

Over the past 80 years, the Winter Olympics have become the competition of reference for winter sports. Organising the winter Olympics represents an enormous challenge for a city, its surrounding region, and even for the entire country. The implications are numerous. There are also many constraints, in particular related to the costs, which are becoming higher and higher with every subsequent candidacy. Nonetheless, the magic of the Olympics is such that they will continue to be sought after for a long time to come.

Applying to host the Games

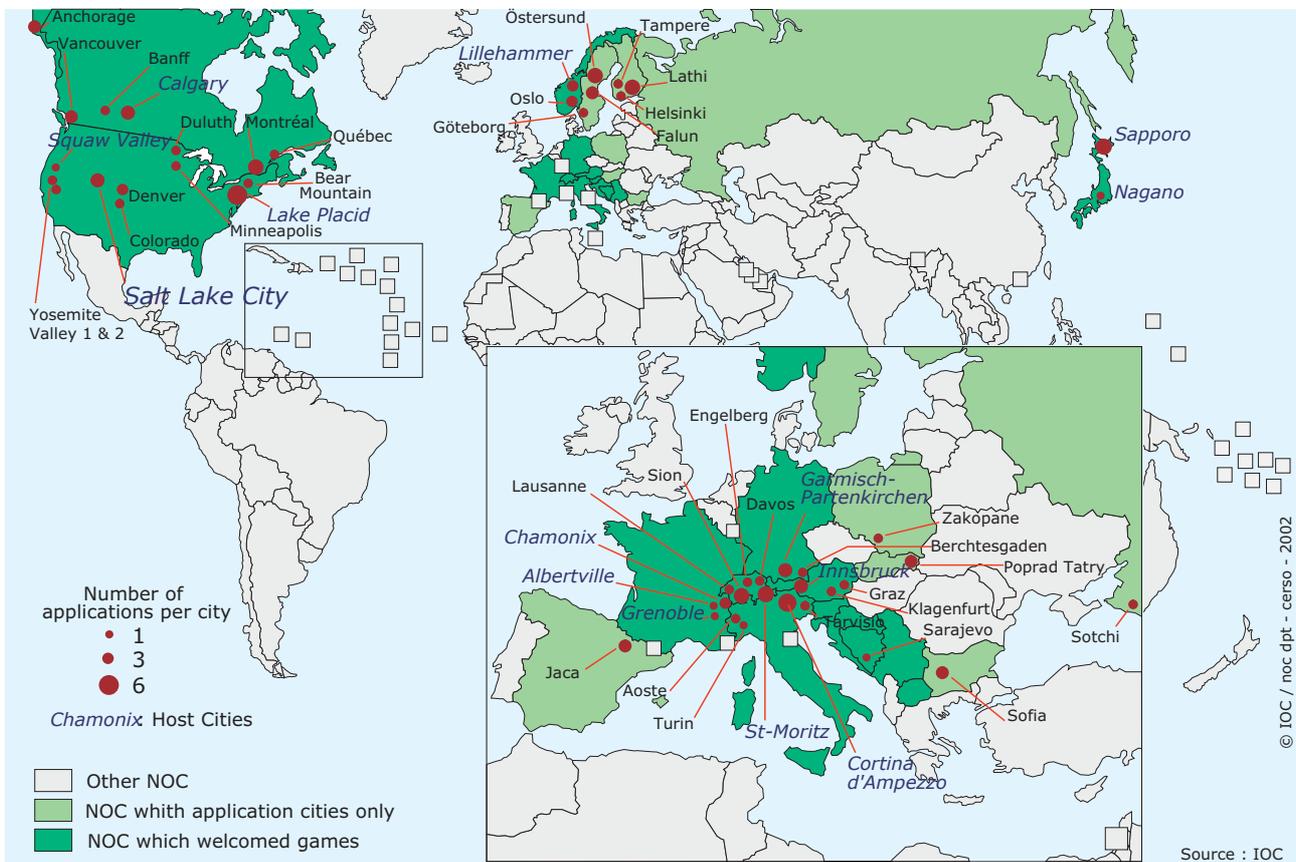
Being a candidate city for the Olympics requires considerable work. The application has to meet many conditions, many of which are very strict. Although the initial idea of applying for candidacy may come from just a few people, it rapidly becomes necessary to reach a wider level of consensus in order to bring the idea to fruition. This consensus has to be reached not only in the candidate city, but also at a higher administrative level. Indeed, the cost of the infrastructures neces-

sary to host the Olympics is such that candidate cities cannot finance it themselves; it is mandatory to have outside funding, be it private or public.

Cities and countries have quickly come to understand the impact that hosting the Olympic Games can have on land development. Apart from the sporting events, the main reason for applying for candidacy lies in the possibilities for economic development and tourism inherent in such an event. For this reason, and also given the high infrastructure costs, only rich countries have the means to make a good return on such a large investment. Therefore, most candidate cities are situated within a rather limited geographical area on a worldwide level. They are localised in the northern hemisphere, where the availability of mountainous areas at middle latitudes, as well as economic and cultural aspects can be considered.

Organising Cities

Only a small minority of countries have had the opportunity to organize winter Olympic Games, considering the 94 NOCs who have

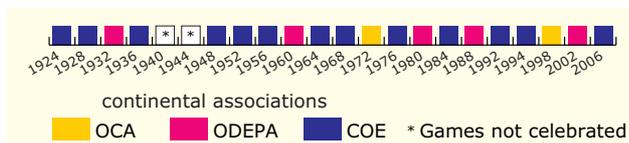


Candidate Cities and Venues for the Winter Olympics

participated in them since 1924. The considerable costs incurred by the organisation of the Games, as well as the necessary climatic and topographic conditions, represent an insurmountable barrier to many countries. Furthermore, the large multinational groups, which have become such important financial partners in the funding of organising committees, seem more and more inclined, for commercial reasons, to organise the Games in countries where winter sports are widely practiced.

Organising cities: western breeding ground

Since 1924, 15 cities have had the privilege of organising the Winter Olympic Games. Two others, Salt Lake City and Turin, have already been nominated as hosts for 2002 and 2006,



Organising cities of the Winter Olympics by continental association

respectively. In fact, the IOC has accepted more than 20 candidacies altogether. The cities of Sapporo, St. Moritz and Garmisch-Partenkirchen were each nominated to host the 1940 Olympics, but World War II decided otherwise, and the Games did not take place in 1940 or in 1944. Similarly, Denver, which had been designated to host the 1976 Olympics, had to withdraw in 1974 after a referendum. Finally, Innsbruck had to take over the organisation of the 1976 Olympics at rather short notice.

Among the candidate cities, and including the host cities for the 2002 and 2006 Games, European cities are predominant in the host venues chosen by the IOC. Out of a total of 20 cities chosen, 13 of these have been European cities (65%). This fact is even more salient among the first 10 editions of the Winter Olympics, where 8 out of 10 venues (80%) were European. In total, the venues chosen by the IOC have been located in 10 countries: United States (in 1932, 1960, 1980 and 2002); France (in 1924, 1968 and 1992); Switzerland (in 1928 and 1948); Austria (in 1964 and 1976); Norway (in 1952 and 1994); Japan (in 1972 and 1998); Italy (in 1956 and 2006, Germany (1936); Yugoslavia (1984) and Canada (1988). Three cities have organised the Olympics twice: St. Moritz (1928 and 1948), Lake Placid (1932 and 1980) and

Innsbruck (1964 and 1976).

A bonus for founder countries

The fact that all these countries became part of the Olympic movement at an early stage (in some cases, even from the very beginning) could explain the localisation of the chosen host venues. The first Winter Olympic Games in 1924, saw 8 out of these 10 countries participate. The other two countries, Germany and Japan, participated for the first time in 1928. Germany was not invited to participate in the 1924 Games in Chamonix by the somewhat vengeful French organisers. Hence, a certain seniority within the international olympic movement, and more particularly, in the organisation of the Winter Games, would seem to justify the candidacies and be an important factor in the choice of the IOC.

The case of Sarajevo

Other cultural, economic or political aspects would also seem to be determinant in the choice of the IOC. Sarajevo, venue for the



Sarajevo: Opening ceremony (IOC, Museum Olympic Collection)

1984 Games, is a singular example, as it was the only organising city to be located in a socialist country. However, this fact must be seen in context; Yugoslavia was somewhat apart from the rest of the socialist countries. It was not a part of the communist bloc and followed a policy of non-alignment compared to certain developing countries. Similarly, Yugoslavia was much closer to Western countries than to the other Eastern powers. Furthermore, they boasted a certain level of development along with a well-anchored sporting history, particularly as regards winter sports. All these factors contributed to permitting Sarajevo organise the 1984 Games, which they did with considerable success.

Wealth and tradition

The other nations organising Winter Olympic Games have all been rich countries, with 6 of them belonging to the G7, namely the richest countries in the world. As for the other three, they all have a particularly well-developed culture of practicing winter sports. They were also precursors in the organization of winter sports competitions. Switzerland and Austria were among the first countries to develop prestigious winter sports resorts, and were also among the first to host alpine skiing, bobsleigh and luge competitions. Norway, the home of many winter sports, was quick to participate in the first international competitions, in particular, the famous Nordic Games.

Candidate cities

These aspects are even more noticeable when one examines the list of cities that have been candidates to host the Winter Olympics. In addition to the 10 countries cited above, only 7 other countries have applied to be hosts for the Winter Olympics.

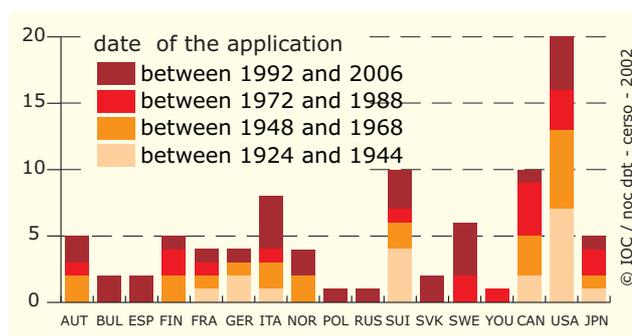
The paradox of the Scandinavian failures

These include Sweden and Finland, which have been candidates 5 and 6 times respectively, but have never been chosen to host the Games by the IOC. Why have Sweden, birthplace of many big skiing competitions, with the famous Vasaloppet and Nordic Games, and Finland, another Scandinavian country, never been chosen as hosts? This is even more surprising because their economic situation, very similar to that of their neighbor Norway, is a factor considerably in their favor, as is the fact that they have been participating in the Winter Olympics since the beginning. The organisation of the Summer Olympics Games in each of these countries (Stockholm in 1912 and Helsinki in 1952) might be one explanation for the non-designation of Sweden and Finland as hosts for the Winter Olympics. They will no doubt join the ranks of the laureats some day, as they meet all the necessary conditions for organising the Winter Games.

The arrival of Eastern cities

The other five countries concerned were all candidates before 1992, and apart from Spain, were all countries from Eastern Europe. Four of these candidacies (Sotchi in Russia

and Poprad Tatry in Slovakia for the 2002 Games, and Poprad Tatry again along with Zakopane in Poland for the 2006) all date from before the fall of the soviet bloc, and the ensuing territorial and political upheaval. However, according to the IOC evaluating committee, their candidacies would appear to be somewhat premature. Their proposed financial plans were judged too risky considering the economy in these three countries. Their candidacies were primarily aimed at gaining international recognition and improving the infrastructures, which are still poorly developed.



Applications by NOC between 1924 and 2006

Perseverance: a recipe for success

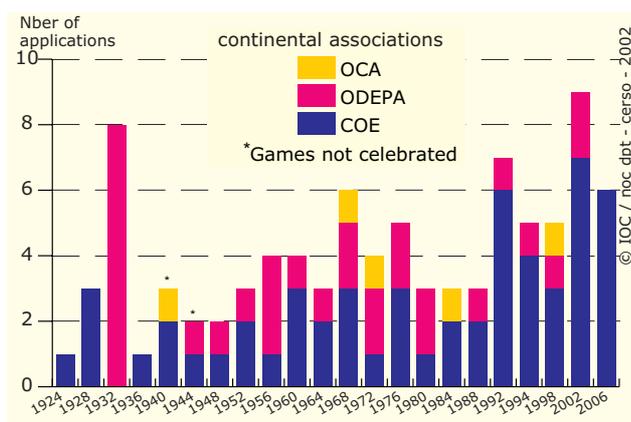
The study of the candidate cities reveals several interesting facts:

- 90 applications were filed by 49 cities, giving an average of 1.8 applications per city. Of these 49 cities, 28 applied only once, and of these, only 6 were actually chosen to host the Games. All cities which applied 4 or more times were nominated at least once, and of the 8 cities who applied 3 times, only 4 were never chosen (namely Lathi, Osternund, Montreal and Sion). In other words, the more often a city applies to host the Games, the greater the chances of being chosen by the IOC. Perseverance would appear to be a factor taken into account by the IOC.
- The 17 cities nominated to host the Games made a total of 43 applications, making an average of 2.5 applications per city. Furthermore, 8 cities of these 17 applied again after already having organized the Games once. The impact and outcome of the Games seemed to be sufficient to encourage them to reapply.
- Of the 90 applications, 55 came from European countries, 30 from North America, and 5 from Asia (Japan). The countries with the most applications are the United States (20), Canada (10) and Switzerland (10).

Multiple candidacies from the same countries were authorised for a long time, explaining why three different Swiss cities were candidates to host the 1928 Olympics, while 7 American cities were candidates for the 1932 Games.

Juggling between European and North-American candidacies

Since World War II, there has been a North American city and a European city in the running for every Games, except in 1984, when no American city applied. However, this could



Applications by continental association between 1924 and 2006

probably be explained by the fact that Los Angeles was the only candidate for the summer Games that year, and thus, was sure of being nominated; the previous Winter Games had been held at Lake Placid.

The number of European cities with the capacity to organise the Winter Games is quite high, which explains the constant presence of European cities among the candidates. The sudden passion of the American and Canadian cities for organising (30 candidacies from the two countries) appears quite paradoxical. This can be understood, however, by the fact that winter sports in general (apart from ice hockey and skating), and winter sports resorts developed much later in American and Canada than in Europe. A policy of developing infrastructure and sports facilities, increasing sports activities in general, coupled with a steady economy throughout the century, and the desire to catch up with the European resorts, where American and Canadian tourists are very numerous, could partly explain this phenomenon.

- A closer look at the number of candidate cities per Olympic Games is also quite inter-

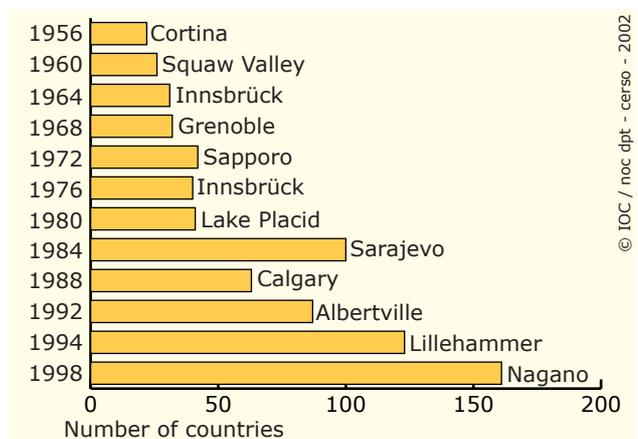
esting. After World War II (and the end of the right of priority), two periods are clearly noticeable. Until 1988, there was an average of 3.5 applications per Games. After 1992, however, there is a marked increase in the number of applications to host the Games, with an average of nearly 6.5 candidates per Games. The newfound enthusiasm of the Eastern European countries, now out of the hold of communism, as well as the ever increasing benefits that come from hosting the Olympics, are all contributing factors to this increase.

Reasons for Applying to Host the Games

The motivation to host the Winter Olympics can come from economic, touristic, cultural, social, or political factors. It is necessary to define the exact expectations of a host city in order to understand the mechanism behind the application. Two main reasons seem to motivate most applicant cities, namely international recognition and increased opportunities for invigorated urban and regional development. Indeed, the host city hopes to take advantage of the event to maximize its facilities due to the considerable income generated by the Games, and to give itself an enhanced image to attract future visitors, consumers and potential investors.

International Recognition

Organising the Olympic Games is a fantastic advertising opportunity for the host city. The notion of "international marketing" has become particularly well developed since the advent of television broadcasting (first in black and white at the Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo in 1956, and then later in color,



Number of countries broadcasting the Olympic Games (source : IOC)

from the 1968 Games in Grenoble). Television broadcasting makes it possible to focus the attention of the world on the host country, which can then use this opportunity to present its various touristic and economic attractions to a very wide public. The development of transportation, in particular air travel rapidly favored a considerable increase in tourism for host cities and their surrounding areas.

Moreover, organising the Olympic Games is an opportunity for the host city and country to show the world their ability to undertake and organise successfully such an important event.

This promotional aspect is often motivated by the politicians of the host country, thereby explaining the heavy involvement of national governments in the organisation and financing of Olympic Games.

Currently, the application to host the Games has the same requirements as a "marketing" application. The most important requirement is to provide a "market", and for this, all the advantages and qualities of the applicant city have to be put forward to try to turn the IOC decision in their favor. This "marketing" aspect explains the ever-increasing amounts of money spent on preparing applications to host the Olympics.

The media impact of the Olympic Games is such that most cities who apply, but are not selected as hosts, estimate that their investment is largely returned simply by the amount of publicity they receive as candidates. Furthermore, creating an application brings to light any shortcomings in the touristic sector, the economy, or the social and political arena of the city and its surroundings, thereby making it possible to bring in the public and/or private investments needed to remedy the situation. It is, therefore, not surprising that the organization of an Olympic Games candidacy is attracting more and more cities and countries, despite the financial and political hazards that may ensue.

Urban and Regional Land Development

Cities often apply to host the Olympic Games in order to bring their urban and regional land development status more up to date. Two different types of development can be distinguished:

– developments directly linked to the Games, such as sports facilities, welcome infrastruc-



Constructing the Olympic Village in Grenoble: heavy investments (IOC, Museum Olympic Collection)

tures (Olympic Village, press, radio and television centers etc), – and, parallel developments, such as communications, telecommunications networks, public buildings, etc.

The developments directly linked to the Games are subject to very rigorous requirements imposed by the IOC, and financed by the Organising Committee. For the first Olympics, these developments consisted of a minimum required to host the Games, but gradually, the extensive developments necessary have been modernised and are even created especially for the Games.

These various developments bring hope that the benefits in terms of employment will be considerable (especially in the building industry and engineering, commerce and touristic sectors), and more generally, that there will be an increase in the local and regional economy and tourist trade. They are a long-term investment. The investments necessary are such that the organising country, as well as the local authorities at all levels, have to make quite a significant financial effort. The Olympic "frenzy" makes it possible to accelerate the pace of ongoing developments, since the expenses are covered by special funds. Thus, for the most recent Olympics, the construction of heavy infrastructures such as transport systems, etc., has been accompanied by extensive renovations on educational, social and cultural buildings.

A further rationale has also emerged in the more recent Olympic Games, namely environ-

mental protection. At the Games in Albertville, several programs to promote and protect the environment in the Savoie region were put into place, e.g. water purification and the rehabilitation of the landscape. The protection and promotion of the environment, a very important world-wide theme, is one of the IOC criteria for the selection of applications to host the Olympic Games.

Types of Organising Cities

Since the beginning of the Olympics, three "types" of organizing cities can be distinguished:

Winter Sports Resorts

The purpose of their candidacy is to develop their image, their international prestige, and their touristic infrastructures. From 1924 to 1960, all the Winter Olympics, with the exception of Oslo in 1952, were organized in winter sports resorts. The requirements in terms of tourism, economy, politics and more generally, cultural installations, are usually already



Chamonix: the prototype for winter sports resorts (IOC, Museum Olympic Collection)

present in these resorts. For example, the publicity campaign for the 1924 Games in Chamonix was mainly organized by a private rail company called PLM (Paris Lyon Mediterranean). The participation of the economic sector in promoting the Games has symbolised, from the beginning, the benefits anticipated from such a large event in a winter sports resort.

Major Cities

Since 1964, a new era began, with the Games being organized by "major" cities, which were often important regional capital cities, or major industrial, university or sometimes tourist centers. All were situated in mountain-

ous areas. Their main expectations were the development of heavy infrastructures, as well as recognition of their economic capacities.



Grenoble: a town in the foothills of the Alps

The development of tourism was of more interest to the surrounding regions than to the city itself.

This type of organizing city persisted until the 1988 Games. (Lake Placid in 1980 could be seen as an exception, but they were the only candidate after Chamonix and Vancouver withdrew.)

Small towns of Regional Significance

After Calgary, the Winter Olympics were given to small towns (Albertville in 1992, and

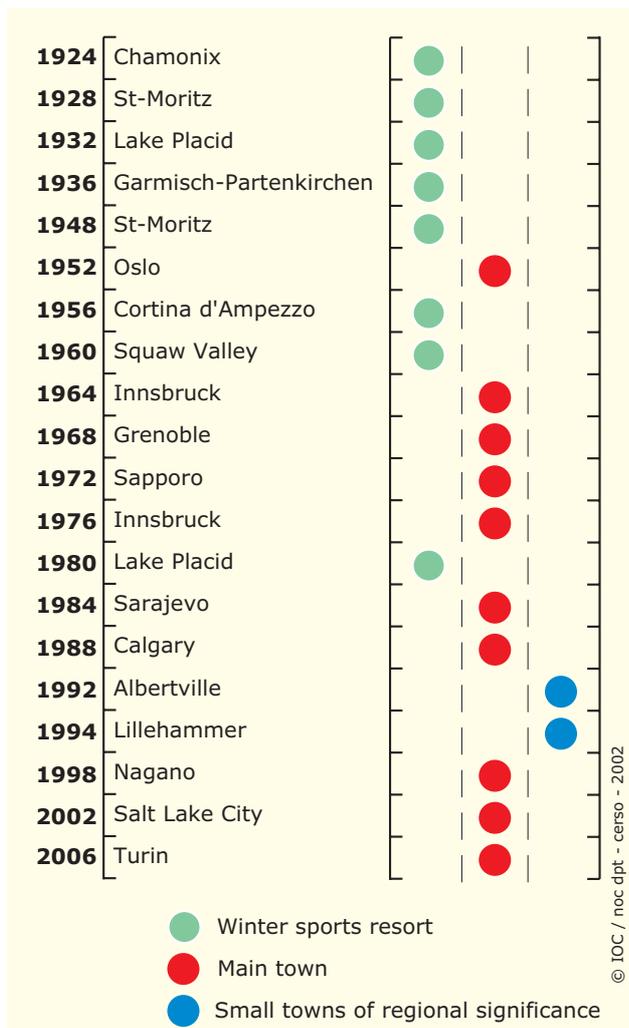


Lillehammer: a medium-sized city (IOC, Museum Olympic Collection)

Lillehammer in 1994). However, they represent a focal point for a whole range of territories. The requirements are the same as for a larger city, but are spread out over the whole surrounding area, and are not focused on one particular city.

The organisation of the last Winter Olympics in Nagano, as well as the nomination of Salt Lake City and Turin for 2002 and 2006 would indicate that the trend towards "major cities" is making a comeback.

The rationale in terms of development and



Types of organising cities

land planning seems to be very different between a winter sports resort and a larger urban city. Winter sports resorts have the advantage of concentrating nearly all the events in their immediate vicinity. Furthermore, many of their infrastructures require only minor modifications to be suitable to host the competitions, hence leading to much lower organizational costs.

Larger cities generally host only a minimum of events, usually the skating events. Several other sites are necessary for the events that take place outside the city. The distance between the central organizing city and the satellite sites can generate higher costs: transportation, road construction, communications networks, and sometimes even more Olympic Villages if the distance is too great.

Although this type of organisation is more expensive, the land developments are to the

benefit of a much greater area. The 1924 Games were of benefit only to the valley of Chamonix, and very little to the rest of the Haute Savoie department, or even to the other sports resorts situated nearby such as St. Gervais or Megeve. However, the developments related to the 1992 Games in Albertville benefited a much greater area, including the main competition locations such as Albertville, La Tarentaise, Le Beaufortin and also the rest of the department of Savoie.

Expectations in terms of economic development

Many consider the organization of the Olympic Games as a providential event in terms of economic development. The expectations in terms of financial benefit are enormous at local levels, as well as at higher administrative levels. However, the organizing communities have not only to make a huge financial investment at the outset, but after the Games, they face high maintenance costs for the facilities installed for the Games. These expenses often weigh very heavily on local budgets for a long time, preventing further investments and developments.

In fact, this factor has been taken into account by some populations, who refused to organize the Games for these reasons, (Denver in 1976) or refused to apply to host the Games (Swiss voters voted no to the Games in 1968, 1976, 1980 and 1996). The last four Organizing Committees (Calgary, Albertville, Lillehammer and Nagano) have tried to face up to this delicate problem by planning multi-purpose facilities that could be used for other



Example of the reconversion of the sports facilities used during the Olympics (the skating rink where the speed skating events were held is now used as an athletics stadium for the town of Albertville) (IOC, Museum Olympic Collection)

events subsequently. They also made a concerted effort to have the "Games financed by the Games".

Is the organization of the Olympics an exceptional starting point for the economic development of a city or its region? The response is far from certain, and an assessment of the repercussions of such an event on the very complex mountain environment seems very difficult.

Applications: a wider choice of locations

It is probable that more and more cities will apply to host the Winter Olympic Games. The exceptional media attention surrounding the event can be the source of satisfaction (or enormous disappointment, such as that of the Swiss when Turin was nominated to host the 2006 Games), and of great expectations. (How well known internationally would Albertville or Lillehammer be without having hosted the Games? Salt Lake City, and Utah in general, had only moderately developed winter sports infrastructures before the Games).

In Europe, the hopes and aspirations of the Eastern European countries will no doubt be rewarded one day; Zakopane in Poland and Poprad Tatry in Slovakia might be candidates again to host the 2010 Games. Sarajevo is also in the running for the same Games, but mostly in a symbolic aspect. In Asia, the application by Muju in South Korea and Harbin (China) to host the Winter Olympics in 2010 opens the door to the IOC on a wider choice of locations in this continent. South Korea has been increasingly present in winter sports over the last few years, in terms of participation and results, but also in terms of organization, with some major competitions, such as the recent downhill skiing World Cup events held at Yongpyong. (Downhill skiing events are doubtless the most complicated to organize, given the topography and the infrastructures required, as well as the implicit challenges confronting the organization of a larger event such as the Olympics.)

There are several other countries in the southern hemisphere that have the capacity to be candidates for the Games, such as Chile, Argentina, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Christchurch may be a candidate for



The growing presence of Korea offers an alternative candidate to the Japanese in Asia (Allsport)

the 2010 Games). Many of these countries have already organized large international events (the World Skiing Championships in Portillo in 1966, Ice hockey World Championships, as well as alpine skiing and artistic skiing world cups). But what would be the impact of organizing the Games in the middle of the summer for the majority of winter sports enthusiasts living in the northern hemisphere? The television channels, one of the major sources of support behind Organizing Committees, might feel less enthusiastic about broadcasting winter sports to spectators who are more interested in the sea and the sand, than in the snow.