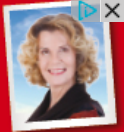


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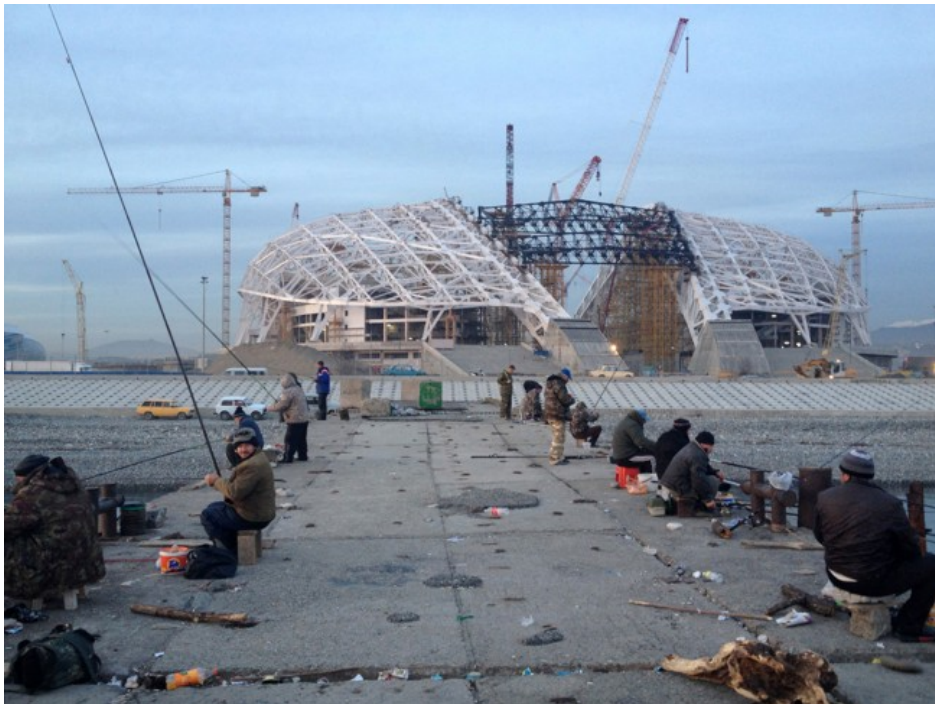

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Winter Olympics Film 'Putin's Games' Denied Chance to Be Popular in Russia

Added by **Alsu Salakhutdinov** on November 29, 2013.

Saved under **Alsu Salakhutdinov, Russia, Sochi Olympics, World**

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The inside story of the preparation for the 2014 Winter Olympics is revealed in a new film called, *Putin's Games*, but this story will stay concealed from most Russians. Recently presented at the International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam, the documentary is going to be shown in Russia on December 6, during the Moscow's ArtDoc International Film Festival, but only one showing of the film will be allowed. *Putin's Games* is a movie about the corruption during preparations for the Olympics in Sochi, Russia, and is a very touchy subject for Russian authorities. It was originally titled *Putin's Olympics*, but the International Olympic Committee, outraged with the content of the movie, denied producers the right to use the word *Olympic* in the title, finalizing it as *Putin's Games*. People allegedly close to Russian authorities also tried bribing the filming crew to silence the movie and deny it a chance to be popular.

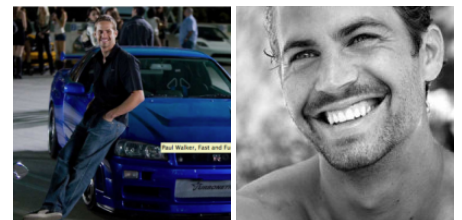
The title change did not do any harm to the movie. On the contrary, it made it sound even better invoking terrifying images of the *Hunger Games* – a dystopian fantasy created by Suzanne Collins. The reality shown in the *Putin's Games* that director, Alexander Gentelev, claims to be fact based, somehow conjures memories of the famous Hunger Game ceremonies of the Capital. The grandiose show planned by the Kremlin includes an Olympic torch ascending to space and then plunging into the depths of Baikal Lake and costs not only money, but human misery for

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the land of Sochi.

Gentelev’s interest in Russia’s involvement with the Olympics started from the absurdity of the chosen location. Why was it that the only subtropical area in Russia – the hottest and with the least snow – was chosen to host the Winter Games? Why was Russian Sochi, famous for its summer resorts with almost zero winter sport facilities, picked up by the IOC instead of the more adequately equipped Austria or South Korea, whom were also bidding on the Winter Olympics? First it was a simple curiosity, as Gentelev admitted in an interview given to the Russian service of Voice of America. But then the snowball started rolling, revealing two realities for the Sochi games.

The first one is all bright and shiny, presented to the world with proud speeches and vast amounts of money poured to the region of Sochi in order to build its new infrastructure. While it usually costs the host city about \$2 billion, according to Gentelev, President Putin promised to spend \$12 billion to develop the area when presenting Russia’s Olympic bid in front of the IOC.

The second one, a shady underground of Putin’s Games, emerges with an estimated \$50 billion spent already, some in kickbacks and some on the numerous rebuilds needed for structures that are collapsing as soon as they are constructed.

“You will be soaked with blood, drowned in blood” Valery Morozov, one of the interviewed businessmen, says in the movie, repeating words addressed to him. Now he lives in London after being granted an asylum after fleeing Russia in December, 2011. He used to pay around 15 percent of contract’s cost in kickbacks to officials for getting the construction work to his firm, and was fine with it. However, after the requested kickback sum reached 50 percent, he refused, went to the police, and, after the police report suddenly disappeared, fled to Britain.

Corruption, however, is not the only drawback revealed in the movie. Putin’s Winter Olympics sacrifice the safety of local people and threaten to destroy ecological balance in the region. Sewage waters are poured out into local rivers, penetrating into drinking reservoirs. Garbage dumps are polluting mountains. Green zones are rapidly declining. Ski ramps are constructed on risky slopes where landslides often occur. Many buildings that were erected on the swampland are in danger of collapsing at any time. The newly built airport and train station have already been flooded a few times. New roads have crumbled.

Local people, living in small villages near Sochi, suffer the most. Their children cannot go to their schools since they are not able to cross newly built highways. Some people have lost water supplies because their water reservoirs are exhausted. Others were evicted from their houses that were then dismantled in order to build new roads. Many experience breathing problems after lime quarries were dug just 400 meters from their homes and work goes on there day and night, filling the air with dust. The region, largely dependent on tourist business, has lost tourists whom have been avoiding the place since preparations for the Winter Olympics began.

Since the movie was a co-production of Germany, Austria and Israel with no Russian money involved, Russian authorities could not censor the movie which is now getting noticed by an international crowd. *Putin’s Games* already won an award in Cannes for the “best project” at the International television trade market and was presented in Amsterdam. Producers have not been dissuaded from showing the film despite some bribery attempts that have gone on behind the scenes. Simone Baumann, producer of the movie, told *The Sunday Telegraph* about some offers she got to sell the movie. According to her, producers were offered about \$1 million in exchange for the movie rights – twice the sum needed to produce the documentary.

“It would have meant they could withdraw our movie from the market” Baumann told the Russian service of Voice of America. Instead of silencing the movie, the crew is planning to present it in Russia at the Moscow Documentary Film festival in December. But unfortunately, it will be the only presentation in Russia, according to Vitaly Mansky, president of the ArtDoc Festival. Because of its controversial content, the Winter Olympics film *Putin’s Games* has been denied the chance to be popular in Russia.

By Alsu Salakhutdinov

The Telegraph

Variety

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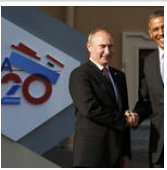
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A. N. (@Ali_Nest_Swiss)

November 30, 2013 at 10:56 am

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American Samoa	1	Iowa	14	Nebraska	4	South Carolina	21
Arizona	66	Kansas City	16	Nevada	981	South Dakota	6
Arkansas	14	Kentucky	12	New Hampshire	6	Tennessee	26
California	499	Louisiana	24	New Jersey	55	Texas	173
Colorado	49	Maine	4	New Mexico	10	Utah	20
Connecticut	39	Maryland	22	New York	175	Vermont	6
Delaware	3	Massachusetts	77	North Carolina	40	Virgin Islands	2
District of Columbia	14	Michigan	43	North Dakota	3	Virginia	34
Florida	165	Minnesota	19	Ohio	68	Washington	31
Georgia	98	Mississippi	22	Oklahoma	35	West Virginia	5
Guam	2			Oregon	47	Wisconsin	22
Hawaii	12			Pennsylvania	55	Wyoming	5

World News

Afghanistan	35	Iran	72	Israel	28	North Korea	28
India	66	Iraq	19	Mexico	85	South Africa	127

