

Olympic cities and communication

Miquel de Moragas Spà & Chris Kennett
Centre d'Estudis Olímpics, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona



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Introduction

One of the main challenges for the Modern Olympic Games is the establishment of a model for City-Games relations. This requires the definition of an organisational, economic and urban model, as well as a cultural and communication model.

The Olympic Games are a mega-event characterised by their periodicity (the quadrennial Olympiad), having a fixed place in time that enables extensive communication planning to take place. This has facilitated the establishment of the Olympic Games as a media event (Dayan & Katz 1992) and has created important opportunities and challenges for the cultural and communication policies of the organising city and country, as well as for the IOC.

The Olympic Games communication stakeholders

Communication planning begins at least six years prior to the opening ceremony, and can stretch back even further to the conceptualisation of the bid when the basic strategic elements of the image of the host city and country are defined. The pursuit of acceptable solutions for all stakeholders is a complex process, both professionally and politically.

The Olympic Games provide significant communication opportunities for the host, particularly in terms of promotion through the extensive media coverage the event receives. In the cases of Barcelona'92 and Sydney 2000 billions of dollars of investment was made in urban improvements that contributed to the construction of a desired image for the Games and their hosts. In short, investment in the Games was high, and so were the risks. It comes as no surprise that it is in the interests of several stakeholders to attempt to control the communication process. These stakeholders have short, medium and long-term interests in the successful communication of the Games.

Firstly, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has a long-term vested interest in the positive communication of several factors including its collective organisational image and the image of key individual representatives, the communication of Olympic values, and the protection of Olympic symbols. It is the combination of these factors that produces the Olympic brand.

Secondly, the local Games organising committee (OCOG) has a short-term interest that focuses on the successful communication of the constructed desired image of the Games, involving balancing the interests of local stakeholders (local, regional, nation governments, interest groups, community groups etc). The management of this process is aimed at generating local public support, which is crucial for the successful organisation of the Games. In the medium and longer term, the communication process may be extended as the host becomes an 'Olympic city', the Olympics becoming part of its identity.

Thirdly, the official rights holding broadcasters have developed a long-term interest in the successful communication of the Olympic Games. Many broadcasters have used the Games in the development of their own brand images, becoming the 'Olympic channel'. As often happens when large amounts are paid

for exclusive rights, questions of journalistic objectivity arise and accusations of 'embedded journalism' made. This is compensated for to a limited extent by the non-rights holding broadcasters and the press.

Finally, and similarly to the Olympic Broadcasters, the official sponsors of The Olympic Programme (TOP) have medium to long-term interests in the successful communication of the Games. While their agreements often span Olympiads, the biannual celebration of the Games provides a focus point for their promotional activities. Marketers from these organisations seek opportunities to add value to their brand image through their association with an Olympic Games, a process that can be facilitated by local organisers (as in the case of Sydney), and in the creation of a coherent image for the Games themselves. The same circumstances apply for local sponsors, but with shorter-term interests that focus on local target audiences rather than international.

The hundreds of millions of dollars that are invested by the broadcast and sponsors as stakeholders, increases still further the risks involved in the communication process and also the need to protect the semiotic and semantic content of the Olympic Movement.

Moreover, it comes as little surprise that attempts by stakeholders to control the communication process have increased. In the case of Sydney 2000 more effort than ever was made to control the communication process in order to ensure the accurate communication of the constructed image for the Games and the hosts.

This could be interpreted as manipulation of the media on the part of the organisers, taking advantage of the fact that international journalists may have to rely on them due to difficulty in accessing primary sources of information themselves. This may be of particular relevance to sports journalists requiring additional information on host culture.

Indeed, the final image decision of the Games is a product of a process characterised by tensions and consensus, by negotiation between the different actors involved. In the case of Barcelona'92, for example, the final image decision was a result of consensus between the governments of Spain and Catalonia (the Generalitat), the Ajuntament de Barcelona (Barcelona City Hall), the IOC, the media, sponsors and social actors involved in the cultural reality of the country.

Each new edition of the Games requires specific research into the political dimension and management of their image.

The Olympic Games communication process

In terms of the professional or advertising aspect, the first step in communication planning involves the definition of the basic semantic contents that should subsequently be communicated through the mass media. The debate over the basic semantic contents inspires the whole of the Games' symbolic production, most notably in the design of symbols (logo, mascot), the selection of a cultural model for the ceremonies (opening, closing, torch relay, medal presentations), the basic information strategies for the mass media (books, brochures, guides, videos etc).

During this process, there is a tendency to reinforce dominant and widely accepted values that are of a non-conflictive nature, which are often 'politically correct' and to avoid controversial or divisive themes. These values are adapted to the Olympic rituals, as well as to the communication production routines of each period in time in which the Games take place.

This adaptation to the Olympic rituals and to period-specific communication conditions implies the synthesis of a complex reality – the identity of the host – in a limited number of images and reference points.

Taking this into account, and based on research undertaken on the Games of Barcelona, Atlanta and Sydney, it is possible to identify the following main categories and semantic processes:

- Adaptation of the messages to an international audience, but also to the expectations of local public opinion;
- Achievement of consensus and negotiation between the actors involved in the organisation of the Games regarding areas for promotion;
- Resistance of publicly accepting the existence of conflicts, but when made obvious and public they are incorporated;
- Semantic synthesis (reduction) of the host's collective image and adaptation to the demands of visual languages;
- International media interpretation of the culture and social reality of the host, encoded as part of their established journalistic patterns;
- Integration of the host city image and the Olympic Movement into the history of that city (Moragas 1987; Moragas, Rivenburgh & Larson 1995; Moragas, Moreno & Kennett 2003).

Consensus, criticism and self-criticism

In order to understand 'image creation', it is also necessary to discuss 'missing elements', or perhaps we should say elements that are omitted from official promotional strategies. As with any promotional activity, negative aspects tend to be left out of image making and semantic processes (pollution, marginalisation, poverty, prostitution, noise, urban inequalities, congestion etc.).

In the case of Barcelona, for example, a principle aim was to avoid outdated tourist stereotypes such as bullfighting, flamenco, sangria, sun, folklore etc. These notions did not fit with the new Catalan identity or the image of a modern Spain that were to be projected internationally.

Despite this, the final image of the Games is a result of many other interventions and tensions that are not under the control of those that officially manage the image. Every four years the Olympic Games take place in different social context and the image of those Games is partly shaped by dissenting voices and alternative perspectives.

The phases of public opinion

The popular euphoria that is produced by the nomination of a city to be the host of an Olympic Games, which is reproduced and reinforced by the local media, is the beginning of a lengthy period where public opinion passes through several different phases:

- Expectation (6 to 4 years before);
 - Mistrust and general criticism from the local press (4 to 2 years before);
 - Consensus (1 year before);
 - Euphoria, local solidarity and limited criticism from the media (year of the Games);
 - Forgetting (the first few years after the Games);
 - Recovery: emblematic anniversaries (1st, 10th, 25th, 50th ...)
- (Moragas, Moreno & Kennett 2003).

The year of the Games is characterised by the containment of self-criticism. Certain studies of public opinion in Olympic cities explain this is a consequence of the effects of large scale promotional campaigns that take place (Rutheiser 1996; Jefferson 2000). Without questioning their influence, it is also necessary to consider the brake placed on criticism by strong collective feeling that is produced by the public's consciousness of the fact that the world's eyes are upon the city.

This feeling ('we'll be watched by 3.5bn TV viewers') facilitates political opportunism in the reaching of agreements and consensus for the achievement of commonly held objectives or for the resolution of historical problems. Examples such opportunism include the opening up of Korea to the world in 1988, the pact between the Catalan and Spanish governments in the creation of the symbols and use of national flags in the ceremonies at Barcelona'92, as well as the agreements struck with Aboriginal communities for Sydney 2000.

Every host city, of course, has certain key themes as part of the everyday functioning of its political and social reality. For Barcelona'92, the key theme was the demand for representation of Catalan national identity in the symbology of the Games and for recognition of its own identity on a global scale. Increasingly the same key themes tend to be repeated, focusing on major problems in the global society: the economy and globalisation; sustainability and urban politics; social integration and multi-culturality. This places the Olympic Movement at the heart of current debate on society in general, not only in relation to sport.

The image of the Games has become increasingly important in the communication of the host's commitment to tackling such themes as peace and the protection of the environment. For example, both Lillehammer and Sydney promoted themselves as the 'Green Games'.

Twelve years later in Barcelona, when considering the current organisation of the Universal Forum of Cultures 2004 in the city, it is surprising how little criticism of there was of the commercialisation and involvement of multinationals in the organisation of the Games. In the context of accelerated globalisation, which the Games have simultaneously contributed to and been subject to, anti-globalisation critiques have

emerged that may form the focal point of new criticisms for the organisation of Games and the Olympic Movement in general.

The main stages for symbolic production

The ceremonies: international projection of the host

The ceremonies are the main media for the symbolic production of the modern Olympic Games (Moragas, MacAloon & Llinés 1994). This has been demonstrated by various research studies, in particular on the opening and closing ceremonies at Barcelona, Atlanta and Sydney (Moragas, Rivenburgh & Larson 1995). The results from these analyses have demonstrated the high level of similarity between the 'ideas-proposal' of the message senders (the Organising Committee) and the diffusion of these ideas through the international television broadcasters. Contrary to this, these studies have also highlighted numerous contradictions and imbalances in the representation of Olympic values, especially multi-culturality, in the broadcasts of the ceremonies.

These studies have also demonstrated that interest in the more general and universal aspects of the Games are compatible with interest in more local or specific aspects. Attention paid to the more local rituals and the representations of the ceremonies by the majority of international TV broadcasters shows a double condition - 'local-global' - in the media coverage of the Games (Tomlinson 1996). The ceremonies, in their totality, structure their discourse in reference to the dual concepts of 'globalisation' and 'localisation'.

In the case of Barcelona'92 understanding was achieved (between broadcasters and other interpreters) on a key issue: the Games presented the opportunity to change the international image of the three main geopolitical reference points: Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain. The international television and press interpreted these changes and communicated them to an unprecedented audience, estimated to be between 700m and 1bn television viewers (Moragas, Rivenburgh & Larson 1995a).

The stadium becomes a TV studio

In recent editions of the Games, and without doubt as a result of the impacts of television, the ceremonies have become one of the key projects of the Games' organisation. The success of the Games is related to a limited extent on the success of the ceremonies, providing a window which opens into the athletic competition and sets the tone for the following days. Sixteen days later the window closes, providing a time for reflection on the Games in sporting and organisational terms, as well as the last chance to communicate key messages.

The Games' organisers have shown the ability to add the necessary dose of creativity to call attention to the originality of artistic and creative proposals. The ceremonies in Barcelona, for example, benefited from opting for a vanguard style and from their clear differentiation from folkloristic antecedents of previous ceremonies and from superficial mass gymnastic festivals, which for many Spaniards provoke memories of Francoist trade union celebrations.

This vanguard approach (which began in Albertville) and the achievement of political consensus concerning the images to be shown were without doubt two of the keys to the ceremonies' success in Barcelona, as well as gaining popular support for them.

After Seoul'88 the ceremonies have generally been structured in three main parts: introduction and presentation of the host country's culture; a celebration of the Olympic rituals; and a final celebration expressed through the culture of the host. Barcelona brought something new to this structure: bringing together these rituals and spectacles onto one stage with the covering of the stadium in a carpet of blue Mediterranean colour. This formula was continued in Atlanta (again blue) and Sydney (brown) creating an enormous stage, a monumental television studio inside the stadium.

The ceremonies of Barcelona, in continuation from those of Los Angeles'84 and Seoul'88 distanced themselves from the rather naïve format of the Moscow'80 ceremonies (including hundreds of dancing "Misha" bears). Important new developments also took place in the treatment of the Olympic rituals, making them more spectacular and more 'televisual'. Three examples highlight this innovation: the archer lighting the cauldron with a flaming arrow; the covering of the athletes with a giant Olympic flag; and the parade of flags representing previous Olympic Games, which included flags with doves for the Games cancelled due to the world wars.

With the new influence of television and modern cultural circumstances (global-local), the ceremonies have become established as the main symbolic and cultural act of the Olympic Games. In the cases of Barcelona, Atlanta and Sydney, the ceremonies were the focal point of the host city's cultural policy relating to the Games.

The ceremonies are an unrepeatable opportunity for the international projection of the host city image, but above all they should be understood as an opportunity to represent Olympic values. Therefore, the Athens 2004 Games constitute a unique opportunity, where host city cultural representation coincides with the historic tradition of the Olympism.

The major communication challenge for the ceremonies involves the adaptation of this discourse to the media stage that the Olympic stadium becomes on the nights that open and close the Games.

However, the control is not entirely in the hands of the organisers. The second part of the communication process lays with the international television broadcasters, in the phrases of the commentators, the selection of images and placement of commercial breaks. The interpretation and edition of the ceremonies, what and how the audience see and hear as they experience the ceremonies is in the hands of a small number of media professionals. The research undertaken on this coverage forms a fundamental part of the final study of the legacy of the Games.

The host city identity: symbol and mascot

The image policy of the Olympics Games receives its first test in the selection of the mascot and the symbol (or logo). It is no surprise that these first design decisions are the centre of controversy and mark the future orientation of subsequent decisions relating to the cultural model of the Games.



Cobi mascot

For example, the Cobi mascot was the product of the initial tensions and the need for consensus in the symbolic production of Barcelona'92. Cobi broke radically from previous 'Disneyfied' mascots. The ambiguity of Cobi enabled its adaptation to a long process of consumption and manipulation, over time becoming recognised as a high quality design (especially in commercial terms) and at the same time vanguard in nature. The Olympic Collectors Association web site recognised the process of acceptance that took place, "the Spaniards did not immediately take to "Cobi", the surreal dog from the Summer Olympic Games of Barcelona. "Cobi's" popularity slowly grew and by the end of the Games he was loved universally by the Spanish and the rest of the world' (International Olympic Memorabilia Federation 2004).



Logo Barcelona'92



Logo Athens 2004

Following the tradition established by Otl Aicher for the Munich'72 Games, the official symbol of the Barcelona'92 Games was a basic element of overall identity of the Games. The red and yellow of the Spanish and Catalan national flags combined with the blue of the Mediterranean in a dynamic image that represents the sporting movement, but also a vibrant and passionate identity for the hosts. The Athens 2004 symbol employs similar design techniques. The olive wreath (kotinos) was the reward for victory in Ancient Greece and was the symbol of the Athenian city-state. The colour combinations are also specifically Greek, the blue representing the Greek sea and sky, and the white reflects the Aegean light. The free-hand drawing of the wreath also has symbolic value, communicating the human element of the Games.

For Barcelona'92 the symbol was a starting point for the development of other design activities such as signage, stationary, posters, publicity materials etc, that combined to form an overall 'look' for the Games. The Athens 2004 'look' continues this tradition, combining three key elements that represent a unique fusion of Olympic history: the heritage of the Ancient Olympic Games; the revival of the Modern Olympic Games in 1896; modern Greece and the Olympic Movement in 2004.

Semantic synthesis, reduction and reproduction

Initial studies of the journalistic coverage of the Barcelona'92 Games showed that the international press focused on a limited number of issues (Ladrón, Còller & Romaní 1995). The phenomenon of semantic synthesis and reduction that took place in relation to image production, is again evident.

As discussed above with respect to television coverage, the selection of issues is induced by the cultural and information policy of the host city. Another influential factor is the result of the interpretation process by journalists as they attempt to make the event conform to the expectations of the readers, following the cultural production routines of each media.

An example of this process of reduction in the semantic area of Olympic interpretation can be found in the selection of images for photographic books that are published in different countries after the Games. The high degree of similarity when selecting the photos that form part of the history of each Games is surprising, considering the hundreds of thousands that are taken. These images form a very narrow, 'reduced semantic' legacy of images that are reproduced in various media when remembering previous Olympic Games. This typically occurs in the build-up to, and during, each new Olympic Games and when celebrating emblematic anniversaries. This limited number of images and often music, as in the case of the song 'Barcelona' (Caballé and Mercury), serve to encapsulate a Games, transporting viewers and readers back through memories that evoke emotional responses. When combined over several Olympic Games, these images create an archive of moments that form a popular Olympic history.

Themes of journalistic interest

Olympic information can be grouped into two main areas: sport on the one hand; political, cultural and social questions relating to the host country on the other.

Sports information is focused on the activities in which the athletes from the home nation of the journalist compete (above all the medals they win), as well as high profile 'negative' stories e.g. doping or other forms of cheating. Peripheral to this coverage are stories about the success of athletes from other countries, particularly in the most prestigious events. In addition, increasing interest is shown in the peculiarities of the host country, which is subject to exhaustive scrutiny and evaluation.

The criteria for analysis of the Olympic host used by the international press are limited to key factors:

- Quality and efficiency of the organisation;
- Transport: punctuality and speed;
- Facilities and services (particularly those provided to the journalists themselves);
- Security;
- Environmental impacts;

- Impacts of the Games on urban change;
- Technology used;
- Economic factors related to the Games;
- General infrastructure.

Apart from these more tangible criteria, journalists reporting on the Games are increasingly interested in other more intangible factors such as:

- Political use of the Games;
- Citizens' participation in the wider festival element of the Games, the atmosphere created in the city and the sports venues;
- The treatment of journalists by volunteers;
- The spectacle created during the ceremonies.

And more recently:

- Adaptation of the Games to the demands of sustainability.

Analysis of the press coverage of the Games cannot simply be restricted to the period of the Games themselves, it must also include coverage during the entire Olympiad, and in the period after the Games where the legacies are evaluated. The Olympic Games command the attention of the international press from the beginning of the bid phase, where attention is shared with other cities, through the seven year preparation phase. At certain points, such as IOC inspections of preparation progress, media attention intensifies, particularly if any form of controversy is involved. In the immediate months before the Games, the degree of media attention builds to its peak as expectations are created. All of the major international newspapers prepare for the opening of the Games with special supplements and informational documents, and journalists become a priority in public relations terms for the local organising committee and local authorities.

The Olympic Studies Centre (UAB) created a non-accredited press centre in collaboration with the Organising Committee to provide support for journalists that were not officially accredited but were reporting from the host city. This idea was repeated in Sydney, along with the creation of the Visiting Journalists Programme, which provided extensive support services to journalists reporting on Games and Australia in general during the build-up (Chalip 2002).

The Sydney Organising Committee (SOCOG) and the Australian Tourism Board further levered the publicity generating potential of the Games by providing services to facilitate the activities of Olympic sponsors and other companies wishing to use Australia in their promotional campaigns (Chalip 2002).

The Cultural Olympiad and cultural policy

An analysis of communication and the Olympic Games is not complete without consideration of one of its fundamental dimensions: cultural policy. This policy is implemented through the ceremonies and symbolic reproduction, but also in the conceptualisation and management of the 'Cultural Olympiad'.

The organisers of the Barcelona'92 Games were the first to propose the idea of a 'Cultural Olympiad' with a wide scope that lasted four years, from receiving the Olympic flag in Seoul 1988 to the closing ceremony at Montjuïc in 1992.

This highly ambitious project, whose efforts to a large extent could be described as 'frustrated', formed the third stage in the cultural programme of the Olympic Games. After a conference held in 1906 at the Comédie Française, Paris, Pierre de Coubertin proposed the organisation of a series of artistic competitions during the Olympic Games, which were to be called the "Pentathlon de les Muses" (sculpture, painting, literature, architecture, music). The project did not begin until the Stockholm Games of 1912, after which it developed in an irregular and contradictory way. The second main stage in the Olympic cultural programme started in Melbourne'52 when the artistic competitions ended and exhibitions and festivals took over (Garcia 2002).

The Barcelona'92 model was followed by Atlanta, Sydney and Athens (at the time of writing), extending the cultural activities over the four year period of the Olympiad. However, rather than incorporating new contents into Olympic cultural policies, the Barcelona, Atlanta and Sydney Cultural Olympiads were limited to profiting from 'the Olympic opportunity' in adding value to the host city's cultural policies and cultural 'brand identity'. In general these 'new' Cultural Olympiads constitute nothing more than another sub-brand that are incorporated into the annual programme of cultural activities organised by the host city.

Time and experience have revealed the difficulties involved in organising a four year project, especially when high levels of demand are focused on a few key moments from when the torch is lit to when it is extinguished in the closing ceremony.

Evaluation of the Athens 2004 experience is still not possible, but recent Cultural Olympiads have suffered from a fundamental contradiction: not taking into full consideration the Olympic Games as a cultural event. Moragas (1987; 1991; 1992) has defended this point since 1987, which has been vindicated by the experiences of Atlanta and Sydney. The new Cultural Olympiad model has contributed little to the cultural policy of the Olympic Movement, only contributing to the renovation of host city cultural policies.

Pasqual Maragall, then Mayor of Barcelona and President of the Barcelona'92 Organising Committee (COOB), stated in a press conference at the presentation of the Cultural Olympiad in 1988 that it should be defined as "a stimulus, from the ideals of peace, dialogue and Olympic fraternity, for artistic and cultural creativity and for the construction of platforms for dialogue and the exchange of universal cultural values".

Ultimately, the Barcelona'92 Cultural Olympiad did not live up to this philosophy. Central to this failure was the creation of an organising committee for the Cultural Olympiad that was separate from COOB. The idea of constructing platforms for dialogues and the exchange of cultural values was achieved outside of the Cultural Olympiad, in the stadium, the athletes' parades in the ceremonies, in the Olympic Village, during the torch relay, in the relations between athletes and the public, during the Paralympics etc.

Years later, and the authors believe as a consequence of the initial ideas behind the Cultural Olympiad, a proposal was made to stage a new large scale event: the Universal Forum of Cultures. This proposal became a reality and the event will take place in Barcelona in 2004. The Forum aimed to create a global platform for intercultural dialogue, explicitly attempting to achieve what the Olympic Games had done implicitly.

Remembering the Games

The Olympic Games have an important impact on public opinion and collective memory. The Games mark cities in tangible ways (e.g. urban change), but also in many intangible ways, which result in the Games becoming part of the collective memories of host citizens and part of a city's history. From the experience of Barcelona, we can see that these memories are revived during emblematic anniversaries and used as political tools.

The celebration of the first anniversary, for example, was characterised by strong institutional involvement, with speeches and commemorative acts, which produced repercussions in the press but involved on limited public participation. The journalists' reports and the political discourse began to openly consider the conflict that the city then faced between nostalgia for the past and the need to create new objectives and to move forwards. This collective feeling was expressed in the *El País* headline, "The bitter sweet awakening from the Olympic dream" (25 July 1993).

The following anniversaries passed by relatively unnoticed as the city returned to a new reality, seemingly wishing to 'change the subject'. Raising the subject of the Games in public amounted to almost political incorrectness. The second and third anniversaries were only celebrated publicly by a few ex-volunteers that met under the cauldron to open some bottles of cava and toast great memories. These memories remained alive among the people of the city, but journalistic references were scant and official acts nonexistent. In some ways it was necessary to put these memories to the back of the individual and collective consciousness in order to be able to move on.

A surprising celebratory anniversary of the Games took place in the media in 1996 after the staging of the Atlanta Games. This institutional, media and above all popular revival occurred amidst the criticisms of organisation in Atlanta, the Catalan newspaper *Avui* stating that "Atlanta make the Barcelona Games even better" (25 July 1996). This was followed in October 1996 with a popular celebration of the tenth anniversary of the nomination of Barcelona as host city involving tens of thousands of people.

Subsequent anniversaries again passed without celebration until the 10th anniversary of the Games in 2002. A celebration was held in the Olympic Stadium, honouring the ex-volunteers who were specially invited, as well as Juan Antoni Samaranch who had recently ended his reign as IOC President. The event was also used as a tool to promote the Universal Forum of Cultures 2004, demonstrating the necessity to refer to the past as a key to undertaking future projects.

While anniversaries seek a place in people's memories, they also need a physical space in which to stage to represent their rituals. In the past, the architecture and design of the Olympic facilities has not always

taken into consideration the importance of creating a central symbolic space as a (physical) referent for the popular memory of the Games. The planning of the Games should consider surviving spaces for post-Olympic celebration: sculptures, parks, and in particular the cauldron as a meeting point and opportunity to revive the ritual of lighting the flame.

“The best Games ever”?

Despite the continual evaluation, albeit of a limited nature, by the media, there was a key moment of recognition for the organisers of the Olympic Games. This moment came in the closing ceremony, where former IOC President Samaranch established the tradition of declaring the Games as the best ever. Great tension proceeds this moment, as expressed by Spanish TVE commentator:

“Here in Sydney there is great anxiety over whether or not Samaranch will declare, which he did not do for example in Atlanta four years ago, these Games to be the best in Olympic history”

This key phrase became very powerful in semantic terms, influencing general opinion about the Games and providing some form of official confirmation for the organisers as well as the host population. The decision not to speak these words during the closing ceremony at Atlanta achieved an even greater impact, but with strong negative connotations. Indeed, a phrase which for some had become an inevitable rubber stamp, became an international judgement cast live on television to a global audience.

The new IOC President Jacques Rogge has already announced that he will not repeat this phrase for future Games. From a communication perspective great caution should be taken with new semantic formulas and the dangers of simplification and reductionism in the final evaluation of the Games.

Internet: a new environment for Olympic communication

Analysis of communicating the Games, which has so far concentrated on mass media, should now extend its focus to include the influence of the Internet. The fact that the Internet did not exist as a generally available medium in the communication of Barcelona'92, highlights the accelerated nature of this process. Twelve years later in Athens, it is impossible to interpret the Games without considering the new applications of the Internet.

The Barcelona'92 Games will form part of the history of the Olympics as the last Games of the broadcasting era, and Atlanta'96 as the first of the Internet era. This transition, amidst rapid developments in ICT during the 1990s, contributed to technological contradictions and limitations that left a symbolic and image related question mark over the Atlanta Games. IT related problems resulted in widespread criticism of the organisers and IBM from the international press.

The subsequent growth of the Internet presents a new set of opportunities and challenges for the organisers of the Olympic Games. The Internet enables highly efficient communication of information such as event results and reports to audiences worldwide, overcoming barriers of space and time. Contents can

also be delivered in interactive formats and through personalised services to customers, combining sports information with opportunities to connect with related websites and make purchases online.

The most important opportunity the Internet offers for the Olympic Games, however, is webcasting – the live or recorded broadcast of sport through the Internet. While this may enable delivery to computers and mobile phones, the potential for convergence between digital television and the Internet also presents the possibility to deliver direct to television sets. This opportunity is also a major challenge for the IOC, producing uncertainty over the sale of TV rights in their current formats.

Unless exclusivity can be secured in a similar way to existing rights packages, the potential webcasting of the Games means that apart from losing all important exclusivity, broadcasters wishing to delay coverage to peak viewing times will not be able to. In addition, audiences may be fragmented, being drawn away from official TV broadcasts to Internet sources – a phenomenon that has already begun to affect TV viewing in general in the USA. This of course would have serious consequences in attracting high paying advertisers and therefore the broadcasters' ability to recover the billions paid for the rights.

Moreover, uncertainty was compounded by the dotcom crash, which raised serious doubts as to the true value of Internet related companies. NBC were left without a partner to run the NBCOlympics.com site for the Salt Lake 2002 Winter Games after Quokka Sports filed for bankruptcy, until Microsoft stepped in as a replacement in June 2001. It is unsurprising therefore, that the IOC decided to delay the development of an Internet strategy and any decision on establishing separate Internet rights.

However, the IOC received criticism from Internet journalists who claimed that not enough accreditations were granted to professionals from online media for the Salt Lake 2002 Winter Games. This is set to change for Athens 2004 as the number of accredited online journalists will increase significantly. Meanwhile, the official Internet partner for the Olympic Games remains tied to the major TV rights holder. The website NBCOlympics.com will be again operated in partnership between NBC and MSN and for the first time will include video-streamed reports from Athens.

Therefore, it seems that the IOC has adopted an *ad hoc* approach to dealing with the opportunities and challenges posed by the Internet. However, the speed of development in this area, its potential impacts on broadcast rights and on the control of the Games' communication in general, means that the IOC will not be able to delay the formulation of a strategy for the 2006 Games and after.

Conclusion

Therefore, while the broadcast era produced a relatively closed, centralised interpretation of the events undertaken by state broadcasters, the Internet era appears to be more open and participatory. These developments will produce important communication opportunities and challenges for the IOC and other stakeholders. This will force changes in the formulation and implementation of Olympic Games communication strategies, which will be of direct consequence to future research into Olympic communication, media and cultural studies.

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