

Leisure at the international scale: sport

Syllabus - Case study of a contemporary international sports event

- Analyse the geographic factors that influenced the choice of venue(s).
- Examine the factors affecting the sphere of influence for participants and supporters.
- Evaluate the short- and long-term geographic costs and benefits of hosting such an event at both the local and national level.

The Olympic Games

- Summer (every four years) and Winter Games (every two years) – multi-sport events
- Established in 1896
- International Olympic Committee plans the games and chooses the venues – countries bid to host the games

Complete Question Block 9C from page 367 in Planet Geography

Geographic factors influencing the choice of venue(s)

Economic factors

I. Wealth

Hosting the Olympic Games is a very expensive business. Countries have to spend vast amounts of money on:

- Venues – sporting stadia for the Olympic Games must be large enough to hold the large numbers of spectators that attend the events. They must also meet rigorous health and safety standards, as well as serving a purpose after the Games have finished.
- Athletes Village – housing has to be built for competitors during the Games.
- Marketing and advertising
- Security
- Transport
- The bidding process itself is also very expensive

The 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing cost \$42 billion over seven years. However, it is worth noting that that \$4 trillion was added to China's GDP in 2008 due to the Games. It can therefore be said that the initial expenditure will usually be repaid in the end.

2. Accessibility and infrastructure

Tournaments must be held in areas which are easily accessible to competitors and spectators. In some cases this may mean that airports need to be upgraded and new roads need to be constructed.

Winter games are generally held in areas where there is existing infrastructure for winter sports as it is not economically viable to construct ice rinks and ski runs for a single tournament.

3. Local wealth

The Summer Olympics is the second largest sporting event (after the football World Cup). Most countries air the event on free to view channels so there is little money to be made from television rights. Therefore, ticket sales need to be high in order to ensure that the event is profitable. It also does not send a positive image of the Games if television viewers see empty seats. Therefore, traditionally, the Games have been held in wealthy nations: they have never been held in Africa, South America or large areas of Asia.

2. Climate

Clearly climate is an important factor when deciding where to hold a sports tournament! Obviously the Winter Games can only be held in locations where there are low enough temperatures to allow the accumulation of large volumes of snow. This limits the locations available to only a few mountainous areas.

There are more options available for the Summer Games, though areas with extreme climates, with high temperature, are likely to be unsuitable for sports tournaments.

3. Political stability

Large numbers of spectators and competitors travel to the Winter and Summer Olympics so they have to be held in areas that are politically stable and where people will be secure.

4. Cultural factors

In many cases, countries that bid to hold the Games have experienced success in the medal table often to bid to host the Games. There is also a great deal of prestige associated with the hosting of the Games.

Cultural factors may also be linked to traditions and customs in countries. There are issues for openly gay athletes about competing in countries where homosexuality is punishable by death. Some countries have strict rules on dress codes for women so again, the Olympics are unlikely to be held in these countries.

Examine the factors affecting the sphere of influence for participants and supporters.

There are 205 countries with National Olympic Committees worldwide. This means that there are 205 countries eligible to participate in the Games: more countries participate in the Winter Games than in the Summer Games.

The sphere of influence for the Summer and Winter Olympics varies greatly. The Winter Olympics are generally attended by countries that have climates suitable for winter sports, such as skiing. Indoor sports, such as ice hockey and curling, are open to participants from countries that do not have extreme winter climates but participants tend to be from wealthier nations, where funding is available for sporting facilities such as ice rinks. Spectators for the Winter Olympics also tend to be drawn from countries where competitors come from.

More countries participate in the Summer Olympics than the Winter Olympics. Countries with greater wealth tend to participate in a larger range of sports and send a larger number of competitors than countries with less wealth do.

Vancouver 2010, Winter Olympic Games

- 17 days of Olympic Games events
- 2566 athletes
- 82 participating countries
- 10,000 media representatives
- 3 billion television viewers worldwide

Beijing, 2008, Summer Olympic Games

A record 204 National Olympic Committees took part in the Games. Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Mauritius and Togo all experienced podium finishes for the first time. However Mongolia, Bahrain and Panama managed to go one better with their athletes bringing home their country's first Olympic gold.

Evaluate the short- and long-term geographic costs and benefits of hosting such an event at both the local and national level.

Long-term costs and benefits

- China gained \$4 trillion in the year after hosting the Summer Games.
- Infrastructure that has to be built/improved for the Games may benefit the country in the long-run e.g. \$3 billion was spent to improve Beijing Airport.
- Tourism figures are boosted in the long-run as people want to visit Olympic venues. Tourist income also leads to the multiplier effect in host cities.
- The profile of the host city is raised on the international stage.
- Urban renewal projects benefit the local community e.g. Barcelona.
- Money is invested to make the Games environmentally sustainable e.g. the Sydney Olympics were held on an area of reclaimed swampland that had previously been a dumping ground for toxic waste.

Short-term costs and benefits

- Initial expenses are high for the bidding process and construction – China spent \$500 million building the athletics stadium alone.
- Creation of jobs in a variety of industries, such as the construction industry. However, this may only be a short-term benefit as many jobs disappear once the Games are over.

You may wish to add to this list once you have completed all the required reading for this section.