

# Marcin Widomski

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## The Olympic Games in the creation of the image of the host country and city

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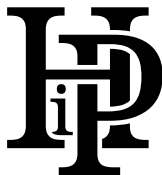
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## The Olympic Games in the Creation of the Image of the Host Country and City

**Igrzyska olimpijskie  
w kreacji wizerunku państwa i miasta organizatorskiego**

### • Abstrakt •

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza skutków wykorzystania igrzysk olimpijskich przez miasta gospodarzy do budowania własnego wizerunku. Artykuł koncentruje się na przybliżeniu kwestii wizerunku jednostki terytorialnej i analizie dwóch wyraźnych przykładów konsekwencji politycznych i gospodarczych imprez zorganizowanych w Berlinie (1936) i Pekinie (2008).

**Słowa kluczowe:** wizerunek, marketing miejsca, igrzyska olimpijskie, Chiny, Niemcy, stosunki międzynarodowe, polityczna komunikacja

### • Abstract •

The aim of the present article is an analysis of the consequences of using the Olympic Games by host cities to build their own image. The article presents the issues related to the image of a territorial unit and an analysis of political and economic results of the sport events organized in Berlin (1936) and Beijing (2008).

**Keywords:** image, place marketing, olympic games, China, Germany, international relations, political communication

## Introduction

The Olympic Games are probably the biggest festivity in sport culture. For many athletes just being part of this event could be an uttermost success in their career. The modern Olympic Games started more than a century ago. Last century was time of intensive evolution, but the Olympic Games still are one of the most important events in mass culture.

No one should be surprised that someone decided to use this potential to influence millions of people to reach their own targets. In comparison to other sport

events on a similar level, the Olympic Games could impress with maintaining restrained commercialization. Defending from aggressive advertising was successful but from political actions unfortunately not.

## **Image of the Administrative Units and Sport**

Competition on many levels of activity has increased. This is a reason why image started to play a more important role. Competing for the best perception are not only commercial companies but also administrative units, from villages to the biggest cities and countries.

Administrative units became entities competing for resources, especially new inhabitants, tourists, companies or investors while also remembering about own dwellers and local business. This necessity leads to using a marketing strategy directly related to image as described by Kavaratzis in his *Place Branding: A Review of Trends and Conceptual Model* in the "The Marketing Review 2005/5".

A competitive advantage of one object over another could be illustrated by the results of economical or social analysis by quantitative or qualitative scientific methods. However, the average income per capita, increasing the number of residents, their general satisfaction, increase in the average age of life, nor any similarly rational reasons are a fundamental determinant of the choice of place to live. During selection, an important factor is immaterial, devoid of rationality, which is the perceived image.

In everyday language, image means the same as portrait or picture, but for management, closer meaning has the word "imagination". In psychological science, image is a view about reflection in consciousness about parts of reality.

Dudek-Mańkowska (2011) wrote why image is never an ideal projection of an object. Because perception is at the same time subjective and active. A good image can exist when the recipient receives concrete and selected messages to create on his own feelings about a particular entity. In this way everyone can have influence on the image created by a person, which could lead to specific behavior. The sender must remember about regularly submitting information coherent with the reality, because the recipient can also use other sources of information. Image is a totality of views, attitudes, and experiences of one man or a group of people in relation to the object, which can be a different person, thing, place, company, brand, etc. Own perceptions, imaginations, and assessments are very important because mostly they have bigger influence than rational and objective information.

Olszewska (2000) claims that imagination is a personal thing. No two people can have the same image of any one thing. Image is a result of cognitive processes

and emotional attitude to the object. Image is an assessment made by a person with individual life experiences, memories, cultural habits, and internal and external factors that are shaping the psyche and personality. Image consists of countless variables. Some of them may be the result of intentional actions of the object to control their own appearance and lead to achieve the desired image. Due to the intensification of rivalry between territorial units, to achieve a competitive advantage it is necessary to have an attractive image. Developing it is a very difficult process that takes a lot of time to form a multi-faceted portrait of the city, then preserve it to change beliefs, decisions, or attitudes of different recipients.

In the opinion of Glińska, Florek and Kowalewska (2009), the image of a territorial unit is a set of feelings and explications correlated with a specific impulse that causes associations with a place. Associations are important in knowledge about the city, which can lead to a positive image or stereotype. The image of a particular thing is modeled through a network of associations built over a long time as a result of the accumulation of many stimulants. And that subjective impressions have a main role in the process of deciding on the choice of a specific location as a place of residence, site to start a business, or holiday destination.

Sport can be a very good means of communication with the environment. This is due to its typical values as universality (national, continental, global), simplicity of the message and associations, emotions, multidimensional acceptance and participation, egalitarianism and exclusiveness, inconspicuous presence of advertising, and international media coverage.

Sport has a special place in the city life. In many countries, also in Poland, one of the main tasks for administrative units is promoting the sport idea and providing easy ways to practice physical culture. In Poland the public target for territorial units is improving conditions for amateurs and professionals alike. We can see the government activity in this area in building new and renovating existing sports facilities, organizing sports events for amateurs and professionals, supporting school sports events, or helping sport clubs.

From many years relations between sport and political sciences were very near and getting more important. They interact in both directions. Sport holds a crucial position in a development strategy of a state, city or region. Simultaneously, sport could be used for implementation of social or economic goals. Administrative units can promote sport, but increasingly administrative units are promoting themselves by means sport.

Bosiacki and Śniadek (2012) noted the modern roles of sport:

- improve health and fitness in society,
- culture, providing entertainment, excitement,

- social integration,
- activation of town/region/country economy,
- improving the quality of life,
- education and upbringing of the young generation,
- policy (demonstration of power, gaining favor),
- infrastructure development,
- promotion of town / region / country, shaping a positive image.

Today, sport no longer covers only the realm of symbolic culture, but it is also an effective policy tool in different types and ranges (economic, social, regional, international, educational, health, tourism) and at all levels of government (national, regional, local). Countries are also permanent players in a game that is about gaining a competitive advantage. Their position depends primarily on their status in relation to the nearest neighbors.

Surely we can say that success in sport is interpreted much more broadly than just as the work of an athlete, team or sports organization. Very often it is perceived (often unconsciously) as indicator of the success of current politicians and general prosperity. This is why countries with something to prove on the international stage willingly engage in the organization of major sporting events. They want to manifest the strength and efficiency of the country. These were the main reasons why Germany in 1936 with such gusto prepared the Summer Olympic Games followed by the Chinese a few decades later.

Today, we can see that the country that wants to improve its image is very willing to organize major sporting events. An example may be the Olympics in Beijing and Sochi, as well as other events in this category. Russia in 2018 will host the World Cup in football. Four years later, the Olympic Games will be held in Qatar, which has been leading its promotion by sport.

After reading Miller's (2008) monumental *The Official History of the Olympic Games and the IOC* we can admit that massification, huge popularity, and a certain universality of sport, gave sports organizations big influence. For this reason, the importance of the Olympic Games cannot be limited to the sport area because they also include areas reserved for culture and partly religion but most of all politics at the highest level – the international level. It is also the result of a political nature of the Olympic ethos as it promotes humanism, cultural diversity, and striving for world peace. On no other occasion simple participation in competitions, mutual respect between the athletes involved, and observance of the principles of fair competition are as prominent. As a consequence, the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic Games are big projects of hosts' cultural gesture. The IOC wants to be apolitical, but such behavior is impossible. Even the

basic task, which is the responsibility of this organization, is organizing the Olympic selection. The choice of the country will be political, because it has highlighted a specific state, so the basic political entity on the international stage.

If you check the history of sport, for example in Lipoński's *Historia Sportu* (2012), you would see that the Olympics did not escape from the political field. The Cold War shows it very well. The Iron Curtain divided the world into two sides competing in every possible field: military, technological, cultural, and political. Sport has a unique role, because nothing else besides an actual armed conflict is able to demonstrate superiority of one country over another. What is more, in sport it will be even more visible, because there everything is done according to simple rules with an easy indication of the winner. The results of a war can always be interpreted in different ways. Representatives of countries feuding with each other wanted to harness enormous power and resources to the sports arena to show who is better in front of millions of witnesses, forgetting the ideas of the Olympics but focusing on the goal of winning, even if it meant forgoing fair play.

The most resonant political issues related to the Olympics and the Cold War in the background were the two cases of boycotts. United States together with, among others, Canada, Norway, and the Federal Republic of Germany decided not to send national teams to Moscow for the Olympics in 1980. The Eastern bloc used the next opportunity for revenge. The USSR and all allied states, including Poland have not appeared at the Olympics in Los Angeles. They hosted their own event – “Friendship-84”. Four years later the contentious issue was the location, which was Seoul in South Korea. Communist North Korea has decided not to send their athletes to the enemies. Likewise acted its allies, namely Cuba, Ethiopia, and Nicaragua. Those events have put permanent policy appeals to boycott the Olympics if the policy of the host was controversial. It was also repeated in 2008 in Beijing and six years later during the Winter Games organized in Russian Sochi.

IOC, even if it does not want it, is implicated in the political game. When selected organizer is controversial, this committee by their actions are trying to force the state to conform to democratic behavior.

### **Benefits for China's Image during the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008**

Whether organization of the games was beneficial to the host is determined by checking if it managed to achieve its goal. It is difficult to obtain economic profits,

so actually the only profit can only be derived from improving the image on the international arena.

“What for did China organize the Olympic Games? To overcome the medals of America, extol the Chinese economic miracle and heal Chinese complexes. And above all, to show that China is again the Middle Kingdom” said Winiecki for *Polityka*. The key was to achieve a specific image that only the future can translate into financial benefits.

The Chinese are trying to stop being associated with cheap labor. They want to make a structural change in their own economy and thus take care of the proper handling of the overall brand transformation. The Chinese have a theory that in order to maintain dynamic growth is necessary to change the vectors of economic policy and join the competition in the field of higher technology and innovation. It is mainly the aftermath of improving the socio-economic situation, which because of rising labor costs and the level of life, is running out of cheap labor, the driving force of export economy. China has problems like states very well developed: the aging of the population, but in this Asian country the negative effects of this process may come even faster. The economy is beginning to slow down, which is shown by the low level of GDP growth as Kaliński (2015) wrote.

Looking for the benefits received by China and achieved the goals related to the organization of the Olympic Games, should focus primarily on indicators of image. The report, prepared by Simon Anholt, very well illustrates how perceptions of countries are changing. It is currently the most popular form of measuring the image of different countries. This is the first classification of national brands on the basis of the image held by other nations. In 20 countries they systematically carried out tests on representative groups of 25,000 people. Their assessment is subject to the image of the country in six areas, where the average ratings ultimately consists in the occupied place in the ranking. About China's image wrote Kuźmińska (2008).

1. Export. In marketing, the issue was referred to as the effect of the country of origin. This would apply to the relationship between the buying and the knowledge of the country of origin. In addition, they are dealing with the field of science, technology, and creative energy. For good results the key is a good result in terms of innovation. For countries focusing on this issue a very positive economic future is envisioned.
2. Management of the state. This aspect includes the perceived business government, political system, the integrity of government, respect for civil rights, fairness, and responsible behavior in the areas of international peace, environmental protection, and poverty reduction in the world.

3. Culture. Checked is the perception of a country's heritage, its contemporary cultural achievements in film, music, literature, and those made at sports arenas, which leave a very big social impact.
4. Housing and investment. This part of the assessment of the state measures whether it is a good place to live or if it is economically stable enough to invest their resources in. The most attractive countries in this regard absorb educated people.
5. Inhabitants. General impression about people from this country. This part consists in truly personal questions about whether during a visit to the country the locals would be hospitable, whether the respondent would like to have a friend from that country, or if he would like to hire someone in his company. Answers to the above questions explain how people are perceived through the prism of friendship and the ability to interact with others, what is the general opinion on their loyalty, cheerfulness, skill, intelligence, competence, and work ethic.
6. Tourism. Four points are evaluated. Three questions cover the main tourist areas: the beauty of nature, historical buildings and monuments, as well as the local life and its attractions. The determinant of tourism potential would be an emotional response or if the respondent would choose this place directing all aspects of outside financial conditions or distance travel.

The position is the average of the results from these six indicators. Each is asked from 1 to 7 questions, which is present scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is the lowest and most negative assessment, 4 is the average "neither bad nor good", and 7 the highest and most positive (Anholt, 2009).

From the point of view of the subject described, the most important results will be included in *The Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index* from 2009, when you can see the first results after the Olympic Games held in Beijing.

In a report published in 2009, China's results are impressive. No other country did improve their position in such a significant way. In the most important category, that is the general assessment, China recorded the highest rise, from 28<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>th</sup> position in comparison with the previous ranking. According to the authors of *Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index* – very large improvement of China is primarily due to the fact of the organization of the Olympic Games in Beijing, which arrived with a very good message to a wide audience (Anholt, 2009).

In terms of export promotion, China recorded the highest value in this statement. From 21<sup>st</sup> place it moved to the 17<sup>th</sup> place. A very large contribution to the positive assessment had a good perception of the spheres on which the Chinese were focusing, so contributions to science and technology. Still, China is primarily



seen as a manufacturer of cheap products, which in the classification of quality of the state took only 45<sup>th</sup> place.

The smallest reason for pride was the second to last position in the category of state management. The organization of the Olympic Games did not help and even it prevented achieving a better result. The public had an opportunity to hear about the chronic problems of China's persecution of Tibetans, lack of respect for civil rights, obstruction of freedom of speech, the world's highest number of executions, and labor camps. This resulted in a drop from the 48<sup>th</sup> to the 49<sup>th</sup> position, which is the penultimate in the assessment. Worse was assessed only Iran. However, even in this regard, the Chinese managed to achieve their goal. The creators of the report noted that the respondents appreciated the efforts to protect the environment, which was one of the priorities of the communications information relating to the preparation for the Olympics.

Observation of the media around the world helped to promote the rich heritage. In the rankings prepared by Anholt China always had a high place in the category of culture, but the Olympic Games further improved it by 6 positions, moving it from the 9<sup>th</sup> place to the 7<sup>th</sup>. This is due to the Chinese athletes in the Olympics, who won the largest number of gold medals. Defeating the US made a very strong impression even on those who are not interested in sport.

Many guests, the goodness of what is natural for the hosts of the event, the possibility of exhibiting desirable characteristics, propagating information by foreign journalists to help the host, all of this has a positive effect on the perception of the inhabitants of the country. In the category about people Chinese made impressive advancement of 6 positions, from the 41<sup>th</sup> to the 35<sup>th</sup> place. Surely it would not be possible without the Olympic Games. This international event really helped to change the image. Advantages of China in tourism are well known: it is a huge country with very rich history. This great sport event helped to remind this to the whole world (Anholt, 2009).

### **The Political Benefits of Germany's Image Policy during the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936**

Unfortunately, such reports as Anholt were not made before II World War. Besides, Germany in terms of the image would not achieve the same as the Chinese. In the contemporary economy, international exchange of ideas, goods, were not as important. The Nazis wanted to export their own ideology, not products. Possible evidence of the benefits that Germany could achieve through the Olympics

would be found primarily in journalistic materials. With a lower prevalence of the media in comparison to today's times, newspapers were the creator of the majority of views on specific issues, and thus also the image for wide audience, including the international elite.

The strength of communication and its efficiency would not have been possible without the innovative and effective approach to image management. In many ways, the competitions in Berlin were important in the Olympic history not only because of the initiated tradition of the Olympic flame. Germany used the latest technology to inform the largest possible group of fans. Later nobody else used the Olympic spirit to further their political interests as Germans did.

From the point of view of image, it was important to win the medals classification. Every authority uses success of their own athletes, but for the Germans it was very important. It confirmed their theory about superiority of their race over all others. A better exemplification of it than triumphs in sport would be very difficult to find, and Berlin Olympic was definitely dominated by Germans. They won 89 medals including 33 gold and triumphed in the medals standings. Great Britain, which was regarded as a European power also in sport was ranked tenth in the medals standings winning 10 medals which only 4 were gold.

Foreign observers were impressed by the Berlin Olympics, which they expressed in their relations to the native press. Frederick T. Birchall's impressions after effects of Germans work were published on the pages of popular and prestigious American daily "The New York Times" in an article entitled: *Olympic pride Reich*. "Foreigners who know Germany from what they saw during those nice two weeks could be limited to one impression, namely, that it is a country happy and incredibly rich that Hitler is one of the greatest living political leaders of the world and that the Germans themselves are wrongly vilified, hospitable, the peaceful nation that deserves anything that can give them the best" Birchall wrote (1938, by: Walters, 2008).

In the United States, owing to the Berlin Olympics no one criticized the policy practiced by the Nazis and some even advertised Adolf Hitler's actions. Some suggested taking the example from this European country and implementing these solutions on the American soil, not only in physical education, but also in the socio-political area. It was the opinion of one of the representatives of the US elite, Avery Brundage, who was chief of the US Olympic Committee. This prominent activist was impressed with the effects of the common practice implemented in the Nazi Germany: great national organization combined with intensive training and superhuman will to win. In the socio-political field, he stated that United States as well as Germany must root out communism from the country and act to

halt the declining level of patriotism, because Germany confirmed a new spirit of confidence (Walters, 2008).

Also in this book we can read similar opinions. One of the most famous American journalists, correspondent in Berlin William L. Shirer wrote a lot of articles about the activities of the Third Reich, also during the Second World War. He said that the Nazis carried out the Olympics in a spectacular style, eclipsing all the previous ones.

Germans lulled the world public opinion. Especially for the guests they covered up all manifestations of anti-Semitism and the Nazi army potential. By the way, the loudest scandal of anti-Semitism in Berlin was created by Americans, when Marty Glickman was unexpectedly withdrawn from the US team. The case of intentional not shaking hands between Adolf Hitler and black multi-medalist Jesse Owens became a legend many years later. Then racism was widespread in the United States and Owens said that he was worse treated in his own country than in the Nazi Germany. As we can read in Hall's article in "Daily Mail", many years later, in the German's press cropped out information saying that there was a meeting between the biggest heroes of the Berlin Olympics – Hitler and Owens. They had small talk, and after that Hitler shook Jesse's hand, someone said that this situation was photographed.

Sołuba (2014) noted that millions of people were charmed by the excellent organization of the event and the appearance of the country under the Nazi authorities. The publisher of the "Los Angeles Times" said that the Olympic Third Reich was falsely portrayed in the reportage. The businessman was impressed by the happiness of the German people and their love for their leader.

The successful hosting of the Olympic Games gave a very positive response in international relations. Other countries praised Germany, impressed not only by sport achievements but also the perfectly functioning state. Opinion was that Germany is a well-organized country and Hitler helped the whole nation to rise from the ashes after the lost war. Traveling through Germany, guests were impressed with the governance in the country and the euphoria surrounding the political leader. This allowed the Nazis to implement the plan to exterminate the Jews and create military power to allow the start of the war, which became apparent only in 1939.

From the point of view of the then authorities, it was important to refer to the good image of their citizens. The authorities demonstrated ability to organize a great venture with the participation of all people. It showed that the joint forces under the leadership of the party allow people to accomplish great things. Stunning sporting successes have built confidence of Germans as a community. Public

legitimacy was important for the government. It could implement its plans, even if the negative consequences were felt by people.

Proofs of it we can be found in Barkai's article (1990). Two months after the Olympics, on the wave of public enthusiasm, the Third Reich implemented the four-year economic plan designed to be implemented in the years 1936–1940. NSDAP already managed to achieve some economic successes. In the years 1933–1936 Gross National Product grew at an annual rate of 9.5%, production – 17%, while the unemployment rate decreased from 6 million to just 1 million.

The four-year plan to provide further economic reforms based on the national chemical industry, automotive industry, and construction of highways. But the most important part was the military industry and increasing the size of the army to realize plans to conquer the whole of Europe and the whole world. During these four years, the country had to be ready for war. Focusing on the military industry had to reflect negatively on the standard of living of the average citizen. The government managed to gradually reduce the level of unemployment, but this success was illusory. Until 1938 unemployment fluctuated at around half a million.

Overy (1994) wrote also about some defects in the Nazis' economy. More and more people were working and thus had funds for life, but focus on only some state industries and adherence to the theory of economic self-sufficiency of the country inevitably led to higher prices for basic items. The citizen had a job and wages, but for the money he could not buy too much. Human needs were drowned by the propaganda slogans. It eased its way into consciousness, because the German people were persuaded for years. Before their eyes industry became developed, decreasing unemployment in the country ruled with a strong hand with visible law and order.

The Olympic Games in Berlin were a great success for the society and the best confirmation of the validity of the reign of the current government. Domination in sport over other nations was for Germans the best illustration of the potential that lies dormant in them as a nation and a confirmation of the Nazi ideology, speaking about the superiority of the Aryan race. This inner strength of the nation, rather than cause concern, was admired by foreign elites who do not respond adequately to the first signs of what might be awaiting the world in 1939–1945.

## Summary

Sport departs from the Western democracies, because they cannot and do not want to organize so expensive events. The Olympic Games in London in 2012 was

three times cheaper than the previous ones in Beijing and also three times cheaper than the Winter Olympics in Sochi following two years later.

Recent years have shown that the greatest sports federations such as the IOC and FIFA do not pay attention to the opinions of fans and citizens of countries organizing the biggest sporting events. Federations even operate to the detriment of them, because countries which want the Olympic Games have to spend money on sport infrastructure instead of more important for people social things. This investment does not improve socio-economic conditions, but inhibits their development, because such objects without an adequate plan for the use after the Olympic Games, almost always generate high costs not only because of the cost of building them but also their subsequent maintenance.

Instrumentalization of major sporting events was initiated in 1936 by the Nazis in Berlin. Today, the event is organized primarily for promotion – it is the cause of publicity and a greater interest in the country. The Olympic Games have become a kind of rivalry on the feelings, as part of international relations, taking upon itself the goal of presenting the capabilities of the state in terms of organization and economy.

It is hard to find economic data which would demonstrate the positive impact of the Olympic Games on a country which organized them. Benefits for the state should be mostly impressions and possibilities to create and disseminate positive image. Only well-executed actions can give economic benefits in the future. But image advantages could also give political profits as we can see in the examples provided above. For the organizer, benefits branding can be determined, which may contribute to the growth of the brand value of any territorial unit or achievement of political goals. Sports committees should have an awareness of this in choosing the organizers but also the recipients at whom the message is directed.

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