Should the Olympics Have a Permanent Home?
By Tribune News Service, adapted by Newsela staff
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In this July 2015 photo, the Olympic Park is under construction for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Olympics offers 28 sports, 300 events, 10,500 athletes and, with the exception of five football venues, are all packed into Rio for 17 days. The Paralympics add two more weeks, and thousands more athletes. Photo: AP Photo/Leo Correa

1 The Olympics are in need of a financial solution. In the heat of summer, there’s nothing better than cheering on your country’s athletes and Olympic teams. But the Games’ price tag for host nations has soared substantially high. Perhaps we need to consider permanent sites for the Summer and Winter Olympic games.

Though Brazil has been sliding into what it is calling “financial calamity,” the Olympics have gone on as scheduled in Rio de Janeiro.

No matter that a security force of 85,000 soldiers and police officers was required.

No matter that Brazil would benefit more from using public funds on affordable housing and clean water for its citizens rather than costly new sports facilities.

No matter that the final price tag for the Rio Olympics are expected to be greater than $20 billion.

“We are in a moment in the world where we need to be reasonable with the way we spend money,” said Fernando Meirelles, the film director who choreographed the Rio opening ceremonies. “When 40 percent of the homes in Brazil have no sanitation, you can’t really be spending (billions) for a show.”

That’s a message that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) needs to hear loud and clear.
Picking a permanent home

Where should the permanent Olympic sites be? Why not ask the athletes? A board of former and current Olympic medal winners would know the top existing facilities in their sports.

It may make sense for Greece, where the Olympics originated more than 3,000 years ago, to be among the permanent sites, too. Such facilities would receive regular upkeep to remain state-of-the-art and help Greece’s struggling economy.

The idea of permanent Olympic sites dates back more than three decades. In 1984, F. Don Miller and William Simon of the U.S. Olympic Committee proposed permanent sites in North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. According to their plan, the Olympics would alternate between each continent.

What else would such a change accomplish?

First, it would end the insane bidding wars to host the games and help put a stop to the bribes that are often involved. More importantly, it would stabilize the costs for the Olympic host cities.

A permanent home would cut costs that keep rising.

Montreal in 1976, Athens in 2004, and now Rio compromised their citizens’ future for the opportunity to throw a party for the rest of the world. These cities spent billions of dollars they didn't have. Unfortunately, the spending continues to spike. The 2008 Summer Games in Beijing cost more than $42 billion, and Russia spent more than $50 billion for the Sochi Winter Olympics six years later. Costs will continue to spiral upward with the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, where a new stadium will cost $2 billion alone!

By splitting television and advertising revenue between the permanent sites, there would be no need to build new facilities for the next Summer or Winter Games. Of course, the world rarely operates in such a logical, fair way, but by using permanent sites, the IOC would have a chance to polish its tarnished image.

Fewer upfront costs could mean redirecting profits to developing countries for vaccines and food assistance. Such programs would revitalize the image of the Olympic games. From the recent doping scandals to reports of polluted water in Rio, you would think those in charge of the Olympics would be eager to clean up their act. Now’s their chance.
On the contrary, hosting the Olympics promotes national pride

2 The seemingly endless problems with the Rio Games have prompted calls for new ways of organizing the games. Instead of having nations compete to host the games, some think they should be permanently held in Greece, or in permanent facilities in North and South America, Europe, Asia and Africa. Keeping the Olympic Games in Greece or in permanent sites on five continents would diminish the majesty and international scope of the games. Doing this would be very wrong.

This would be a serious mistake. It would deprive countries of a chance to show national pride, boost their economies and, most importantly, make history. The Olympics represent the ultimate opportunity to showcase a national identity on the global stage.

Hosting the Olympics helps celebrate recovery.

For example, the 1964 Tokyo Olympics marked a shining moment in Japan’s history. It restored Japan’s national pride after it was defeated in World War II, and it signaled the country’s long, victorious climb toward becoming an international economic power.

Those Olympics helped rebuild the nation’s infrastructure. Tokyo’s public transportation network was given a major boost. The bullet train connecting Tokyo and Osaka started operating just days before the Games were held and the Metropolitan Expressway, the highway system in central Tokyo, was newly constructed for the games. Tokyo’s public broadcasting system was also upgraded for the Olympics, which encouraged Japanese families to purchase color television sets.

The 2012 Olympics in London showed that a vast majority of British citizens felt a renewed sense of national pride because their nation was hosting the Games. This sense of pride is invaluable to a nation.

Hosting the Olympics extends beyond the sporting events.

The Olympics have also made history for reasons larger than the sports themselves.

During the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany, Nazi leader Adolf Hitler planned to show the world that the Aryan people, meaning whites of Northern European ancestry, were the dominant race. Jesse Owens, an African-American, proved him wrong by becoming the most successful athlete of those games.
Owens became the first American to win four track and field gold medals at a single Olympics, a record that stood for 48 years. The fact that Owens did this in Berlin, in front of Hitler himself, added a layer of meaning to his achievements. Hitler wouldn’t have been as humiliated if the Olympics had taken place somewhere else in the world.

Another case where the world was focused on the Olympics came in 1956 in Melbourne, Australia. Back then, Australia was an exotic, unknown place for much of the world, which caused great interest in the Melbourne games.

However, armed conflict threatened to disrupt the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. Earlier that year, tanks from the Soviet Union rolled into Hungary to crush an anti-Communist revolt by the Hungarians, who were vastly outnumbered and outgunned.

In Melbourne, the Soviet water polo team met the Hungarians in the 1956 Olympic semifinals. Hungary got the world’s attention by winning the match 4-0. The match turned ugly after a Hungarian player was pulled from the pool bleeding with a deep gash over his eye, the result of a head butt from a Soviet player.

A brawl involving players and spectators quickly started, and the police had to step in to prevent a riot. But again, the brave Hungarians prevailed.

The Olympics do not belong to any single nation. The Olympics belong to the world. Any major city that wants to host the Olympic games (and foot the bill for everything that goes along with the games) should be eligible to host them.