understanding may help to answer whether fighting what is widely claimed to be an Islamic threat really is the right way to establish peace in the region, Hellberg argues.

In Chapter Nine Jakob Hedenskog (Swedish Defence Research Agency) presents “The Terrorist Threat Against Sochi 2014” where he argues that never before in Olympic history have the Games been held so close to a conflict zone: only a few kilometres away from Abkhazia. The gravest security concerns are, however, the activities of Islamic rebels in North Caucasus. The closer we get to the Games, the more explosive the security situation is likely to be, Hedenskog asserts. He discerns a great risk that North Caucasus Islamist groups will try to use the Sochi Olympics as a target for terrorist attacks, and believes that the Olympic Games in Sochi will become the most security-laden in the history of the Winter Games.

Caucasian Knots

Alexandre Kukhianidze (Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia) discusses in Chapter Ten “Security of the Winter Olympics in Sochi from a Georgian Perspective”. The author argues in his engaged Chapter that one principal goal of the 2008 Russian war against Georgia was to ensure the security of the impending Sochi Olympics. Before and after the war, Russia has repeatedly blamed Georgia for supporting terrorism and attempting to undermine security in the region. The aim of the Chapter is to examine how Georgia perceives the security situation of the Sochi Olympics against the backdrop of Georgian–Russian relations and address how Georgia perceives the current threats to the security of the Games.

Revaz Tchantouria (Malmö University, Sweden) addresses in his Chapter Eleven “Abkhazia and the Preparations for the Sochi Games: Possibilities and Conditions”. His empirical point of departure is the short distance from Sochi to the secessionist Georgian republic of Abkhazia. Tchantouria explores key political and juridical aspects of Abkhazia’s

participation in the preparations of the Sochi Games. Two central problems are discussed in particular: the exploitation of Abkhazia's natural resources and the development of infrastructure in Abkhazia for use in the Olympic Games. Abkhazia has offered construction materials such as sand, minerals and gravel at low prices, minimal transportation costs and inexpensive labour force. These issue-areas display de facto processes of integration of Abkhazia into the Russian Federation, Tchantouria argues.

Finally, in Chapter Twelve, Helena Rytövuori-Apunen (University of Tampere, Finland) presents her "Disputed Frontiers: Abkhazia in Russia's Sochi 2014 Project". She examines Russo-Abkhaz and Russo-Georgian relations through the prism of the Sochi Games. In so doing, she analyzes how Abkhazia serves to expand Russia's geopolitical borders and how the Sochi Games project is being used by Russia to attain this goal. There is an intense discursive battle, Rytövuori-Apunen argues, between Russia and Georgia about the legality of the boundaries and the territorial unity of the two states.

Note on Transliteration

For transliteration of Russian words and names from the Cyrillic alphabet we use the Modified Library of Congress System, with exceptions for the uses of "yu", "ya" and the soft sign, the latter of which is omitted in our transliterations.

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PART I

OLYMPIC PERSPECTIVES

CHAPTER ONE

SNOW, ICE, AND VERTICAL DROPS: WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THE SOCHI WINTER GAMES?

RAYMOND TARAS

How do the 2014 Winter Olympics in the Black Sea resort of Sochi measure up to a half-century of Winter Games? Which controversies and problems that affected the twelve preceding Games also troubled Sochi? On the other hand, can we identify issues unique to the southern Russian city which justify speaking of Russian exceptionalism?

This Chapter provides an overview of the politics of hosting a Winter Olympics. It reviews the controversies that swirled around 50 previous years of Winter Games beginning with the IX Games of 1964. Over this period two-time host nations included Austria, Canada, France, Japan and the US. All these Olympics were held in mountain regions of these countries so how is it that the first Winter Games to be staged in a northern country like Russia are located in a southern seaside resort? This Chapter examines what is different about controversies and critiques targeting the Sochi Games. Can this subtropical town count on “wintry” conditions in adjoining mountains for the Games? Are physical facilities up to global standards? Or can we treat the semi-tropical surroundings for Winter Olympics in Sochi as a “dry run” for future Winter Olympics under conditions of global warming? Are they more professionalized, commercialized, corrupted, and nationalistic than ever, as critics suggest? Will television networks manipulate sport events to improve ratings, nudging them further into entertainment rather than athleticism? Are security threats greater than ever? Can international politics trump international sports and produce another boycott by countries of the Olympics?

This Chapter makes the case that the Sochi Games are much like preceding ones—nationalistic, corrupt, commercialized, securitized, and insensitive to local cultural and physical environments.