INTRODUCTION

This reference document is designed to trace the Olympic programme’s evolution and the Olympic Charter rules that have defined and shaped it. Additionally, it focuses on who has been involved in the assessment and revisions as well as on how the evolution is reflected historically at the Games.

The document does not cover the detailed evolution of the programme of Olympic arts competitions and festivals, nor the demonstration sports at the Olympic Games.

SPORT, DISCIPLINE AND EVENT

DEFINITIONS

The First List of Possible Sports

At the 1894 Paris International Congress for the Re-establishment of the Olympic Games where the decision was made to re-establish the Games, the question of what sports might be included was also studied. The Commission assigned to examine the question arrived at a list of sports that was unanimously accepted by the Congress participants.

The 1894 list of possible sports that could be included consisted of athletics, rowing, sailing, swimming, skating, fencing, boxing, wrestling, shooting, gymnastics, cycling as well as “athletic games” such as football, lawn tennis and the French “jeu de paume”.

Obligatory & Optional Sports

As early as 1912 the idea of establishing categories of sports was considered. After lengthy discussions, two categories were chosen for use in the period between 1923 and 1957. Obligatory sports, also referred to as compulsory, were those that had to be included on the Programme. On the other hand, optional sports, which were also referred to facultative, were IOC designated sports which an Olympic Games Organising Committee (OCOG) could choose from to propose for possible inclusion on the Programme of their edition of the Games.

Olympic Sport

Despite the fact that the term sport has been used since 1894, it was not until the 1982 Olympic Charter that the specification was made that a sport which is included on the official Programme is an Olympic sport.

Discipline & Event

It was also not until the 1982 Olympic Charter that definitions were introduced for the terms discipline and event. A discipline is a branch of an Olympic sport that consisted of one or more events. An event, included under a sport or discipline, is a competition for which there were final results and medals awarded.

Olympic Winter Sports

In the case of the Winter Games, it was the acceptance of then IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch’s proposal that led to the inclusion of a definition of winter sports starting with the 1983 edition of the Charter. By definition a winter sport is only one that takes place on ice or snow.
ASSESSMENT AND REVISION

- Assessment and revision of the Olympic programme has existed from the very beginning. The fact that the list of sports approved by the 1894 Congress was one an OCOG could choose from meant that variation was inevitably open to discussion. The emergence of International Sports Federations (IFs) and their role in the Olympic Games and Movement as well as the quickly increasing size of the Games and inclusion of sports that were viewed by some IOC members as perhaps being not so universal have also contributed to the Programme's evolution.

- In addition to 1894 there have been two other occasions where members of an Olympic Congress played a key role in helping to define the Olympic programme. Their recommendations on the subject of obligatory and optional sports that were made at the 1914 Congress stalled due to World War I. However, the subject was again addressed at the 1921 Congress and this helped the IOC to define a list of these two categories of sport that was then include for the first time in the 1924 Olympic Charter.

- It was also with the modifications to the Olympic Charter rules in 1924 that the IOC began to strongly assert its control over the shape of the Programme. While the OCOG could still choose from some sports it was the IOC that ultimately gave its approval to the Programme for a Games edition. It was also the IOC, or more specifically the Executive Board (EB), that the IFs were to work with in order to determine which events were to be included on the programme of the Games.

- Feedback gained from Olympic Congresses or from the IFs that are responsible for the governance of their respective sports is not the only way in which the IOC has evaluated the Olympic programme over the years. Throughout its history, the IOC has also established its own working groups and committees to assess the Olympic Programme. Today, it is the IOC Olympic Programme Commission that carries out a systematic review of the Programme after each edition of the Games. Composed of IOC members as well as National Olympic Committee (NOC), IF and athlete representatives this Commission is responsible for reviewing the Programme and making recommendations to the IOC Executive Board and Session.

- When it comes to the matter of final decision making for the Olympic programme the roles of the IOC and the IFs that were established in 1924 have remained largely the same. It is still the IOC Session that decides on the sports to be included on the Programme. The EB, after consultation with the IFs, still decides the events.

- With the introduction of Agenda 2020, the OCOGs again have the possibility to have a more interactive role in the process of the shaping of the Olympic programme. Added to the Olympic Charter in 2014, it is now stipulated that an OCOG can propose one or more additional events to be considered by the IOC Executive Board for inclusion, but only for their specific edition of the Games. This strategy is designed to incorporate new flexibility into the way in which events are chosen and introduce more innovation and a focus on youth into the Games.
The first inclusion of a ‘widely practised’ criteria for sports was in the 1949 Olympic Charter where it was stipulated that for consideration on the Summer Games Programme a sport must be practised in at least 10 countries. In 1955 this number was increased to 20 and in 1958 to 25. Over time, a continental criteria was added and numeric requirements increased for both gender and Games type.

**Summer Games**

**Men:**
- between 1972 and 1980 – at least 40 countries and 3 continents
- between 1982 and 1990 – at least 50 countries and 3 continents
- between 1991 and 2004 – at least 75 countries and 4 continents

**Women:**
- between 1972 and 1980 – at least 25 countries and 2 continents
- between 1982 and 1990 – at least 35 countries and 3 continents
- between 1991 and 2004 – at least 40 countries and 3 continents

**Winter Games**

**Men:**
- between 1972 and 1980 – at least 25 countries and 2 continents

**Women:**
- between 1972 and 1980 – at least 20 countries and 2 continents

**Men and/or Women:**
- between 1982 and 2004 – at least 25 countries and 3 continents

Beginning with the 2007 Charter this stipulation was removed.
KEY CRITERIA
CHANGES con’t

‘Widely Practised’ Disciplines

‘Widely practised’ criteria for a discipline was introduced at the same time as its definition in the 1982 Olympic Charter. The criteria were the same as those for a sport. Timing of further increases and distinctions for gender and Games type, as well as the removal of such stipulations, were also the same those for a sport.

‘Widely Practised’ Events

In the case of the events, the first inclusion of a ‘widely practised’ criteria was in the 1982 edition of the Olympic Charter. There it was stipulated that for consideration on the Summer or Winter Games Olympic programme an event, either for men’s or women’s, must be practised in at least 25 countries on 3 continents. This stipulation remained in the Charter until 1990.

Beginning in 1991 and remaining in place until 2004, a modified version of the criteria was introduced into the Charter with the number of countries for men’s events increased to 50 and the women’s were raised to 35. The ‘practise’ numbers for the continents remained unchanged.

Amateur Status

A limited number of events specifically for professional athletes – for example fencing in 1894 and 1900 - were included in the earliest editions of the Olympic Games.

The IOC’s increasing focus on participation being limited to amateur athletes led to the Charter appearance of a criteria that sports on the Olympic programme also be reserved for amateurs only. This stipulation was included in the period between 1930 and 1946.

‘Other’ Sports and Events Criteria

Over the years ‘other’ criteria has also been added or removed from editions of the Olympic Charter. The actual number of teams participating in the Games, for example, could be enough for a team event to be excluded from a Games edition if that number was deemed to be too small.

With the introduction of the terminology of Olympic sport in 1982, other criteria defining an Olympic sport was added to the Charter until 1990. Amongst these, were stipulations that sports using mechanical propulsion were not to be considered, the cost of staging the sport was to be taken into consideration and the sport should ‘serve the harmonious physical and moral development of the abilities’ of those taking part in it.

World Anti-Doping Code

Beginning with the December 1999 edition of the Charter the stipulation was added that in order to be considered for inclusion on the Olympic programme a sport must comply with the Olympic Movement Anti-Doping Code, which was subsequently named the World Anti-Doping Code.
AT THE GAMES

- From the Games of the I Olympiad Athens 1896 the size of the Olympic programme has grown from 43 events in 10 sports and disciplines to more than 300 events in 49 sports and discipline in 2020. The Winter Games have also witnessed a large increase, from 16 events in 9 sports and disciplines in 1924 in Chamonix to more than 100 events, but in 15 sports and disciplines in 2018.

- PyeongChang 2018 is the first edition of the Winter Games at which the application of Agenda 2020 recommendations relating to the Olympic programme is seen. Curling mixed doubles, both a men's and a women's speed skating mass start event, an Alpine skiing mixed team event as well as a men's and a women’s snowboard big air event have all been added to the Programme for 2018.

- In the case of the Summer Games, Tokyo 2020 is the first edition where, based on the Agenda 2020 recommendations, an OCOG’s proposal of new sports will be included. Events in five sports – baseball/softball, skateboard, karate, sport climbing and surfing - will now be contested at the Games of the XXXII Olympiad.

DID YOU ALSO KNOW?

- Even though the Olympic Winter Games were not introduced until the 1920s, figure skating was included on the first list of possible Olympic sports. It was not, however, until the Games of the IV Olympiad London 1908 that skating was included on the Programme.

- In addition to considering the inclusion of sports, disciplines or events on the Olympic programme the IOC has also had to considered and make decisions on cases of which of them should also be excluded or eliminated from the Programme.

- At early Games editions, the exclusion of professionals impacted not only athletes but also the events. For example, sports such as tennis, which included professionals, were eliminated from the Programme. During the time of Avery Brundage’s presidency his strong views on the subject meant that other sports such as ice hockey, Alpine skiing and figure skating were also considered for removal.
SOURCES

- The Olympic Charter – all editions of the Charter are available electronically for online consultation via the links in the Key Collections section on the Olympic World Library (OWL).

- The Olympic Games Official Report – published by the each OCOG, these Reports for Summer and Winter Games editions are available electronically for online consultation via the links in the Key Collections section on the Olympic World Library (OWL).

- For further information and links to sources see the “Zoom In” on “The Olympic Programme” on the Olympic World Library (OWL).

CREDITS

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