THE SOCHI OLYMPICS
MAPPING AND UNDERSTANDING THE POLITICAL CONTROVERSIES DURING THE GAMES

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The purpose of this thesis is to, through media, observe and map the political controversies during the XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi and once the games have finished summarize and analyze them in order to close in on a comprehensive understanding of them. In addition to being tinged by the hermeneutics and inductive reasoning the study uses a methodology referred to as a qualitative explanatory case study with an intensive approach. In applying IR-theory, and more specifically the theoretical perspectives of realism, liberalism and social constructivism, the study manage to shy away from mainstream Olympic research. The thesis finds that the political controversies during the Games in Sochi were fewer than anticipated and offers various understandings of why that is, including the realist notion of the triumph of the principle of sovereignty over human rights, the within liberalism found belief of the good nature of mankind, and the social constructivist idea of actions being constrained by social structures.

Keywords: IR-theory+sports, liberalism, realism, social constructivism, Sochi, the Olympic Games
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INTRODUCTION

The area of interest for this research paper is the XXII Olympic Winter Games taking place in Sochi, Russia between the 7th and the 23rd of February 2014. Coming into the games, the local organization committee, the state of Russia and its prominent figures with President Vladimir Putin in the obvious front seat, as well as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) have all been widely criticized on a broad range of matters. The themes of condemnations varies from economical, ecological and geopolitical aspects to claims of violations against Human Rights with perhaps the most loud criticism surrounding the Russian law enforcements aimed towards the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender – community (LGBT). With a law in place prohibiting “gay propaganda among underage minors in Russia” (RT 1), and with a special protest zone where conflicting views freely can be expressed during the games, established 12 kilometers from the nearest Olympic venue, and with the IOC urging for “not to let politics interfere with the Olympics.” (RIA 1), there appears to have emerged a situation crucial to carefully monitor. The theoretical foundation chosen in order to do so is the academic field of International Relations (IR) which will be more properly introduced in the THEORY section, and the distinct methodology used in this piece is summarized as a qualitative explanatory case study with an intensive approach which, subsequently, will be presented in the METHODOLOGY section.

The outline of this initial section will be arranged in the following order: Firstly, the purpose and the two research question will be introduced. Secondly, the attention turns to the relevance of this work with arguments for its societal as well as scientific relevance brought to light. Thirdly, a brief background will be offered concerning how the initial idea of this project came to be, which will land in a discussion regarding the research problem this piece is designed to offer alternative understandings of. Fourthly, the research questions will be revisited in order to highlight their rhetoric construction, Thereafter, a number of acknowledged limitations will be stated, and finally, an outline for the rest of this work will be provided.
Purpose

The purpose of this work is to, through media, observe and map the political controversies during the XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi and once the games have finished summarize and analyze them in order to close in on a comprehensive understanding of them.

This purpose will be reached by using two research questions which in its construction are rather straightforwardly asked, but assumingly quite demanding to answer:

1. Which events, statements and manifestations of a political character can be observed during the XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi 2014?

2. How can those be understood?

Relevance

First of all, the overarching relevance, lays in the never ending discussion of the dynamics between sports and politics. Can they, and should they, be seen as two separate spheres? It is not very likely that the findings of this work will constitute a definite and final answer of that question, but the complexity that arises when engaging in discussions of such kind does nonetheless provide the starting point of why the topic chosen is one of significant importance.

Considering the academic context in which this work is written, a master program with focus on the chemistry between societal and sports related processes and changes occurring in their interaction, the idea of observing the “chemistry” between politics and sport during a sporting mega-event such as the Olympic Games arguably falls within the relevant scope of research.

Societal relevance

In terms of societal relevance, one first has to turn the attention to the appeal that sport has to people and why they choose to watch it. In the very ambitious and comprehensive Handbook of Sports and Media, Arthur A. Raney states that “The importance of mediated sports in contemporary global society is undeniable.” (2006: 313). Furthermore, Raney notes that most studies made on the subject shows that people choose to view the mediated sport “…because they expect positive emotional impacts from their viewing.” (315). With the growth of social media and with TV-broadcasters promising the viewer not to miss a second of the Games (Viasat 1), there is reason to believe the Games in Sochi will be one of the most mediated mega sporting events in history. The question is whether or not the people, in viewing the Games in Sochi, can seek their emotional lifts without political controversies interfering.
Furthermore, the potential of the Games being surrounded by political controversies has implications on media reporting in general. Does sport journalism in the 21st century go beyond sport? Can the average Olympic TV-viewer extract him/her from the political aspects and solely focus on its interest in sports? Note that this work do not intend to handle the emotional aspects of the people watching the games, but the issue does however pinpoints where the societal relevance of it lays, as well as giving additional fuel to the sports vs. politics-discussion.

**Scientific relevance**

Guttman (2002) has shown that the Olympic Games were political already from the beginning of the modern Olympic era back in Athens 1896. So what is new with politics in relation to Olympic Games and why would a mapping and an attempt of understanding the political controversies during XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi be scientifically relevant? Grix (2013) points out that sporting mega-events such as the Olympics in recent times increasingly are given to what can be referred to as “new lands”. The 2008 summer Olympics in China, the 2016 equivalent in Brazil, the FIFA World Cup in the same country and the FIFA World Cup of 2022 which is to be held in Qatar is brought up as examples of this new trend. Even though Olympic Games on Russian soil is not entirely new (The summer Olympics of 1980 was held in Moscow) the Games in Sochi should still be considered in line with the identified trend; “There appears to be a clear shift from what could be termed developed democratic states to ‘emerging’ democratic and non-democratic states.” (Grix 2013: 25). It ought to be of scientific relevance to monitor how these mega-events play out in regard to politics.

In the book *The Sochi Predictaments* (Peterson & Vamling 2013), in which authors from various academic fields come together in an elaboration on the preconditions of the Games, the editors Peterson and Vamling finish the first section with stating that “…there seems to be a gap to be filled in the scholarly literature…” in regard to the XXII Olympic Winter Games. Bearing in mind the relatively short period of time elapsed since the Games ended, as well as the unlikelihood that the findings in this work will correspond to the rich thematic variety found in *The Sochi Predictaments*, the direction pointed out is nonetheless what this piece is aiming for.
Background/Research Problem

The initial spark of this thesis came from encountering the previously mentioned book *The Sochi Predictaments* (Peterson & Vamling 2013) which highlights many of the controversies surrounding the Games in Sochi. At first, the idea was to follow up the predictaments offered in the work by closely observing every single piece of controversy occurring during the Games. When starting to engage in previous research on Olympic Games it soon became clear that a vast majority of the research published in various ways had to do with legacies of hosting the Games, which suddenly made the predictaments offered even more intriguing and the stand presented almost unique in its construction.

So with the predictaments in hand and a huge variety of research done on legacies the obvious question was where all the research on controversies occurring during the Games was. As it turned out, there nearly was not any which shifted the focus of this thesis and resulted in the research design which this piece is the end result of. What later also was realized, which will be more carefully discussed in the methodology section, was that the lack of research on controversies during Olympic Games might be due to the problematic process of gathering data and applying an useful methodology in research of such kind.

Apart from the controversies brought forward in *The Sochi Predictaments*, which among other things include the issues of marketing and sustainable development, environmental ethics, the Russian political identity, terrorist threats and geopolitical aspects in regard to the neighboring regions of Georgia and Abkhazia, many controversial issues were apparent in media. Perhaps the most discussed issue concerned the anti-gay propaganda law that came in place ahead of the Games (RT 1), which made 52 Olympic athletes come together in a mutual protest in which they demanded action from IOC and their sponsors (Aftonbladet 1). Furthermore, there were reports of Sochi being the most expensive set of Olympic Games throughout history, but also that workers had been left without payment and that corruption was as ever apparent. The working conditions for the migrants who were hired to build the Olympic infrastructure were said to strongly violate against the Human Rights and there were even reports of workers being tortured (SVT). One journalist platonically stated that President Putin had united the entire world in giving everyone something to protest about (Zirin 2014) while David Rowe, Professor of Cultural Research, speculated in the Sochi Games as an arena for athlete activism suggesting that the Games “may be remembered less for gold-medal winning performances than for a media blizzard of activist athlete-generated politics.” (Rowe 2014).
This whole wide range of controversial aspects made me formulate the obvious research problem which the research design is constructed to help finding out:

*How will all these controversial issues play out during the Olympic Games in Sochi?*

**Research questions revisited**

With the relevance of the topic chosen argued for, and research problem presented, there needs to be some further clarifications regarding the research questions.

1. *Which events, statements and manifestations of a political character can be observed during the XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi 2014?*

2. *How can those be understood?*

An immediate reaction one might have towards the research design of this work is that the purpose, as well as the research questions, can be seen as rather broad or loose in their character. That is, however, the basic idea of the entire research process. In stating that the purpose is to *observe and map the political controversies*, and that relevant data to collect consists of *events, statements and manifestations of a political character* the boundaries of what kind of empiricism that can come in to play are definitely not very sharp.

The intention of the loosely defined empirical boundaries is to being able to grasp and collect as much varied data as possible in order to reach a comprehensive understanding. In shaping the “collection-filter” to tight, the risk is losing out on data which might be necessary to get the complete picture of the research problem. When it comes to the task of defining what constitutes a political controversy in the Olympic Sochi context, it is out of mine control as a researcher, but rather lays in the hands of media and other involved actors. In determining if an action taken is one of political character is in this case, however, completely up to the researcher’s interpretation (which will be further discussed in the Methodology-section).

In order to be considered as relevant data, the event, statement or manifestation (summarized *as an action taken*) should be an action taken possible to interpret as one firstly motivated by political reasons as opposed to purely sport-related. This action taken can be made by numerous actors including states (not only the Russian Federation), the organization committee, the IOC, national Olympic organization committees, the athletes, coaches and other people surrounding the athletes as well as representatives from various parts of civil society.
Another aspect that needs to be clarified is the fact that the research to a certain extent is depending on political controversies occurring in Sochi, meaning that the purpose will risk not being fulfilled if the Games turn out to be completely non-controversial. The meaning of the term “political controversies” as stated in the purpose has, however, a twofold connotation in this work. If the Games in Sochi end up being considered a major sporting success without any severe political controversies taking place, that would in itself be considered as highly controversial considering the given pre-conditions, which would give the final analysis a somewhat unexpected, but for that sake not less interesting touch.

**Limitations**

In a research paper of this kind, there are of course a number of limitations which will affect the findings.

Firstly, one could argue that the geographical location of the researcher plays a great part. In this case the researcher has no possibility to experience the Games on-site and solely depends on the information conceived through media reporting. It is very likely that the general impression would have been a different one if the process of collecting data took place on Russian soil. Also, not being located in Sochi during the research process will mean that controversies which potentially will be hidden away from media by Russian state authorities (or the IOC) will be impossible to bring to light. It has, however, never been the intention to travel to Russia and has not been a factor in the construction of the research design. In fact, since the idea is to attain a comprehensive understanding through extensive observations, one can argue it is more doable to conduct such research otherwise located.

Secondly, it cannot be overlooked that this work is written from within what can be referred to as “the western world” while Sochi arguably can be found outside the very same “world”. A fact which will affect how the empiricism found is interpreted and how the analysis is being made. As a researcher, and in line with the hermeneutic nature of the research process, an entirely objective position is however neither desired nor possible to take.

Furthermore, there exists an assumed language barrier which might limit the gathering of empirical material. There is no guarantee that Western media, i.e. those using either the English or the Swedish language, will cover the same news as for example their Russian counterpart. If unlucky, the research design might fail to account for political controversies brought to light solely by non-Swedish/non-English media channels, which should be considered a limitation, but also a limitation which would be extremely time consuming if it was to be avoided.
Outline

The rest of this work will be divided into four major sections named as **THEORY**, **METHODOLOGY**, **EMPIRICAL FINDINGS** and **ANALYSIS** which will be followed by a conclusion that summarizes this thesis. The **THEORY** chapter will provide a review of previous research and thereafter introduces the framework of IR-theory and the chosen analytical perspectives. The section of **METHODOLOGY** starts out with presenting the two scientific stands, hermeneutics and inductive reasoning, which have been essential for the research design in this work. Next, attention is devoted to the methodology used which is referred to as a *qualitative explanatory case study with an intensive approach*, which is followed by a review of the process of gathering data. Methodological weaknesses as well as methodological reflections stitch up the section before a brief outline of the following empirical findings is provided. In the **EMPIRICAL FINDINGS** one will encounter a daily journal which carefully presents the controversial events observed from the 17 days of Olympic action. The **ANALYSIS** begins with clarifying a few crucial analytical restrictions, and proceeding from there, the theoretical perspective of realism will be presented and then applied on the Games in Sochi. Thereafter, the same procedure will take place when first liberalism and then social constructivism is presented. The piece ends with a **CONCLUSION** in which the findings are summarized and suggestions for future research are given.
THEORY

Although this section is named theory, it will have a slightly different outlook than theory chapters normally do. Initially, an overview regarding previous research relevant for this work will be provided which will land in the identified research landscape-position of this piece. Thereafter, the position, as well as the theoretical foundation of this work, will be introduced, as well as why the framework chosen is relevant to use. Note that due to the inductive stand of this research design no theoretical perspective will be applied to carry with us when presenting the empirical findings. No hypothesis or theoretical lens will be used when collecting the findings. Instead, the theoretical work begins when all observations have been made and all empiricism has been gathered. This section will nonetheless be finished by a paragraph in which the perspectives chosen in the analysis will be briefly introduced in order to give the reader a sense of what is to come.

Previous research

The study and academic research of Olympic Games is one of nearly unmanageable reach. In general, many research projects related to Olympic studies seems to direct its focus on legacies of the arrangement of Olympic games which of course is of high importance (Kidd 2010, Leopkey 2008 & Mangan & Dyreson 2010 to name a few), but surprisingly few studies are aimed at saying something about what is going on during the Games, when the entire world is watching. Billings (2008) note that: “No sporting event has a wider scope than an Olympic telecast.” which pinpoints the relevance of focusing on the messages that all the millions of people watching the Olympics will get from doing so. This work follows the argument that media and its role in the Olympic spectacle cannot be ignored. Lenskyij (2006) argues that mainstream media historically has reproduced an idealistic and uncritical view of the Olympic idea, but that the arena is starting to change with the growth of social media which, according to Lenskyij, in the long run will hinder such reproductions. This argument, or prediction, will be of high significance to watch in this work.

A large part of the Olympic research encountered is in one or another way, quite logically, associated with what is referred to as Olympism or the Olympic values where different theoretical perspectives is used to highlight the foundation, perception and change of the Olympic idea (see for instance Bale & Christensen 2004, Filho & Reinaldo 2008 & Wassong 2009). One academic institution which devotes great attention to this manner is the Institute of Sport
Science of JGU (Johannes Gutenberg Universität) in Mainz, Germany. With Prof. Dr. Holger Preuß leading the way in an recently initiated project referred to as The Olympic idea and its future, the research team intends to investigate the “…structure of values that are explicitly and implicitly associated with the Olympic Games.” and with that hope to clarify “…whether some of the Olympic values are threatened in today´s environment and which are constant.” (JGU 2014). Many of the research projects that are underway under the supervision of Dr. Preuß’s should be considered as very interesting ones, and bear great significance for this work since part of the intent here is to come up with a description of the present state of the Olympic idea. This piece is however a case study with data collected from one Olympic event only, and with data which collected during the games, which differs widely from the more comparative design that Dr. Preuss seems to advocate. But what should be considered quite alarming with the JGU approach, and why it is relevant to even bring up their contributions in this context, is that JGU constitutes a great example of what seems to be an assumed agreement amongst Olympic researchers in always having the Olympic idea or the Olympic values as the point of departure. To further highlight the stand initiated, it should be mentioned that a surprisingly large part of the academic contributions written on the Olympics, according to this researchers impression, are formulated in association with the Olympic Studies Centre which is found within the same organizational structure as the IOC.

Where this discussion is going is that Olympic research to a much greater extent needs to “break free from its chains” and look at the Olympic movement from a perspective which is not influenced by the idea of what the Olympics should be. In this piece of work, the intention is to start from the opposite direction. Since the purpose is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Games in Sochi, the conviction is that the perspective needs to be raised to include not only the Olympics, but rather to perceive the Games as part of a broader picture. The understanding sought for therefore demands theoretical tools which allow analytical interpretations of everything the world is.

In the quest for finding these ideal theoretical tools, a tiny corner of the academia was identified which came to constitute this work’s place in the research landscape, namely the combination of sport (in this case Olympic sport) and the academic field of International Relations (IR).

In an article named Sport and International Relations: A Case For Cross-Diciplinary Investigation, Aaron Beacom states that the combination of sports and IR is not a very common one, and concludes that among researchers there appears to prevail a resistance of considering
sports as a human activity which affects and integrates with world politics. According to Beacom, special attention to international sport institutions, such as the IOC, will provide valuable insights to IR-theory (Beacom 2000: 4, 17). Beacom’s desire for a cross-disciplinary approach is shared here, but in this piece the understanding sought for is nearly the opposite; Rather than turning to sports to gain insights to IR-theory the intention here is to turn to IR-theory as a way of interpreting and understanding sports, and more specifically the Olympic Games in Sochi. Other than Beacom, Adrian Budd and Roger Levermoore constitute rare members of the flock which has considered the relation between IR and sports. In the book Sport and International Relations – An emerging relationship (2004), which Levermoore and Budd are the editors of, the general editor J.A Mangan praises the theme chosen in stating that it ”...breaks new analytical ground ; constitutes the beginning of a new type of inquiry; and is a welcome first for sport in the global society” (Budd & Levermoore 2004: xii). Included among the many suggested future research projects, Budd and Levermoore demand an increased focus on the role of international sport institutions in the international system. Their introductory chapter is rounded up with an expressed hope that others will welcome their attempt to develop what they consider a continuously ignored academic corner (Budd & Levermoore 2004: 14-15).

Even though a decade has passed since the first publication of Levermoroe & Budd’s piece, the need for the increased focus pointed out, by Levermoore & Budd as well as by Beacom, is, from this researchers view, as apparent as ever.

Introducing IR

So what is the academic field of IR and why does it fit so well into the purpose of this work? When referring to IR it is crucial to clarify that what is meant is the academic field of International Relations, not to confuse with the international relations that occur between states on a daily basis through diplomacy or business. Neither is IR solely a question of international politics or current affairs occurring in the international system. Those aspects are all part of IR, but the academic field as such is much broader and more loosely defined. In fact, there is no clear definition of what IR is, but a simple explanation would be that it is constituted by different theories and ideas of how we can understand the world. Some of the variables that are contested, and highly debated, between the various understandings of the world include views of the human nature, which actors that have power to act, peace and security, the state, conflict, identity, institutions, inequality and justice. The various perspectives within the field of IR all have their own specific intellectual origins and basic assumptions about how the
World can be understood. It should therefore be stressed that in applying an IR-perspective one is not making anything clear about one’s view of the world since the variations within the field are nearly endless. The reasons for why the IR-perspectives will suit this piece so well are several. Firstly, its theoretical reach will enable the analysis to grasp the wide range of empiricism that can come in mind. Secondly, since there are numerous of theoretical variations within the field, many various understandings of the assumed complex matters will be possible. Finally, and most importantly, the choice to combine sports with IR offers a good way of getting loose from the perceived ideas of what Olympism and the Olympic values should be, which, as argued above, often paint the picture of academic research on the Olympics.

**Introducing the chosen perspectives**

Again, it should be stressed that these theoretical perspectives were applied after the process of gathering empiricism. This is simply a brief introduction just to give a flavor of the different stands. A more detailed elaboration, as well as arguments for why the perspectives were chosen, will be offered in the analysis.

The perspectives chosen in order to perform the analysis in this work are realism, liberalism and social constructivism.

Within realism the international system is considered anarchic and all actors are by nature inherently selfish. The state is seen as the one key actor, and the only actor with real power. To gain more power, or to maintain the power a state enjoys, is considered the one major force driving world politics. The defining characteristic for the realist view of the state is the state’s sovereign authority over its territory and the key for upholding the authority is power. For realists, the essence of power lays in the ability to dominate with military or physical force. The principle of sovereignty is considered superior over giving priority to notions of social justice or human rights (Steans et.al 2010:53ff, 65).

Within liberalism, the conviction is that people in general are of a good and peaceful nature. Rationality is seen as the central characteristic of the human kind, and in general people are considered possessing the ability to live their lives guided by moral principles and in line with the rule of law. Therefore, the individual has the liberty and the power to act. Many other bodies other than the state, such as multinational companies, international institutions and NGOs, are seen as actors enjoying power and are considered influential in the international system (Steans et. al 2010:31, 36f)
The theoretical stand of social constructivism distinguish itself from structure-centered equivalents (such as realism), but also separates itself more action-centered perspectives (such as liberalism). Social constructivists mean that no social part of life is constant and that people always are situated in certain settings or contexts which affect their actions, and that those action in turn construct or reproduce the world in which they act. Furthermore, Social constructivists gives great attention to the roles of institutions, norms and identity affect people’s behavior, and are convinced that a state act and behave the way it does because it is socialized to do so (Steans et. al 2010:183, 187, 192).
METHODOLOGY

Bearing in mind what was stated in the preceding section, there are very few examples of previous research carrying the same research design as this piece does, and as a consequence there were not really any methodological wisdom to grasp from engaging with the literature which could be applied in this particular context. The result being a rather innovative methodological design with many potential pitfalls to avoid, but the choices made does however, from the researchers point of view, appear to have served this thesis well.

Before immersing in the methodological choices and its consequences, there needs to be a presentation of the foundation which the methodology is built upon. There have been two scientific directions, or stands, which have been essential for the research design in this work; the hermeneutics and inductive reasoning. Thereafter, the method used will be carefully elaborated upon followed by a paragraph explaining how the process of gathering data took place. Next, the methodological weaknesses dealt with in this piece will be discussed, and finally a few finishing methodological reflections will be offered followed by an outline of the upcoming chapter of empirical findings.

Hermeneutics

There exists a long history of attempts to clarify what interpretation and understanding really is, how understanding is possible and which specific problems that occurs when interpreting meaningful phenomenon. These attempts are generally referred to as hermeneutics. (Gilje & Grim 2007: 172f).

This work is hermeneutic in that its findings are a result of interpretation. There were two major stages in which the interpretation occurred during the research process. Firstly, during the observation of the XXII Olympic Winter Games, the idea was to distinguish events, statements or manifestations of a political character to include in the empiricism. Whether or not an event was noted and taken in to account had to do with if it was interpreted as relevant and meaningful enough. Secondly, once the games had ended and all the empiricism was gathered, another process of interpretation took place. This time all the pieces had to be interpreted into a whole, and a total understanding of the findings was sought for with help from various available theoretical explanations, whose usefulness again was determined through a process of interpretation.
Inductive reasoning

The last part of the above given clarification is what places the work along the lines of what is referred to as inductive reasoning, as opposed the deductive equivalent. In deductive reasoning the researcher generally starts out with a hypothesis or a specific theory which the findings of the research then either will find conformable or not. In using inductive reasoning, however, no hypothesis or theoretical lens is used when collecting the findings. Rather, the researcher enters the process with a blank paper and then begins the theoretical work based on the observations being made.

In this specific work, there was no clear definition of what the empirical findings might consist of when entering the research process. Besides the criteria that the action taken, in order to be relevant, would be possible to interpret as one motivated by political reasons, rather than purely sport-related, there existed no definite boundaries or limitations of inclusion/exclusion in the findings. Therefore, applying a specific theoretical framework or using a pre-given set of characteristics to look for would entail a risk of missing empiricism that would not “fit” into the assumed model, and with that ending up with a potentially misleading result. As Halvorsen notes as the key with inductive reasoning, maintaining a flexible, open-minded and unbiased stand towards the empiricism is what makes a total understanding possible (1992: 78f). This is why the preceding chapter only offered a brief introduction to the theoretical perspectives used in the analysis. That does however not mean that this work is non-theoretical. The different theoretical perspectives will be applied in the analysis in order to offer various interpretations and explanations of the empirical findings, but the key here is that those are not considered until the gathering of the empiricism is finished due to the inductive approach of this work.

A qualitative explanatory case study with an intensive approach

Other than being tinged by hermeneutics and inductive reasoning, the methodology used in this work can be classified as a qualitative explanatory case study with an intensive approach. In trying to navigate through the jungle of terminology that methodological choices often mean, the starting point was that this work deals with the case of the Olympic Games in Sochi, and that a case study therefore would be suitable. There is, however, not a whole lot written about case studies as a research method, and for a long while the concern was if it even is considered its own method. When coming across the works of Robert K. Yin, and more specifically his book Case Study Research – Design and Methods (2003), it turned out that those
feelings of anxiety were not completely unjustified. According to Yin, even though he argues that a case study should be considered “…a comprehensive research strategy.” (2003:13) researchers in general tend to “disdain the strategy” and view the method of case study “…a less desirable form of inquiry…” (2003:10) compared to other more acknowledged set of methodologies. The prejudices towards the method of case study does Yin explain with the absence of established systematic procedures compared with other research methods which often has “…numerous methodological texts providing investigators with specific procedures to be followed.” (2003:10) while the number of textbooks similar to Yin’s work is limited. In fact, Yin notes, the majority of the textbooks available within social science fails to even consider the case study as an recognized research method at all (2003:12).

One researcher that has covered the issue of case studies is the Norwegian scholar Knut Halvorsen. In his textbook on methodology in social science, Halvorsen explains that when one seeks to examine a number of various traits about one single unit, it is referred to as an intensive approach (1992:62). Here, the amount of different traits and their character was not known beforehand other than that they would be found within the one single unit (the XXII Olympic Winter Games). The reverse set up would have been an extensive approach whit a single variable in play but with multiple units. A plausible and exemplifying scenario would have been to look for signs of athlete activism within all the different disciplines represented in the Games in order to generalize and compare. Halvorsen notes that an intensive approach, on the other hand, enables a much deeper knowledge of the single unit gained through the amount of various variables (1992:62). In this work, an understanding of the unit as a whole was sought for which made the intensive approach more suitable. It should be noted that the word intensive solely is a methodological term borrowed from Halvorsen in order to properly describe the chosen methodology, and that it does not point out this particular research as being distinctively intense in comparison with academic research in general.

Furthermore, Halvorsen notes that a case study usually puts focus on processes and how something progresses or develops. The purpose is often to give an intense description of a social system and with that attempt to reach a total understanding of the researched unit (Halvorsen 1999: 67f), which all sounds as characteristics fitting this project.

To return to Yin, he notes that a case study often is the preferred method when the research questions are starting with “how” or “why” which correlates well with the second of this work’s research questions: How can those be understood? Furthermore, according to Yin a case study is suitable “…when the investigator has little control over events, and when the
focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.” (Yin 2003:1) which definitely describes the conditions of this thesis. Additionally, Yin distinguish three different ways of approaching the case study method. It can either be explanatory, exploratory or descriptive in its character. This work is clearly of an explanatory character since the intention is to explain how the events can be understood.

To sum up, the methodology used in this work is a qualitative explanatory case study with an intensive approach. It is qualitative in the sense that it concerns analysis of social phenomenon rather than statistical data. It is explanatory in that it is intended to help explaining the outcome. It is a case study since it only deals with one single case, the Olympic Games in Sochi, and it comes with an intensive approach in the meaning that it seeks to examine a number of various traits about this one single case.

Collection of data – How and where?

The data in this work has been collected through observation. When coming across the term “observation” in academic material, there is a good chance the context is one of socio-anthropological character. As a method, observation often takes place on the field where the researcher observes actions in its natural environment (Halvorsen 1992: 83). In several aspects, observation has been used differently here. First of all, it should not be considered a method in this context, but rather the course of action taken in order to perform the method. Furthermore, the research has not been made on “the field”, and neither has the data relevant to observe taken place in a natural milieu. Instead, the observation of the Games has been made through media, and primarily through TV. In Sweden, where this work has been written, the broadcasting rights of the XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi 2014 belonged to Viasat AB, which is owned by an international entertainment corporation named Modern Times Group (Viasat 1). Through its numerous TV-channels (TV 3, TV 10 & Viasat Sport) and its online service, which offered additional coverage of those events that did not make the TV-channels as well as instant replays, Viasat offered a complete coverage of the entire Games with a daily summary every night (Viasat 2). With access to the right channels as well as the online service one could observe every single sporting event that took place in Sochi. Occasionally the empirical findings will also constitute relevant issues broad up in a daily summary show on another broadcasting channel (SVT) which did not have any rights to send live pictures from the Games. Other than that, Viasat also provided a news feed on their website which often summarized issues related to the Games that were floating around in other news channels.
One could argue that other channels of media such as radio broadcasts or social media feeds (Facebook, Twitter etc.) should have been included to a greater extent in the gathering of empiricism in order to reach the comprehensive understanding sought for. Choosing the coverage offered by Viasat as point of departure did however enable a much more manageable research process than would have been the case if no boundaries for empirical sources were put in place. Viasat promises the viewer not to miss a second of the Games which is an argument enough to solely rely on their coverage (Viaplay 1). Other sources of media were, however, consulted when a relevant observation was being made, or when an interesting news item appeared in the Viasat news feed, in order to grasp possible reactions to a controversial event or to track down the original source of the data. The intention in doing so also had to do with being able to follow the development of certain issues as the Games went on. To clarify, the coverage offered by Viasat to the Swedish audience was the main source of empirical findings but other media also proved to play an important part in the collection of data.

Note that even though media had a vital role in the research design, the methodology used is not a media analysis. The observations have been made through media, but the analysis will not circle around how media has portrayed the Games, but rather of why things happened as they did. Media in general and Viasat in particular have functioned as the mean for accessing the data relevant to analyze, and although the media portrayal of the Games certainly would have been an interesting issue to investigate, that is not the purpose of this work.

**Methodological weaknesses**

Perhaps the most apparent weakness of this work is related to the hermeneutic nature and the various stages of interpretation apparent in the research design. There are no guarantees that anyone else will interpret and understand the phenomenon observed in exactly the same way. Neither is there any assurance another researcher would find the same phenomenon meaningful to include in the analysis even if the same research questions were asked. The final interpretations and analysis will most likely be unique, which in itself could be seen as both strength and a weakness.

The transferability of this work is therefore not very high, but the only way around when it comes to qualitative research of this kind it is to rely on the total impression of credibility which the reader hopefully will abide to after finished reading this thesis. The rather unique research design in combination with relatively unusual methodological choices also raise questions regarding the overall dependability.
The nature of doing observations can also constitute a weakness in this research. When an observation is made, the risk is that specific event only exists for a short period of time, meaning that others will be having problems with verifying that the event has been correctly observed, or that it even took place. In this case, when the majority of data is collected through TV, it is up to me as a researcher to give the presentation of the empirical findings and the analysis that follows as much credibility as possible. If the findings are not considered reliable the risk is the whole thesis will be considered irrelevant. At the moment there is, however, a possibility to review every single broadcasted event from the Games through the online service viaplay.se, but there remains an uncertainty of how long that option will exist.

**Methodological reflections**

There needs to be a few more things said about the choice of using inductive reasoning in this work. Some would argue that being truly inductive is impossible in the sense that every human being subconsciously creates pre-understandings of everything the world is, that a complete absence of thoughts which affect the outcome therefore is unavoidable. Furthermore, one can argue that everything a person does, every choice one makes and every conclusion one draws is based on the current knowledge of that person which would mean that every single part of this work inevitably is a result of a knowledge that cannot be ignored. Neither would it be possible to ignore pre-conceptions of theories and ideas when gathering empirical data. No explanation in order to avoid this potential criticism can be properly offered here, other than that the purpose of this work is not to offer the final answer to a question which has been debated among scientists for centuries, but rather to create the best possible research design for the topic chosen. The inductive reasoning is used here simply because the nature of what to analyze is not pre-given.

Another aspect which needs to be reflected upon is how the individual characteristics of the researcher comes in play in research of this kind. There was a slight concern that the “sport fanatic” part of this particular researcher would be too emotionally engaged to ignore, and that the process of gathering empiricism from time to time would shift over to simply watching and enjoying a broadcasted sporting event, which thereby would affect the objectivity and focus necessary to complete the quite demanding task of performing research in front of the TV for 17 straight days. In retrospect, the outcome rather was the opposite; the assumed enjoyment of being totally devoted to the broadcast of the Olympic Games was diminished by the academic duties assigned. On the other hand, it should be noted that those academic duties
probably would have been impossible to fulfill if it was not for the incorrigible sport nerd part found within thin researcher.

**About the empirical findings – outline**

The following chapter of empirical findings will be presented in the form of a daily journal which presents the controversial events observed from the 17 days of Olympic action. Following the daily coverage of controversial events there will each day be a section called *Personal reflections* which is provided partly to give the chapter some more “life” and the reader a more enjoyable reading experience, but also to capture the immediate thoughts that were present when the observations were being made. Many of these reflections will be covered in the analysis while others will not, and does instead provide suggestions for potential future research projects. Every noted event will be numbered in order to easily access it when reading the analysis. The coverage from the opening ceremony, as well as the closing ceremony, is constructed in a slightly different manner with immediate reactions or reports of the sequences of events written down as they happened. Note that the purpose here is not to in detail analyze the two ceremonies (which in itself is a potential research project). In order to fully grasp every symbolic action during an opening ceremony one needs to be equipped with a much deeper knowledge than what this researcher can admit to.

To once again repeat a crucial part of this thesis to have in mind when taking part of the empirical findings, the purpose and research questions of this work are the following:

*The purpose of this work is to, through media, observe and map the political controversies during the XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi and once the games have finished summarize and analyze them in order to close in on a comprehensive understanding of them.*

1. **Which events, statements and manifestations of a political character can be observed during the XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi 2014?**

2. **How can those be understood?**
EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The following relevant observations were being made during the XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi 2014:

2014-02-06 Pre-opening ceremony

# 1

During the Slopestyle qualification round, on the day before the opening ceremony, Russian snowboarder Alexey Sobolev were using a snowboard “…apparently resembling a member of the opposition punk group Pussy Riot.” (RIA 2). As the very first Russian to compete in the games, Sobolev displayed an image of a woman wearing a balaclava, the characteristic face-mask associated with the punk group, and holding a sharp knife in her hand. When confronted by Russian media and asked whether or not the image should be interpreted as a tribute to the controversial punk group, Sobolev referred to the fact that he himself was not the designer of the motive and that “Anything is possible.” (RIA 2). The event also got attention in several Western channels of media but with more focus on the fact that Sobolev also chose to display his phone number on his helmet with an extensive load of text messages coming in from fans all over the world (see for instance Dailymail 1).

Personal reflections:

One wonders whether or not the image on Sobolev’s snowboard was the catalyst which triggered fans to get in touch with him, or if the display of his personal phone number itself was enough to cause the reactions. Would the volume of text messages sent to Sobolev’s phone have differed if he would have competed with a “normal” snowboard? Also, would he have dared to do the same thing if it would have been an actual Olympic competition, and not just a qualification round? It is also worth noting the fact the display of the phone number seemed to catch more attention from the media than the suspected image of the Pussy Riot member. What does that tell us?
2014-02-07  **DAY 1**

The opening ceremony

Broadcast: TV 3 17:00-21:00

17:00-17:15 Opening ceremony – preview

The two former professional athletes Carolina Klüft and Anja Pärsson provide the Swedish audience with a discussion regarding the given conditions surrounding the ceremony. Among many other things Klüft asks the rhetorical question whether or not it is possible to separate sports and politics. Pärsson (whom recently publically acknowledged herself as homosexual) states that everybody should agree that those two are inextricably linked together, and that one should remember the controversies which were apparent during the summer Olympics in China 2008 and how the debate faded out once the Games were finished. According to Pärsson, it is crucial to maintain a critical stand at all phases of these mega-events.

17:15 The ceremony begins under the theme “Russian dreams”.

17:24 The Russian President Vladimir Putin, the IOC counterpart Tomas Bach and Ban Ki Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations are zoomed in on in the stands.

17:26 A male choir signs the Russian national anthem. Vladimir Putin remains silent.

17:33 The athletes are starting to march in, nation by nation.

17:38 Team Belarus enters the arena and draws great cheers from the audience.

17:44 Team Germany marches in wearing their talked-about rainbow-colored tracksuits. Nearly half of the athletes are however wearing white pants which drastically interfere with the rainbow hue. IOC President Tomas Bach, himself being German, is zoomed in applauding his fellow-countrymen.

17:46 The six man strong squad Georgia enters the stadium. Except from a few sullen faces, the Sochi-neighboring state cause no disturbance.

17:53 As the only state so far, Team China walks into the arena waving both their own as well as the Russian flag.

18:08 Team USA receives great attention from the crowd as they enter the ceremony. One of the athletes is carrying a mobile phone with rainbow colors on its cover.
18:13 Team Ukraine enters the arena and gets accompanied by ovations from the audience. The Swedish commentator Ola Wenström speculates that the extensive cheering might be related to politics and to what they are currently fighting for in the Ukrainian capital, Kiev.

18:21 Similar to Team China, the Japanese athletes are waving Russian flags.

18:22 It is time for the athletes of the hosting country to enter the arena. The camera focuses on Tomas Bach and a straight-faced Vladimir Putin.

18:31 All the athletes have toured the arena and are now taking their seats in the stands. An 18 chapter long movie informing the crowd and the TV-viewers about Russian history is about to begin. According to the pre-information obtained by Swedish expert commentator Göran Zackrisson, the core of the movie will circle around hard work, family values, discipline and the fact that President Putin seeks to unite all the various minorities under the same flag.

19:16 Dmitry Chernyshenko, president of the 2014 Sochi Organizing Committee gives a speech in which he explains the essence of the Sochi 2014 motto Hot. Cool. Yours. According to Chernyshenko, “Games will be yours, all of yours, because when they come together, in all our diversity, the Olympic Games have united us.”.

19:17-19:26 IOC President Tomas Bach follows:

“To the athletes, you have come here with your Olympic dream. You are welcome, no matter where you come from or your background. Yes, it’s possible even as competitors to live together and to live in harmony with tolerance and without any form of discrimination for whatever reason. Yes, it is possible even as competitors to listen, to understand and to be an example of a peaceful society, to building bridges and bring people together. The Olympic Games are never about erecting walls or to keep people above. Olympic Games are a sports festival in praising human diversity in great unity. Therefore, I say to political leaders of the world, thank you for supporting your athletes, they are the best ambassador of your country. Have the courage to embrace your disagreements in a peaceful and not political way and not on the back of these athletes.” (The Guardian 1)

19:26: Putin officially declares the Games opened!

20:09 Back in the studio the Swedish audience gets introduced to Malcolm Dixelius whom with help of his Russian fluency will provide ”an inside perspective” of what happens throughout the Games. According to Malcolm, the opening ceremony was designed to boost the Russian self-image.
Controversies during the opening day:

# 2
Ulrika Westerlund, President of Stockholm Pride, was detained by Russian police while holding a manifestation on the Red Square in Moscow together with fellow Russian LGBT activists. The group started singing the Russian national anthem while waving rainbow Pride flags but was not allowed to go on for very long before the police interrupted. Earlier the same day a similar scenario occurred in St. Petersburg where Russian authorities displayed the same determination in regard to the much-disputed Russian anti-propaganda law, and arrested at least four activists. According to Westerlund, the group had only been singing for approximately five seconds before they got arrested. Furthermore, the police were aggressive but not brutal in their treatment and the group was released after a few hours (DN 1).

# 3
An “air-pirate” and potential terrorist was “taken down” on an airplane departing from Kharkov, Ukraine, and heading for the Turkish capital Istanbul. The rumors state that one traveler claimed carrying a bomb in his luggage and that he suggested the flight should head for Sochi and the opening ceremony instead of its planned destination. The actual seriousness and potential intentions of the threat remains unknown and the plane landed safely in Istanbul without any disturbance occurring during the flight. No bomb was found. The Ukrainian foreign ministry confirmed that the suspect was of Ukrainian heritage. No confirmed association with the Caucasus region was reported (CNN 1).

Personal Reflections:

One has to say that it seems like the Games have started just the way that Russia and the local organizing committee wanted it. The feeling is that the opening ceremony did exactly what Malcolm Dixelius stated it was intended to do; boost the Russian self-image. Further on, it should be highlighted how the IOC President Tomas Bach expressed himself in his speech. The fact that he emphasized “human diversity” and “tolerance” could be interpreted as aimed directly towards the hosting country and the controversies surrounding the anti-gay propaganda. However, rhetoric is one thing, action is another. It is also worth noting that the Swedish broadcaster, Viaplay, does not seem to have a definite stand on the politics vs. sports discussion (most obviously displayed by the studio host Carolina Kluft). It appears as if every individual involved has its one view of whether or not “we should talk politics in this sports broadcast”, which in itself is interesting in many ways. One effect of it, however, is that occa-
sionally people with no legitimacy what so ever in the field as such ends up discussing politi-
cal issues with millions watching from the TV-sofas, an aspect which further reinforces the
relevance of the topic chosen for this study.

2014-02-08 DAY 2

No relevant observations made.

**Personal reflections:**

Yet another day where everything works out just as intended to. Will this be a common theme
for the Sochi Games?

2014-02-09 DAY 3

#4

One of very few openly gay athletes competing in Russia, the Dutch female speed skater Ireen
Wust, managed to secure her third straight Olympic gold medal when winning the 3000 me-
ters speed skating-race. Wust chose not to manifest her gay sexuality when celebrating her
victory, and when media wanted her to say something about her relation to the location for the
victory she made no references to gay rights or her own sexuality, and did instead talk about
the huge pressure she felt being the favorite to win (Yahoo 1). Neither Associated Press (AP
1) nor Viasat mentioned Wust being gay.

AP did however report of the openly gay Austrian ski jumper Daniela Iraschko-Stolz declar-
ing that she will not protest against Russian anti-gay propaganda: “I don't think it's a good
idea to make protests here, no one cares. I know Russia will go and make the right steps in the
future and we should give them time.” Being the favorite to win the gold medal Iraschko-
Stolz offered another take on the issue: “I´m here as a sportswoman. To jump pretty good is
also a statement”. (AP 2).

**Personal reflections:**

It is striking how the media is trying to provoke athletes to say or do something that potential-
ly would constitute a thorn in the side of the Olympic hosts. The quote from Iraschko-Stoltz is
a very interesting one; “To jump pretty good is also a statement.” What can we make of that?
Since the interview circles around her not wanting to protest against Russia (not making a
political statement) one have to assume that she is implying that performing well, in the sport
she is competing in, also has political implications. In comparison with not making a protest
and not performing well at all, jumping pretty good might be a “stronger” statement, but when did a good sports result become a statement? If two just as good performances takes place on two different sites, is one of them a statement if there is an assumed reason to protest against something at one of the sites?

2014-02-10 DAY 4

#5

In an assumed response to the criticism towards the Organisation Committee, and the construction companies involved, for not paying many of the guest workers who came to Sochi in order to build the Olympic settings, the IOC Director of Communications, Mark Adams, issued a statement declaring that 500 companies have been investigated and that more than 6000 migrant workers have been compensated for the non-payment. Adams praised the Russian authorities for their engagement in the process and also stated that Russia has done a good job in assuring the payments to the workers who made the Games possible (Viaplay 1).

#6 Broadcast: TV 3, 19:00

Jesper Björnlund, member of the coaching staff of the Swedish mogul skiing team, had a set of rainbow-colored headphones during the men’s final in mogul skiing. The headphones were clearly seen in TV when Björnlund were giving his final instructions to the Swedish skiers Per Spett and Ludvig Fjellström before starting their respective race. The Swedish commentary said “It’s nice with people who dare to take a stand in the ongoing discussions”. The manifestation was all over Swedish media but no international reporting of the action has been obtained. On the question whether the headphone colors had to do with the antigay-propaganda laws or the poor working conditions for the migrant workers, Björnlund answered that it had to do with all the controversial issues surrounding the games: “The Olympic Games should be arranged in the best proper manner possible. The Games itself has been wonderful but it doesn’t feel good that those workers has not been paid”. One of the Swedish skiers, Per Spett, said that even though the Games are not a political forum, disrespectful behavior towards Human Rights needs to be acknowledged.” (Aftonbladet 2). Tomas Carlqvist, Team Manager for the Swedish team, admitted that Björnlund had brought up the issue of wearing the headphones before the competitions, but also stated that he had no opinion about it and that it was solely Björnlund’s own decision (Expressen 1). SOK, the Swedish Olympic Committee, made no statement in regard to Björnlund’s manifestation.
The Norwegian Ladies Cross Country skiing team collectively decided to wear black mourning bands during the Skiathlon-race as a way of honoring one of the team members recently passed away brother. IOC found it against the regulations and issued an official reprimand. The Norwegians found it frustrating not being able to have their mourning process in quite while IOC issued an official statement expressing their deepest sympathy for the loss, but also stating that the competitions should come with an atmosphere of joy and happiness rather than sorrow (Viaplay 2).

**Personal reflections:**

The controversies definitely started to pile up during the fourth day of the Games. The issue of the non-allowed mourning bands was wildly discussed in the daily summary show seen on Viasat and soon led into a conversation concerning political expressions in sports in general, upon which a short documentary of the “Black Fist” in the summer Olympics in Mexico 1968 was shown. My initial thought concerned why IOC decided to issue the reprimand, bearing in mind that no one probably would have protested if they would have not. Why cause disturbance if they does not need to? What it so controversial about mourning bands? On the other hand, this issue might constitute a “cautionary case” for the rest of the games, which might be what IOC are looking for.

2014-02-11 **DAY 5**

# 8

The Swedish Slopestyle team staff members Patric Nyberg and Jan Aiiku followed the example set in place by their fellow countrymen on the day before in wearing rainbow-colored headphones and making sure they were seen in the international TV broadcast. Aiiku claimed it should be obvious to everyone that the headphones represent an intentional protest: “It is a human right to give and receive love, the rest of it should not matter”. (Aftonbladet 3).

# 9

Dmitry Chernyshenko, president of the 2014 Sochi Organizing Committee, issued a statement in which he defended the selection of a pro-Kremlin MP as one of the chosen ones to light the Olympic flame during the opening ceremony. There were rumors, initiated by American news channel CNN, stating that the election of the former figure skater Irina Rodnina as the “flame lighter” was motivated by political reasons. The allegations concerned a tweet from 2013 where a picture of the US President Obama together with a banana appeared on her twitter
account. "Any political talks or discussions are not appropriate for the Olympic Games," Chernyshenko said. "Irina Rodnina is one of the most respected Olympic athletes in the world and I want to stress the Olympics is not about politics." (The Guardian 2).

**Personal reflections:**

It is interesting to note that IOC apparently had nothing to comment on the rainbow colored headphones from yesterday, since the pattern repeated itself today. Why are mourning bands more “political” than a piece of equipment which is worn for political reasons? Is it possible that the manifestations from the Swedish staff members somehow have managed to avoid the eyes of the IOC? Or is it more a matter of how the different sports differ in popularity, that mogul skiing and slopestyle are not popular enough to attract IOC attention?

2014-02-12 **DAY 6**

No relevant observations made

2014-02-13 **DAY 7**

#10

Stefan Holm, Swedish former Olympic athlete but now an IOC representative, is asked on his stand in regard to the criticism aimed towards the Games in Sochi. Holm agrees with those arguing for a more stern set of demands put in place for the nations hosting mega-events such as the Olympic Games, but also adds that it is very difficult to interfere with an independent state and its laws. According to Holm, the problem lays in the fact that each nation has its own differences. Instead, Holms points in the direction of the United Nations and rhetorically asks why it is that they do not seem to bother at all when it comes to issues of such kind (Viaplay 3).

#11

Upon winning a silver medal in the female ski jumping competition, the openly gay Austrian athlete Daniela Iraschko-Stolz is interviewed by CNN. She said that she will remember her medal as both an achievement in the very first female Olympic ski jumping competition in history, but also “as making a point in Russia with the anti-propaganda laws.” (CNN 2). Iraschko-Stolz had previously explained that she did not think it was a good idea to protest in Russia, and when asked about the responsibility to speak out she responded that it is difficult to do so due to the IOC rules. She did however also add that it probably was not the best
choice to give the games to Sochi and that she hoped human rights would become a factor when deciding on Olympic hosts in the future.

Additional material from the daily summary show:

# 21:35 – Swedish hockey expert Håkan Södergren mentions the fact that all the volunteers wear colorful mittens not unlike the gay movement’s rainbow colors, when they in fact reflect the colors of the five Olympic rings. According to Södergren, someone had asked Putin what the thought behind the mittens were, upon which the Russian President fretfully answered that it obviously was not himself who had come up with the design.…

# 21:51 – Russian expert Malcolm Dixelius talks about the political implications of ice hockey in a Russian context. The anticipated gold winning Russian men’s hockey team had entered the Olympic tournament previously the same day, and Dixelius argues that the entire Russian population is united in their faith to the Russian team and that the expectations are that they will help the fans revisit good old times when Soviet dominated the hockey scene, as well as the scene of international politics, completely.

# SVT – Daily summary show 22:43 – In proceeding from the discussion regarding political expressions in an Olympic context (with the mourning bands and rainbow headphones as the most current examples), the studio host with guests ends up trying to define where the line should be drawn; What is political and what is not? Several cases of various kind are being made such as the bobsleigh runner Bruno Banani who changed his name in order to promote the correspondingly named clothing company, the Norwegian men’s curling team who surprised their surroundings with wearing overwhelmingly colorful track suit pants, and the Czech Republic ice hockey player Jaromir Jagr who are playing with number 68 on his back as a tribute to the Czech revolution and the liberation from communism in 1968 to name a few.

Extra: New York Times reports of a complete absence of demonstrations in the, for the special cause designed, protest zone situated roughly 10 miles away of the Olympic setting (NY Times 1).

Personal reflections:

It is interesting to hear Stefan Holm’s view of things, but one should also bear in mind that, being a newly elected IOC representative, probably the last thing he would like to do is probably to criticize his own organization. Blaming the United Nations for being inactive was,
however, a rather unexpected twist from my point of view. He certainly has a point, but for this specific Olympic event I hardly think that the Security Council would have acted to impose sanctions on the Olympic hosts since Russia is a permanent member of the very same council. When speaking of the difficulties of interfering with an independent state and its laws, Holm does nevertheless pinpoint a crucial aspect; To what extent does the principle of state sovereignty trump international sporting mega events (and the potential opposing views and values those might bear) taking place on “sovereign soil”?

The question of where the line should be drawn, and more importantly if it is even possible to draw a line, when it comes to what constitutes a political expression and what does not is certainly not one with an easy answer to it. Might that question also be one troubling the IOC? I would think it does, and perhaps that is one of the reasons for the mourning band-ban, that IOC in setting the bar extremely low for what will be defined as political in Sochi wishes for a less controversial mega-event than what could be anticipated. If that is a strategy in place, will it be successful?

Also, who would have thought of a complete absence of demonstrations in the remotely located protest zone?

2014-02-14 DAY 8

# 12

The IOC President Tomas Bach issued a statement saying that he is very pleased with how the Games have progressed so far. Furthermore, he stated that the fear that the increased security measures taken would dispel the atmosphere in the Olympic village, which was raised as a concern coming into the Games, was uncalled for: “The Russian authorities has handled the security issue in an excellent way. The security personnel are very friendly and the Olympic atmosphere has not been affected at all. I have not received a single complaint from the athletes.” (Viaplay 4).

Personal reflections:

It would be an interesting topic to investigate whether or not the athletes dare to file an official complaint in fear of being interpreted as having political intentions?
2014-02-15 DAY 9  

#13

In a re-run of “The miracle on ice”, one of the most well-known Olympic moments throughout history, Team USA beat fellow combatant Team Russia on penalty shots without any apparent controversies occurring. President Putin watched the defeat from the stands. The Miracle on ice took place in the ice hockey finale of the 1980 Olympic Games of Lake Placid where the previously nearly unbeaten and superior Team Sovjet suffered a very unexpected loss to Team USA (The Guardian 3).  

Personal reflections:  

One might argue that a sociopolitical impact of the meeting no longer exists since the players from the two sides regularly play with and against each other in the National Hockey League (NHL) and since Team USA and Team Russia already have played each other three times in the Olympics. That would however be to put too much attention to the perspectives of the team’s respective individual athletes, and to shy away from the issues raised by Dixelius who stated that ice hockey in Russia constitutes, or is intended to constitute, a major uniting force which can remind Russians of a bygone era of Soviet supremacy.

2014-02-16 DAY 10  

No relevant observations made  

2014-02-17 DAY 11  

#14

Vladimir Luxuria, Italian transgender activist and former member of the Italian parliament, was detained by Russian police twice during two days. Luxuria was strolling around in the Olympic park in Sochi wearing a rainbow colored outfit and displaying a banner with the words: “Gay is OK” in letters of the Cyrillic alphabet, which was not appreciated by the authorities. On the question of whether or not Luxuria was welcome to watch the Olympic Games, IOC spokesman Mark Adams avoided to give a straight answer and instead said: “On the wider issue, as we have said very often, I am sure the Games will not be used as a platform for any demonstration, and we hope that continues,” (Washington Post 1).  

#15

In an interview with CNN, Russian prominent Olympic athlete and figure skater Evgeni Plushenko, stated that he “Is open to using his public profile to help raise awareness
of anti-gay propaganda”, but also added that it is not his duty to do so (CNN 3). It should be added that Plushenko arguably did what he could to avoid saying anything of substance in the matter during the video-recorded interview, but that the reporter to a certain extent pressured him to do so.

#16

On a visit to the House of Switzerland in the Olympic village President Putin clarifies for a reporter that he ““hopes they stop mixing sport and politics”. (NY Times 2). It is never explained who Putin is referring to when he talks about “they”…

Additional material from the daily summary show:

22:14 – The reporter Göran Zackrisson have met with Alexander Karelin, Russian national hero, multiple Olympic Greco-Roman wrestling gold medalist and now a representative of the political party led by President Putin. When asked by the anti-gay propaganda laws in Russia, Karelin diplomatically answers that one cannot adjust legislation in order to satisfy other states, or in order to informally belong to the “liberal world”. Karelin argues that Russia is liberal as it is and that individuals with an unusual view of family structure and sexuality already are enjoying good conditions in Russia. - Nobody is haunting them, Karelin adds, and no one is pointing at them.

Personal reflections:

The Italian activist Luxuria’s manifestation, and detainment that followed, marks the first action taken at the scene in Soeji by a “member” of what can be referred to as the civil society. Although the IOC spokesman Mark Adams commented the detainment with stating he hoped that “…the Games will not be used as a platform for any demonstration, (Washington Post 1) one might wonder if the determination to remove Luxuria would have been equally strong the sign if the sign had displayed a message aimed against, rather than for, homosexuality. In regard to the figure skater Evgeni Plushenko, I sense the reporter’s prejudice of figure skaters being more “open-minded” and with that being more likely to express their support of the gay community. Being aware that I in labeling that as a prejudice might make myself guilty of the same accusation, I still find it rather unfair that a Russian figure skater is pressured to speak up, and with that speak against his own country, when Russian athletes of other more “masculine” sports are left alone by the western media.
The quotes from Karelin pinpoints the differences of what constitutes “good conditions” in different parts of the world. The fact that he considers those of “an unusual view of family structure and sexuality” as having good conditions in that nobody is pointing at them or haunting them, and that it therefore is no need for “liberalization” and improved rights, can be criticized for a number of reasons. The most obvious one being that a life in accordance with human rights consists of more than the right to not be haunted or pointed at.

**2014-02-18 DAY 12**

**#17**

The activist group Pussy Riot had merely arrived in Sochi before they got arrested. The initial information was stating that two members of the activist group had been arrested and accused for theft when walking down the street. After being violently handled with and detained for approximately 10 hours the women ran down the street outside the police station singing a new song, referred to as “Putin will teach you to love the motherland”, which include sarcastic implications aimed at the Russian President and his leadership.

Ms. Tolokonnikiva, one of the women involved, said they had arrived at the site in order to “…make a political claim about the Sochi Olympics.” and also added that “There is no space for political protest here. If you want to say something critical you will be detained, Sochi is a political event.” (BBC 1). The news got great attention from media channels of various kinds and was also brought up by Viasat (Viaplay 5). In the daily summary show from Viasat, Dixelius stated that Pussy Riot is edging the limits and that the political situation in Sochi has sharpened. At the same time, Dixelius said that the games have played out much less controversial than he anticipated and that it seems like the Russian security apparatus is working properly. With that view brought up the talk show-host Ola Wenström marked the end of the political discussion: - Great. Now we know all about that. Let’s talk ice hockey instead…..

**#18**

In commenting on the treatment of Italian transgender activist Vladimir Luxuria by Russian authorities, IOC defended the “removal” of Luxuria and argued that she was “escorted peacefully from the premises” rather than detained. According to BBC, the former Italian MP tried to enter one of the hockey arenas to watch a women’s hockey game when she was taken away by a number of unidentified men driving a vehicle with an Olympic logo on it (BBC).
Personal reflections:

First Luxuria and now Pussy Riot; the manifestations from the civil society are starting to pile up and that is bad news for those aiming for a set of non-controversial Olympic Games (The Russian hosts and IOC both fall under that category). The question now is how provocative Pussy Riot dare to be, and how violently the Russian authorities dare to treat them with the entire world watching.

2014-02-19 DAY 13

#19
Due to reports of clashes between civilians and police resulting in several casualties occurring in Ukrainian capital Kiev, the Ukrainian Olympic Committee asked IOC to let the athletes wear black mourning bands in order to enable the Ukrainian athletes to show their sympathy towards their fellow countrymen. The inquiry was denied (Viaplay 6).

#20
The activist group Pussy Riot once again caused disturbance when performing and singing their new song on site in the Olympic village under a sign advertising the Games, and was soon attacked by Cossack militia. The performance was interrupted after only a few minutes and the Cossacks (who constitute an informal polis force) were reported of behaving in a very aggressive manner and used teargas, as well as whips, on members of the group (Viaplay 7).

Police arrived at the scene but no one was arrested. A video clip and pictures with Cossacks using a whip were spread all over the internet. Region governor, Alexander Tkachev, said he promised to prosecute the attackers even though Pussy Riot and their opinions “are not supported by the majority of people in the region”. (The Guardian 4).

#21 Broadcast TV3 15:45

The referee blow the whistle which mean that the anticipated gold-winning Russian men’s ice hockey team is eliminated already in the quarter final after being defeated by Finland. Approximately 12000 Russian spectators in the stands, and many more in front of the TVs, are chocked to silence.

Personal reflections:

Did the Ukrainian Olympic Committee really believe that IOC would give their thumbs up to their plans of wearing mourning bands considering that the Norwegian skiing team was fined
for it, or should the news of Ukraine asking IOC for permission be interpreted as a protest of the stern rules?

From my point of view, the spreading of the shocking video of Pussy Riot being beaten up with whips offers two possible scenarios: Either the Cossacks simply lost their temper to such a degree that they surpassed their mandate of behavior, or (and I am not sure which one is the preferable version here) they had orders to treat the punk group with as much violence as necessary to prove the point. I am leaning towards the latter explanation.

2014-02-20 DAY 14

#22

With serious unrest occurring in her native country, and with IOC not allowing the Ukrainian athletes to wear black armbands, the Ukraine skier Bogdana Matsotska stated, upon entering the Olympic slalom competition that she, during the given circumstances, saw no other option than not to compete.

Matsotska had already participated in two other downhill competitions without any prominent results. She said the IOC-ban on wearing black mourning bands was behind her decision. Sergei Bubka, former Olympic pole vault champion and now head of the Ukrainian Olympic delegation, but also a member of the ruling party in Ukraine led by President Yanukovych, had tried to persuade her to stay without result. Matsotska said that she had considered competing and yelling the slogan of the Kiev protesters during the race. Her father and coach, Oleg Matsotskiy, said: ""We don't want to cause agitation. But we don't want to compete in the name of this government." (The Guardian 5).

Viasat simply came out with the news that Ukrainians were leaving Sochi (Viaplay 8). Mark Adams, IOC spokesperson, denied banning the black armband, instead claiming IOC never got the question from the Ukrainian delegation while the delegation themselves said that they had asked to wear them but was told such an act was not appropriate. Mark Adams: "There are 2,800 athletes here. As you can imagine, there are a lot, sadly, a lot of people with personal tragedy in their lives. Some with big political tragedies, some with personal tragedies, friends, loved ones, some athletes, some non-athletes. The idea is to try to help them to find other ways, individual or collectively, to mark those moments." (The Guardian 5).

Many Ukrainian flags with black mourning bands attached to them were seen in the Olympic village. The Ukrainian Olympic delegation issued a statement saying that families and loved
ones back in Kiev are present in their minds and that they will do their “best to honour them on the field of play” in Sochi (The Guardian 5).

Oleg Matsotskiy argued that the old principle of Olympic Truce had been violated while Sergei Bubka said he was convinced “Ukraine can be brought together by success in Sochi and through "sporting and Olympic values." "We want to show to everyone that Ukraine exists and is united through sport and Olympics.” (CNN 4).

**Additional material from the daily summary show:**

Dixelius claims that the sensational ice hockey-defeat of Team Russia is a major blow for the entire Russian population since the plan was to “bring hockey back to Russia”. Dixelius does however also points out that Russia can be very pleased with the Olympic sporting effort as a whole, but that the success so far has come in sports which Russia usually are not successful in. Instead of traditional Russian Olympic events such as cross country skiing, ski shooting and ski jumping, the medals have been taken in, perhaps until now, less popular sports such as bobsleigh, skeleton, short track and parallel slalom for snowboarders. Furthermore, Dixelius talks about the curious fact that two of the Russian gold-medalists, the short track phantom Victor An and the snowboarder Viv Wind, are immigrants with An being of South Korean heritage and Wind originally from the U.S. Dixelius speculates whether or not this might affect the Russian opposition to immigration (Viaplay 9).

**Personal reflections:**

The implications of the developments in Ukraine are interesting in many ways. Firstly in the sense that Matsotska completely is turning to a form of athlete-activism where she acts to protest against her own state, and more precisely the ruling party in her own state. Secondly, the role of Bubka being both a member of the ruling party and also the head of the Ukrainian delegation in Sochi and that he is referring to “sporting and Olympic values” as a cure. One also wonders if this “disturbance” could have been avoided if IOC were to allow the Ukrainians to wear mourning bands. The impact of sport successes on Russian attitudes towards immigration is definitely an interesting topic for future research.
2014-02-21 DAY 15

#23

During intensified social unrest in Kiev and an ongoing debate of whether or not the athletes are allowed mourn the dead, the Ukrainian female biathlon relay team managed to win the first Ukrainian gold medal in Sochi. Russia came in on second place and the camera soon found a Russian and a Ukrainian member of their respective team staff hugging each other. Through his twitter account, head of the Ukrainian Olympic delegation Sergej Bubka, soluted the effort: “Girls devote their win to Ukraine! We waited 20 years for gold medal! And we needed it right now. Let this win unite Ukraine and bring peace!” (Bubka twitter).

IOC President Tomas Bach also reacted on the peculiar circumstances: “Ukraine’s victory in the women’s biathlon relay was the standout moment of the Sochi Olympics, a powerful symbol of unity during the country’s bloody political crisis”. (Boston Globe)

On the press conference following the victory, biathlon team relay member Olga Pidrushna urged everyone present to have a minute of silence for those killed in Kiev. Pidrushna later said the team dedicated the gold to “the whole of Ukraine”. Bubka added: “This is a message for a better future.” (Washington Post 2).

#24

According to the Russian minister of sports, Vitalij Mutko, the Olympic Games in Sochi should already with two days left of competitions be considered a major sporting success for the hosts. Compared to the Games in Vancouver 2010, where Russia only managed three gold-medals, the amount of Russian medals in Sochi is now up on 23 and still counting with no less than seven gold-medals (Viaplay 10).

Personal reflections:

What great symbolism for Bubka and his talk about uniting around success and Olympic values. But to what extent is the victory a message for a better future?

2014-02-22 DAY 16

#25

In regard to the criticism surrounding the games, the civil society coalition consisting of Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Human Rights Campaign offered their view in issuing a letter to the IOC demanding explicit changes before future Olympic Games.
The demands circled around a much more visible stand in regard to Human Rights and discrimination of sexual rights, arguing that Human Rights should be a fundamental part of an application to host the Olympic Games and that severe sanctions should be introduced and applied if the hosting nation does not respect those rights. The demands suggested that the new stand should apply ahead of the Games as well as and during the Games.

The IOC spokesperson Mark Adams said the IOC appreciate the Human Rights Watch and are happy they have such a good and constructive dialogue. He made sure the IOC will read, embrace and reflect upon the demands stated before they get back to the coalition (Viaplay 11).

**Personal reflections:**

I am not sure that the civil society coalition share Mark Adams’s view of their dialogue with IOC.

2014-02-23 **Day 17**

**# 26**

Russia got the best possible ending of the Olympic competitions in Sochi when Alexander Legkov, Maxim Vylegzjanin och Ilja Thernousov completed a Russian “triple” over 50 kilometers cross country skiing (Viaplay 12).

**# 27**

After the last day of competitions IOC President took time to praise Sochi and everone involved in organizing the Games. “What have happened here in Sochi is fantastic, especially considering how much construction that was not finished just a few months ahead of the opening.” (Viaplay 13)

**Closing Ceremony, Broadcast TV3 17:00**

17:24 Vladimir Putin and Tomas Bach enters the ”presidential box”.

17:25 The Russian flag is carried in by the 13 Russian gold-medalists, a number of victories greater than what any other nation can pride itself with, and is then raised up next to the Olympic flag.

17:30 The Russian national anthem is sang by thousand children. All of the gold-medalists sing along except the, from South Korea newly emigrated, Short track runner Victor An.
17:37 The flag-bearers of the remaining countries march into the stadium in alphabetical order. All the athletes march in together and the Swedish TV-viewer is told the intention is to symbolize global unity and the Olympic spirit.

17:51 Expert commentary Anja Pärsson states that athletes probably will have a greater say in the future in terms of how and where the Games are organized: "…not to mention the political aspects considering the controversies surrounding the Games in Sochi."

17:53 It is time for the medal ceremony of women’s 30 kilometers cross country skiing and the men’s 50 kilometers cross country skiing. Tomas Bach is handing out the medals.

18:00 The Russian cross country skiing-trio is receiving their medals to an enormous cheer from the spectators and marks the perfect ending of the Games from a Russian perspective.

18:03 The Russian national anthem is played once again.

18:40 Tomas Bach enter the stage together with the mayor of Sochi and the counterpart of Pyounyang (the host of the next Olympic Winter games in 2018).

18:56 Head of the local organizing committee, Dmitry Chernyshenko is about to give a speech:

“Sochi has delivered as promised. We have proved we could take on the challenge. This is a great moment in history which will never be forgotten. This is the new face of Russia, our Russia. For us these games are the best ever”.

Tomas Bach takes over for some finishing remarks:

“Thank you athletes. You have shared your emotions with us, celebrated victories and defeats with dignity. You lived together in the same Olympic village. That sends a powerful message from Sochi to the rest of the world. A message of a society built of peace, tolerance and respect. I appeal to everybody, against oppression and violence, act on this Olympic message of peace.

As our Russian hosts have promised, perfect organization! Russia delivered all that they have promised. In just seven years they succeeded. I would like to thank Putin for his personal commitment, the Russian government, the organization committee, the IOC, and all the Russians and people in Sochi.

To all the volunteers: Your smiles made the sun shine. The legacy of you will provide a strong civil society in Russia. Through you everybody with an open mind could see a
new face of the new Russia. Effective, and open to the rest of the world. These were the athletes’ games. We arrived with great respect for the rich and varied history of Russia. We leave as friends of the Russian people.”

**Personal reflections:**

The Games have ended and many talks about it as a major success in every aspect. Sports wise, the Russian won the medal league and got the perfect ending with the cross country skiing-treble. Organization wise, IOC seems pleased with the hosts and everything appears to have worked out as planned. In terms of controversies, not a whole lot occurred during the Games, at least not as many as anticipated. At this point, this work turns attention to those controversies that did occur, as well as the lack of controversial issues, and how those can be interpreted.
ANALYSIS

The intention of this section is to make sense of the data collected during the Games. As stated in the introduction, this work is tinged by a hermeneutic approach and inductive reasoning. It is hermeneutic in the sense that both the empirical findings and the analysis that will follow are results of interpretation. The data was collected through observation and the interpretation took place when determining whether or not an event observed was considered relevant in this context. Here the second phase of interpretation takes place when all the data is interpreted into a whole, and a total understanding is sought for. In line with the approach of inductive reasoning, no theoretical lens or theoretical perspective was used as a filter when observing the Games and collecting the data. Instead various theoretical perspectives, whose usefulness again is determined through a process of interpretation, will be used here in the analysis in order to offer different explanations and understandings of the political controversies occurring (or not occurring) during the Games.

Before proceeding with the analysis it should be noted that the political controversies observed during the Games were fewer and less controversial than anticipated. That is my own interpretation, but it also seems to correspond with how others summarize the Games. For instance, IOC President Tomas Bach stated in his speech at the closing ceremony that the Games fell out as”…our Russian hosts have promised, perfect organization!” , and arguably keeping the Games free of political controversies was one of the promises made. The question is, however, how and why the Games ended up less controversial than anticipated.

Analytical restrictions

As previously stated, there is no clear definition of what the academic field of IR is or consists of, neither is there any definitive number of how many various theoretical perspectives, approaches or stand that are apparent within the field. In this work I have chosen to perform my analysis through three various perspectives, realism, liberalism and social constructivism. The reasons for doing so are several. Firstly, after summing up the empirical findings I sensed that all three perspectives would offer intriguing arguments and interesting as well as alternative understandings to the analysis. Secondly, realism and liberalism are considered as perhaps the two major perspectives within IR with intellectual roots going way back in both cases, and therefore I felt that those two should be included. Thirdly, realism and liberalism stand in sharp contrast to each other which opens up for an analysis with a very wide scope, while
social constructivism is considered occupying a middle ground on the imaginary scale of IR theory which makes the perspective a good complement to the two others. Finally, even though it is tempting to add a few more perspectives three seemed an appropriate number given the nature and preferred length of this thesis.

It should also be noted that there are numerous distinctive stands and school of thoughts within all three of the perspectives used, but that the intention is to focus on the core assumptions that guide the different perspectives. Having said that, I do not claim to give the perfect summary of the main perspectives since such a quest would be impossible with just a few pages of space available, and the main focus here is on searching for various understandings of the empirical findings rather than carefully outlining different theoretical stands.

One should also note that the plan here is not to find in what way the different perspectives does not fit, but rather to line out how the Games can be understood if fully engaging in every one of them. At first sight it might seem like the entire analysis simply is a forced way of invoking theoretical perspectives that does not fit. If that is the experienced feeling, I will urge the reader to read again and reconsider since the idea is to offer alternative understandings of the topic investigated, understandings that are not commonly presented and which might offer a new way of looking at it.

It should also be stated that purpose is not to state whether or not the controversial events that took place was “good or bad”, but rather to, again, offer alternative understandings of the topic investigated. For the same reason, the intention is neither to determine which of the three chosen perspectives that “fit the best” for the same reason.

Proceeding from here, realism will be presented and then applied on the Games in Sochi. Thereafter, the same procedure will take place when first liberalism and then social constructivism is presented.

Realism

The theoretical perspective of realism is perhaps the most “common” and well-established perspectives within the field of IR. Within realism the international system is considered anarchic and all actors are by nature inherently selfish. Realists have an egocentric and often “aggressive” view of the world where interests are pursued “…without regard to the constraints of law or morality.” (Steans et.al 2010:53). Because of the egocentric nature no state is willing to fully give up its sovereignty to an international body, and the state is therefore
considered as the one key actor, and the only actor with real power, within the international system (the United Nations is simply seen as an arena where states act with solely their own interests in mind). To gain more power, or to maintain the power a state enjoys, is considered the one major force driving world politics. Furthermore, the power “available” in the world is of a “zero-sum structure”, meaning that power only can be gained on the expense of another state. The defining characteristic for the realist view of the state is the state’s sovereign authority over its territory and the key for upholding the authority is power. For realists, the essence of power lays in the ability to dominate with military or physical force as the main form of power. In line with the thoughts of the sixteenth-century Italian political thinker Machiavelli, realists propose it is better to be feared than loved in order to maximize power. Moreover, realists suggest that respect for the laws set up by a state is depending on, and can only be achieved by, the threat of force. When it comes to international cooperation realists claim it occurs only for the benefit of states, and that it is significant only in the sense that it might help states pursuing their own interests. Every action a state pursues is, through a realist perspective, driven by its own national interest which in turn is motivated by the drive for power and national security (Steans et. al 2010:54, 56, 65). Other realist assumptions important to mention in this context includes the superiority of the principle of sovereignty over giving priority to notions of social justice or human rights. For instance, intervening in the affairs of other states on the basis of those concepts is, from a realist point of view, equal to undermining the sovereign independency and authority of a state and even to comment or criticize the domestic political, economic or social order of another state is therefore not in line with a realist perspective of the world (Steans et. al 2010:69).

The Sochi Games through a realist perspective

Firstly it should be noted, even though it has not been the quest for this work to verify, that the Russian choice to seek, and the willingness to arrange, the Olympic Games should be assumed to be in line with the national interest of the Russian state. Whereas the true essence and the exact meaning of this interest is complex and in itself worthy of its own thesis, one can only assume that the Russian state also wanted the Games to play out in a manner that correlated with the national interest.

The visible protests from civil society during the Games in Sochi were few in number, and in all cases met by physical force. When LGBT activists started waving rainbow-colored flags in Moscow during the opening day (Empirical finding (EF) #2) they were soon detained in an aggressive manner by local police. The same scenario occurred, although perhaps a bit less
violent, when Italian transgender activist Vladimir Luxuria displayed a banner with the words “Gay is OK” on site in Sochi (EF #14), while the violence were all so visible when the punk activist group Pussy Riot was “taken care of” twice by local police force with a video clearly showing how whips were used spread through social media (EF #17 & #20).

Through a realist understanding of the world this clearly relates to the assumption that laws only will be respected with a visible threat of force. With the anti-gay propaganda law in place coming into the Games and an anticipated, and as it turned out also apparent, force to be reckoned with if the new law were to be ignored, the number of visible protests from civil society was held to a minimum (in fact within realism civil society is not even considered carrying any power at all which we will see later differs widely with other perspectives of thought). In a Machiavellian sense the fear of physical force worked and can be said to have served the national interest (people not using the Games for political protests) of the Russian state. Neither did any of the bigger civil society organizations which led the protests ahead of the Games give much noise during them. In the empirical findings of this work those organizations only appeared once at the very end of the Games when Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Human Rights Campaign came together in issuing a letter of complaint to the IOC in which they demanded explicit changes in terms of Human Rights for future Olympic Games (EF #25).

Note that the “controversial event” noted took the form of a letter and that the organization were not able to protest on site during the games. Although this particular letter was sent to the IOC, a realist interpretation of the fact would suggest that IOC is a secondary actor of power and that the “lack” of visible manifestations from western civil society actors was due to the controlled sovereignty of the Russian state, that Russia controls what happens on Russian soil, and that the principle of sovereignty in all cases trumps giving priority to notions of social justice or human rights.

The realist attention to state sovereignty and the difficulties that other actors experience in coping with it, is clearly exemplified by the stand taken by the IOC representative and former Olympic athlete Stefan Holm when pressured to express his opinion on the matter (EF #10). Holm agrees that a more stern set of demands in regard to human rights and social justice is preferable to put in place for states hosting the Olympic Games, but adds that it is problematic to interfere with an independent state and its laws. According to Holm, it should be up to the United Nations to do so but in Holm’s view the UN apparently does not care.
From a realist point of view, the speculated absence of attention from the UN is not the real issue here. Rather, the realist would suggest that the UN as an organization lacks real power to act in a way that does not correlate with the Russian state. Intervening in the domestic affairs of another state is equal to undermining the sovereign independency and authority of that state and is, from a realist perspective, to act against the core of the realist worldview. When Alexander Karelin, Russian national hero, multiple Olympic Greco-Roman wrestling gold medalist and now a representative of the political party led by President Putin, is stating that: “one cannot adjust legislation in order to satisfy other states, or in order to informally belong to the “liberal world” (EF Additional material Day 10), he express the reliance of this principle of sovereignty, that the Russian state can pursue their domestic affairs without worrying too much what the rest of the world have to say about it.

The state is always in center of attention when looking at the world through a realist perspective. In analyzing the Sochi Games the state of Russia, subsequently, become the main actor of interest since the games took place on Russian soil. The state of Russia did, however, shared the organization duties of the Games with the IOC and arguably those two actors co-operated in keeping the controversies aside. The Games could not have taken place without any of the two parts being involved in the process and it would certainly be a legitimate argument to state that the IOC, like Russia, used its power in trying to keep the Games free from controversies, and that the IOC therefore should be held just as accountable for how the Games played out.

From a realist viewpoint, however, as previously stated cooperation occurs only for the benefit of states and is significant only in the sense that it might help states pursuing their own interests. In this case, the cooperation between Russia and the IOC occurred not only because it was necessary in order to arrange and host the games, but more importantly because the IOC shared the Russian national interest; To arrange a set of Games that did not get politicized or too controversial.

To take this argument a bit further, a realist read of the controversies surrounding the games would suggest that the IOC, due to the national interest of the hosting state, had an even stricter stand towards political aspects than usual. On the fourth day of the Games the Norwegian Ladies Cross Country skiing team collectively worn black mourning bands to honor one of the team members recently passed away brother, but the IOC found it against the regulations and issued an official reprimand and stated that the Games should be about joy rather than sorrow (EF #7). This caused agitation amongst the athletes and would play a part in per-
haps the most controversial chain of events that took place during the Games in Sochi when the mourning band-ban made a Ukrainian skier feel she had no choice than refuse to compete. With serious unrest occurring in her native country and no way to honor the injured she did not want to compete in the name of the Ukrainian government (EF #19 & #22).

Only four years ago, during the opening ceremony of the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver, the IOC remained silent when Georgian Olympians, as well as athletes from several other countries, wore mourning bands to honor a Georgian luger who tragically had lost his life during practice ahead of the Games (CNN 5). How come the IOC stand towards mourning bands changed so dramatically over four years? Although it may be a rather speculative argument, the peculiar fact about previously allowed mourning bands could add fuel to the realist argument that the IOC acted on behalf of the Russian national interest rather than their own interest during the Games in Sochi.

To sum up, a realist read on the events in Sochi finds that the low number of protests from civil society all were met by physical force, which can be said to reinforce the realist and Machiavellian conviction that it is better to be feared than loved if the laws are to be followed. Furthermore, the notably few visible protests from civil society can be interpreted as the triumph of the principle of state sovereignty over the notion of human rights. Finally, realism suggests that state power trumps the power of international institutions such as the IOC and that the cooperation necessary to arrange the Games together only took place because it suited the Russian national interest.

Liberalism

Liberal thought regarding international relations dates all the way back to the eighteenth century and concerned the problems of creating peaceful relations between the various people in the world. Among others, German philosopher Immanuel Kant contributed with insightful views which yet today are influential within the liberalist perspective of IR. There are numerous of different stands within the liberalist perspective, but in this context the focus will lay on outlining some of the persistent principles and assumptions and close in on the very core the liberal school of thought is built around (Steans et. al 2010:23f). Liberals believe that people in general are of a good and peaceful nature, and of the vital value of individual liberty. Other than its good nature, rationality is seen as the central characteristic of the human kind, and because of the rational behavior people are able to pursue their interests and do generally possess the ability to live their lives guided by moral principles and in line with the rule of
law. Furthermore, cooperation is perceived as not only possible but a central feature to all relations, and positive change is possible to accomplish due to the potential harmony of interest amongst people (Steans et. al 2010:31). The liberal perspective combines the belief that change is possible with the conviction that those changes occur through a gradual process in which “the faith in the possibilities of education, human progress and the establishment of fair and just institutions” (Steans et. al 2010:48) remains persistent.

For utilitarian thinkers, such as Jeremy Bentham, the assumption of an inherent nature to act rationally means that people always will act to maximize their own interests which might seem completely selfish at first glance, but which, according to Bentham, will lead to mutual benefits to the population as a whole as long as the actions are based on a sense of morality. These moral judgments should circle around to what degree any action taken will contribute in ensuring the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people (Steans et. al 2010:27).

In difference from the realist point of view, liberals argue that there are other bodies apart from the state, such as multinational companies, international institutions and NGOs, that are influential and enjoy power in the international system. Additionally, liberalism accept that the sovereignty is what defines the state, but the state is regarded as “…at best, a necessary evil.” (Steans et. al 2010:36). Moreover, liberalism divides states in two different categories; there are liberal-democratic states and there are authoritarian and more tyrannical states who are more likely to be of an aggressive and/or ignorant kind with no or little respect for human suffering and the notion of human rights (36f).

**The Sochi Games through a liberalist perspective**

In using liberalism as a theoretical lens to make sense of the controversies that occurred (or did not occur) during the Sochi Games, the perhaps most obvious line of thought would start with turning to the liberal view of the state. In contrasting the State of Russia with the preferred liberal-democratic state one would end up with categorizing the Olympic host and its rule as authoritarian and with that offer a possible explanation for the lack of respect for human rights which liberalism dictates. It is certainly an argument that has bearing to a certain degree but also one which is rather simplified and one that leaves many of the core assumption within liberalism behind. First of all, liberalism assumes that there are numerous of other actors besides the state that enjoys power and therefore can affect the outcome. Among those actors are international institutions and, which is very relevant for this context, IOC undoubtedly qualifies into that category. So from the liberalist perspective the IOC stand is essential
to gain an understanding of how it all played out. In his speech during the opening ceremony, IOC President Tomas Bach said the following:

“To the athletes, you have come here with your Olympic dream. You are welcome, no matter where you come from or your background. Yes, it’s possible even as competitors to live together and to live in harmony with tolerance and without any form of discrimination for whatever reason. Yes, it is possible even as competitors to listen, to understand and to be an example of a peaceful society, to building bridges and bring people together. The Olympic Games are never about erecting walls or to keep people above. Olympic Games are a sports festival in praising human diversity in great unity. Therefore, I say to political leaders of the world, thank you for supporting your athletes, they are the best ambassador of your country. Have the courage to embrace your disagreements in a peaceful and not political way and not on the back of these athletes. “(The Guardian 1)

Several parts of his speech can be related to the, within liberalism found but yet distinctive, “liberal peace theory” which essentially says that because of the inherent good and peaceful nature of mankind, people have no interest in war, which in this context translates to “no interest in starting a conflict”. President Bach is touching upon the criticism towards the anti-gay propaganda law without saying it out loud when he is talking about that everybody no matter the background is welcome, and that everybody should abide to living in Sochi “without any form of discrimination for whatever reason”, as well as in praising “human diversity in great unity”. Bach is urging the athletes and the political leaders not to create conflict over potential differences, and with that asking them not cause any controversies. What liberal peace theory tells us is that “A peaceful world order is also likely to be one in which human rights are respected and upheld.” (Steans et. al 2010:34), and with the order referring to the one during the Sochi Games rather than the world in this context, one might argue that is the message Bach wants to convey.

To take this argument all the way in, the liberal peace theory interpretation of why the Sochi Games ended up less controversial than anticipated would be that due to the inherently good nature, rationality and willingness to cooperate rather than starting conflicts among people (in this case the athletes and the political leaders whom the speech was directed to) controversies were put aside. Whereas realism suggested the sovereignty of the Russian state as the key factor for keeping the Games free from controversies, this liberal interpretation turns to the individual and collective conviction that conflicts regarding people’s rights would not lead to improved opportunities to uphold those rights; that it is better and more rational to cooperate in a peaceful way rather than create conflict and controversy and that everybody involved together cooperated in making the games the success it is seen as it despite all controversies apparent coming into the Games.
In terms of the athletes, they appear to have done what Bach asked them to:

You lived together in the same Olympic village. That sends a powerful message from Sochi to the rest of the world. A message of a society built of peace, tolerance and respect. I appeal to everybody, against oppression and violence, act on this Olympic message of peace. (The Guardian 1).

The findings of athlete activism aimed towards the Olympic hosts during the games were few and rather discrete. The ones noted in the empiricism include the Russian snowboarder who displayed a Pussy Riot-image on his snowboard (EF # 1) and the staff members of the Swedish slopestyle and mogul skiing team who wore rainbow colored headphones (EF # 6 & 8). In all three cases the activism took place “outside” the rules set up by the IOC with the snowboarder showcasing his stand in a pre-qualification round (and thereby not formally in an Olympic competition), and with the staff members not included in the Olympic clothing and equipment regulations.

To sum up, one potential explanation for why the athletes did not cause more controversy is that they due to their inherent good nature followed the message of peace and tolerance drawn up by the IOC, and thereby followed the liberal peace theory. Note that the perspective of the individual athlete is not included in this realist interpretation since individuals are not considered significant actors within realism, while liberalism, on the other hand, praise the individual liberty to act.

Another possible understanding of why the controversies were held down, which also can extend to include actors other than the athletes, can be found if interpreting the Games through the theoretical lens of utilitarianism. As already stated, liberals believe that people behave rationally, and that they do so in order to maximize their interest. In cases where activism perhaps was expected the interest were otherwise focused. For instance, the openly gay Austrian ski jumper Daniela Iraschko-Stolz (EF #4) declared that she did not think it was a good idea to make protests and that she was in Sochi “…as a sportwoman.” (AP 2). It is fair so say then that Iraschko-Stolz’s main interest in Sochi considered her sporting results. On the one hand, that intention might appear selfish in the way that she as a prominent athlete should have taken a stand to defend those with the same sexuality who does not enjoy the same rights as she does. In her rational reasoning regarding her attitude she said the following: “I know Russia will go and make the right steps in the future and we should give them time.” (AP 2).

Her own individual choice was not to protest and from a utilitarian point of view that might have been a choice she shared with many others. It is possible that the collective behavior of
not protesting, from all actors involved, contributed to what the utilitarianism call “the greatest happiness for the greatest number”. It is not unlikely that a higher number of people wanted a non-controversial set of Olympic Games and that those who wanted a politicized and controversial equivalent constituted a minority. All the athletes and the staff surrounding them who had prepared for the Games for a long time, the IOC, the state of Russia, the organizing committee and all the volunteers, the various TV-broadcasters from all over the world and their viewers in front of their TVs who were looking forward to enjoy one of the greatest sporting events there is. Again, it is not unlikely that these actors combined constituted a majority group which were happier to enjoy the Games in a non-controversial manner, and that those actors who kept the Games non-controversial in that sense created the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

To apply utilitarianism in this context might seem rather provocative, especially since the notion of human rights is not given any room in the discussion, but the theoretical perspective as such does nonetheless provide an interesting and alternative understanding of how the Games in Sochi played out.

To sum up the analysis made through applying the theoretical perspective of liberalism, one first need to note the difference from realism in turns of which actors that possess power and the nature of mankind. Where realism suggests the state as the only actor with real power, liberalism emphasizes how international institutions such as the IOC as well as individuals enjoy power to act and affect the outcome. Because of the faith in the good nature of mankind found within liberalism, to contrast with the realist conviction of a solely egocentric behavior, people will act in a peaceful as well as rational manner with the consequence that conflicts are avoided. Applied on the Games in Sochi one might on the one hand simply classify the state of Russia as an authoritarian regime and rely on that fact as the main reason for the absence of controversies and manifestations for human rights. On the other hand, one might consult the within liberalism found concepts of liberal peace theory and utilitarianism and with that end up with alternative understandings which include the notion that actors because of their rational behavior are giving priority to cooperation rather than conflict, and that actors with their individual choices not to protest contributed to the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.
Social constructivism

In comparison with the two previously used theoretical perspectives, social constructivism is a rather young approach within IR with the likes of Alexander Wendt leading the way with a set of highly discussed articles published in the late 1980s, and is considered trying “to occupy the middle ground” of the academic field (Steans et. al 2010:183,195). Social constructivism is often seen as occupying a middle space of the “IR-scale” due to its view of the relationship between structure and agency which are considered mutually dependent. In that the theoretical stand distinguish itself from structure-centered equivalents (such as realism), but also separates itself more action-centered perspectives (such as liberalism).

Many within the field are inspired by the sociologist Anthony Giddens and his idea of structurationism which states that “…action is influenced and constrained by social structures, which in turn are reproduced by agency.” (Steans et. al 2010:186). Constructivists mean that no social part of life is constant and that people always are situated in certain settings or contexts which affect their actions, and that those action in turn construct or reproduce the world in which they act. The construction itself does, however, occur merely when engaging with other people and cannot be done single-handed (Steans et. al 2010:183).

Furthermore, social constructivism gives great attention to the roles of institutions, norms and identity affect people’s behavior. Institutions are divided into two kinds, formal and informal ones, where the formal institutions are built around recognized principles, rules and norms with a state, an international organization or a university as good examples. Informal institutions on the other hand, are simply patterns of practice which are constructed through the repetition of the same behavior over an extended period of time (Steans et. al 2010:187). Additionally, social constructivists also ask to what degree actors interests are shaped by these institutions (Steans et. al 2010:188).

In terms of the social constructivist view of the state, they are convinced that a state act and behave the way it does because it is socialized into the institutions apparent within international politics (Steans et. al 2010:192). This is closely connected to the concept of identity which social constructivists mean is crucial, not only to understand national interests, but to explain the actual policymaking of a state. Identities then are constructed through the process of othering, that all identities is set against another which constitutes what the state or person does not want in itself. Furthermore, identities are considered rather “sticky” in the sense that they do not normally change easily and definitely not in a drastic way. Through a social con-
structivist perspective, however, nothing is constant and because of the continuous process of construction and reproduction everything can change although socialization is a long process and takes time (Steans et. al 2010:196f).

Another commonly discussed theme within the field concerns different logics which are considered to drive action. This discussion is inspired by sociologists March and Olsen who identified two diverse logics; the logic of consequentiality where actors act with the consequences of their actions in mind, and the logic of appropriateness where actors in a much less rational manner act the way it seems appropriate to act, often with unwritten norms of behavior as the trigger for the actions. Some social constructivists also propose that there is a third logic of action which is drawn from the works of Jurgen Habermas. This “third” logic states that people sometimes follow an argumentative behavior where actors, instead of worrying about consequences or doing what seems fitting, discuss with each other in order to come up with the best possible solution or way of acting. The logic of argumentative behavior does however require an open-minded environment in which people can discuss freely with each other (Steans et. al 2010:188,190).

The Sochi Games through a social constructivist perspective

In order to highlight how social constructivism in many ways constitutes a middle way between realism and liberalism we turn to the notions of interests and actions. Whereas liberalism finds that the individual has the choice and power to act, which in the case of Sochi was interpreted into that individuals choose not to create controversies because it was not in their interest, and where realism states that there are constant structures which constrains the individual power to act, in the Sochi case exemplified by the structure of state power (the Russian national interest) and the principle of sovereignty, social constructivism combines these two opposing stands (structure and agency) and instead asks to what degree interests and actions are shaped by institutions.

In the case of Sochi, both the state of Russia and IOC constitute what a social constructivist would classify as formal institutions with written laws and principles which shaped the interests and actions of actors involved in the Games. When the openly gay ski jumper Daniela Iraschko-Stolz was asked about her responsibility to speak out and responded that she did not think it was a good idea to so in Russia and that it was difficult to so due to the IOC rules (EF #4 & #11), she in fact expressed how the formal institutions shaped her interest and with that also her actions.
Furthermore, there is an assumed pattern of behavior (an informal institution) within the world of sports in general, and within the Olympic context in particular, of not being political or creating controversy. Normally, athletes, as well as staff surrounding them, do not make protests or political statements which, in line with the social constructivist thought, can be seen as a pattern of practice which is constructed through the repetition of the same behavior, and which affect the interest and actions taken of other athletes. With order words, other than being constrained by the laws and principles of formal institutions, athletes would also break a norm and ignore an informal institution in creating a controversy during the Games.

Media certainly plays a part in all this and one possible interpretation is that media were trying to provoke a new pattern of behavior out of the athletes. In an interview by CNN (EF #15), a reporter obviously wanted Russian figure skate Evgeni Plushenko to say something critical in regard to the anti-gay propaganda law and eventually Plushenko found himself stating that he was open to “…help raise awareness of anti-gay propaganda” (CNN 3) which then made the headlines. Plushenko did, however, also say that he felt it was not his duty to so which give further strength to the above discussion regarding constraints from formal and informal institutions.

Perhaps the closest we got to a new pattern of behavior was the one of using equipment or accessories with symbolic meaning as a way of showing discontent, with, as previously mentioned, the Russian snowboarder who displayed a Pussy Riot-image on his snowboard (EF #1) and the staff members of the Swedish slopestyle and mogul skiing team who wore rainbow colored headphones (EF # 6 & 8). Those three events did, however, all take place in the early stages of the Games and no examples of the same pattern were observed later on throughout the games, so in that sense the new pattern failed to reproduce itself.

Although the athlete perspective of the Games tends to be easiest to exemplify with, and is for that reason getting the most room in this analysis, the social constructivist understanding of institutions and its influence on interests and actions can be extended to include other groups of actors as well. To simplify, the context and setting of the Games in Sochi, and the social structures that were found within it, can be said to have constrained the actions of all actors that potentially were to protest or in other ways create a controversy of a political kind.

In terms of the different logics that drive action it appears as if the logic of consequentiality was more apparent compared to the logic of appropriateness. With the Pussy Riot-protests (EF #17 & #20) as the obvious exception, actors seem to have assessed the potential conse-
quences of their actions and thereby in a rational manner avoided controversies. On the other hand, one might argue that the punk group knew very well what the consequences of their actions would be and that those consequences were part of their manifestation; To show the world how the Russian state treat those who disagree. The Habermas proposal of logic of action based on argumentative behavior found no empirical support in the findings of this work.

To continue with the behavior of Russia, social constructivists suggest that states behave the way they do because they are socialized into doing so. Where the realist interpretation referred to *the national interest* to explain the actions of the state of Russia, a social constructivist understanding would be that Russia, with strong historical connotations, has been socialized into playing the role of being non-west (or anti-west) and that the action Russia takes is made to secure and reproduce that role. Therefore, acting in a way that the west will find provocative constitutes a part of that socialized behavior, which would be an alternative understanding of the decision to legislate the anti-gay propaganda law ahead of the Games.

The argument regarding socialization is closely connected to understanding of identity. According to social constructivists, an identity is constructed through a process of othering which translated to case of Russia vs. the west would mean that Russia construct their national identity around traits that are non-west and that these traits are crucial to constantly reproduce. Identities are, however, not considered constant. They can change although not easily and through a long process of socialization. Only future will tell if the exposure and the media attention that these mega-events mean (the Sochi Games and the upcoming FIFA World Cup in 2018) will socialize Russia into thinking differently. Perhaps ski jumper Daniela Iraschko-Stolz (*EF # 4*) is on to something when she claims that she “…know Russia will go and make the right steps in the future and we should give them time.” (AP 2).

An argument of such sort does however proceed from the notion that “we” in the west know the right way of living our lives and that Russia eventually will “catch up”, which in many ways is a problematic point of departure. From a social constructivist mainly because nothing is constant and everything is always up for “renegotiating” through structure and actions, so also the notion of what constitutes a human right.

To sum up, a social constructivist read of the events in Sochi highlights how the theoretical perspective constitutes a middle way between structure and agency (realism and liberalism) exemplified by how the formal institutions of Russia and the IOC shaped the interests and action of individual athletes, in addition to the informal institution of not protesting as an
Olympic athlete. Furthermore, one social constructivist interpretation was that media tried to provoke athletes to be critical and thereby force a new pattern of behavior. Also, a social constructivist explanation for the lack of visible is that it was due to the constraining social structures apparent at the Games, which can be applied to all actors and not solely the athletes. Additionally, the logic of consequentiality appeared as the most present logic of action during the Games. Finally, a social constructivist behavior of the behavior of Russia states that the state behave in the way it does due to a long history of socialization into that behavior, that identity is constructed through a process of othering, and that it is possible that the exposure the Olympics will contribute to changing the identity, but that it if so will take time since socialization does not happen over a night.
CONCLUSION

In this thesis, the political controversies during the XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi have been observed, mapped, summarized and then analyzed in order to close in on a comprehensive understanding of them. The events, statements and manifestation of a political character observed during the XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi 2014 were fewer and less controversial than anticipated. Through the application of the IR-perspectives of realism, liberalism and social constructivism various understanding of how it all played out has been offered.

The realist interpretation found the triumph of the principle of sovereignty over the notion of human rights, and the Machiavellian conviction that it is better to be feared than loved if the laws are to be followed, as the main reasons for why the Games ended up as they did.

Liberalism, on the other hand, believe in the good nature of mankind, to contrast with the realist conviction of a solely egocentric behavior, which was interpreted into that people will act in a peaceful as well as rational manner with the consequence that conflicts are avoided, and that political controversies therefore were avoided during the Games in Sochi. Furthermore, the liberal concepts of liberal peace theory and utilitarianism offered alternative understandings which included the notion that actors because of their rational behavior are giving priority to cooperation rather than conflict, and that actors with their individual choices not to protest contributed to the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.

The social constructivist understanding of the Sochi Games state that the answer is somewhere in between the realist and liberalist interpretation, that people has the power to act but that they were constrained by the social structures put in place in Sochi by the formal institutions of Russia and the IOC. Furthermore, one social constructivist interpretation stated that media tried to provoke athletes to be critical and thereby force a new pattern of behavior. The behavior of Russia was interpreted as being due to its socialized identity of being anti-West, but that there is a possibility that the exposure a set of Olympic Games mean over time will change the Russian identity.

The loosely defined boundaries of the research design in this piece enabled the process of collecting empirical data to include enough variety to perform an extensive analysis even though the “outcome” of data was less than anticipated. In the same way did the innovative methodology, spiced up with the hermeneutics and inductive reasoning, serve the project with
the necessary room to reach interesting conclusions. The contribution of this thesis does, however, not lie in the selected methodology or the rather unique research, but rather in the theoretical framework chosen. In shying away from the mainstream way of performing Olympic research, and instead demonstrating how the use of IR-theory can provide alternative understandings of the world of sports, this researcher hopes that others follow the path pointed out.

**Suggestions for future research**

Other than the need to use IR-perspectives in order to offer alternative understandings of sports in general, and the Olympic Games in particular, this researcher would also like to suggest a few other potential future research projects which has emerged during the work with this thesis.

One interesting aspect important to monitor in future research is how the appearance of athlete activism will develop. Did the “open door” for athlete activism, that Rowe (2014) suggested the Sochi Games would constitute, close, and does that mean that it will be closed in future mega-events as well?

In relation to athlete activism it needs to be investigated if IOC will abide to the criticism regarding the lack of respect for Human Rights and change their stand in the future, not only rhetorically but in practice.

Furthermore, a potential but perhaps a bit overwhelming suggestion for future research is if (or how) the general Russian opposition towards immigrants will be affected by the sporting success of Victor An and Viv Wind who both managed to win an Olympic gold medal for their new nation
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