

BACHELOR THESIS

Winter Games in the Summer Capital: A Case Study on How Infrastructural Modifications Changed Tourism in Sochi

Theme: Spatial Impacts of Mega-Events
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Abstract

Sport mega-events started to be used as an engine for the urban development and infrastructural modifications, and the case of 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics is a clear example of that. This study aims to determine how infrastructural modifications, made for the Olympic 2014, have changed tourism in Sochi. This is done through the documentation study of the official documentation for the data on the infrastructural modifications and number of the tourist arrivals in the study area and whole Russia, and in-depth semi-structured interviews with three residents and three experts.

The results showed that tourism in Sochi has changed and increased significantly during and after the Olympics. The made infrastructural modifications have changed tourism in Sochi in terms of geographical location, opportunities, accessibility, touristic interests, seasonality, and accommodation. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the initial inflow of tourists was caused by the Olympics city branding, which was used as a tool that informed the people about city's existence and its facilities.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Introduction | 4 |
| 1.1 Mega-Events | 4 |
| 1.2 Case Study | 4 |
| 1.3 Research Statement | 5 |
| 2. Theoretical framework | 6 |
| 2.1 Mega-Events and the Olympic Games | 6 |
| 2.2 Mega-Events and Tourism | 7 |
| 2.2.1 Tourism Area Life Cycle | 8 |
| 2.2.2 Tourism after a Mega-event | 9 |
| 2.3 Concept Model | 10 |
| 2.4 Expectations | 10 |
| 3. Methodology | 10 |
| 3.1 Data Collection | 10 |
| 3.2 Research Ethics | 11 |
| 3.3 Limitations | 11 |
| 4. Results | 12 |
| 5. Discussion | 20 |
| 6. Conclusion | 21 |
| 7. Reflection | 21 |
| 8. References | 22 |
| 9. Appendices | 25 |

1. Introduction

1.1 Mega-events

Since the 20th century, mega-events became an essential factor of political acts and urban development (Clark et al., 2016), which are used for expenditure and large-scale urban transformations justifications (Clark et al., 2016; Gusmão de Oliveira, 2020). They became viewed as a tool for economic stimulation (Gusmão de Oliveira, 2020) and further benefits such as strengthened city branding, infrastructural benefits, revenue from event ticket sales, and increased tourism as the most foreseen one (Kim & Kang, 2020). However, claims on the potential economic regeneration and many other advantages from the mega-events are made, they might not be forthcoming (Zimbalist, 2020). Some even point out, that based on the previous mega-events, the consequences of hosting an event were primarily damaging and unfavourable, especially if looking at how the facilities and their space are used in the post-event period. Most of the time, the sites become abandoned or not utilised at its full capacity (Azzali, 2016).

Summer and Winter Olympics are categorized as the “hallmark” of the mega-events and are still seen as an economic growth opportunity (Kim et al., 2004; Zimbalist, 2020). Countries are constantly actively bidding and developing large action plans to have a possibility to host an Olympic (Zimbalist, 2020). In the last decades the nature of the events has changed and has become characteristics of increased gigantism (Azzali, 2016) because now the organizers not only focus on the event-related facilities, but also the major city infrastructure (Pitts and Liao, 2009). Therefore, apart from the mega-event, itself, they start to become used as an engine for the urban development (Qu & Spaans, 2009) like in the case of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

1.2 Case Study

Sochi, a city in Russia, has held the Winter Olympics in 2014, which received a lot of national and international attention in media reports, primarily due to the political context, impact on the environmental (Stimilli et al., 2016), and it being the most expensive Olympic in the history (Azzali, 2016).

Sochi is the main Russian resort, also seen as the summer capital of Russia, is located in the Krasnodar region at the coast of the Black Sea spreading over 145 km across the coastline (**Figure 1**) with a population of around 490 000 (City Administration of Sochi, 2021). It is also known as the Greater Sochi consisting of multiple districts: Central Sochi, Adler, Lazarevsky, and Khostinsky City District. It has a subtropical climate which strongly contrasts with the snowy bordering Caucasus Mountains.

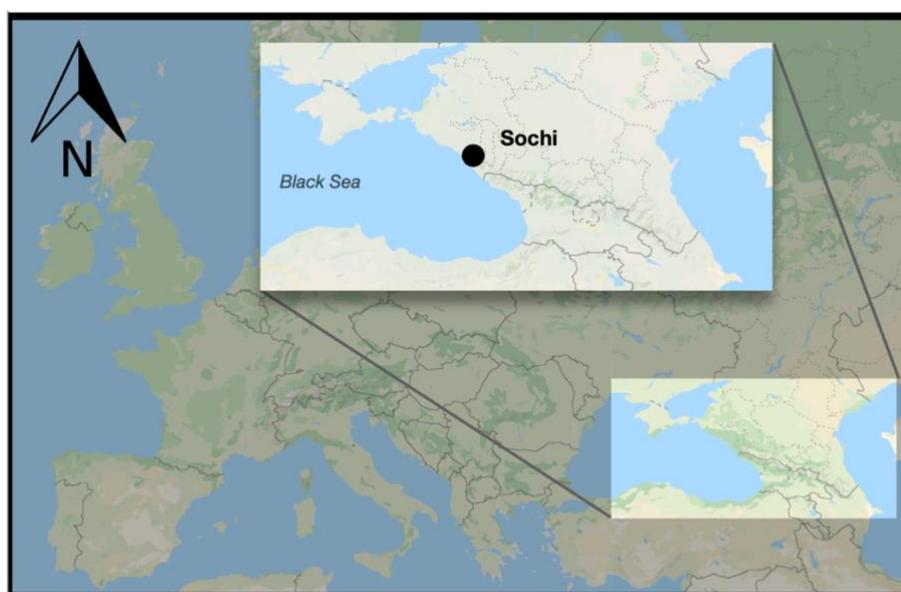


Figure 1: The Geographical Location of Sochi, Russia

The city has a long history as a resort destination in Russia (Stimilli et al., 2016). It started to develop as a health resort destination in the late 1800s and continued until 1960s. The “golden decades” of Sochi peaked in 1960s-1980s, where it became a year-round resort for seaside and health tourism. It was also seen as the “role model” city for Soviet tourism (Müller, 2015). It entered a significant decline phase in the 1990 due to a difficult economic situation, open borders, and military actions in the neighbouring Abkhazia (Alexandrova et al., 2019) and how Müller (2015, p.190) said “*the Russian people simply had other things to worry about than going on vacation*”.

Already in the 1990 there were plans by the central government to organise Winter Olympics in Sochi and in 2007, after two previous unsuccessful bids, it was officially decided to hold the Winter Olympic in Sochi in 2014 (Alexandrova et al., 2019). The government has linked the Olympics with the federal target programme of development, which was on its agenda for over a decade. For these Games, the organisers had three primary goals for the following Olympic: present the “new” image of Russia in the international context as an open, modern, and attractive country; fill in the gap of the high-level sport infrastructure absence; and transform Sochi into a popular year-round resort for national and international tourists (OC, 2014).

As a result of the set goals, a huge amount of infrastructural modifications were implemented in Sochi, amounting to the total cost of around €41 billions of which €31 billions were spend on non-sport related infrastructure alone (Müller, 2014), as everything was created from “scratch” (Azzali, 2016; Müller, 2014; Stimilli et al., 2016). Minenkova (2019) pointed out that these infrastructural modifications could be even called “revolutionary” because according to the calculations, without the Olympic, 52 years would have been needed to create them.

When looking at this amount of money invested into the infrastructural changes of a city for a single event, one could be interested in seeing the effect on different fields from these implementations. As tourism was one of the set goals, this paper is going to study and analyse how tourism was affected by the infrastructural modifications made for the 2014 Olympics.

Studying the infrastructural modifications of this Olympic and its impact on tourism is of relevance for both, the theoretical and societal aspect.

The majority of the found academic literature in relation to the Sochi Winter Olympics 2014 focuses on the economic costs and benefits, environmental cost, and political analysis. Also, at the knowledge of the author, little attention was placed on tourism directly and no literature was found that would discuss the tourism change in relation to the infrastructural modifications. Finally, the found literature on Sochi’s tourism after the Olympics uses the secondary data and interviews with the professionals only. Therefore, it is important to produce further knowledge on the topic, to make a greater understanding of this specific case, but also for potential generalization purposes.

Further, this knowledge is of societal relevance because this information might create a better understanding on what role the executed infrastructure plays for tourism. This knowledge from a unique case could give an insight to the residents and other involved stakeholders of a potential mega-event host city, on how tourism could be influenced by similar infrastructural modifications and what they could potentially expect if they wanted to have a similar approach.

1.3 Research statement

As one of the three main goals for the 2014 Winter Olympics was to boost tourism in the area and most of the financial investments and effort went into the construction of the infrastructure, it is important to understand how these infrastructural modifications play a role for tourism. Therefore, this research paper aims at contributing additional knowledge in the existing gap of analysing the long-term tourism change in Sochi after the Olympics with a specific focus on the infrastructural modifications.

For the sake of clarity, this research focuses on all the infrastructure implemented for the Sochi Olympic except for the “Principal Infrastructure” (*Figure 6*)

Main Research Question:

How did the infrastructural modifications, made for the Winter Olympic 2014, change tourism in Sochi?

Sub - Questions:

- | | | |
|--|---|------------------------|
| 1. What infrastructural modifications took place for the Olympics 2014? | } | official documentation |
| 2. How did tourism change, in terms of tourist numbers, over the years in Sochi? | | |
| 3. How did tourism in Sochi change in the last 10-15 years? | } | in-depth interviews |
| 4. What role did the infrastructural modifications play for the tourism change in Sochi? | | |

2. Theoretical framework**2.1 Mega- Events and the Olympic Games**

Mega-events are widely discussed in the academic literature, however, often a clear definition is not present or differs from author to author (Müller, 2015). Hiller (1995) and Rose & Spiegel (2011), for example, include international expositions, festivals, or summits, where others like Gold & Gold, 2008 include and focus only on the sports events in their definition of mega-events. Therefore, a more general definition provided by Müller (2015, p.634) seems to be the most appropriate for the following research and thus, used to define mega-events:

“Mega-events are ambulatory occasions of a fixed duration that attract (1) a large number of visitors, (2) have a large, mediated reach, (3) come with large costs, and (4) have large impacts on the built environment and the population.”

The Olympic Games are a type of sporting mega-events which are highly discussed in academic and non-academic literature. They are viewed as the largest and most prestigious sport mega-event, which in the recent decades developed into an instrument for urban renewal, *“a catalyst of substantial urban transformation”* (Essex & Chalkley, 2010), and a motivational force for driving tourism (Tsiotsou & Gouri, 2010). Olympics are even said to be the *“most important phenomena of modernity”* (Vetitnev, Bobina & Zelenskaya, 2016) having an immense effect on the development of the host area.

A great number of papers study the impacts of the Olympic Games on the host area, region, and even country, however, a greater emphasis was placed on the discussion of the Summer Olympics, rather than the Winter Olympics. This is explained by Winter Olympics being less excessive with regards to the *“expenditure, scale and magnitude and therefore perhaps also more focused on sport itself”* (Petersson & Valming, 2013, p.3; Gaudette, Roul & Lefebvre, 2017). The impacts, that the host areas experience, include city branding, global viewers, massive media earnings, employment opportunities, sports participation, urban renewal, and new and improved infrastructure and facilities (Müller, 2015). Additionally, the Olympic Games draw a large number of visitors during the event, and it is also said that the build legacies remaining after the event, such as buildings, also attract guests to the host area also long after the event itself (Müller, 2015; Gibson et al., 1998). If the previous impacts are considered of a benefit for the host area, such impacts as high inflation, gentrification, mismanagement of public funds, traffic problems, increased crime, and devastation of physical and environmental structures, counts as negative side-effects for the host (Kim, Gursoy & Lee, 2006)

However, for the Olympics, as well as other major mega-sport events, it was not always the case of having such a great effect on the hosting area, especially in terms of space (Qu & Spaans, 2009). Multiple authors have determined a patterns of sport mega-events urbanization in the last century (Azzali, 2016). The identified trends of Olympic Games by Pitts and Liao (2009) are presented in **Table 1**. According to them, the first three trends did not cause a significant urban transformation because, primarily, the already present or short-term constructions were in use. Nonetheless, in the fourth trend, which could be noticed from 1960s onwards, more extensive urbanization is observed on a larger scale, where not only the sport-related facilities were build, but also new and improved infrastructure and new overall redevelopments of entire neighbourhoods (Azzali, 2016; Pitts and Liao, 2009). This is also supported by Qu & Spaans (2009), who state that now in the era of globalized

world, Olympic Games became a tool to establish new landmarks “to attract global investment, facilitating fast-track development and promoting a new urban image through place marketing” (p.1292). And, that the sport-related facilities steadily became the “large urban projects” which have surpassed the level of building sport-related facilities only, now it also focuses on the build environment renewal, improvement, and provision of infrastructure.

| Trend | Description |
|---------|---|
| Trend 1 | Ephemeral event, no focus on new infrastructure |
| Trend 2 | Focus mainly on urban infrastructure |
| Trend 3 | Focus mainly on event- related infrastructure |
| Trend 4 | Both focus on sports venues and major city infrastructure |

Table 1: Trends of impact on the built environment from Olympic Games over the last century (Pitts and Liao, 2009)

Also, Dansero & Mela (2007) have described such Olympic phenomena as “Olympic territorialization” which became more apparent in the last decades through more extensive interventions to the built environment for the Games. This phenomenon says that Olympics could be seen as a “project area” which is designed for the event’s requirements and tries to balance out the “global needs” (official requirements, benefactors, etc.) and the needs of the host destination.

As this balance between the required and local needs is an important aspect of the Olympics, multiple scholars have discussed the different types of physical environment which should be provided for the Olympic Games, and which should be decided by the host destination. In **Table 2** one can see the classification of the physical requirements for the Olympic Games. The direct infrastructure is the one without which Olympics cannot be held and generally relates to the sport-related infrastructure (Erten, 2008).

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Direct | Primary Infrastructure |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stadium • indoor arena(s) special facilities (swimming pools, shooting range, equestrian facilities, rowing course, etc) |
| Indirect | Secondary Infrastructure |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athlete Village & Media Village • Media and Press Centre Training Facilities • Parklands |
| Indirect | Tertiary Infrastructure |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport (rail system and roads, stations, airport facilities, etc) • Tourism (accommodation, attraction places, etc) • Principal infrastructure (sewage system, tele-communication, fiberoptic labelling, etc) • City centre renovations and rehabilitations) |

Table 2: Physical Requirements for the Olympic Games (Erten, 2008)

2.2 Mega-Events and Tourism

A significant number of papers has been written discussing the impact of the mega-events and the Olympic Games specifically on tourism (Erten, 2008). Multiple scholars like Vetitnev, Bobina & Zelenskaya (2016) explain that Olympics are directly linked to tourism due to the high number of tourists it attracts and according to Weed (2008, p.22) it is a “tourism behaviour motivated or generated by the Olympic related activities”. It is usually classified as part of the sport tourism or nostalgia-sport tourism, meaning travel to watch sport-events, participate in the sport activities, or visit post-event facilities associated with the Olympics (Gibson, 2003). And, in some cases like Barcelona Olympic in 1992, it was shown that through an Olympic, long-term tourism growth could be achieved (Qu & Spaans, 2009).

2.2.1 Tourism Area Life Cycle

When looking at any type of tourism for the purpose of analysis or prediction, it is very important to understand its dynamics and the potential reason behind it. One of the influential theories in tourism is the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) by Butler (1980) which over decades was very discussed, tested, and expanded.

This theory explains that tourist places are not static, meaning they evolve and change with time due to various reasons starting from the preferences change and ending at the change in the natural heritage. And, that there is a hypothetical cyclical pattern of touristic areas' evolution consisting of six to seven stages which are visualized in **Figure 2**.

1. *Exploration*: low number of tourists come in an irregular pattern, no facilities for tourists provided.
2. *Involvement*: number of visitors increase with some regularity, small facilities only for tourists.
3. *Development*: well-defined touristic market, heavy advertisement, more up-to-date facilities, attractions developed, national and regional planning involved.
4. *Consolidation*: increase in numbers of visitors will decline, although total numbers will still increase, areas economy tied to tourism.
5. *Stagnation*: peak number of visitors will have been reached, capacity levels exceed, problems arise, type of tourist could change.
6. *Decline*: area cannot compete with new attractions, no longer vacationers.
7. *Rejuvenation*: may occur but only with a complete change in attractions through two ways: addition of a man-made attraction or take advantage of previously untapped natural resources.

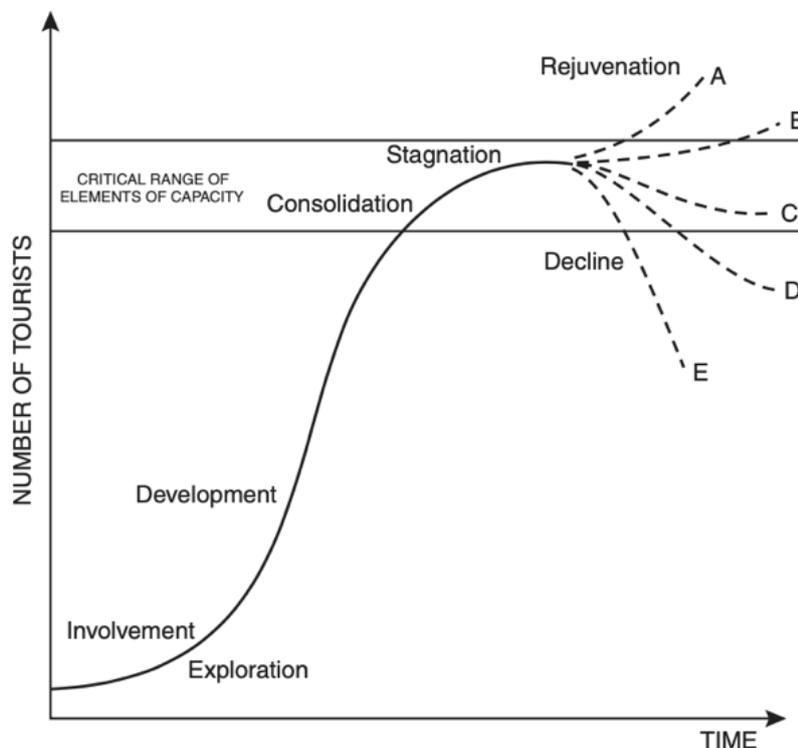


Figure 2: Hypothetical Tourism Area Life Cycle Stages (Butler, 2006)

Multiple studies were conducted to prove the theory and the results have supported it overall, however, scholars received distinctness from the “ideal model” which was explained by the context-specific nature of destinations

(Benedetto & Bolanic, 1993). In addition, some authors have discussed multiple possibilities for “stagnation”, “rejuvenation”, and “decline” stage (Benedetto & Bolanic, 1993). Therefore, in 2006 Butler with further scholar has expanded the theory and included further explanations for different stages.

Based on this patter one could try and place a touristic destination on a stage of the cyclical pattern with the purpose of a clearer understanding of the processes that this area undergoes and potential prediction of further events. According to Alexandrova, Aigina, & Minenkova (2019) who have looked at Sochi from TALC have affirmed that the city has passed a full life cycle and after the Olympics it started to revitalize and is moving to a new beginning of a life cycle.

2.2.2 Tourism after a Mega-Event

Olympic Games, as well as other mega-events, are often discussed in the relation to tourism, however, there is very little literature discussing the importance of the infrastructure provided by these mega-events on tourism, especially, in the long run.

Solberg & Preuss (2007) did a thorough literature review to distinguish the long-term impact on tourism caused by sport mega-events. They have presented that the mega-event itself often increases the awareness of the city and the city’s facilities, however, it was acknowledging that the “promotion” effect from the event does not last forever. Therefore, based on their literature review, an area can be positioned as a touristic destination through a sport mega-event, but two important aspects need to be done and work simultaneously: strengthening the destination profile (brand) and development of hard location factors (**Figure 3**). By the hard location factor, touristic infrastructure is meant, such as “parks, pedestrian zones, sport facilities, public transportation, highways or freeways, tourist attractions, and the airport” (Solberg & Preuss, 2007 p.220), so places that can attract and serve tourists. It was also explained that the initially provided infrastructure for the mega-event could stage further cultural and sporting events, festivals, expos, concerts, etc. which could additionally promote the area for tourism by strengthening the new or improved profile.

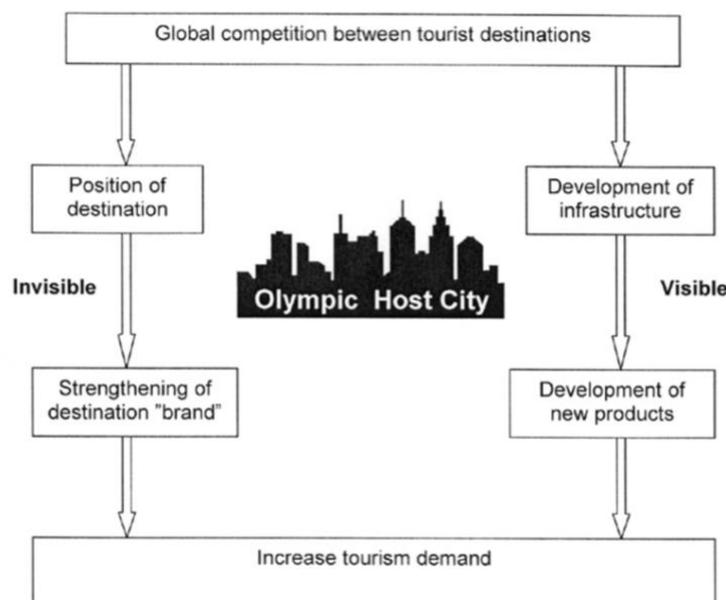


Figure 3: Potential Tourism Legacy for Host Destination (Solberg & Preuss, 2007)

Multiple authors acknowledged that some areas require a lot of investment into the infrastructure to stage the mega-event and some not, depending on their pre-event availability. Solberg & Preuss (2007) have made it clear that if a destination wants to promote long-term tourism after staging a sport mega-event, it is required for the city to consider construction of infrastructure which is not particularly necessary for the event itself, but serves tourists. Examples that were given are museums, shopping malls, touristic attractions, etc.

It is also important to mention, that besides the destination branding and infrastructure, the sociopolitical environment plays a very important role in the post-event tourism promotion because they are unpredictable and have a tremendous influence on the destination perception. These include wars, economic crises, pandemics, terrorist attacks, and other incidents.

2.3 Conceptual model

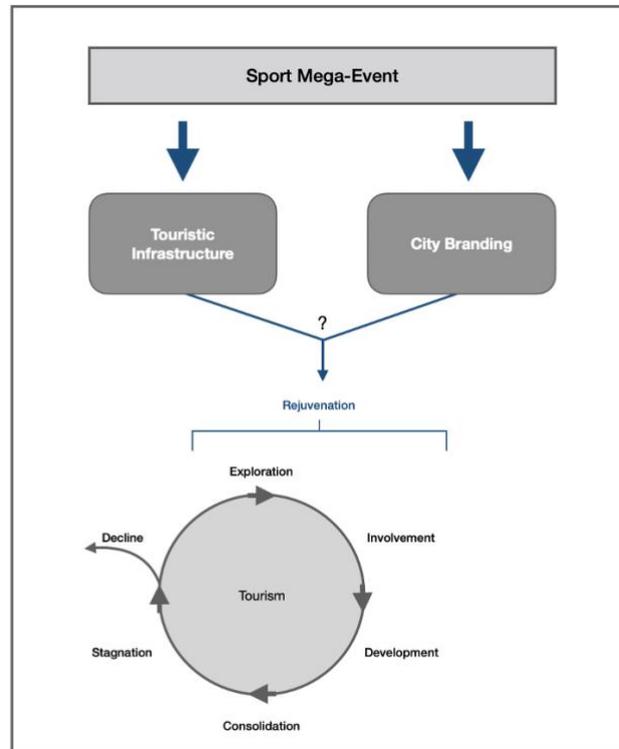


Figure 4: Conceptual Model

The Conceptual Model in **Figure 4** visualizes the two main theories discussed. It tries to represent that potentially a rejuvenation stage of a touristic area, according to TALC, could be reached through hosting a sport mega-event that focuses on both, touristic infrastructure, and city branding.

2.4 Expectations

Based on the theoretical framework it is expected that the infrastructural interventions, made as a result of Sochi Winter Olympic 2014, in combination with the city branding, have moved its tourism from the “decline” to a “rejuvenation” stage. This is so because the infrastructural modifications were not only necessary for the event itself, but also serve tourists after that.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

To answer the main research question, two methods were used, study of the official documentation for the data on the infrastructural modifications and number of the tourist arrivals in the study area and whole Russia, and in-depth semi-structured interviews with the residents and experts.

A qualitative approach is adopted. As the topic of tourism change is highly complicated and multifaced, a more precise and explained information is required to see the impact of the infrastructural changes specifically. Additionally, as infrastructural modifications and tourism change might not seem to have a direct relationship,

it is important to explore that from the perspective of residents' and experts' opinions because they are directly impacted by both aspects. Therefore, in-depth interviews were chosen as it is the most appropriate way of receiving and understanding people's personal perception on a topic with the ability to provide in-depth information (Clifford et al., 2016; Punch, 2014). Semi-structured interviews, in particular, allow the researcher to hold a conversation on the topic of study and guide it into the direction of interest and be flexible, further, it also provides the possibility for the interviewee to be open in his/her answers and touch upon topics of their consideration. Additionally, it presents a more informal setting, which could contribute to the ease in communicating information and experience of the participant (Clifford et al., 2016).

The interviews were conducted in Russian¹ with the residents and experts who live in Sochi for over 15 years (For Interview guide see *Appendices*). The interviews covered three main areas: personal perception on how tourism in Sochi has changed over the last 10-15 years; personal perception on how the Winter Olympics has influenced tourism in Sochi; and personal view on how infrastructural modifications, made for the Olympics 2014, have influences tourism in Sochi. Residents' opinions could be indicative to the research question.

The participants for the interviews were found through different recruiting methods. The residents of Sochi were searched for on social media by sending messages to different "groups" to those who would be willing to participate in the research. Those who were interested got in contact with the researcher and received further information. Additionally, the snowballing technique was used, meaning that one interviewee helped to recruit further interviewees (Clifford et al., 2016). This technique was used to find the experts and some of the residents.

After the primary data was collected, it was transcribed and coded in the 'Atlas.ti'. The interviews were divided according to the identical topics and sub-topics for the purpose of comparability and analysis of patterns, differences, and connections between the different interviews (Thomas, 2003).

3.2 Research Ethics

Communication with third parties can create a power relationship, especially, during the interviews. However, it can vary depending on the interviewee (Clifford et al., 2016; Punch, 2014). This was thought about before and taken into consideration by providing clear information and guidelines for the interview.

Also, when working with personal data, views, and perceptions of individuals it is important to treat it with the according confidentiality by the means of anonymity and keeping the data by a password secured storage (Longhurst, 2016). Each participant was orally informed about the research and their right and possibility to withdraw anytime without an explanation, also, they were informed about the way their data and anything they would say would be treated during and after the research, and they were given the possibility to ask any questions at any time before, during, and after the interviews (Clifford et al., 2016).

For this study, the researcher could be considered both, as an outsider and an insider for the participants. An insider because the researcher is a Russian national and is able to search for the local information and conduct the interviews in Russian. This could create a greater communication bond and trust with the locals. However, the author might have been perceived as an outsider due to a different city and country of living and studying, which can generate distrust and maybe suspicion, nonetheless it did not happen. Also, as an outsider, who is not in any way affected by the topic of the research directly, it gives the possibility to stay more objective when drawing conclusions based on the interviews and secondary data collected, however, due to the same reason, the author might cause the author interpreting the data based on the own experience.

3.3 Limitations

It might be difficult to generate concrete and comparable conclusions due to subjective responses. Additionally, as this research deals with a case that happened in the past, it might be difficult for respondents to think of how it was before the Games, which might not provide a straightforward picture of the change.

¹ The author is a Russian native speaker

To reflect on the trustworthiness of data, the author acknowledges that the interviewees might provide very subjective responses, not presenting the actual picture and, therefore, took that into consideration when drawing the conclusions. However, when transcribing the interviewees, it was seen that a very similar picture of the case was presented, which could be an indicator that it could be trustworthy and potentially reliable.

4. Results

4.1 Documentation - Infrastructural Modifications

Based on the Legacy Report 2014 **Figure 6** was created to represent the major infrastructural modifications that took place for the Olympics in Sochi. In addition, **Figure 5** was created to further indicate geographical location of the main modifications which could be used by the reader to visualize them during the process of reading.

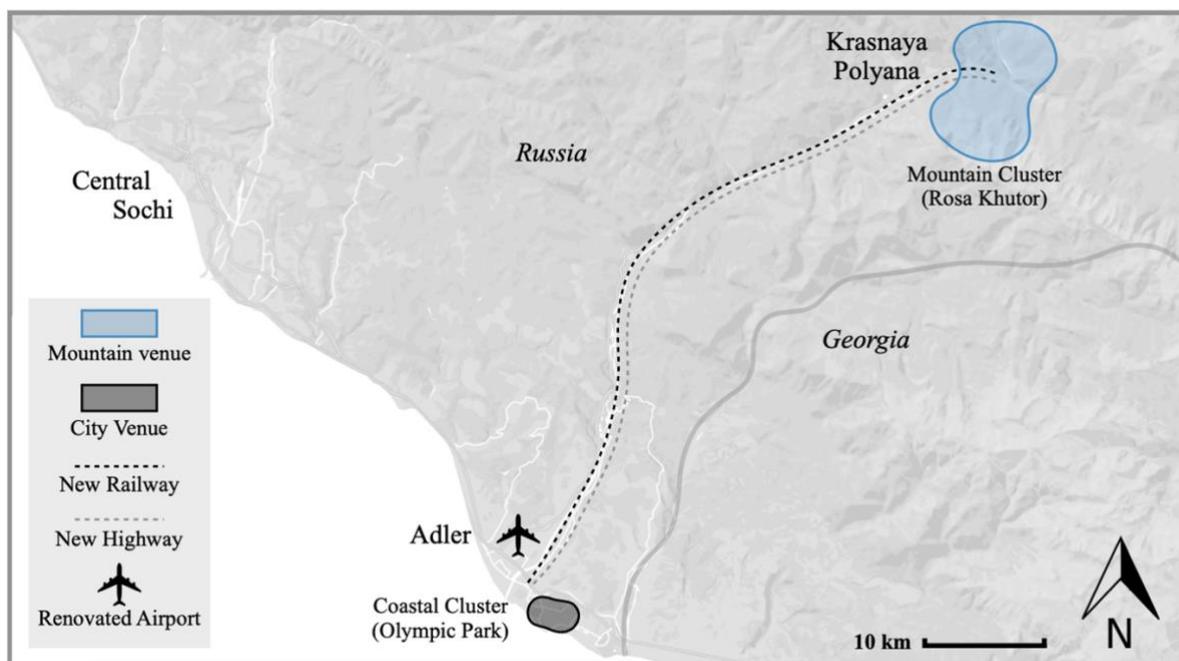


Figure 5: Geographical Location of the Main Olympic Infrastructural Modifications in Sochi

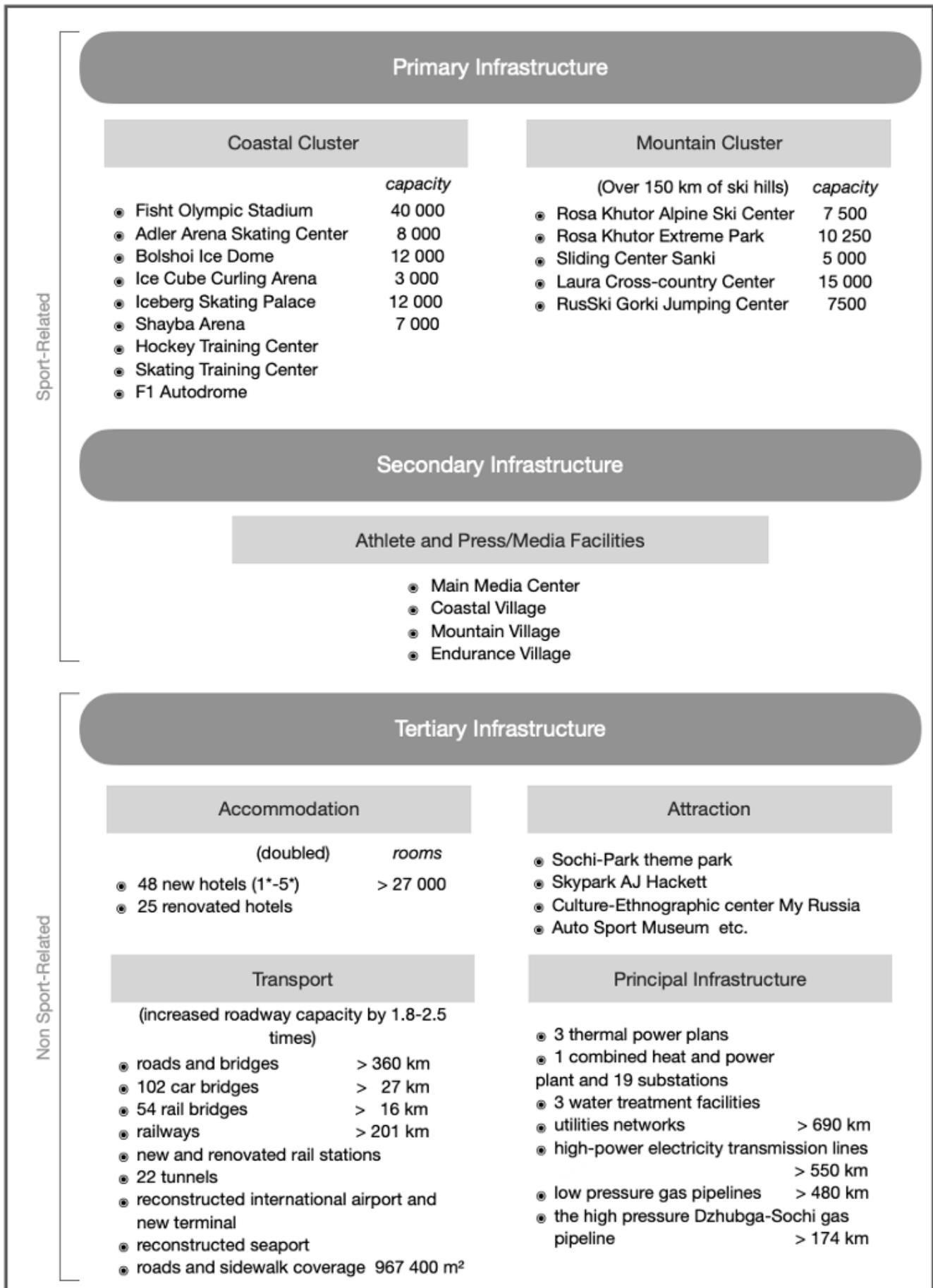


Figure 6: Infrastructural Modifications that Took Place in Sochi for the 2014 Winter Olympics

4.2 Documentation - Tourists increase

Based on the Federal Agency of Tourism (2020) and statistical publication of the Krasnodar region (2020), the official numbers of tourists arriving to the Sochi starting from 2009, are presented in **Table 3**. One can clearly see that the number of tourists increases over time with a few exceptions in the years 2011, 2013, and 2020.

| | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Sochi | 1 043 292 | 1 044 778 | 932 365 | 2 348 067 | 828 315 | 2 422 665 | 3 600 000 | 3 003 549 | 3 311 685 | 4 300 194 | 6 200 000 | 5 100 000 |

Table 3: Number of Tourists arriving to Sochi 2009-2020

As it is acknowledged that the global trend of tourism is increasing (UNWTO, 2020), it was decided to compare the percentage growth of tourists in Sochi to the whole Russia for the available timeframe. As seen in **Figure 7**, for both Russia and Sochi yearly the percentage of tourist numbers was increasing, with a few exceptions. However, one can clearly observe that Sochi had a much higher rate of percentage growth than Russia overall, especially when looking at the year of the Olympics (2014), 2018, 2019 and it had a much lower decrease in percentage in the year of the pandemic (2020).

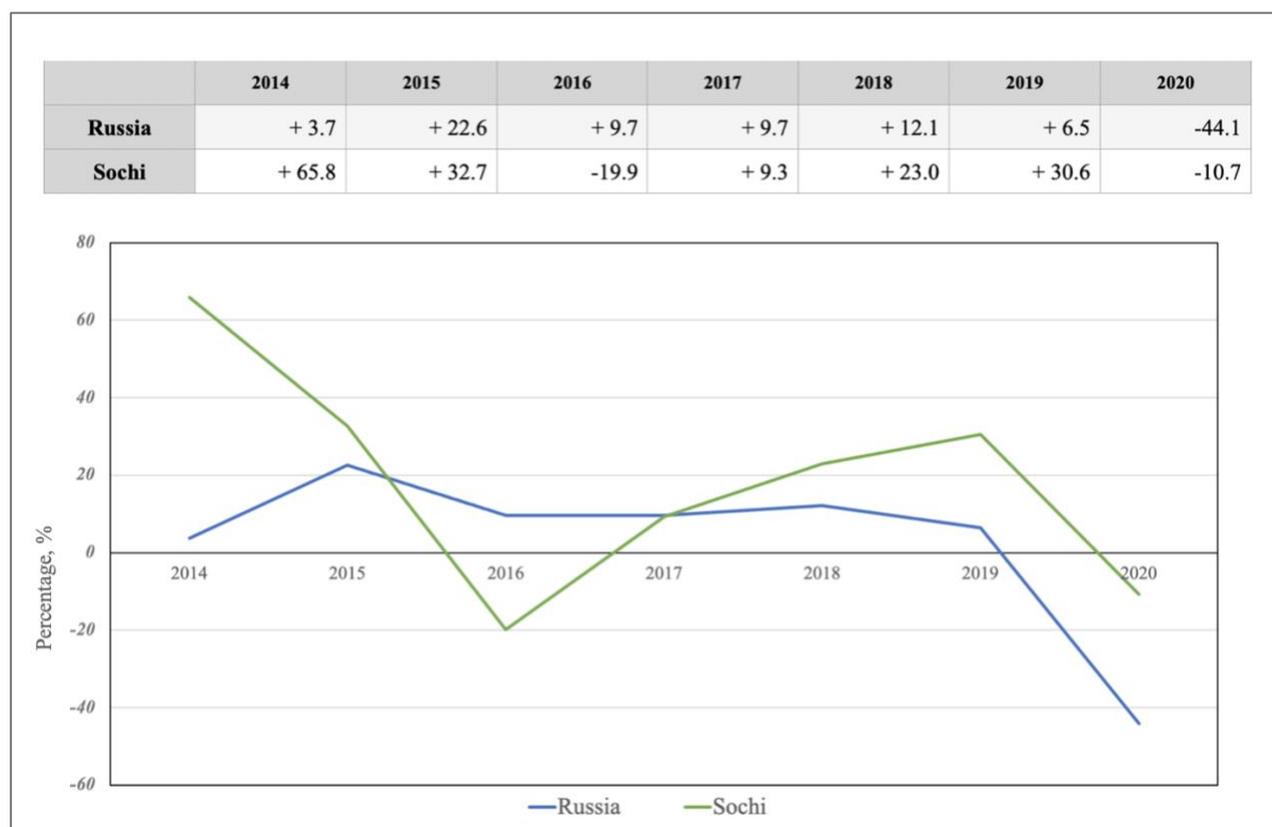


Figure 7: Percentage change in tourist number in Russia and Sochi 2014-2020

4.2 In – Depth Interviews

In total, six semi-structured interviews were conducted with two experts in the sphere of tourism, one expert in the sphere of telecommunication who worked for the Winter Olympics 2014, and three residents (**Table 4**).

| Interviewee | Category | Position | Lives in Sochi (years) | Expert in Sochi (years) | Online Platform | Duration (minutes) |
|-------------------------|---------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| (explorative interview) | Resident | - | > 5 | - | WhatsApp | 28 |
| Expert 1 (E-1) | Expert and Resident | Sochi Olympics Telecommunication Developer | > 50 | > 25 | Zoom | 43 |
| Expert 2 (E-2) | Expert and Resident | Owner of Tourist Company | > 35 | > 15 | Telegram | 51 |
| Expert 3 (E-3) | Expert and Resident | Owner of a Tourist Company | > 65 | > 40 | Telegram | 60 |
| Resident 1 (R-1) | Resident | - | > 30 | - | WhatsApp | 58 (recording not saved) |
| Resident 2 (R-2) | Resident | - | > 35 | - | Telegram | 61 |
| Resident 3 (R-3) | Resident | - | > 35 | - | Telegram | 32 (not full recording) |

Table 4: Overview of Interviewees

4.2.1 Tourism Change in the last 10-15 years

As Resident-2 said, “before the Olympics, let’s say, it was a life “before” and after the Olympics became the life “after””, therefore, this section is separated on how tourism in Sochi was before and became after the Olympics. An overview of the overall findings could be found in **Figure 8**.

Before

Before the Olympics, tourists were coming to Sochi, however, according to the interviewees “it did not feel as a lot”(R-2). Their primary interest in Sochi was its beach and health resort in the summer, so more of a “relaxed tourism”(R-2). Additionally, all interviewees pointed out that after the Olympics announcement in 2007, there was a wave of tourists who “arrived to just look at the construction sites for the Olympics”(E-3). In winter and off-season though, there was “nothing really to do”(E-1). Although, Expert-2 has indicated that it was already a year-round destination, especially for people from northern part of Russia, who would look for better climate. Nonetheless, no other interviewee has supported that statement.

The Mountain Cluster(MC)/Krasnaya Polyana was one of the most discussed aspects. MC was “not interesting to anyone really”(E-1) because it was a village and there was almost nothing. There were no facilities, accommodation, and attractions, and it was hardly accessible. Residents mentioned that if they remember correct, there was one lift and one snow route, but they were very short, expensive, and not popular. And, they said, what was supported by experts, is that it was interesting to specific tourists who liked hiking/camping in the wild nature or there were nature-viewing excursions which were not very popular because they took over a day due to the limited accessibility.

When talking about the current Coastal Cluster (CC), almost everyone referred to it very short “there was nothing” and Expert-3 and Resident-2 have added that it was a nature area

Another very discussed topic, was the “absence of proper accommodation and absence of choice”(E-1). There were very few hotels that were very expensive and anyone who was not able to pay for these hotels had to rent a room/apartment from the residents which was very inconvenient because no real common “service”, that would offer it, existed.

To conclude on tourism “before”, 5/6 interviewees have said that Sochi was not really known especially by the internationals “*who always nodded out of courtesy*”(E-1) when heard the answer “Sochi” to their question “where are you from?”.

After

All interviewees have explicitly said that with the Olympics, a lot has changed in tourism and some even said “*everything*”(E-1).

Now many new touristic objects or how multiple interviewees said “points of attractions” exists, which gives the opportunity for tourists to do and see more. These include MC and new attractions. MC is said to be built from scratch because it changed completely, even though something was already there. Now it contains over 170km of snow routes and a significant number of winter multi-sport facilities. It offers a diverse variety of accommodation possibilities and facilities. Due to this and an increased accessibility there is a choice for tourists to stay longer or have a single-day trip there. And, it is said that more cultural and sport activities take place in the city.

When looking at the most popular objects/facilities for tourists according to the interviewees (**Table 5**), it could be seen that the majority of these are the new infrastructures provided for the Olympics.

| Most mentioned (from high to low) | Singly mentioned |
|---|---|
| <p>Mountain Cluster/Krasnaya Polyana</p> <p>Olympic Park</p> <p>“Sochi Park”</p> <p>Park “Dendrarij”</p> <p>Sea/Coast</p> <p>“Ordzhonikidze” Sanatorium</p> | <p>Olympic objects</p> <p>Formula -1 track</p> <p>Car Museum</p> <p>Tea Plantations</p> |

Table 5: Most Popular Objects/Facilities for tourists according to interviewees
(new attractions provided for Olympics are in green)

Due to these increased possibilities, tourists’ purpose of stay in Sochi has started to shift. Now, tourists are coming for the beach, winter, and sport activities and stay for a longer period. According to the experts, “*earlier it was the sea, and now I don’t know really, probably 50/50. Sea and sport activities, including extreme*”, “*Extreme and sport tourism started to grow strong, and health has moved*”. This has also caused tourism to move geographically from the Central Sochi to Krasnaya Polyana and Adler (**Figure 5**).

With the new opportunities and a shift in touristic interests, 4/6 interviewees now call Sochi a year-round destination, meaning tourist can and do come in summer, winter, and off-season because there are now “*things to do*”(R-2). In winter, it includes winter-sports and in-door activities, in summer it involves beach, watersports, and the rebranded MC area for summer activities, like mountain biking. And 3/6 had an impression that tourists’ age changed from over 45 to 20-45.

A “huge” change that was mentioned by everyone, is the provided availability and choice of accommodation. According to the interviewees, currently, people of different income could find a variety of hotels in different locations. It was often said that the hotels “*grew like mushrooms*”(E-2), and that their amount “*has increased by ten times, definitely more than doubled*”(E-1).

Often it was perceived that with the Games, the service quality has increased, which was “*almost non-existent*”(E-1) before.

The most common point discussed by the interviewees, was a significant increase in the number of tourists during and after the Olympics which only grows with years. Especially, it was seen with internationals, whose arrivals have increased by 20-30% (perception). Resident-2 said “*there was no big flow here. “Bang” everyone was shown some kind of candy and now everyone wants to see it*”. The overall increase in tourists was connected to the strong branding of the Games and the new offered opportunities. Additionally, two interviewees have connected it to the economic crises that made Russian Ruble devalue, making it very expensive for Russians to travel abroad. Finally, it was also connected to the fact that no similar alternatives are currently existing in Russia.

To conclude on tourism “after”, 4/6 respondents noticed that now much more people know, including internationals, about Sochi’s existence and what it can offer. Expert-2 even added “*in principle, [when] foreign tourists go to Russia, they visit, for example, Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, I don’t know, Kazan. And Sochi became one of such points that became interesting to visit in such a general cultural program of acquaintance with Russia*”.

| Before | |
|---|--|
| <p><u>Perceived by most interviewees</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a lot of people came to Sochi • Sochi was primary a destination for beach tourism and health resort • Sochi was a tourist destination in summer and there was little to do in winter • Shortly after it was decided in 2007 about the Olympics in Sochi, tourists arrived to view the construction sites of the infrastructure • The Mountain Cluster/Krasnaya Polyana: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - was not interesting for tourists - had no facilities or accommodation - was used for “specific” tourism, nature viewing and hiking in wild nature - had one lift and ski route - was difficult to access • Nothing was, where the Coastal Cluster is • Sochi did not have a choice accommodation choice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - very few hotels (expensive) - renting of rooms/apartments (inconvenient) - exception are sanatorium “holiday packages” • No one really knew about Sochi, especially internationals • the age group was over 45 years | <p><u>Perceived by minority of interviewees</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sochi is a year-round destination • The Mountain Cluster/Krasnaya Polyana: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - was an established tourist destination - popular for nature viewing for more than 1 day trips |
| After | |
| <p><u>Perceived by most interviewees</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • serious increase in tourist numbers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - branding - economic crises (devaluation of currency) - new possibilities and variety • many new touristic objects and attractions (Mountain Cluster, Sochi Park, etc.) • Mountain Cluster became very popular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - over 170 km of snow routes - facilities, accommodation, accessibility - choice of long-stay and 1 day trips • Shift to beach, winter sports, and sports tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - health not popular anymore • Became a year-round resort • Big availability and variability of accommodation • Service quality increased | <p><u>Perceived by minority of interviewees</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no real increase in tourists |

Figure 8: Overview on the Perceived Change in Sochi’s Tourism over the last 10-15 year

4.2.2 The Role Infrastructural Modifications in Tourism Change

One of the first things interviewees said about the infrastructural modifications was connected to transportation: roads, rails, airport, connections. There were big problems with this in the past, bad roads, no connections, difficult to access to/from/ and within the city. It has profoundly improved. All interviewees observed that these modifications have made it easier, faster, and comfortable for the tourists, as well as residents, to travel. Tourists have easier access to the city by car, which is a very popular mode of transport of arriving tourists, because of better roads; by train because of better connections; and airport because it is connected to more destinations. Besides that, the airport became connected with the city and MC through railway. Big railroad was done from the city to the MC, which allows to travel in less than an hour, when it was “at least 4 or 5”(E-1) before. Additionally, new technologies for the rail were used which allowed it to go fully smooth without loud noise. These modifications were told to impact tourism indirectly and positively. This is because now, not only the city became more transport accessible, but many areas in general, which became integrated to the city due to accessibility, “offer a continuation of touristic opportunities, which might have been there before, but were inaccessible”.(E-1)

New hotels were actively mentioned in the interviews as part of the infrastructure. How said earlier there were few hotels and almost no choice. As part of the modifications, many diverse hotels were built. This has influenced tourism as there are more available spaces, meaning that more people can come. Especially, as Expert-1 said, it plays a big role for Russia since demand for such touristic place exceeds the supply.

4/6 interviewees have noticed that the service quality has increased. This was partially linked to the infrastructural changes, which required new knowledge and skills positively influencing the tourists.

As pointed out by the interviewees earlier, the biggest “after” in tourism was the new opportunities for tourists through the new “points of attraction”, which were created by the infrastructural modifications. This new infrastructure provided new options for diverse recreation, especially “active recreation”(E-3). MC, for example, not only offers new winter tourism, but also extended the summer options through a re-branding in summer with a variety of activity options. Meaning, that now it is possible to not only enjoy the beach. Experts have also explained that the Olympic legacy which is not constantly or directly used by tourists, is very popular because “they find it very interesting just to view”(E-2). However, it was also acknowledged that this “boom” of “pure” interest in the viewing of Olympic legacy slowly decreases over time and people prefer to combine this with other type of recreation. CC, for example, provides Olympic legacy for viewing (Olympic Park); museums to visit; and “Sochi Park” for recreation and fun. Also, it is said that there are more cultural and sport events taking place because of more facilities to stage them.

As these infrastructural changes have created new opportunities and increased the accessibility, it caused the touristic location to shift to Adler and Krasnaya Polyana.

| Interviewee | Number of Infrastructural Modifications out of Total Number of Most Popular Touristic Attractions |
|--------------|---|
| Expert - 1 | 3 out of 4 |
| Expert - 2 | 4 out of 9 |
| Expert - 3 | 2 out of 4 |
| Resident - 1 | 2 out of 2 |
| Resident - 2 | 2 out of 4 |
| Resident - 3 | 5 out of 7 |

Table 6: What number of infrastructural modifications that were provided for the Olympics, is considered to be the most popular touristic attraction out of all mentioned ones by each interviewee?

All in all, when looking at all responses, it seems that the interviewees have an impression that infrastructural modifications have positively influenced, increased, and/or changed tourism through more accommodation and easier, faster, and comfortable accessibility within and between areas. And, when looking at the number of most popular touristic attraction each interview mentioned and the number of infrastructures provided for the Olympics out of them (*Table 6*), one can see that these modifications had a significant influence on tourism.



Figure 9: Coastal Cluster in 2005 and 2015 (Google Earth)



Figure 10: Not Completed Sochi Airport 1991 and Renovated in 2019 (Sochi Scapp, 2015)



Figure 11: Mountain Cluster with Indication of Locations on Some of its Facilities 2014 and Krasnaya Polyana 2018 (Sochi Scapp, 2015)

5. Discussion

The case of Sochi could be considered pretty unique compared to all the existed Olympics until now when looking at the extend of the infrastructural modifications made, especially from scratch. It does fit into the last trend of sporting mega-events having a much greater effect on the build environment of the host city (Pitts and Liao, 2009) because it did not use pre-existing facilities, but created new primary, secondary, and tertiary infrastructure. Therefore, if going with Erton's (2008) requirement for the Olympic build environment, Sochi is an example where serious implementations were made to the direct and indirect infrastructure, with a very special attention to the tertiary when looking at *Figure 6* and the interview results. Thus, as such great modifications were done, one could argue the statement made by Petersson & Valming (2013) about Winter Olympics being less excessive in their spending, scale, and magnitude.

When focusing on the impacts of infrastructural changes on tourism, it is important to understand what change has occurred first and then look at the extend of its cause.

Based on the official documentation the number of tourists arriving to Sochi has significantly increased in the year of the Olympic and continues to grow. As suggested by majority of interviewees, it is related to a strong city branding for the Games, which made the potential tourists know about its existence and facilities it can offer. Apparently, how discussed by the interviewees, a big wave of tourists arrived back then with the primary goal of Olympic legacy viewing. However, based on the interviewees, this legacy interest started to decrease. Nonetheless, the number of tourists did not, except for the pandemic year. Therefore, based on this, one could derive that the Olympic legacy itself is not the only reason tourists come to Sochi. New constructions, both primary, secondary, and tertiary, provided a diverse choice of new activities, with easier accessibility, and more and better places to stay.

The above-mentioned changes and its pattern go in hand with the statements described by Solberg & Preuss (2007) that branding and infrastructural developments needs to exist if an attractive touristic destination wants to be achieved through a sport mega-event. They need to work together because if after the "promotion" phase, there would be no points of attractions presented that could be offered, tourism might not be successful in long-term because the "awareness" effect from the event fades over time. If looking at Sochi, one could see that both direct and indirect infrastructure was modified, which was actively branded before, during, and after the Olympics. Both infrastructures infrastructure serves tourists by being landmarks on its own, offering recreational activities (MC, CC), accommodation, and staging further cultural and sporting events. CC is a good example of good touristic multifunctionality because it offers legacy, sport, and recreation. This all has strengthened the "new" and "improved" profile for tourism of Sochi, how Solberg & Preuss (2007) assumed.

Overall, based on the increased number of tourists and the statements made by the interviewees, the long-term tourist demand is seen. The initial increase in tourism could be explained by the mega-event itself and its branding mechanism which informed the potential tourists of its existence and its facilities, however, it started to decrease over time. This is where the infrastructural modifications began to "take over" as they were not only Olympic-related, but also provided recreation on its own. However, how said in the *Theoretical Framework*, sociopolitical environment is very important and can have an influence on the touristic development. In Sochi's case, the economic crises, that caused Ruble to devaluate, had a positive effect on tourism because due to the expenses with the currency exchange, nationals had much lower opportunity to travel abroad. And, as no similar tourist destination in Russia exists, Sochi became even more popular.

As seen from the academic literature and the interviewees, tourism in Sochi has been becoming less and less popular over the time before the Olympics. Tourist numbers were not high and were decreasing, the health sanatoriums, that were once very popular, started to close and there was not a lot to do in general except for the beach resort, which also did not have a lot of facilities. If looking at the TALC, one could position the pre-event period at the "decline" stage. Sochi could not compete with other international destinations, after the opened borders, as it was not cheap, did not have comparable facilities and service. After the Russian government set a goal to make Sochi a popular year-round resort for national and international tourists with the help of the Olympics, tourism has changed substantially. If looking now, Sochi could be located at a new

stage of TALC – “rejuvenation”. This is also supported by Alexandrova, Aigina, & Minenkova (2019). Rejuvenation takes place when there is a complete change in attractions through new man-made attractions or new use of natural resources. In Sochi, tourism did not change completely because the beach continues to be of interest, but all the other things have changed through the man-made infrastructural modifications. Therefore, now the city started to experience increased inflow of different type of tourists in terms age, incomes, and interests.

6. Conclusion

This qualitative research tried to find how the infrastructural modifications, made for the Winter Olympic 2014, have changed tourism in Sochi. Based on the results multiple conclusions could be brought. The infrastructural modifications:

- have become the landmarks, which attract tourists on their own (Mountain Cluster, Olympic Park)
- provided better accessibility to/from/ within the city through new and renovated: roads, rails, airport. This gave the opportunity to access greater number of touristic options which have been there before, but were difficult to reach, and the new ones.
- provided new diverse accommodation, which made it possible for more tourists to arrive.
- provided new opportunities for tourists by provision of new facilities and attractions which can attract more and diverse tourists in terms of age, income, and interests.
- provided the base to host tourist all year-round, in summer, winter, and off-season.
- provided the base for the change in the touristic interests from health and beach resort to beach, winter activities and other sport recreations.
- have shifted the geographical tourism locations from the Central Sochi to Adler (CC) and Kransaya Polyana (MC)

As seen, the made infrastructural changes in Sochi have had a significant effect on tourism which in end effect has strongly contributed to its growth. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the initial inflow of tourists was caused by the Olympics city branding, which has presented the additional opportunities the city could offer besides the event itself.

To conclude, infrastructural modifications have changed tourism in Sochi in terms of its geographical location, opportunities, accessibility, touristic interests, seasonality, and accommodation. Nonetheless, it is likely that such an increase in tourists would not have happened without the Olympic city because this was the tool that informed the people about city’s existence and its facilities.

7. Reflection

To comment on the generalization, it is very important to acknowledge that everything is very context specific, especially when referring to the spatial component, and the case of Sochi Winter Olympics is no exception to it. On one hand though, some of the findings could be potentially applicable to other places because this type of provided infrastructure could generate similar outcomes. On the other hand, it is not the case because there are few places with the same spatial characteristics, history, and similar country context.

For the future research it would be beneficial to conduct more interview with residents and experts from different fields, including geography, urban planning, and governance. This could provide new links within the topic. Additionally, it would be strongly advised to conduct a physical observation of the study area over multiple periods of time, which was not possible due to COVID-19, to create a personal perception and having an option to talk to people in person.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Interview Guide

Opening questions:

1. How long do you live in Sochi?
2. Could you please tell me a bit about Sochi?
 - What is known for?
 - How has it changed? (maybe)
3. From your personal view, do you think Sochi is a good touristic destination?
 - Why do/ don't?
 - For whom would you consider Sochi a good touristic destination? (nationals/international)
 - In what time of the year would it be better to come? (Can Sochi be considered a good tourist destination all year round, why? Is it possible to come all year round for tourism?)
 - What are the tourists coming for in Sochi? (beach, relax, mountains, ski, sports ..)
 - What attractions/facilities are the most popular for tourists?
 - Why these in your opinion? (only if facilities from Olympics were mentioned)

Main Questions:

4. Could you please shortly tell, how tourism changed in Sochi in the last 10 - 15 years, in your opinion?
 - Did some big changes happen? When? What was the reason in your opinion?
 - Did it increase/decrease? When was this trend noticed? Any specific reason?
 - Could you explain this in further detail? Could you give an example?
5. Could you please tell, how Winter Olympics in 2014 affected tourism in Sochi in your opinion?
 - In what way? How did it change tourism? (nationals/internationals? Summer/Winter/Both?)
 - Do more tourists come to Sochi after the Olympics?
 - Why do more tourists started to come in your opinion? (only if before said that more tourists come)
6. What infrastructural interventions were done for the Olympics 2014? (sport related and non-sport related)
 - Roads? Rails? Hotels? Olympic Village (formula 1 ring)? Coastal Cluster? Mountain cluster?
 - Which of the mentioned interventions are actively used by the tourists after the Olympics?
7. How and why do you think these infrastructural interventions affected the tourism?
 - Do tourists come because of greater variety of sports activities?
 - Do tourists come because of the larger selection of hotels?
 - Do tourists come because of improved transport accessibility?
 - Can tourists come all year round now in your opinion?
 - Can tourist come in winter not for winter sports?
8. Do you think these infrastructural interventions attract more tourists? (national/international?)
 - Why/Why not?
 - Which spatial interventions attract?
9. Have more cultural and or sporting events been held since the Olympics?
 - What is the reason for this?
 - Can you give an example please?

Closing questions:

10. Do you have anything else to add you feel might be important?