

# An Olympic Mosaic

Multidisciplinary Research and Dissemination of Olympic Studies  
**CEO-UAB: 20 Years**

## Editors

Emilio Fernández Peña  
Berta Cerezuela  
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**Publishers**

Ajuntament de Barcelona  
and Centre d'Estudis Olímpics  
de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

**Barcelona City Council Publications Board**

Ignasi Cardelús, Enric Casas, Eduard Vicente, Jordi Martí, Màrius Rubert, Jordi Campillo, Glòria Figuerola, Víctor Gimeno, Joan A. Dalmau, Carme Gibert, José Pérez Freijo.

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**Design and Layout**

Mireia Rocher, Ramon G. Sedó,

**Publishing and Printing**

Direcció d'Imatge i Serveis Editorials  
[www.bcn.cat/publicacions](http://www.bcn.cat/publicacions)

© Of the publication: Ajuntament de Barcelona and Centre d'Estudis Olímpics de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona  
© Of the texts: The authors

ISBN Ajuntament de Barcelona: 978-84-9850-317-3  
ISBN Centre d'Estudis Olímpics 978-84-938759-2-3

Legal Deposit: B: 23138-2011  
April 2011

Printed on paper from sustainable sources

**Acknowledgments**

This book has been published within the framework of celebrations marking the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Olympic Studies Centre at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (CEO-UAB), which was founded in June 1989.

We would like to express our thanks to all the people and institutions that, in one way or another, have helped to make this project a reality.

And, in particular, to CEO-UAB co-founder Barcelona City Council, which has made the printing of this publication possible.

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Ajuntament de Barcelona

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# **The Cultural Olympiad of Barcelona'92. Lights and Shadows. Lessons for the Future**

**Miquel de Moragas**

**Professor of Communication Theory; CEO-UAB Founder and Director, 1989-2009**

## **A brief historical introduction. What cultural programme do you propose?**

The idea of organising the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona has its origins in 1979 with the first talks between Narcís Serra, then Mayor of Barcelona and Juan Antonio Samaranch, then Spanish Ambassador to Moscow. These talks were formalised in 1982 after Samaranch had become President of the International Olympic Committee (July 1980) and Narcís Serra was appointed Spanish Minister of Defence by the Socialist government of Felipe González. Pasqual Maragall (also a Socialist), elected Mayor of Barcelona in 1983, enthusiastically took the lead of the project. Work began immediately after application in 1984 and culminated in October 1986 in Lausanne with Samaranch's phrase: "*À la ville de... Barcelone*" (Moragas and Botella 2002).

The candidature dossier included a bold answer to question 13 of the International Olympic Committee's questionnaire: *What cultural programme do you propose?* The response of Barcelona's candidature to that question was basically one main point: to do more and do it better than anyone, and to achieve it we shall organise a true Olympiad lasting four years.

Later, not all the promises were kept, which revealed that the cultural programme, like cultural policy programmes in general, does not allow for improvisations, but requires a highly complex solution, impossible to meet without the required theoretical reflection and planning, and without the commitment of multiple stakeholders.

Why talk in 2010, so many years later, about the Cultural Olympiad of Barcelona? We suggest talking about this for two reasons. Firstly, for the benefit of the Olympic Movement, to discover, in that past experience, some lessons for the future of the Cultural Olympiad and Olympic cultural policy in general. Secondly, in the interest of Barcelona and Catalonia, to rethink, critically, their own cultural policies using the unique experience of having hosted one of the main world events of our time.

## **Barcelona'92: a global success. Lights and shadows of the Cultural Olympiad**

The Barcelona Games merited a very positive assessment of the various diverse stakeholders, not only by President Samaranch when he closed the Games with the famous phrase "The best games in history", or by the representatives of international sports federations and National Olympic Committees but, more generally, by many independent actors, among whom were the international press and broadcasters, as shown in several academic studies (Moragas and Botella 1995; Kennett and Moragas 2006, 177-195; Moragas 2004, 225-234).

The keys to the success of Barcelona'92 must be sought in the multiple effects of the Games: the urban renewal of the city, economy, social involvement of citizens, facilities and sporting results, communication impact on the international media and effects in the medium term resulting in the consolidation of the tourism industry, etc.

In the context of this global success, the Cultural Olympiad is observed as a set of lights (multiple activities, some of which are of great quality) and shadows (an uneasy grouping within the central organisation of the event), and an important contribution to the project: the added value that the candidature dossier meant to bring about. Later, as we shall see, the real Olympic cultural programme of Barcelona'92 was developed outside the strict framework of the Cultural Olympiad in the organisation of the main festivals and rituals of Olympism.

## **The Cultural Olympiad in the context of the city's cultural policy**

To interpret the Cultural Olympiad in Barcelona, we need to refer to the importance that the public administration had on the Olympic organisational model of Barcelona'92 (Botella 2006, 139-148). Moreover, one should keep in mind that in Europe, especially in Catalonia, the public administration plays a key role in the cultural sphere, both in terms of infrastructure (theatres, concert halls, museums) and of the management of cultural events (consortia, festivals, etc.), with private initiatives being very dependent on subsidies. Private foundations, especially the cultural foundations of banking institutions, had a leading and visible role at the end of the Cultural Olympiad, coinciding with the Olympic Arts Festival.

The period of preparation and celebration of the Games coincided with numerous election campaigns,<sup>24</sup> and with a period of great political confrontation, particularly evident in the field of culture, between the City Council (Socialists) and the Government of Catalonia (Catalan Nationalists), a confrontation that was expressed ideologically as 'nationalism / cosmopolitan municipalism'.

In 1985, some attempts at 'cultural consensus'<sup>25</sup> failed to agree on the cultural policies of Barcelona and Catalonia regarding museum infrastructures, theatre and music facilities, libraries, the language normalisation programme, etc. In 1986, the then Catalan Minister of Culture, the Catalan Nationalist Max Cahner, wrote to the newspaper *Avui* (Cahner 1986) about his anxiety about the draft project of the Cultural Olympiad's that had been submitted for the bid and that had been entrusted exclusively to Socialist people connected with Pasqual Maragall.

Unlike what happened in other aspects of the organisation of the Games, the Government of Spain had a rather small role in the Cultural Olympiad. In 1992 the Spanish state had other important platforms for cultural projection: the celebration of the 5<sup>th</sup> centenary of the discovery of America and the Universal Expo in Seville. As for the Barcelona Games, the symbolic representation of the state focused on the presence and representation of King Juan Carlos and of the royal family in general, both in competition and at the ceremonies.

All this affected the Cultural Olympiad, which, in the major pacts and the general consensus between the different levels of government and social institutions organising the Games, was ultimately considered as a relatively minor activity in the context of the great event being prepared.

---

24. Since the nomination of Barcelona as the host city of the XXV<sup>th</sup> Olympiad (18 October 1986) until 1992, the year of the Games, there was only one year (1990) without elections. However, this period coincided with great rivalry between the President of the Government of Catalonia Jordi Pujol (Catalan Nationalist) (1980-2003) and the Mayor of Barcelona Pasqual Maragall (Socialist) (1982-1997).

25. In 1985, the Catalan Minister of Culture (Joan Rigol) had proposed a 'cultural pact' between the various authorities with responsibilities in the cultural field. But this process ended that year with the resignation of the Minister mentioned. The newspaper *El País* attributed this resignation to the impossibility of advancing the pact: "One of the fundamental reasons for the resignation of Rigol has been featured since the attack led by Convergència (Nationalist Party) against his political stance of openness to the opposition, qualified as pro-Socialist and against the cultural pact that he has negotiated." (*El País*, 12 December 1985).

## **The organisational model: the Cultural Olympiad separated from the Organising Committee for the Olympic Games**

The first organization chart of the Organising Committee for the 1992 Olympic Games (COOB'92) gave the structure of the Division of Culture, a responsibility for managing the cultural project, with an initial budget of 3.5 billion Pesetas. The Olympic gateway acts (receiving the Olympic flag, opening of the Barcelona'92 Exhibition in autumn 1988) although organised by the Division of Culture, according to the press, had little success with the public and artistic participation.

After a few days, the segregation of the Cultural Olympiad from the organisation of COOB'92 was approved, and the Cultural Olympiad Company Limited (OCSA) was founded, with capital provided by the Organising Committee, but with a separate local organising administration (COOB'92 1993, vol. 2, 78).

Thus, the COOB'92 Division of Culture had a very short life. Not like the Division of Communication, which, from that moment, assumed the highest cultural responsibilities within the Olympic organisation, as it was responsible for all processes involving symbolic production: the design and image of the Games, the torch relay and opening and closing ceremonies.

The history of OCSA, unlike COOB'92, was affected by several changes of direction, with a background of three main problems:

- The funding and sponsorship programme of OCSA, separate from the funding of the Games.
- The difficulty of inserting the cultural programme into the organisation of the Games (both by cultural players and by the Olympic organisers).
- The difficulty of achieving consensus among the political actors involved in the cultural sector.

## **The proposed model: the four-year Olympiad**

The cultural programme proposed in the Barcelona candidature offered "more than any other" and adopted a four-year duration of the Olympiad, thus differentiating the organisers from previous organisers and from other candidates that had focused the cultural offering on activities concentrated mostly in the same year as the celebration of the Games.

This plan involved an annual theme; 1988 - the inclusion of a cultural gateway, 1989 - year of sport, 1990 - year of the arts, 1991 - year of the future and, in 1992, the proposal of a more intense period of activities in the final months leading up to the Games called the Olympic Arts Festival.

This time-theme criterion was completed with the proposal of organising autumn festivals each year, with an extensive programme of cultural activities of the highest level, following the model of cultural policies of some major European capitals such as Berlin and Paris, which concentrate the offering of cultural excellence in this season of the year.

The entire programme was inspired by the principles of a new ideology of the cultural programme, which was proposed as a hallmark of Barcelona: creative, innovative, with few concessions to the commercialisation of art, truly cosmopolitan, etc.

To all this, we should add some far reaching cultural policy objectives that turned out to be unattainable during the short time from the start of the Olympics to the closing of the Games. The Olympics proved to be too short to achieve these goals. There are some that came about some years later, but others still remain to be accomplished in the Catalan cultural agenda of 2010.

## **The autumn festivals**

One of the main pledges of the Cultural Olympiad was organising a series of artistic, musical and theatrical activities concentrated in a single season (autumn). The Olympic Arts Festival, since 1992, was the culmination of these programmes on the dates closest to the Games.

According to the internal documents of the Cultural Olympiad (Olimpíada Cultural 1988b), the autumn festivals were intended as a framework to develop proposals for programmes in the areas of music and the performing arts in collaboration with public authorities and existing theatre and music festivals [...] in order to offer the Catalan capital a bright and coherent start to the season with national and international reach, in the fields of theatre, dance, music, opera, etc. This proposed the active involvement of all stakeholders of the local art scene and the realisation of truly international and powerful projects, with the most significant artists of the moment.

In 1990, for example, the autumn festival had five sub-programmes:

1. Theatre (36 shows).
2. Dance (eight performances).
3. Music (20 shows).
4. Outdoor shows (16 shows).
5. Exhibitions (four photographic exhibitions).

According to information published in the Official Report of Barcelona'92, it was not until July 1991 that the City Council, the Catalan Ministry of Culture and the Cultural Olympiad (OCSA) reached an agreement to organise the autumn festivals, after the first two had already been held in 1989 and 1990 (COOB'92 1993, vol. 2, 364).

## **The Olympic Arts Festival (Summer 1992)**

The Cultural Olympiad ended with the organisation of the Olympic Arts Festival, with over 200 activities, from April to August 1992 (COOB'92 1993, vol. 4, 323), which followed, more or less, the same format as the autumn festivals, although with a greater involvement of several private entities (banking foundations). The structure of this event is shown in Table 1.

## **Economy and finance**

The initial budget planned by the Organising Committee for the Cultural Olympiad was 3.5 billion Pesetas. To complete this budget, the Cultural Olympiad had other sources of supplementary financing: revenue from ticket sales, for television rights and sponsorship. Finally, the contribution from sponsors was limited (1.63 billion Pesetas), and funding from television rights was almost nonexistent.

The final budget, considered insufficient by the organisers, was 6.61 billion Pesetas, 59.3% provided by COOB'92, 24.6% by sponsors and 15.9% by its own resources (mainly entrance fees), see Table 2.

**Table 1: Olympic Arts Festival. June to August 1992. Types of activities**

| AREAS   | APPLICATIONS   |
|---|--|
| Music   | Music (classical and popular)<br>Opera   |
| Dance   | Numerous performances with participation of major local groups   |
| Theatre   | Local and international groups   |
| Exhibitions   | Olympics (not held)*<br>Technology, life, design, etc.<br>Art: mediaeval and contemporary  |
| Folk demonstrations   | <i>Sardanas</i> (traditional Catalan dancing)<br><i>Castells</i> (Catalan human pyramids)  |
| Popular festivals   | <i>Revetlla de Sant Joan</i>   |
| Cultural activities at the Olympic Village  | Not met  |
| Miscellaneous   | Philatelic (postage stamps)<br>Barcelona Awards  |
| VENUES  | ACTORS OF REFERENCE  |
| Major renovated cultural infrastructures (not complete)<br>Emblematic open spaces of the city<br>Areas of international recognition (tourism related)<br>Olympic venues (exclusive to the OC) | <i>Universal Catalans</i> : musicians, painters, architects, sculptors<br>(Gaudí, Miró, etc.).<br>World famous international artists |
| PRIVILEGED THEMES   | ABSENT THEMES  |
| Arts and sport<br>Environment<br>Avant-garde art<br>Design  | Olympics<br>Politics<br>Science  |

Source: COOB'92 1993.

(\*) The commemorative exhibition of the XXV<sup>th</sup> Olympiad of the modern era entitled "History of the Olympic Movement from its origins to today".

**Table 2: Budget for the Cultural Olympiad (in millions of Pesetas)**

|                             | 1989         | 1990         | 1991         | 1992         | Total        |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Revenue</b>              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Contributions of COOB'92 SA | 910          | 850          | 1,240        | 925          | 3,925        |
| Contributions from sponsors | 54           | 172          | 191          | 1,216        | 1,633        |
| Other                       | 196          | 227          | 321          | 313          | 1,057        |
| <b>Total revenue</b>        | <b>1,160</b> | <b>1,249</b> | <b>1,752</b> | <b>2,454</b> | <b>6,615</b> |
| <b>Expenses</b>             |              |              |              |              |              |
| Overheads                   | 310          | 277          | 285          | 356          | 1,228        |
| Programmes                  | 1,307        | 1,048        | 954          | 2,078        | 5,387        |
| <b>Total expenses</b>       | <b>1,617</b> | <b>1,325</b> | <b>1,239</b> | <b>2,434</b> | <b>6,615</b> |

Source: COOB'92 1993, vol. 2, 78-79.

Those responsible for the Cultural Olympiad (Guevara 1992) attributed disputes between OCSA and COOB'92 as a major cause of its economic difficulties, particularly the marginalisation of the Olympic sponsorship programme, but also increased costs derived from the need to duplicate administrative services (premises, staff, etc.). However, the Cultural Olympiad was able to benefit from tax privileges that were agreed upon by the organisers of the Olympic Games and the Seville Expo, also being held the in same year (Royal Decree Law 7/1989).

The Olympic Partners expressed no interest in sponsoring cultural activities and, moreover, imposed their own rules of incompatibility to prevent other companies from funding the Cultural Olympiad using the argument of having previously paid for exclusive rights for their respective major product lines. Thus, the Cultural Olympiad could not benefit from large revenues that, in the early 1990s, were generated by television rights and the implementation of the TOP sponsorship programme (TOP - The Olympic Partners), launched in Seoul in 1988.

Pep Subirós, CEO of Olimpíada Cultural SA declared that he was naïve to think they could obtain financial means by themselves, but they were blocked by a series of conditions in the Olympic project [...] They had the disadvantage of being closely tied to COOB, in the sense that when COOB signed an agreement of exclusivity, that also affected the Cultural Olympiad because, ultimately, the money stayed with COOB (Guevara 1992).

For example, Olympic Arts Festival publications only listed as sponsors Barcelona City Council, the Government of Catalonia, the airline Iberia and a few local media.

## The remaining targets

The ambitious proposal for a four-year Cultural Olympiad, offering such a big programme with so many cultural funding commitments for the city, ended up with several gaps.

These gaps, in my opinion, have their origin in a poor forecasting of achievable goals and badly calculated claims, as if cultural planning were based on intuition rather than a proper prospective analysis. This serious problem of political culture in Barcelona was revealed again a few years later with the development of another major cultural project in the city, the Universal Forum of Cultures Barcelona 2004, with initial promises that were neither satisfied nor recognised. In Barcelona we know full well the hard and often repeated question: What is the Cultural Olympiad? And some years later: What is this Universal Forum of Cultures?

Among the objectives not achieved, we can identify the following:

- To reduce the historical deficit of the cultural infrastructure that was inherited from Francoism.
- To revitalise cultural patronage.
- To form a new critical mass of actors and artists.
- To encourage creativity and cultural innovation.
- To promote local groups internationally.
- To coordinate the cultural activities of the different public administrations.

These objectives and intentions were difficult to bring about. As an example of exaggerated claims we can mention the case of the Barcelona Cultural Olympiad Awards, intended to cover matters that are not included by the Nobel prizes [...] and that [...] have the screening and support of communication networks in both hemispheres to ensure a more complete coverage (COOB'92 1986, 49). The truth is that Barcelona awards had little impact internationally, except in the media closest to those who won.

Most significant was the lack of foresight regarding the impacts of the Cultural Olympiad on Barcelona's cultural infrastructure (then clearly lacking). Initially, it was thought that culture would do something similar to what happened in the case of urban planning: that the Games would help to recover the deficit inherited from the Francoist regime in Barcelona by promoting the construction of facilities.

It was believed that the Games would constitute an opportunity to accelerate the construction of the cultural infrastructure needed, such as the Auditorium of Music, the Museum of Contemporary Art and the renovation of the Art Museum of Catalonia on Montjuïc (Guevara 1992).

However, the reality was very different: all these infrastructures were inaugurated a few years after the Games. The Auditorium opened in 1999, and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA) in 1995; for its part, the Art Museum of Catalonia on Montjuïc was remodelled in 1990, and its large oval room was used for different Olympic protocols in 1992. However, its large collection of Romanesque art was not opened until 1995.

Another major objective of the Cultural Olympiad was the continuation of autumn festivals after the Olympics, while maintaining broad institutional cooperation (referring to public authorities) in this field.

The autumn festivals had no such continuity. The time spent planning and managing cultural policy was to prove even slower than the time needed to build urban infrastructure, telecommunications and roads.

## **Cultural interpretation of the separation of COOB'92 and OCSA**

The separation of OCSA and COOB'92 was not only to have important economic and administrative consequences, but also important cultural consequences. The first, in my opinion, was the gradual distancing of the Cultural Olympiad from the symbolic references and rituals of the Olympic Movement. It is true that the Cultural Olympiad had begun to organise an exhibition on sport, but it is equally true that, in the end, one of the main activities planned for the Olympic Arts Festival in 1992 eventually disappeared from the schedule: a major exhibition about the Olympic Movement and its hundred year history.

This does not mean that the Barcelona Games had no Olympic cultural programme, but the Olympic cultural programme was developed out of the Cultural Olympiad. The Olympic cultural programme is in the ceremonies, rituals, communication design and the image of the Games. But the Cultural Olympiad was specifically left out on the edge of these great cultural activities and of communication.

Cultural causes of the separation? With the passage of time, and after removing personal and circumstantial aspects, it could be argued that the cause of the separation had its origin in the differences in the judgments of the planning, production and scheduling of activities between the cultural organisers and Olympic organisers.

The Olympic organisers wanting to free themselves from the complexity and improvisation that went with the cultural debate, in the context of the political rivalries touched upon above. The precision required by the Olympic organisation, which worked with a deadline, was considered incompatible with the cultural organisers' way of working. In turn, cultural organisers, somewhat indifferent to the Olympic or sporting organisers, preferred to keep their distance.

These differences were also influenced by the perception held by COOB'92 that the Cultural Olympiad was nothing more than a complementary activity, dispensable in order to obtain a successful Games. Worse luck was to come it should be recalled; the Olympic education programme, perhaps the main gap in the memory and legacy of Barcelona'92.

## **The corporate image of the Cultural Olympiad**

Another problem of the Cultural Olympiad of Barcelona'92 consisted precisely in an erratic communication and image policy. This would ultimately lead to an unfairly negative judgement on the set of activities undertaken by the Cultural Olympiad.

The increase in activity to four years and the variety of formats presented an excessively fragmented corporate image, starting when the heterogeneity of names: Cultural Olympiad, autumn festivals and Olympic Arts Festival. Other activities organised by OCSA were not adequately identified.

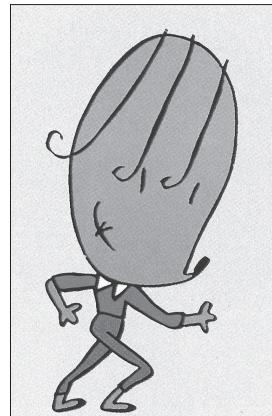
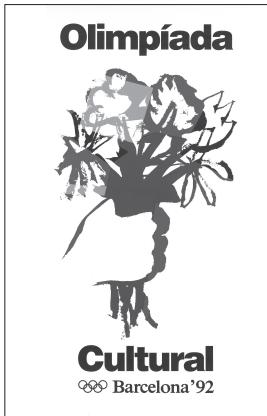
But it was not only nomenclature (important to communication as this is) that could dilute the image of OCSA, but also the inadequacy of its iconic identifiers. OCSA was given two different logos during its development period. At first it used a logo inspired by the general institutional image of the Olympiad in a similar way to that used by the sponsors. But this logo was replaced in February 1992 by a new image with a less institutional symbolism. This coincided with the presentation of the Olympic Arts Festival. The new design was the main reason for a festival advertising campaign that linked the new image, a bouquet of flowers, with the spirit of cultural diversity, dialogue and fraternity of the Olympiad itself.

OCSA also gave itself a mascot (Nosi) who had to live alongside Cobi. This mascot (also designed by Mariscal), with a meaning difficult to relate to the cultural programme, was barely used in the corporate image of the Cultural Olympiad and its activities.

## Corporate image of the Cultural Olympiad, Barcelona'92



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1989-1992  
Design: J. M. Trias

1992  
Design: Leopoldo Pomés

Mascot (*Nosi*)  
Design: Mariscal

## Conclusions. Some lessons for the future

As a first conclusion of these reflections, I would like to highlight that the programming of cultural activities should be considered a task as complex as the programming of logistics, economics, technology and urban planning. The poor results of the Cultural Olympiad of Barcelona'92, in contrast to the success of other aspects of organisation, are due in part to minimal preparatory discussion on the content and specificity of the Cultural Olympiad as part of the Games and the cultural policy of the city.

The Olympic city's cultural leaders should not ignore the 'cultural' importance of the Olympic phenomenon itself. The idea must be overcome that the only point of contact, or the main one, between Olympism and culture are arts applied to sport. Olympism and the Games are cultural phenomena. Culture is not an added value to the Games; it is the basic value.

One of the main problems of planning the Games' cultural programmes, like major events in general, is to correctly identify the clearly differentiated target populations: the local population, visitors (tourists) and members of the organisation itself (the Olympic Family). Experience has shown that the main target audience of the cultural programme is citizens of the host city, while keeping in mind that the event takes place in the international arena.

Cultural Olympiads should know how to combine two seemingly opposite approaches: the need to integrate their programme in the annual calendar of cultural policy of the city (autumn festivals, summer festivals, etc.) and the exceptional nature of an event that it is international. The Cultural Olympiad should be integrated into the annual programme of the host city, but must also overcome this scope so as to incorporate the global dimension and the sporting dimension of the event.

Cultural Olympiads must be committed to the cultural challenges of our time, such as diversity, sustainable development and cooperation, and not only to excellence as the primary value associated with Olympism.

Cultural Olympiads should be designed considering the overall legacy of the Games. It is legitimate, for example, to think about using them as a pretext to correct the shortcomings of the cultural infrastructure of the Olympic city. But the legacy has also to be raised in terms of intangible assets: not only as an opportunity to promote a city's own image in the world, but also as an opportunity to promote local community participation in the international debate on culture.

The Barcelona Games have left an important cultural legacy, but this legacy originated mainly in the areas most directly related to the Games, particularly the ceremonies, the Olympic torch relay, the celebration in the streets, coexistence and the festival stadium, where Olympism is truly a great cultural phenomenon.

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