

Tourism and the city image: the Barcelona Olympic case

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Abstract

There have been many studies carried out connecting the phenomenon of contemporary tourism to phenomena caused by globalization, wherein its visible characteristics reveal the contradiction between global and local aspects.

This paper intends to discuss tourism not only as a measurable economic phenomenon, but also as a determining factor in the development and formation of urban planning projects, as well as its influence on political administrative decisions that have a social and economic impact on the city.

Barcelona will be examined as a case study, with a specific emphasis on explaining the change in the city's tourism model caused by the preparation for and celebration of the 1992 Summer Olympics Games. It is a model that, for many "foreigners", on an international level, is still today a reference, and which residents of the Catalan capital have difficulty departing from when searching for alternative models.

Keywords: Barcelona, urban Planning, Olympics game, tourism

Introduction

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The opportunity to host the Olympics Games, just over a decade after the reinstatement of a democratic political system in Spain, was the opportunity to project the city as another great European city, in line with the policies of "urban marketing" that dominated the seventies. P. Hall explains that "urban marketing" during the seventies was based on the promotion of the city –the renovation of its image– and it is coherent with the reconversion of the industrial economic base towards the service sector. In other words "urban marketing" was the urban answer to the passage from the Fordist to the Post-Fordist era.

The path within the different images projected for a possible tourist, before and after the Olympics, will be used to discuss how tourism –in the effort made to construct an image, a logo– has a tremendous impact on the actual construction of the city that becomes blind to the real needs of its citizens with this much too large perspective.

1. An Approximation to the Argument: Tourism and Fragmentation

From the 1990s up until the present there have been many studies affirming that starting in the XIX Century, tourism is a phenomenon with enormous expansion and weight in the future of the territory.

These studies focus on various multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary aspects regarding the tendency towards the homogenization of the quality of local tourist sites in the world and question the definition of the term tourism itself: business related, scientific, holiday...

Urban planners, geographers, environmental scientific researchers, sociologists, anthropologists, and certainly other professionals have dedicated themselves to tourism and its impacts on the environment and the future of cities. It seems that the connecting points of these reflections, articulated in various manners, are basically two: the relationship between tourism as an economic activity within the functionality of the locality's natural, cultural and leisure resources –local aspects– and tourism as related to financial economy related with larger scale, better known as globalized, economic systems.

This paper will attempt to frame the theme of tourism with relation mostly to the construction of new promotional imagery that ultimately have the power, along with other factors such as the socioeconomic and political situation of a country, to construct the city for its visitors, which currently traverses through various degrees of Celebration, Florida, invented entirely out of the possible desires of the real city's users, such as Paris, London, Venice and Barcelona, among others. The city of visitors includes a rationalization and new city map to guide the visitors and at the same time the construction of reference points representative of the entire city. Francesc Muñoz talks about the “brandified” city, where the city itself becomes or is transformed into its own imitated, deformed image.

The perception and imagery of the city have been objects of studies since the middle of the nineteenth century with the expansion of the interest regarding the rules that governed the “gestalt” in multiple fields of knowledge. An example of this trend regarding architecture and urban planning is Camillo Sitte's fundamental book which opened the doors to various types of research regarding the city, from a perceptual point of view, in which it is focused as the correct control of the imagery of an urban locale, be it the foundation to create urbanity and a sense of belonging. The methodology proposed by Sitte can be defined as “discrete”. The author, in fact, proposes urban planning projects that define themselves, after an exhaustive analysis, the best places for the placement of public spaces in the city and subsequently defines the overall structure of the city.

Starting from the 1970s, as a response to some of the results of the modern movement, new research about the imagery of the city begins at the MIT in Boston, with a different focus. Kevin Lynch's studies, which called for the necessity to find principles of orientation in the city based on two principle qualities and which in some manner had to encompass the entire structure: the legibility –which is essentially the ease with which people understand the layout of a place–, in other words the pattern of the city, and the ‘imageability’ which is the quality in a physical object that gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer, points in the memory. (Lynch 1960).

Lynch's ideas can be linked to more recent arguments, where it is observed that city authorities have adopted strategies that aestheticize cities by stressing the visual consumption of public space in order to improve tourism (Lash and Urry 1994, Zukin 1998).

Lynch and Sitte arrive at the same conclusion, in which it is evident that if the perception and the construction of the imagery of the city is one of the main objectives of urban planning then it must be carried out in segments, by zones that represent the various images that the tourist can gather. The “continuum” of the medieval city or the abstract repetition of the functional city do not respond to this criteria.

As Balibrea argues (2004) the city image is important to draw because tourists require “a coherent representation/meaning of the city, one that is easy and pleasant to consume” in order to be oriented in a new map.

The case of the transformation of the city due to the Barcelona Olympic Games allows for an analysis of an example in which many authors signaled a before and after in the evolution of city tourism in Barcelona, in addition to the theories about “fragmentation” policies which have progressively obfuscated real and local needs. Paragraphs and Headings

Body text should be typed in 11 pt. Text should be both left and right justified. Paragraphs should not be indented. There should be one blank line between paragraphs. First-order headings should be typed in 12 pt, in bold with only the first letters capital. One blank line should be left above and below first-order headings.

2. The Urban Spectacle Begins

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Olympic games and the Universal Expositions seem to have a determining role in the growth of large western cities. Along with these events terms such as universalism, cosmopolitanism, economic competition and technology arise, which represent crucial moments in their development and transformation.

Many scholars (Ferrer, 1994) underline the similarities between the Olympic Games and the Universal Expositions as a confrontation for technical supremacy between states. These transitory mega events have, since they began, not only left concrete buildings, but have at times caused real cultural and social changes.

In this manner, the Olympic spectacle also became for Barcelona an opportunity for urban development as a goal, just as the Universal Expositions of 1888, 1929 and the Eucharistic Congress of 1954 had been, and as the 1936 Olympics had been for Berlin. This goal had as its basis the construction of the city according to principles aimed at realizing democratic ideals and creating a territorial equilibrium, utilizing territorial decentralization as a conceptual instrument for urban planning. Also present was a political objective aimed at relaunching the role of the Catalan capital in the economic and political spheres of Spain and the world. Similar urban regeneration policies are present during the same period in other European cities: in London with the reconversion of the port as residential and service sector areas; in Rotterdam, with the construction of the residential Kop Van Zuid quarter; in Amsterdam with the PJ Plein project; in Berlin with the IBA reconstruction of the 1980s. They are all projects carried out in the 1980s, which also strive for an international consensus in terms of image and as a product attractive for tourism.

Various authors have commented about how the construction of an image, or rather, of various images becomes at this point one of the city of Barcelona’s strategic objectives, which was slowly losing contact with its social foundation. The need for a continuous renewal of a new image as an urban objective has relatively changed the priority of the administration of issues such as the regulation of the housing sector, economic and environmental sustainability, public education and health.

3. Discontinuity: The Birth of Barcelona's Many Images

Up until the restoration of the modern Olympics in 1896, promoted by Baron De Coubertin (1863-1937), the Olympic Games were proposed as an event which should signal a discontinuity. The baron described the Olympics as the most important event in the field of sports which would provide international prestige to the hosting city. De Coubertin (2000), in his description of the Olympic city, emphasized two aspects: the transitory nature of the event which nonetheless leave a patrimony of public and sports related buildings which would provide a stimulus to the athletic culture of the hosting country. The other aspect would have been the longer lasting influence not only of the constructions in the hosting city, but also in the socio-political structure of the age, where athletics, along with education, would provide the foundation for international unity and a society based on equality.

The profound urban transformation of Barcelona in the last twenty years, in my opinion, is, however due only in part to the 1992 Olympic Games. In reality, almost all European cities have had enormous mutations in this period which have caused their transformation into service and communications cities. In many cases, the "city's goods" or the "city's supplies" as a promotion within the tourism market has been of key importance in its development. For this reason, one can question which aspects of this development are mostly related to the fact that the Olympics were carried out in the city and which are fundamentally part of processes which are in the city's general investments.

In the specific case of Spain, it's worth remembering some political, economic and cultural details which have influenced urban development notably.

Spain, during the Franco regime (1939-1975), had almost forty years of enormous political and cultural isolation. The cities, in a more marked manner than in other European situations, were developed through unregulated urban growth which emphasized growth and development rather than the recuperation and regeneration of urban areas. This urban growth was characterized by its informal nature, a fundamentally peripheral nature and without a proper public services policy. In particular, an investigation by Juan Busquets (1986) reveals how, in Barcelona, during Franco's regime, many of the sports structures were closed and that the few remaining buildings were regrouped in specific zones: on the mountain of Montjuic and in Pedralbes, one of the city's most bourgeois quarters, developed between the 1950s and 1960s. But starting in the 1970s, the development climate, the end of the authoritarian economy and policies, and the expectation of a political change favoring the creation of instruments to control municipal urban activity of tremendous importance for the future project of the Olympics: the General Metropolitan Plan of Barcelona. This Plan was fundamental in reserving the spaces in which the Olympic zones would be located, two along the coast area, Montjuic and Poblenou, two in the city's interior, La Diagonal and Vall d'Hebron, joined with the bypass/road system which would have closed the ring around the entire city.

The 1980s were characterized by a euphoria in the construction of a new Spain and above all a new Catalonia, always in competition with Madrid. It's worth remembering how, in 1992, on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America, Barcelona celebrated the Olympics, while Seville hosted the Universal Exposition, Madrid was the European Culture city, and the first high velocity train rails were inaugurated (Harris, 1992).

The 1980s in particular are characterized in Barcelona by a strategy of urban re-qualification and restoration of public spaces which would have served as activators for urban regeneration processes based on the collaboration between public and private initiatives. Oriol Bohigas, in his book "Plans and Projects for Barcelona, 1981-1982", head of the city's Urban Planning Department from 1980 to 1984, illustrates the principles of this urban planning strategy, based on small public space projects controllable economically and in time of execution. The objective was to create a diffused urbanity, emphasizing the specific qualities of each quarter, including the historic center.

It was urban planning based on the collage and the fragment (Rowe and Koetter, *Collage City*, 1978), rather than on a large-scale infrastructural project, and at the same time, a model of urban planning which placed a renewed attention on the value of the city's patrimony, whether historic, symbolic or cultural, similar to the experience of Bologna during the 1970s.

Various terms have been used to confront the two policies before and after the Olympics: from quality to quantity, from reconstruction to "urban marketing", from public space to infrastructure, from interstitial to structural urban planning, from the city to the metropolis, from the industrial city to the post-Fordist city (Ribas Piera, 1992). All of these various images lead to a reflection about how the preparations for the 1992 Olympics in some way carried out the various trends being carried out with various modulations throughout Europe.

The Barcelona Olympics materialized a cultural model in the urban planning field which became known as the Barcelona Model, with which there has been an attempt to attribute a theoretical body to practices which were already underway.

The interpretations of the Barcelona Model are not completely agreed upon. For some, such a model refers to the interventions carried out in public spaces in the 1980s which would have eventually triggered urban regeneration processes, while for others it refers directly to strategic projects which were developed during the city's preparation for the Olympics.

Local professionals, researchers and administrators began talking about the "Barcelona Model" during the 1990s, as a theoretical framework and ideal of the models adopted (Montaner i Martorell, 1990). The experience has been amply cited and described in the academic and professional context, but few (Monclús, 2003, Essex, 1999) have attempted to use a comparative point of view to understand the Barcelona Model as part of a general change, related to the politics of deindustrialization, to the advent of the city as provider of services, images and communications, in the practice of urban planning in Europe (Secchi, 1989).

If the construction of the Barcelona Model indicates in effect the consciousness of a change which also permits theorizing about structure and fragments upon which a city is built, the city's physical transformations are not of minor importance.

A key aspect of Barcelona in 1992, which demonstrates its structuring aspect, is the fact that 61.5% of the costs of the Olympics were charged as public works. The construction of the bypasses, the reopening of the city to the sea, the creation of new central zones and the actual Olympic areas, were among the major interventions (Brunet, 2005).

And related to the Barcelona Model, in which a close relationship between private and public investments was recommended, it is impossible not to emphasize how the Olympic works would influence the economy and the growth of tourism activity in the city.

For the most part, local analyses and statistics regarding the economy and tourism up until 2004 have demonstrated extraordinary growth curves, but in which there was not an accompanying analysis of the growth's connection to the political work focusing mainly on external promotion, instead of the controlling more fundamental problems.

In London, from 1990 to 2000, the hotel accommodation capacity increased by 30%, while in Barcelona, during the same period, the increase was 105% (Duran, 2005).

4. The Olympic Games: Towards a Globalized Model

In the same manner in which that which occurs during the 1980s can be interpreted as a synthesis of issues present in the field throughout Europe, the following period can be interpreted as part of a movement, which, with different rhythms and techniques, develops in various North American and European cities

It seems that it is possible to interpret the Barcelona model from the period of the construction of the Olympic Barcelona as a time defined as post-industrialization.

At the same pace as the advent of globalization, defined in the economic field as the passage from the Fordist to the Post-Fordist era, there is the development of the idea of the city centred mostly on its productive dimension manifested in the protagonism of grand urban projects and the city's various infrastructures. The idea is to activate an "urban marketing" which includes the promotion of the city, the renovation of its image, coherent with the reconversion of the industrial economic base towards the service sector.

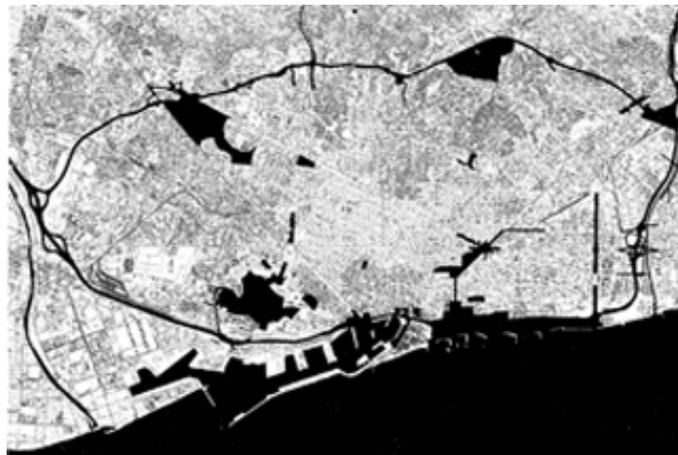


Figure 1, 1981-1992 The Olympic thrust: large scale and infrastructural projects. (Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, 1996. Pg 228)

This is an idea that is well explained by P. Hall (Hall, 1996) in the chapter "The Promoters' City. Shared Urban Practices: Baltimore, Honk Kong, London, 1975-1987" of the book "City of Tomorrow". The author comments how in the 1970s urban planning changed completely. The predominant idea described the city as a machine that creates wealth and the main function of urban planning was to help the machine grow. It is a movement begun in the United States, but which has developed on a worldwide scale. It is a new attitude, in which there is the conviction that urban interventions must be selective and aimed at improving the city's economic efficiency and functionality. Strategic Plans are talked about, characterized by their definition of medium and long-term objectives, which define the manners in which local public and private actors will be involved and which are highly publicized, with a preference for grand urban projects for the promotion of the city, among which we can recall the construction of the "Grand Projects" in Paris.

A particular typology of the new urban planning strategy includes the planning of large-scale international events such as the Olympic games. In 1986 Barcelona is chosen as the host of the Olympic games. There

follows a period in which the issue of the metropolitan infrastructure becomes the main priority (Fava, 1998), without forgetting that the Olympic project has left an important heritage to the city. Barcelona has definitively opened up to the sea, and has urbanized Montjuic. Vall d'Hebron and the Olympic Village are designed, configuring a new, balanced, central metropolitan area. The basic idea was to build a new centralities homogeneously distributed in the territory, which answered at the same time to the need not only of reinforce the "image of the city's past" but also the icono of the new Barcelona. The icons of modernism, or the city of Picasso and Miro are renewed with new symbols and meanings It should be noted that if in the first period the architects who worked on the construction of the democratic Barcelona are essentially local, even during the city's preparatory work for the Olympics, clearly renowned architects such as F. Ghery, A. Isozaki, F. Gregotti, and A. Siza are called upon. Barcelona definitely enters into that world in which the architectural "star system" defines the form of the city.

In Barcelona the most noticeable effect of globalization is the abandonment of the focus of urban planning on recovery or the recuperation of the attempt to contain the effects of the developmental growth of the 1950s and 1960s, passing over to a form of urban interventions in which the promotion of the city is the pre-eminent function (Adagio, 1998). The urban model not only achieves the construction of the "Olympic Barcelona", but also, and most importantly, brings to a reality the "Mediterranean Barcelona". On the other hand, the globalized model brings a new form of urban planning to Barcelona. From this moment Barcelona always appears to be defined following the rules of commercial advertising and "urban marketing", following a global project of ethereal dreams.

The analysis of the community associations (Unió Temporal d'Escribes, 2004) and local scholar (Borja, 2004, 2007, Capel, 2005, Delgado, 2005, Bohigas, 2004) and international professionals (Monnet, 2002, Marshall, 2004) focuses basically on the lack of attention to the civic welfare, basically the housing policy, citizen integration and the urban heritage. The general feeling that seems to emerge from this criticism is that the city is not for the citizens any more, as it was during the construction of the Olympic Barcelona, but for promoters, tourists and immigrants. The idea arises of a distance between the public administration and the real problems of the society.

City reimagining often involves attempts to develop attractive and memorable synecdochical images for cities that do not possess them. It can also be used to supplant existing synecdochical images that municipal authorities are keen to disassociate their cities from. Flagship buildings and spaces are often specifically developed to meet one of these objectives and the concept of 'imageability' may help to explain the mechanisms through which they can develop synecdochical qualities. Kevin Lynch pioneered the investigation of 'imageability' and he refers to this concept as the quality in a physical object that gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer

To the casual observer, the contemporary reimagining programme deployed by Barcelona may appear to be a typical example of the long-established urban tradition of civic boosterism. The 1992 Olympic Games provided the seemingly obligatory grand spectacle and a conventional mixture of slogans and promotional material was used to sell Barcelona to an external audience. However, the Games and associated marketing campaigns were supplemented by an extensive regeneration programme pursued throughout the administration of mayor Pasqual Maragall (1982-1997).

Essentially, it is these innovative initiatives, assisted and showcased by the 1992 Olympic Games, that have fundamentally reinvigorated Barcelona's image. This programme began with localized neighbourhood renewal, but evolved into a more extensive regeneration project that both reshaped and resemanticized city. A more subtle approach to reimagining was incorporated into these initiatives, involving the construction and showcasing of 'imaginable' buildings and urban spaces.

5. The Competitive Barcelona is not died yet

As Andrew Smith stated "Barcelona's sport reimagining can be equated to the image mechanisms identified in the conceptual framework. Because of sport's symbolic capacity, media exposure, contemporary significance and popular acclaim, some commentators imply that sport facilities possess particular synecdochical qualities. For example, Raitz (1987:5) states that sport stadia provide cities with buildings that are distinctive and which evoke a strong sense of place. This view is echoed by Bale who observes that 'it is the floodlights of the stadium, not the spire of the cathedral that more often than not act as urban landmarks and points of reference' (1993:3). Meticulous attention to external appearance and milieu, rather than merely technical specifications, suggests that many of the new sport facilities in Barcelona were designed as synecdochical tools"

The sport imaginery reflects political goals, but even nationalistic and progress pride, but at the same time the torch opened a party that today is totally consumed. The memory of the word success of the Barcelona Olympic still today difficults to imagine a different future in our cities, where it still often gets the impression that the policies of the fragment, the images of the ever new, the urban zapping for tourists and citizens bring to lose others possible projectes, out of the dialñetics of the city consumption. Even in the summer of 2011 Barcelona made a record in tourism, due to political difficulties in all countries of North Africa, but it is not hard to see the decline and lack of perspective in the no restrain policies of the tourism, the go-back nomadism and its effects.

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