The legacy of the 1936 Winter Olympics in Garmisch-Partenkirchen in the context of sports tourism

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Summary

The IV Winter Olympics in Garmisch-Partenkirchen (Ga-Pa) are regarded by researchers as a test stage for the international demonstration of the German Reich's economic power in relation to the Games of the XI Olympiad in Berlin, which were organized half a year later. Through the Games, Adolf Hitler sought to test all of his resources and means, thereby testing the country's readiness to host another major sporting event. Despite numerous controversies related to the intense exposition of Nazi politics and anti-Semitism, the Olympic Games were remembered among the international public as a professionally organized event, among others thanks to the modern and extremely functional sports facilities of the time. The aim of this paper is to characterize the Olympic legacy of Ga-Pa, which due to its numerous remnants and nowadays well-maintained historical sports base contributes to the development of sports tourism in Germany. This account is briefly preceded by an account of the preparation and course of the IV Winter Olympics.

Keywords: Olympic Games, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Winter Olympics, Olympic legacy, sports tourism

Introduction

The IV Winter Olympics held in Garmisch-Partenkirchen (Ga-Pa), a town within the German Reich in 1936, are considered a test stage for the economic power of Adolf Hitler's country in relation to the 'more important' for him Games of the XI Olympiad in Berlin in the summer of the same year. Through these Games, the Führer tested his resources and means, verifying the Reich's readiness to host further major sporting events. One of the main goals of the Ga-Pa Games was the propagation of Nazism and the undertaking of demonstrations, which despite protests and explicit orders from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Third Reich government tried to use at every opportunity to disseminate and spread its ideas. In particular, the attitude consistent with state policy, which was one of racism and expressed prejudice, discrimination, aversion and hostility towards Jews and people of Jewish origin, known as anti-Semitism, was emphasized. However, this policy orientation did not prevent the extremely solid infrastructural preparation of the sports games. The new sports facilities and complexes were impressive in their monumentality and surprising in their functionality for the time. By investing extremely large funds in them, to this day they are a tourist attraction of the region.

The aim of this paper is to characterize the Olympic legacy of Ga-Pa, which due to the numerous remnants and the historical sports facility maintained in a very good condition contributes to the development of sports tourism in Germany. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part is a reminder of the socio-political conditions related to the preparation and course of the IV Winter Olympics, which clearly made a mark in Olympic history and to this day arouse considerable interest among historians, political scientists, and scholars of physical culture. The second part of the paper focuses on the sports facilities used during the event, which are still used today for various competitions and attract tourists from all over the world.

The most relevant information for the paper was collected through the accumulation of academic experience and use of the social character of academic activities. Having to deal with an event that took place nearly 85 years ago, the presented objective was verified primarily through the use of content analysis as a non-reactive research method that enables the study of various recorded forms of human messages, including, among others, sources showing the genesis of formation of the current heritage. The primary basis for this paper consisted of source and photographic materials dating back to 1936, made available as a part of the historical exhibition of the Olympia-Skistadion archive in Ga-Pa and acquired for on-site research in February 2016. Other historical sources from the period of Olympic Games, led by the official report of IV. Olympische Winterspiele 1936 or Ka-
Preparations for the organization of Olympic Games

Initially three localities wanted to compete for the organization of the IV Winter Olympics in 1936. Readiness to host an international sports event was declared by Canada’s Montreal — which four years earlier had unsuccessfully applied to host the III Winter Olympics in 1932; Switzerland’s Sankt Moritz — host of the II Winter Olympics of 1928; as well as the Weimar Republic’s two nearby alpine towns of Garmisch and Partenkirchen (which won an internal rivalry with Schreiberhaus in Lower Silesia, as well as Braunlage and Schierke in the Harz Mountains) [Bucholz, 2017]. In the end, after the outcome of the postal vote on the organizer of the Games of the XI Olympiad in 1936, which was won by Berlin, the choice fell on the German proposals. Germany thus exercised its right of priority (functioning on the basis of Article 6 of the then IOC Statutes), reserving, in cooperation with the German Olympic Committee, the right to organize on its territory the IV Winter Olympics, in the same year as the Summer Olympics [Młodzikowski, 1984].

In 1933, Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist German Workers’ Party came to power in the country. The Weimar Republic ended its existence and was transformed into the Third Reich due to the decree issued by Reich President, Paul von Hindenburg, after the Reichstag fire — Decree on the Protection of the People and State (de. Verordnung zum Schutz von Volk und Staat), which ‘temporarily’ suspended the basic civil rights contained in the existing Weimar Constitution one week before the early Reichstag elections. Although it was not officially repealed until 1945, the Enabling Act of March 23, 1933, passed by the Reichstag with a constitutional majority, allowed the Reich government to pass laws without regard to the constitutional wording and without having to obtain the consent of the Reichstag each time. The powers granted to the government already then caused the first suspicions that the German Reich would want to turn the organization of the IV Winter Olympics into its political success [Hart-Davis, 1986]. However, the IOC officials together with its President refused to trust the spreading speculation believing that the event would be held in a strictly sporting spirit without any political agitation [Bucholz, 2017]. Interestingly, prominent German politicians have also called for restraint and limiting the overexposure of the politics of anti-Semitism. One example is Karl Ritter von Halt, who in a letter sent on May 14, 1935 to Secretary of State, Hans Pfundtner, wrote that he had observed with growing concern the propaganda being bred, previously seen as dormant and sporadic in relation to the turn of events, in which the systematic expulsion of Jews from Ga-Pa began. He noted that in all possible places, especially on the route from Munich to Ga-Pa, there appeared large mounted signs reading ‘Jews not welcome’. He also reported that the head of the German Labor Front in Garmisch, at a meeting of all hotel owners in the city, said that any owner who had a Jewish guest would have to be excluded from the party, and if he was not a member, other measures of punishment or exclusion would have to be applied in his case. The consequences of such conduct would in effect be borne exclusively by the German Reich [Karl Ritter von Halt…, 1936]. Rudolf Hess, Adolf Hitler’s deputy and propagator of the cult of leadership, also spoke out on a similar issue, fearing that the German reputation abroad would be harmed by individual interpretation of cases of unrepresentative announcements, images or signs. Therefore, he suggested abandoning inscriptions clearly indicating the possibility of punishment against Jews (for example, the inscription ‘Jews move through this area at their own risk’) and handling emotions with caution [Abschrif…, 1936].

However, in the end, a number of anti-Jewish posters were visible in Ga-Pa, which if taken down by anyone, were seen by foreign journalists as an attempt to cover up the situation of Jews in the German Reich. For example, on December 6, 1935, the Manchester Guardian newspaper published a photo of a poster with the headline ‘Jews – Entrance Forbidden’. The Reich Propaganda Ministry immediately petitioned the Organizing Committee of the IV Winter Olympics to prove the falsehood of this statement. The request was forwarded by the Organizing Committee further to the Information Office in Ga-Pa. Director Max Werneck — head of the Olympic office — stated in his reply that the poster had nothing to do with the institution he managed [Ein Bild…, 1936]. From the IOC’s point of view, the situation did not look good, and some of the signs were reportedly noticed by the IOC President, Henri de Baillet-Latour, who threatened Hitler with cancellation of both the Winter and Summer Olympics if he did not react. Ultimately, the Führer declared that a group of people would be organized to take them down, while assuring that Jews would be treated equally, as exemplified by the participating athletes Helena Mayer, Goetel Bergmann, and Rudi Ball [Walters, 2008]. De facto, they participated only for show, to prove to the world that they were equal and that they were not discriminated against in any way. Eventually about five hundred
journalists from 29 countries wrote mostly positive reviews for the international press, thus contributing in no small measure to the success of the Nazi propaganda [Die Rechnung..., 1936]. For those who had doubts, help was offered, among others, by the acting Secretary of State in Joseph Goebbels’ Propaganda Ministry, Walter Funk, who organized a banquet for media representatives from all over the world, offering them support in the form of sending reliable German assistants and guides to the games, showing only the real side of the Games [Walters, 2008].

Like the Games of the XI Olympiad in Berlin, the winter sports games were to become an instrument of propaganda for the social and political order of the Third Reich. Their organization and spectacularity were to dominate all other events that took place in a similar period of time. In the course of setting up a tight staff of co-organizers, thought was simultaneously given to finances and gathering thousands of people to help in the preparation of this undertaking. Eventually, very large material and propaganda resources were mobilized to promote the achievements and political goals of the regime [Mandell, 1987]. According to preliminary estimates of the potential income and expenditure from the games organization, written out in detail as early as October 1933, it appeared that the outlays for current activities would amount to about one million Deutschmarks (DM), one third of which was to be spent on administrative and organizational matters, professional decoration ceremonies, propaganda and various other unforeseen expenses. The remaining two-thirds were to be spent on sports infrastructure, including the complete reconstruction of the Große Olympiaschanze, the design and construction of bob-sleigh track, ice rinks and stands at the sports facilities, as well as the improvement of the ski trails, slalom and downhill trails. At the north-western end of the ski jumping hill it was furthermore decided to build the Olympia-Ski stadium and the Gasthof Olympiahaus – an Olympic ski stadium including an Olympic House, which was to become a professional sports center for the local community after the Games [IV. Olympische Winterspiele 1936, 1936].

Eventually, the IV Winter Olympics in Ga-Pa were very popular with countries from all over the world. Twenty-eight countries sent their representatives, including distant Australia, Japan, Canada or the United States of America. Such a high attendance was due to, among others, an advantageous geographical location of the villages of Garmisch and Partenkirchen situated south of Munich, thanks to which it was easy for the countries to get to the place of games [Porada, 1980].

Two demonstration sports were presented during the Games: military patrol with nine men’s teams and Bavarian curling, also known as eisstockschießen. The main programme of the event was based on four key sports: ice hockey, bob-sleigh, skating (speed and figure skating), skiing (alpine and Nordic: cross-country skiing, ski jumping and nordic combined). For the first time, the men’s 4x10 km relay race was added to the 18 km and 50 km running distances. Of the alpine skiing, only nordic combined, both for men and women, was included in the event schedule. However, the discipline divided the skiing community and caused a conflict between the International Ski Federation and the IOC regarding the non-qualification of ski teachers in the amateur category. This resulted in a boycott of the Games by the federations of Switzerland and Austria [Large, 2007].

The Games were inaugurated by Adolf Hitler, who declared the solemn opening ceremony according to the Olympic protocol. Interestingly, just before the very start of the IV Winter Olympics, Henri de Baillet-Laframe the German Führer and reminded him of a number of organizational issues, including the necessity to refrain from spreading political propaganda and to respect the previously established international Olympic rules. In his speech, he also pointed out that Hitler was only a guest of the event, while the IOC was fully responsible for its organization, and therefore hoped that the ruler would comply [Mayer, 1960].

There were more spectators at the Garmisch-Partenkirchen Games than at all previous Winter Games combined. However, it should be noted that many ‘fans’ from nearby villages and towns came only for propaganda purposes, with specially organized trains running every ten minutes throughout the night at the Munich station. Some, on the other hand, arrived out of conviction, because the advanced preparations for the Games, which motivated the local community, had already taken place at the beginning of the year, when the people of Ga-Pa decorated all the masts, lampposts, and balconies in the villages with numerous Olympic flags interspersed with flags bearing the symbol of swastika, the official state symbol of the Third Reich. The vast majority of activities with subliminal political messages were concentrated in the very center of games, including the Bavarian hotels and pensions where athletes, Olympic team members, and special guests stayed. The external conditions that caused some concern among the international guests were not consistent with the internal ones, including the extraordinary hospitality of the hosts, for example in preparing meals for the foreign representatives that were similar to their national dishes. On the other hand, for connoisseurs and admirers of exploring local cuisine – care was also taken to provide the best possible quality of regional products, including pork, pork knuckles, liver dumplings or beer [Large, 2007].

The organizers had no concerns about things or activities for which humans were responsible. Their biggest concern was the weather, which had not been favorable four years earlier at the Lake Placid Games and was not forecast to be so this time either. In the end, the day before the Games began – on February 5, 1936 – it began to snow, and the Opening Ceremony (in front of an audience of sixty thousand people) literally took place in a snowstorm [Muszelówna, 1936].
Olympic legacy as an object of interest for sports tourists

Since the 1980s, in the literature, especially in German and British research centers, there have been numerous discussions on the definition and scope of sport tourism. One of the key definitions in the context of this paper seems to be the one developed by Axel Dreyer, which takes a maximally broad approach and characterizes sports tourism as an issue ‘including all forms of temporary absence from a place of permanent residence, which have an important purpose in dealing with the topic of sport’ [Dreyer, 2004, p. 327-376]. It is a kind of generalization of the definition proposed by Heather Gibson, which defined sports tourism as ‘traveling from one’s residence in order to undertake recreational or competitive sport activity, to watch popular or exclusive sporting events, and to sightsee at sport (such as sports arenas and avenues of fame, famous sports parks and stadiums, sports museums, etc.)’ [Gibson, 1998, p. 157-179]. It is worth mentioning that apart from active and passive sports tourism, numerous classifications also take into account the so-called nostalgic sports tourism, which is characterized by visiting places important from the point of view of sports history, additionally motivated by the nostalgic charm of sports [Ramshaw & Gammon, 2005].

The places and facilities of sports competitions during the IV Winter Olympics in Ga-Pa, such as the Große Olympiaschanze, the Olympia-Skistadion or the Gasthof Olympiahaus are extremely important points on the tourist map of sports and history lovers. In 1936, a total of about 60,000 people could be accommodated in all constructed facilities, and on the last day of the Games – due to the spectacular nature of ski jumping – an additional 20,000 seats including accommodation were provided. The professionally organized construction groups before the Games had constructed among others a modern ski jumping hill with a 43 meter high and 5 meter wide tower, an alternative 22 meter high judges’ tower with three radio stations and three judges’ chambers, made of wood and placed on a concrete foundation, an ice rink with 10,000 seats for the public, and a 15,000-seat stadium that was designed for ski jumpers in the winter and used as an athletics stadium with jumps and a 400-meter paved track in the summer [Wlodarczyk, 2018]. Repeatedly improved and modernized, it was 90 meters wide and 120 meters long from the very beginning, with access to a sound system and telephone line. Standing next to it, the Gasthof Olympiahaus, measuring 16 meters wide and 24 meters long, was a multi-functional facility that on the first floor offered athletes two ceremonial rooms and a balcony overlooking the stadium and jumps, on the ground floor it provided a lobby with a terrace adjacent to the restaurant, and in the basement it contained sanitary facilities for athletes and guests, a bowling alley, and a beer storage room. The rooms for athletes, staff rooms and the police station were located under the western stand, which was the place to watch the games not only for spectators, but also for media representatives. It is worth noting that the Bavarian Political Police (BPP) responsible for combating political enemies of the Third Reich, which among others organised night control patrols, was accommodated just before the Games in the Postillon hotel [Die Bayerische... 1936]. The eastern stand had similar spaces to the western one, with telephone booths and technical rooms with equipment for amplifying transmission signals. In total, all stands had more than 18,000 seats [W. Olympische Winterspiele 1936, 1936].

Many places, with the Gudiberg, Kreuzjoch and Kreuzeck mountains being the kingdom of alpine skiing, are also located in the immediate surroundings of Ga-Pa. For figure skating and ice hockey, a modern Olympia-Kunsteisstadion with changing rooms, bathrooms, offices, nearly 10,000 spectator seats, and a freezing system for the competition ice surface measuring 30 by 60 meters was also built. For the guests of honor – including Adolf Hitler – the facility also had a special balcony in the middle of a fully covered grandstand that could hold nearly two thousand people [Das Olympia…, 1936]. The Riesensee Lake, where the Olympic bobsleigh, ice hockey and speed skating competitions were held, had the same capacity of stands, as well as four soundproof cabins for radio broadcasts. In addition, an Olympic bobsleigh track was built nearby with space for nearly three and a half thousand spectators.

When visiting such places today, tourists can learn about the tangible and intangible heritage of the IV Winter Olympics in Ga-Pa and the role these Games have played in the history of international sports. This heritage can be considered in the category of lieu de mémoire (en. memorial sites) [Szpociński, 2008]. This concept was developed by Pierre Nora as institutionalized forms of collective memories of the past refer to places where different communities (such as nations or ethnic groups) put together their memories or consider them an integral part of their personality [Nora, 1974]. Contact with heritage serves to acquire cultural capital for communities that build their identity around the theme of sport. An additional advantage may be a reflection on the impact of heritage on urban space in the context of changes or the latest ways of dealing with problems and mistakes from the past [Banoi & Omorczyk, 2018]. Finally, a walk around Ga-Pa, combined with knowledge of the history of the Games, can allow the potential tourist to imagine what the atmosphere was like during the competition, both from the point of view of the residents, as well as athletes and sports fans – often unwelcome. However, while the decades-old facilities may on the one hand impress visitors, it is quite another matter to compare them with the memory of the events of that time, often painful for many nations, which may be an...
interesting issue for researchers of morality or ethics in tourism [Kazimierczak, 2018]. To this day, many places and resorts that were directly or indirectly associated with the Ga-Pa Games benefit from the Olympic legacy and earn financial profits. For example, Olympia-Skistadion alone, due to its public accessibility, is visited by more than half a million people each year [Holzapfel, 2013]. The entity also has its own archive, where it stores numerous historical sources and presents them to the public during organized exhibitions. For this reason, the local government of the region takes care of its historical infrastructure, adding to it information boards that provide tourists with basic information about the facilities or supporting local projects led by the organization of public excursions along the sports themed trail.

Conclusion

In gaining the right to host the IV Winter Olympics in Ga-Pa in 1936, Adolf Hitler's primary goals were to glorify the Nazi system and demonstrate power. Political objectives completely dominated the Olympic idea as relegated to the background. During the Olympic Games, only a few athletes with distant Jewish roots were allowed to participate in the German team. Despite clear instructions and protests from the IOC, the Nazi government of the German Reich tried at virtually every point to use the Games to disseminate and spread racist, anti-democratic, and above all anti-Semitic policies. As a result, many Jews were expelled from the country and those who resisted were placed in concentration camps.

The example of games in Ga-Pa, due to the previously unprecedented in the history of the Olympic movement series of characteristic and multithreaded issues of social, cultural, political and sporting profile makes the Winter Olympics organized at the end of the interwar period extremely interesting not only for people directly interested in history, but also for enthusiasts of broadly defined sporting heritage. Facilities that have survived to the present day as elements of the interwar period extremely interesting not only for people directly interested in history, but also for enthusiasts of broadly defined sporting heritage. Facilities that have survived to the present day as elements of the tourist sports map of the twenty-first century, attract a large number of not only domestic, but above all foreign tourists. Thanks to that they can successfully compete with other mass or recreational attractions of the region.

References:
