

Symbol and logo of the Barcelona'92 Olympic Games

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Competition for the obtainment of the symbol and official logo

In October 1987 an advising commission of the Organising Committee of the Olympic Games of Barcelona'92, made up of 14 experts in design, recommended conducting a restricted competition to obtain the Olympic symbol and mascot. Several names were put forth, ending up with the 6 most voted professionals being invited to compete in both categories.

On December 1st of the same year a jury composed of professionals in design and communication and representatives of COOB'92 decided for the Olympic Games'92 to choose (by 17 votes to 18) the proposal for the symbol and logo presented by Josep Maria Trias.

On the language of the symbols

One of the basic premises of the competing process was the need to get away from the characteristic images of the previous Olympic Games or the candidatures. This consideration did not arise so much from demands for originality in design as from seeing that the symbol could not be made with a technical, geometric or technological vocabulary. Neither Barcelona, nor Catalonia nor Spain, can “see” an image of technologist nature. It is undeniable that internationally Barcelona is associated with Picasso, Miró, Dalí, Gaudí or Tàpies; this evidence led to the need to define a language more human, more artistic, more creative, more personal, in short, more in keeping with the communicative values it was necessary to transmit.

And from the start of the project I therefore considered the possibility of the symbol having the condition of “hand drawn” and not with instruments proper to more technified languages. The dash appears as the symbol's fundamental characteristic.

In the numerous models, sketches and notes this valuation of the graphic dash appeared insistently as one of the most consistent alternatives; countless trials of a thousand and one dashes of roller pen continuously mixed themselves up with sketches of more anecdotic expressive content, rejected in the final stage of concreting the symbol. The colour appears in the final result as one of its more characteristic elements appeared once the constructive definition of the design had reached a high degree of concretion.

On the Mediterranean-ness of the symbol

Barcelona is a port, with a history going back thousands of years, and it is difficult –not to say impossible– to disassociate the city's history from the sea.

And the sea besides is the Mediterranean, which shapes an unequivocally extrovert character, expressive, bright, dynamic, colourful, carefree, free, direct and human.

No doubt these concepts differentiate and identify Barcelona and its culture, therefore this personality should be reflected in the symbol to represent and identify the Barcelona Olympic Games. So, it should be a design that could be defined as a Mediterranean symbol.

The criterion of Mediterranean-ness was a new justification for the need to differentiate this design from

the previous graphic images of earlier Olympics, most of which could be defined as geometric drawings, far from that expressive character which design should communicate.

On the universality and humanity of sport and the Olympics

The image of the previous Olympic Games had habitually focused on symbols of cities or countries, or else on their buildings or emblematic elements such as shields or flags. From the start it was considered that the symbols Barcelona could supply in this field –crosses and stripes, standard, Holy Family, Columbus monument– implied a certain danger of falling into an excessive anecdotism, very far in any case from the universalism required of the symbol, and with the evident risk of possible semantic errors. An excessively localist symbol would restrict the semantic field necessary to construct a message representative of Barcelona-Catalonia-Spain, a role which the logo must play. As well as this universality there are the expressive values proper of the Olympic Games, that dimension which could be called sport-Olympic.

The Games are a sports manifestation of world scale with the protagonists being sportsmen and sportswomen. Why not design a symbol using the synthesis of a human figure in a sports attitude? The symbol designed wants to be a synthesis (almost rock-like or archaeological) of an individual (man or woman) in a dynamic attitude (running or jumping), values accumulated to those described before. Man as protagonist of an Olympic Games, the Mediterranean athlete. Thus the symbol allows two readings: and first and immediate one focused on its tactile values and a second more reflexive and induced one, of certain figuration values.

On the colours

The colours of the standards of Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain are basically yellow and red, therefore, if the idea was to identify this triple topographic and political reality, they had to be used.

A special characteristic of Mediterranean-ness of Barcelona referred to earlier, advised the incorporation of blue representing the sea, a colour fundamentally cool in evident contrast with the two warm ones.

Red is associated with life (blood), fire (heat), passion, feelings, pain and freedom; yellow with sun, light, understanding, intuition, intellect and human values. Blue is associated with the sea, the sky, daylight, thought, constancy, justice and coldness. Thus, also the chromatic dimension –besides its decisive contribution to the material definition of the design and its successive development– took on a separate and characteristic part in the overall expressive value of the symbol.

On the dynamism

The symbol describes the intention of a displacement (from left to right, in the ordinary sense of reading), in an attitude of jumping or running; the arms open and stretched out contribute to the dynamism of the symbol, while the head –held in a more static position– balances the whole, forming the central hub of rotation. It is the jump of the athlete, over Barcelona and the Olympic rings acting as support for the composition; but it is at once the leap of happiness on winning a medal or the attitude of open arms, the universal symbol of welcome.

On the logo

The Barcelona'92 logo has been composed with the Times Demi Bold (New Roman) typography, which possesses cultural references, of antiquity and Romanness, of Latin-ness and seriousness. A typography which for its features works perfectly as a bridging element between the essentially tactile values of the dash and the geometric mechanism of the symbol of the five Olympic rings, a role emphasised by their position between one another (unusual, if judging from the associated graphic developments of other Olympic Games).

Compared with the coldness, apparent asepsis and desired "modernity" of dry typographies (Futura and Helvetica, basically), the use of a Times, which despite its Saxon origin reveals itself as direct heir of the Roman capital, meant a decided commitment towards a new culture of typography.

The Cultural Olympics

With the designation of Barcelona as seat of the XXV Olympic Games Barcelona 1992, the COOB'92 acquired the commitment of carrying out a wide cultural programme during the four years leading up to it. The line this programme will follow, in keeping with the Olympic principles of friendship among peoples, of creativity and harmonious coexistence, is that of universal exchange associated with sport and with the great youth festival of the Olympic Games, offering a fitting prologue in the four years leading up as well as during the Games. A logo has been created to identify this Cultural Olympics and which will accompany all the activities which are developed in the programme.

Logo

It consists of the following elements:

A red (Olympic colour) square background.

The initials "OC" for Olimpíada Cultural: formed based on a fragment of the symbol of the Olympic rings, they place culture in an Olympic context and form a logo reduced to "easy to remember" memorable initials.

The official symbol of the Olympic Games Barcelona'92: strategically placed in the upper right margin of the background and above the initials "OC" collaborated in the equilibrium of the 3 configurating elements of the image, and at the same time unequivocally Barcelonising the whole.

Times Demi Bold typography: it is the same as used for the logo "Barcelona'92" thus achieving a typographical coherence plus a decidedly cultural character.

Volunteers'92

For a better internal and external functioning of the whole organisation of the Olympic Games imply, a team of Volunteers collaborate and participate directly in different functions according to organisation needs.

Among others, these functions will include from a complete translator's service to information on control

of accesses, including general information to the public, accompaniment, competition assistants, technical help at the Radio and TV centre, etc.

A logo has been created to identify this team of Volunteers and which will accompany all the activities developed by the team's members.

Logo

It consists of the following elements:

A horizontal rectangular red and blue (Olympic colours) double background with the lower end "torn" which give it a young, dynamic, living and not mechanical cultural character;

The word "Volunteers'92" in white negative composed with the same Times Demi Bold typography as the "Barcelona'92" logo and the "Olimpíada Cultural Barcelona'92", so as to have typographical coherence;

Substitution of the "i" (in Catalan) and the "io" (in Spanish) for the symbol of the Olympic Games of Barcelona'92 with the aim of personalising the name and Barcelonising the concept of volunteer, as well as to get round the bi-lingual question.

Pictograms of sports

The series of pictograms proposed for symbolising the Olympic sports has its origin in the same symbol of the Games of Barcelona'92.

The symbol, as anthropomorphic synthesis of an athlete in a dynamic attitude or jumping, right from the start was seen to be able to have the sufficient variations to be associated with the different Olympic sports, anyway already known and internationally assumed in its form of pictogram. Thus, from the conception of the design itself one of the basic conditions of the pictograms was fulfilled, that of the creation of a unitary image of the Olympic Games, serving as vehicle for the central significances attributed it. In this case the basic values of a design of quality, with humanist will, of prosociality and of identification with local culture and its Mediterranean environment.

The three anthropomorphic elements of the symbol become the three basic structure elements of the pictograms of the sports: the blue dot suggests the significance of the head. The yellow line suggests the significance of the arms. The red line the significance of the legs.

The differences from previous systems of pictograms are notable. There are differences in the elements that compose the structure of the pictograms and also in the forms of articulation of these elements.

The structure is now composed of only three elements: head, arms and legs. Unlike all previous experiences, there is no element proper to signify the trunk. The perception of the athletes trunk must result from the perception of the pictogram's whole. The identification of the body is entrusted to the receiver's decoding action, who must use his imagination.

The second great difference is to be found in the form of articulation which establishes itself among the elements making up the pictogram. Whereas in previous series these elements (head, body, legs) were articulated in keeping with strict geometric code and with a limited number of combinations, in the new pictograms of Barcelona'92 this combination is open, less codified or standardised, and, therefore, more creative. The pictograms of Barcelona do not belong to an articulated system, but to a fully iconic language, made up by analogies between the visual perception of the pictogram and the memory each receiver has of sport practices, whether by direct vision of the sport or by visual experience through the media.

The work of design carried out consisted of researching the possibilities of extrapolation of the graphic style of the symbol Barcelona'92 to different Olympic sports, obtaining the maximum comprehension, expressiveness and personalisation.

Symbol and logo for the Paralympics¹

The symbol of the IX Paralympics Barcelona'92 has its origin in the Absolute Games of Barcelona'92. The identity of the Paralympics had to be able to be recognised and associated to the Absolute Games, but it could not be the same, it had to have its own personal image. So, the symbol designed aims at transmitting the same concepts of humanity and Mediterranean-ness by the humanised and anthropomorphic expression of its stroke, and by its three colours: Mediterranean blue, yellow of the sun and red for life.

Then, to the blue head in the centre and the yellow arms outstretched in welcome and friendliness was added a third red circular element which gave it its finishing touch and which wants to be a synthesis between legs and the main element of the universal and symbolic wheelchair for the handicapped.

The logos "Paralímpics" and "Barcelona'92" have been composed using the same letter type used in the Absolute Games in order to give the symbol the same contrast of graphic and typographic character.

¹ The word Paralympics has been used for this edition of the text instead of the words "Olympics for the Disabled" used in the original edition of the text.