

The Symbols of the XXV Olympic Games, Barcelona '92

Josep Ma. Trias Folch

Contest for the official symbol and logotype

In October 1987, an advisory commission of the Barcelona Olympic Games Organising Committee, comprising fourteen experts in design, recommended holding a restricted competition as a mean of obtaining an Olympic symbol and mascot. Various names were proposed and eventually the six professionals who had received most votes in both categories were invited to participate.

On 1 December of the same year a jury composed of professionals in the fields of design, communication and representatives of the COOB'92 (Barcelona Olympic Organising Committee) decided (by 17 votes out 18) to choose the proposal for a symbol and logotype submitted by Josep M. Trias for the 1992 Barcelona Games.

The language of the symbol

One of the basic premises of the project process was the need to differ from the characteristic images of earlier Olympic Games or candidatures. This consideration arose not so much from demands of originality in the design as from the endorsement that the symbol could not be achieved with technical, geometric or technological vocabulary. Neither Barcelona (nor for that matter Catalonia and Spain) could «sell» an image of a technological character. It is undeniable that on an international level Barcelona is associated with

Picasso, Miró, Dalí, Gaudí or Tàpies; such evidence led to the need to define a language that was warmer, more human, more artistic, more creative, more personal -in short, more in keeping with the communicative values which had to be transmitted.

From very beginning of the project I therefore considered the possibility that the symbol might have a «drawn by hand» aspect rather than one carried out with instruments suited to more technified languages. The outline thus appeared as a fundamental feature of the symbol.

In the numerous sketches, drafts and early notes this evaluation of the graphic outline appeared insistently as one of the most consistent alternatives; countless trials with thousand of pen-strokes mingled continuously with sketches with a more anecdote type of content, all of which were rejected in the final stage of correction of the symbol. The colour, which appears in the final result as one of its most characteristic features, put in its appearance once the constructive definition of the design had reached a high degree of precision.

The mediterranean quality of the symbol

Barcelona is a port with thousand of years of history, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the sea from the historical development of the city.

Moreover, the sea is the Mediterranean, which unmistakably shapes a personality that is extrovert, expressive, luminous, dynamic, filled with colour, easygoing, free, direct and human.

There is no doubt that these concepts distinguish and identify Barcelona and its culture and so this personality had to be reflected in the character of the symbol, which was to represent and identify the Barcelona Olympic Games. It had, therefore, to be a design that could be regarded as a Mediterranean symbol.

This Mediterranean criterion was a new justification of the need to differentiate this design from the graphic images of previous Olympic, which could for the most part be defined as geometric forms, far removed from the expressive character the design ought to communicate.

The universal and human quality of sport and the olympics

The image of earlier Olympic Games had habitually been centred on symbols of cities or countries or perhaps on their buildings or other elements such as shields or flags. From the very beginning it was considered that the symbols which Barcelona could contribute in this respect -crosses and stripes, the national flag, the church of the Sagrada Família, the monument to Columbus- involved a certain danger of sinking into anecdotal

excess, far distant in any case from the would-be universality of the symbol and with an obvious risk of possible semantic ambiguity. A too localised symbol would restrict the semantic field necessary in order to constitute a message representative of Barcelona-Catalonia-Spain, a role that the logo had inevitably to assume. Alongside this universality ran the expressive values proper to the Olympic Games, the dimension that could be designated «sporting-Olympic».

The Games are a sporting display on an international scale centred on sportsmen and sportswomen. Why not design a symbol that would be the synthesis of a human figure in a sporting attitude? The designed symbol aims to be a synthesis (almost cave-like or archaeological) of an individual (man or woman) in a dynamic attitude (running or jumping) -values added to those already described: Man as the central character of an Olympiad, the Mediterranean athlete. In this way the symbol allows of two interpretations: a first and immediate reading centred on its tactile values and a second, more reflective and inferred, on certain values of representation.

The colours

The colours of flags of Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain are basically yellow and red; consequently, if the aim was to identify this triple

topographical and political reality, their use could not be avoided.

One special feature of the Mediterranean quality of Barcelona, previously mentioned, suggested the incorporation of the blue of the sea, a colour basically cold and in sharp contrast to the other two warm colours.

The colour red is associated with life (blood), fire (heat), passion, feelings, pain and liberty; yellow is the sun, light, comprehension, intuition, intellect and human values. Blue, on the other hand, is for the sea, the sky, the light of day, thinking, constancy, justice and coldness. In this way, the chromatic dimension too -besides its decisive contribution to the material definition of the design and its later development- took on a characteristic role of its own in the global expressive value of the symbol.

The dynamism

The symbol describes the intention of movement (from left to right, in the usual direction of reading), in an attitude of jumping or running; the outstretched arms contribute to the dynamism of the symbol, while the head -set in a more static position- gives balance to the whole, forming a central rotation axis. It is the athlete's leap, more so than Barcelona and the Olympic rings, that acts as the supporting base of the composition; but at the

same time it is also the leap of joy on winning a medal or the open-armed attitude, the universal symbol of hospitality.

The logotype

The Barcelona'92 logotype is composed in a Times Demi Bold (New Roman) font, which has a cultural references of antiquity and Rome, of Latinity and seriousness; a font with features which allow it to operate perfectly as a bridge element between the essentially tactile values of the line and the geometric mechanism of the five Olympic rings symbol, a role that is emphasised by its position between the one and the other (unusual, to judge by the graphic development associated with recent series of Olympic Games).

As opposed to the coldness, apparent asepsis and supposed «modernity» of the bare fonts (Futura and Helvetica, basically), the use of Times, which despite its Saxon origins is seen as a direct descendant of the Roman capital, meant a decided commitment to a new cultural quality in typefaces.

The cultural olympiad

With the designation of Barcelona as the site of the Games of the XXV Olympiad Barcelona 1992, the COOB'92 was committed to carrying out an extensive cultural programme throughout the four years' duration of the Olympiad. The line

followed in this programme, in accordance with the Olympic principles of friendship between peoples, of creativity and harmonious competition, was that of the universal interchange associated with sport and with the great festival of youth which make up the Olympic Games, offering a fitting prologue during the four years of the Olympiad as well as during the actual Games. To identify this Cultural Olympiad a logotype was created to accompany all activities carried out within the framework of the programme.

Logotype

This is formed of the following elements: A squared red background (the Olympic colour). The initials «OC» of the Cultural Olympiad: these, formed from a fragment of the Olympic rings symbol, situate the culture in the Olympic context and form a «logotype» reduced to memorable initials.

The official symbol of the Barcelona'92 Olympic Games: this, strategically situated on the upper right hand edge of the background and above the initials «OC», helps to establish the balance between the three elements that figure in the image and, at the same time, unmistakably «Barcelonizes» the whole.

Times Demi Bold font: this is the same as that used to compose the «Barcelona'92» logotype,

thereby achieving coherence in typeface as well as bestowing a markedly cultural character.

Volunteers'92

To ensure the smooth internal and external running of the whole organisation presupposed by any Olympic Games, a team of Volunteers was created to collaborate and participate directly in various functions, depending of the needs of the association.

These functions, among others, ranged from a complete translation service to entry control information, and included general information for the public, escorts, competition assistants, technical help in radio and TV centres, etc.

For the identification of this team of Volunteers a logotype was created to accompany all the activities carried out by members of the team.

Logotype

This is formed of the following elements: A horizontal rectangle with a double background of red and blue (Olympic colours) and with the lower extreme «broken» to give it a cultural character of a young, dynamic, lively, non-mechanical nature.

The word «Volunteers'92» in a white negative composed of the same Times Demi Bold font as in the logotypes for «Barcelona'92» and the

«Cultural Olympiad Barcelona'92», in order to achieve typographical coherence.

Substitution of the «i» (in Catalan) and the «io» (in Spanish) by the symbol of the Olympic Games of Barcelona'92, in order to personalise the name and to «Barcelonize» the concept of Volunteer, as well as to attempt to overcome the bilingual element.

Pictographs of sports

The series of pictographs proposed for the symbolisation of the Olympic sports had its origin in the symbol of the Barcelona Games'92.

The symbol, as an anthropomorphic synthesis of an athlete in a dynamic or leaping attitude, suggested, from the first moment it was arrived at, the possibility of making enough variations for it to be associated with all the different Olympic sports, already well known and accepted in their pictograph form. So, from the very beginning, the design fulfilled one of the basic conditions of the pictographs, that of creating a unified image of the Olympic Games that could serve as a vehicle for the central meanings attributed to it: in this case, the basic values of a design of quality, with a humanistic aspiration, of orientation towards society and identification with culture as such and its Mediterranean environment.

The three anthropomorphic elements of the

symbol become the three basic elements of the structure of the sports pictographs: the blue spot suggests the head, the yellow line the arms and the red line the legs.

The differences between this and former systems of pictographs are notable. There are differences in the elements that make up the structure of the pictographs and also in the ways these elements are articulated.

The structure consists of only three elements, head, arms and legs. Unlike all previous example there is no longer a single element to represent the trunk of the body. The perception of the athlete's trunk has to be the result of the perception of the pictograph as a whole. The identification of the body is entrusted to a decoding action on the part of the recipient, who must bring his own imagination to bear.

The second great difference is found in the means of articulation established between the elements that make up the pictograph. Whereas in former series these elements (head, body, legs) are articulated in accordance with a strict geometric code with a limited number of combinations, in the new pictographs of Barcelona'92 the combination is open, less codified or standardised, and so more creative. The pictographs of Barcelona do not belong to an articulated system, but to a fully iconic language formed by analogies between the visual

perception of the pictograph and the memory each recipient has of sporting practices, whether through direct vision of the sport or by means of visual experience through communication media.

The design work carried out consisted of an investigation of the possibilities of extrapolating from the graphic style of the Barcelona'92 symbol the different Olympic sports, while attaining the highest degree of comprehension, expressivity and personalization.

Symbol and logotype for the paralympic games

The symbol of the IX Paralympic Games Barcelona'92 had its origin in that of the Absolute Games of Barcelona'92. The identity of the Paralympic Games had to be recognisable and associated with that of the Absolute Games, but could not be the same; it had to have an image of its own. For this reason the designed symbol aimed to transmit the same concepts of humanity and the Mediterranean quality through the humanized and anthropomorphic expression of its line and through its three colours: the blue of the Mediterranean, the yellow of the sun and the red of life.

Furthermore, besides the centred blue head and the welcome and joy of the wide open yellow arms, there was added a third circular red element which finished the characterisation of the symbol and is intended to be a synthesis between

the legs and the principal element of the universal symbolic wheelchair of the physically handicapped.

The «Paralímpics» and «Barcelona'92» logotypes were composed with the same typeface as that used in those of the Absolute Games in order to give the symbol the same graphic and typographic contrast.

(Imatges: làmines 11 i 12)

LÀMINA 11

Josep Maria Trias Folch: The Symbols of the XXV Olympic Games Barcelona '92



Simbol Olímpic - 1989



Paralímpics
Barcelona '92

Simbol Paralímpics - 1990



Logo Voluntaris - 1988



Look Barcelona '92 - 1992



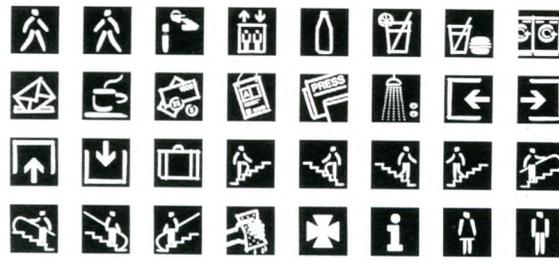
Look Barcelona '92 - 1992



Olimpiada Cultural - 1988



Pictograma Esports - 1991



Pictograma Serveis - 1991



Pictograma Paralímpics - 1988

Casimir C. de Rham: Drapeaux, bonnets et chapeaux

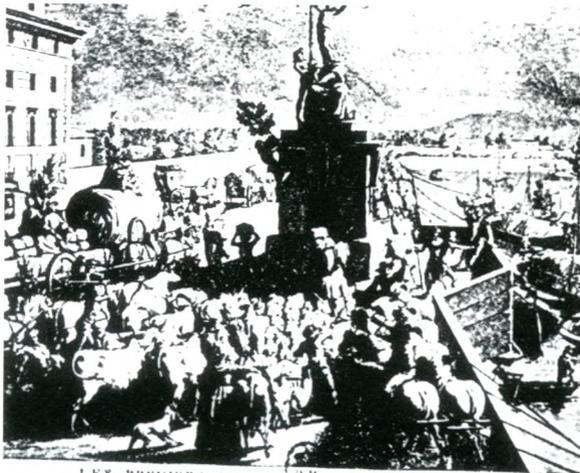
Fig. 1 - Joie populaire lors de la suppression de l'octroi
aux portes de Paris en 1971

Fig. 2 - Newport light infantry, 1774

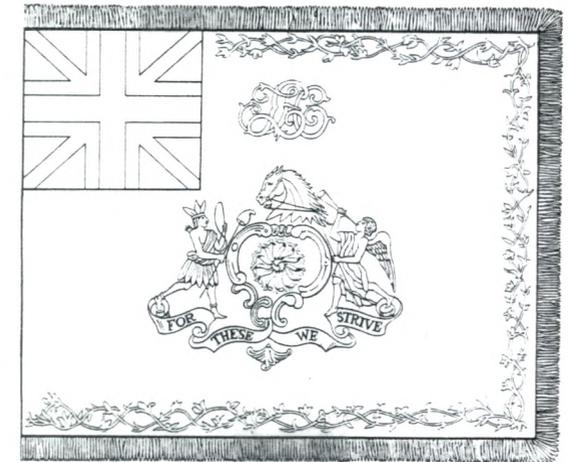


Fig. 3 - First troop of Philadelphia light horse, 1775