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The Magnitostroi of Health: Sochi and the Transformation of the Caucasian Black Sea Coast as a Model for Regional Development in the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation

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Abstract: In the run-up to the Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014, the Russian leadership repeatedly declared the games to be exemplary for future regional development projects within the country. Treating Sochi as a model case for regional development has a long pre-history, going back to the period of 'high Stalinism'. Discussing the consecutive development plans for Sochi since the 1930s, this article suggests that in the case of Sochi, Moscow's methods of octroying centrally planned grandiose schemes with massive short-term investment 'against all odds' displayed a high degree of consistency over time. Stalin's plans to create a 'world-class' resort, the ambitious plans to accommodate a genuine Soviet mass tourism in the 1960s and 70s in 'Great Sochi' as well as the preparation of the 2014 Olympics habitually produced significant discrepancies between the aspired aims of Soviet development and its socio-economic and ecologic consequences in the region.

Keywords: Black Sea, Caucasus, Central Planning, Ecology, Five-Year Plans, Great Sochi, Health resort, Mass tourism, Olympic games, Perestroika, recreation, regional development, Sanatoria, Social tourism, Soviet Union, Stalinism, Urban Planning

The 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics entered history as the biggest and most expensive ever, showcasing contemporary Russia's modernity and openness. According to Western estimates, the games cost approximately 50 billion US dollars, more than five time the sum initially planned. The lion's share had to come from the Russian Federations state budget (Müller, 2015, pp. 191). Whom did Vladimir Putin intend to impress? If it was a global audience, then the rampant corrup-

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tion afflicting the mega project from the beginning, and its obvious neglect of environmental standards and human rights in the process of realisation rendered international perception increasingly sceptical. Russia's annexation of the Crimea and its interference in the Donbas immediately after the games closed seem to indicate that Putin could not have cared less.

The Sochi Olympics, then, were also meant to be awe-inspiring for a domestic audience, "fomenting solidarity and place-based loyalty through spectacle" (Alekseyeva, 2014, p. 168). In this respect the games may have indeed been quite successful, eliciting pride in the fatherland and its leadership. True, an outspoken minority within Russia criticised the above-listed shortcomings, too, yet opinion polls demonstrated that a majority of Russia's citizens expressed consistent support for the project (Alekseyeva, 2014, p. 161, quote 16). Besides raising patriotic feelings, the Olympics served the federal government, led nominally by the 'moderniser' Medvedev in much of the preparatory period (2008–2012), as a blueprint for large-scale regional development schemes. Again, critics have been quick to point out that the excessive spending on oversized sports facilities, like the skating rink, or gigantic infra-structural projects like the new Sochi Airport or the rail link to Krasnaia Poliana, constitute a rather dubious legacy for the future development of the Sochi region, the prime tourist destinations in southern Russia (Alekseyeva, 2014, pp. 159, 161; Müller, 2014, p. 154; Müller, 2015, pp. 198, 203).

In fact, the emergence and growth of the holiday destination 'Great Sochi' had followed a quite similar logic in terms of a top-down development implemented by Moscow. My article argues that the creation of Sochi as the model Soviet health and holiday resort under Stalin's auspices in the 1930s set a paradigm for gigantic regional development projects in the realm of leisure and tourism. In this sense, the federal government's approach to the Olympics project, turning Sochi once again into the "largest construction site on Earth" (Müller, 2015, p. 191), followed a deeply entrenched logic.

Russia's Caucasian Black Sea coast had been relatively underdeveloped well into the Soviet period, while other destinations in the Empire, like the Crimea and the Baltics had witnessed significant tourism in the wake of railway construction already during the second half of the nineteenth century. Sochi, the primary resort on the so-called 'Russian Riviera', emerged as a genuinely Soviet showcase project during the Second Five-Year Plan (1933–1937), intended to dwarf all existing resorts in the Soviet Union in terms of quality and quantity. Sochi was declared an *udarnaia stroika*, a prioritised "shock construction" site (Anonymous, 1934), along with *Dnieprostroi* Dam or the Moscow metro. Calling Sochi a "magnitostroi of health", *Pravda* compared Sochi to one of the iconic

industrial projects of the First Five-Year Plan, Magnitogorsk. This was a town built around a gigantic steel plant in the middle of nowhere. Launched around the time in which Stalin celebrated the advent of 'Socialism' in the USSR, the Second Five-Plan tended to prioritise industrial projects not as exclusively as the First. Still, the comparison with Magnitogorsk is quite remarkable, as Soviet thinking about modernisation and development was deeply rooted in nineteenth-century concepts of industrialisation and agricultural improvement. Until the late Soviet period, third-sector service industries including tourism were hardly seen as means of regional development and thus, as a rule, were not a priority for planners.

In that sense, Sochi's development is both paradigmatic and an exception to the rule. The article first analyses Stalin's 'invention' of Soviet Sochi as a 'world class health resort' and then traces the impact of the first grand design on the region and on later development strategies, from the creation of 'Great Sochi' in the 1960s to Putin's Olympics project in the 2000s, with which the story comes full circle.

1 The Setting

As late as the 1870s, the Caucasian Black Sea coast south of the Caucasus remained a contested borderland of the Russian empire, temporarily evacuated during wars against the Ottomans. Primarily strategic considerations led to Russian colonisation of the coastal region after the expulsion of indigenous peoples like the Cherkess. Up to WW I, the Empire resettled the area with retired soldiers and ethnic minorities from other parts of the empire, for example, Estonians and Germans. The tsars also granted larger landholdings to high representatives of their civil and military administration, some of whom built sumptuous summerhouses in the area.

These colonisation efforts, however, suffered from the difficult climatic conditions, endemic malaria and poor connections with Russia across the Caucasus. Seasonal heavy rains, floods and landslides harassed the settlers. After the destruction of Cherkess orchards, the settlers struggled with setting up their own farms, fortresses, villages and towns. The narrow coastal plain, segmented by a large number of ravines, gullies and small streams, created significant obstacles for an agricultural exploitation that would have made the colonisation effort economically viable. The area remained dependent on the importation of food.

The influx of Armenian refugees from the Ottoman Empire after the pogroms of 1894–1896, 1909 and 1915–1916 brought some agricultural improvement in the shape of tea and extensive tobacco farming and left a significant imprint on the demographic situation. By 1926, Armenians amounted to about one third of the local population, whereas ethnic Russians accounted for only one quarter (Vershadskaia, 2006, p. 21).

Access to the area remained difficult well into the twentieth century. Besides one road from Novorossiisk constructed in 1892, the Sochi area could be reached by Black Sea navigation only. The lack of proper ports, however, obstructed sea travel and trade. Until the 1930s, passengers had to disembark on the roadstead and were brought to the shore with barges. Sochi was linked to the Russian railroad network only in 1923. Although some foreign observers praised the beauty of the region and coined the terms *Côte d'Azur Russe* and *Riviera du Caucase* around the turn of the century (Martel, 1908), an 1898 expedition by the Russian geographer Voeikov found the coastal area unsuitable for development. Voeikov rather suggested developing the nearby mountain village of Krasnaia Poliana into a health resort (Conterio, 2015, pp. 99–100). Upon local initiative, a first hotel called 'Kavkazskaia Rivera' was built in the village of Sochi in 1909. Moreover, an association for the exploration of the Matsesta hydrogen-sulphurous springs was set up in the 1900s to capture the mineral waters. An unassumingly equipped spa opened in 1912. The influx of vacationers remained modest, with about 10,000 visitors annually on the eve of WW I.

2 Building the "Magnitostroi of Health" (1930–1950s)

Nothing much changed in the Sochi area in the 1920s. Soviet reports testify that malaria continued to molest vacationers, whose number had risen slowly to about some 50,000 annually in the early 1930s (Kurorty, 1983, pp. 321–322). Among them were some prominent members of the party leadership, including Anastas Mikoian. Mikoian allegedly recommended the curative powers of the Matsesta springs to Stalin, who was suffering from a rheumatic left arm. (Samsonenko, 2008). Whatever may be the degree of truth to this founding myth of *Soviet* Sochi, Moscow in the early 1930s embarked on a grandiose development scheme for the area, turning Sochi into a flagship project for the emerging Soviet variety of social tourism. At the time, travel and recreation in a health resort

became an important part of the system of rewards bestowed upon the party elite and distinguished shock workers (Noack, 2011).

In the framework of the Second Five-Year-Plan (1933–1937), which foresaw the 'socialist' reconstruction of cities like Moscow, Gorkii and Novosibirsk, the party leadership decided to transform Sochi into a 'world class health resort', catering for the toiling masses and its leadership. Besides a significant extension of facilities and capacities (up to 25,000 beds), the plan entailed the construction of 40–50 exclusive 'state dachas', to be used by Stalin and his inner circle. In order to accomplish this flagship project, the partly leadership chose a top-down approach characteristic for the period. Sochi's transformation was included on the list of priority projects of the Second Five-Year-Plan. Substantial financial means and planning facilities were set aside to elaborate a first 'general development plan' for Sochi in 1933–1934. Stalin invested a special plenipotentiary with the coordination of the construction work. Commissioner Aleksandr Denisovich Metelev and his staff of 55 employees had to look after the allocation of human and technical resources necessary for the realisation of the project. They squatted inside the building of Sochi's city Soviet, ousting the local deputies. (Samsonenko, 2007, pp. 11–13; Conterio, 2014, p. 249).

Sochi's limited development as a destination at the time – it counted barely 15 recreational facilities in 1933 – allowed for a ruthless 'overwriting' of the existing town and its immediate surroundings, the coastal stretch between the Mamaika and Kudepsta rivers. The best Soviet architects and landscape planners, including M. Ginzburg, V.A. and A.A. Vesnin, responsible for the 1935 Moscow general development plan, were commissioned to design sanatoria and clinics, to lay out parks, avenues, bridges or embankments. I. Merzhanov's iconic building of the Voroshilov Sanatoria in Sochi won a Grand Prix at the 1937 Paris World Fair. A cable car, dubbed the "sanatorium metro", linked the Central Military and the Ordzhonikidse sanatoria to the beaches (Zaitsev, Komarov & Maksimov, 1963, p. 108). As splendid as the architecture of these sanatoria was, they were never meant to cater for the masses, to whom they were dedicated in official propaganda. The average size of the new sanatoria rarely exceeded 250–300 places. Large sanatoria were seen as "poor for relaxation" by Stalin himself (Conterio, 2014, pp. 245–246).

Overall, the Sochi general plan reads like an extension of the 1935 Moscow plan, transforming Sochi into a remote subtropical suburb of Stalin's capital, mirroring the latter's lavish layout. In terms of investment, Sochi's planning was excessive and indeed inefficient. It was meant to impress. Once having passed through the procedures of medical and political vetting and been admitted to the spa, selected Soviet vacationers received heavily subsidised vouchers

that entitled them to enter a perfectly organised world of leisure, juxtaposed to the mundane experiences of life and labour during the Soviet industrialisation drive (Noack, 2012, p. 190; Koenker, 2013, pp. 29–34).

More than the 'socialist reconstruction' of huge cities like Moscow, the conversion of a peripheral village into a world-class spa entailed a substantial transformation of landscape and vegetation. In a recent study, Johanna Conterio has demonstrated in detail that Sochi's planners drew on the international experience and emulated, to a degree, the contemporary creation of Miami Beach out of Florida's Everglades. For the sake of the creation of a luxurious subtropical spa, Soviet urban planners and landscape architects connected the older and the newly emerging recreation facilities through a central axis, the palm-lined highway Stalin Prospect. They obviously expected tourists to admire land- and cityscapes rather from a car window than as pedestrian *flâneurs*. In and around this central resort area, riverbeds received embankments, flooding areas were drained and ravines spanned by viaducts. The existing vegetation of the Black Sea coast, which, according to a contemporary, did not "correspond to its climatic features", was replaced by evergreen Mediterranean plants in order to correct the 'mistakes of nature' and introduce 'the flora suitable' to what was now hailed as the 'Soviet subtropics' (Conterio, 2014, p. 252 quote; Conterio, 2015, pp. 92–93, 104–107, 111).

Initially urban planners and landscape architects, not medical specialists determined the way the project was implemented. This insinuates that the making of 'new' Sochi was much less about the accessibility of health resorts for the Soviet masses than about the creation of a built-up Soviet dream-world, just as happened in the USSR's capital Moscow. Only in the course of time were medical experts from the Commissariat of Public Health able to augment their authority. They prevented, for example, city planners from offering several decentralised facilities for taking waters. Matsesta's springs remained a centralised institution for water cures under the control of the local doctors (Conterio, 2015, pp. 108–109).

The spatial distribution of the facilities mirrored both the medical preferences and the ideological tenets of a Stalinist health resort. Sochi's littoral was reserved for parks, theatres, cinemas and, above all, the sanatoria, providing for the most prestigious and at the same time the most strictly regulated form of vacationing. Less prestigious facilities, like rest homes, were banned to the foothills, whereas the mountainous area was meant to be converted into forest parks, from which visitors would enjoy panoramic views over the resort and its surroundings (Stadelbauer, 1986, p. 12; Samsonenko, 2007, pp. 8–10).

In spite of the allocation of human and financial resources, the implementation of such grandiose designs in Sochi created innumerable difficulties. They resulted, among other things, from the disproportional investment in the development of the resort. Between 60 and 70 million roubles were spent on the construction of the spas in 1934 alone, whereas the budgets assigned to the municipality for the development of the infrastructure amounted only to 2.5 million roubles in the same year. Sochi at the time had no sewage system and only rudimentary supplies of fresh water or electric power. Beyond that, the town with 18,000 permanent inhabitants as of 1930 and the surrounding villages had to accommodate the bigger part of 30,000 workers, who could not be recruited locally (Samsonenko, 2008, pp. 4–5).

Such disproportionate investment during Stalin's times resulted in a partial urbanisation of Sochi, producing sharp contrasts between the central health resort area and the other quarters of the town. Moreover, water and energy supplies played out as a zero-sum game – the more was siphoned away for the recreational area, the more the local population had to live with shortages. More pressing were the poor housing conditions. Besides the construction workers, the extensive medical and service personnel for the new facilities had to be housed. As was the case for construction workers, only a small number of this service personnel could be recruited locally (Kuznetsova, 2012, p. 193). Hence barracks built for the workers were not demolished when construction ended. Instead, they were used as accommodations for the sanatoria staff. By 1960, no less than 4,000 families were living in such barracks (Zaitsev, 2009; Natolochnaia, 2010, p. 55). Investors, i.e., Soviet enterprises aiming at the construction of vacation facilities, and immigrants from other parts of the country, often retired army officers, competed with the locals for rare housing space or building grounds. The miserable wages in the recreational sector acerbated the problems. Low service culture and high labour turnover remained problematic throughout the Soviet period. An attempt at addressing both issues was the practice of the municipal housing administration to demand uninterrupted employment for some years in Sochi as a prerequisite for accepting people on waiting lists (Zaitsev, 2009, p. 39; Natolochnaia, 2008a). The net influx of population during the Stalin years changed Sochi's ethno-demographic outlook significantly. By the end of the 1950s, 70 percent of Sochi's 80,000 inhabitants were ethnic Russians (Tveritinov, 2008, p. 29).

Sochi's Soviet developers also failed to solve other urgent tasks, like that of sufficient food supplies. Due to limited and expensive transport facilities, the planners aimed at provisioning the resorts from neighbouring villages. This required a redeployment of existing tobacco plantations for horticulture. Alt-

hough the collectivization drive of the 1930s facilitated the regime's interference with local agricultural production, the lack of investment and incentives meant that food supplies from the region remained precarious and poor in quality (Samsonenko, 2007, p. 11; Vershadskaia, 2006, p. 23).

In order to address the transport bottleneck and to accelerate the extensive construction work, a seaport was built in Sochi in the late 1930s. The necessary construction of large piers almost immediately exacerbated ecological problems, as currents along the shore changed and began to wash away the pebble beaches of the recreational zone to such a degree that some of new resort structures were at risk of slipping into the sea. The beaches had suffered already from the illegal but tolerated excavation of gravel, sand and stone for construction. This made extensive stabilisation of the shoreline necessary. Frequent landslides occurred also in other build-up parts of the area, due to strong seasonal rainfall swelling the rivers (Samsonenko, 2007, p. 11; Natolochnaia, 2008b, p. 15; Conterio, 2014, pp. 277–278).

In many respects, Sochi's development as a Stalinist flagship resort had thus little bearing on the development of the region at large. By contrast, the spa remained a deliberately secluded funfair for "the best of the best of our country: shock workers of factories, mines, towers, fields, etc., engineering-technical workers, scientists, commanders of the Red Army, industry, etc." (Kurorty SSSR, 1936, p. 20). The new resort areas around the central alley, the *Kurortnyi prospekt*, with their symmetric parks and squares, displayed all the splendour of palatial resort architecture. The outlook of the remaining parts of the town, however, changed only slowly. Tellingly, Sochi's palm-lined highway ended abruptly at the borders of the resort. Tourists and travellers circulated within a narrow developed zone or were transported to a few designated destinations beyond, like the mountain resorts of Krasnaia Poliana or Lake Ritsa, without getting into much contact with the local population (Samsonenko, 2007, p. 10; Natolochnaia, 2009, p. 21).

3 Soviet Mass Tourism (1960s–1980s)

Many of the structural development problems listed above did not escape the attention of the Soviet administrators, however, they had little power to address them efficiently. In 1938 and 1948, respectively, more competences for tourist development were concentrated with the trade unions, and after the war, Sochi was severed from the Krasnodar region and designated a special territorial unit directly subordinated to the government of the RSFSR. These measures had

little effect, and it was only with Khrushchev's consumerist turn that the character of Soviet tourism began to change.

With Khrushchev, 'organised' vacations ceased to be the privilege of a select few. Instead, the regime perceived and presented tourism and recreation as important pillars of the Soviet welfare state, demonstrating the superiority of the communist system over the capitalist. Accordingly, the regime's earlier rhetorical commitment to mass tourism became more genuine. It propagated tourism and travel as purposeful socialist forms of leisure and consumption, especially after Soviet citizens received rising wages and enjoyed reduced workloads, including the five-day working week introduced in 1967. Against the backdrop of the Soviet citizens' growing wealth and mobility, the encouragement to travel for leisurely purposes proved a self-fulfilling prophecy. It seems that already early in the 1960s, more people travelled independently, i.e., otherwise than with the tourist infrastructure provided by the trade unions (Noack, 2006, p. 281).

Access to the resorts for larger parts of society, including previously excluded groups like collective farmers, became thus a declared priority. With reference to the fact that statistically a higher percentage of workers had enjoyed holidays in the 1920s than in the 1950s, trade unions pressed for a significant extension of tourism facilities. In fact, the trade unions gained more responsibility in the process, when in 1960 a large number of medical and recreational facilities passed under their jurisdiction (Noack, 2006, pp. 282–284). In Sochi, however, they were only in charge of less than half of the recreational facilities, and of a slightly higher percentage of the simpler accommodations in the tourist sector, amounting to one third of the available beds (Zaitsev, 2009, p. 43).

Finally, in 1964, the Soviet government decided on making hitherto unprecedented investments into the tourist infrastructure to boost capacities. The terms 'mass tourism' and 'tourist industries' entered the Soviet vocabulary. The government refrained, however, from making structural changes. Within trade unions, different branches (councils) bore responsibility for stationary vacationing termed *otdykh* ('recreation') and more mobile forms called *turizm* (Henningsen, 1993, pp. 25–39). Neither was this institutional separation between tourism and recreation given up, nor was the creation of a strong economic branch with its own ministry on the cards. Only such an upgrade would have provided a Soviet 'tourism industry' with administrative leverage comparable to that of the favoured (heavy) industry branches in the USSR's planned economy.

In the post-Stalin period, however, some significant administrative preparations preceded the large-scale investments designated to turn Sochi into a destination for real 'mass tourism'. A second general plan for Sochi had foreseen a

moderate growth of the resort within the limits of the existing town in 1957, but the planners quickly realised the constraints – there was too little space to enhance capacities as envisioned (Zaitsev, 2009, pp. 38–39). In 1960, the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR staked out a three-kilometre-deep coastal area and interdicted construction work for purposes other than recreation within this zone. Finally, it decreed in 1961 the creation of "Great Sochi", with a joint administration for a 145-km stretch of the Caucasian Black Sea coast from Magri (near Tuapse) in the northwest to Adler in the southeast, on the boarder to Abkhazia. This was to allow more coordinated regional planning, including the ascription of specific functions to certain areas or towns within the zone, and a cost-effective extension of necessary infrastructure including roads, supplies, canalisation etc. (Stadelbauer, 1986, pp. 11–12; Zaitsev, 2009, pp. 41–43).

A third and, again, very ambitious general plan, devised for 25 years, was finally announced in 1967. The plan suggested enhancing Sochi's capacities from 42,000 to 200,000 beds. It also dealt with zoning, the coordination of the local economy for better service of the resort, the development of infrastructure and housing, with road construction and the designation of 'green areas' (Zaitsev, 2009). Over the whole coastal stretch, the 1967 general plan suggested a 'division of labour' between eight recreational zones. While central Sochi remained a recreational area characterised by sanatoria and clinics, less developed places like Adler or Dagomys were earmarked for cheaper tourist accommodation, including some facilities for increasingly popular family vacationing.

The plan implied a clear move away from the grandeur of Stalinist resort architecture and hence from expensive and labour-intensive sanatoria. Since Khrushchev had taken power, they were faulted for their 'excessive' ornamentation. Sanatoria were to be replaced by cheaper facilities in the style of the international second modern. This allowed for the development of types of projects that could be realised easily and cheaply across the Soviet Union, using standardised building material. Again, Soviet planners sought inspiration abroad. Instead of Miami and Florida, as in the 1930s, the new role models of the 1960s were closer to home, in the recently finished Romanian and Bulgarian Black Sea resorts, targeting foreign tourists and currencies. The Soviet planners "translated" the foreign models into large 'recreational complexes', realised first in the Sochi area in the late 1960s with Adler's *kurortnyi gorodok*. It featured standardised sleeping corpuses to accommodate no less than 2,000 vacationers at a time. (Conterio, 2014, pp. 377–382, 391–394). Modern and more spacious new buildings, which allowed for a quicker increase of capacities, supplemented or replaced some of the historical buildings of the pre-revolutionary or early Soviet period in Sochi as well (Zaitsev, 2009, p. 41). At the time, observers often de-

cried the erection of concrete, steel and glass hotels and accommodations. Among the criticised "modernisms" of the period were, for example, luminous (neon) signs as "advertisements" of hotels and restaurants (Noack, 2012, pp. 193–194). Indeed, the 1970s and early 1980s saw the completion of some of the largest vacation facilities in contemporary Europe, such as the 25-storey resort "Neva" in central Sochi with 500 beds or the recreational complex "Dagomys" (1975–1981) with 2,500 beds, 1,650 of which were located in a 27-floor skyscraper (Zaitsev, 2009, p. 43).

In the wake of the construction boom of the 1960s and 1970s, Sochi lost much of its heterotopic appeal (Foucault, 1986). Architecture that was more mundane spread across the entire coastal zone. The urban character of the growing agglomeration – with a planned increase from 173,000 to 250,000 inhabitants – was emphasised, not just by the erection of skyscrapers, but also by the transformation of Sochi into a venue for regular film, music or youth festivals. Although the bottlenecks in rail and road transportation remained, the emergence of affordable air transport moved Sochi closer to Moscow and other big industrial cities in Russia. By the end of the 1970s, no less than 60 per cent of the visitors seem to have come by plane, as opposed to 38 per cent by train and a mere 2 per cent by car (Stadelbauer, 1986, p. 12).

At the same time, the realisation of the new grand designs suffered from old problems and challenges. To begin with, Sochi's builders lacked the capacities for construction work of this scale. The completion of facilities trailed significantly behind the planned schedules. Moreover, in many stretches of Great Sochi earlier planning mistakes obstructed the envisioned extension of the recreational zone. Water and energy supplies remained insufficient, a sewer system was in many places totally absent. Except for 'old Sochi', the coastal railway line and the highway cut off the resorts from the shore. The geographic setting would have made any attempt at redirection prohibitively expensive. Therefore, circular roads were not built, although this had been suggested in the general plan (Zaitsev, 2009, pp. 42–45; Conterio, 2014, p. 386).

While recreational areas and a large natural preserve were protected at least on paper, industrial areas and living quarters were not separated. More investment into apartment buildings notwithstanding, the housing problems remained acute and the government continued to restrict residency permits to those employed in Sochi. (Zaitsev, 2009, p. 39). The planned increase of facilities alone stretched the already strained labour and housing conditions further (Kuznetsova, 2012, p. 194). Beyond that, effective coordination was continuously thwarted by the fact that even if the municipality would find ways to come to terms with the two councils (for recreation and tourism); it encountered difficul-

ties in reining in the owners of the *vedomstvennye* facilities (i.e. those run directly by enterprises or branches of the state or party apparatus). More than thirty different organisations owned recreational facilities in Sochi at the time, which accounted for about two thirds of the capacities in the *kurort*, and these organisations would rather be guided by self-interest than by commitment to the common good (Zaitsev, 2009, p. 43).

With hundreds of thousands of 'non-organised' tourists flooding into Sochi during the summer season, the problem of overcrowding reached hitherto unknown dimensions. By the mid-1970s, two thirds of the 3.5 million annual visitors were such 'wild tourists'. Unable, and possibly also unwilling to limit the influx of the 'wild tourists', the trade union councils and the municipality called for pragmatic solutions (Noack, 2016, pp. 66–71). Private letting of beds to tourists had been tolerated throughout the Soviet period, even though it conflicted with Soviet law. Since the early 1960s, the trade unions broadly attempted to organise and control this sub-letting, even claiming such additional capacities in their statistical reports (Stadelbauer, 1986, p. 13). The emergence of private accommodation, however, further increased the strain in the housing sector and impacted on the occupational structure. By 1980, about 30 per cent of the inhabitants were directly employed in the official Soviet tourist infrastructure. About 10 per cent worked in the medical sector, 8 per cent in trade and catering, 6 per cent in food production and processing, 5 per cent in transport and 4 per cent in the cultural sector. Yet even Soviet statistics allowed for no less than 90 per cent of all income in Sochi being generated by tourism. (Stadelbauer, 1986, pp. 12–13). During the period, it seems, tourism finally pervaded all walks of social and economic life in Great Sochi.

For the 'wild tourists' vacationing in Sochi required a lot of improvisation and acceptance of substandard room and board, not to mention congested beaches. It became increasingly difficult to keep the crowds away from the recreational zones and beaches originally reserved for "organised tourism". Under such circumstances, Sochi hardly represented an ideal socialist model world for the vacationers anymore. What made 'wild tourism' attractive was that it allowed an escape from the narrow social contexts of mundane life, facilitating, for example, extra-marital relationships, as many married men and women travelled on their own. Organised tourists, too, received holiday vouchers only for themselves and not for their spouses. In the Soviet Union, 'moon bathing', i.e., flirts at night, were widely practiced in sanatoria, and the idea that "the health resort is a place where romance flourishes" was firmly established in Soviet popular culture (Conterio, 2014, pp. 356–357 quote; Kuznetsova, 2014).

The congestion with tourists could not but exacerbate Sochi's fragile ecological situation. Water reservoirs were heavily polluted, as were the beaches and the sea. The sewage system and treatment plants were deficient or ineffective. Attempts to boost agricultural production in the area by the use of fertilisers and herbicides added to the water pollution. Towards the end of the Soviet period, increased individual traffic and mobility also implied heavier air pollution (90 per cent caused by road traffic). Allegedly, mobile 'wild tourists' littered large parts of the area, putting up improvised campsites wherever they could. Waste disposal was organised in an inefficient way and a waste incinerator built in 1984 never functioned properly (Chernogaeva & Federov, 1992; Ermachkov & Cherkasov, 2007).

An important factor contributing to local disenchantment was the fact that the general plan of 1967 was never fully implemented. During the 1970s, the government channelled less investment than planned into Great Sochi. Many projects took years to build, causing complaints by vacationers and locals exposed to excessive noise, traffic and pollution through ongoing construction work. In 1981, Great Sochi offered some 81,000 beds in recreational facilities and another 15,000 places in tourist accommodations. It was twice as big as "Great Yalta" on the Crimea, yet a far cry from the initially planned 200,000 beds.

Hence, the "pragmatic" shifts towards mass tourism under Khrushchev and Brezhnev allowed planners to envisage a more coordinated touristic valorisation of the Sochi region in the shape of yet another huge development scheme. However, like their predecessors under Stalin, they failed to create the necessary structural preconditions for managing a project of this scope. The contemporary use of terms like 'mass tourism' or 'tourism industry' suggests that vacationing was increasingly being understood to be more than a social benefit to be bestowed on the population. This 'tourist industry', though, was neither put on an equal footing with the traditionally "strong" industrial branches in the USSR, nor revalued as a serious instrument of economic revenue. The institutional fragmentation between the competing central and local institutions continued, even if Sochi's direct sub-ordination to Moscow allowed by-passing at least the regional level of the Krasnodar district. The centre's stronger leverage often meant in practice that regional or local interests were ignored by planners and decision makers. Where the plans had foreseen more regional coordination, the latter was in practice often thwarted by the competition for scarce resources, for the allocation of building spaces, financial investments in communal infrastructure or access to scarce local construction capacities and labour forces. Ironically, the emergence of genuine mass tourism in the area in the shape of 'wild

tourism', an unintended 'collateral damage' resulting from the structural deficiencies of Soviet social tourism, proved to have more of an impact on regional development than some of the grand designs by Soviet tourism planners, which could only partly be realised. 'Wild' independent mass tourism changed socio-economic relations beyond the planners' imaginations, and further threatened the region's fragile ecology, suffering already from the damages inflicted by Soviet planning megalomania.

4 Transition

Gorbachev's perestroika, aiming at raising the efficiency of the Soviet economy and cutting excessive spending, could not but have an impact on the development of a tourist destination like Sochi. The most import factors were, on the one hand, the attempts to convert state enterprises into self-financing units from 1988 onwards, which affected the labour- and cost-intensive sanatoria more than other branches of Soviet tourism. On the other hand, the economic downturn meant that Soviet citizens, probably for the first time in decades, had less money to spend on leisure, including on their holidays, which hit unorganised vacationers harder than those who travelled on the highly subsidised vouchers (*putevki*). All of this became obvious only with a certain time lag. With its 5.2 million tourists, the year 1988 constituted the apex of Soviet tourism in Sochi in terms of annual visitors (Ermachkov, 2010b, p. 57).

One might have expected that new opportunities to open small businesses in the form of cooperatives, provided by Gorbachev's cautious economic reforms, might have helped to overcome some bottlenecks in the Soviet tourism service sector. The new cooperatives emerging during perestroika, however, meant initially little more than legalising existing grey or black market practices. Of the 1,200 cooperatives that have been accounted for in Sochi in 1990–1991, only a small percentage was directly involved with tourism: 7 per cent in catering, 6 per cent in trade, less than 2 per cent in medical services or sports, respectively (Bagdasarjan, 2008, p. 39). Prohibitively high prices for goods and services prevented the cooperative sector from redressing some of the structural deficits in the decaying field of organised tourism. A case in point was the food supply to Sochi, which had always been problematic. It deteriorated further during perestroika. By contrast, cooperatives rather suggested new services like beauty parlours, gambling machines or video shops (Ermachkov, 2010a, p. 76).

The transition to a market economy and the ensuing privatisation politics after 1992 quickly eliminated 'organised' tourism in its Soviet shape, which had

been chronically suffering from a lack of investment already in the late Soviet period and during Gorbachev's tenure (1985–1991). With the end of Communism and the launching of 'shock therapy' in 1992, Russia's social insurance system, which had financed much of the touristic infrastructure during Soviet times, collapsed, too. Initial hopes that foreign investors might take over the economically inefficient and overstaffed sanatoria quickly evaporated. Efforts to launch a third general plan for Sochi in 1990–1991 had failed to materialise due to the demise of the USSR. The policies of the new Yeltsin government reverted to symbolism rather than to massive investment: Sochi was declared a resort of 'federal importance' in 1993, but in the midst of privatisation and an economic slump there was little effort to preserve the costly structures and facilities of Soviet social tourism in the country. Beyond that, the decaying tourism facilities in Russia suffered from the fact that the slowly emerging Russian middle class began to discover cheap travel destinations abroad.

The lack of a new general plan and the collapse of the trade unions' tourism and recreational administrations in 1991 unexpectedly empowered the municipal government. Sochi remained directly subordinated to Moscow, but the centre was neither able to grant viable development perspectives nor to allocate financial subsidies. At least in theory, the city government, in the Soviet past one of the weaker agents in tourism development, could have profited from the demise of the trade unions' tourism administrations and from the difficulties Moscow encountered in exerting its power in the peripheries.

The influence of Sochi's city council on local and regional tourism development remained limited, though, as for example the practice of skirting the official accommodation agencies, already widespread during the late Soviet period, continued. Depending largely on local resources, the municipal government, not entirely for altruistic reasons, allowed relatively uncharted development for the next decade. Initially, the private sector boomed in the form of comparatively small-scale family businesses, i.e. hostel-type accommodations or small cafes. Thriving private entrepreneurship, tax evasion and a more or less destitute municipal treasury characterised the situation throughout the 1990s. Contemporary observers complained about 'squatting' by private businesses on beaches and the littoral and recalled with some degree of nostalgia the decaying splendour of Sochi during its Soviet past, with its alleged 'socialist orderliness', which was rhetorically juxtaposed with the 'uncontrolled spread of capitalism' (Suchkov, 2009).

The centre's importance as the driving force behind Sochi's impressive development under socialism became thus fully apparent at the very moment that Moscow's grip on Sochi was loosening. Neither international players nor local

agents were able or willing to take over this dominant role. With the economic recovery in the Putin era, however, incomparably greater opportunities opened up for a collaboration between the city government and real estate developers. No longer was the extension of recreational facilities for the masses or the privatization of the tourist business on the cards, but the sale of secondary homes and apartments in 'Moscow's southernmost suburb' to the new Russian elite. Sochi's city governments allowed for rezoning in the most attractive parts of Great Sochi, including the 'recreational areas' (*kurortnaia zona*). Whereas the 1970s and 1980s had seen a new type of recreational architecture partly overwrite the Stalinist spa, the 'intrusion' of residential building construction and the demolition of existing sanatoria began to change the actual functions of central parts of the town and littoral in general during the 2000s (Suchkov, 2009). The social and economic consequence of these changes during the 1990s and 2000s have not yet been thoroughly researched and mapped. Given the relatively unregulated character of the transition years and, presumably, the lack of documentation, this process will be difficult to analyse for future historians of Sochi.

The ecological consequences of Sochi's planned and unplanned growth, by contrast, are well documented. They became obvious as early as 1991, when after two days of strong rain the small rivers swelled, flooding parts of the town and washing away roads, gas and electric supply lines, water pipes, sewage canals. The floodwaters also destroyed some of the tourist facilities like the recreational complex (*gorodok otdykha*) "Lazerevskoe vzmor'e". Total damages amounted to 163 million roubles, a substantial sum at a time when the state treasury was virtually empty (Ermachkov, 2010b, pp. 58–59). Such flooding is a regular occurrence in Sochi to the present day (Richmond, 2013, p. 212).

5 The Olympic Games

When the federal government started its search for a potential venue to host an international mega event like the 2014 Winter Olympics, Sochi's prehistory made it both an improbable and an obvious choice. On the one hand, as a traditional summer resort it had very little to offer to host a winter-sports event, from climate to facilities, except for its closeness to the Western Caucasus mountain range. Compared to other areas in the Caucasus, however, the nearby mountain village of Krasnaia Poliana, was relatively underdeveloped as a skiing resort. But this disadvantage was readily turned into an asset by the promotors of the games. By developing Krasnaia Poliana and by building indoor sports facilities

in Sochi, they argued, Sochi's dependence on seasonal summer tourism would be reduced, turning it into a "world class, all season resort" (Alekseyeva, 2014, p. 161). On the other hand, earlier Soviet development had provided geographically peripheral Sochi with excellent links to the rest of the country. And after years of 'wild capitalism', at least parts of the local population could also be expected not to be too dismissive of a new, large scale top-down development scheme, promising visitors and thus jobs and renewal for Sochi as a tourist destination.

Tellingly, Russia's federal government under the leadership of Putin took the decisions to proceed with the bid for the 2014 Winter Olympics before a solid plan for Sochi's preparation had been elaborated. The International Olympic Committee, for its part, did not take exception to the lack thereof when it granted the right to host the games to Russia in 2007. The new development plan, hastily compiled by international development agencies in 2009 (Suchkov, 2009; Richmond, 2013, p. 204) bore quite some similarities with the 1967 plan as to its megalomania. It contained, for example, the promise to increase Sochi's capacities from an estimated 70,000 beds to 200,000, with the aim of raising accommodation capacities to about 8 million vacationers annually. It also suggested an extension of the infrastructure, including the long-awaited circular roads and new residential quarters, partly in the form of the "Olympic Village". Critics were quick to point out that this extension would have serious ecological implications, including a reduction of the protected territory of Sochi's national park (Bakharev, 2009; Suchkov, 2009; Richmond, 2013, p. 211).

Reminiscent of Stalin's use of a 'plenipotentiary' in the 1930s, a federal law disenfranchised the municipality in 2008, and Sochi de facto turned into an extra-constitutional zone, allowing for the acquisition of privately owned land and facilitating construction without much respect for environmental standards (Richmond, 2013, pp. 205–207). Sochi's inhabitants gladly saw real estate prices skyrocket after Sochi had won the bid for the Olympics. They soon recognised, however, that the influx of crowds of managers and administrators from Moscow and of an even bigger army of cheap labourers brought from abroad also raised the cost of living in the city, again without providing too much employment opportunities for locals. Worse still, land ownership in the area had been poorly documented during the privatisations of the 1990s. This facilitated land evictions or the valuing of properties below market prices when compensations were negotiated (Alekseyeva, 2014, pp. 164–165).

Sochi rapidly turned into a vast construction site once more, with almost 96,000 construction workers labouring around the clock in 2013 to assure that the sports facilities, new accommodations and infrastructure would be finished

in time (Müller, 2015, p. 191). With ever-mounting time pressure, administrators and contractors showed not very much respect for the protection and preservation of Sochi's cultural and natural heritage, although the promise to conduct the games in a "sustainable, inclusive, environmentally responsible manner" had by necessity been emphasised in the successful bid for Sochi. Among the worst examples was the building of a highway and a new train line to Krasnaia Poliana in the bed of the mountain stream Mzymta. The damage to the landscape and environment was aggravated by the discharge of toxic waste into the river during the construction period. Drinking water springs in the area threatened the health of thousands of inhabitants. The excavation of gravel from the river and the straitening the river bed as well as the illegal felling of trees further increased the risk of inundations, endemic to the whole region anyway (Müller, 2015, p. 192).

Likewise, the Sochi bidding committee had promised that "all key Olympic infrastructure locations have been selected to ensure maximum sustainability and legacy". By contrast, many historic buildings were destroyed in Sochi. This is why the monuments of Sochi's 'golden age', i.e. the years of Stalinist opulence, are both celebrated and endangered today. Contemporary tourists revel in guided tours to those lavishly decorated sanatoria of Stalin's time that have survived. Nonetheless, surviving monuments of Sochi's tourism history, like the remaining buildings of the 1909 sanatoria "Kavkazskaia Rivera", were demolished in 2010 (Kuzetsova, 2012).

Nonetheless, nostalgia for the Soviet past thrives in Putin's Russia. This includes, it would seem, a longing for the good old days when Stalin's mobilising dictatorship moved enormous amounts of financial and human resources to execute top-down whatever centrally-planned policies had been designed to transform the Soviet Union's peripheries. In its design, the ostensive 'modernisation project' Winter Olympics 2014, framed as a mechanism for regional improvement by the Kremlin, reverted to the 'tested' methods of the Five-Year plans. When confronted with the realities, however, the "complexity of the project began to overwhelm the government" (Richmond, 2013, p. 204) and planning turned into improvisation yet again. It was a revenge of the past. The Soviet Union had never elaborated efficient instruments for regional development, relying on hyper-centralisation in state administration, party and economic planning. Local or regional bodies were at best consulted in the decision-making process. Khrushchev undertook some rather erratic attempts at decentralisation between 1957 and 1964 with the creation of the "Regional Economic Soviets" (*Sovnarkhozy*). After 1964, however, Brezhnev had immediately re-established the old hierarchies (Dmitrieva, 1996). Hyper-centralisation col-

lapsed with the Soviet Union, but the ensuing period of more regional and local self-determination was overshadowed by the economic slump. Russia's recent history since 2000 has been a successful exercise in re-centralisation, and the Sochi top-down Olympic project can be understood as an "archetype of Russia's development strategy under the Putin government" (Alekseyeva, 2014, p. 159).

Predictably, the effects of Stalin's and Putin's modernisation drives appear quite similar. Aiming to impress in the short term, they produced expensive splendid façades with little concern for sustainable regional development. The shortcomings quickly became visible. Building trailed years behind the schedule, Sochi's urban and the regional infrastructure developed totally unevenly and partly out of proportion, environmental problems accumulated. Yet the amount of corruption reached under Putin seems to be unmatched. Kickbacks, preferential treatment in the allocation of tenders or simply virtual contracts allegedly siphoned away between 50 and 60 per cent of the 50 billion US dollars spent on the games (Richmond, 2013, pp. 204, 212–214; Müller, 2014, p. 154).

The decision to host the Winter Olympics 2014 in Sochi and the relaunch of a (however 'fake') general plan in 2009 was initially celebrated by a significant part of Sochi's inhabitants, and by Russian citizens more generally, as a return to the heydays of grand Soviet development designs. Such perceptions, however, could not but be crestfallen. Neither the history of the creation of the 'magnitostroi of health' in the 1930s, nor the contemporary attempts at staging a sports mega-event could arguably ever live up to the grandiose projections produced around these projects in Soviet and post-Soviet propaganda.

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