Understanding Russia's Identity through Olympic Ceremonies

Abstract

This paper focuses on the comparative (mis-)interpretation of the 1980 Moscow and 2014 Sochi Olympic ceremonies by media outlets located in Great Britain and the USA, Russia's 'significant others'. Further, the paper attempts to uncover the most persistent facets of Russia's identity - by decoding culturally-specific meanings of the signs and symbols in both ceremonies - and to trace which aspects of its national narrative Russia had to let go eventually in the course of the 34 years that separate the two Olympics. This is undertaken by a documentary analysis of 'Western' media between the periods of 20 July and 6 August for Moscow and 7- 23 February for Sochi – time frames when the direct coverage of the ceremonies took place. Our key findings suggest that instead of enabling Russia to validate a new national identity and image the Western media only helped to reproduce resilient reciprocal national identities. Furthermore, it was the Sochi Olympics as Russia's biggest soft power party to date, not the aftermath, which, not least through a transformative attendant media response/framing from both sides, became the closing chapter of the Russian-Western interdependent identity construction in the early 21st century. Thus, apart from placing the spotlight on Russia's evolving identity and interests, this paper also investigates how the USA's and the UK's media resisted Russia's (Soviet) soft power strategy, whilst in the process solidifying their own identities and promoting their strategic narratives.

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Introduction

A peculiar combination of domestic and international factors contribute to the formation of the new state identity in Russia (Hopf, 2005). The Russian leadership appear acutely aware of Wendt's argument that 'the ability of states to create new worlds in the future depends on the old ones they created in the past' (Wendt, 1994, p.389) and that a new identity necessarily has to involve 'a difference with itself' (Derrida, 1992, p.72). Russian identity reveals the significant interdependence and indivisibility of Russian and Western identities. Both consider each other as their inalienable, albeit currently antagonistic 'Other'. This binary co-construction/opposition is for now mostly limited to the discursive sphere especially manifest in bitter reciprocal media attacks. The media not only foster domestic identity but also help the local public to internalise certain salient information about foreign states and societies (Oettler, 2015; Thomas and Antony, 2015). The recent Alexei Navalny affair, resulting in the jailing of the opposition leader, is indicative of the manner in which the media shape domestic attitudes towards Russia's 'Other', with the RBC news channel condemning criticism of Navalny's prison sentence as meddling '…in the Kremlin's internal affairs' (Deutsche Welle, 3.02.21).

Evidence from a recent study comparing the depiction of both Britain and Russia during their respective pre-Olympic discourses in *The New York Times* confirms the anti-Russian stance of much reporting (Bolshakova, 2016). Despite the similar problems faced by London and Sochi in the run-up to the Olympics they hosted, the media source disproportionately focussed on failures and weaknesses of Russia, whilst selectively extolling London's virtues and focusing on the projected legacy of the Games for British society as a whole. Thus, whereas the Western media prefer to attribute Russia a national identity of 'an autocratic, abusive, and revisionist power' (Tsygankov, 2017, p.31), the national brand identity it tailored specifically for the Sochi Olympics could be summed up as 'dangerous, inefficient, inept, turbulent and troubled' (Bolshakova, 2016, p.462). This way, the author

opines, that by 'becom[ing] Britain's negative Olympic alter ego and its cultural Other … Russia is juxtaposed not only against the UK specifically, but against the whole Western world, of which Britain and the US are prototypical members' (ibid, p.446).

The objectives of this paper are twofold: First, the authors show how Russia's identity has changed during the thirty-four years that separate the Moscow and Sochi Games and what it means for its strategic interests in the world. The authors thereby underscore Miskimmon and O'Loughlin's assertion (2017, 118) that 'Russia's strategic narrative of the international system is underpinned by its identity narrative and this plays out in how it narrates its policy preferences'. Second, the authors conduct an analysis of the Western media framing of the Moscow and Sochi Olympic Ceremonies in order to understand how the West interprets and internalises Russia's identity and what aspects of that identity it is particularly opposed to.

National Identity and the Olympics

The rationale for hosting SMEs, the legacies and effects associated with them have led to burgeoning literature in sports studies. Numerous studies exist on specific SMEs, for example, the 2006 FIFA World Cup (Ismer 2011; Grix, 2013); the 2008 Summer Olympics (Brownell, 2012); the 2014 Winter Olympics (Alekseyeva, 2014); the 2018 FIFA World Cup (Meier et al. 2019 in Communication & Sport) and the upcoming 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar (Brannagan et. al., 2018). Grix et. al. (2017, 3) noted five 'types' of legacy that states seek to derive from SMEs, including:

1. Economic
2. Urban re-generation
3. National pride/feelgood factor
4. Increased participation in physical activity and sport
5. International prestige and 'soft power'.

Since the tit-for-tat Olympic boycotts of the 1980s fuelled by diverging values and irreconcilable ideological differences there has been a somewhat cooling of the hosts' Olympic agenda. In the case of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, for example, ideological messaging was almost absent, except for the implicit distancing from the communist North; all the emphasis shifted to signalling the country's modernity and democratic choice (Black and Westhuizen, 2004; Mangan and Park, 2011). During the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, ideology for a brief period gave way to pragmatism (Preuss, 2007; Oettler, 2015). As a result, regional competitiveness and post-industrial revitalisation took the lead among the local elites' priorities. The 2008 Beijing Olympics, on the contrary, although signalled China's commitment to peaceful and sustainable development, became a visual claim for China's ascendancy in the international system (Luo, 2010; Brownell, 2013).

This paper – and the use of ceremonies – touches on both national pride and 'soft power' creation. Sports mega-events hosts in the 21st century traditionally pursue soft power goals; that is, they believe in augmenting their international image and increasing status through a seamless, creative and extravagant organisation of an event. 'Soft power', as a concept, has increasingly been used by scholars seeking to understand the rationale behind the hosting of sports mega-events (Cull, 2008; Manzenreiter, 2010; Brannagan et. al., 2018; Grix, 2012; 2016). The concept is linked to, and bound up with, states' public diplomacy and image management strategies. It offers an overarching term to capture a state's strategy, inter alia, to improve its international standing – not by influencing 'the behaviour of others to get the outcomes one wants' (coercive power), but rather by attracting them and co-opting 'them to want what you want' (Nye, 2004, p. 2). Sport is clearly part of a 'soft power' strategy and hosting sports mega-events – especially the Olympics – is clearly considered by states to provide a major contribution in the process of improving their nation's image, profiling and showcasing themselves globally and 'attracting' others through inbound tourism, increased trade and

a growing sense of national pride through the often experienced, but under-researched 'feel-good' factor that accompanies major sports events (Grix, 2013; Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2014).

Yet, while such events invariably become a part of a national narrative, the situations when they are used for its complete overhaul or a legitimisation of a new identity, arguably what Russia aspired to, are far less common. Japan's and South Korea's Olympic experiences in 1964 and 1988 respectively are remarkable in this regard. In view of the circumstances, it was necessary for these countries to assume new identities in a limited timeframe. Yet, the complexity of the concepts of national identity and national brand mean that it is rather difficult to transmit a coherent unified message to different target groups across different markets (Anholt, 2010). Collins (2007), for example, attributes the West's difficulty in interpreting the symbolic meanings of the East Asian Olympic Games to the paucity of cultural dexterity in the first place. As a result, the central message, which was inward-directed and intended to consolidate the nations in the face of their upcoming socio-economic global offensive, escaped wider audiences. This reasoning partially explains why Russia's Olympic messages got lost in translation. The originality of the current analysis stems from the synthesis of interpretations of the cultural programme of the Moscow 1980 and the Sochi 2014 Olympic Games by the Western press. What this effectively does is present a snapshot of the evolution of Russia's identity over 34 years and charts the changes in its reading in the West in the context of similar events. To an extent, this paper endeavours to demystify Russia and, by identifying persistent nodal points as well as contentious points in its national narrative, lend some predictability to its future self and interests; a predictability, which, however, 'derives not from imposed homogeneity, but from (an) appreciation of difference' (Hopf, 1998, p.200). This ambition is predicated on the constructivist premise that:

> Identities offer each state an understanding of other states, its nature, motives, interests, probable actions, attitudes, and role in any given political context. Understanding another state

> as one identity, rather than another, has consequences for the possible actions of both (ibid, p. 193).

The Western reading of Russia's identity is, likewise, crucial for Russia's understanding of itself. One of the central thrusts of social constructivism is that 'identities are only useful if they are interpreted by others' (Scanlon, 2015). The mere fact that Russia, and previously the USSR, took foreign media approval to heart demonstrates its vulnerability and self-consciousness as well as the role of significant others in the construction and legitimisation of Russian identity.

This paper sets out to add to the scant existing literature on the nexus between nationalism and mass communication, inter alia, in reifying national collective attachments. It builds on the seminal works of Karl Deutsch (1966), Benedict Anderson (1991) and Michael Billig (1995), who acknowledged a particular importance of media in constructing a national narrative. By examining the Western media's domesticated framing of the Soviet and Russian Olympic ceremonies, that is the reporting through the national prism (see also Kotnik, 2002; von der Lippe, 2002), this study explains how the media helps both to sustain a sense of nationhood and, whilst thereby extolling the disparities between the two types of modernities, regrettably, to further polarise societies in question.

Sports and the Nation

Before presenting the analysis of the Russian case studies, it is worth flagging up the use of SMEs by states to enhance their national identity (Houlihan, 1994). Here we distinguish between 'national identity' and 'national brand identity'. Both are, of course, interrelated, however, an important distinction exists between the two concepts. The former develops naturally through the course of time and exists irrespective of whether or not individuals are consciously aware of it (see Anholt, 2008; Kavaratzis, 2004). National brand identity, on the other hand, is developed by brand specialists in pursuance of definite economic or political objectives (Fan, 2010; Anholt, 2010). China's brand identity in the context of the 2008 Olympics, for example, was seen as the 'New Beijing, Great

Olympics', and was based on the principles of a 'Green Olympics, High-Tech Olympics and People's Olympics' (Li, 2017, p. 256). This portrayed the three-fold nature of China's Olympic objectives, enabling Beijing to fore-front its efforts to change for the better with regard to sustainable development, thereby addressing Western criticisms on air pollution and broader environmental issues. This also placed the main source of its competitive advantage, namely its technological genius, in the limelight. However, most significantly, it emphasised its focus on nation building through the Olympics. In contrast, as we suggested above, the 2012 London Olympics demonstrated the quintessential Britishness of the twenty-first century (Bryant, 2015), thereby presenting Britain as 'a nation secure in its own post-empire identity' (Hepple, 2012). Such representations are part and parcel of what both Britain and China are and want to be; however, they are not all that there is to these nations. National brand identity is, therefore, based on the constituents of national identity and the most distinctive, enduring, and representative traits of a particular nation (Kotler et al., 1999; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002), which differentiate it from other nations and positively resonate with the target audience. However, as the examples above show, national brand identity is not only context- and time-dependent; it also lends itself to various modifications and interpretations subject to stakeholders' requirements and strategic interests. For example, Germany's identity in the context of the 2006 FIFA World Cup can be summed up by the national image campaign 'Welcome to Germany: Land of Ideas' and a more relaxed, outgoing, less serious nation at ease with itself (see Brauer & Brauer, 2008; Kersting, 2007; Grix and Houlihan, 2014). The malleability of a national brand identity needs to be borne in mind when we discuss our findings from 'Western' media below and their interpretation of Russia's identity.

Methodology

The intention of this research was not only to establish the contours of Russian identity and foreign policy interests and to trace their evolution and continuity with those of the Soviet Union, but also to establish how those identities and interests were internalised by important 'others' – the UK and the USA. For that purpose, the authors analysed the framing of the opening and closing ceremonies of the 1980 Moscow Olympics and the 2014 Sochi Olympics in the news sources listed among the top-10 most credible in those countries. The sample was based on the findings of the Pew Research Center, the Publishers Audience Measurement Company (PAMCo) and Ofcom's News Consumption Survey. To be used in the current study the articles not only had to appear in a reputable, balanced, authoritative media outlet but also to elaborate extensively on the artistic part of the Olympic ceremonies. This study did not discriminate between the sources based on their ideological leanings, it exclusively intended to analyse news outlets that ran articles with a deep and comprehensive evaluation of the ceremonies. Based on those considerations, the articles reviewed came from *The New York Times, The Observer, The Telegraph, The Independent, The Boston Globe, The Guardian, Huffington Post, Daily Mail, New Republic, The Washington Post, The Atlantic, Chicago Tribune, Time, USA Today, The New York Post, The Wall Street Journal.* In total, the authors reviewed 41 articles which appeared between the periods of 20 July and 6 August for Moscow and 7- 23 February for Sochi – time frames when the direct coverage of the ceremonies took place. Via this sample, the authors expected to obtain a more holistic, multi-dimensional picture, where the disparities between an 'ideal' national identity narrative the Russian elites sought to create and an interpreted image were to transpire.

Taking into account that the current paper deals with such intangibles as 'identities, norms, understandings, sentiments and subjective beliefs' (Lezaun, 2002, p.234) it is deeply rooted in social constructivism as a structural theory of IR. Preoccupation with states as the units of analysis, the intersubjective character of their identities and interests and their propensity for change made

constructivism particularly useful for this study (Wendt, 1994, p. 385; Hopf, 1998). Constructivism, in this context, contrasted with realism, rests on the notion that not only is reality a social phenomenon but it also lends itself to change especially when identities and interests are concerned. Following this logic, interests, identities and states likewise are 'constructed by historically contingent interactions' (Wendt, 1994, p.385) or, in other words, are dependent on 'historical, cultural, political, and social context' (Hopf, 1998, p.176).

However, whilst the international system was initially viewed by constructivists as pivotal for identities and interests (Wendt, 1992), recently 'domestic level constructivists [posit] that states may change because of domestic processes independent of international interaction' (Copeland, 2000, p.188). In a more restrained manner Tsygankov (2012, p.22) argues that 'domestic-level variables' such as culture, economy and politics as well as 'the memory of the past interactions with its external environment', perhaps particularly defining in Russia's case, generate 'a social purpose, or a system of meaning in which to act'.

In addition to studying identities, social constructivism sets out to explain ensuing social roles of the states on the international arena and attendant foreign policy (Wendt, 1992). Constructivism holds that shared knowledge and common meaning define actors' identities, interests and behaviour, and consequently, whether their interaction will be based on conflict or cooperation (Wendt, 1994; Hopf, 2010). Both Olympics Russia hosted therefore turned out to be a missed opportunity to create that common understanding of each other with the West.

In this context, an argument that understanding of 'the meanings and emotions' (Reus Smit, 1999; Wendt, 1992) of individual societies as well as 'beliefs about the moral purpose of the state' (Tsygankov, 2012, p.19) helps to predict the vector of the foreign policy of the state is particularly central to this paper. Appreciation of and sensitivity to emerging Russian identity might shed light on

and lend some degree of predictability to the dynamics of Russian interests and, as a result, what appears expedient nowadays, to Russia's behaviour.

The 1980 Moscow Olympic Ceremonies in the Western Media

British newspaper reports concerning the Moscow Olympics opening ceremony were as much about the pageant itself as about the partisan policy of the British government towards the Soviet Union and the media complicity in making the Olympics into an accessory. The commentators almost unanimously lamented the fact that the publics were deprived the chance of forming an unbiased and balanced opinion about the Moscow Olympics. For fear of inculcation of the enemy ideology and as part and parcel of the boycott, the planned coverage of the Olympics was curtailed from 170-180 hours to a mere 40 hours on ITV and BBC. Such politics of the broadcasters and the British Prime Minister's, Margaret Thatcher, staunch position, aimed to reduce the first socialist Olympics to an ordinary 'news event' ('TV to slash coverage of the Olympics', *The Guardian*, June 6, 1980, p.24).

Fiddick of *The Guardian* (21 July, 1980a, p.11) argued in this regard that such an approach to the Moscow Games set 'an unfortunate precedent' and largely violated 'the basic principles of a free broadcasting system, [which] is to show the events, not to hold them back'. Meanwhile, Steele (July 21, 1980, p.6), also of *The Guardian*, drew attention to the fact that Soviet television on its part edited the show to make their preferred storyline prevail. For example, it 'sidestepped the issue' of several countries opting for the Olympic flag instead of the national one (ibid.) and the absence of several teams at the parade 'to demonstrate varying degrees of disapproval of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan' (Brasher and McIlvanney, *The Observer*, June 20, 1980, p.1). Not that there was much need for this extra effort, as according to Craig R. Whitney of *The NY Times*, the protest gestures were simply lost 'in the vastness of the stadium, the roar of the crowd, the blare of martial music'.

Entrenched ideological enmity in general and political antecedents affecting the Olympics set the broad context for the media framing of the Moscow ceremonies, the principal medium of Soviet communication with the world. Accordingly, the majority of British and US commentators in their reports of the ceremonies could not resist passing judgments on what they saw as the defining and by default negative features of Soviet society and the Soviet state system as a whole. For them, these conspicuously came to the fore during the cultural and artistic part of the ceremonies. For Fiddick (July 21, 1980, p.11) of *The Guardian*, 'the opening ceremony of the Moscow Olympics was never going to be a time for subtleties'; rather it became 'an event unsurpassed for its ideological blatancy'. Frank Keating (August 5, 1980a, p.19), for the same newspaper, echoed these sentiments in his harsh and succinct verdict on the closing ceremony as 'the gruesomely rehearsed spectacular'. His poignant comment almost exactly tallies with his perception about what he saw as the overpowering staged atmosphere of the opening night: 'the dancing was fantastic, the gymnastics elastic, though smiles very plastic….Nothing was spontaneous. Everything was ordered, rehearsed and very, very spectacular' (Keating, *The Guardian*, 1980, August 4, p.1). For Antony Austin (July 23, 1980, p.7) of *The NY Times*, the opening ceremony offered 'a well-organised entertainment and cultural program' yet equally he was 'disappointed by the lack of spontaneity and warmth'. Speaking further on the issue of precision, he maintained that 'the cold efficiency, the strictness of the rules, the militarism [were] taking the gaiety out of [the ceremony]' (ibid). An unequivocal impression about the opening ceremony of Flora Lewis (July 22, 1980, p.3), also of *The NY Times*, as of a 'monumental display of complete social control' leaves no question that these remarks were certainly aimed at the whole oppressive Soviet system where, from the Western perception, the gigantism of the state projects came first. Human value and individuality came last and genuine emotions should have been rare, subject to the needs of the party and under its strict surveillance.

An embedded characteristic of authoritarianism, stiff precision and impeccable orchestration could be seen in an even more grandiose display 28 years later at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. It is not that China for its part did not try to take a step away from the tradition of 'socialist mass callisthenics' in view of the imminent evolution of the aesthetics of the Olympic ceremonies (Brownell, 2013, p.1321). After the 1984 Los Angeles Games, when China was readmitted to the Olympic fold after 32 years of absence and the whole nation was mesmerised by a 'Hollywood-style' ceremony, 'artistic elements' began finding their way into the national ceremonies. Yet as underlined by Brownell (ibid.), 'despite 25 years of debates, mass callisthenics still constitute the core of the opening ceremonies'.

Luo (2010, p.776) maintains in this respect that 'precision, discipline and harmony seem to be internalised in individuals', whose worldviews are shaped by some type of ideology and, thus, they carry the risk of being distorted due to 'the years of instability, normalisation and modernisation'. This appears to be equally true for Russia. In China's case, Luo explains (ibid., pp.779-780) what she calls a pathological 'obsession with perfection' by 'an inferiority complex and insecurity, typical of a nation suffering and recovering from a traumatic experience'. Although the callisthenics in Sochi in 2014 were on a significantly lesser scale, the antecedents listed bear a close resemblance to those of the Sochi Games.

Overall, however, the Western media did not present a united front in its criticism of the Soviets, and there were columnists who expressed honest admiration at the scale and ingenuity of the Moscow ceremonies. Accordingly, Brasher and McIlvanney (July 20, 1980, p.1) of *The Observer*, albeit still placing the event into a political context, thought that Moscow welcomed the world with 'the brilliant opening ceremony for the Games that Jimmy Carter, Margaret Thatcher and several other world leaders tried to kill'. By the same token, the *Chicago Tribune* (August 4, 1980, p.2) in its summary of the closing ceremony hailed it as no less than a 'spectacular' and 'a mighty display' by the Russians.

Despite the occasional positive and enthusiastic or even nonpartisan reports, the disproportioned emphasis was on militarisation and the overbearing staged character of the ceremony. As observed by Arning (2013, p.527), mass orchestration at the Olympic ceremonies in general and military performance in particular 'is an opposite metaphor for SP, which often conceals hegemony under attraction'. Keating (August 4, 1980, p.16) in Moscow sensed in this respect the disheartening iron-handed discipline, the insignificant role of individuals, and what we would now call the desire to flex the 'hard power' muscle in front of the watching world:

> …half of the Russian army marched on, blowing bugles and crashing cymbals, and putting not a foot out of place. The whole shebang was led by a pompous drum major, then everyone followed him out, ridiculously precise great crocodile of flags and symbols, and I suppose people.

The author went on to highlight the ideological nature and prevalent hard power statement of the event with the following observation: 'There were banners everywhere, fluttering yellows and blues and greens, but mostly reds. There were fireworks and cannons that made us innocent mortals cover' (ibid).

Steele (July 28, 1980a, p.6), also of *The Guardian* yet representing a mentioned humble minority, cited a contrasting opinion of Sir Denis Follows, Britain's team commandant, who overall rated the opening ceremony a success: 'as for the military side of it, there was not much there. There is more of a military atmosphere at a Cup Final at Wembley'.

Steele (*The Guardian*, July 21, 1980, p.6) also indicated the perfect synergy of the Soviet coordinating doctrine and fundamental aesthetics, alongside the values and pomp of the Olympics by maintaining that 'it was hard not to feel this weekend that the Olympic ritual was tailor-made for the Soviet Union. It has all the ingredients of pagan religiosity, and heavy sentiment so prevalent here'. Effectively, the columnist sensed that the Moscow Olympics had indeed turned out to be the biggest ritual in what Lane (1981) called 'a highly ritualised society'.

Regarding the 'outlier' status of the Moscow Olympics, columnists from *The Observer* (July 20, 1980, p.1) and *The Guardian* (July 21, 1980, p.6) were further bewildered by another ambiguity in the power and society symbiosis. The following words demonstrate the journalists' attitudes to what they saw as the manifestation of the complex and perplexing interplay between the hypocrisy of the state and the patriotism of the people in their warm welcome of the Afghan delegation at the opening ceremony:

> As a political gesture it was a stroke of genius. Was it the spontaneous response of the Soviet public to the Western boycott and a further sign that they support their Government's line? Or was the vast audience in the stands really part of the cast, playing its own role in a cynical piece of stage-management, designed to impress the world? In this society where discipline and imposed discipline often merge imperceptibly, the answer will never be clear. What is certain is that the Soviet sporting publics are super patriots (Steele, *The Guardian*, July 21, 1980, p.6).

Notwithstanding the political and ideological framing of the Moscow Games, the British and US press did mention several cultural components of the ceremonies, albeit fleetingly. In terms of the most memorable components of the Moscow '80 Ceremonies, the majority of media outlets singled out the pieces of world-famous Soviet classical composers and the music of their comrades written precisely for the occasion. Another particularly noteworthy feature of the ceremonies was the vibrant multicultural make-up of the show. *The Guardian's* Frank Keating (August 4, 1980, p.1) observed that 'there was Shostakovich and Rachmaninov and Artemyev and Pachmutova. There were national dancing and national costumes and national nations'. The 'friendship of nations' magic worked on Jonathan Steele, also of *The Guardian* (July 21, 1980, p.6), who surprisingly got to the root of this symbolic sign and further elaborated on this issue of the Soviets' peculiar ethnic diversity, highlighting a notable contrast with the US:

> As a reminder of an important aspect of the Soviet Union which is usually ignored in the West, there was a whirling bust of folk-dancing from the many nations which form this country. The United States is a melting-pot in which a homogeneous mass culture has already largely eroded ethnic variety, but Soviet power and ideological uniformity have not yet had this same effect.

The Soviets' innovative approach to mass calisthenics as well as 'the brilliant union of the gymnastics and ballet - in which the Russians are supreme' (ibid.) also caught commentators' attention in Britain. By the same token, newspapers paid tribute to the appearance of Soviet spacemen in the middle of the ceremony on a computerised scoreboard with an appeal to universal peace (*The Observer*, July 20, 1980, p.1). Apart from reiterating 'with a touch of extravaganza' (*The Guardian*, July 21, 1980, p.6) the preeminent message of the Soviet Olympics, this section of the show demonstrated Soviet excellence in terms of state-of-the-art technology and its knowledge and leadership in the identity-defining space exploration programme.

At the same time, Fiddick (July 21, 1980a, p.11) of *The Guardian* reminded his readers that one of the most symbolic elements of the opening ceremony and what Arning saw as one of the most prominent iconic signs, the procession with the doves, was envisaged to persuasively bring home the message of the Soviets spearheading the cause of peace. This is due to its 'particular form of ceremonial march', which instead 'would have the effect of sending echoes of the 1936 Olympics positively clanging across the years' (ibid).

As previously established, through hosting the Moscow Olympics the Soviet state attempted to address both domestic and international audiences, and do so under the extraordinary and unfavourable circumstances of the boycott. *The NY Times* columnists had their own opinions regarding the nature and effectiveness of these SP efforts. With the West doing its utmost to send a message 'over the heads of the Kremlin to the Soviet people that …. people outside their borders don't trust Moscow's ''peaceful'' intentions', Lewis (July 22, 1980, p.3) argued in this respect that inside the country the Olympics were supposed to offset the main effect of the boycott. She went on to conclude that, indeed, 'The Soviets have shown their power to mobilise, organise, dominate their people's understanding of the world through these Olympics' (ibid.). Austin (August 4, 1980a, p.1), in his turn, in the summary of the closing ceremony contended that despite its best effort Moscow was

deprived of a two-week status of 'the capital of mankind'. As a result, it seems that the mission of the West was successfully accomplished as, according to his verdict, the Soviet leaders did not reach their ultimate goal 'of casting the 1980 Olympics as an occasion marking full international acceptance of the Soviet Government as a world leader equal to, if not more equal than, the United States' (ibid).

The 2014 Sochi Olympics Ceremonies in the Western Media Reading

In notable contrast to the Moscow'80 Olympics, reviews of the opening ceremony of the Sochi 2014 Olympics regarding its artistic side were either mild or positive. Thus, it was considered to be 'a spectacular display' (*The Independent*, February 7, 2014), 'enjoyable' (*Huffington Post*, February 7, 2014), 'pulse-raising' (*The Boston Globe*, February 7, 2014), 'a stunning and delightful success' (*USA Today*, February 7, 2014), and 'a fanfare for reinvented Russia' (*The NY Times*, February 7, 2014).

Yet several columnists found the 'relatively simple metaphors' (Konstantin Ernst cited by *Daily Mail*, February 8, 2014) too intricate and locally grounded for a foreigner to comprehend. Rice (February 7, 2014) of *The Independent* thought that several elements in the ceremony were 'utterly confusing' and served as 'a reminder that these curtain raisers are rather daft unless you can fathom what is going on'. Poniewozik (February 8, 2014) of *Time* likewise opined that 'watching the Sochi Olympics opening ceremony could at times feel like going to the party of someone you barely knew'. Mary Dejevsky (February 13, 2014) of *The Guardian* noted that 'international coverage missed the point of the Sochi opening ceremony'; *The Atlantic* (February 7, 2014) speculated that the North Americans would 'have some questions' about it.

The majority of columnists though appeared to share the view of Sonne *et al.* (February 7, 2014) from *The Wall Street Journal* that the opening ceremony was 'a spectacular if at certain moments scrubbed tour through Russia's history' which offered a compelling answer 'to London's eccentric historical bonanza in 2012 and Beijing's abstract statement of power in 2008.' Yet even if there was no question that for Russia, in the established traditions of such spectacles, the opening ceremony would become

‘a national manifesto, a reflection of how a nation sees itself, and where it is going’ (Harris-Quinney, *The Commentator*, 30 July, 2012), its exact face and the attendant philosophy it was going to unveil to the world remained rather nebulous and mired in speculations. All the same, two points were initially clear: the ceremony would theatrically inaugurate a vision of the new Russia, collated in the mind of Vladimir Putin. Whilst indeed this was the case, the Western press grappled with its symbolism and skimmed only the surface of the panoply of meanings and messages. *The Telegraph* (February 7, 2014), for example, concluded that it was Putin’s ‘introduction of the new Russia to the world’; however, this left the principle attributes of this ‘newness’ as unspecified. The newspapers echoed each other regarding the exceptional role of Putin and the trivial intents of the ceremony; they almost in unison reflected on ‘sheer pageantry and national pride, with all of the homespun promotionalism, mythmaking and self-aggrandizement’ (*The NY Times*, February 7, 2014). These characteristics as a rule are commonplace for such occasions and are passed down to every following event. For *Time* (February 7, 2014), it was ‘Vladimir Putin's show’ designed to ‘cast [the host country] in an optimistic light’. Chadband (February 7, 2014) of *The Telegraph* thought that the show ‘was Putin’s vision of his Russia, connected by its majestic past to an exciting future’. *The NY Post* (February 7, 2014) likewise labelled the ceremony ‘a crowning achievement of Vladimir Putin's Russia’, which became ‘a celebration of its past greatness and hopes for future glory’. As the columnist of the paper saw it the ceremony triumphantly announced ‘Putin’s version’ of Russia: ‘a country with a rich and complex history emerging confidently from a rocky two decades’. *The NY Times* (February 7, 2014) succinctly reasoned that ‘the message of the over-the-top ceremony was simply this: In a big way, Russia is back’. It went on to argue that being the ‘personal ambition of President Vladimir Putin’, the Games and the ceremony accordingly ‘illustrate the nation’s rise from post-Soviet chaos under his leadership’ (ibid.).

The Sochi ceremony, entitled ‘Dreams about Russia’, portrayed the journey of an 11-year-old girl named Lyubov ‘across centuries, as well as Russia’s roughly 4,400-mile expanse, across nine time zones, from Europe to the Pacific Ocean, and from the Arctic Sea to the Black Sea’ (*The NY Times*, February 7, 2014). During the trip through Russian history, the ceremony celebrated outstanding literary, musical, and scientific achievements from each period. By reaching deep ‘into the repertory of classical music and ballet’ (ibid.), Russia relied on its tried-and-tested SP trump card, namely high culture.

The producer of the show, Konstantin Ernst, was explicit in stating that the choice of classics was in a way a matter of exigency, because ‘we cannot, like London, boast of a great number of world-famous pop performers' (Herszenhorn, *The NY Times*, February 7, 2014). This observation, by indicating the London Olympics as a reference point, further suggests the role of the West as Russia’s significant other. Regarding Ernst’s penchant for classics, the director also noted ‘that the goal was to introduce the world to Russia and its history through storytelling that balanced the “simple and straightforward” and “the artistic and metaphorical” (Stuever, *The Washington Post*, February 8, 2014). As Lally and Englund (February 7, 2014) of *The Washington Post* noted in this respect, ‘if London was pop, Sochi would be poetry — in motion’. Ernst, likewise, went on to speak about the concept of spectacle, which broadly should have been showing the civilised side of Russia, and thus taking the foreign audiences off the beaten track of banal clichés, whilst presumably also evoking pride and a sense of unity amongst the locals:

> I wanted to break the stereotype of our country. What is Russia for an average person of this world? It is caviar and *matryoshka* dolls, balalaika or *ushanka* hats, or even just a bear. These things are all part of us but they are not the whole of us (Ernst cited by Chadband, *The Telegraph*, February, 7, 2014).

Chadband (ibid.) appropriately raised a question in this regard, asking whether the proverbial 'War and Peace and Swan Lake and the Russian Revolution' were indeed a step away from stereotypes, and immediately surmised that 'the scenes were carried out with such élan and so differently, featuring some of Russia's greatest dance and musical artists, that they did feel completely original'. Defying stereotypes, Ernst, nevertheless, succeeded in immersing the audience into the imaginary invented Russia, which drove Poniewozik (February 8, 2014) of *Time* to suggest that 'this ceremony was so thoroughly Russian you could keep it in your freezer and pour shots of it'.

Apart from Tolstoy with the ball scenes from his *War and Peace*, the writers mentioned in the ceremony were Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, and the émigré writer Nabokov with his controversial novel *Lolita*. The ceremony ended with the particularly enduring image of 'the glowing white troika, the chariot drawn by three horses immortalised in Gogol's novel "Dead Souls'' (Herszenhorn, *The NY Times*, February 7, 2014). This time, the image of the *troika* drew a strong allegorical conclusion, which, however, was easily deciphered by the Western journalists, of an eventful and controversial Russian history as portrayed in the show, where the only constant was Russia: persevering through the night and, like a Phoenix, each time rising from the ashes.

The introduction to the 20th century started with images of the revolution, an event still considered by many Russians to be the greatest achievement of the century, and avant-garde art, considered by many in the world to be one of the greatest Russian contributions to the century. These two topics were shown in a type of perplexing symbiosis. As Konstantin Ernst explained, 'they are very close, they go hand in hand. In fact, avant-garde art predicted the revolution in a way, and the revolution killed avant-garde art' (cited in *The Washington Post*, February 7, 2014). The impetuous inevitability of the historic cataclysm 'was portrayed as a gathering snow storm over the sumptuous imperial waltz of tsarism broken through by a locomotive glowing red as it screamed into the stadium' (Ioffe, *New Republic*, February 8, 2014). The revolution in technology and the transition from revolutionary

idealism to dehumanising drudgery, alongside the excesses of industrialisation, were metaphorically represented by juxtaposing the workers against the giant machinery that shortly reduced them to nothing but 'mechanical cogs and gears' (*The New York Times*, February 7, 2014). For some, this represented a very telling metaphor of the individual's place within the Soviet system.

Commentators from the start hypothesised that the ceremony was a metaphorical moment of enacting a new Russian identity, which essentially should have involved making a difference with itself, namely by primarily relinquishing its troubling totalitarian past. Unlike the UK, however, where 'the ceremony harked back to a more glorious imperial era' Sonne *et al*. (February 7, 2014) rightly observed that Russia's task 'of presenting its history was in many ways far trickier, with so much of the country's past century's challenged by societal upheaval, dictatorship and war.' The journalists, as a result, were fixated on how Russia had come to terms with its communist period, or disturbingly for some, rather still refused to do so. Thus, whilst *The Atlantic* (February 7, 2014) simply admitted that the positive narrative 'kept a light touch on virtually all of the more troubling moments in Russia's history', Herszenhorn (February 7, 2014) of *The NY Times* was truly upset that 'the re-narration of history in the opening ceremony occasionally involved some breezing past inconvenient episodes — the Stalinist purges that killed millions, for instance, and the gulags that imprisoned and killed millions more'. Similarly, if *The Independent* (February 7, 2014) suggested that 'the choreographer touched on Russia's difficult history in what appeared a sensitive and clever way', Poniewozik (February 8, 2014) of *Time* acerbically quipped that '[the] version of Russian history, especially in the 20th century, was so smoothed over you could skate on it'. He went on to criticise the woeful deliberate cynicism of the directors, who:

> skipped over the bloody excesses of Stalinist Russia in favor of a bit of World War II and a whole lot of Soviet '50s teenyboppers. The turbulent recent history, perestroika, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia's lurches toward and away from democracy, were summed up by a girl letting go of a red balloon.

Mirroring the previous attitude, Dejevsky (February 13, 2014) of *The Guardian* was appalled that 'the time allotted to the building and flourishing of St Petersburg was almost as much as that reserved for the blood, guts and 1950s-style security of the defunct Soviet Union'.

The conspicuous absence of atonement, self-flagellation, and condemnation of the dark crimes of the previous epochs, which would have been a sight for sore eyes in the West, was explained by Ernst, the creative director of the ceremony. In the Russia unveiled that night, 'the emphasis was on achievement' (*The Washington Post*, February 7, 2014). Indeed, instead of dwelling on 'the crimes of the Stalin era and the harrowing post-Soviet collapse' the director of the ceremony put 'Russia's most flattering foot forward' (Sonne et al., *The Wall Street Journal*, February 7, 2014). Such alleged pragmatism, which should have struck a note in the West, made 'Mr. Ernst design a show that, like Mr. Putin, was not shy about embracing certain aspects of the Soviet past' and its unquestionable triumphs like 'industrialism and the avant-garde' (Herszenhorn, *The NY Times*, February 7, 2014).

Despite the anxiety about the selectiveness of the narrative, there was no consensus amongst the commentators as to the exact feelings and attitudes of the ceremony towards the Soviet period. As a result, Lally and Englund (February 7, 2014) of *The Washington Post* thought that it offered 'an unflinching look at the Soviet system, absent of nostalgia or shame, viewed through the artistic vision of one of its victims'. For Stuever (February 8, 2014), also of *The Washington Post*, on the contrary, there was an aura of romanticising or what 'turns out to be some Vladimir Putin-approved nostalgia for the look and feel of the Stalin era'.

According to Herszenhorn (February 7, 2014) of *The NY Times*, the overarching message contained in the portrayal of the Soviet period and 'clearly shared by Mr. Putin, [was] that [the Soviet Union's] sheer bigness — especially its unification of Russia's multitude of ethnicities — should be admired'. This view, indeed, is among the principles of the Russian SP concept and the Russian world project;

the same time, it is a fascinating reference to and a symbolic echoing of one of the central ideas of the Moscow'80 Olympics. A notable contrast to the Moscow Olympics, though, which particularly dismayed Ioffe (February 8, 2014) of *New Republic*, was the 'glaring omission throughout the parade of Russian culture [of] any pretence of cultural diversity'.

Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, was among the bearers of the Olympic flag. Space was likewise honoured in the original opening of the ceremony during a parade of Russian historical figures and achievements in Cyrillic alphabetical order, which Mary Dejevsky (February 13, 2014) of *The Guardian* saw as 'no less than an attempt to devise a new, post-Soviet cultural canon'. Her contemplations on the choice of Soviet symbols for some letters are as follows:

> S, you will be relieved to know, was for Sputnik, not Stalin, one of several references to the glory days of Soviet space conquests: G for Gagarin; L for moon robot *lunokhod*; T for the rocket scientist, Tsiolkovsky.

Remarkably, in the ceremony that Chadband (February 7, 2014) of *The Telegraph* saw as an 'ostentatious, controversy-packed show of strength', in stark contrast to the Moscow'80 Ceremonies the only explicit allusion to hard power was 'the celebration of military prowess of Peter the Great' (*The NY Times*, February 7, 2014), as well as an entirely humourous and placatory take on hard power: 'the Russian Police Choir that arguably stole the show with a surprisingly rousing rendition of Daft Punk's dance floor anthem 'Get Lucky'' (*Daily Mail*, February 8, 2014). In general, for Dejevsky (February 13, 2014) of *The Guardian*, the ceremony above anything else caught attention through an 'encouraging lack of dogma and militarism', which was so typical of the Moscow'80 Games.

Instead of military swaggering or flexing muscles, the ceremony introduced the unfamiliar traits of Russia, and accordingly the possible sources of its SP. An unorthodox idea replete with elusive symbolism and concealed controversy was conveyed in a performance of the Russian anthem by 'the choir of the Sretensky Monastery, founded more than 600 years ago to celebrate Moscow's escape

from invasion by Tamerlane' (Lally and Englund, *The Washington Post*, February 7, 2014). A symbol of Soviet rule, where 'the lines "the great Lenin" [were] replaced by references to "Russia — our sacred homeland" and "wide spaces, for dreams and for living'' (*The NY Times*, February 7, 2014), it was thus performed by an institution suppressed and stigmatized in the USSR. Such a move, by design or by default, intensified the effect of the substitution of the communist ideology with what appeared to be civic patriotism, and focused the attention on Orthodox Christianity, which was proclaimed as one of the spiritual foundations of modern Russia. Turning into one of the most visually memorable scenes in the ceremony, Christian tradition featured unobtrusively once more when the 'dancing Orthodox spires' (Stuever, *The Washington Post*, February 8, 2014) and 'the multicolour onion domes of St. Basil's Cathedral bobbled in the air' (*The NY Times*, February 7, 2014).

Overall, the Moscow 1980 Olympics was an important symbolic touchstone for the Sochi 2014 Games and 'the ceremony was, in many respects, the introduction to the world of a re-created Russia, one far different from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics that hosted the Summer Games in Moscow in 1980' (ibid). The newspaper's assumption that 'in many ways the Sochi Olympics have been designed to supplant memories of that time' might, however, be inaccurate. Whereas the Moscow'80 Games were an important marker and a conspicuous validation of the coherent Soviet identity, the Sochi Olympics as 'an ultimate achievement of Vladimir Putin's Russia' (*Daily Mail*, February 8, 2014) are indeed a rather pretentious appeal for 'global vindication' (*The Boston Globe*, February 7, 2014). Yet, they represent a timid attempt to lay the grounds for, and map out the future of, Russian identity. Despite the fact that many facets of Soviet identity have followed the socialist state into obscurity, memories of the Moscow Olympics persevere and are successfully exploited as a revered uncontested footing for an emerging Russian identity, as well as being a crucial indicator of the continuity of the Russian state. This unfinished internal affair and the pre-eminence of local audiences might explain why the majority of the symbols in the ceremony, being symbolic signs, remained misunderstood by

global spectators. Poniewozik (February 7, 2014) of *Time* noted in this respect that, 'The ceremony, in a way like this whole Olympics, felt like a story Russia was telling the world, but most of all a story it was telling itself, about a vital, proud, storied country on the rise'. *The NY Post* (February 7, 2014) columnist's following explanation of the psychological significance of the Sochi Olympics for the Russian people also contains hints as to why Russia was rummaging through history for inviolable national reference points and was unable to let go of memories of its glory days under communism:

> These games are particularly important, as many Russians are still insecure about their place in the world after the end of the Cold War and the years since that have seen the dominance of the United States and China. Perhaps cuing on those feelings, it didn't take long for the classic Russian pride to come shining through at the opening ceremony.

The NY Times (February 7, 2014) journalist, consequently, diagnosed that 'if there were any traces of national self-consciousness lingering nearly a quarter-century after the collapse of communism and the loss of superpower status, they were put aside for the evening'. This inevitably invites comparisons with the 2008 Beijing Games, which according to Luo (2010, p.779), epitomised China's 'dream of becoming able-bodied and powerful'. Strikingly similar to Sochi's case, '[t]he ceremonies were viewed as if they were a curative cult, helping China to live with its past, to remember, forget and forgive the experiences of the Hundred Year of Humiliation' (ibid). The notable difference lies only in the fact that, whilst for China the ceremonies and the Games became 'efficacious' due to 'the presence of former attackers now returning as guests to celebrate together this extravagant carnival' (ibid), Russia exulted itself because of the attendance of its former ideological opponents, who at the same time never ceased to be its important others. At the time of the Games, they were even more indispensable in terms of validating Russia's emerging identity.

The releasing of the red balloon at the end of the show invites parallels with the final moments of the Moscow'80 closing ceremony; however, last time it was a sentimental farewell to Misha, the Olympic mascot. An iconic symbol and a symbolic sign in Russia ever since, he is a romantic personification

of peace and friendship, whereas letting go of 'the red balloon is meant to signal the end of the (very red) Soviet Russia, and ''the dream of an era with great hope for the future,'' according to the official media handouts' (*The Atlantic*, February 7, 2014). Whilst it is doubtful that the balloon would trigger the same emotional attachment among Russians, it is a symbol of great significance, which shows that Russia is ready to shed its red skin and step into the future, albeit not by repeat its fatal mistakes of the 20th century and forget its past.

Conclusion

This analysis builds on and out from a broader scholarship that seeks to understand sport, politics, nationalism and national identity (Anderson, 1991; Billig, 1995; Wendt, 1992, 1994; Tsygankov, 2017). While sport and politics are clearly entwined (Grix and Kramareva, 2015; Houlihan, 1994), the Cold War era and post-Cold War period offered the Soviet Union and Russia the chance to use sports mega-events to position themselves against the perceived 'other'. This they did, first and foremost, by being successful through sport, in particular, Olympic sport. Another use of sport for both domestic legitimacy and international prestige was the hosting of sports mega-events and the opening and closing ceremonies associated with them. This paper has sought to understand both the message being sent – by placing it in its geo-political context – and its reception by the perceived 'other', the 'West'. This allows us an insight into what type of image the Soviet/Russian state wished to portray and how that image was actually received. This was undertaken by an analysis of 'Western' media at or around the time of each event (1980/2014).

The message conveyed by the Moscow '80 Olympics, catering to both domestic and international audiences, was one that signalled a strong, multinational country committed to spreading peace in the world. Thus, the USSR vied to celebrate what it saw as an undisputed superiority of the socialist order and display its greatest attainments – that is the friendship of the nations and the Soviet person

(*Izvestiia*, 'Grand opening of the XXII Summer Olympic Games in Moscow', July 20, 1980, p.1; Austin, *The New York Times*, 4 August, p.1, p.4)

In view of the controversial status of the Games, the aggressor image of the host and the extensive boycott, the Soviets acutely needed to construct an aura of historical legitimacy around them so that they could send a set of effective counter messages and persuade the global audience of their peaceful designs. Hence, they built the Olympic ceremonies around predominantly iconic or easily decipherable signs such as the procession with doves, children performances or an extensive Hellenic part of the show – universally shared metaphors of purity, happy future and innocence. Whereas *Pravda*, the main Soviet official newspaper, declared that 'the XXII Olympic Games made its contribution to the strengthening of understanding, friendship and trust among nations – that is their main achievement' ('In the name of peace, in the glory of sport', August 4, 1980, p.1), the foreign press decried the 'gruesome orchestration' and the 'monumental display of complete social control' of the ceremonies. Overall, the 1980 Summer Games, taking into account the Afghan War controversy, symbolized an assertive and uncompromising Soviet policy towards the West and, in view of the resilience of the Western media to overtures of the ceremonies, failed to reduce the disparities between two modernities and conflicting outlooks.

The message conveyed by the Sochi 2014 Olympics was less clear and remains obscure and, taking into account the plethora of difficult to decipher locally grounded symbols, has become lost in translation. Foreign audiences received mixed signals in the ceremony due to the unorthodox lumping together of different epochs, juxtaposing at times utterly clashing symbols and underlying traditions to knit together a credible uniform narrative. The messages did not hit the target, which Dejevsky (February 13, 2014) of *The Guardian* found 'unfortunate, because this image – part accurate, part delusional, part aspirational – says quite a lot about how today's Russia wants to be seen and what it aspires to be'. 'Dreams about Russia' was in a way an exercise of psychoanalysis: through scouring

the subconscious and reliving the formative episodes in its history, Russia attempted to obtain several vital answers to existential questions. What answers it uncovered remains to be seen. Regarding the image of itself that Russia favoured at that time, Dejevsky (February 13, 2014) of *The Guardian* thought that 'Russia that was culturally inclusive, both traditional and modern, in which each age, from Muscovy through to the pluses and minuses of Soviet times, had its allotted place'. At the same time, in her comment about Russia's envisioned future, Ioffe (February 8, 2014) of *New Republic* assumed that the show was unambiguous about the hierarchy of nationalities in Russia: 'a historically significant nation but one that is still climbing back up to its historic heights after a historic fall, one that has many nations but of which one is dominant'.

Despite relying heavily on the best of the Russian classics and the heroes of bygone days, the ceremony was an exciting and technically innovative re-narration of Russian history, which ignited pride and patriotism but did not offer values or a system of meaning. It also did not introduce a viable 'Hero of Our Times', which has traditionally been essential for Russia to make sense of what it is and where it is going. The ceremony emphatically dwelled on the defining and enduring manifestations of Soviet identity, such as space exploration. It paid tribute to Soviet sport and the Moscow Olympics. Yet, instead of showing Russia's multicultural side, which was the case in Moscow and which was largely absent due to the dissolution of the USSR, the ceremony showed its geographical vastness. The questions of what Russia is and what it wants appear to remain largely unanswered. In Moscow, the Soviet Union as a great power offered its vision of the world; in Sochi, as an aspiring great power, Russia was trying to offer a vision of itself. Sochi was a public exercise in self-reflection, albeit neither a confession nor penitence. If in Moscow the USSR conspicuously confirmed its grand mission, in Sochi Russia simply introduced itself to the world.

This research has only been able to offer a glimpse of some of the 'Western' media attitudes towards the identity message projected by the Soviet Union and Russia. Clear limitations remain with the

choice of media outlets that could be extended to a variety of other countries and languages to understand whether the 'Western' response was uniform or differed according to nations.

There are a number of key topics related to nationalism and sport that we have not been able to develop fully here, for example, the notion that hosting such 'Western' SMEs can be a force for democratization of host countries; we agree with Lankina and Niemczyk (2014) who suggest Russia is a 'resister state' with its own distinctive and (potentially) endearing values and leadership style, if not institutions (Pu and Sweller 2014). The primary objective of Sochi 2014 was to validate Russia's claims for the re-establishment of national greatness (Persson & Petersson, 2014; Orttung & Zhemukhov, 2013) and thus Nye's claim (2014) that Putin 'failed to capitalize on the soft-power boost afforded to Russia by hosting the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi' is a misunderstanding of the state's rationale for hosting in the first place.

Further research ought to follow up on the intervening years in global politics (from 2014 until 2021), as Russia has clearly gone from strength to strength as a nation, something that impacts national identity formation domestically. The recent European gas crisis and the key position Russia holds in this, is further evidence of an increasingly strong player on the global stage.

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