

# THE GROWTH OF THE OLYMPIC CITY OF BARCELONA

The organization of the Games of the XXV Olympiad in Barcelona in 1992 placed Barcelona in a privileged position to face with solid guarantees, some of the great targets of the end of the century and to promote and guide correctly the lines of its development, this was a future which is today a splendid reality.

The growth of Barcelona and its effort to maintain the leadership of the Spanish economic development have been systematically accompanied by the celebration of great events with international projection. This is a constant historical item, which was repeated on the occasion of the World Exhibitions of 1888 and 1929, and the Olympic Games of 1992.

by José Miguel Abad\*



These great events have always served to inspire the modernization of the city, to multiply our organizational capacity and to impulse our exterior image. The

Olympic meeting in 1992, I have repeated insistently, was the catalyst of many public and private initiatives which, conveniently planned, provided an unrepeatability opportunity to settle the bases of collective, ordered and prosperous development. The Olympic Games were a great source of positive energy, the utilization of which depended only on ourselves. We had the instrument in our hands. As for the responsibility for the future, we clearly had to look for it in ourselves.

May these first words of introduction be useful to settle some principles so that nobody would believe that the Olympic Games succeeded, just by themselves, to miraculously resolve all the persistent problems.



*Opening Ceremony of the Games of the XXV Olympiad in Barcelona.*



The Olympic Games are a sports event, obviously. But they are more than anything a social event. I would even say that they are the social event which cyclically calls on the highest expectation in the world. The parameters of the follow-up speak for themselves,

The technicians measured the audience in 1992 as over 3,000 television viewers during the Opening and Closing Ceremonies. One can faithfully say that Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain entered all the homes of the planet. But a long time before the magic opening date, even during the phase of the candidature, Barcelona was given ample space in the news media of the entire world. This signified an extraordinary free promotional effect without precedent. Barcelona's run in Olympic history has served to put it on the world map of great cities. To quantify the cost of an image campaign of this magnitude remains impossible but we can affirm, with some certainty, that there would not have been enough money to pay for it.

Today, almost nine years on, we cannot only confirm the clearly positive balance of the 'Games effect', we even see its tendency to consolidate and to last even longer. The most visible form of this, though not the only one, is the constant increase in the number and especially in the quality of tourism that is not dependent on the seasons, but permanent all year round.

I am referring to the numerous symposia, congresses, trade fairs and professional meetings of all kinds, that choose Barcelona. The pressure of demand is so strong that it explains and justifies only too well the construction, foreseen or completed, of more convention centres and more top category hotels. How far and how unwarranted by reality remain the intents which over the years 1988, 1989 and 1990 were undertaken by well-known representatives of the sector in order to prevent the amplification of the hotel



*The Olympic port "Nova Icaria de Parc de Mar".*



*The front of the Montjuic Olympic Stadium.*



*The Olympic Village buildings.*



offer. Fortunately, this short-sightedness was not shared by the public administration, nor by the people responsible for the Olympic project, nor by the dynamic entrepreneurs.

If the qualification given by the world to the organization of some Games is high or very high - in our case, they were unanimously qualified as 'the best ever

in history' - it is doubtless that the post-Games effect reaches levels that surpass the expectations which the very city dreams of during the Olympic Games. It is clear that this effect has to be fed constantly and that sleeping on your laurels could turn out to be catastrophic. That is the reason for the constant efforts realized by the organiza-

tions implicated in the promotion of Barcelona, whether public or private.

The above-mentioned post-Games effect is not a work hypothesis but a proven reality if, like almost everything in life, it is done well.

The organization of the Games, apart from the economical and social reactivation they imply, has above all an essential reflex on the improvement of the strategic infrastructures of the organizing city and its surroundings.

The Games were a great pretext for an immense totality of public investments, foreseen and unfinished, but necessary to respond to the dynamics of the territory to give them the green light.

As is well known, one of the characteristics defining any Olympic project is the time limit. One starts from zero, you reach the highest speed in a period of a few years to return to zero in several days, once the Closing Ceremony is over. This atypical rhythm demands a concentration of investments of such a size, that in normal circumstances, they would have needed much longer periods. But it is also clear that it allows much more energetic economical and social reactivation and development.

In other words, and to use a popular expression, the Games also served to make the city tackle its pending matters. And as for infrastructures, Barcelona did have quite a subject pending. The Games were the great occasion, the catalyst which I mentioned before. Mentioning all the infrastructure works - of transport on land, sea and air, of communications, residence, waste treating, etc. - would be too long to list.

From a town planning point of view, the recuperation of the seafront of Barcelona, with its defence plan of the coast and the subsequent rehabilitation of a totally degraded urban space that was segregated from the rest of the city, recuperating more than five kilometres of beaches for public use, the burying and disappearance of the



*The seafront recovered for the Games.*

railways - which were running along the coast and therefore made it impossible to reach the sea properly - and the construction of the Olympic Village are, in my opinion, the most important aspects.

All these improvements in the urban infrastructures, however important they were, did not have any direct incidence on the tourist sector, but they did on the improvement and diversification of the complementary offer based on the creation of important centres dedicated to time-off, such as the recuperation of the monumental centre of the city, the remodelling of the ancient port storehouses into a first class commercial and tourist centre, the continuation of the campaign to recuperate facades and the restoration of buildings, the creation of new cultural centres like the Casa de la Caridad or the Auditorium and the recuperation of the complex of the 'Spanish Village'.

Thus, at last Barcelona went back to the sea! Today the European Union gold stars on a blue flag are waving on its beaches as a symbol of quality.

Undoubtedly, this improvement in infrastructure and public installations was not an isolated phenomenon. The Olympic 'bug' reached - as could be expected - the private sector, the entrepreneur's initiative, which not only created new hotel accommodation but there was also real improvement and restoration of the already existing hotels. This revitalization of the Barcelona tourist sector served then, and I hope will go on serving, to end the excessive season dependence, to balance the binomial quality-price, to improve the attention to the client. to guarantee security, etc. It also served to penetrate into new segments of the offer of which one has called 'new types of tourism', for example weekend tourism especially directed towards the Spanish market, cultural tourism, sports tourism, monument

tourism, gastronomic tourism, etc. The upgrade of the industry had and is still having a multiplier effect on other agents of the tourist sector: travel agencies, tour operators, camp sites, apartments, means of transport, airlines and the commercial sector. Tourism promotes, directly and indirectly, the investments of many other economic sectors like construction, time-off industry, services, etc.

We faced a challenge which we could collectively resolve with good results. In 1992 the world was depending on us, and I sincerely believe that we met those expectations.

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*A crowd on the famous Barcelona street, 'Las Ramblas'.*