

The Pros and Cons of Hosting the Olympic Games

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Every four years the Olympic games provide the opportunity for one lucky host city, or region, to gain the international spotlight by fully embracing the pomp and circumstance that goes along with hosting athletes from nations around the globe. Just as is the case in the battle for Gold medals on the field of play, the competition to be an Olympic host city can be intense. Years before the games are held countries battle against each other for the coveted exposure that comes with hosting either the summer or winter games.

The work really begins once a city or region is named as the host. Olympic planning committees try to think of every possible contingency that could occur at the games. This attention includes a heavy security presence thanks to instances that occurred in 1972 in Munich and 1996 in Atlanta. Despite this attention to plan for the unexpected, it is unlikely that many Olympic planning committees had a line item in their bid for what to do during a global pandemic. The question of what to do with the Olympics when the entire world is battling a new virus was raised in early 2020. Tokyo was set to host the 2020 Summer Olympics but was forced to move the games to no earlier than 2021 based on the impacts of the COVID-19 virus. When the Games return in 2021 it will mark the second time Japan has hosted the summer games. Japan has also hosted the winter games twice

There are many items that all host committees must deal with long before the opening ceremonies are held. The shadow cast by the games can last long after the closing ceremonies. The post-games shadow creates increased pressure for cities to get it right when their turn to host the games arrives. Two of the biggest challenges cities face when preparing to host the Olympics involve where to house the athletes and all other attendees for the games, as well as securing the facilities for the various athletic competitions to take place in. Host cities must construct housing in the form of Olympic Villages, as well as arenas and other venues for the competitions to take

place. Host cities also need to ensure that there are enough hotel rooms available for the millions of spectators. Some cities like Vancouver and Los Angeles rise to the challenge while other cities like Rio de Janeiro and Sochi struggle mightily under the pressure preparing for the games causes. Journalists covering the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympic Games shared photos of the unfinished hotel rooms that greeted them when they arrived to cover the games. Unfinished rooms were definitely not the first impression that the organizers had hoped to make.

In addition to rushing to finish facilities, host cities are also faced with the question of what to do with the facilities after the games. Although it is not always the case, some of the facilities built for Winter games like ski jumps live on after the games. Of course, there are exceptions to that rule. One need only do an internet search for abandoned Olympic sites to see what happens after the athletes and spectators leave town at many venues. Challenges with finding uses for facilities after the games have left town was first reported in 1968 (Alberts, 2011). The ski jump from the 1968 games has seen minimal use in the years that followed and the bobsled tracks were abandoned in place (Alberts, 2011). The inability to reuse facilities is not entirely the fault of the host cities. Changes in the level of competition in sports like bobsledding lead to scenarios where older tracks cannot withstand the speeds that current bobsleds are capable of reaching (Alberts, 2011).

Another challenge host cities face is that very few cities are chosen to host multiple Olympics. London has hosted the Summer Olympics three times and Los Angeles is set to host the games for the third time in 2028. Even if everything goes perfectly during an Olympic hosting opportunity, the odds are severely stacked against hosting again. Or, if a city does get to host again it runs into the scenario where facilities are outdated and in need of replacement. The

Los Angeles Coliseum will host the Olympic torch for the third time in 2028 making it one of the very few facilities to be around by the time the games return.

From a Christian worldview perspective for large events like the Olympic games, it is important for planners of the events who may be Christians to understand and appreciate that not everyone attending the event will be Christian. While planners should use their Christian faith to guide their activities to address any circumstances that arise with facilities, or events, it would be a grave error to expect everyone attending the event to ascribe to the same Christian values. Events like the Olympic games draw participants who practice all different kinds of world religions. Some attendees do not practice any religion. Trying to impose one's own faith on attendees like spectators, participants, and working media representatives is the wrong approach to take and could lead to negative experiences at the event. Instead, facility managers should show their faith through their actions and the way they respond to challenges as they arise. Keeping a level head, as well as maintaining an ability to adjust as situations call for, while treating everyone with respect and kindness is the best way to demonstrate a Christian perspective during the hectic environment surrounding the Olympics.

The Olympic games will resume at some point once the world of sport reopens following the COVID-19 timeout. The Olympic torch will continue to travel from city to city as countries seek to secure their legacy on the list of places to host the games. Tokyo will get their chance to host the games during a rare odd year in 2021 followed by Beijing in 2022, Paris in 2024, and Los Angeles in 2028. The host city for the 2026 Winter Olympics has yet to be determined and is likely to lead to another round of intense competition to win the right to host the games. Some groups will continue to excel at hosting the games and finding ways to continue to use the facilities and housing created for the games long after the torch has moved on. Other cities will

struggle to get facilities ready in time, and will struggle even more to find a use for venues in their post-Olympic lives. The crumbling Olympic venues dotting landscapes across the globe serve as reminders that as cities continue to battle to host the games, some countries would be better off spending the billions of dollars it takes to host the games in others ways. Pomp and circumstance is fleeting and in the years to come more countries will need to take a closer look at whether the enormous cost needed to secure the bragging rights of being an Olympic city are worth it. That attention to fiscal responsibility will be even more crucial in the post COVID-19 world.

References

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