

*When Hoteliers Were Organizing the Olympic Games*

**Beyond the Local Organization of the Winter Olympic Games in St. Moritz in 1928**

## **Abstract**

After an almost continuous growth since 1850, with the First World War, the tourism sector, in Switzerland as elsewhere in the West, faced its first real crisis and had its actors to develop more refined strategies for the first time to "attract" customers and "retain" those who were already there. In this context, it should be noted that the hoteliers of St. Moritz, along with broader tourism networks, took advantage of a unique historical configuration between the two world wars to improve the reputation of the resort and enlarge its offer, both in the winter season with skiing and other disciplines like bobsleigh, but also in the summer season, especially following the opening of traffic to cars in the canton of Graubünden in 1925. In our article, we seek to analyze the involvement of hoteliers in the organization of the 1928 Olympic Games, both to understand the 'local' network behind the organization of a major sporting event and to take an innovative look at the development of tourism in the inter-war period. We based our analysis on municipal archives (political authorities, tourist office, hotel infrastructures, ski club), never really used in historical work on the winter Olympics.

## **Keywords**

Winter Olympic Games, Winter Tourism, Hoteliers, St. Moritz

## **Introduction**

With around 4,500 hotel bed-spaces in 2018, St. Moritz ranks among the top ten cities in Switzerland according to this criterion for measuring tourism development. While Davos is ahead of the Engadine municipality, with a total of about 6,500 beds, both municipalities are the only mountain locations in this top 10, with the canton of Graubünden ranking first in terms of tourism supply with more than 47,000 beds in total, or about 17% of the total supply in Switzerland in 2020 (OFS, 2020). These figures are not simply the result of contemporary policies, they are the product of a history spanning more than a century and a half, a history replete with crises, moments of growth and catalyst events, such as the hosting of the Olympic Games in 1928 and 1948 in St. Moritz.

In fact, after unrivalled and almost continuous growth since 1850, the tourism sector in Switzerland, as elsewhere in the West, faced its first real crisis with the advent of the First World War. As an example, in St. Moritz, it was not until the summer of 1927 that the number of visitors was once again similar to the summer of 1913 (22,458 in 1913 compared with 22,875 in 1927) (SMMA, ATO, Tourism statistics (1911-1922)). Faced with this situation, the sector now had to develop more refined strategies to “attract” new customers and “retain” existing ones. In addition, improved transportation conditions and better means of communication increased competition between tourist destinations tenfold (see Figure 1), which now had to come up with their first real “tourist policies”.

**Figure 1 – International Railway Connections to and from St. Moritz, 1915-1915**  
**(SMDLA, ATOP, Prospectus for 1915-1916) © Dokumentationsbibliothek St. Moritz**

In this context, it should be noted that the leadership in St. Moritz took advantage of a unique historical configuration between the two World Wars to strengthen the reputation of the resort for all seasons, both in winter with skiing and other disciplines (Denning, 2019; Quin, 2021), but also in summer, especially once cars were permitted in the canton of Graubünden from 1925. Fundamentally, they could count on a hotel infrastructure that was already very significant by international standards and on the extensive networks of Engadine hoteliers.

Taking account of this contribution and using the example of St. Moritz and the Olympic Games of 1928, we aim to propose a socio-historical analysis of the organization of the Olympic Games in the light of a singular rise of tourism, a way of proposing a framework of analysis for other similar events of the same period, but also to question the often-reductive conclusions of research conducted on more contemporary events. Indeed, prompted by the existence of different positions on the issues of sustainability, cost or urban footprint, and provoked as much by the negative popular reactions to certain major events as by the sports organizations themselves, several studies have been conducted since the turn of the 21st century on the organization of major sports events, and especially on the Olympic Games, by researchers such as Bill Bramwell, Martin Müller and others (Bramwell, 1997; Ma et al., 2011; Müller, 2015a; Caizza, 2015). In fact, the research questions of these studies often relate to economic profitability (either directly or as a consequence of more tourism), the sustainability of urban planning or even forms of evaluation of organizational policies. In fact, this field is probably one of the most active in the sphere of sports analysis since the 2000s, with a very large number of special issues of journals and research with sometimes predictive elements, and which often becomes a policy advisor around the most contemporary events (Müller, 2015b).

As an exemplar of research focused on the most recent decades, resulting in partial analyses of a complex phenomenon, John and Margaret Gold's book *Olympic Cities* sheds partial light on a history that is nearly a century long (Gold, Gold, 2017). Above all, this book invites us to

produce more ambitious empirical research (Quin, 2017a) on the documentary production of the events themselves and to better identify the social, cultural, economic and political contexts in which major events are organized, beyond a simple look at the organizers' final reports.

For our purposes, we should stress that the historical research on the development of tourism from the 19th century onwards constitutes a relevant resource, particularly in that it can invite us to consider local archives in detail. In this sense, the pioneering works of Delphine Guex and Géraldine Sauthier on the examples of Montreux, Finhaut and Zermatt are real sources of inspiration (Guex, 2016; Sauthier, 2016), as are several publications by Roland Flückiger-Seiler or Laurent Tissot relating to hoteliers and hotel history (Flückiger-Seiler, 2005; Schneider, Tissot, 2018), but also of Cédric Humair who offer a framework for understanding the tourist boom between 1850 and 1950 (Tissot, 1995; Tissot, 2003; Humair, Tissot, 2011). While studies on winter sports and mountaineering have been conducted, in the case of Switzerland, by Susan Barton and more recently by Grégory Quin, Sébastien Cala and Quentin Tonnerre, and all of them emphasize the uniqueness of the Swiss case for understanding the development of winter sports (Tissot, 1995; Barton, 2009; Quin, 2017b; Cala, 2019; Tonnerre, 2021), they rarely use the rich archives of the various winter sports resorts to reveal the local dynamics of how sports practices were structured (Denning, 2019). In the case of St. Moritz in particular, the 1920s were a clear turning point in the positioning of the resort between the continuation of spa tourism, the affirmation of winter “sports” tourism since the 1900s, with the advent of a new sports rationale based on downhill skiing (Holt 1992; Amstutz, 2010; Denning, 2014), but above all the beginning of a form of innovation that was to become the hallmark of the municipality.

In fact, our argument is also based on two empirical observations: first, in 1928–29, St. Moritz experienced its best financial year in the entire first half of the century—around one million francs for the balance of the municipality's accounts (SMMA, BAA, 1928); and second, the

winters of 1927–1928 and 1928–1929 were record-breaking, with more than 350,000 overnight stays in its hotels (for a total of about 600,000 overnight stays over the course of a year), a figure that was not exceeded until 1960–1961 (SMDLA, DG, Tourism statistics between 1921 and 1997). Also knowing that the 1928 Olympic Games accounts shows a balance around CHF 750'000.-, it is possible to highlight the importance of these Games, since the ratio of one year of municipal budget to the budget of an edition of the Winter Olympic Games can be identified until very recent editions such as with “Vancouver 2010”.

To conduct our analyses, we will rely in particular on the archives of the municipality of St. Moritz (political authorities, tourist office, hotel and transport infrastructure), on several private archives (like those from the Testa Family), as well as on the archives of the various institutions involved at that time in the hosting of the Olympic Games (*Fédération Internationale de Ski* (FIS), *Comité Olympique Suisse* (COS), *Association Suisse des Clubs de Ski* (ASCS), *Association des Ecoles Suisses de Ski* (AESS)), and also on a review of local and national newspapers. Using those archives, our ambition is to analyze them considering the local organization dynamics around the 1928 Olympic Games as driven by ‘interests groups’ (Offerlé, 1994; Offerlé, 2009; Bezes, Le Lidec, 2010), which are involved in a broader tourism growth and in local *sociabilités* (Agulhon, 1987). Around a local example, we can also identify some interpretative confusions between the public and private spheres (Bourdieu, 1978), whereas hoteliers, as private company owners, use the resources of public action to ensure the profitability of their businesses.

We will develop our analysis in three chronological stages, starting with a description of the state of tourist development in the municipality on the eve of the Olympic Games, continuing with the organization of the Olympic Games and ending with the infrastructural, political and economic consequences of the Games.

## **From an office for the embellishment of a “spa town” to the construction of substantial hotel capacity for a “winter sports resort”**

After the first few years of winter tourism and initial attempts to develop the local tourist offering, notably through a first “office for the beautification of St. Moritz”, whose statutes were registered in March 1874 (SMDLA, DTO, Statutes from the Tourism Office, March 3, 1874), on 24 June 1882, the general assembly for the establishment of a tourist office for the entire municipality of St. Moritz (Dorf and Bad) took place under the aegis of Florian Gengel, then director of the hotel Hof Sankt Moritz (SMDLA, DTO, Invitation to the founding meeting of an office for tourism, June 21, 1882). As a member of the Graubünden Grand Council, the hotel owner belonged to the active circles of Graubünden's radicalism (Simonett, 2009), which was also very much involved in the beginnings of the canton's tourism boom (Metz, 1991, pp. 366-384). He contributed with Johannes Badrutt and other hoteliers to the pioneering role of St. Moritz as the birthplace for (winter) tourism (Lütscher, 2014) since the 1860s. The transition to a winter-oriented resort was easier in the case of St. Moritz because its mountaineering (summer) tourism was not as highly developed as in Zermatt (Guex, 2016; Sauthier, 2016) or in Chamonix (Schut, Levret-Labry, 2014). Based on the proximity of the valley leading to Mount Bernina, it was Pontresina—and not St. Moritz—which hosted the alpine center for the region (Maier, 2002, 37), leaving the way open for other activities in St. Moritz. In parallel, we need to highlight the fact that St. Moritz was a genuine pioneer resort, as Zermatt only started with a winter season in 1928, having other examples in Europe, like in Arlberg for Austria (Thöny, 2019) or in France (Larique, 2006), only developing winter tourism during the interwar period.

While the change of name of the tourist office, to Kurverein after the First World War, was primarily connected to a formalization of the organization's aims, it also reflected a form of

structuring of tourist promotion activities, especially toward new ‘sporting activities’ (Schneider, Tissot, 2018). Engaged in beautifying activities at the end of the 1890s, the office became the pivotal organization of the municipality in the 1920s, bringing together hoteliers, doctors, and politicians, and sportsmen, taking on more and more functions. Interestingly, when structuring more clearly the way of taxing the tourism – by introducing a local tourism taxation system – all the benefits were allocated to the Kurverein, to finance its activities and especially the sporting program of both winter and summer seasons. Thus, in the 1920s, looking at the composition of the successive committees of the Tourism Office was like diving into a Who’s Who of the influential hoteliers and tourism promoters. With a director directly hired by the Kurverein and working locally with a 10-person team (in the 1920s), the structure was under the supervision of a committee composed mainly of hoteliers, alongside other local key players.

**Figure 2 – Composition of the central committee of the Kurverein, 1920-1921 (SMMA, ATO, Annual report for 1920-1921)**

In the 1920s, St. Moritz was facing many uncertainties due to the international economic situation and economic difficulties, but in the prospectus published by the tourist office, St. Moritz was increasingly portrayed as the Mecca of winter sports, and sometimes as the “holy city of winter sports” (SMDLA, ATOP, Winter program for 1924-1925), which allows us also to mention that the altitude of the city is also a key factor regarding its success, with guaranteed snow in winter. Above all, against a background of real growth in the number of overnight stays between 1921 and 1928—from 200,000 to 650,000 overnight stays per year during this period (SMDLA, DG, Tourism statistics between 1921 and 1997)—it is worth noting that it was already apparent just before the First World War that the winter season was now the season that generated the most overnight stays. Although there were more visitors in summer, winter stays

were longer, generating more overnight stays and more tourist tax, and they became the primary source of profit for the Kurverein and by extension for the hoteliers themselves.

Moreover, if we look at the statistics for the hotel capacity of St. Moritz (Table 1), it is interesting to note that the growth between 1921 and 1928 was largely based on the same capacity, since with the opening of the Suvretta in 1912 (Candrian, 2012, 45), the municipality reached a capacity of approximately 5,500 beds, a figure that remained stable until at least the end of the 1930s.

**Table 1 - Evolution of the hotel capacity (number of beds) in St. Moritz (1856-1937)**

**(SMDLA, DH, List of the Hotels in St. Moritz)**

The figures presented in Table 1 are important because they show that at the time of the Olympic bid itself, or more precisely when the idea of hosting the Olympic Games surfaced, in the mid-1920s, the municipality was confident that it had a real capacity to host the event. Beyond the feeling of a continued growing hotel capacity, those statistics also provide precious information on the several stages reached by St. Moritz on its development path. In 1875, three new hotels were opened in St. Moritz-Bad (Du Lac, Engadinerhof and Victoria) offering almost one thousand new beds and thought particularly to satisfy a clientele of spa-goers who made their way to Engadin for the quality of the water provided in the baths (Rhätisches Museum, 1992; Wyder, 2003; Hofmann, 2014). While legend emphasizes that winter sport was invented by the Kulm-Hotel in the 1860s (Barton, 2008; Lütscher, 2014), it seems that the lower part of the town – St. Moritz-Bad – was the center of attraction in the last few decades of 19th century, finally not developing itself as a real medical place as other resorts at that period (Lüthi, 2012), following the ban on the construction of a clinic for patients suffering from lung problems decided by the municipality on December 22, 1898 (Ruf, 2011, 59). Thus, the opening of the

Palace in 1896, followed by the Grand Hotel in 1905 (Rucki, 1989), created a greater attraction for St. Moritz-Dorf, accentuating the split—albeit only symbolic—between the two parts of the city, and the two types of tourism (spa and sport). Again, more than 500 new bedspaces were available for tourists, and which became more accessible once the Albula railway line opened in 1904 (Rhätische Bahn, 1939, 66-73). In 1912, 500 more bed-spaces became available with the opening of the Suvretta in Champfèr and then, at the top of the newly built funicular line, the Chanterella.

The price lists which can be consulted in the local archives (SMDLA, DH, price lists (1915-1925)), and which were part of the policy of the local hotelier association and the tourist office, show us that the two seasons (summer and winter) were different for the two parts of the town at the beginning of the 1920s, and that most of the hotels—especially the bigger ones—in St. Moritz-Bad were closed during the winter season. This also shows that the interests within the group of hoteliers were not identical, beyond a common will to develop tourism.

**Table 2 - National distribution of tourist numbers in St. Moritz (expressed in % between 1911 and 1930/1931) (SMMA, ATO, Annual reports 1911, 1920, 1925-1926 & 1930-1931)**

Similarly, the countries of origin of tourists visiting the resort remained stable and ensured a constant influence throughout the European continent, while the actual number of tourists visiting Engadin grew constantly from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. Apart from the change in tourist numbers resulting from the First World War, particularly regarding visitors from Germany, it is above all from the point of view of stability that the figures for visitors to St. Moritz in the first decades of the twentieth century can be read (Flückiger-Seiler, 2005). Beyond the evidence of the British role in the spreading of modern sports through Europe (Holt, 1992; Lanfranchi, 1998) and in the invention of tourism (Tissot, 1995), in St. Moritz the great

mass of tourists was German speaking. At a time when Germany was re-entering the Olympic movement and was Switzerland's main trading partner, these statistics fueled local interest in hosting the 1928 Games (Tonnerre, 2021).

### **Organizing the 1928 Olympic Games**

From the first discussions in the summer of 1925 about the project to host the Olympic Games, concern about the financing of the event arose, particularly considering the difficulties encountered by Chamonix for the 1924 Games (Arnaud, 1991). Nevertheless, the situation seemed to be “different because St. Moritz already has a better infrastructure” (SMMA, ACC, Minutes from the city council, July 15, 1925, p. 101), also because the tradition to host winter guests and events was already quite long and it was indeed enthusiasm that seemed to prevail at that very moment toward a bid for the 1928 Winter Games. In fact, the process for selecting host cities for the Olympic Games in the inter-war period was still relatively informal (Pérez-Aragón, Viuda-Serrano, 2021), and the time frame (two years before the event) for the selection process prevented very significant planning on the part of candidate cities.

In the case of St. Moritz, the selection took place during the IOC Congress of May 1926 in Lisbon, where the municipality of Upper Engadine won against Davos and Engelberg, after the Swiss Olympic Committee (SOC) chose not to hold a preselection within Switzerland. The tourist reputation of the Engadine municipality was to determine part of the vote, on which the influence of Count Bonacossa—an Italian member of the IOC and a regular visitor to St. Moritz’s most prestigious palaces—was probably very great (Sbetti, 2019). As Quentin Tonnerre points out in a recent article, international dynamics between sports federations (particularly in ice sports) also played a catalytic role (Tonnerre, 2021).

Locally, however, the process was launched in the winter of 1925–1926, even before the IOC's formal decision. Thus, in a meeting on 10 November 1925, within the municipal executive—and on the initiative of the Kurverein (so of Hoteliers)—there was talk of transforming St. Moritz railway station, whose inauguration dates from the opening of the Albula line at the very beginning of the twentieth century (Töndury, 1946, 52). This included adding a post office and allowing more trains and passengers to arrive. A few weeks later, on December 22, 1925, a meeting of the municipal council dealt in parallel with the expansion of the station and the organization of the Olympic Games, with more specific discussions on the necessary availability of the infrastructures for hosting the Games. From the very beginning, the tourism's circles are involved.

While the expansion of the train station was a necessity, this issue was coupled with more directly sports-related problems regarding the ski jumping hill. Indeed, the Julierschanze had existed since 1905, but it did not meet the requirements of Olympic competitions and a new ski jumping venue would have to be built. At that time, the estimated cost of such infrastructure was around CHF 400,000, and the risk was too great for the municipality to bear alone, since that sum was almost a whole year of its operating budget (SMMA, BAA).

Negotiations between the local actors took place and, in June 1926, a guarantee fund was set up for CHF 200,000 (mainly from the Rhaetian Railway), with additional funds provided by the hoteliers. In fact, it seems that the Alpina Ski Club also played a key role in the discussions, notably through discussions on renovating the Julierschanze. Indeed, during the winter of 1925–1926, significant sums were allocated by the club to renovate its ski jump, but the NOC made new infrastructure a necessity (ASCA, AASCCC, Minutes of the General Assembly, June 24, 1926, 1). In its general assembly of June 1926, the club accepted a project that would see it cover up to CHF 40,000 for the construction costs of a new “Olympia-Schanze” (ASCA, AASCCC, Minutes of the General Assembly, June 24, 1926, 2), before agreeing to cover costs

up to CHF 60,000 in the fall of 1927. Although the annual budget of the club was only a few thousand francs in the mid-1920s, there was here a kind of cross-redistribution of the finances of the municipality, which sponsored the club in exceptional proportions in these years. Moreover, the presence of the municipality's mayor, Carl Nater, in the Ski Club committee facilitated talks, while the increase in the municipality's resources made it possible to envisage significant involvement. In the meantime, one should note that the Alpina Ski Club was also ruled by the hoteliers of St. Moritz, such as Emil Thoma-Badrutt, since its creation and that it was an instrument for the promotion of winter tourism (Alpina Ski-Club, 2004). Interesting case study, the local ski club is a genuine 'lieux de sociabilité' (Agulhon, 1987), where the city's notables could meet both to relax – in a less formal atmosphere – and also to engage with a modern activity such as skiing (Denning, 2014).

However, the hosting of the Games did not seem to have only unanimous support in the hotel industry, as shown in a letter from William Hirschy—then president of the COS—to Rudolf Jilli, then also the president of the Ski Club Alpina. Although the Ski Club had taken the initiative to create a sub-committee of the ASCS to plan the skiing events of the forthcoming Games (ASCS ASCSAR, reports for the 1925-1928 years), the exchange shows that some hotel owners were not enthusiastic about the idea of hosting the Games (and receiving the IOC managers) in conditions that were too expensive for them. Indeed, it seems that the boom in tourist numbers in the mid-1920s had led some hotel managers to increase prices, a practice that was not appreciated by the organizers and the IOC for their event, and even led some to prefer a “normal” season to an Olympic season, about which there were still a lot of unknowns, particularly in the absence of any real hindsight on the Chamonix experience of 1924 (Schut, Levret-Labry, 2014). In fact, Hirschy emphasized his displeasure by indicating that:

“It is not the perfection of the facilities that will make St. Moritz the reputation that you hold dear, it is the perfection of the welcome, and the IOC, which is received

with respect in all the capitals of the world, informed of the dissatisfaction that its presence could cause in you, will not fail to compare and will not hold back its comparison.” (SMMA, AOG, Letter from William Hirschy to Rudolf Jilli, February 22, 1927)

In this context, the logic of hosting the Olympic Games, coupled with the IOC's desire for prestige, intersected with the logic of growth of the resort, which experienced a real upturn in tourist numbers during the 1920s, which some hoteliers took advantage of to adapt their rates and increase their profits, in parallel with a policy of development of their hotels (Candrian, 2012, 90). Thus, according to the tourist brochures consulted for the 1920s, prices increased mainly during the years 1920 to 1925 at a rate of almost one franc more per night and per year, during these five years, leading to an increase of approximately 15-20% over 5 years. On the other hand, a certain stability was established after 1925, although this must also be read in the light of what different hotels were now able to offer in terms of heating, bathing and electricity, with supplements charged to clients seeking these advantages. Modernity had reached the mountains in the 1920s, and the cost of modernity can be seen in the price lists.

In addition to the above letter from the President of the COS, the archives of the municipality of St. Moritz are full of numerous “pre-Olympic” exchanges in which various interests and issues inherent to the organization of the event can be identified. In fact, the negotiations with the IOC resulted in 20% of the municipality’s hotel capacity being made available for the event, i.e. around 1,000 bed-spaces (SMMA, AOG, Report of the Organizing committee for July 1927). In a letter to Francis Messerli on July 9, 1927, Carl Nater indicated several potential limitations to the discounts that hoteliers could grant on hotel services, particularly on drinks in bars or during meals. Thus, discounts would only be given to officials or competitors “in the hotel where [they are staying] and not in the establishments where [they might] visit” (SMMA,

AOG, Letter from Carl Nater to Francis Messerli, July 9, 1927). Business is business and the interests of the hoteliers have to be safeguarded.

In a letter to the National Olympic Committees that were planning to take part, Francis Messerli specified that the quota of bed-spaces reserved, allowed “without any doubt the accommodation of all the officials and competitors who will take part in the second Olympic Winter Games” and he added that for the visitors wishing to stay in St. Moritz “several hotels usually closed in winter have arranged to be opened this coming winter and that the prices of the hotels (...) will be within reasonable limits” (SMMA, AOG, Letter from Francis Messerli to the National Olympic Committees, September 30, 1927). These prices were set between CHF 15 and CHF 18 for a luxury hotel, between CHF 12 and CHF 15 for a first class hotel and around CHF 10 for a second class hotel, and this applied to all competitors and officials (journalists included). In fact, the efforts made by the hoteliers were quite substantial, since we are talking about reductions of up to 30% of the price advertised in the municipality’s seasonal brochures, including heating and modern comforts (SMMA, AOG, Report of the Organizing committee for November 1927). These concessions could effectively be considered a reduction of 50%, in that these rates included “the room, three meals, bath, service, lighting, heating and the gratuity to staff” (SMMA, AOG, Letter from Francis Messerli to the National Olympic Committees, March 1, 1927). Although the negotiation was not easy or quick, the potential gain for the main economic players involved in the Olympic Games seemed to give them hope beyond the Games in a rather favorable tourist-economic climate (see Table 1).

However, these organizational elements also revealed imbalances in the tourist scene in St. Moritz, the asymmetrical interests between different hoteliers – according to the different categories of hotels. Indeed, exchanges of letters in the fall of 1927 showed that 20% of the rooms made available were not actually guaranteed within each hotel. Although some of the reasons given seemed quite rational, such as needing to arrange accommodation for all the

journalists in the same hotel (in this case the Hotel Victoria in St. Moritz-Bad), it was mainly the more prestigious hotels (Palace, Suvretta, Kulm) that had obviously bought up rooms in other hotels to leave possible reservations open in their own establishments, particularly for the public expected to attend the event. A few weeks before the Games, at the beginning of December, and while all the national delegations had not yet exactly confirmed their reservations, there was still some doubt as to whether there was enough capacity to provide the necessary accommodation. But in the end, bar a few hitches, everything turned out fine.

In fact, the Olympic Games were a success from an organizational, popular and economic point of view, with CHF 138,560 worth of passes purchased by the public before the event and CHF 143,441 worth of passes purchased on site during the nine-day event (see Figure 3). Despite the very bad weather on February 14, 15 and 16, this represented a daily attendance of nearly 1,500 visitors (considering the price of a pass for the entire event at CHF 200), ensuring a degree of profitability for the entire resort.

**Figure 3 – Final Consolidated and Detailed Accounts of the 1928 Olympic Games  
(SMMA, AOG, Consolidated account of the 1928 Olympic Games, May 20, 1928)**

The accounts for the second edition of the Winter Games revealed that the involvement of the tourist sector was significant, insofar as half of the income came from the sale of tickets for events, which often implied at least one night's stay on site, given the transport limitations at the time. Although 40% of this revenue had to be paid back to the COS, under the agreement between the institution and the local organizing committee, the profits were nevertheless considerable for the hotels in the region, and the deficit of around CHF 45,000 was not a major issue.

During the meeting of July 6, 1928, the municipal council studied the consolidated accounts of the event and after discussion with the COS, it was even decided to slightly reduce the amount that the municipality had to pay to the national Olympic committee, to which was added some uncertainty about how much was raised through the nationwide fundraising campaign that took place in 1927 (SMMA, ACC, Minutes from the city council, July 6, 1928, 92). In fact, by a unanimous vote and for as long as the deficit remained under CHF 30,000, the municipality undertook to bear that cost while also extending the repayment of the loan obtained by the Ski Club over six years, at a rate of CHF 10,000 per year (SMMA, ACC, Minutes from the city council, July 6, 1928, 93).

### **Between economic crisis, international competition and the legacy of the Olympic Games**

Since the fall of 1928, St. Moritz benefited from the extension of the Chantarella funicular to Corviglia, which opened up new snow fields for skiers, especially downhill skiers (Denning, 2019), and made access to the snow fields much easier. This new infrastructure to Corviglia was also part of a deeper process of institutionalization of political work in the municipality regarding tourism. In fact, in the middle of the twenties, the tourist office was strongly structured under the impetus of a new committee which included the hoteliers Hans Badrutt and Hans Bon (directors of the Palace and Suvretta respectively) and the mayor of St. Moritz, Carl Nater. The extension of this funicular a few months after the end of the Olympic Games may have seemed counter-intuitive in comparison with broad interpretations that research on the more contemporary “mega-event” suggests. The Corviglia funicular was, in fact, a double legacy of the 1928 Games, in that it inscribed winter sports – especially downhill skiing, even if it was not on the Games’ program (Quin, Cala, 2019) – in the local landscape of a hitherto regular tourism but also because it was made possible by the success of the Games that

offered—just before the financial crisis—growth prospects to all those involved in local tourism. Indeed, it is impossible to speak of a real reinvestment in the economic sense, but rather of the creation, by the Olympic Games, of a future of economic-sporting success. At the risk of over-interpreting the situation, it can be assumed that the Corviglia helped establish alpine skiing as a new sport because the Piz Nair slopes could now be accessed by skiers without them having to make the ascent on foot (Quin, 2021).

Parallel to the construction of the funicular extension, in the spring of 1928, the tourist office approached Giovanni Testa to set up a ski school, which began teaching in the winter of 1928/1929 (Morandi, 1979, 17), one year after the Games. Although there were already more than fifty “ski instructors” with that title in St. Moritz and who had been practicing since the early 1920s, the existence of a school that centralized the activities highlighted the transition from adventure skiing to a form of skiing that would be able to expand its base of practitioners, especially for the guests of the various hotels. Indeed, at the beginning of the 1930s, the competition with Austria was increasing. The new “Schneider school” or “school of Aarlberg” (Dettling, Tschoffen, 2014) established in Austrian resorts attracted more and more tourists who had previously gone to Switzerland (SMMA, ASSSM, Letter from the Director of the Och Sports shop, March 20, 1931), and this sparked many debates at the turn of the thirties, including an initiative of Swiss hoteliers to define the best method to learn ski (Quin, 2017b). In fact, these debates revealed how tourist and hoteliers’ networks extended to include players with more direct economic interests related to the practice of the new dominant form of skiing, alpine skiing, such as the new sports equipment stores opening up in the resorts in the inter-war period. Although the threat weighed on the whole of the Swiss Alps, it was even stronger in Engadine by its proximity to Austria (Müllner, 2013).

After the Olympic Games, St. Moritz entered a new era and the Engadine resort sought to develop its internal structure by recruiting a new director for its tourist office. While this

position was obviously key (SMMA, ATO, Job description for the new director position, February 5, 1929), it was also the personality chosen for the post who was pivotal in developing the resort at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, this person, Walter Amstutz, was to succeed very early in establishing St. Moritz in the alpine ski landscape, using both its heritage as a “place of invention of winter sports”, its new status as an Olympic town and the power of its socio-economic and political network. Thus, the St. Moritz network played a key role in the development of more structured organizations for alpine ski instruction, beyond the recognition of downhill skiing by the FIS in 1930 (AFIS, AFISC, Minutes of the congress in Oslo, February 24-26, 1930, 18-22), as many of the city's delegates were already involved in the new bodies promoting skiing in Switzerland before the Second World War, with the *Interassociation Suisse pour le Ski* (IASS) and the *Associations des Ecoles Suisses de Ski* (AESS). More oriented toward the economic interests of skiing, the AESS sought to “bring together in one organization all the institutions interested in ski instruction” (Association des Ecoles Suisses de Ski, 1984, 14). At the founding general meeting on 13 September 1934, Hans Bon was elected president of the AESS in his capacity as representative of the Graubünden region (AAESS, AAESSGA, Minutes from the general assembly of September 13, 1934). Here, the individual interests of the hotelier intersected with the interests of the ski instructors in his community, the former providing employment for the latter. At the same time, Hans Bon opened one of the first ski lifts in the mountains behind his hotel.

**Figure 4 – The two skilifts in the backyard of the Suvretta palace, Suvretta-Randolins and Randolins-Plateau Nair, 1940 © Dokumentationsbibliothek St. Moritz**

After the successful trials since the 1928 FIS-Congress, held in St. Moritz during the Olympic Games (AFIS, AFISC, Minutes of the congress in St. Moritz, February 14-16, 1928), a new

consensus emerged to allow the creation of downhill competitions (Quin, Cala 2019). In 1930, it was then the Swiss member of the FIS Central Committee who promoted alpine skiing during the general assembly, where Walter Amstutz represented Switzerland, while already being the director of the Kurverein of St. Moritz and maintaining close contacts with the “Count Hamilton”, the Secretary General of the FIS and one of its references when applying for the job in 1929. Amstutz even got special support of CHF 1000.- from the municipality to attend the congress, as “the decisions taken at this congress are decisive for St. Moritz” (SMDLA, ATOM, Minutes of the meeting of January 23, 1930). In fact, the impact of the growth in alpine skiing was significant for many resorts in the Alpine region (Strobl, Podkalicka, 2019), and the debates that led to the invention of a “Swiss method” within the framework of the IASS highlights that learning to ski was becoming a major area of interest (Quin, 2017b). Meanwhile, in terms of hotels, pricing structures were overhauled; although basic prices did not change significantly, in comparison with the twenties, which saw a real rise in prices in St. Moritz, especially when they were charged by the night, different offerings began to emerge, with full board and seven-day packages, sometimes including the ski courses. While it was still too early to see the “one week on the slopes” become the norm, the ski school’s decision to hold a race every Saturday to award small local prizes indicated that new time frames were taking hold and skiing was a key factor in these (SMDLA, ATOP, Winter sports program for 1939–1940). For the first time, in the winter of 1934–1935, the town’s tourist brochure included a map of the ski slopes around the Corviglia funicular through the snow fields above St. Moritz-Dorf. This reflected the confirmation of a new way to enjoy the mountains in winter and soon the inauguration of a ski-lift on the slopes behind the Suvretta (Figure 4) would crown these developments as a further expression of the commitment of a local network of hoteliers, ski promoters and tourist interests. Thus, it is no surprise to read that Giovanni Testa was selected as the technical chief

for a course organized by IASS in Davos in December 1937 (ATF, ATFGT, Letter from the IASS to Giovanni Testa, October 4, 1937).

Although the number of tourist visitors to St. Moritz were impacted by the economic crisis of 1929 and its international consequences (see Figure 5), our hypothesis is to underline that the combined success of the Olympic Games of 1928 and the opening of a new offer for alpine skiing lessened the negative impact of the crisis on these numbers.

**Figure 5 – Tourism statistics (1920-1956) (SMMA, ATO, Statistics of the Tourism Office  
(1920-1956))**

In this context, the municipality's decision in the 1930s to take over control of the ski lifts is an interesting process to bind the hosting of the 1928 Olympic Games and its effects into a true socio-historical analysis on the development of St. Moritz in the inter-war period. In fact, the construction of the Corviglia funicular extension in 1928 was carried out by a limited company—in fact two limited companies: Société Anonyme Chantarella and the Société Anonyme Corviglia—under the presidency of a Lausanne banker, Alfred Galland, whose interests in the development of tourism in Switzerland went beyond St. Moritz. They also included those of Emil Thoma-Badrutt, owner of the Hotel Chantarella at the top of the lower section of the funicular, who was vice-president of both companies (Ruf, 2011). Arguments were emphasizing the potential of the growth in skiing, when Emil Thoma-Badrutt submitted to the City Council his project to extend the existing infrastructure with a new cableway to Piz Nair (Figure 6). First the authorities highlighted the fact that “every new installation built in St. Moritz to take skiers to higher points are interesting for the development of the resort”, adding that the opening of the new cableway to Piz Nair “creates the possibility to ski down to St. Moritz with more than 1000 meters of vertical drop, over Alp-Giop Suvretta toward St. Moritz-

Bad or over Saluver toward Celerina” (SMMA, ATI, Documents about the cableway toward Piz Nair (1936-1939), plan for the extension toward Piz Nair).

**Figure 6 – Cableway system toward Piz Nair, 1937 © Dokumentationsbibliothek St.**

**Moritz**

It was in these same terms that the Municipal Council came out in favor of their acquisition of the two limited companies, Société Anonyme Chantarella and Société Anonyme Corviglia, on August 20, 1937, indicating that there was an “enormous advantage for a health and winter sports resort to become the owner of such an infrastructure (...), [because] with normal winter attendance, the profits cover slightly more than the interest on the investments made.” (SMMA, ACC, Minutes from the City Council, August 20, 1937, 53) What seemed to predominate in the decision of the municipality to take control of the ski lifts is the autonomy that this allowed it to obtain and to complete in terms of building a genuine policy for tourism. This was also the argument used in the voting process on October 23 and 24, 1937, which recorded 288 votes in favor of releasing a credit of CHF 900,000 for the purchase of shares in the two limited companies (SMMA, ACC, Results from the vote on the takeover of the cable cars by the municipality, October 23 & 24, 1937). A fortune for the municipality – more than an annual budget and/or account at the same period –, which was to pay for it by going bankrupt after the Second World War, when it hosted the Olympic Games for a second time.

**Conclusion**

While we have focused our analysis on the organization and consequences of the Olympic Games for winter sports and skiing, we must note that the tourism policy of St. Moritz in the thirties also focused on aspects other than those directly related to winter sports. Thus, it was also on the initiative of stakeholders in Graubünden that the “Glacier Express” would make its first trip on June 25, 1930, between Zermatt and St. Moritz, a journey that took eleven hours. Although it only operated in summer, this train became an emblem of Swiss alpine tourism policies, linking two major resorts by opening a railway line across the Furka Pass (Caminada, 1982). At the same time, St. Moritz continued to structure its tourism offer under the aegis of Walter Amstutz, who also set up “automobile weeks” along the several roads and passes which had opened to automobile traffic from 1925 (Hollinger, 2008). Among others, the Bernina pass would become, from 1929 when the first edition of the ‘automobile week’ would take place, “one of the most beautiful ‘pistes’ in the whole world” (SMDLA, DAW, press reports about courses in the 1930s), according to several press reports published in the newspapers. Although the word was written about a road, it also described more broadly the dynamics of the development of sports tourism in the Upper Engadine valley, being soon also described as one of the most beautiful touristic destination in the Alps. In the meantime, and as early as 1946, the races were moved to the Maloja pass, and the secretariat of the organization committee (OC) of the races was then headed by a certain Peter Kasper (Cala, Quin, 2019), and the OC still consisted of Carl Nater (still mayor of St. Moritz), Hans Bon and even Dr. Paul Gut, a famous doctor in St. Moritz, where he opened his own practice in 1929, and later in 1941 a hospital named after him.

In fact, through our contribution, we also emphasized that in-depth empirical research, that could be undertaken on other editions of the Olympic Games, identifying the networks of local actors involved in the organization of the event, and mobilizing local archives, is likely to

provide new elements of understanding for the history of the Games and other international events.

In a way, it seems, as we have already underlined, that the Olympic Games were an opportunity for St. Moritz, and its hotelier network, both to develop specific instruments for winter sports, such as the construction of an Olympic ski jump, where each winter several events are organized in the 1930s, and to initiate certain innovations in terms of tourism planning. In fact, the timetable for the organization of the Olympic Games at that time—St. Moritz was officially selected only a few months before the event—meant it was impossible to develop a real urban planning policy targeted specifically for the Games but opened a whole horizon of possibilities for the municipality and for the hotels owners. From the construction of the Corviglia funicular, to the publication of a map of the ski slopes and the establishment of a real sporting calendar, there is no shortage of examples to highlight “what the Games have made possible”. While these dynamics would benefit from the arrival in 1929 of Walter Amstutz, as director of the tourist office, the permanence of the networks of actors and the continued commitment of hoteliers were clearly decisive conditions for the growth of St. Moritz in the 1930s and beyond, with a real local resistance to the economic crisis caused by the crash of 1929, and then a capacity to develop in the aftermath of the Second World War, which would also be demonstrated by the organization of the Olympic Games in 1948, even while the municipality being bankrupt.

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