

*Miquel de Moragas and Miquel Botella, Editors*

**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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# The Keys to Success

## The Social, Sporting, Economic and Communication Impact of Barcelona '92

*[The following text is extremely faint and largely illegible. It appears to be a list of contents or a detailed index, possibly including sections on the social, sporting, economic, and communication impacts of the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.]*

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## POLITICS

### THE POLITICAL GAMES: AGENTS AND STRATEGIES IN THE 1992 BARCELONA OLYMPIC GAMES<sup>1</sup>

JOAN BOTELLA<sup>2</sup>

An event of the size and impact of the Olympic Games cannot be considered a politically irrelevant event. Quite frequently it is relevant in terms of international politics (we only have to recall the alternative absences and presences of the United States and the Soviet Union in various Games), but also when dealing with the lesser known dimension of internal politics.

Some political impacts are produced in the medium or long term. The processes of urban change in the organizing city can bring about, accentuate or delay certain tendencies of social change; it would be impossible for these changes not to have a political impact.

Political impacts also come about in the short term. The economic costs of the preparation of the Games, the involvement of various public administrations, the way in which these relate to each other and to the private sector, or the importance of symbolic elements in the area of sports make the great Olympic event an opportunity for various political forces, and potentially a terrain for confrontation.

The 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games were a particularly adequate event for the study of these phenomena. In effect, four types of specific circumstances gave them the potential for considerable political impact.

First, the preparation and organization of the Games was conducted directly by public institutions, in contrast with Los Angeles 1984, for example, where an essentially private model was opted for.

Second, all of the public administrations were involved in their organization. In contrast with other cases where the

1. This text is based on a presentation made in the symposium «Impacts of the Olympic Games», directed by Miquel de Moragas within the courses of the Menéndez Pelayo International University (Barcelona, July 1993). Due to its origin, we have reduced to a minimum notes, citations and so on. The author wishes to thank the commentaries of participants in the course.

2. Joan Botella Corral. PhD. is Law Professor of Political Science at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.



role of the organizing city was almost exclusive, the case of Barcelona came closer to the precedents of Munich, Montreal or (though in different conditions) Seoul, with a strong influence of the central government and the government of the Generalitat de Catalunya, as well, obviously, as the local government of the organizing city,<sup>3</sup> as is natural.

Third, the preparation of the Games occurred in a context of strong political competition. From the designation of the Barcelona as organizing city until the Games themselves, there was one general election, two local elections and two regional elections; in the period from 1986 to 1992 only in one year was there no election. This competitiveness was more intense in the case of Catalonia than in the rest of Spain: while in other areas of the country there was a complete socialist hegemony (this was especially the case of Andalusia, which serves as a partial contrast to Barcelona with the Seville Universal Exposition), this was less the case in Catalonia, where the regional government is in the hands of a centre-right coalition, CiU (Convergence and Union), which increased its electoral predominance in this period, contrasting with the socialist administration of Barcelona and the central government, also in the hands of the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers Party).

Finally, the specific linguistic and cultural problem of Catalonia uncovered a potentially conflictive situation in an event as rich in symbolic elements as the Olympic Games. This symbolic density was even accentuated by the enormous impact of worldwide television. The potential linguistic-cultural conflictivity and the perception of the Games as an «opportunity» for international projection reciprocally fed conflict and were a part of it, expressed until the closing moment.

Besides this multiplicity of territories, there was simultaneously a diversity of institutional agents involved in the preparation of the Olympic Games, that we can summarize in

3. As is known, the Games were not limited to the city of Barcelona. About twenty other cities had the status of sub-sites, in some cases with important investments. The Diputació de Barcelona (provincial government) played an important role in the preparation and coordination of the network of sub-sites and the financing of many of the corresponding installations. However, the leading role of the City of Barcelona, the fact that its Mayor was also the President of the Organizing Committee (COOB) and the political similarity in terms of political party of the City of Barcelona, the *Diputació* and many sub-sites, allow us to consider the role of the city of Barcelona only in this context. This is not to undervalue the importance of these other institutions, nor minimize the relevance of certain concrete conflicts which came about in some cases.

three: the City of Barcelona, the government of the Generalitat, and the central government.<sup>4</sup> Each of these institutional agents operates as the leader of a wider group of other agents (political parties, groups of opinion, communication media, and so on), so that, for example, the reference to the central government has to be understood as a reference to the PSOE overall, while the reference to the Government of the Generalitat is also applicable to organizations as diverse as CiU, the «Joventut Nacionalista de Catalunya» (Nationalist Youth of Catalonia), or more occasionally, entities such as the «Crida», or the movement for an independent Catalan Olympic Committee.

The three institutional agents that we will consider here (and that, I repeat, can be seen as leaders and spokespersons for a group of political and social movements) interact in the various areas defined by the four above-mentioned dimensions. Yet these interactions, this game of alliances and counterpositions, generates a complex situation that cannot be reduced to simply being «for» or «against».

We will try to focus in more precisely. Effectively, and beyond rhetoric and discourses, what did the various agents mentioned propose? What were the goals they sought to fulfill? I will allow myself to examine what these goals were, introducing a distinction that I hope will be justified by the rest of the paper: these objectives were both «substantial» (results to be attained) and of a «procedural» nature (organization and ways of participation in the decision-making process).

For the central government, the Barcelona Olympic Games were a piece within the overall group of events of the «1992 project». They were not only in coincidence with the Seville Universal Exposition and the Madrid European Cultural Capital, but in a wider sense, the will of the central government was to show the world how Spanish society had modernized and transformed, and aspired to play an important role in the heart of the European Community. The start-up of the European single market, the inauguration of a high velocity train or the success of the three above-mentioned events (in spite of being completely heterogenous realities) had to lead to the strengthening of the new international image of Spain as a developed society, free and competitive.

As is logical, given this global perspective, the central government aspired to coordinate and supervise the overall group of events. Yet it wanted to go even further: the extra-

4. See the comment in the above note.

ordinarily high cost of the projects required an attitude of watchfulness and constant presence to ensure both adequate financing and the homogeneous transmission of the image it wished to project. Thus from a procedural point of view, the objective of the central government was to assure global control of the process (understanding by «control», I repeat, not so much a direct and meticulous direction, as a key role in financing and a position that would allow it to coordinate and supervise the group of events, in order to ensure a certain coherence).

For the government of the Generalitat, and in a wider sense for various nationalist circles in Catalonia, the Olympic Games were seen simultaneously as an opportunity and a danger: an opportunity in the sense of the possibilities for international promotion, and a danger in that Catalan identity could be dissolved within the wider «1992 project», which for its overall Spanish characteristics and its international projection could represent a factor in the loss of importance of specifically Catalan elements. If, furthermore, we recall the element of competition between parties that we have mentioned, it can be understood that the desire of the Generalitat to Catalanize the Games did not just represent a goal of a cultural nature, but a desire to establish a differentiating element, which had to permit it to emerge from the overall «1992 project» and give it its own presence.

This political will meant, from an operational point of view, being actively present in the financing and in the machinery of the preparation and organization of the Games. Weighing the possible risk of being sandwiched between the preponderant role that the Olympic Charter gives to the organizing city and the globalizing will of the central government, the Generalitat established its procedural interest in its participation in the mechanism of preparation and organization of the Games.

For the City of Barcelona the situation was set out in different terms. In an explicit way, both City Hall and the organizers of the Games declared that the Olympic event had an instrumental character, with the goal of projecting the city internationally and going ahead with a number of projects and transformations that would «complete the city».

On the one hand, situating the city on the international circuit would allow it to welcome enterprises and activities of a high level, as a response to changes undergone in the previous fifteen years (the process of de-industrialization, the demographic decline, and so on), all of which threatened the city with—in the words of the Mayor himself—a situa-

tion of «Marseillization». In second place there was the construction or improvement of a number of infrastructures that would resolve the traditional deficiencies of the city, completing its urban identity while respecting (relatively, at least) the traditional identity of the city and its neighbourhoods.

TABLE 1

<i>Agents</i>	<i>Goals</i>	
	<i>Substantial</i>	<i>Procedural</i>
Central Government	«1992»	Control
Government of the Generalitat	Catalanization of the Games	Participation
City of Barcelona	Urban change	Autonomy

Barcelona 1992. Goals of the various institutional agents.  
(Source: the author)

Yet this perspective, derived from a strongly urban and not merely sport-related point of view, would play an important role in the preparatory process of the Games. The decisions concerning infrastructures, mechanisms of financing, or affecting urban administration, had to be taken by the local government itself, involving other agents without being pulled in by their behavioural logic. In other words, the procedural goal of City Hall was to assure that if its role was not one of leadership, at least it would have autonomy in the processes, so that it would be a secondary and subservient agent (which was what happened to the City of Seville in the preparation of the Universal Exposition).<sup>5</sup>

In a very synthetic fashion, Table 1 resumes this analysis of both the substantial and procedural goals that the various institutional agents pursued.

What happened when these different strategies entered into contact? How did they act with one another? These questions are important to be able to read the results of the Games for the various agents in terms of success and failure.

5. As is shown by the study of Seville carried out by G. Roulland, «L'exposition Universelle de Séville (1992). Etude du Système local de Décision», Bordeaux (Les Cahiers du Cerul), n° 1, 1991.

It should be said that this contrasting is not simple, since from the very moment that the city was designated in October of 1986 until the days the Games themselves were held, the preparation was involved in a multitude of conflicts and polemics, during which the positions of each agent were not necessarily coherent. On the other hand, the multiplicity of subjects of conflict partially altered the «visibility» of the respective positions. Yet we can try to conduct an exercise of reconstructing the woods without letting the trees obstruct us. We might deal with the question in the following terms: what was the attitude of each public administration (and by extension, of the «constellation» of political and social forces that each represented) when faced with the goals of the other agents?

For the central government, the overall operation of 1992 was the key element. Yet for its global role in the coordination and supervision of all the projects, it could prefer a position of not opposing itself to the objectives of other agents. Thus, in spite of the extreme tone that the claims for a Catalanization of the Games often took on, the government adopted quite systematically a position of reducing conflict, notably underplaying its positions, even though it did show itself to be uncomfortable upon occasion (we might think of the polemic over the Olympic mascot, the famous Cobi; the scandal over the opening of the Olympic Stadium upon the occasion of the World Track and Field Championship in September 1989; or the long polemic over the use of Catalan or the presence of the Catalan flag in the Olympic ceremonies). In the same way (though with greater enthusiasm and a financial commitment of the first degree) the government was sensitive to the aspirations of City Hall, both from a substantial and a procedural point of view, accepting the desire of the Mayor to preside the organizing committee, or the naming of Santiago Roldán, an economist, and an old friend and university colleague of the Mayor, as the head of governmental participation in financing.

If the Generalitat put its emphasis on the «Catalanizing» aspect of the Games, that did not necessarily mean that it enthusiastically accepted the «1992 project». Just the opposite was true: until the last moment it took up positions to alert everyone of the risks of «Spanishization» that the Olympic event could have, and the risk of seeing the presence of Catalonia as a differentiated reality dissolved. Less negative, however, was the perception of urban change; the Generalitat was deeply involved in some of the elements of the urban process, even though maintaining strong disagreements

(over questions of financing, urban planning licenses, the hotel plan, and others).

For City Hall, the insertion of the Games in the overall set of operations of 1992 was a key question. Instead of a vision of competition with the events that took place in Madrid or Seville, the City of Barcelona chose to situate itself in the front row, calculating (probably rightly) that a global success would make the success of Barcelona greater and that the Olympic Games would probably provide the best results of the three events. In his closing speech for the Games, the Mayor affirmed that «Spain is Barcelona» (and not the opposite, as would seem to be required from a logical point of view). Nothing demonstrated better the desire to be at the heart of the «1992 project» than to tell the world that the characteristics that it had seen in Barcelona for 15 days (a great spectacle, a permanent popular festival, organizational rigour down to the last detail) were characteristics of the new Spain.

Perhaps it is more interesting to state that the City Hall also participated in an active way in the project to Catalanize the Games. Here two different elements coincided: first, the wide acceptance of Catalanizing positions amongst the Catalan political elite (something not always understood in the rest of Spain, where the tendency is to interpret Catalanism in terms of political parties); second, this position allowed City Hall to separate itself, albeit slightly, from the positions of the central government, given that party identity could easily have dissolved the positions of the Catalan socialists into those of the PSOE) and come closer to, or at least reduce the potential conflict with, the positions of the government of the Generalitat.

In effect, as Table 2 shows, the real conflict was much smaller than could have been expected. Conflict was in fact quite small, limited to the persistent reticence of the executive of the Generalitat with regards to the strategy of globality that hovered over the overall plans for 1992.

Readers should not come to the conclusion, however, that the process of the preparation and organization of the Games was a bed of roses. Two important stages can be identified: the first, from 1986 to 1989, was marked essentially by debates and confrontation between the different agents, where one notes a visible effort by all sides involved to position themselves in the process and acquire the most relevant positions possible. This is where the debates over the organization of the Games came from, as well as the debated presidency of the Organizing Committee by the Mayor of the city,

or the problem of how to incorporate the private sector into decision-making bodies.

Undoubtedly the end of the stage came with a concrete event: the inauguration, in September of 1989 of the emblematic Montjuïc stadium as the venue of the World Track and Field Championship. Under a spectacular storm, it was seen that the building, the darling of the Barcelonan architectural elite, had leaks, and that there were organized nuclei that could organize noisy protests against the monarch and the Spanish flag. The events of the opening of the stadium, in other words, indicated that the Olympic Games could come across badly, both from an organizational and a political point of view.

TABLE 2

	«1992»	Catalani- zation	Urban Change
Central government	+	=	≠
Government of the Generalitat	-	+	=
City of Barcelona	+	+	+

Symbols used:

- + signifies a positive perception of each goal, either as a central goal for the respective agent, or by its participation in goals sought by another agent.
- = denotes an attitude of passive participation, of tolerance with regards to a goal sought by another agent.
- denotes an attitude of opposition to a goal sought by another of the agents involved.

Attitude of institutional agents towards different goals  
(Source: the author)

The consequence was immediate. If the Seoul Olympic Games (which had been visited by a large group of Barcelona Olympic officials) had been impressive for the demonstration of strong cooperation between different administrations, the events of the inauguration of the stadium had a visible effect on the positions of the various public administrations involved in the Barcelona Games, who opted to deactivate the conflict, not enter into reciprocal quarrels, and, more in the long term, actively set out to ensure the success of the Games. In other words, the perception arose that to

ensure the success of the Games they had to be « Everybody's Games », so that no political force nor administration could hope to capitalize on them to the detriment of others.

As for general reasons, the participation of the central government and the government of the city in the organization of the Games were two obvious elements, that did not do anything but ensure the involvement of the Generalitat and other Catalan nationalists in the Olympic event. In spite of a multitude of previously threatening signs, neither the « Crida » nor ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya) developed actions against it, nor did the proposal to create a Catalan Olympic committee receive significant support from the Generalitat (something that was bitterly noted later on by the promoters of the admission of Catalonia into the IOC).

This had a result in public opinion. As various surveys showed before and after the Games, the financial contribution and international projection of the Generalitat was evaluated higher than that of the central government (when in financial terms the proportion was 3 to 1 in favour of the latter). Thus in a survey of residents of Catalonia published in *La Vanguardia* (July 19, 1992), it was seen that a third of those asked (32.8%) put the contribution of the City of Barcelona highest; 15.4% pointed to the contribution of the Generalitat, while only 6.7% mentioned the contribution of the central government as the most important.

TABLE 3

Juan Carlos I, King of Spain	8.6
Pasqual Maragall (Mayor of Barcelona)	8.6
Juan Antonio Samaranch (President of the IOC)	8.5
Jordi Pujol (President of the Generalitat)	7.3
Narcís Serra (Deputy Prime Minister)	6.5
Felipe González (Prime Minister)	5.6

Evaluation of the role of various personalities in the celebration of the Olympic Games (scale from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 10)

(Source: OPINA survey for *La Vanguardia*, 11/8/92, from a sample of 800 residents of Catalonia).

The same phenomenon was seen in the evaluation of the role of various Spanish personalities in the Games. If we wish, we might easily understand the role of the Monarch given his presence throughout the Games and the participa-



tion of the Prince of Asturias in the Spanish team. In the same way the high evaluation for the president of the IOC, Mr. Samaranch, could seem obvious. But the fact that the President of the Generalitat could be higher than the Prime Minister of the Spanish Government, or its deputy Prime Minister, former city mayor, Mr. Serra, is a sign of the perception of the relative role played by the various public institutions. A survey after the Games asked those surveyed to evaluate from 0 to 10 the participation of various Spanish personalities in the celebration of the Games. The results are seen in Table 3.

Even still, there is another side to the coin. There were few images as symbolic as the football final in the stadium of Football Club Barcelona, which is charged with Catalanist symbolism. The vision of Nou Camp presided by the King, full of Spanish flags, watching the Spanish team win the gold medal, showed in the clearest way possible that the Games had meant an enormously significant shift in the integration of Catalonia into Spain, without at all denigrating its own symbols of cultural and social identity.