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Research on Sports Events Empowering Urban Renewal: Overseas Experience and the Development of Cultural Teaching Resources for International Chinese Education in Hainan

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Abstract: The interaction between large-scale sports events and urban renewal has emerged as a critical and increasingly prominent issue within the field of contemporary urban research. This paper systematically reviews the practical experience of cities in developed countries, including Barcelona and Sydney, in leveraging the Olympic Games to promote spatial reconstruction and functional transformation of urban environments. Through a comprehensive analysis, the study identifies and refines several core mechanisms underpinning these successful transformations, namely advance strategic planning, post-event legacy benefiting local communities, and symbolic place-making construction. Building upon this international comparative framework, the paper then situates its analysis within the strategic context of the Hainan Free Trade Port construction initiative. It critically examines existing practical challenges in cultural teaching for international students in China, specifically identifying three key deficiencies: a notable lack of modern regional development materials in current curricula, an insufficient incorporation of comparative perspectives between China and foreign countries, and limited student comprehension of the ongoing free trade port construction process. On this analytical foundation, the paper proposes a comprehensive set of development principles and a detailed content framework for theme-based teaching resources centered on the sports events and urban renewal nexus. Furthermore, it thoroughly discusses the embedding pathways and extracurricular practice strategies for integrating these resources into existing courses such as "A Survey of China" and "Hainan Regional Culture." Ultimately, this research aims to provide valuable theoretical references and practical guidance for international Chinese regional culture teaching and the effective foreign narrative communication of the free trade port initiative.

Keywords: sports events; urban renewal; international Chinese education; cultural teaching; Hainan free trade port

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1. Introduction

Since the establishment of the Hainan Free Trade Port as a national strategy, its role as an international tourism consumption center has become increasingly well-defined. In this context, large-scale sports events serve not only as short-term instruments for enhancing the region's global visibility but also as sustained catalysts for coastal spatial reconfiguration, infrastructure modernization, and urban brand evolution. From the preparatory phase of the Sanya Asian Beach Games to the recurring hosting of the Hainan Island International Road Cycling Race, the convergence of sport and urban development is generating a distinctive spatial narrative across Hainan. Concurrently, foreign students in China—key participants in the Free Trade Port's cross-cultural exchange initiatives—face persistent misalignment between existing cultural pedagogy and contemporary realities: current teaching materials and classroom practices predominantly emphasize

historical and folkloric cultural elements, while giving limited attention to dynamic, present-day phenomena such as urban transformation and innovations in spatial governance driven by Free Trade Port construction. This temporal imbalance tends to confine overseas students' understanding of Hainan to a surface-level perception of 'island tourism', hindering deeper engagement with the underlying mechanisms of urban renewal and institutional openness [1, 2].

Existing scholarship on the interplay between sports events and urban renewal has yielded substantial insights within urban planning, sports economics, and related disciplines. Multifaceted analyses have addressed topics including legacy utilization of Olympic venues, post-event venue repurposing, and city revitalization through event-driven strategies. Yet such studies typically remain anchored in urban ontological analysis and seldom translate findings into culturally accessible teaching resources for international audiences [1, 3]. Conversely, research on Chinese language and regional culture instruction for foreign students has increasingly emphasized localized cultural content; however, it continues to prioritize traditional domains—such as folk festivals, culinary heritage, and intangible cultural practices—while underutilizing contemporary, cross-culturally resonant, and spatially grounded materials like major sports events. To bridge this gap, this paper adopts literature analysis and comparative case study as primary methodologies. Drawing on international experience, it explores how practices linking sports events to urban renewal can be adapted into pedagogical resources tailored for Hainan-based international students. The aim is to support meaningful enrichment of regional cultural instruction and contribute to more nuanced external communication frameworks for the Free Trade Port.

2. Reference and Enlightenment of Sports Event Enabling City Renewal in Developed Countries

As a representative example of large-scale sports events, the relationship between the modern Olympic Games and urban renewal has been empirically observed for over a century. Urban outcomes have varied significantly across host cities due to differences in developmental stage, governance approaches, and resource endowments [4]. In some cases, post-event venue underutilization led to economic and functional inefficiencies; in others, the Games catalyzed comprehensive urban functional transformation. Barcelona and Sydney are widely regarded as benchmark cases, distinguished by strategic long-term planning and enduring legacy integration.

2.1. Barcelona: Embedding the Event into the Strategic Framework for the Long-Term Renewal of the City

The preparatory process for the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games functioned as a city renewal initiative catalyzed by sport. Prior to securing the hosting rights, Barcelona faced multiple urban challenges, including deterioration of the historic core, industrial decentralization, and underutilized coastal zones. Urban spatial development exhibited pronounced stagnation. The national '1992 Plan' treated the Olympic Games not as a standalone sporting event but as an integral component of broader urban development strategy, thereby establishing a deeply integrated relationship between event infrastructure and long-term renewal [5]. Specifically, Barcelona's approach operated across three dimensions: first, spatially, Olympic venues were deliberately distributed across four distinct zones—Montjuïc Mountain, the Diagonal area, the coastal zone, and satellite municipalities—avoiding concentration in a single district. This decentralized configuration satisfied functional requirements while simultaneously stimulating coordinated regeneration across diverse urban areas; second, regarding post-event management, the Barcelona Permisio agency was established prior to the Games to oversee unified, market-oriented operation of all venues, enabling newly constructed facilities to achieve financial sustainability without ongoing public subsidy; third, the Games accelerated major infrastructural transformations—including completion of a five-kilometer beachfront promenade, comprehensive port redevelopment, and integration of

two ring road systems—facilitating Barcelona’s evolution from a traditional industrial port city into a leading European destination for tourism and culture. This transformation reflects deliberate strategic alignment with the Olympic cycle, rather than an incidental outcome.

2.2. Sydney: Lead Brownfield Regeneration and Community Building with the Concept of “Green Olympics”

The 2000 Sydney Olympic Games marked the first systematic integration of environmental sustainability principles across all preparatory phases. Site selection and construction strategies offered a new model for urban renewal. Homebush Bay—the primary Olympic venue—had previously served as New South Wales’ largest landfill, accumulating approximately 9 million cubic meters of domestic and industrial waste since the 1960s. The site suffered severe contamination and was widely regarded as a blight on the city. Rather than avoiding this legacy, the Sydney authorities embraced it as a demonstration platform for the ‘Green Olympics’ vision, committing AUD 2.3 billion to ecological remediation. The project employed innovative in-situ waste containment, sealing contaminants beneath a 1-meter clay barrier; introduced 40 million earthworms to accelerate organic waste decomposition; and utilized phytoremediation—leveraging plant root systems for soil stabilization, water retention, and air purification. Venue construction adhered strictly to the ‘3R’ framework—reduce, reuse, recycle [6]. Approximately 220,000 cubic meters of reclaimed construction material were incorporated into the main stadium, while waste recovery during Olympic Village construction achieved a 94% recycling rate. Post-Games, the athletes’ village was reconfigured into a sustainable residential community accommodating roughly 5,400 residents, complete with educational facilities and commercial amenities; the Olympic Park was permanently opened to the public, evolving into a multifunctional urban space supporting sport, exhibitions, recreation, and eco-tourism. This case illustrates how major sporting events can catalyze integrated environmental governance and community revitalization—contingent upon coordinated pre-event planning that unifies ecological restoration, infrastructure development, and long-term civic functionality, rather than sequential, reactive approaches.

2.3. Enlightenment of Foreign Experience on the Transformation of Cultural Teaching Materials

Although the cases of Barcelona and Sydney differ in institutional context and developmental stage, their core insights demonstrate cross-cultural applicability. From an urban governance perspective, both cases collectively illustrate three fundamental mechanisms through which sports events facilitate urban renewal: first, the strategic alignment mechanism—ensuring that event planning is integrated with long-term urban renewal objectives to prevent isolated, short-term infrastructure development; second, the public benefit mechanism—guaranteeing that post-event venues and spatial assets are repurposed as accessible community facilities or cultural leisure spaces for residents, rather than remaining restricted to elite or professional use; and third, the symbolic construction mechanism—leveraging sports events to cultivate distinctive urban cultural identities and enhance international visibility. For international Chinese language education, such practices offer a valuable comparative framework. International students often lack contextual reference points for understanding China’s urban renewal processes; the transformation of Barcelona from an industrial hub into a globally recognized tourist destination, and Sydney’s redevelopment of former landfill sites into vibrant green communities, provide complementary external perspectives that foster critical dialogue with domestic cases. Crucially, the underlying principles of spatial governance, environmental stewardship, and equitable public resource allocation embedded in these examples can be adapted into pedagogically rich content—moving beyond descriptive cultural exposition toward analytical inquiry into the rationale behind diverse urban development pathways.

3. The Realistic Foundation of Hainan Free Trade Port and the Pain Points of Cultural Teaching for International Students

3.1. Local Practice of Urban Renewal Driven by Sports Events in Hainan

The construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port provides a distinctive institutional context for the interplay between sports events and urban renewal. Leveraging its coastal geographical advantages and policy benefits associated with the free trade port, Hainan has progressively established a multi-tiered competitive event system to drive systematic spatial transformation of cities. For instance, in preparing for major international sporting events hosted in Sanya, efforts extended beyond upgrading arena infrastructure to encompass comprehensive urban renewal—such as revitalizing coastal zones, optimizing transportation networks, and enhancing public service facilities—ensuring that event-related benefits extend broadly into the urban public realm. Similarly, the annual Hainan Island International Road Cycling Race traces a route linking Haikou, Wenchang, Qionghai, Wanning, Lingshui, Sanya, and other jurisdictions, effectively forming a dynamic corridor of urban representation during the race period. Municipalities along the route have utilized this opportunity to advance road reconstruction, landscape enhancement, and cultural-tourism facility development, achieving spatial activation through a 'linear-to-areal' approach. Furthermore, the regular hosting of sailing competitions, beach marathons, and similar events continues to redefine the public character of coastal areas including Haikou Bay and Sanya Bay, facilitating their evolution from predominantly tourism-oriented spaces to multifunctional zones integrating sports, leisure, and consumption. While differing in scale and global visibility from mega-events such as the Olympic Games, these initiatives share a comparable logic of interaction among events, spatial practices, and urban development, offering abundant localized cases for pedagogical resource development.

3.2. Triple Pain Points of Cultural Teaching for International Students in China

However, in sharp contrast to the active practice of sports events driving urban renewal in Hainan, cultural teaching for international students in China faces notable challenges in content development and delivery [7, 8]. Analysis of current pedagogical practices and scholarly literature reveals three persistent pain points.

First, teaching materials exhibit a strong traditional preference while omitting contemporary development narratives. Whether drawn from general textbooks or locally developed supplements, cultural instruction for international students continues to emphasize static traditional symbols—such as the Spring Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, traditional Chinese medicine, martial arts, and tea ceremony—without adequately integrating dynamic themes like urban renewal, regional economic transformation, and institutional innovation in modern China. As a result, learners often form a symbolic and surface-level understanding of Chinese culture, associating it primarily with food, festivals, and historic architecture; existing curricular content unintentionally reinforces this limited perception. For international students in Hainan, this gap is especially pronounced: the visible transformations they encounter daily—including free trade port infrastructure, coastal spatial reconfiguration, and venue upgrades for major sporting events—are rarely incorporated into classroom instruction, creating a disconnect between academic learning and lived experience [5].

Second, cross-cultural comparative frameworks remain underutilized. Regional cultural instruction typically follows a unidirectional transmission model—presenting Hainan's history, customs, and landscapes without situating them within broader global contexts. While effective for factual knowledge transfer, this approach falls short in cultivating students' capacity for cultural interpretation and critical analysis. For instance, when examining urban renewal driven by sports events, students who learn only about venue construction in Hainan—without exposure to Barcelona's decentralized planning strategies or Sydney's brownfield regeneration models—struggle to grasp the underlying rationale for sport-led urban development. Consequently, China-specific practices risk

being perceived as isolated cases rather than situated responses within wider international urban governance trends.

Third, international students' understanding of the Hainan Free Trade Port remains shallow [9]. Due to temporal and spatial imbalances in curriculum design, many students continue to associate Hainan predominantly with its tourism image—'sunshine and beaches'—and lack foundational awareness of the Free Trade Port's institutional architecture, the spatial logic underpinning urban renewal, and the functional role of sports events within this framework. This cognitive limitation not only constrains their ability to engage meaningfully with contemporary Chinese development paradigms but also diminishes their potential as intercultural intermediaries. When sharing impressions of Hainan with peers abroad, students frequently rely on generic promotional language, failing to convey the complexity, strategic intent, and innovative dimensions of the Free Trade Port initiative.

4. Principles of Teaching Resource Development

In view of the above challenges, developing teaching resources on sports events aligned with urban renewal requires systematic design in content selection, difficulty calibration, and presentation methods. Such resources must fulfill the language teaching objectives of international Chinese education while simultaneously supporting regional cultural communication and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

First, language difficulty must be systematically classified and adapted. Resources should be tailored to the Chinese proficiency levels of international learners. For beginners, emphasis should be placed on foundational vocabulary and straightforward descriptions of sports events and urban renewal processes—such as venue names and key terms related to spatial transformation. For intermediate and advanced learners, authentic materials—including policy excerpts, news reports, and analytical commentaries—can be incorporated to strengthen complex text comprehension and argumentative expression. This tiered approach not only enhances language acquisition efficiency but also ensures cultural content remains cognitively accessible; excessive linguistic complexity may impede students' engagement with urban renewal themes.

Second, resource development should promote reciprocal learning through comparative case studies. Rather than presenting China's experiences in isolation, materials should integrate international examples—such as those from Barcelona and Sydney—with domestic cases, including those from Hainan. Such comparison must go beyond parallel listing and instead employ clearly defined analytical dimensions—such as planning philosophy, environmental integration strategies, and post-event utilization models—to guide learners in identifying shared principles across contexts and distinguishing context-specific features [2, 10].

Third, content must be grounded in verifiable facts and balanced representation. Teaching resources should avoid overstating economic benefits or presenting urban renewal outcomes in an uncritically positive light. For instance, when examining Barcelona's Olympic legacy, attention should include the displacement effects associated with Olympic Village construction on pre-existing communities; similarly, discussions of Sydney's experience should acknowledge post-Games financial constraints affecting certain venues. This commitment to factual accuracy upholds academic integrity and supports the development of nuanced, evidence-based perspectives on China's developmental practices among international learners.

Fourth, resources must bridge classroom instruction and experiential learning. A cohesive pedagogical loop—linking in-class textual analysis with out-of-class application—should be established. Structured reading and discussion materials are delivered during class time, while follow-up tasks encourage students to observe, document, and reflect on local sports-related spaces, thereby reinforcing conceptual understanding through direct, contextualized engagement [3, 7].

5. Conclusion

Sports events serve as catalysts for urban renewal, intersecting urban planning, sports economics, and cultural pedagogy. Drawing on international experience from Barcelona and Sydney, this paper identifies three core mechanisms: alignment of event planning with long-term urban strategy, post-event public access to infrastructure, and the reconfiguration of urban identity through sports-related symbolism. Against the backdrop of the Hainan Free Trade Port's development, the study identifies persistent challenges in teaching regional culture to international students—including limited availability of contemporary, region-specific materials; insufficient comparative frameworks between China and other jurisdictions; and shallow conceptual engagement with free trade port dynamics. In response, it proposes guiding principles, a structured content framework, and actionable pathways for developing pedagogical resources. The contribution extends beyond enriching instructional materials for international Chinese language education: it introduces a 'spatial practice' discourse model for narrating the free trade port internationally. This approach enables international students to grasp the dynamic interplay between sports events and urban transformation, fostering informed, experiential understanding—and positioning them as potential interlocutors in cross-cultural urban dialogue.

This study remains focused on resource design and has not yet undergone systematic empirical validation in classroom settings. Future work should integrate questionnaire surveys and classroom observations with international students in Hainan to refine linguistic scaffolding, enhance multimedia delivery, and assess the impact of these resources on learners' urban cognition and cross-cultural critical thinking. Only through iterative cycles of implementation, feedback, and revision can such thematic resources evolve from conceptual proposals into scalable, replicable teaching tools—thereby sustaining the synergy between international Chinese language education and the global communication of free trade port development.

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