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The Keys to

Success

*The social, sporting, economic
and communications impact of*

Barcelona'92

*Centre d'Estudis Olímpics i de l'Esport
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
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© Centre d'Estudis Olímpics i de l'Esport
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
Edifici B. 08193 Bellaterra (Barcelona, España)

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Servei de Publicacions
Edifici A. 08193 Bellaterra (Barcelona, España)

Editors: Miquel de Moragas and Miquel Botella
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Cover Design: Josep Maria Trias

First edition: November 1995

Legal Deposit: B. 44.139-1995
ISBN 84-490-0450-0
Photocomposition: Víctor Igual, S. L.
Printing: Duplex, S. A.
Binding: Encuadernaciones Maro, S. A.
Printed in Spain

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THE IMAGE OF BARCELONA '92 IN THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS

MURIEL LADRÓN DE GUEVARA
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To open a copy of a paper like the *International Herald Tribune* towards the end of July, 1992, and see the names of Barcelona, Reus, Terrassa or Mollet in the headlines that indicated each item of news — where normally you would expect to see Tokyo, Brussels, New York, or Paris — made us feel both strange and pleased. Barcelona had never before launched a promotional campaign of this scope. The city itself was on the front page of more than 15,000 newspapers around the world, with a total estimated circulation of 500 million copies. 12,000 accredited journalists were covering the Games, not only more than for any previous Olympic event, but also a record figure in the world of news coverage in general. In the Barcelona Games, in fact, the journalists outnumbered the athletes.

But what was the image given of Barcelona '92 by the international press? It would be literally impossible to provide a comprehensive worldwide answer to this question. But the systematic monitoring of a selection of publications in the course of 1991 and 1992 — key months involving the run up to, and celebration of, the Games — provided us with a closer look at the subject matter and points of view which together helped to give us a generalised but significant idea of the media treatment handed out to Barcelona by print media around the world.²

A total of 17 newspapers, 4 news agencies, and 3 news

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2. Further information can be found in the studies on which this article has been based: Ladrón de Guevara, Muriel/Cóller, Xavier (1993) *La imatge de*

weeklies were selected, on the basis that they provided the most important points of reference in press terms, thanks to their circulation, quality, and influence, in three European countries (France, Italy, United Kingdom), and the United States of America. The publications chosen were: in France: *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *l'Equipe*, *Agence France Presse*; from Italy: *Il Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica*, *La Stampa*; from the UK: *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *Financial Times*, *The European*, *Reuter*; in the US: *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *USA Today*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Associated Press*, *United Press Independent*.

All these publications were monitored between January 1, 1991, and August, 1992. Out of all the items of news published in the course of this period, 186 were selected for a detailed analysis of their content.

This analysis has made it possible for us to identify the main issues covered by the international press, and to give an idea of the image of Barcelona '92 that was passed on to the readers of the publications in question, together with an indication of the ideas which were assimilated by the journalists who had come to Barcelona, with the emphasis being placed both on what they said and what they left out, and on the relationships which they established with the main players involved in the organisation of the Games, and the way in which disagreements between these players were described. It should not be forgotten that the press was there not simply to report on the more technical and political aspects of the organisation of the Games, but also to criticise where criticism was due.

Main issues

In a short space of time, thousands of journalists who had had no previous contact with the city, and who had never written anything either about it or its country arrived in Barcelona. Some of them arrived with certain preconceived ideas and their work here was largely a matter of searching for statements and figures in order to confirm these ideas. Others, however, went deeper and put together reports which provided their countries of origin with previously unknown information.

Catalunya. Una aproximació al tractament de Catalunya a la premsa internacional a propòsit dels Jocs Olímpics, Centre d'Estudis Olímpics i de l'Esport, Working Paper No. 14.

Romaní, Daniel (1995) *Observats per la premsa internacional*, Centre d'Estudis Olímpics i de l'Esport, Working Paper No. 34.

At all events, it is hardly surprising that most journalists were fascinated by the same subjects, from the urban transformation which Barcelona was undergoing — by far the most well-covered issue — to the Catalan national question, the high hotel prices, the traffic flow, the peculiarities of Catalan popular culture, or the city's night life.

Similarly, the same sources were constantly referred to for information: the designer Xavier Mariscal, the writers Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Eduardo Mendoza and Joan Barril, the architect Oriol Bohigas, the painter Antoni Tàpies and — it goes without saying — the Mayor Pasqual Maragall, the President of the Catalan Autonomous Government (Generalitat), Jordi Pujol, and the Councillor Delegate of the COOB (Barcelona Olympic Organising Committee) Josep Miquel Abad, were all representative members of the select group of Catalan public figures courted assiduously by the international press.

An article in the American magazine *The New Yorker* stressed this tendency to repeatedly interview the same figures. The author of the article, William Finnegan, describes the scene when he had to interview the «gourmand and democratic communist» Vázquez Montalbán: «I got there just behind two TV crews, who interviewed Montalbán in Catalan and French respectively, and just ahead of a third TV crew who — after our chat — interviewed him in Italian.»

Speaking generally, journalists got the idea that they were in an organised, efficient country. It can therefore be concluded that the national image fostered by clichés such as paella, sun, bullfights, tambourines and improvisation was laid to rest or, at least, put seriously into question, and partially replaced by positive points of reference such as as modernity and design, and, in general, by a sense of responsibility and punctuality.

Other concepts involving the Barcelona Games that were widely circulated throughout the international press were linked to values such as security, hospitality, punctuality, planning, and efficiency. The climate of participation was widely praised, with respect to the accommodation provided for visitors, the massive turnout at the different sporting events, and the generous collaboration of the Olympic Volunteers. The media also brought across the concepts of universality and fraternity promoted by the Games, expressed in the slogan «Friends for Life». Moreover, Barcelona'92 provided an image which previous Olympic cities had been unable to give, that of playing host to a universal Olympiad, with the presence of Russia, Cuba, South Africa, the two Germanies united, and of all the countries which had been at loggerheads a year and a half before, in the Gulf War.

From out of this complex network of images, we will analyse five central issues which we believe to be central to the vision of Barcelona'92 held by the international press:

- The host city: the image of Barcelona. The Games as the driving force behind urban renovation.
- The political and cultural identity of Catalonia.
- Security: the terrorist threat.
- The economy: the Games as investment.
- The Opening Ceremony of the Games.

For each of these sections, quotes and references have been taken from articles in order to highlight the opinion of the press with respect to each of these issues.

1. THE HOST CITY: THE IMAGE OF BARCELONA

The Games as the driving force behind urban renovation

In the years previous to the Games, one issue which raised considerable interest in the international press was the process of urban renovation that Barcelona was going through. There were numerous articles dedicated specifically to this issue. Indeed, reporters were quick to note what has been described by Mayor Maragall as «the most important transformation in the history of Barcelona since the demolishing of the town walls at the end of the 19th century».

In these reports, there is a frequent use of expressions referring to the «authentic renaissance» of the city, or to the «metamorphosis» of Barcelona. A sub-heading in *Libération* on July 26, 1992, gives a good idea of the image they were trying to get across: «The great mass of stone has given birth to a Barcelona—Janus, in which the modern is on friendly terms with the old. The urban layout and traffic networks have undergone an impressive facelift in order to prepare the city for the post—Olympic future.» The *Wall Street Journal* used similar terms in this headline for 21 July, 1992: «In Barcelona, Olympics are used as an engine of Civic rejuvenation.» The *Times* newspaper wrote, on the 24th of the same month: «Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, is undergoing a Renaissance.»

On the other hand, this image of urban renewal was seen to be a success for the city and its rulers. The Games were seen as an excuse for the carrying out of a complete overhaul of the city which made up for a 40 year setback in comparison to the progress of other main European cities. The *Wall Street Journal* was thus able to affirm, in the article mentioned above:

«Barcelona's ambitions developers have exploited the Olympics as few other cities have done—perhaps as no city will do again.» The recurring theme in all these reports is that the great merit of Barcelona lies not only in having known how to take advantage of the Olympic Games in order to build a few emblematic and isolated buildings — as had been the case in other Olympic cities — but also in having taken advantage of the «Olympic requirements» in order to implement a widespread series of improvements throughout the city. The weekly magazine *Newsweek* was thus able to affirm in an article on May 18, 1992: «Barcelona is simply not what it used to be — and that is due to careful planning.»

The city of Barcelona was widely praised with respect to this issue. Here are just a few examples: *The Guardian* newspaper (16/7/92) stated that «Olympic Barcelona is perhaps the only great event in the history of post-war town planning involving a city as a whole.»; *The European* (7/4/91) describes the rebuilding of the city as «futuristic»; the *Washington Post* (25/4/92) affirmed that «the first medal of the Olympic Games goes to the new city.»; and, to finish, the *Guardian* newspaper (16/7/92) had this unambiguous headline for one of its articles: «Homage to Catalan planning».

Weak points

The international press analysed here also gave some coverage to the problems created by the Olympic Games and by the preparations for them. Particular mention should be made here of the reports on the way in which the citizens of Barcelona were negatively affected in the course of the six year build-up to the Games, by the building work, by worries about the possibly excessive debts being contracted by the city, the criticisms of certain Olympic buildings and the political quarrels which put a stop to some projects (such as the extension of the metro to Montjuïc mountain, the connection of the Ring Roads to the airport, or the projected building of new hotels).

We would like to deal separately with one of the negative aspects which the reporters devoted a lot of space to: the fact that Barcelona had become one of the most expensive cities in Europe. *Agence France Presse*, for example, stressed the increase in prices — which had made Barcelona the most expensive city in Spain — in an article dated April 13, 1992. Meanwhile, the Mayor of Barcelona and COOB'92 itself urged those involved to exercise moderation when it came to making money. The *International Herald Tribune* pointed out on November 6, 1991 that site prices were four times more expen-

sive than in 1986. The *European*, on July 10, 1992, revealed that prices had reached a new high in the Olympic city. The *Reuter* agency, on July 26, 1992, dealt extensively with the same issue, albeit with reference to Spain as a whole.

The atmosphere in Barcelona

As with previous Olympic events, on the the days leading up to the opening ceremony, the media focussed on the atmosphere to be found in the streets of the host city. In the case of Barcelona, as the *Herald Tribune* (24/7/92) pointed out, this pre-Olympic atmosphere was an event in itself. The report stresses the festive mood of the city which «reflected the Catalans' pride at being at the centre of the world stage».

The press gave widespread coverage to the enthusiastic participation of the citizens of Barcelona in the celebration of the Games: the streets were packed every day, every evening, every night. Phrases such as «Games on a human scale, carried out without needless monumental gestures, and determined by the needs of the city,» (*La Repubblica*) were commonplace in the international press throughout July and August of 1992. Special mention was made of the atmosphere of the city. Corine Lesnes, *Le Monde's* opinion columnist for the Olympic period, wrote several columns in which she emphasised the tremendous atmosphere of the city, the exceptional response made by the citizens, the nightlife of the athletes and the Barcelonans, and the «conquest of Montjuïc».

Meanwhile the popular newspaper *USA Today* — in an article published while the Games were actually in progress — made special mention of the festive and welcoming atmosphere to be found in the city. The commentator was agreeably surprised to find women walking around fearlessly on their own or in groups in the city streets at any hour, day or night. Another remark he made was «pickpocketing is an art here, but there is little violence».

This warm, friendly and hospitable atmosphere made a decisive contribution — according to the press — to the success of the Games. Certain reports give us the impression that some correspondents had even fallen in love with the city. This was the impression given by George Vercey of the *New York Times* when he wrote — two days after the Games' closing ceremony — «The athletes never had a chance. It doesn't matter how high they jumped or how fast they ran, they just couldn't win the Games. The Gold Medal went to Barcelona.»

A significant example of the way in which the success of the Games helped change the opinions of certain media is to be

found in *The Wall Street Journal*. When the journalists Craig Forman, Lee Lescaze and Cartla Vitzhum entered Pasqual Maragall's office during the frenetic spring of 1992, the first thing the Mayor did was remark on an article which had been written two years ago by Nicholas Bray, one-time correspondent for the paper in Madrid, and which went as follows: «This is the city of paradoxes. While Barcelona spirit fuels ambitions plans, many go unrealized. (...). Barcelona is desperately overcrowded. Traffic jams block the Seafront boulevard between its port and the city center. Its picturesque Gothic quarter is a nest of poverty, prostitution and petty crime.» In the Summer of 1992, this financial newspaper — considered to be one of the most influential in the world — praised Barcelona — it spoke of the city's energy and of its efficient organisation— and dedicated an unprecedented daily page to news concerning the Olympic Games.

2. THE NATIONAL QUESTION: THE IMAGE OF CATALONIA

The political and national context of the host city

The international press referred repeatedly to the existence of two politico—cultural tendencies: one which stressed the city's role as a showcase for the Spanish state, and another which laid the emphasis on the fact that Barcelona was an expression of Catalan culture.

One image policy tried to ensure that the Games were interpreted as simply one more event among the others that were taking place in Spain in 1992, such as the Seville Expo and «Madrid Cultural Capital». A revealing indication of this interpretation is given by the headline of a *Newsweek* report for December, 1991: «The year of Spain», in which reference was made to the great events of 1992.

Another image policy tried to ensure that journalists would recognise Barcelona as the capital of Catalonia, and Catalonia as a country with its own culture, language and identity. Special mention should be made of the advertising campaign carried out by the Catalan government (Generalitat de Catalunya) and which consisted of the appearance — in the main international papers, just one week before the Games — of a two-page colour advertisement in which, next to a map on which Catalonia and Barcelona were clearly marked, the text read: «In which country would you locate this point (Barcelona)? In Catalonia, of course. A country inside Spain which has its own culture, language and identity.» Some headlines in the international press commented on the philosophy behind this campaign. For

example, this *New York Times* article: «The place where the 1992 Olympics are going to be held? Well, Catalonia!», or the *Time* headline: «Welcome to the Catalan Olympics».

This campaign was linked to different images of Catalonia in the pages of the international press. On the one hand, it was interpreted as an attempt on the part of the Catalan government to stress that Catalonia was a country and not merely a region (for example, *Le Figaro* of 21/7/92, and the *International Herald Tribune* of 18/7/92). On the other hand, coverage was given to criticisms of this campaign, which was seen as playing a part in an excessive Catalanisation of the Games (see *The Times* for 21/7/92 and 25/7/92, or *Le Figaro* for 21/7/92). Last but not least, some reports expressed a fear that this campaign would fan the flames of more radical nationalist groups («perhaps even terrorists», as the *Times* newspaper said) who could boycott the celebration of the Games. The call for tolerance and respect for symbols held in common with other Spanish peoples made by Pasqual Maragall, the mayor of the city and the president of COOB'92, confirms the existence of a potential conflict to a certain extent, while making it clear that points of view differed in varying degrees on this issue (see the *Reuter* reports for 18/7/92 and 19/7/92).

Aspirations to Home Rule

Our analysis has led us to the conclusion that, in general, Catalonia was presented as a community whose aspirations to home rule had been satisfied in part, but that there existed historical wrongs which were responsible for continuous tension between Catalonia and the State (see articles in the *International Herald Tribune* for 6/11/91, *Libération* for 20/3/92 and *The European* for 9/4/92, among others).

As an example of such tensions, mention should be made of the different ways in which the international press interpreted the campaign undertaken by the Catalan Olympic Committee (COC) in order to win recognition from the IOC. Some of the reports which refer to the COC show Catalan nationalism as a radical movement, aiming at eventual independence for Catalonia. For example, the *Reuter* news agency published the following on 14/4/91: «The powerful region of Catalonia is after independence from Spain and its Olympic committee is asking to be recognised by the IOC.» Other reports pointed out that the aspirations for separate recognition on the part of the Catalan Olympic delegation from the Spanish Olympic delegation did not imply that the former had independentist aspirations. The same news agency affirmed, two months later: «Barcelona

is the capital of the Spanish region located in the North East, which wishes to participate in the Olympic movement as a separate territory, without seeking independence from Spain.»

Despite inaccuracies and differing points of view concerning the autonomous regions, the nationalities and decentralisation, there was a generalised recognition of the existence of Catalonia's political and cultural identity as distinct from that of the rest of the Spanish State. The advertisement published by the Generalitat ended up by becoming a point of reference for understanding the identity of Catalonia.

The nationalist parties

The international press also pointed out the differences between the minority of nationalists who pursued an independentist policy, represented by Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) and the majority nationalist party which did not seek independence from the Spanish state, represented by Jordi Pujol and the coalition led by him, *Convergència i Unió* (CiU).

Catalonia's aspirations to self-government were seen as broad-based claims which the Spanish government could only satisfy with difficulty. However, special mention was made of the fact that in Catalonia — as opposed to the Basque Country — tensions were expressed through moderate political parties. This moderate image of Catalan politics was a constant factor, even in articles which analysed the possible links between terrorism, the political situation and possible repercussions of the latter on the Games.

The press stressed the pacific nature of Catalan nationalism, which defended its separatist beliefs in a determined fashion, but without recourse to the use of violence. The negotiations over the use of Catalan symbols in the Olympic protocol and Ceremonies were commented on in reports as a pact between three political players: the Mayor of Barcelona and the President of the COOB'92, the President of the Generalitat, and the more radical nationalist sectors (ERC, *la Crida*, COC). The signing of the agreement in June, 1992 — between the «very nationalist» President of the Catalan government, Jordi Pujol, and Mayor Pasqual Maragall «Catalan, but a socialist and thus closer to the Spanish administration» (according to *Agence France Presse*) — which ensured the presence of the Catalan flag and national anthem at the Games, was held to be a real victory for Jordi Pujol (see, for example, articles by *Agence France Presse* for 5/7/92, in the *International Herald Tribune* for 18/7/92) or *Libération* for 24/7/92).

The international press made special mention of the extraordinary presence of Catalan flags — both on the balconies of flats and in the street — along the route taken by the Olympic Torch. The international reporters were astonished by the overwhelming presence of Catalan flags, and made news items out of those which carried the slogan «Freedom for Catalonia» or the word *independence*.

By way of example, we have a quote from the French newspaper *Libération* (27/7/92): «and everywhere are the flags of blood and gold, and independentist slogans, including the inevitable *Freedom for Catalonia*.» Other reports stress the complete absence of Spanish flags, such as those made by *Agence France Presse* (5/7/92), *Reuter* (25/7/92) or the *Times* newspaper (25/7/92). The *Corriere della Sera* (26/7/92) explained events in the following somewhat dramatic fashion: «During these days it is the Catalan and not the Spanish flag which flutters in the wind or hangs from the balconies of all the houses. The people shout *Freedom for Catalonia* in the street, showing banners which have been prepared and thought-out beforehand. Freedom for Catalonia, right in the King's face.»

The vast quantity of Catalan flags was interpreted as a sign of Catalan society's proud wish for autonomy. This was the view taken by the *Associated Press* agency, which published the following just one day before the opening of the Games: «The whole of Catalonia is using these two weeks in which exceptional attention is being paid to the area in order to proclaim their national identity and their language, suppressed by Madrid during the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco.»

The overall image of Catalonia to be gleaned from the reports which have been analysed is that of a social reality which is different from that of other communities in Spain and Europe, and which had a certain tendency to draw attention to these differences by using the international repercussion of the Olympic Games. Catalonia was also presented as a culture which had managed to recover quickly after the Francoist repression.

Special attention was paid to the linguistic identity and the co-official status in Catalonia of both the Catalan and Castilian languages. The considerable use of the Catalan language both in official circles and in daily life, explained the ease with which the IOC accepted Catalan as one of the four official languages of the Games.

Special mention should be made of articles published in

The New York Times (19/4/91) «Catalan is spoken with pride here. Did you hear that, Madrid?», or the *International Herald Tribune* (18/7/92) «Barcelona: Catalonia's appearance on the world stage», or *Libération*, «Do you speak Spanish? No, Castilian!»

The presence of Catalan symbols (language, anthem, flag) during the celebration of the games was held by some reporters to be a historically unprecedented concession on the part of the International Olympic Committee and as proof that the Olympic movement had recognised that Catalonia was different (see, for example, *The Times* (21/7/92) or *Libération* (27/7/92).

Other reports assured us that the real reason for these concessions lay in the fact that the President of the IOC, J.A. Samaranch was a Catalan and a Barcelonan. What the international press really stressed in the end was the simple fact of official recognition, to a greater or lesser degree, of the existence of a differential factor within a plurinational state.

Catalan idiosyncrasy

Reports can be found which mention a supposedly specific Catalan mentality. The *Reuter* news agency pointed to certain stereotypes: «the Catalans have certain qualities which could be described as Northern European: they go to bed early, they're hard working, and don't like throwing their money away.» Similarly, *The Times* newspaper (21/7/92) described Catalonia as one of the hardest-working regions of Europe, and the Catalans as the businessmen of Spain.

A less favourable view of Catalan idiosyncrasies was taken by the weekly magazine *Newsweek* (18/5/92) or the French newspaper *Le Figaro* (19/7/92). *Newsweek* described the Catalans as being known for their superior airs and for their considerable chauvinism. It explained that: «they are eager to promote Barcelona as an international capital, while insisting at the same time on the use of Catalan, a peculiar dialect, in state schools, in official documents and as one of the four official languages of the Games». *Le Figaro* is hardly any friendlier in its report: «eternally dissatisfied, they blow their own trumpets. Wherever they go, they proclaim their virtues.» «They're a little overwhelming,» a diplomat explained to the *Figaro* correspondent, «but also terribly efficient».

3. SECURITY: THE TERRORIST THREAT

A year before the Games, one of the most important news issues for the international press was the security of the Games and the risk of terrorist attacks. News concerning armed groups — ETA especially — was linked directly to the Olympic Games by questioning the security arrangements for the latter, while at the same time providing information about the historical and political context of Catalonia.

The main events which attracted the interest of the press and news agencies were the following:

— The series of bombs placed by the Basque terrorist group ETA towards the end of May, 1991, in different cities (Rome, Alacant, Malaga).

— The ETA attack on the Civil Guard barracks in the Olympic sub-site of Vic and the capture afterwards of those responsible, who called themselves the «Barcelona commando».

— The voluntary disbanding of the Catalan terrorist group «Terra Lliure» and the entry of its members into the political party Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya.

Taking the analysed reports as a whole, a complex reality emerges around four points of reference: Spain, Catalonia, Barcelona and the Olympic Games.

Spain, through its administration (government, police), is identified as relating to *authority and power*, faced with the task of confronting the terrorist threat and guaranteeing the security of the games.

Barcelona appears as *the main geographical reference point* which hypothetical terrorist attacks would be centred on. It thus becomes an *object of reference*. Reports on terrorist attacks were linked one way or another with Barcelona. For example, by indicating the distance between the city and a terrorist target town such as Vic, Alacant or Malaga.

Catalonia is presented as a *secondary geographical reference point*, much vaguer than Barcelona, but submerged in a political reality (Spain) of which it forms a part. Catalonia is an area whose inhabitants abhor terrorist activity, but it is also the area within which the Olympic Games will be celebrated. It should also be pointed out that as the process of preparation for the Games continued, and due to the direct contact of journalists with Spanish social and political realities, Catalonia gradually became a reference point as important as or more important than Spain. This process reached its climax at the Games' Opening Ceremony.

Finally, the Olympic Games are used as a *time reference*,

marking given periods: «with only a few months to go before the celebration of the Olympic games..»; but, above all, as a great echo chamber on a worldwide scale, as regards the use terrorists could make of it in terms of propaganda.

Illustrations of the treatment given to these reference points are the reports which appeared on May 30 and 31, 1991, concerning the ETA attack in Vic, in the following newspapers: *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica* and the reports put together by the *Associated Press*, *Reuter* and *France Presse* news agencies.

The positive development of political conflicts that might have influenced attempts at violent action, and the neutralisation of terrorist groups thanks to a thorough police clamp-down, meant that in the end security came to be one of the issues which least interested the international press. Examples of this can be found in extracts from reports published in *Le Monde* (10/7/92), *Reuter* (17/7/92), *The International Herald Tribune* (24/7/92), *Libération*, (24/7/92), *The Daily Telegraph* (25/7/92) *Time* (27/7/92).

4. THE ECONOMY: THE GAMES AS INVESTMENT

The international press recognised that the Olympic Games represented a golden opportunity for strengthening and improving economic infrastructures. The press pointed out that investments related to the Olympic Games had not been concentrated exclusively in the city of Barcelona, but that they had been distributed among the sub-sites which were hosting different Olympic competitions.

On the other hand, it is worth stressing that it is precisely in the economic reports that the Olympic Games are considered as simply another of the 1992 events, along with the Seville Expo, the status of Madrid as Cultural Capital, and the celebration of the 500th Centenary, all of which were taking place in Spain and which were designed to function as a boost for the development of the Spanish economy and as the country's answer to the economic challenges presented by European unification (see *The Wall Street Journal* (24/6/91), *The New York Times* (1/6/91), or *The Sunday Times Magazine*, for example).

The Games as an international boost for Barcelona

The huge effort made by Barcelona demonstrated its wish to become a commercial and cultural centre in the Mediterranean region and one of Europe's main cities. To this effect,

The Times wrote that «The city is emerging from years of Francoist repression and is turning into one of the main focal points of Europe.»

In fact, Barcelona was presented as the centre of an important metropolitan area with over 4 million inhabitants and as the capital of one of the most powerful regions in Europe: «The capital of Catalonia sees itself as a centre of industrial strength within Spain and as an emerging force in Europe» claimed the *Reuter* news agency (11/7/91). For *The Wall Street Journal* (21/7/92) «the Olympic Games have not only changed the city's body but also its mind» and added that now Barcelona felt strong enough to compete with the most important European cities.

All together, these reports bring across the dynamism and energy of the city which — according to certain reports — is constantly searching for new projects with which it can project itself. «Barcelona is insatiable» claimed the French newspaper *Le Figaro* (19/7/92).

Catalonia: an image of economic strength

The news, reports and articles which appeared in the international press over the period analysed by us present an image of Catalonia in which special mention is made of the country's economic and industrial wealth. In general terms, this image is based on four main lines of development: industry, tourism, financial operations, and investments of Spanish and foreign capital.

The *Le Figaro* (7/6/91) described it as «one of the four motors of the Old Continent». The *International Herald Tribune*, on November 6, 1991, presented it as one of Europe's most important financial markets. The *Wall Street Journal* for August 6, 1992, commented that Catalonia was a region of spectacular economic growth. *Time*, on July 27, 1992, said that Barcelona had always been an industrial area and that the Catalans were «producers rather than dreamers».

5. THE OPENING CEREMONY.

A GREAT MULTICULTURAL DISPLAY

Most of the reports which dealt with the Opening Ceremony stressed the Catalan differential factor more than before. The playing of the Catalan national anthem, the presence of the Catalan flag, the reference to Lluís Companys — the President of the Generalitat who was shot by Franco — made

by Mayor Pasqual Maragall and other symbols which appeared in the Ceremony provided plenty of material for journalists, so that they could start investigating the reality of Catalonia, on the basis of this Ceremony.

Most reports also pointed out that the Ceremony differed in concept from previous ceremonies of this type and introduced a whole new dimension in which symbolism and modernity were combined, resulting in an improvement on all the other Opening Ceremonies. The idea that the Ceremony recuperated the Mediterranean spirit of the Olympic Games was another recurring theme. Examples of this are to be found in articles published in *The New York Times* (26/7/92), *The Sunday Times* (26/7/92), *The Times* (27/7/92), *Libération* (27/7/92), and *Time* (3/8/92).

The originality (of the Ceremony) was well received, although more than one country had trouble in understanding the meaning of some of the scenes. The use of symbology was excessive in the opinion of some countries, and it was claimed that this created a certain amount of confusion for some media. Indeed certain sections (of the Ceremony) met with the disapproval of more than one national culture.

According to *USA Today* «the ceremony was impressive. And very serious, no revelry, no light music.» In another paragraph it also added that «to compare this Ceremony with the Los Angeles one is like comparing the myth of Hercules with Mickey Mouse. Which of the two is stronger?» On the other hand, the important Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun's* permanent correspondent in Barcelona, Chihiro Ito, wrote: «The opera was the best in the world and the stage felt like the Liceu. The fireworks were magnificent.»

But the praise was not unanimous. Some media, especially in France and Italy, openly criticised certain aspects of the ceremony. Almost all the French newspapers stressed the fact that the President of the French Republic had merely mentioned, as he left, that he had liked the singing. Other extracts which we have selected speak for themselves: «A disappointment» said the sports paper *L'Equipe*, insisting: «too many Spanish clichés»; while *Le Figaro* revelled in adjectives such as «absurd...dull...a huge disaster». Jerome Bureau, of *L'Equipe Magazine*, claimed that «it was a disappointing ceremony. There was no feeling. The show had too much classical music and too much Spanish cliché, like the Flamenco dancing. The scene with the ship was highly superficial, it didn't get to the bottom of things, and the entire ceremony was too much geared to television. I expected more.» His colleague Jean Louis Pierrat, of *Libération*, provided a clue as

to the reason for the criticisms made by the French press: «There were some very good ideas — such as the sea — and some grandoliquent ideas, such as that of the arrow. But, in general terms, it lacked emotion. It is difficult to compare it with Albertville, because that ceremony was so original that there will always be a before and an after Albertville».

This attitude on the part of the French press brought the following comment from the London newspaper *The Times*: «Others might ignore the insolence of the French, but not Barcelona, whose antennae are finely tuned to the image created by the city around the world. The ridicule of the French is a double blow, given that Catalonia has always preferred to describe itself as being closer to France than to the Baroque and emotional power of Madrid.»

Some Italian newspapers — perhaps due to a certain cultural closeness — were also somewhat critical as far as the Ceremony was concerned. More than one newspaper made the comment that the archer had misfired because the arrow carrying the Olympic flame had not really entered the burner, comments which had to be corrected the following day. For *La Repubblica*, «The arrow landed way past the target, but the burner ignited anyway. It is obvious that by allowing Rebollo's mistake to be spotlighted in this way, with cynical precision, reduces the symbolic value which the creators of the Barcelona ceremony had wished to create by putting the symbolic gesture of world sport in the hands of a paraplegic athlete.» A few paragraphs further down, the same publication says that «he had missed the target twice in previous training sessions». As far as the Ceremony in general was concerned, we have found comments in the Italian press which are not exactly flattering: «kitsch Ceremony» was the banner headline of the *Corriere della Sera*; «the Ceremony has been splendid, but as it went on it seemed to us that it got got further and further away from the subject of sport», claimed *La Stampa*.

The *Financial Times* described the ceremony as «extravagant». The *International Herald Tribune* considered it to be a «multicoloured, confusing» Ceremony. «Often pretty, occasionally magnificent, and just about always incomprehensible.. Seriously, that first hour of the Opening Ceremony, what was that all about?», was how Tony Kornheiser's opinion article began. However, this journalist acknowledged that it was a spectacular ceremony, but ended up by revealing his personal tastes: «the organisers lost an opportunity to show other Spanish scenes apart from the Flamenco dancers. For example, there was no bullfight.»

The Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games represent-

ed the culmination of the process in the course of which the international press had been incorporating Catalonia as a cultural and political frame of reference for Barcelona'92. On 26 July the *New York Times* opened its sports supplement with the following headline: «The Olympic opening ceremony is the celebration of a region». *The Times* published, on July 27: «Catalonia bares its soul to the world». *Il Corriere della Sera*, published this headline on July 26: «Barcelona in Catalonia, capital of the TV kingdom».

To finish, multiculturalism was associated with universal values. The *New York Times* decribed the ceremony as «a careful mix of Catalan and Spanish culture.». Similarly, *Time* said on August 3 that the ceremony contributed a «quadrilingual perspective in a multicultural future». *Le Monde* insisted on July 27 that the Ceremony had been an internationalist success. *Il Corriere della Sera*, remembering Barcelona's four failed attempts to host the Games in the past, wrote on July 26: «History has asked to be forgiven for the delay by giving Barcelona the first Olympic Games free of hatred between Americans and Russians, Games with Nelson Mandela as a spectator and black athletes playing for South Africa, with hundreds of Eastern European champions walking along the Rambla without any spies or political commissars by their side, with Germany united and without much doping.»