

Olympic lessons from Barcelona that might help Brazil

Staging a major sporting event affords the host city a chance to boost its international profile and reputation.

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Excellent management, public/private cooperation and exemplary implementation of the strategic plan: these were the pillars of success for the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona.

Twenty years since Barcelona hosted the Games, IESE professors [Carlos García Pont](#) and [Paulo Rocha e Oliveira](#) have written a [case study](#), in collaboration with David Campoy, on the "Barcelona Effect."

In it, they analyze the success factors of the past to discuss which assets will help the Catalan capital meet its future challenges.

With Brazil organizing the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics, this study serves as a useful case for determining how to leverage such large-scale events for sustainable business opportunities.

What do you want to be?

Before the Olympics, Barcelona was hardly the top draw that it is today. Despite its Mediterranean coastline and spectacular monuments, it was mainly an industrial city. It also lacked key infrastructure, a problem that Rio de Janeiro is also facing.

The Games forced Barcelona to reflect on what it wanted to be after the event. This yielded a comprehensive strategic plan, which began to be implemented before the Games and continued long after.

This is key: not focusing on the short-term needs of the event itself, but using the event as a springboard for positive, lasting impact throughout the entire region.

More than 60 percent of the long-term investment came from public funds. A public/private partnership was created to fund most of the infrastructure.

Besides investment in infrastructure, the transformation plan extended to politics, governance, talent management and branding.

Three pillars of success

The 1992 Barcelona Olympics were a success for three main reasons.

- *Institutional Coordination.* The International Olympic Committee, the governments of Spain and Catalonia, and the City of Barcelona all united around a common goal with an extremely high level of coordination.
- *Excellent Brand Management.* The public/private body created for the Games morphed into the official Barcelona Tourism organization after the event, to continue positioning the city's brand as a global "destination city." Besides regularly organizing world-class sporting events, Barcelona repositioned itself as a place to do business, and became a top European cruise port.
- *Exemplary Execution.* The Games attracted a pool of highly qualified talent to Barcelona, and had the support of some 35,000 volunteers. Without such a trained and talented workforce, the strategic plan would not have been so successful.

Replicating the "Barcelona effect"

Following the Games, tourism increased steadily, going from 1.7 million visitors in 1990 to some 7 million by 2007. Barcelona also repositioned itself as a business hub: In 2009, it was second for its number of European conventions.

The general population also benefited from improvements made to roads, public transportation, a renovated waterfront, regenerated districts, as well as the national pride of becoming a world-famous city.

Twenty years later, however, the "Barcelona effect" is wearing thin, especially given the question marks now hanging over the city's future in light of changed social, political and economic realities.

What would revitalize the tourism sector? Is it possible to become a global "destination city" yet still be a good place to live? How should Barcelona manage its brand in relation to other brands, like Spain?

Such issues must be considered when designing a strategic plan for staging a major world event. Rio de Janeiro and Brazil would certainly do well to learn from the experience of Barcelona and Spain.

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