

Olympics – heaven or hell?

As the cost of staging the Athens Olympics continues to grow, the world asks: will the games be a success?

1 Complete the table of Olympic statistics with figures from the box below.

€4.6 billion	€6 billion	€100 million	€189 million
202	5.2 million	3.4 million	1.2 million
			198

(a) Cost of running the 2004 games		(d) Number of tickets available	
(b) Original budget for running the games		(e) Number of tickets unsold	
(c) Cost of the main stadium roof		(f) Number of competing nations	

2 Scan the article about the Olympics and check your answers to exercise 1.

Spiralling costs and corruption. The cost of hosting the Athens Olympics will be much higher than predicted, according to Greece's finance minister. The bill is now likely to reach 6bn euros (£3.9bn). The original budget for the Games was 4.6bn euros. Many problems have contributed towards this escalation in costs. These include the now infamous construction delays and with current fears of a terrorist strike, meeting the biggest ever security bill. Overspending is now so high that the national budget deficit is likely to *spiral*. Fears of terrorist attacks, unfinished construction and high hotel prices mean that 3.4m of the 5.2m tickets issued are still unsold. The authorities have been criticised for their ambitious plans, such as the complicated main stadium roof, which cost a mammoth 189m euros to build and was only fitted a few weeks ago. The race against time to complete all the venues continues.

Meanwhile, in Beijing, China's auditor general has found that money for Olympic projects has been *siphoned off* from China's 2003 budget. It seems that \$170m (£93.7m) is missing amidst widespread *embezzlement*. Much has been spent on

building homes for the organising committee's staff. Problems include wasteful spending and tax evasion.

The Games have long been a high point in global advertising events and the Olympic statistics are impressive. A record 202 nations are set to compete this August and around 21,500 members of the world's media are expected to cover the event. Brands inextricably linked to the Games include Coca Cola and Visa. Visa enjoys *exclusivity* as the only credit card accepted at the Games. This year Kodak, which has advertised since the first modern Games in 1896, will be pushing its digital products. However, some experts question the value of advertising at the Games for any except the biggest global brands. One risk is that if there was a terrorist attack, the key sponsors would be linked forever in the minds of millions of global viewers. As the Olympic torch continues its journey through Europe, and the world awaits the spectacle, many questions are being asked: Is the cost too high? Have the Games become too commercialized? And just how much corruption surrounds the event?

3 Read the whole article and list the main problems which could prevent a successful 2004 Olympics.

4 Match the words in *italics* in the article to the definitions below.

- (a) illegally moved money from one other account
- (b) to continuously become worse
- (c) the right to sell something, limited to just one company
- (d) stealing money you have been entrusted

Some definitions based on *Macmillan English Dictionary*. Text © Bloomsbury Publishing Plc 2002

5 Discuss the following questions in small groups and report your ideas to the class.

- (a) Do you believe that the construction will be completed on time?
- (b) Do you think that the games have become too commercial?
- (c) Can anything be done to prevent corruption in organising such events?