

## REGIONALENTWICKLUNG

### **SOČI-2014 AND SUSTAINABILITY POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICTS – LOCAL PERCEPTION**

Kurt SCHARR, and Ernst STEINICKE, both Innsbruck\*

with 8 Fig. and 1 Tab. in the text

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#### *Zusammenfassung*

##### *Soči-2014 und Nachhaltigkeit: Konfliktpotenzial und lokale Wahrnehmung*

*Die Wahl von Soči als Austragungsort der XXII. Winterspiele in der subtropischen Schwarzmeerregion mag selbst für Geographen eine Überraschung gewesen sein. Bis 2007 verband man mit dieser Stadt lediglich ihre Funktion als Sommerressort für privilegierte Sowjetbürger und nach dem wirtschaftlichen Dauertief der 1990er Jahre für die Klasse der Neureichen. Im Februar 2014 wird erstmals seit der Auflösung des Warschauer Paktes in einem Land des vormaligen Ostblocks dieses Mega-Sport-Event ausgetragen. Die Organisation der Olympischen Winterspiele 2014 in einem dezidierten Konfliktraum gerät dabei schon vorab zur Bühne einer sich global neu positionierenden Kreml-Machtelite. Aus dem Blickwinkel der Nachhaltigkeit versucht dieser Beitrag – als Teil einer ex-ante Analyse – sowohl die Besonderheiten natur-*

\* Priv.-Doz. Mag. Dr. Kurt SCHARR, Institut für Interdisziplinäre Gebirgsforschung, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Technikerstraße 21a, ICT-Gebäude, A-6020 Innsbruck; e-mail: kurt.scharr@uibk.ac.at, <http://www.mountainresearch.at/index.php/de/team-de/80-team-de/295-kurt-scharr.html>;  
ao. Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Ernst STEINICKE, Institut für Geographie, Universität Innsbruck, Innrain 52, A-6020 Innsbruck; e-mail: ernst.steinicke@uibk.ac.at, <http://www.uibk.ac.at/geographie/personal/steinicke>

*räumlicher und kultureller Regionalstrukturen im Westkaukasus zu thematisieren als auch auf das hier vorhandene Konfliktpotenzial hinzuweisen. Darüber hinaus soll die lokale Wahrnehmung von Soči-2014 berücksichtigt werden. Die Autoren stellen dabei nicht nur die Frage nach der unterschiedlichen Zustimmung sozialer Gruppen und nach den Faktoren, die zu einer positiven Haltung zu den Spielen führen, sondern wollen auch vorhandene Tendenzen verstehen und neue Einsichten im Hinblick auf eine nachhaltige Regionalentwicklung gewinnen.*

## Summary

*The suitability of the subtropical Black Sea city of Soči as place for the XXII Winter Olympic Games may have been a surprise – even for geographers. Until 2007 Soči was known in the Western world as a summer resort for the elite of the Soviet working class and later for the higher social classes of the new Russia. In February 2014, for the first time after the fall of the Iron Curtain a post-socialist country will host this mega sports event. The image-pregnant Winter Games 2014 are essentially a manifestation and repositioning of a resurrected “new Russia” on the international political stage in an area extremely conflict-ridden since the decay of the Soviet Union. Viewed from the perspective of sustainability, this paper – part of an ex-ante analysis – focuses on significant natural and cultural regional structures in this Western Caucasus area as well as on the potential for conflict there. Moreover, it addresses also the local perception of Soči-2014. The contribution does not only question how support differs across social groups and what factors predict support for the Olympic Winter Games, but seeks also to gain an understanding of tendencies and new insights in regard to a sustainable regional development.*

## 1 Motivation and research concept

Festivalisation and major sporting events such as football championships and the Olympic Games are international events, celebrated by the global media, which most often generate socio-economic, ecological, cultural, and urban changes in their respective venues (PREUSS et al. 2009, 2010; BENNEWORTH & DAUNCEY 2010; MÜLLER 2012). While the private economy uses large-scale sporting events for individual marketing, the interest of countries and cities, insofar as based on the organisation of mega-sports functions, focuses primarily on the expected national and regional developmental impulses as well as on political expression (SCHARR et al. 2012).

After two failed bids (in 1989 and 2002), the IOC chose the Black Sea coastal city of Soči in 2007 to host the 2014 Winter Olympics.<sup>1)</sup> The mega-sports project provides the region with a range of instruments favoured by the centralised state that makes it

<sup>1)</sup> XXII Olympic Winter Games and the XI Paralympic Winter Games 2014 (in the following chapters also called *Soči-2014*).

seem feasible to close structural gaps fairly soon. The necessary adaptations must be completed in a relatively short time (by the end of January 2014 at the latest). This is the source of various problems, some of them severe, since the traditionally authoritarian and hyper-centralist Russian structures (GOEHRKE 2010; PETROV 2012) and the general lack of a civil society hardly permit any bottom-up processes. The Winter Games are thus a political prestige project that is in danger of demanding too much of the region. The political mission of the Games, i.e. to emphasise Russia's new strength in its foreign policy, was already clearly stated in 2006 during an official meeting of the Russian Government attended by President V.V. Putin (KOROTKIJ et al. 2008).

In view of the fact that winter sports do not have any tradition at this Black Sea summer resort, it seems prudent to analyse natural and cultural structures fundamental to the Olympics. They are also central to assessing the sustainability potential – the major objective of this study – of the Olympic event *Soči-2014*. Thus, key issues of this contribution are: Will *Soči-2014* give the region long-term impetus for tourism and economy and also for the environment, i.e. can the effects of these Games be sustainable? The question arises also whether this event can play a pivotal role in generating or resolving conflict. In this context it is advantageous to gain insight into the opinion of the population of Soči city and neighbouring areas about these Winter Games.

Apart from the studies of MÜLLER (2009; 2011; 2012), who provides an overview over the current status of research and discusses the state influence governing the Soči Winter Olympic Games and the popular perception of this mega-event, only few scientific works relevant to *Soči-2014* and hardly any empirical studies exist; nonetheless, older and newer, mostly so-called 'grey' literature, which is hardly available, addresses individual aspects of the region (SALPAGAROVA 2000; NIKOLIN 2005; KONCEVAJA 2007; KLIMOV 2010). In addition, discussions about meaningfulness and the backdrop of *Soči-2014* occur in the domestic media – so far as the political situation in the Russian media landscape permits. In particular, the Russian domestic media discusses questions about the relationship between democracy and the authoritarian style of government in the Russian Federation (R.F.) (KASPAROV 2008).

On the other hand, numerous authors, most notably in the past twenty years, focused on the economic and territorial impact of large-scale sporting events (e.g., RAHMANN et al. 1998; MAENNIG 1998; JEANRENAUD 1999; FANELSA 2003; HORN & ZEMANN 2006; DANSERO & MELA 2007; SMITH & FOX 2007; KURSCHIEDT et al. 2008; FLÜCHTER & WANG 2008; PREUSS 2011; PREUSS et al. 2009, 2010; BENNEWORTH & DAUNCEY 2010; MÜLLER 2012). Rarely, however, has the scope included the potential for conflict as well as all three dimensions (i.e. ecological, social and economic) of sustainability.

Until well into the 1980s, only the ecological aspect was regarded with the term "sustainability." Only with the Brundtland Report in 1987 and the new definition of "sustainable development",<sup>2)</sup> a concept was introduced that includes, in addition to environmental concerns, economic and social aspects (cf. BRUNDTLAND 1987; JÖRISSEN 2005). Since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, this new concept of sustainability has its firm place in almost all documents and discourses on regional

<sup>2)</sup> "Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (BRUNDTLAND 1987, p. 43).

development and planning. However, with its diverse and sometimes conflicting use and often strategic functionalisation by various political actors, the term has become an empty phrase that does not do justice to the fundamental intention of the concept (BRAND 2004; KATES et al. 2005).

To date, mainstream research of major sporting events has focussed mostly on their short-term economic effects (ANDRANOVICH et al. 2001; GELAN 2003; PREUSS 2004; JONES & MUNDAY 2004; DANIELS et al. 2004; LEE & TAYLOR 2005). More generally, only a limited number of studies span the entire duration of an event; they are conducted primarily preceding (ex-ante), seldom following (ex-post) the occasion.

A study group on "sustainability in large sports events", formed at the University of Innsbruck following the ex-ante and ex-post evaluation of the UEFA Soccer Championship *Euro 2008* in Switzerland and Austria (BORS DORF & STEINICKE 2009), designed a longitudinal approach for identifying the impacts of *Soči-2014* on the local population, settlement, and economy. The project assumes the basic view that studies for the benefits of sustainability are only meaningful if the situation prior to the large-scale event is scrutinised with the same thoroughness as the aftereffects. The University of Innsbruck research design encompasses both these major levels of analysis. The study group already produced several ex-ante analyses of *Soči-2014*, each of them focusing on a specific aspect: nature, history, population, settlements, or conflicts (SCHARR & STEINICKE 2010, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; SCHARR et al. 2012).

This paper contains most of these aspects in an integrated manner – but viewed from the perspective of sustainability. In addition to the presentation of essential regional structures and conflict potential, it also addresses the local perception of *Soči-2014*. Unlike ZHOU & AP (2009) for Beijing, HILLER & WANNER (2011) for Vancouver, or MÜLLER (2012) for Soči, the current study does not only question how support differs across social groups and what factors predict support for the XXII Olympic Winter Games, but seeks also to gain an understanding of tendencies and new insights in regard to a sustainable regional development.

From the less than abundant volume of research to date, specifically regarding the question of sustainability, the following main hypothesis can be deduced for the Soči Winter Olympic Games:

The Winter Games do not lead to a sustainable regional development of the Soči region. Although there will be sufficient infrastructure, the economic potential for winter tourism is extremely low. Moreover, *Soči-2014* is a typical top-down project and participation of the public plays no role at all. Additionally, a part of the Olympic infrastructures seriously affects the existing National Park and the Biosphere territory of Kavkazskij Zapovednik. Overall, it therefore follows that the project of *Soči-2014* has no potential for sustainability, neither in social terms nor in terms of ecology and economy.

In addition to the evaluation of the status quo of the research and of some official statistics, this project seeks to obtain data from standardised interviews, from varying forms of qualitative interviews and from mapping activities. Repeatedly published (e.g. SCHARR et al. 2012), the historical background will not be addressed in the current contribution.



## 2 Spatial characteristics of Soči-2014 – potential for conflicts

Soči is an unexpected choice of site for Winter Games, both for its absolute and its relative location in the transition zone between European and Asian cultures. The main venue of Soči is situated immediately on the north-eastern coast of the Black Sea, at 43° northern latitude, approximately equivalent to Nice in geo-ecologic terms. Just a few hundred meters inland, the contours rise markedly; less than 50 km inland the western Caucasus reaches altitudes of more than 3,300 m. Flora and Fauna are therefore of great diversity in this area. The only area of subtropical climate in the Russian Federation is found here. A national park affiliated with the UNESCO program 'Man and Biosphere' (since 1979) and designated World Natural Heritage (in 1999) reflects this exceptional situation of diversity on different scales (cf. BRINIĆ et al. 2000; SCHMIDT et al. 2006). The area of the Olympic Coastal Cluster (Olympic Village I and Olympic sports facilities) on the Imeritinskaja Buhta (Bay) near Adler is expected to be the warmest region in the Russian Federation during the Olympic Games in February even though heavy snowfalls are not rare in that period (STADELBAUER 1990). The close proximity of the sea to the highest mountain range in Europe is responsible for the considerable precipitation rate, which falls as snow in the mountains during the cold season.

Within the rather dense setting of nature, society and persistent historical structures of this region, we can explore various ecological, socio-economic and ethno-political fields of potential conflict that are strongly influenced by the Olympic Winter Games, its preparations and aftermaths.

### 2.1 Ecological dimension

The topography around Soči is characterised by a narrow coastal strip and the main ridge of the Caucasus rising sharply only a few kilometers inland. During the Soviet period, the increase in population in this confined space, combined with the dense tourist infrastructure, created heightened traffic tension. Since 2007 this situation has been exacerbated by a migration of locals into more affordable zones at the city's fringes. While trendsetting ideas to resolve these traffic problems have been widely ignored (e.g. KOROTKIJ et al. 2008), traditional concepts (such as a new highway) have been adopted – not always taking the particular topographical situation of Greater Soči into account. Additionally, this conurbation currently does not have a sufficient drinking water supply, connection to central heating, or electricity grid. Further, the waste-water system is overloaded, and most of the waste water remains untreated and is led either directly through pipes or indirectly through natural tributaries into the sea. In 1995, a study highlighted the extraordinary pollution of the coastal waterways by the central settlement area around Soči (NAGALEVSKIJ & ČISTJAKOV 2003). In contrast, other authors refer to existing projects within the urban development plans concerning *Soči-2014* in order to cope with rising ecological risks (BORISOV & MARŠALKOVIĆ 2012). Some of these plans were promised to be implemented by 2014.

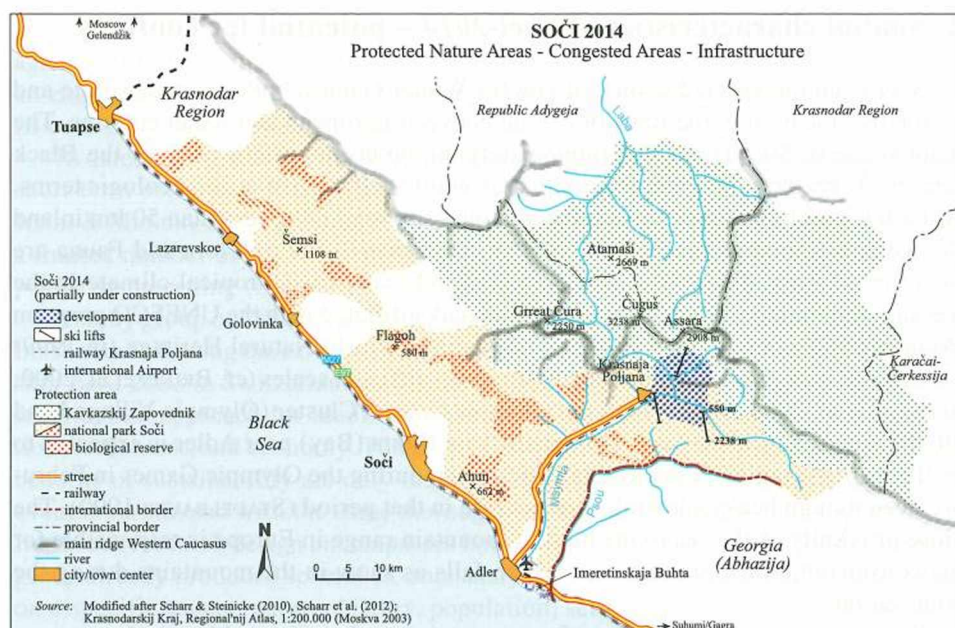


Fig. 1: Soči-2014 – protected areas and sports infrastructure

The mission of the Soči National Park to protect the native habitat is severely compromised by its patchwork structure within the urban area and along the Mzymta valley (see Fig. 1). To date, the zonation of the National Park, however, has been no obstacle to tourist use around Krasnaja Poljana; quite the opposite, the development of tourism was included in the original concept for the Park (AVDONIN 2000). While a number of Russian academics (e.g. BOGOLJUBOVA & NIKOLAEVA 2011) agree to this proposition, it remains to be seen whether holding the Olympic Games is at all compatible with the conservation principles of a national park. This is also true for the Biosphere territory of Kavkazskij Zapovednik, although building activities (hotels, ski runs, etc.) so far have only happened just outside its boundaries (see Fig. 2) as a part of the Olympic Mountain Cluster. As billboards and posters in the Gazprom ski area of Krasnaja Poljana promise, however, the existing plans for expansion into the protected areas could be implemented after the Games – if the number of tourists increases.

Greater Soči is also confronted with at least three natural hazards. First, in Krasnaja Poljana the enlarged settlement areas (buildings, transport facilities, infrastructure) will face an increased risk of avalanche activity (STETHAM 2008; KANONNIKOVA 2012). Second, the outflow regime of the Mzymta river, coming from Krasnaja Poljana valley, is characterised by a typical Mediterranean climate in which precipitation peaks in late autumn and winter and in the form of torrential downpours. In the area of the Western Caucasus source and mouth of the creeks are close together, the average gradient of the Mzymta bed is particularly high and even in the delta area the current

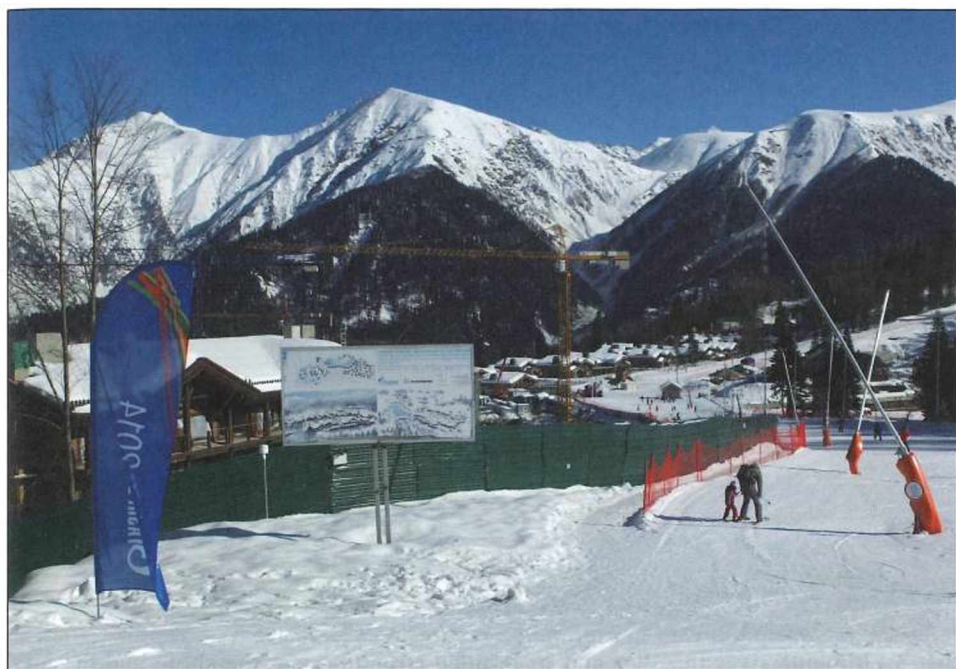


Fig. 2: Laura skiing area of the Gazprom company (part of the Olympic Mountain Cluster). At an altitude of 1,400 m numerous cottages and ski lifts are built, extremely close to the main Western Caucasus ridge and the biosphere territory. A dense set of snow canons guarantees sufficient snow cover (photograph by the authors, February 2013).

is considerable. The force of the torrent in the cold season is enormous and the risk of flooding is therefore high. Due to building numerous new complexes (including the new airport) erected in the last years, the potential of damages has significantly increased (see Fig. 3). Third, Greater Soči is located in an active seismic zone (MALO-FEEVA et al. 2012). The latter, due to time pressure and rising estate prices, has not always been taken into consideration.

## 2.2 Socio-economic dimension

The conurbation of Soči stretches along a narrow, 145 km band, running parallel to the Black Sea coast line between Tuapse and Adler. The total population numbers nearly 397,000, of which 134,000 live in the central part of the town. In ethnic terms, Russians are the majority in Soči (>70%). Armenians, Ukrainians and Georgians, as well as Adyghes (Circassians) form large minorities as well (census data of 2010).<sup>3)</sup>

<sup>3)</sup> [http://www.perepis-2010.ru/results\\_of\\_the\\_census/results-inform.php](http://www.perepis-2010.ru/results_of_the_census/results-inform.php)





Fig. 3: Mzymta river in Adler and its braided structure near the shore and the city park; in the background the Caucasus (photograph by the authors, February 2013).

During the Soviet period, the Caucasus region and the Black Sea coast provided almost 40% of all hotel beds within the former Soviet Union (NOACK 2006). Overnight stays in the region fell drastically between 1991 and 2000, and the share of state- or city-owned hotels decreased from 13% to 1.2%. But still, Soči has the highest density in recreational infrastructure within the Russian Federation. In the last decade tourism has recovered, and in 2010 – after several years of constant growth – Soči registered about 3.1 million arrivals (i.e. approximately 14% of the total number in Russia) (SNEGIREVA 2012, pp. 105–106). At the same time, population figures have also grown continuously (see Tab. 1).

Area	1900	1915	1939	1959	1970	1989	2010
Soči centre	1,400	11,000	71,000	127,000			
Greater Soči after 1968					224,000	312,000	332,000 <sup>4)</sup>

Source: KONCEVAJA (2007, p. 92) and census data 2010; presented by the authors

Table 1: Population growth of Soči 1900–2010

<sup>4)</sup> Inhabitants of neighbouring rural areas (about 65,000) are not included.

The economic ideas of the profitability of large sports events (cf. PREUSS' Munich study 2011) can hardly be applied to the Russian case, where market economy principles are subordinate to political decisions. The enormous time pressure to deliver, with the state powers as the only drivers, minimizes any opportunity for participation in political decisions from the start (CHEPIKOVA & LEISSE 2010). For example, the local population is powerless to oppose the compulsory purchase of its land or its relocation from the Imeretinskaja Buhta to make way for Olympic sports venues and athletes' accommodations. This situation is comparable to that in preparation for the Beijing Games (FLÜCHTER & WANG 2008). Concerning these various problems, the former prime minister and leader of Russian opposition B. NEMCOV recently asked repeatedly about the "Olympic Winter Games in subtropics – but what will come after them?" (NEMCOV 2013).

### 2.3 Ethno-political dimension

In the southwest of Russia the Krasnodarskij kraj (Krasnodar Region) and the Respublika Adygeija (since 1992) are two federation subjects with independent jurisdiction. The latter is completely surrounded by the Region; the Kavkazskij Zapovednik is partly situated in the southern area of the Republic. The elevation from autonomous region to the status of a republic has to be seen as a concession to the titular nation (Adyghes), the second-largest ethnic group after Russians. In functional and economic terms, however, the republic is tightly interwoven with Krasnodar and dependent on it. In Soči, the collective memory of the systematic expulsion of the local Circassian population after the military conquest by Tsarist Russia in 1864 is negligible, in contrast to the situation in the northern Caucasian republics (KING 2008; KHODARKOVSKY 2011). In the course of the fight for a share of the incoming investment in the preparations for *Soči-2014*, however, a noticeable instrumentalisation of this historic tragedy (with a political background) is taking place (NEFLJAŠEVA & MALAŠENKO 2011). Even back in the early 1990s, Adyghes in Russia had supported Abhazian separatists in Georgia (O'LOUGHLIN et al. 2007). Concerning other nationalities (e.g. Armenians), the Region's administration fosters, at least officially, special programs of 'national teaching' [Nacional'naja škola] towards tolerance in Greater Soči (PETROVA 2012).

This opens up an indirect connection with the more severe foreign policy conflict on the southern border of Russia, particularly with the Republic of Georgia. The war of 2008 over the Georgian provinces of South Ossetia and Abhazija – the latter less than 50 km away from the centre of Soči – ended in the declaration of two vassal states of Russia that are not internationally recognised. This reinforced the conflict between Russia and Georgia, which has been rumbling on since 1991. With its military intervention, Moscow not only succeeded in creating a *cordon sanitaire* around the Games but also paved the way for Russian investment in this region (ANONYMUS 2008). Abhazija remains a geopolitical uncertainty issue in close proximity to the 2014 Winter Games. Russian scholars prefer to highlight the positive side of the coin, for example: emphasising the important role of the Russian state in guaranteeing sovereignty and assuring the independent development of the Abhazian people, who

are predominantly Russian citizens as well (PETROVA 2011); and supporting Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's opinion that the attempted political blackmail of *Soči-2014* is conducted by "some foreign states" who are – seen from the Kremlin perspective – "ignorant and poor" (NUŽDĚNOV 2011, pp. 122f.).

### 3 Perceptions in Soči – results of two surveys

Any assessment of the effects of mega-events requires input from public opinion from which opportunities and risks can be derived. In the following sections we present the results of two investigations, a standardised survey (September 2011) as well as a long-term, partly structured survey (September 2008 – February 2013).

In order to capture and record residents' impressions, opinions and interests regarding *Soči-2014*, the University of Innsbruck researchers chose as their instrument of data acquisition a standardised questionnaire containing closed and hybrid questions. The survey, however, does not only include common questions to the opinions of the residents – how they assess the Winter Games and what they expect, which MÜLLER (2012) also addressed, but it specifically highlights public opinion regarding the sustainability potential of the mega-event. Unlike the MÜLLER study, our evaluations are broken down by locations in the Soči area, as they refer not only to the city of Soči but also to Adler (population 2010: 69,120) and Krasnaja Poljana (population 2010: 3,969). Given the politically sensitive nature of the research, some topics (for example, the forced relocation of residents) were excluded from the 2011 questionnaire.

Addressing this issue, the second source of revealing information is a survey conducted as a 5-year-longitudinal analysis based on various qualitative interviews. The main objectives are to explore the current situation and problems of the people relocated from the Imeretinskaja Buhta, where the Olympic Coastal Cluster, including the Olympic village I, was constructed (see Fig. 7).

#### 3.1 Special methodology of the standardised interviews

The research team had basic problems with the definition of target populations as well as with the sample. Convenience sampling (see below) does not allow the application of techniques of statistical inference. It was clear from the outset that the survey results would reflect only approximate values and tendencies; therefore the survey has only limited validity. Since this contribution is aimed at generating new research questions regarding sustainable regional development, the effects of the statistical inconsequence are negligible. Regardless, the technique to collect the data was worked out carefully.

When designing the questionnaire (written in the Russian language), importance was placed on reflecting as closely as possible the actual perception of the residents regarding *Soči-2014*. Options for responses were offered in the form of a rating scale that extends over four levels of evaluation, positive to negative. Preliminary tests were



held at the University of Innsbruck as well as on site. The evaluation of the interviews and the data analysis were carried out immediately after the field study.

The translation of questions into another language represents a critical issue in circumstances of great cultural differentiation. In the course of the data acquisition, for example, it became apparent that the residents questioned held varying views of the terms environment and environmental protection. Therefore one must be aware of an occasional slight distortion of the portrayal resulting from the survey data.

The interviews were conducted in the centre of Soči (Soči Centre) and in the settlements Adler and Krasnaja Poljana that are part of the linear urbanised area. The number of completed questionnaires is 81 in Soči, 21 in Adler, and eight in Krasnaja Poljana, which generally corresponds with the population ratios. Even in light of the points of criticism above, the 110 completed questionnaires supply a data base suitable to analyse and interpret the perceptions of the respondents regarding the Olympic Winter Games 2014.<sup>5)</sup>

### 3.2 Results

Most of the general questions provided similar responses to those MÜLLER (2012) presented in his study: There is great interest in the event itself. Although the unfavourable perception of impacts exceeds positive expectations, we can observe more supporters than opponents, and the population of Greater Soči views its function as host of the Olympic Winter Games with pride. On the other hand, *Soči-2014* causes additional traffic jams and leads to an increase in cost of living. In the current contribution we therefore limit ourselves to a closer look at questions referring to sustainability of the new regional development.

Examining the official statistics of 2010 we could learn, however, that our sample approximately corresponds to Soči's population structure: two thirds are between 16 and 54/59 years old. In terms of ethnicity, too, the survey reflects the expected ethnic diversity of the population.

The results show that the over 41-year olds, in particular the category over 51, rather reject *Soči-2014*. This clearly contrasts with the responses of the younger generation. Over two thirds of the up to 20-year olds are enthusiastic about hosting the Games. An important indication for the general attitude and also for social sustainability represents the question of the cohesion of the population as a result of the Olympic Winter Games. Almost 70% of respondents believe that *Soči-2014* will enhance the sense of community. Conversely, one quarter of respondents stated that the community spirit would not benefit from the Games at all.

For *Soči-2014*, most sports venues need to be newly constructed. This raises the question of whether these will still be sufficiently utilised after the Games. To find the answer, a prior discussion of fundamental factors seems necessary.

<sup>5)</sup> Further explanations to specific methodology and the comprehensive results cf. SCHARR & STEINICKE (2012b, pp. 161–181).

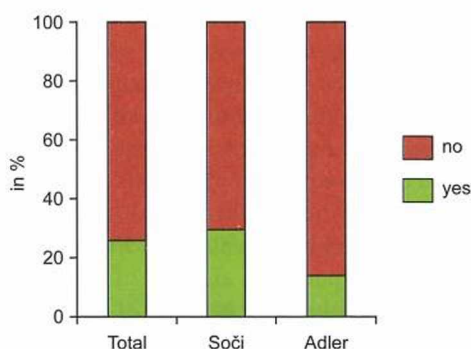


Fig. 4: Do you pursue winter sports? (Total n=110, Soči-Centre n=81, Adler n=21, K.P.=8)

Winter sports come with high costs; equipment and tickets are not affordable for all social classes. Russian salaries are low compared to those in Alpine countries, and due to the prevailing high costs of living the financial abilities of many residents are limited. On the other hand, the resort benefits from the influx of skilled labourers. Analysis of the questionnaires reveals that mostly the younger generation practices winter sports. Those engaged in snow sports preferred skiing or snowboarding; only one person claimed to have started cross-country skiing. Of interest is also that many of the respondents added that they had only recently started to practice winter sports. The duration of this leisure activity, the interviewees responded, is mostly restricted to the last ten years. Only two people over 51 declared they had skied since their school years.

Since at least one quarter of the respondents pursue winter sports, it would be interesting to learn how many people overall will use the sports facilities.

54% of the interviewees stated that they intend actively to use the new sports facilities. Since nearly three-quarters of the respondents reported not to practice any

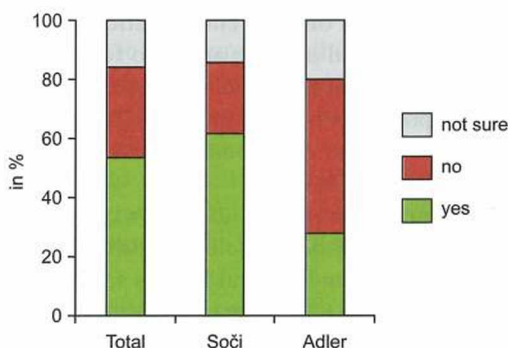


Fig. 5: Do you intend to use the new sports facilities? (Total n=110, Soči-Centre n=81, Adler n=21, K.P.=8)

winter sports, one could deduce that some may want to begin after *Soči-2014*. 31% do not intend to use the new sports facilities in the future. There is a perceptible difference between Soči Centre and Adler. While 62% of the respondents in Soči Centre consider using the sports facilities, in Adler only 29% answered that they would. The often provided “no response” might indicate that the survey participants have not yet given thought to future use of the sports amenities. Beyond that, the usage fees represent a limiting factor. The practice of winter sports is a privilege – also in the region of Soči – for the upper social classes who live in the city centre rather than in Adler.

A key issue around *Soči-2014* is the degree of use of the new sports features and hotels after the Olympic Games. Can tourism be stimulated to such a level that the facilities created will be sufficiently utilised? To what extent will the investments in the billions of Euros beforehand advance the future developments in Soči? The essential question here is whether in the future the sports facilities will be sufficiently frequented by both tourists and the local population. Therefore the initial question is how many of the respondents who conduct winter sports will use the sports resources.

Of those practicing winter sports, 55% declare that they will use the new sports facilities; at present almost one quarter already rules this out. On the other hand, only about a quarter of the respondents state that they pursue winter sports. Therefore it is genuinely possible that the number of winter sports athletes may increase in the period leading up to the Olympic Games. 60% of respondents in Soči Centre imagine that they will be physically more active in the future. Conversely, 32% believe they will not. In Adler the respondents are ambivalent: 43% expect that their sports activity will increase, 48% believe it will not.

At the time of the field studies in Soči, it did not appear as if the city and region would benefit aesthetically from the Olympic Games. Nevertheless, slightly less than half the interviewees state that Soči is definitely becoming “more beautiful.” Unlike Soči Centre, in Adler the general opinion is again ambivalent: 38% express the view that the wider area gains from the Games, while one third disagrees with this outlook. The people interviewed in Krasnaja Poljana are mainly of the opinion that their home region is becoming more presentable through the influence of the Games. The results

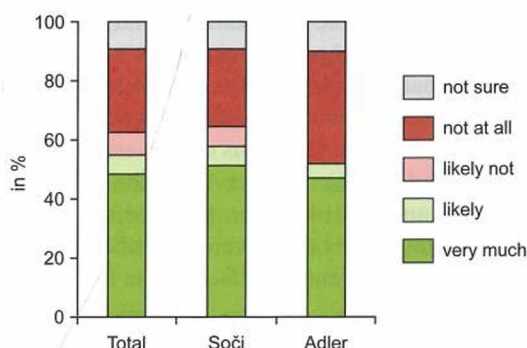


Fig. 6: Impacts on the environment (Total n=110, Soči-Centre n=81, Adler n=21, K.P.=8)

in Adler can most likely be tracked to the enormous structural changes in the Mzymta Delta. In Krasnaja Poljana the development of the technical infrastructure undoubtedly also plays a role. It is also possible that the respondents have different views on what constitutes attractiveness, as numerous construction sites were developed in the whole region in preparation for the Games. High-rise buildings, hotels, and new transport infrastructure emerged from the ground. In order to evaluate the overall positive attitude about the impact of the Games on the attractiveness of Soči, it is useful to consider certain aspects in more detail. How, for example, will the environment change through the Olympic Games?

More than half of all respondents believe that the environmental situation will definitely deteriorate. In contrast, 35% link the current changes in urban and rural areas with a positive influence on the environment. The interviewees in Soči Centre are more optimistic in this concern than those in Adler. The survey results were unequivocal in Krasnaja Poljana. None of the respondents there believe in an improvement to the environmental conditions.

In Central Europe, the support of the population for mega-sporting events is an important factor (SCHARR & STEINICKE 2012b). Without the general consent of those persons affected, the implementation of plans would be difficult; public meetings and information sessions are held ahead of those events. But how do the preparations play out in Soči? Do the residents in the metropolitan area feel sufficiently informed of the actions around the planning and implementation of the Winter Games?

38% said they felt very well informed about *Soči-2014*, 31% of the respondents stated that they were enlightened only to a very limited extent about the preparations. To deduce generalities from this, more than half the respondents feel well informed – and 44% not adequately – of the developments in relation to the Winter Games. The results varied between Adler and Soči Centre: more than a third of respondents in Soči Centre consider themselves very well in the picture about the preparations, whereas somewhat less than a third felt poorly informed. 43% in Adler stated to be very well up-to-date about the Games, and the same percentage regards itself very lacking in information. The residents of Krasnaja Poljana felt comparatively the most informed (almost living in the centre of Olympic Mountain Cluster). What “informed” implies, however, will only become clear when the responses to the question of where the interviewees get their information will be examined in more detail. The respondents obtained their information mainly from television and radio, and less often from the Internet, newspapers, work, school, institutions or universities. Thus, for the 110 people interviewed, the mass media especially served as the main source of information about the Olympic Winter Games 2014. Given the enormous financial burden of the organisers, the question remains largely unanswered whether the provided infrastructure for tourism and sports will be sufficiently utilised in the future. International tourism will thereby play a vital role.

When asked whether international tourism will increase in Soči, 54% of respondents expect an unfavourable and 35% a positive development – despite hosting one of the largest sporting-events worldwide and standing in the global spotlight for several



weeks. Here, too, it is evident that the residents of the affected areas take a very critical stance towards the developments around the Olympic Games. Regarding domestic tourism, the respondents' assessment is also largely negative. Half of them expected no profit for the domestic tourism from the Games. 42% believed in a favourable development, particularly evident in Adler, where more than 70% anticipated an improvement in domestic tourism.

### 3.3 Relocated residents from Imeretinskaja Buhta

At the time of bidding for *Soči-2014* it was already clear that the Olympic sports facilities, as well as the Olympic Village I, would be located east of Adler, in approximately ten square kilometers in the Imeretinskaja Buhta, and therefore the resettlement of residents would be necessary. This began in 2007 with the "Olympics Law 310" (cf. specifically article 15)<sup>6)</sup>: Local residents were compensated with alternative accommodation and/or cash payments.

Except for the flood-prone delta of the Mzymta-wash, the sparsely populated Imeretinskaja Buhta is the only level coastal area of the long-stretched conurbation. Until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this marshy area, situated partly below sea level, was unhealthy for human living conditions. In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a widespread system of water canals was built to drain the swampy coastal zone and to make the ground fertile (DOBROHOTOV 1916, pp. 292 and 334). Until 2005, a most intensively farmed region has emerged there, and in the 2006 Google satellite image the high number of greenhouses is still apparent. In the Soviet period, housing settlements arose only on the northern edge of the polder and along the coast, where the houses grow dense in the east toward the village Vesëloe, which borders directly onto Abhazija. For the construction of the Olympic Coastal Cluster, however, the 5 km long, narrow ribbon settlement along the beach between the mouth of the Mzymta and Vesëloe had to be relocated. In a comparison of Google's satellite images of 2006 and 2011 it is obvious that both the total greenhouse industry as well as some 150 garden houses, about half of them dachas, were removed. Scattered expropriated houses and former tourist camps were allowed to remain, because they could serve as accommodation for the construction workers. Although exact figures are not available, it can be assumed that approximately 500 permanent residents were affected by resettlement. For these, single- and multi-family dwellings were provided in the east of the polder region (see Fig. 7).

To gain insight into the matter of the resettlement projects, twelve experts were surveyed in a snowball analysis during three visits between September 2008 and October 2011 (four from the Municipal Council Soči, two from the Organising Com-

<sup>6)</sup> Federal Law 310/FZ: On the Organisation and Holding of the XXII Olympic Winter Games and the XI Paralympic Winter Games 2014 in Soči, the Development of Soči as a Mountain Climate Resort and the Amendment of Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation; adopted by the State Duma on November 16, 2007 and approved by the Federation Council on November 23, 2007. – [http://sochi2014.blob.core.windows.net/storage/games/legal/folder/olympic\\_law\\_eng\\_new.pdf](http://sochi2014.blob.core.windows.net/storage/games/legal/folder/olympic_law_eng_new.pdf)

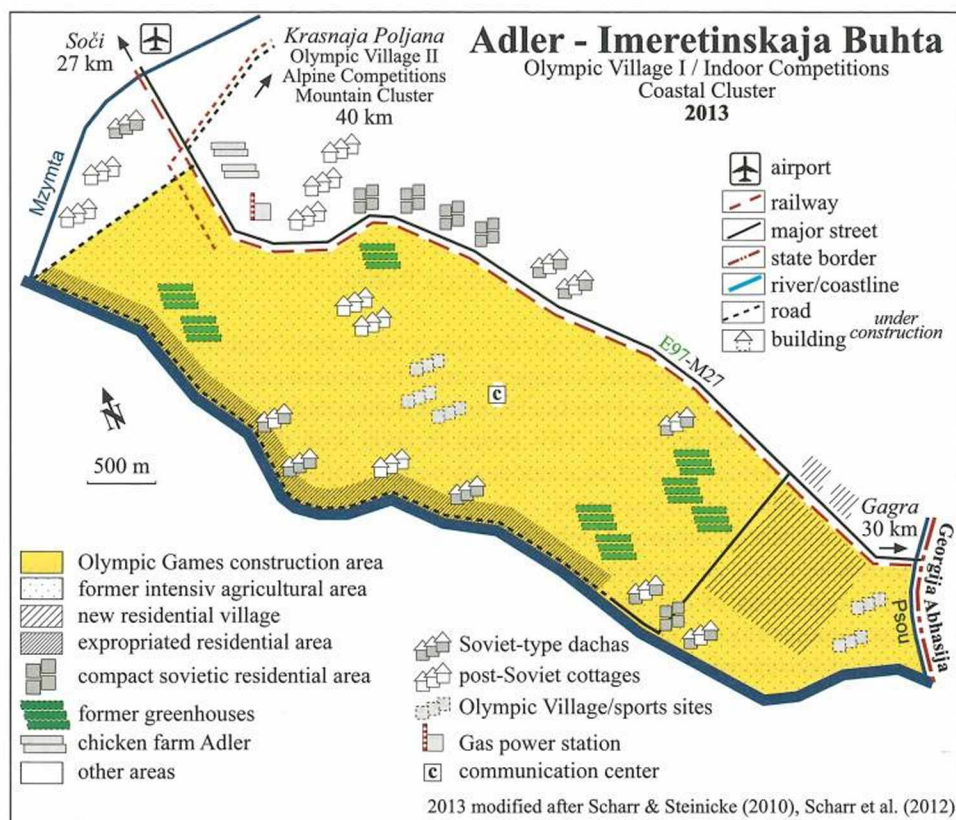


Fig. 7: The Olympic Coastal Cluster in the Imeretinskaja Buhta

mittee Soči-2014, and six from the University of Soči). It should be pointed out that we were denied examination of official documents regarding the expropriations: the Organising Committee would not have permitted it without considerable bureaucratic red tape. All interviewees expressed regret about the expropriations, but most of them agreed that the provided replacements would be affordable homes for the settlers. In addition, they related, the new buildings would be better equipped, particularly the sanitary facilities. Furthermore, the new homes also possess additional and generous garden plots. Lastly, it should not be overlooked that the vast majority of alternative accommodation would be located in the immediate vicinity of their original homes.

So much for the actual people affected. Even a cursory media analysis (e.g. TEUFFEL 2013) shows that this positive attitude is not shared at all by the international journalists, however. Expropriations simply stand in contradiction with the Olympic spirit. It is noticeable, however, that the new situation of the evacuees is scarcely the subject of the representations. This may not be surprising, particularly since an official survey of resettlers is difficult because the entire construction area of the Olympic Coastal Cluster is guarded by police and private security firms, and official permission is required for surveys. An exception is the cinematic study by Steffi WURSTER that puts



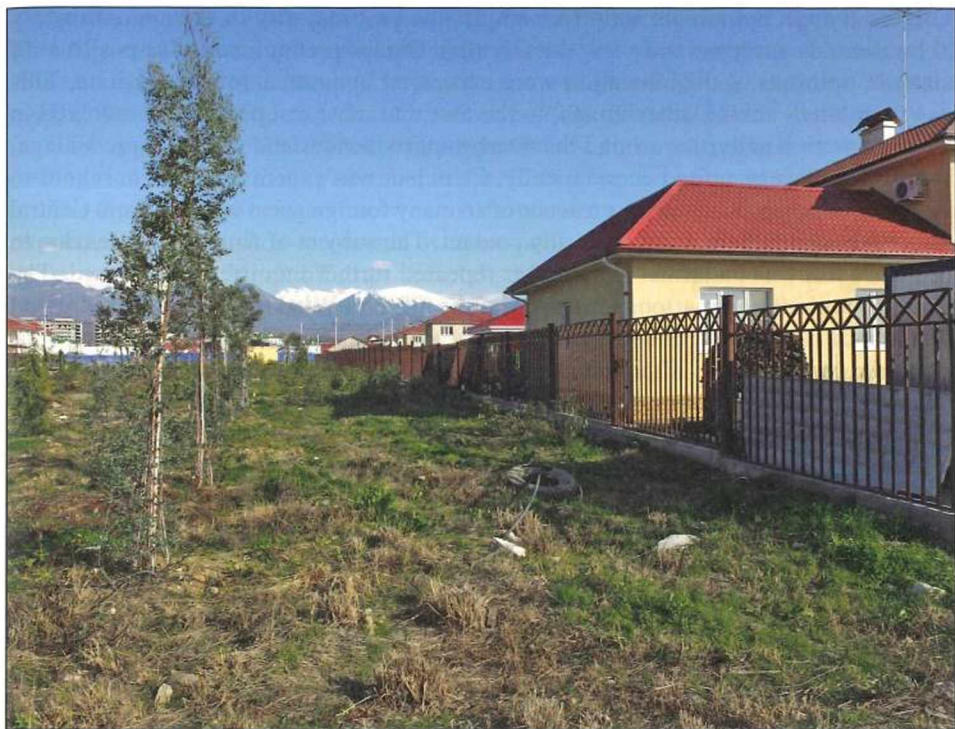


Fig. 8: Part of the new residential area designed for relocated families (photograph by the authors, February 2013)

focus on both the remodelled landscape and the impact of the mega-project on the residents of Imeretinskaja Buhta (WURSTER 2012). By commenting on a specific film sequence, the text reflects on the gradual replacement of fields and settlements as the master plan of the Games is being implemented. Drawing from interview clips and shots of residents' old and new homes, the text sketches a vivid picture of the relocation process. Most of the resettlers had to trade their large plots for a modern house on a smaller site. From what the people said, we learnt about their struggle for fair compensation as well as to the extent to which local history feeds into current problems.

Within the framework of our ex-ante analysis one year before the Games, interviews with the displaced people were scheduled. To obtain such insider information, it seemed advantageous to make informal contact with as many new residents as possible. The opportunity offered itself during a repeat visit to the polder in early February 2013, at a walk through the area with the newly constructed homes for the resettlers. Once more, the snowball system was used in which the interviewees were asked to name other resettled individuals who would also be willing to speak with the authors. Often these talks were organised informally across property fences. It became apparent that higher-ranking employees who work long-term at the construction site had settled in some of the 80 newly built houses (see Fig. 8).

Even though not a representative sample, the vast majority of the approximately 20 households surveyed did view the Olympic Games predominantly as positive. In contrast, opinions of the relocation were expressed in a rather reticent fashion. This may be related, among other things, to the fact that most resettlers were involved in the construction activities around the nearby sports venues and the Olympic Village, from which they benefited economically. Criticism was expressed more in regard to construction noise, dust and the presence of so many foreign guest workers from Central Asia, with whom there was hardly any contact. The subject of financial losses due to the relocation was therefore – even after repeated further inquiries – not raised: The difficult buy-out negotiations portrayed in the film by WURSTER were not addressed in the talks. The resettlers also gave no satisfactory answers to the question of their economic opportunities after the Olympic Games. In their spare time, the new inhabitants were engaged in efforts to complete their apartments or houses in the form of community support and simultaneous to the other construction activities. Many already planted fruit trees in their gardens; in some places even a kind of modest agriculture was visible – just as around their old homes at the coast. Overall, one gets the impression that after a short time the pain of dispossession had faded, especially due to the new possibilities of revenues. One weakness of this survey, however, cannot be overlooked: With our method, only the permanent settlers could be captured. This omits the owners of the many dachas, as for those city dwellers no resettlement, only compensation was provided.

## 4 Conclusion

Ex-post analyses of Olympic Winter Games after World War Two have demonstrated that they contributed significantly to regional development (SCHARR & STEINICKE 2012b). In almost all cases they have left behind enduring structures, especially in aspects of settlement geography as well as in the technical infrastructure. Although the organisation of the Games operated everywhere almost inevitably with a financial deficit, economic benefits are nevertheless recognisable in the longer term. Often, however, the effects cannot be evaluated monetarily, as is the case with the strengthening of regional identity or in a city's gain in image (cf. e.g. REN 2008).

In terms of sports economy, *Soči-2014* differs considerably from former Winter Olympic sites in the Alps. Here political considerations play a major role in the organisation and execution of this mega-sports event, as the ceremonies in Adler one year before the official opening on February 7, 2013 showed quite impressively. The idea of sustainability, although proclaimed, is thus meaningless, and participation in the planning by the local population was at no time seriously considered. Similar to the Olympic Winter Games 1936 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, or most recently the Summer Games in Beijing, the Russian political elite is using *Soči-2014* to construct a propaganda event, which is intended to proclaim the new power of the state. Economic, social and environmental considerations have to take a back seat to this principle.

In sharp contrast to this is the geopolitical reality of the entire Caucasus region. This concerns primarily the internationally unresolved question of the sovereignty of Abkhazija – barely some hundred meters from the Olympic Village in Adler. Thus the conflict between Georgia and Russia, which in 2008 culminated in a war, directly affects the region of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games. In its external effect this creates instabilities similar to those elsewhere in the North Caucasus region, such as Chechnya.

The frictions in Soči itself between state powers and the local population – be it over environmental, socio-economic or ethno-political issues – are intensified the more the central powers block off civil-societal structures from their inception (GEL'MAN 2010). In addition, such behaviour kills off any formation of a regional identity, which is indispensable for modernisation, at an early stage (BUSYGINA 2002). The conservation interests of the Kavkazskij Zapovednik as well as of Soči National Park are subordinated to the political project of the Games. The organisation of the Olympic Games does take both protected areas into account, at least nominally. However, the protected-area authorities are not included in any discussions about planning or implementation of the Games.

International journalists criticise the expropriations and relocations during the construction of the Olympic complex in the Imeritinskaja Buhta strongly and consider them incompatible with social sustainability (TEUFFEL 2013). Our research shows that these criticisms regarding the authoritarian approach to the expropriation are entirely justified. Surprisingly, however, the fact is that the settlers have not only resigned themselves to the new living situation but also accept it. Today, well-equipped new homes, employment opportunities in the Olympic Coastal Cluster, and additional income from rental housing for workers compensate for the efforts of the buy-out negotiations.

The low sustainability was also reflected in our survey concerning the attitude of the locals toward *Soči-2014*. Although in the venues Soči, Adler, and Krasnaja Poljana the opinions vary, in general, there is great interest in the event itself, and there are more supporters than opponents. This is surprising given the large number of negative responses regarding the Olympic Games and its impacts. It seems that there is a correlation of opposition with age. Popular opinion appears to be extremely negative regarding the expected impacts on price developments, environment, and general traffic. It is especially noteworthy that only a few respondents declare the intention to pursue a winter sport. Moreover, a quarter of those persons engaged in winter sports have already rejected the idea of using the new sports facilities in the future, which, given the small number of those who practice winter sports in general, is a very detrimental prognosis. Furthermore, the high price level of the cable car, compared to the income of the local people, creates another hurdle against the continued practice of downhill skiing. In addition, the majority of the persons interviewed were not convinced that both international and domestic tourism will increase due to the mega-event. This invites a certain amount of doubt as to the future occupancy rate of the tourist infrastructure implemented for the Winter Games. It can also be concluded that the affected residents of Greater Soči were rather poorly informed about planning and preparations. Information sessions for the local people reportedly have not taken place at all.

Overall, the results of our analyses do not suggest a modification of the leading thesis, even assuming that the Winter Games do not affect the existing National Park and the Kavkazskij Zapovednik directly. Additionally, the results of our study suggest that the potential for socio-economic and ecological sustainability of *Soči-2014* is low. The ex-post analysis, scheduled as part of our longitudinal project two years after this mega sports event, should provide more clarity.

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Jahr/Year: 2013

Band/Volume: [155](#)

Autor(en)/Author(s): Scharr Kurt, Steinicke Ernst

Artikel/Article: [Soci-2014 and sustainability. Potential for conflicts - local perception 171-194](#)