



CIPRA position paper

Adopted by the CIPRA Presidency 2014, updated 2016

Alps without Olympics

CIPRA International believes that, given the present situation, the Olympic Winter Games should no longer be held in the Alps. The Alps should remain the Olympic-free zone they have been since 2006. As they currently stand, the Olympic Winter Games are neither environmentally nor socially acceptable. CIPRA is therefore opposed to the Winter Olympics being staged in the Alps – or anywhere else – in their current form. Developments in recent decades show that the mountain regions are no longer suitable venues for these environmentally harmful and ruinous major events. Referendums held in the Canton of Grisons and in Munich prove that large segments of the population of the Alps are no longer willing to shoulder the burden of Olympic Winter Games.

The Alps constitute a sensitive natural and cultural space that is unsuitable for the Winter Olympics in their present form. Such events now require a scale that exceeds the capacity of the Alpine regions with their predominantly small-scale structures. The requirements of Olympic Winter Games with regard to traffic infrastructure, sports facilities and accommodation are so high that they can no longer be met in the Alps. The Olympic inflation resulting from the constant increase in the number of disciplines has outstripped the capacities of the venues and their host regions. The burdens imposed by Olympic Winter Games have passed the threshold of what is acceptable for people and nature alike.

Nor does the 2020 agenda drawn up by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) represent any real progress. Its forty recommendations are merely aimed at bringing the Western countries back on board. Only when the IOC revises its rules and structures from the ground upwards, guarantees democratic values in the host countries and takes account of the principles of sustainable development in the planning and realisation of the Olympics Winter Games can their future staging in the Alps be discussed.

Bigger and bigger impacts on nature and the landscape

More and more space is required for ski trails, lifts and cable cars, stadiums, access roads and car parks. That has serious consequences for the natural environment and the landscape. For the decision-makers on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and many politicians in the host cities, climate change – a major problem for the future of the Alps – appears to be irrelevant. Changing weather patterns and inadequate snow cover are either ignored or presented as a purely technical challenge. In order to guarantee the necessary snow cover, artificial snow has to be produced with the help of increasingly powerful systems. There are now even “snowfactories”, where snow can be stockpiled during the summer. Such installations have a growing ecological footprint in terms of landscape, energy and water.



The IOC's unfair contracts

Given the IOC's current rules and terms of contract, it would be irresponsible to hold Olympic Winter Games in the Alps today. The IOC's procedures are opaque and its rules are undemocratic. Nor does the newly drafted Agenda 2020 change anything. The IOC's host city contracts in particular deprive the local and regional authorities of all self-determination. Nor does the IOC guarantee that no changes will be made to the facts that are presented as the basis for decision-making in a referendum. Such a strategy may work in an autocracy, but in a democracy it is unacceptable. Moreover, topics like sustainability and the environment, which are of great concern to the municipalities and regions of the Alps, do not feature highly on the agenda of the IOC.

CIPRA is calling for a fundamental reform of the IOC and also the framework for planning and holding the Winter Games. The Winter Olympics must become games for the younger generation once more, acting as a symbol for peace and freedom. They must be planned and held in a way that is transparent as well as being socially and environmentally acceptable.

Economic disaster for the regions

For the taxpayer, an honest cost-benefit analysis can only result in a negative balance. There is not a single robust study in which the authors have been able to show that Olympic Games held in an Alpine region have made a positive contribution to economic development in the long term. On the contrary, experience shows that Olympic Games have only short-term economic effects, if any. What they produce most commonly for the host cities and regions is debt. Moreover, the focus on snow dependent winter sports in the Olympic context is misguided in terms of the market and has a PR impact that merely benefits the established destinations, while the peripheral regions are left with debt and ruin. "Torino 2006" and the Italian valleys of Susa and Chisone are a case in point.

The Alps of the future: an Olympic-free zone!

In light of these facts, it is clear that the Alps need an Olympics-free future. No regional or local authority should participate in a bid to host Olympic Winter Games. The sheer expense of the bidding process - at a time when governments and municipalities urgently need their resources for other purposes - should be reason enough. And in view of the unwillingness of the IOC to radically rethink its policies for Winter Olympics, the regions of the Alps have only one alternative: Alps without Olympics, today and in the future!