



## Citizen participation in the Olympic Games

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Series **University Lectures** | 20



**Centre d'Estudis Olímpics**  
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

This work has been published as part of the educational project promoted by the Olympic Studies Centre (CEO-UAB), *University Lectures on the Olympics*, within the framework of the International Chair in Olympism (IOC-UAB). The project aims to provide online access to texts covering the main subjects related to the written by international experts and aimed at university students and lecturers.

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To cite this work, you can use the reference:

Panagiotopoulou, Roy (2010): *Citizen participation in the Olympic Games* [online article]. Barcelona: Centre d'Estudis Olímpics UAB.  
[Consulted: dd/mm/yy]  
<[http://ceo.uab.cat/pdf/panagiotopoulou\\_eng.pdf](http://ceo.uab.cat/pdf/panagiotopoulou_eng.pdf)>

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ISBN: 978-84-693-6214-3

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The Olympic Games are the only athletic event based on specific ideals and a movement. For this reason the organization of the Games is based on the participation and contributions of various groups of people. It would be impossible to carry out the Olympic Games only with athletes as they would not then be the Olympic Games but some other athletic event. Moreover, the tremendous popularity the Games acquired in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and thereafter can be attributed in part to their exposure from the mass media as well as to the possibility of participation. With the exception, of course, of the athletes and the Olympic family who are directly related to the competitive part of the event (support of the individual sporting events and the competitors), the volunteers, the citizens of the host city, the visitors and finally the Olympic torchbearers provide the possibility for anyone who is not an athlete or in some way involved to the sports industry to participate directly. Without the volunteers and the other participants, the Olympic movement, which motivates people to participate in the largest athletic and cultural event of global scope and visibility, could not exist (Panagiotopoulou 2000a: 81-90, idem, 2000b).

## 1. The Olympic volunteers: concept and evolution

The meaning of the volunteer in the Olympic Games, as seen in the Official Report Games of the XXV Olympiad Barcelona 1992, is similar to the more general perception of volunteers and is specified in the following way: "The volunteer is a person who makes an individual, altruistic commitment to collaborate, to the best of his/her abilities in the organization of the Olympic Games, carrying out the tasks assigned to him/her without receiving payment or rewards of any other nature."<sup>1</sup>

Since World War II, the organization of the Olympic Games has incrementally been based on the contributions of volunteers. The evolution of the idea of voluntary participation in the organization and the conducting of the Olympic Games can be divided into four long periods depending on the logic of the Games themselves and on the social changes of the time (Moragas et al. 2000:135):

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<sup>1</sup> See COOB'92. *Memoria Oficial de los Juegos Olímpicos de Barcelona 1992*. Barcelona: COOB '92, vol. 1, p. 381. It is obvious that the volunteers are not paid even a symbolic remuneration; nevertheless, some compensation is given such as for example diplomas, uniforms, souvenirs, free tickets to the Games, and so on. Although strictly speaking this is contrary to the ideals of the Olympic volunteer, it has been an ongoing practice at all the Olympic Games since the beginning of the 1990s.

1. *From the Olympic Games in Athens 1896 to Berlin 1936.*<sup>2</sup> This period is characterized by the anonymous contribution of volunteers through various organizations and bodies (for example scouts, the army, and so on).
2. *From London in 1948 to Montreal in 1976.* The post-war spirit of industrialization and economic development of the western countries dominated. Voluntary participation gradually increased through the traditional organizations (scouts, the army) as well as through individual participation.
3. *From Lake Placid 1980 to Seoul 1988.* Voluntary participation gradually takes its present form. The volunteers follow the suggestions of the Organizing Committee more and more. From the Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1984 and after, their significance is fundamental.
4. *From Albertville and Barcelona in 1992 to Athens in 2004.* In recent years we have observed a consolidation of the model in which the Organizing Committee is the authority that not only takes charge, but also coordinates the volunteers. The ongoing increase in the scope of the Organizing Committee in addition to the evolution of the Games into an athletic and cultural event has resulted in an increase in the participation of volunteers and has established them as a necessary condition of the Games' organization.

### 1.1. The Significance of the volunteer movement in organizing the Olympic Games

The basic characteristic, which differentiates the Olympic Games from the other large athletic events, lies in the ideological element of the promotion of the Olympic ideals. The most consistent and dedicated disseminators of these ideals have proven to be the volunteers. It has already been noted by many who have studied the Olympic Games that they could not take place without the volunteers because then they would simply not be the Olympic Games, but some other athletic event. The volunteers are the soul and the driving force of the Games.

The importance of the Olympic volunteer movement can be analyzed under a number of different perspectives (Moragas et. al., 2000:151):

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<sup>2</sup> At the Berlin Olympics in 1936 the Scouts were replaced with the Nazi Youth and the participation of volunteers was more in terms of ideological support of the regime, rather than participation based on free choice for the promotion of the Olympic ideals.

- *Political*: It expresses the unity of actions of subjects related to a common purpose. It constitutes a new form of participation and expression of citizens in a large public event.
- *Economic*: Through their work, the volunteers contribute to a significant reduction of the cost (primarily wages). So long as there is sufficient training, one may expect a number of highly skilled individuals ready to work efficiently in other sectors of the economy.
- *Cultural*: Volunteerism embodies the characteristics of solidarity and cooperation with various people of different cultural origins. Communication and cooperation between peoples have been strengthened through voluntarism.
- *Athletic*: Direct communication with the athletes motivates young people to become involved in sports and at the same time it offers direct support for the athletes and their federations.

## 1.2. Incentives and particularities of voluntarism

The ethical and the material incentives that motivate volunteers can be numerous and varied (Burns 2000:55-56). With respect to the incentives that motivate each individual to choose to devote time and energy for the Olympic Games, they may be summarized as follows (Roennigen 2000: 184):

- Once-in-a-lifetime experience.
- Valuable training and experience – e.g. speaking in another language in an international environment.
- Patriotism – helping to promote the city, the region and the country.
- Loyalty- helping a sporting club or organization you are personally committed to.
- Meeting and establishing new friends and contacts.
- Gaining insight information or skills that are valuable or meaningful.
- Participating in a winning team.
- Experiencing the working of a major professional organization from the inside.

Volunteerism in the Olympic Games is not necessarily identified with that of other philanthropic, environmental, organizations, etc. The particular characteristics of the Olympic Games volunteerism are that:

- It lasts for a specific period of time.
- It offers the possibility of social contribution in combination with entertainment and making acquaintances on a national and international level.
- It allows young people to acquire work experience or to improve their curriculum vitae.
- It involves the possibility of training and specialization in a variety of economic sectors.
- The organization of the Olympic Games is of exceptional symbolic significance and apart from the unique experience obtained during the Games; it usually offers important social rewards and acceptance.
- Although athletics and competitive sports are becoming more and more professionalized, the voluntary contribution of services assists the sport bodies and the federations in controlling their expenses and at the same time creating a group of strong supporters.

### 1.3. Comparative data on the development of participation of volunteers in the Olympic Games

The number of individuals who offered voluntary support to the Olympic Games has increased significantly since the 1980s. The table and the related diagrams below present comparative data regarding the development of the number of volunteers in both the summer as well the winter Olympic Games.

Diagram 1

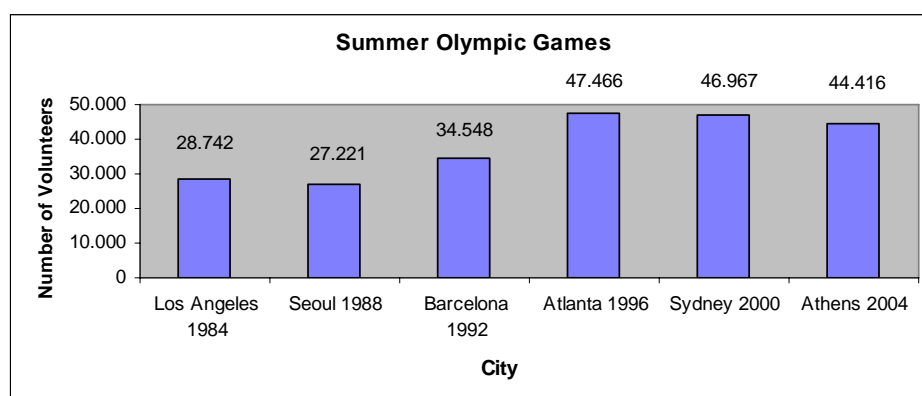




Diagram 2

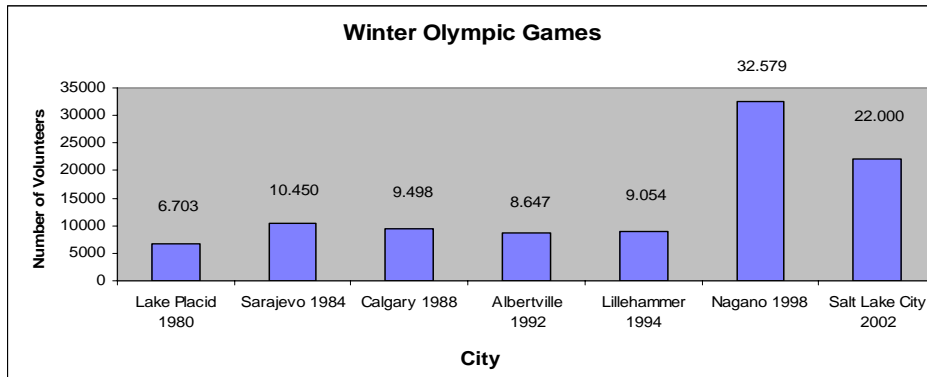


Table 1 | Development of the number of volunteers from 1980 – 2004 (in thousands)

A. Summer Olympic Games

City	Number of volunteers	% difference
Los Angeles 1984	28,742	
Seoul 1988	27,221	-5.3
Barcelona 1992	34,548	26.9
Atlanta 1996	47,466	37.4
Sydney 2000	46,967	-1.1
Athens 2004	44,416	-5.4

B. Winter Olympic Games

City	Number of volunteers	% difference
Lake Placid 1980	6,703	
Sarajevo 1984	10,450	35.9
Calgary 1988	9,498	-10.0
Albertville 1992	8,647	-9.8
Lillehammer 1994	9,054	4.5
Nagano 1998	32,579	73.5
Salt Lake City 2002	22,000	-32.4

**Source:** 1980-1998: M. de Moragas, A. Belen Moreno and R. Paniagua (2000), "The Evolution of Volunteers at the Olympic Games", M. de Moragas, A. Belen Moreno, N. Puig (eds.), *Volunteers, Global Society and the Olympic Movement*, International Olympic Committee, Lausanne, p. 144-145.  
2000: <http://www.olympic.org/uk/games/past/index.uk.asp?OLGT=1&OLGY=2000>.  
2002: <http://www.olympic.org/uk/games/past/index.uk.asp?OLGT=1&OLGY=2002>.  
2004: ATHOC, General Division of Volunteers, Provisional Official Report, Athens, December 2004 (mimeo in Greek).

It could be argued that from the beginning of the 1980s, a new period has started with regard to the organization of the Olympic Games. The increased participation of volunteers and the TV ratings have provided with the opportunity for “direct participation” to a greater and greater number of individuals who are not athletes and guaranteed the consolidation of international support for the event. The participation of Olympic volunteers in the summer Games has steadily increased in the 1990s when a slight stagnation in these numbers has been observed. This was not attributable to an unwillingness to participate (see Table 2), but first and foremost to the evaluation of the cost/benefit of volunteer work, in addition to various external factors such as: fear of a possible terrorist attack; the economic crisis; epidemics; etc. which led to the more precise determination of need for volunteer or paid work.

It is clear that the increase in the number of volunteers creates at the same time a new series of organizational problems and obligations which must be planned in detail (for example – training, briefing, spatial allocation and the transporting of volunteers, security issues, and so on); and it demands systematic organization that begins several years prior to the conducting of the Games. In the table below the key dates are recorded which concern the planning and the recruitment of volunteers at the summer Games from 1990 and thereafter. Having positions covered with trained volunteers is now recognized as the principle precondition for the successful undertaking of the Games.

**Table 2 | Organizational steps and features for Olympic volunteer recruitment**

<i>Volunteers</i>	<i>Olympic City</i>			
	<i>Barcelona 1992</i>	<i>Atlanta 1996</i>	<i>Sydney 2000</i>	<i>Athens 2004</i>
<i>Estimated need</i>	45,000	61,000	40,000	54,000
<i>Start-up of information campaign</i>	1990	1995	1998	2002
<i>Application Deadline</i>	Beginning 1992	June 1996	May 2000	July 2004
<i>Applications received</i>	102,000	250,000	200,000	165,000
<i>Applications accepted</i>	35,000	60,422	50,000	57,000
<i>Applications confirmed</i>	34,541	47,466	46,967	44,416
<i>Training Program</i>	Advisory Committee and COOB	ACOG and Deeley Rechtman Communications	TAFE NSW (private enterprise)	ATHOC

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**Sources:**

Barcelona 1992: Official Report of the XXV Olympiad Barcelona 1992, vol. VII, The Means, Objectives, Resources, pp. 109, 12, 114, 121.

Atlanta 1996: Atlanta '96: Official Report of the Centennial Olympic Games, Staffing of the games, vol. I, pp. 421, 426, 427.

Sydney 2000: InfoSheet, Volunteers, SOCOG, Olympic Headquarters 1997, [www.olympics.org/eng/about/volunteers/recruitment/html](http://www.olympics.org/eng/about/volunteers/recruitment/html)

Athens 2004: ATHOC, General Division of Volunteers, Provisional Official Report, Athens, December 2004 (mimeo in Greek).

The experience from the organization of the last four Olympic Games demonstrates that the campaign for informing the volunteers and the first distribution of the application form for participation begins two years prior to the event. Application forms are now accepted closer and closer to the date of the opening ceremony. This is because as preparations go on, more people decide to participate while at the same time the gaps in personnel and expertise for each venue are clarified.<sup>3</sup> In addition, since Atlanta, the Organizing Committee has chosen to set an upper limit on the number of applications since the process for the selection, training and allocation of volunteers constitutes a long, expensive, and complex undertaking, which requires more and more complicated procedures of planning and coordination with the other services of the Organizing Committee such as sport and other bodies and sports federations.

The basic parameters in the training of volunteers differ significantly depending on the perceptions which dominate in each Organizing Committee as well as the local conditions. In Barcelona, the members of the COOB and other state and sport bodies constituted an Advisory Committee, which undertook the whole programme of volunteers' training (Clapes 1995, idem 2000). In Atlanta, it emerged from cooperation between the ACOG with the sub-committees of the local chamber of commerce, while in Sydney the training was done by the private company TAFE NSW in cooperation with the University of New South Wales (Cashman 2000: 291ff.). In Greece, the training of volunteers was the sole responsibility of the ATHOC.

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<sup>3</sup> The primary areas in which volunteers were involved in the Athens 2004 Games were: spectator services; hospitality and accommodation, library and archives; risk management; economic services; provisions; security; transportation; medical services; doping control; accreditation; functioning of facilities; sponsorships; tickets; Press services, communication, the Torch Relay, the medal ceremonies, language services; Olympic Village; the Press Villages; relations with the IOC and NOC protocol; public relations; youth camping; athletic events. Volunteers for the opening and closing ceremonies constituted a special category.

#### 1.4. Volunteer participation in the Games of Athens 2004

In Greece, a country in which volunteerism is not a common social practice, the volunteer recruitment<sup>4</sup> had to be planned in detail, not only with regard to the different areas of needed expertise, but also to the expectations of the volunteers and the social significance they had to undertake. The significance of this did not come to an end with the successful undertaking of the Olympic Games but extended to the creation of a positive experience with regard to participation on a volunteer basis to support other collective goals or demands. (Panagiotopoulou 2003; Kikou 2002).

##### 1.4.1. The profile of the volunteers

In the case of Athens, the management and the placement of volunteers in various positions and sectors of activity was undertaken by the General Division of Volunteers which was established by the ATHOC in early 2001 specifically for this purpose.<sup>5</sup> Briefly, its work was to organize the campaign to recruit volunteers, to work out the guidelines for the concept of the Training Guide for Volunteers and the training seminars and, most importantly, to process the applications of the volunteers and to look after the placement of each volunteer in the best possible way. That is to say, the Division had to meet the needs of different sectors of activity (65 for the Olympic Games and 34 for the Paralympic Games) which had declared that they required volunteers, but also to take into account the preferences of the volunteers.

The recruitment campaign originally began at the end of January 2001 when informational material was handed out. Exactly one year later, the first official application to become a volunteer was released to the Press and on the Internet. The communication strategy was directed at two categories of volunteers a) general volunteers and b) special categories of volunteers who would assist at the opening and closing ceremonies as well as some volunteers of special skills (interpreters, doctors etc.).

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<sup>4</sup> Civil society has not developed sufficiently in Greece because since the Second World War, and thereafter, the domination of the state in addition to political parties did not allow space for any sort of Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) and non-political groups for citizen initiatives. The political parties held power as the only agents of the political and social integration of the masses. In research undertaken by the European Social Survey in 2003, on a national basis, 79.5% of Greeks questioned declared that they did not participate in any NGO. This percentage is the lowest in Europe. Comparatively the respective percentages are reported for some countries of the EU; Netherlands 13.9%, United Kingdom 23.5%, Finland 23.8%, Germany 24.7%, Italy 51.8%, Spain 54.5% and Portugal 67.4%, (Panagiotopoulou and Papliakou 2005).

<sup>5</sup> In full operation prior to the Games, the General Division for Volunteers employed 83 people full time, in addition to 17 interviewers, 30 volunteers. During Games-time, the core group for volunteers had 34 people for central coordination and 54 individuals responsible for volunteerism at the different venues (ATHOC, General Division of Volunteers, *Provisional Official Report*, Athens, December 2004 [mimeo in Greek]).

The collection of applications was completed at the end of April 2004 and consisted in total of 165,511 applications: Greeks (65%), Greeks from abroad (10%) and foreigners (25%).<sup>6</sup> This unprecedented participation for a country in which the experience of volunteer work and participation in an NGO is exceptionally limited, can be attributed, in my view, to the fact that the success of the Olympic Games constituted a major national goal. Furthermore, the universality of the goals in addition to the fact that these Games acquired an “authenticity” because they returned ‘back home’, gave the event a particular prestige, primarily for the foreign participants.

For the opening and closing ceremonies approximately 10,000 volunteers were needed, and were selected through a separate process by the Jack Morton Company – the company that undertook the organization of the ceremonies.

The social profile of the volunteers who took part in the Olympic Games of Athens 2004 is outlined briefly below:

Table 3   Demographic characteristics of Athens 2004 confirmed volunteers (in %)		
Confirmed Volunteers	Olympic Games	Paralympic Games
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	45.4	39.8
Female	54.6	60.2
<b>Age groups</b>		
< – 18	4	8
18 – 24	38	30
25 – 34	30	28
35 – 44	13	14
45 – 54	8	10
55 – >	7	10
<b>Education</b>		
-	5	12
Primary	3	4
Secondary	43	39

<sup>6</sup> The interviews began in March of 2003 and until the beginning of July 2004 91,017 interviews were conducted (individual and by telephone) in order to place a total of 57,018 volunteers: 44,416 for the Olympic Games and 12,602 for the Paralympics Games. It is estimated that approximately 60% were volunteers in both of the Games. Of the total applications, 43% were printed and 57% were made via the Internet. Withdrawals or rejections reached a total of 13.1% of the total applications See ATHOC, General Division of Volunteers, *Provisional Official Report*, Athens, December 2004 (mimeo in Greek).

University	28	27
Post graduate	11	9
Other Higher Education	10	9
<b>Origin</b>		
Greece	88	94
USA	1.7	0.8
Cyprus	1,6	0.7
Germany	1.4	0.5
Great Britain	1.1	0.5
Australia	1.0	1.5
Italy	0.5	-
Canada	0.5	-
France	0.5	0.2
Spain	0.4	0.2

**Source:** ATHOC, General Division of Volunteers, *Provisional Official Report*, Athens, December 2004 (mimeo in Greek).

The participation of women is clearly greater than that of men and the presence of young people up to 35 years of age significantly outnumbers (72% Olympic Games and 66% Paralympics) that of older individuals.<sup>7</sup> Half of the participants had university education. In the vast majority they were of Greek origin, with only 12% of the total number of volunteers being foreigners. This low percentage is due primarily to an inability of the Division for Volunteers to process the bulk of the applications from abroad in time, but also to the reluctance of some areas to integrate foreign volunteers into their groups. It appears that in many cases language, distance and cultural differences created functional and communication problems not faced in Atlanta and Sydney, both of which are English speaking countries.

#### 1.4.2. Communication campaigning

The communication campaign to recruit volunteers went on for approximately three years and used the most contemporary means of putting together a promotion campaign. More specifically, the various activities are summed up in the following table:

<sup>7</sup> Similar age characteristics were observed in Barcelona, where 84.2% of the total number of volunteers was 35 years of age and under (*Official Report Games of the XXV Olympiade Barcelone 1992*, vol. VII: 119. On the contrary, in Sydney the respective age group reached 41% (Brettel 2000: 198). It is obvious that in countries with a well developed civil society, participation among older people is higher.

<b>Table 4   Communication campaigning for volunteer recruitment</b>	
<i>Medium</i>	<i>Activity</i>
<i>TV spots</i>	3 general spots, 2 special spots promoting Sports and Transportation
<i>Radio</i>	4 radio ads
<i>Press</i>	a) Various publications during the whole period
	b) Special ad on the international day of volunteerism of 5.12.2003
	c) Special "Thank you" ad at the end of recruitment period
<i>Publications</i>	a) Special corporate publication on volunteers
	b) Newsletter "Volunteer moments" 4 issues
	c) Special daily bulletin in each venue during Game-time
<i>Indirect promotion</i>	a) volunteer testimonials from test events
	b) interviews with VIP's
<i>Events</i>	2 test events (rowing and beach volley in 2003)
	3 volunteer parties after the Games
<i>Internet</i>	Special section on the official website
<i>Welcome kit</i>	With information material (Guide etc.)
<i>Gifts</i>	Collective pins, tickets, a Swatch watch

**Source:** ATHOC, General Division of Volunteers, Provisional Official Report, Athens, December 2004 (mimeo in Greek).

The training of the Athens 2004' volunteers consisted of three stages: basic training; training at the venues and at the test events; and specialized training for each sector of activity separately. Due to the long delays in the completion of many competition venues, in many cases the training at the venues took place in rough outline only a few days prior to the Games' opening. Even so, and despite the relatively short term experience of the volunteers, they accomplished the tasks assigned to them with exceptional effectiveness which was recognized on an international basis.

## 2. Torchbearers: an opportunity for international participation and promotion

The torch relay was designed to pass through all the cities that had organized the Games in the past and provided a great impetus for the promotion of the Olympic Games in general and of Athens in particular. The torch relay, on its international journey across five continents, lasted 78 days, passed through 26 countries, and 3,600 torchbearers carried the flame. The flame returned to Greece to continue its 43 days journey through the country where approximately 7,700 people carried the torch ([www.athens2004.com/en/Athens2004OlympictorchRelay](http://www.athens2004.com/en/Athens2004OlympictorchRelay)). A total of 260 million people had the opportunity to see the torch relay (Jaquin 2004: 7). For the first time the torch relay received extensive publicity and the demand to become a torchbearer went far beyond all expectations. This was of course the basic incentive of the two companies – the sponsors Coca Cola and Samsung – to take on the organization of the relay.<sup>8</sup>

## 3. The Citizens: dedicated supporters of the Games

Even during the period in which Greece was a candidate to host the Olympic Games, an overwhelming majority of Greek public opinion was in favour of hosting the Olympic Games in Athens.<sup>9</sup> This positive stance throughout the Athens candidacy and remained so during and after the Games. According to the polls, from 2001, public opinion, concerning the Olympic Games showed an upward trend. For example, in September 2004, the positive attitude towards the Olympic Games reached its peak (89%, when in 2001 it was 75.4%, in 2002 it was 77.2% and in 2003 it was 78.6%) (Vernardakis 2004a: 81, *idem*. 2004b: 3).

In 1997 when Athens won its bid as the host city, few Greeks were concerned about the international image of their country and even fewer realised the wider benefits of a positive image. It was during the last four years that this issue gradually began to interest more and

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<sup>8</sup> The intense commercialization that the organization of the torch relay took on (with the logos of the companies everywhere, many employees who planned everything with the only criterion the best possible filming conditions and so on) complied neither with the announcements of the ATHOC concerning the limitation of the commercial exploitation of the Olympic Games, nor with the spirit of participation and reconciliation symbolized by the Olympic flame (MacAloon 2004: 16).

<sup>9</sup> In July of 1996 two different public opinion polls were held regarding the candidacy of Athens as the next host of the Olympic Games. One was done by the company VPRC in which 93% accepted the organization of the Games by Athens (negative position 4%), and the other was done by the company MRB in which the percentage of acceptance reached 96.2% (negative position 2.5%), (Vernardakis, 2004a: 79-80).



more citizens.<sup>10</sup> After the Games, the percentage of Greeks who hoped for an improvement in the image of the country and considered it the greatest advantage to stem from the organization of the Olympic Games, reached 51% (September 2004).<sup>11</sup> This tendency demonstrates, in the most eloquent manner, first the influence exercised by the global communication system upon citizens through the proclamation of the Olympic Games as a reality constructed by the mass media and promoted to the greatest degree possible (Real 2004: 19-21). Second, the citizens realized that the possibilities offered by the internationalization of the communication industry as a central element of the global system of economic relations must be exploited in the most efficient manner possible.

The Athens' Games were supported by a broad social majority and constituted the event with the largest and most tenacious social consensus in the contemporary post-war history of the country, and possibly of the Olympic Games. The Games were vested with intense ideological – visionary arguments such as ‘they constitute an honour for the country’, ‘they are the largest celebration in modern Greece’, and ‘they will revive the notion of Olympism’ which had enormous impact on the majority of Greeks (Vernardakis, 2004b: 6). Even more so, the Olympic Games were presented as a vehicle that would once again unite Greeks both in Greece and abroad under a major common national goal. The ideals of Olympism - which are very well known to Greeks and constitute a part of their national education -, offer a stable ideological basis upon which a network of political, economic, diplomatic and possibly development prospects could be based.

Thus the Olympic Games were interlinked to the national identity and finally were chosen as the unique opportunity that would guarantee a new and better image for the country on the international scene. The perception of the continuity of Greek history and the unbroken ties of modern Greece with Antiquity<sup>12</sup> offered the key argument which was promoted intensely during the opening ceremony of the Athens Games. The tremendous social acceptance of the

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<sup>10</sup> The percentage of all those who wished to improve the image of the country, which was usually connected with increases in tourist activity, did not exceed 22% (2001: 21.4%, 2002: 17.2%, 2003: 18.1%), see MRB – VPRC, *Panhellenic poll concerning the image of the Olympic Games* for the years 2001, 2002 and 2003.

<sup>11</sup> See MRB – VPRC, *Panhellenic poll concerning the image of the Olympic Games* for the years 2001, 2002, 2003 and September 2004, [www.vprc.gr](http://www.vprc.gr)

<sup>12</sup> Regarding the perception of the continuity of Greek history, M. Llewellyn Smith (2004: 260-261), maintains that there are strong ties between Greece and the Olympic Games which will never be lost, such as the name, the memory of the athletic rivalry, the universality of the ancient Games, some specific athletic events etc., while the supposed ties including the sacred ceremony of the lighting of the flame, the Olympic truce and so on are rites created in modern times.

Olympic Games supplanted the small number of critical opinions, justified the economic consequences and the possibly negative interventions with regard to the environment and furthermore legitimized the daily hardships resulting from the public works in progress and the delays. (Vernardakis 2004a: 92).

This generalized social acceptance was always one of the strong points working in favour of the candidacy of Athens for the Games. I believe that it is one of the determining factors that will help the country to overcome the first post-Olympic year of inertia, of nostalgia, of looking into how the Olympic legacy can be exploited, of the additional economic burdens and furthermore that it will contribute to the creation of a new collective memory with regard to this event.

#### **4. Spectators: active participants, enthusiastic fans**

Before the Games were awarded to Athens, the image of the city promoted by the international media was not a positive one. To a large extent, this remained the case throughout the entire preparation period until approximately one month prior to the opening of the Games.<sup>13</sup>

The major delays in the completion of the building projects in combination with the security concerns of the Games created an unprecedented negative atmosphere in the international mass media which, rather than declining as the opening of the Games approached, became more intense.<sup>14</sup> Such on-going negative reports are a very important parameter for the image of an Olympic city, especially when the host city belongs to a small country that does not have a powerful international lobby, as a result of which many efforts at organizing the Games and improving the city are, to a large extent, not recognized.

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<sup>13</sup> Air pollution, chaotic traffic, garbage in the streets, the absence of a particular architectural and cultural urban character in the city, etc. were the main negative aspects highlighted. Quite often, such stereotypical criticism combined with strong prejudice, which failed to recognize some gradual improvements in the city (new Metro, traffic rotation, and others) were mostly related to tourist activity and the problems that tourists encountered in Greece (Waterfield 2004: 322-323).

<sup>14</sup> With regard to security, many articles were exaggerated and often unfair. Greece funded the most up to date security systems, cooperated with NATO and experts from the US, Great Britain, and Israel and finally spent a huge sum (more than 1 billion Euros) not foreseen in the original organizational costs. Criticism also focused on the delays in Olympic venues and infrastructure construction. See *Times of London* 13 April, 2004, and 16 May, 2004, *Financial Times* 6 May, 2004, *The Guardian* 16 January, 2004, 30 March 2004, 6 May, 2004 and 14 May, 2004.

Both ATHOC and the Greek government did not manage to come up with an effective communication strategy which would contain and alter the overall negative atmosphere in time.<sup>15</sup> This situation, combined with a number of international events (terrorist acts in nearby areas including Madrid and Istanbul, the war in Iraq, SARS, the increase in the value of the Euro relative to the US\$, the increase in Athens hotel rates etc.) discouraged people who might have been interested in visiting Greece for the Olympics.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the excellent coverage of the Olympic Games both in terms of extent and quality had a negative impact in terms of encouraging visitors to attend the Games in person. The result was that not as many visitors as expected came to Greece, and tourism remained at an exceptionally low level.

In the last six months prior to the Games the Greek Press maintained the same position of controversy and negative criticism as the international mass media. Perhaps this stance, in combination with long term hassles; the uncertainty as to whether everything would be ready, as to whether the organization would respond to demands from abroad where only negative comments had been expressed; as well as the upcoming summer vacations initially created an atmosphere of reservation and indifference towards the Games on the part of the Greeks. This atmosphere of moderation is very different compared to that of previous years and can possibly be attributed to the general anxiety of the Athenian population, if not the whole country.

Feelings began to change with Greece's unexpected success in the EURO 2004 soccer competition in July and the first few days of August when the city took on its celebratory image. Perhaps this explains the belated interest of the Greeks in purchasing tickets. When the Greek and international mass media began to promote the positive side of the Games, it was

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<sup>15</sup> Finally in June of 2004 the ATHOC started undertaking advertising activities abroad. The advertising campaign was addressed first and foremost to television and then the international press. More specifically, the campaign, with its central message of 'Welcome Home' and a television spot of 50 seconds, was broadcast by the television networks NBC, ITV, CHANNEL4, CHANNEL5, FRANCE2, FRANCE3, CANAL+, ZDF, RTL, RTL2, ARD, SAT1, KABEL1, VOX, PRO7, see [www.athens2004.com](http://www.athens2004.com).

<sup>16</sup> Indicatively, the occupancy rate of hotels in the Athens region in July 2004, was 12% lower than the rate for Sydney hotels for that same period four years ago (Delezos 2004: N14). Occupancy reached 84.4%. According to analysts of Deloitte "in terms of visitor numbers, the travel industry had estimated the Olympics would attract an extra 2 million tourists to the country as a whole during the summer months. However, preliminary figures suggest that fewer than half of these actually arrived. The year-to-July 04 visitor numbers show a decline of 12%. But this decline was not surprising given that many 'traditional' visitors chose to avoid crowds and increased prices. In the case of Athens, heightened concerns about security and the widespread publicity given to the unfinished building projects prior to the Games would likely have deterred some visitors." See, "Athens hoteliers hiked Aug 04 rates by 261%", 24.9.2004, [www.e-tid.com/pma/22384](http://www.e-tid.com/pma/22384), accessed 18 November, 2004.

at that point that the atmosphere changed and finally, at the end of the Games, record sales of tickets were achieved.<sup>17</sup> All in all, Greeks and their visitors enjoyed “their” Games with great enthusiasm attending many cultural events (exhibitions, music festivals, theatre etc.) and celebrating in the streets with parties lasting until early in the morning. But these Games, from the perspective of the spectators, remained primarily a Greek affair.

## 5. Audience: inactive but devoted participants

The broadcasting data of the Athens Games are remarkable. According to statements of Jacques Rogge, the president of the IOC and the Athens Olympic Broadcasting (AOB) data, television coverage of the Athens Olympic Games was transmitted by more than 300 television stations in 220 countries throughout the world. For the Olympic Games worldwide, there were a total 44,000 hours of dedicated coverage.<sup>18</sup> This established the Athens 2004 Games as the most covered ones in their history, since 3.9 billion people (an unprecedented number) had access to the events (compared to 3.6 billion viewers for Sydney). Live coverage had increased and the AOB produced 4,000 hours of live sports competitions which were transmitted by more than half of the global broadcasters. Prime time coverage was up by 55% compared to Sydney. More specifically prime time transmission reached 21% of the total dedicated time for the Athens Games (13% in Sydney) (Exarchos 2005). There was a significant increase in the diversity of choice available to the viewers since more satellite and cable channels devoted all their programming to Olympic coverage on a 24 hour basis. According the IOC President, “Athens has set a new benchmark with the highest audience, images of spectacular quality, expanded coverage of sports, new technologies and, I am delighted to say, a high level of satisfaction amongst our rights holding partners.” (Rogge 2004a: 1).

Globally, the average viewer watched over 12 hours of Olympic Games. In Europe, the average viewing time per person reached 14 hours (50% above that of Sydney). In France the average viewing time was 17 hours, in Germany 11 hours, in Greece 17.5 hours, in Spain 15 hours and

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<sup>17</sup> At the Athens Games, over 3.5 million tickets were sold (Rogge 2004b: 1). In the first two days, spectator turnout was limited primarily to some qualification games. From 15 August and on, the venues were packed. The number of tickets finally sold was larger than in Barcelona and Seoul, countries with obviously larger populations than Greece. Many tickets, which were given to sponsors or to the Olympic family were not used, a phenomenon also observed in previous Games (Preuss 2004: 169).

<sup>18</sup> Relative to previous Games, the hours of dedicated coverage were 29,600 in Sydney in 2000, 25,000 in Atlanta in 1996, 20,000 in Barcelona in 1992. That is to say, an increase in the order of 49% was observed relative to the previous Games in Sydney, (Exarchos 2005).

in Great Britain over 13 hours. All countries had an increased average viewing relative to Sydney (Rogge 2004a: 2).

In the US, the increase in the TV ratings of the Olympic Games was remarkable. Over 203 million viewers watched some parts of the Athens Games. The total number of viewers was increased by 15% in comparison to those of the Sydney Games. According to TV ratings in the US, the NBC programs focused on the Olympic Games were ranked in top positions. Furthermore, the transmission of the Games by the cable channels attracted over 60 million additional viewers (Rogge 2004a: 2).

However, Japan was the country that surpassed all expectations in terms of viewer time. It transmitted over 700 hours of television programming and every viewer watched an average of 29 hours of Olympic Games coverage. Similar interest was shown by the Chinese who watched the Games on an average of 9 hours per viewer and attracted in total approximately 85 million viewers.

In brief, from the perspective of the viewing audience, the Athens Olympic Games of 2004 were a complete success. They justified both the efforts of the technicians and the journalists to offer full coverage and the television stations' purchase of the rights at quite a high cost. The very favorable time difference between Greece, the rest of Europe and the US contributed to this success since it facilitated live coverage.

## 6. Conclusion

The possibility for as many citizens as possible to participate in different areas of activity in the organization and staging of the Olympic Games is one of the basic characteristics of the Athens Games. Moreover, the Olympic Movement, that is to say the possibility of participation in athletic events supported by specific ideals, is the element that differentiates the Olympic Games from other major athletic events and guarantees them global support and visibility.

Olympic volunteers make up the most active part of the Olympic Movement and lend the event the vivid presence of ordinary people who through their actions enrich the event with

variety and an “everyday” dimension with which millions of people from all over the planet can identify and through which stories with a human element can be written by the media. In addition, they have proved to be extremely useful because they can reduce the cost of organizing the Games which over the last twenty years has been increasing tremendously.

The activities of the volunteers require timely planning, organization and training both with regard to the Olympic ideals and for each and every position that is to be filled. So far this work has been taken on in by a number of agencies in the past Olympic Games. Each national strategy is determined primarily by the local needs of the OC but also by previous experience of the citizens in volunteer activities in NGOs.

More specifically, in the Athens Games, the previous volunteer experience was very limited. Nevertheless, the Olympic Games constitute a part of the country’s cultural heritage. Additionally, the almost pan-Hellenic support of the Games constituted the basis from which the organizers were able to motivate, especially young, volunteers with the final result the successful presence of the volunteers at both the 2004 Olympics and Paralympics.

The management of the country’s image in the international media was not effective. This was also due to international conjuncture (terrorist attacks, the rising value of the Euro, the economic crisis, epidemics (SARS), etc.). The outcome was that Athens could not experience the increase in tourism as the cases of Barcelona and Sydney. Although Barcelona and Sydney could effectively promote their image abroad, Athens could attract an unprecedented global TV viewership.

The new ways, due to the advent of new TV technologies, to watch the Games initiate a new issue; i.e., as to what extent the future of the Olympic Games will be able to ensure the large numbers of visitors as they did in the 1980s and 1990s. The case of Athens is not enough to prove this tendency; however, it may be an indication of what may be followed in the future. This may influence the availability of volunteers and even more the stance of the citizens of the host city, who may need very strong motives and passion for the Games and sports as the one that was demonstrated by Athenians.

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[www.vprc.gr](http://www.vprc.gr)

## **Citizen participation in the Olympic Games**

This paper presents the opportunities of the indirect participation of individuals in the Olympic Games; a unique athletic event based not only on specific ideals, but it also carries on a movement and foresees the participation of different groups of people. The volunteers have proven the most consisted and devoted disseminators of the Olympic ideals. Since the beginning of the 1980s, one notes the stable and increasing offer of volunteerism in the Olympic Games and later the participation in the torch relay. This tendency causes a series of organizational concerns and obligations (i.e., training, information, venue distribution and transportation of volunteers, issues of security, etc), that in each organization are confronted with respect to the local needs and conditions. Moreover, the number of TV viewers has increased from one Olympiad to another. The second part of this paper is focused on the participation of the volunteers, the torchbearers and the Athenians in the Athens 2004' Olympic Games. It also describes the global viewership of the Olympic Games of 2004.

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