

Examining the Athens 2004 Olympic Games Contribution to National Branding, concerning Tourism Promotion: A Holistic Approach

DIMITRIOS BELIAS

Department of Business Administration, Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly,
Larissa, Greece

MARIA CHAROULI

Department of Business Administration, Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly,
Larissa, Greece

DIMITRIOS KYRIAKOU

Dept. of Economic Sciences, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

LABROS SDROLIAS

Department of Business Administration, Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly,
Larissa, Greece

EFSTATHIOS VELISSARIOU

Department of Business Administration, Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly,
Larissa, Greece

NIKOLAOS KAKKOS

Department of Business Administration, Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly,
Larissa, Greece

LADISLAV ROLINEK

Department of Management, University of South Bohemia, Czech Republic

ZUZANA DVOŘÁKOVÁ

Líšková, Department of Regional Management, University of South Bohemia, Czech Republic

GEORGIOS MOURGAS

Dept. of Business Administration, T.E.I of Thessaly, Greece

ABSTRACT

The organization of such an important event as the Olympic and the Paralympic Games by a country creates conditions for global popularity, thus the advancement and promotion of economy via tourist resources. It consists of an impeccable opportunity for marketing/branding and can lead to positive results in terms of attracting tourists and ameliorating the country's profile. The organization of the Olympic and Paralympic Games 2004 in Athens was a particularly important event for Greece, with multiple economic and social impacts. The case of the Olympic Game's hold proves that the successful organization is the key to promote nation branding and marketing, in order to long term social and economic benefits, as a stepping point for the development of a coherent and result orienting branding strategy. The challenge is whether the strategic planning will achieve its goals coping with imponderables, such as the deep socioeconomic crisis and uncertainty that Greece faces since 2009.

Keywords: Nation branding, Olympic Games, Athens 2004, Tourism business

1. INTRODUCTION

Aim of this paper, is the socially constructed notion of a nation and the nation branding idea, in terms of popularity and long term benefit engagement. Which are the qualities that consist the general idea that we shape for a nation? Can the qualities of an imagined community (Anderson, 1997) be used for a nations' strategic plan in order to ameliorate life quality?

Organizing a global event, as important as the Olympics and Paralympics, is a significant commitment, as infrastructure is assumed. This means that in the cities that are holding the events there is the feeling of safety, the capacity to accommodate people in clean and comfortable places, the transportation is accurate, fast and pleasant, there are facilities for people with disabilities and the city is "friendly" – technically as well as emotionally (concerning the citizens) for the "users" (Belias et al., 2016; Kyriakou et al., 2016).

Greece is fundamentally connected with the Olympic Games, so it was really a very big deal when the Olympic Games *returned home*. This very idea of *returning home* had been the key factor to all dimensions; political, social, economical, emotional and technical. Olympic Games define and are defined by what is constructed as "greek spirit" at the global community, regarding both Greeks and *non Greeks*. There is, for sure, an imperceptible feeling of respect to such an institution that refers to the ideals of peace, noble rivalry and brotherliness (Belias et al., 2016).

Globalization has intensified competition among cities, in order to attract investment, visitors, qualified staff, as well as major events. In this context, the city marketing has become a strategic tool for promoting the competitive advantages of a city and – inductively – of a country. The most common marketing strategies are the adoption of a brand, innovative construction of buildings, and organization of major events.

Big events can play a very important role not only superficially, but also to solve deep urban problems, as they can lead to important transformations to the urban landscape, as well as to the country's identity profile (Belias et al., 2017).

The amelioration and promotion of a reshaped profile can lead to positive results in terms of attracting tourists regardless of sports or social events. Tourists can be attracted by landscape, culture, art and facilities, that are existent to the country that is their destination, but, most importantly, a place attracts visitors depending on the image that is promoted by the nation itself, by the strength of the Nation Branding as a successful marketing tool.

2. METHODOLOGY

This is a literature review which will examine the value of information and data management for a tourist company. Hence the methodology of this paper relies on the use of already made researches and papers; this is a literature review. The source of papers has been from various databases such as science direct and ESCBO.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 The Concept of Nation Branding

“Brand” is a key term in marketing theory and practically can be translated as “brand”, “name”, “trademark” or “commercial identity” (Chernev, 2012). This term refers to a product, a service or an organization and is associated or interpreted in conjunction with the name, identity and reputation of the brand. More specifically, brands consist of a mix of tangible and intangible attributes (Hart and Murphy, 1998), usually marked with a brand (trademark) and constitute commercial properties, which with proper management can generate profits, as well as large influence on their respective market. For example, a popular trademark has loyal fans, which loyalty derives from qualitative and economic characteristics of its products, as well as from their “social capital”. The latter is so important, that customers have the feeling of belonging to a certain social class or group with the same qualitative economic and social standards.

The most important meaning of the term “branding” that is useful for this analysis refers to the process of the strategic planning and management. The focus is on building the name and the identity of a product, aiming at the promotion of its comparative advantage over the existing competition; the goal that must be obtained, is none other than the best preferable position in the public's mind and the market concerned.

Focusing on the so-called “identity management”, “branding” or “brand management”, the most interesting fact is that it is formed via the following consecutive procedures; identity creation, identity protection, enhancement and / or change (Belias et al., 2016).

- Identity Creation: It is the creation of a product's identity from scratch to its first appearance in the market; the core based work.
- Identity protection: The product is already shaped and gains the benefits of a successful identity of a product. The aim of this process is *the maintenance* of means when dealing with the various challenges that arise from the internal as well as the external environment.
- Reinforcing an identity, is an important process, and is mainly associated with the need to "modernize", so each product through the renewal of identity manages to cope with the ravages of time and the constant changes taking place in the context of an intensely competitive market.
- Finally, Identity change (re-branding) occurs when a product is going to fail in being competitive, either due to some errors in the original identity's design, either because of significant problems that encountered in its path. So, in both cases, the re-branding of the product is considered necessary in an effort to save the product from the crisis situation and become competitive, by correcting errors and transform or adapt to new needs.

Furthermore, nation branding is steadily gaining prominence, with more and more countries around the world committing resources to the development of their nation-brand (Dinnie, 2008). Simon Anholt, the father of nation branding, suggested that countries have always been brands, in the way they present themselves to the other countries. The main substances that reflect the essence of each brand, are: *strategic planning* for the nation's progress, *substance*, that reflects the effective results on economic, legal, political, social, cultural and activity results that derive when a strategic plan is implemented .

As Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2006) cite, Anholt defined nation branding as the “the sum of people's perceptions of a country across the following six areas of national competence: exports, governance, tourism, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, and people.” Anholt has developed the hexagon model to depict the concept of nation branding. In this hexagon, each point represents a country's main pillars of its nation branding. These pillars are tourism, governance, exports, people, investment and migration, culture and heritage. Among all, tourism is the most important factor concerning nation branding.



Picture 1, Anholt's Hexagon

Nowadays, most states have undertaken major policies that aspire to increase their popularity and improve their international image. The possibility to create a positive image for the country abroad, will contribute to the achievement of obtaining a competitive advantage against other competing countries, especially in the field of tourism as well as in investments. Thus, the modern States, following the dictates of the current times, have to integrate the objectives and main goals in developing a strategy within the framework of nation branding. The upper goal is no other than promoting and “building” their reputation, in an appropriate and effective way (Belias et al., 2016; Kyriakou et al., 2016).

The truth, of course, is that most States intend to do the best that they can for a successful promotion and image of their products - tangible and non tangible ones – but, usually, the lack of a coordinated and technically properly edited and designed effort is evident. The various institutions involved in this process, either official or unofficial, politicians, commercial such as ministries, companies, investment vehicles or non-governmental organizations, media and interest groups, promote, de facto, their own version for the country, which, however, creates a more confusing than coherent and comprehensive picture of the country's profile (Belias et al., 2016; Kyriakou et al., 2016).

3.2 Greece and the Olympic Games

In 2004, Athens, Greece's capital, hosted the Olympic and the Paralympic Games. Taking into account the magnitude of the public expenditure for the construction of the Olympic projects, but also the financial benefit from the additional economic activity during the preparation and after the end of the Games, time proved that the conduct of the Games did not substantially burden the financial position of the country. However, poor utilization of the Olympic heritage and the

negative publicity that accompanies Greece by the end of 2009 reduced both the amount and the duration of the benefits gained. While the successful organization of the Olympic and Paralympic Games depicted that Greece, as a country, had the ability to bring out difficult operations, as the largest sporting event in the world, it showed inefficiency in maintaining that success (Belias et al., 2016; Kyriakou et al., 2016; Belias et al., 2017).

With the organization of the Olympic Games, Greece undertook to confront a significant challenge that is part of a larger and even more ambitious goal: to boost the modernization of the country, especially in the capital.

The preparation for the Olympic Games led to large infrastructure projects, with long life, considerably improving city transportation and enhancing cultural heritage: the construction, extension and improvement of the Metro; the tram network, which facilitates an opening to the sea and ameliorates the urban landscape; increased and improved highways and street reconstruction facilitated access to the international airport of Athens. The archaeological sites unification network that was created was a great innovation for the city and constituted a motivation for Greeks all over the country to visit such places. It was obvious that awareness for the cultural heritage was highly raised, as mass media promoted all these new works and networks.

These changes, were expected to contribute to the successful conduct of the 2004 Olympic games, but the most important anticipation of all, was the expectation that, especially Athens, would obtain a new image to millions of visitors and spectators from around the world; a new image, modernized, that has accepted that we bring about the whole perception of “greekness”; ancient Greece’s heritage, Mediterranean cultural heritage along with the globalization adaption (Belias et al., 2016).

Interventions and projects on Olympic cities significantly improve the level of urban infrastructure and come to respond to chronic and significant needs. These projects contribute to upgrade the cities profile and offer significant opportunities for employment, resources exploitation, benefiting in total local economy.

The benefits of the use and economic exploitation of sports infrastructure are of great importance, balancing long term benefits that arise from construction expense. One reason is that construction costs are on - off, while demand can create several sports projects infrastructure are, under certain conditions, effective management, recurring annually. Another reason is that public spending multipliers projects are usually less than the expenditure multipliers related services (sports and tourism), as the latter are characterized by greater added value at local level.

All of the works that were undertaken under the context of the 2004 Olympic games refer to a number of projects and actions also in the Greek provinces. The works in the four Olympic cities reinforced the emergence of four major regional development poles, with relevant development diffusing in the peripheral economies. All projects undertaken in the four cities had multiple positive effects on production and employment conditions, but also on the residents' life quality. For example, upgrading or construction of hospitals would help to improve the health

services. In addition, the improvement or construction of road projects, return faster transportation services and urban landscape improvement. Furthermore, the creation of sports facilities expanded options for quality leisure activities for the local population and especially for young people (Belias et al., 2016; Kyriakou et al., 2016; Belias et al., 2017).

This doesn't apply only to the four Olympic cities, but also for all the Municipalities of the country, which for the first time and without distinction, in so little time high obtained quality sporting infrastructure.

Along with the Olympic games, the projects that were undertaken concerning hotels, road network infrastructure, directly and indirectly, developed and improved tourism infrastructure and also promoted the *city branding* of the four Olympic cities. The tourism promotion was successful and tourists were encouraged to visit various Greek cities and not only Athens.

Big events, especially sports events, have long lasting effects, on the social, emotional, political and economic sphere. Only through a holistic approach it can be obvious that such scale events consist of a landmark for the entire world, but especially for the host nation.

Analyzing the benefits, in the economic level, the organization and hosting of major sporting events such as the Olympics, creates new jobs and increases overall employment levels, as well as general economic growth as it attracts investments, especially in the sector of works and infrastructure; increases the activities of all economy sectors and is a source of revenue for the peripheries as well (Toohey & Veal, 2000).

Concerning the social level, there have been noted many positive effects as well. Such effects include the improvement of the infrastructure and services that are provided to the local communities, especially in the public transport field, having (re)constructed roads, telecommunications and security systems, health facilities, while the creation of new modern sport facilities is an important legacy (Frew & White, 2011; Maennig, 2012).

Considerable are also the environmental effects. A very notable one is the reduction of pollution levels due to the increase of new technology and procedures, especially in transportation and the intensification in the efforts to clean up the cities that will hold the events.

However, such organizations have also a negative impact on the hosting cities and the natural environment, as they are responsible for creating immense amounts of waste due to the consumption increase and at the same time monuments and cultural sites require extra protection, due to the increased number of visitors, as well as to the infrastructure and other works for the creation of Olympic projects (Bowdin, 2001; Karamichas, 2013).

3.3 The 2004 Olympic Games and Nation Branding for Tourism Reinforcement

The organization of the Olympic Games provided an excellent opportunity to improve Greece's international image. Big sports events that are characterized by international recognition, have been recognized as key factors that create a generally positive image for the hosting country

(Theodoraki, 2007). Such events also operate as pulling factors for tourism, as analyzed on this paper (Weed, 2008). More specifically, the very same event can be viewed as “large scale tourism product” that enhances tourism development, as it is a grave opportunity to gain the attraction of large numbers of participants, as well as spectators and visitors.

However, the beneficial contribution of the Games does not end at this point; in addition, the main gain concerning the nation branding is the increase of the country’s presence in the international media, leading to the increase of its recognition that serves in attracting future visitors and tourists (Singh & Hu, 2008). To cut a long way short, the profit of increasing the country’s social capital, (Bourdieu, P., 1986) is the key factor to gain competitiveness and win a high place on a global popularity board.

The Olympic Games, according to J. Nye have tremendous impacts in the increase of a country's soft power economy. According to Nye’s theory, a country’s soft power derives from three resources: culture, political values, foreign policies (Nye, 2006). The results are proportionally to the strategic planning success.

Recently, the competition concerning the organization and hosting of the so called "mega-events" between countries and among cities has been increased (Hayes & Karamichas, 2012). But what is the accurate meaning of this term? The events that are organized and take place for a short period of time and only once in a year or in longer intervals are characterized as major events.

These are mainly international events with specific thematic character such as sports, cultural, arts or other commercial content. Such events attract large number of people and are the means for a general overhaul, modernization and growth of the hosting places. The main indicator concerning tourism dimension is the stability and repetition of this event that is being established in the collective unconsciousness.

What is important for our analysis is that the states and the cities where these events were held acquire a particular brand name. Mega events, especially sports, have long lasting effects. It is obvious that they are a landmark for the entire world, but especially for the host nation. The impacts for the hosting country are highly important, as we analyzed in the previous chapter, affecting both internal and external characteristics, concerning the international image.

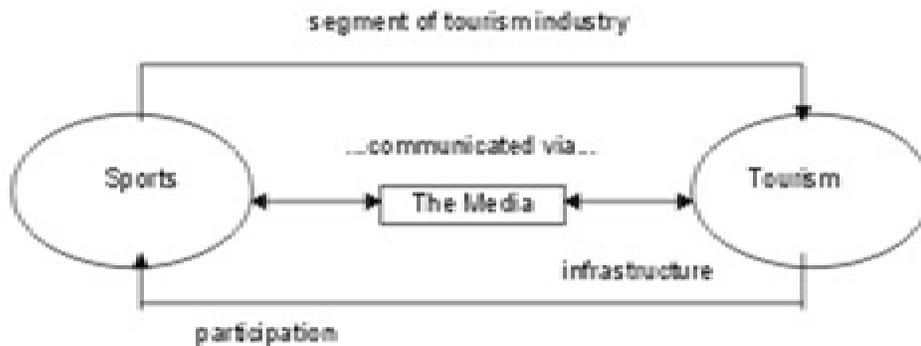
Standeven & De Knop (1999), also deduces that organizing major events, such as the Olympic Games, enhances nation image and improves living conditions for local population.



Source: Standeven & De Knop 1999 p. 5.

Source: Standeven & De Knop 1999 cited in De Groote (2005)

According to De Groote a “localised participative or spectator sports can contribute to tourism (i.e. local teams traveling to compete away from home), and that tourism in turn can lead to local sports development. But when the sport is a mega-event, the added impact and value of the media, means that the s activity is communicated to a much wider audience.” The graph below depicts this interrelation between sports and tourism (De Groote, 2005)



Source: Standeven & De Knop 1999 cited in De Groote (2005)

Kartakoullis et.al (2003 cited in (Bonarou, 2008)) suggests that the organization of a major event such as the Olympics have created the following advantages for Greece concerning the development of tourism that is listed below:

- Attraction of high-income tourists and creation of a new tourist’s generation, willing to repeat their visit to the host country, regardless events or periods.

- Creation of a favorable tourist image for the destination country.
- Creation and modernization of the tourism infrastructure.
- The unique opportunity of the host country to gain profit from the international media presence and communicate various messages to the rest of the world.
- Creation of a skilled work force in the organization, management and funding sectors, with a special emphasis on hosting special sport and tourist attractive events.

Despite many fears that Greece would not be able to carry out a successful organization of such an event with multiple impacts, national and global. After the year that Olympic Games took place, at 2004, the country was considered as a “safe destination” for visitors and tourists, as the issue of national security was considered a priority among Greek policies.

In the field of nation branding, Greece achieved the goal to create a new national identity, reformed and revised, engaging the ancient cultural heritage with the European one.

The successful organization of the Games created a more positive opinion about Greece among other EU and U.S. citizens, as the remaining fact was the certainty that Greece, against all odds (and that refers mainly to the feeling that Mediterranean countries are not famous for organizational achievements), did finally managed to impress. Deductively, Greece did finally managed to strengthen the tourism sector, since visitors stated at questionnaires held their intention to visit Greece in the future as tourists (Bititci & MacBryde, 2002).

An important fact that needs to be hyper linked was that, shortly after the Olympic Games, the large majority of respondents demonstrated great interest about Greece, concerning having access to relevant information being obtained through mass media, such as television channels, magazines and advertising.

Focusing on statistics, the 2004 Olympics were characterized as “successful” by 90% of Americans and 93% of Europeans who were interrogated, while 40% of all respondents considered the Athens Games as “the best Games ever organized in the history of the modern Olympic Games” (“The Olympics improve Greece’s image abroad, Branding Greece.com”, 2004)

3.4 The Aftermath of the Olympic Games and Tourism Development

As proven, Greece, especially Athens, managed to gain international publicity, by hosting successfully the Games and this fact resulted in the general nation branding improvement abroad. Moreover, as already stated, this had multiple effects on the state concerning numerous areas in the economic sector on national output and employment, but most importantly on tourism.

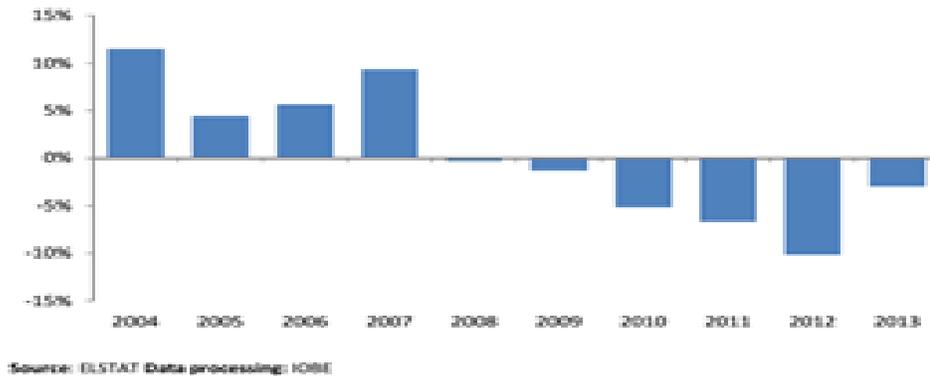
Concerning tourism sector, Greece was expected to benefit greatly from the improved image that had been created during the Olympics, taking into account the improvements made in transportation and accommodation infrastructure and the high quality tourist services provided (Belias et al., 2016).

The event offered an excellent opportunity to the hosting nation that goes beyond the traditional and obvious tourist by-products (Findling & Pelle, 2004). In 2015, the Foundation for Economic & Industrial Research (IOBE) investigated the influence of the 2004 Olympics in tourism attraction.

According to the analyzed data, there was a clear connection between Olympics and tourists attraction, but this connection had only short-term positive effects. The Games' impact, however, seemed to have faded away after the Economic crisis dawn. This evidence seems to validate the outcome of new theories, concerning major sport events such as the Olympics and its influence on tourism, that suggest the short term character of these effects.

Graph No 1 presents the incoming tourism in Athens from 2004 to 2013 and was produced by IOBE, taking data from the Greek statistical service (ELSTAT). As it is clearly shown by the statistics, immediately after the 2004 Olympics and until 2007, the city of Athens managed to attract increasing numbers of tourists. However, this trend ceased in 2008, after the economic recession. Concerning the reasons for this fact, we can speculate that they are twofold. The one dimension refers to the general global economic crisis that affected tourism worldwide and the second is linked to the image that was shaped after the Greek crisis that influences European economy.

A major indicator that Greece has managed to employ the 2004 Olympics success, is the Nation Brand Index that is being used for some years now in order to measure and rank the national value of a country. The ranking procedure takes into account various factors such as national identity, as well as the international perceptions of foreigners about a country.



Graph 1 Arrivals in Attica, annual percentage change (ELSTAT)

Greece appeared in the Nation Brand Index only in 2007, three years after the Olympics, as a “guest country”. It was positioned in the 17th place among the 50 most popular states (Sakas & Konstantopoulos, 2010). After the end of the Olympic Games, Greek government and the Ministry of Tourism applied a marketing strategy in order to endure that the benefits from the Olympic

Games would be used to upgrade tourism as a great tool for the economy and diversify the tourism base through the positive 2004 image. This strategy included several targets, such as the development and attraction of congress and exhibition tourism, the hosting of major events, promoting the Olympic cities for city break tourism et al (Sakas & Konstantopoulos, 2010; Belias et al., 2016).

In the 2015 Index the fact that Greece is found on the 21st position, shows clearly that the states have not managed to take advantage and multiply the 2004 effects. According to the relevant press release, Greece has followed a downward course in the Index, constantly losing places, due to its deteriorating economic situation and degradation of its public image ("USA regains position as top nation brand from Germany | GfK India", 2015).

During the post 2004 period and up to today we have to note that in the case of tourism and the arrival of visitors, Greece had a strong advantage over other countries, due to its unique natural environment and ancient culture that lure tourists in a global level. The ancient Greek civilization was in fact the basic element that could attract tourists to the country that gave birth to the Olympic Games. After the end of the games, however, the Greek state failed to develop a policy that would brand this success into future results, concerning tourism (Belias et al., 2016; Kyriakou et al., 2016; Belias et al., 2017).

On the contrary the Ministry of Tourism didn't succeed in taking advantage of the 2004 publicity and positive image of Greece. The 2004 heritage soon disintegrated and the rapid economic deterioration along with its social impact and political unrest, which dominated the global media, eroded the image of Greece. The discovery of the huge debt, the collapse and the degradation of the political and social tissue, eventually dismantled the tourist bloom of the previous years. All this, along with the feeling of insecurity that has prevailed for some time in the country, plus the negative image that was culminated by the international media, cumulatively resulted in the gradual deterioration of the tourism industry (Belias et al., 2016).

SETE (Greek Tourism Confederation) in a marketing proposal concerning the branding of Greece and the promotion of tourism, highlights that during the past years the Greek policy has failed to create a brand system in an organized, continuous, consistent and proficient way, presenting the national logo as a striking example via the multiple forms that it has taken since the 90's. Consistency is the secret ingredient in Greece's branding at international levels.

What is clear after this experience is that nation branding is a concept that incorporates multiple factors. The most important features, however, is the ability to demonstrate and promote a country's special characteristics that will clearly designate the uniqueness and superiority among competition. Tourism is a highly competitive industry that demands a highly effective branding strategy, in order to differentiate a country among competitors.

Undoubtedly, the application of a coherent policy is imperative should Greece decide to re brand itself. Long term policies that will promote the Greek longstanding values and elements of uniqueness are essential to achieve this aim. In addition, innovative messages are needed and old

stereotypes should be avoided; such a strategy was adopted for the Olympics, but soon proved to be insufficient and was abandoned as it would lead the procedure of branding into a stalemate of promoting old traditional images.

4. DISCUSSION - CONCLUSIONS

The organization of the Olympic and Paralympic Games 2004 in Athens was a particularly important event for Greece, with multiple economic and social impacts. The successful organization appointed Greece as a developed country that has the ability to undertake and bring out successfully difficult projects, such as the preparation and celebration of the biggest sporting event globally. The hosting of the 2004 Olympic Games affected significantly positive economic activity and employment in Greece, but the incomplete utilization of the Olympic heritage and the negative publicity that accompanies Greece since the Crisis dawn, reduced benefits.

The investment to develop the country's infrastructure for holding the Games, but also the catalytic effects, transformed tourism into a main economic pole and increased productivity after maturity, positively affecting economic activity and employment in Greece. This experience showed that commitment to the goals, as also to the satisfactory degree of consensus in society, may pleasantly surprise the world community by the successful results.

Considering the difficulties experienced by the country and the need for fast exit from the deep economic crisis, makes the course of the Olympics example for nation branding, investing in tourism, more evident and prominent than ever.

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