

## SPORT AS AN ELEMENT IN THE PLACE BRANDING ACTIVITIES OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

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**Abstract:** In the new millennium certain places more and more often use the field of sports within the framework of their place branding activities to attract the economic actors, tourists and inhabitants. The literature focusing on the topic differentiates between three platforms (event, team, place), and considers it essential that the individual places should take appropriate steps in the fields of conception-making, infrastructural development and communication activities. The present paper outlines the possibilities of the certain places and their measures through Hungarian and non-Hungarian case studies and the steps taken by the central government and the local governments concentrating on the above fields.

**Key words:** place marketing, sport, events, teams, local governments

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### INTRODUCTION

From the early 1980s, first in the United States and then gradually in Western Europe as well, the attitude of the local governments (especially of the cities) has undergone a transformation on two levels. First of all, they started to pay more attention to their environment, to the processes which take place there and the analyses of how these events influence their own future. Secondly, – while earlier they regarded the development of services and infrastructure and the control and regulation of the development generated by them as their primary task – from the beginning of the decade they had to realize that they must be much more initiative in the formation of the fate of the area entrusted to them (Leitner, H., 1990).

The changes described so far raised the interest of the researchers dealing with urban policy and regional development too and since several elements of the new activity recalled the marketing of the traditional consumers' goods, therefore they started talking about the selling and marketing of territorial units. By the late 1980s and early 1990s a new terminology was also created: certain authors (like Ashworth, G. - Voogd, H. 1987) talked about *geographical marketing*, while the term "*place marketing*" became much more wide-spread/popular in the English-speaking countries (Kotler et al., 1993).

In the writings of researchers dealing with the topic, the expression "place branding" has played an increasingly important role since the late 1990s, which is also evidenced by the fact that a journal titled *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* has also been devoted to this field since 2004. There have been many diverse opinions so far concerning the meaning of the new terminology. Some of the researchers believe that

there is no fundamental difference between place marketing and place branding, and the two phrases can be considered as synonymous (e.g. Hall, C. M., 2008).

By contrast, summarizing the work of researchers (e.g. Bailey, J. T., 1989; Ward, S. V., 1998) analyzing the temporal aspects of the place marketing activity, Kavartzis, M. (2007) distinguished between three stages of development. In the first stage, place marketing primarily comprised advertising, and it was predominantly simply tools that were put to use (e.g. the attraction of tourists to British and French resorts in the early 1900s, or Londoners desiring to settle in suburbia in the 1920s). In the second stage (from the 1970s on), the activities of the local governments have become a lot more refined, and it also included the use of product development and various financial incentives.

In the new millennium, then, researchers (e.g. Anholt, S., 2007; Moilanen, T. - Rainisto, S., 2009) have increasingly realized the importance of image, as a factor influencing the decisions of the potential and the existing target groups, and this led to the emergence of the third stage associated with the label of place branding. In the spirit of the above, place branding can be defined as follows: "Place branding is the management of place image through strategic innovation and coordinated economic, commercial, social, cultural and government policy" (Moilanen, T. - Rainisto, S., 2009, p. 7.).

### **SPORT AS AN ELEMENT OF THE PLACE BRANDING ACTIVITY**

In the course of the place branding activity, the formation of a strong and coherent place brand, the local governments can concentrate on various areas (e.g. culture, medicinal tourism), from among which one of the possibilities is placing sports in the centre. This statement, which may appear somewhat surprising at first sight (as the question may arise why we should spend on sports when education, transportation and social services all have significant financial problems) can be supported with the following reasons (Hall, C. M., 1992; Law, C., 1994; Ward, S. V., 1998; Gratton et al., 2005; Jun, J. W. - Lee, H. M., 2007; Rein, I. - Shields, B., 2007; Avraham, E. - Ketter, E., 2008; Maanning, W. - du Plessis, S., 2009; Rosentraub, M. S. - Joo, M., 2009):

- sporting events generate a significant amount of direct economic revenue;
- participants of sporting events (e.g. athletes, spectators) may, in case of favourable impressions, later return to the settlement concerned;
- the media interest the media interest accompanying sporting events can make the given settlement well-known in a short time which may play an important role in raising the interest of tourists and investors;
- the infrastructural developments related to the sport also enhance the competitiveness of the city in other fields (e.g. cultural tourism);
- the successful organization of these events adds to the pride and self-consciousness of the local population: the emotional link created between the participants and the spectators symbolizes the energy, vital force and the strength of a rising society (cultural or eco-tourism, for example, are hardly capable of the same);
- the increasing popularity of sports plays an important role in the promotion of a healthy society;
- it strengthens the relationship between the private and the public sectors;
- due to the more popular nature of sport, the general public accepts them better than the other types of events;
- the volunteers assisting in the organization of the sporting events come from various layers of society, and the event concerned also promotes networking between them.

With respect to using sports in the framework of place branding, Rein, I. and Shields, B. (2007) fundamentally differentiated between three platforms:

- *event platform*: the organization of sporting events ensuring large-scale media attention (e.g., Olympic Games, European and World Championships, conferences/general meetings related to an important branch of sports;

- *team platform*: supporting teams (or perhaps individual athletes) who can be associated with the given location;

- *place platform*: “city development” that relies entirely on sports (e.g. the Dubai Sports City investment project).

The authors emphasised that, due to the scarcity of financial resources, the places should emphasise the one or two platforms that are most suitable for them (due to the very high financial demands, it is likely that the third one will be the least attractive in most cases). At the same time, the basic condition of success on each of the various platforms is that the places should take the appropriate steps in the following areas:

- concept: drawing up clear ideas, the definition of the objectives to be reached;

- infrastructure: providing the human and physical conditions necessary for the successful activities;

- communication: ensuring familiarity with and the availability of information on the given location, introducing it onto the market.

- Concentrating on the above areas, my paper will use the Hungarian and non-Hungarian examples (figure 1) to illustrate the steps taken by central governments and local governments.



Figure 1. Location of Hungarian cities mentioned in article

## THE AREAS OF THE USE OF SPORTS IN PLACE BRANDING

### The Formulation of the Branding Concept

For places wishing to put sports into the centre of their place branding activities, the first important task is the formulation of a concept in which they determine

- their endowments related to sports, i.e. their strengths and weaknesses;
- the opportunities and threats inherent in the external environment;

- on the basis of the above, the objectives they wish to achieve in the course of their branding activities.

So far there has not been on the part of local governments in Hungary any branding concepts that specifically placed sports in the centre, and therefore, it is necessary to examine the documents created in the following areas:

- general development plans;
- tourism related concepts;
- sports related concepts;
- marketing concepts.

In connection with the general development plans and concepts related to tourism we can make the observation that the documents in these categories (National Development Concept, National Tourism Development Strategy, 2005-2013), sports are hardly dealt with, and the role that sports can play in marketing is not mentioned at all. From among sports related concepts, the "Sport XXI" National Sports Strategy (Resolution no. 65/2007 (VI. 27.) OGY of the Hungarian Parliament) plays an outstanding role, in which several annexes make references to the links between sports and marketing. On the one hand, Chapter I. 2. (The social and economic role of sports) emphasizes that "Outstanding results in the field of sports contribute to the strengthening of national self-esteem, which contributes social cohesion", then Chapter I.4 (The maintenance of our status as a nation of sports) points out that "Maintaining the successfulness of our competitive sports building upon our significant traditions in the field of sports effectively contributes to:

- the strengthening of national self-esteem;
- increasing the level of awareness of the country, as well as improving its attractiveness for tourists;
- indirectly improving the general assessment of the country;
- mediating appropriate samples of behaviour for the citizens."

On the other hand, chapter III.1 (The strategic goals of sports policy), section 7 (The strengthening of national and community identity) emphasizes that "Sports, as a part of the universal Hungarian culture, plays a significant role in the formation of the community and the development of Hungarian consciousness. Through the international results achieved in competitive sports, national pride and self-evaluation may be improved. Through the achievements of local teams and athletes, local pride may be strengthened."

From a marketing point of view, the most important Hungarian document is the Marketing Strategy drawn up by Magyar Turizmus Zrt. (Hungarian Tourism Co.) for the period between 2009 and 2011, in which sports is mentioned with respect to incoming and domestic tourism, as a factor contributing the increasing of cultural and sports-related international tourism. The role of sports marketing is well shown at the same time that in the image campaign of Magyar Turizmus Zrt. launched in 2005 (Talent for entertaining), 4 of the 11 faces used can be linked to sports.

Analyzing the level of settlements we can say that all of the larger cities have a general development strategy, a tourism concept and a sports concept (Act I of 2004 on sports actually requires local governments to draw up the latter); these documents, however, deal with the role of sports in marketing activities in varying depths. At the same time, in case of cities of county rank, which are settlements outside of Budapest playing a major role in sporting life, we can state that the majority of them are aware of the importance of sports in this respect, and they also make reference to this fact in their sports concepts (Kozma, G., 2010).

### **Infrastructure Development**

The second element of the creation of the sports brand is *infrastructure development*, which comprises the creation of the physical (construction/modernization of sports facilities) and human (ensuring a supply of young athletes, establishing the

appropriate organizations) infrastructure.

The provision of *physical infrastructure* means, for the largest part, the renovation/construction of sports facilities, which has become in the recent period in North America and Western Europe a very important and also highly debated element of the product development stage of place marketing. At the same time, important differences can also be observed between the two continents in connection with the above (Gratton, C. et al. 2005). In Western Europe, the development (construction or modernization) of facilities was linked for the largest part to major sporting events (e.g. Summer Olympics, World and European championships, Commonwealth Games) and served the purpose of creating the conditions necessary for hosting such events.

By contrast, the primary goal we can find in the background of such projects in North America is to ensure that the local teams would stay on the given settlement or to attract teams from other settlements to relocate there. In the spirit of the above, in the United States of America 19 of the 30 teams in Major League Baseball moved to a new facility with 3 other ballparks under construction; in case of National Football League (30 teams) 17 new stadiums were built while 4 others went through major overhaul and three more are currently under construction; while in the National Basketball Association, more than two thirds of the 30 teams moved a new arena between 1990 and 2008 (Coates, B., 2008).

The researchers (e.g. Essex, S. - Chalkley, B., 1998; van den Berg, L. et al., 2002; Thornley, A., 2002; Maenning, W. - du Plessis, S. 2009) formulate the following for expectations in connection with sports facilities:

- image creation: with their appearance and external shape, facilities should contribute to the creation of an attractive image;
- urban development: the facilities should contribute to the renewal of the given neighbourhood or district of the city;
- tourism development: the facilities themselves should also serve as tourist attractions (e.g. stadiums of football teams in Western Europe, along with the museums in them);
- multifunctionality: the facilities, partly in the interest of ensuring profitable operation, should be suitable as venues for different types of events.

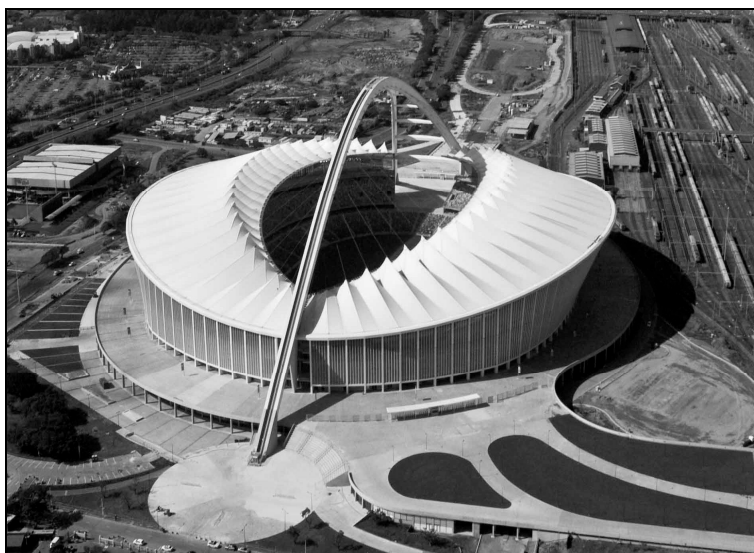
As far as image is concerned, it is the opinion of the researchers (e.g. Smith, A., 2006) that the facilities can primarily satisfy the expectations if, in addition to being located in or near the city centre, along the shores of a body of water, and having an innovative architectural solutions, they also meet the requirements of “synecdoche” and “connotation”. The first of the above terms is primarily used in linguistics, and it means that a part of the whole is capable of representing the whole (e.g. the Golden Gate Bridge – San Francisco, the French Quarter – New Orleans), while the latter refers to the fact that the given building carries a certain meaning (e.g. the Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao, by way of its characteristic form, already referring to modern culture in its appearance).

In case of sports facilities, Maenning, W. and du Plessis, S (2009) examined the above conditions with respect to constructions related to the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa (primarily Mosses Mabhida Stadium in Durban). In their opinion, the stadium with a seating capacity of 70,000 (figure 1) meets the above expectations in multiple ways:

- it is located near the city centre and the coast;
- it is in the centre of a district of the city which, by way of further construction projects (e.g. the modernization of the swimming pool and the athletic stadium) would subsequently become suitable for organizing more complex sporting events (e.g. the Commonwealth Games or Summer Olympics) as well;
- it fundamentally meets the requirement of synecdoche: the two arches starting from the southern side meet above the stadium, then descend on the northern side,

symbolizing the goal also pictured on the national flag of the country, the political union of the nation consisting of whites and blacks.

In the opinion of the authors, the successfulness of the connotation requirement depends, among other things, also on whether there would be a South African football success connected to the stadium.



**Figure 2.** Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban

A further expectation in connection with sports facility developments is that they should be an integral part of the renewal of the cities in which they are located, which is primarily mentioned in connection with project related to the Summer Olympic Games. Studies written on the topic (e.g. Essex, S. – Chalkley, B., 1998) divide the Summer Olympic Games organized between 1896 and 2000 into three groups (with the cities listed below being only some examples):

- low impact games (no major developments made): 1896 – Athens, 1948 – London, 1968 – Mexico City, 1984 – Los Angeles;
- games the primarily concentrated on the development of sports facilities: 1908 – London, 1932 – Los Angeles, 1952 – Helsinki, 1996 – Atlanta;
- games that caused a transformation of the built environment: 1960 – Rome, 1964 – Tokyo, 1992 – Barcelona, 2000 – Sydney.

From among cities falling in this latter category, the studies (pl. Essex, S. – Chalkley, B., 1998; van den Berg, L. et al. 2002) primarily emphasize Barcelona as the best example of how the Olympic Games can be used a catalyst of urban renewal. In addition to the large-scale facility development (e.g. 15 new locations, as well as the major transformation of 10 and minor transformation of 43 existing facilities), there was a significant upgrading in the transportation system of the city (development of the railway system, the construction of the new, coastal ring road) and the renewal of a deteriorated area located between the city centre and the sea, which has by now become a major destination of seaside tourism.

At the same time, sports facilities may also constitute tourist attractions in many cases, which is primarily true of stadiums of major football clubs. In the spirit of the above, guided tours are offered around the stadiums of Barcelona, Liverpool, and Manchester United where the most interesting parts of the facilities (e.g. changing rooms, VIP boxes, media centres) as well as the museums of the clubs can be visited. In addition, the above mentioned Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban also offers a peculiar attraction:

by elevator or climbing the 550 steps, one can reach the highest point of the structure from where the surrounding area can be seen in 360°.

The last important role of sports facilities (and among them, in particular, of sports arenas) is that they can also serve as a venue to events other than sports (e.g. exhibitions, fairs, cultural events), which serve as entertainment opportunities, thus enhancing the competitiveness of the given settlement also in other areas. In case of the 1992 Olympic Games held in Barcelona, for example, much emphasis was placed on making the facilities multifunctional, as this can significantly enhance the opportunities of utilization after the event (van den Berg, L. et al. 2002).

As far as sports facilities constructed in Hungary so far are concerned, only some of them can be compared to the international examples of urban renewal. In the course of the developments, functionality was a primary guiding principle, and there was no effort to ensure that the new facilities would have an image-modifying function (the fact that Főnix Arena in Debrecen, for example, was constructed on the basis of the design for an arena in Tallinn also played a role in this). Due to the smaller volume of the developments, their role as influencing entire districts of the cities can only be recognized in a limited extent. The best example would be ETO Park in Győr, located in the eastern part of the settlement along the section of motorway M1 leading into the city, which consists of several units ([www.etopark.hu](http://www.etopark.hu) – accessed on 6 January 2010). The facility includes the infrastructure related to football (which currently consists of a 16,000-seat stadium and a football academy for young players), as well as four-storey shopping and entertainment centre on a plot area of 11,000 m<sup>2</sup>, consisting of 23,000 m<sup>2</sup> of commercial space and 7,000 m<sup>2</sup> of Category “A” office space. The third element of the complex will be ETO Park Business & Stadium Hotel\*\*\*\*, scheduled to be opened in 2010, which will also serve as a conference venue with a number of halls and other facilities designed for this purpose.

Due to the local nature of Hungarian sports clubs, there is hardly any example in Hungary for sports facilities also serving as tourist attractions. The only real example is the stadium of Ferencváros with the Nagy Béla “Fradi” Museum opened there about 20 years ago, where the trophies, prizes and cups won by the club over the decades are on display, and in addition to the various group photographs, certificates of recognition and newspaper articles, the awards and other relics of some of the greatest legends of the club can also be seen.

With respect to sports facilities abroad, the last important characteristic feature mentioned is their multifunctionality, which has played a major role in case of all new developments. In the light of this it is hardly surprising that only 1/3 of the event days held in Főnix Arena of Debrecen between 2003 and 2009 were related to sports (table 1).

Table 1 The utilization of Főnix Hall between 2003 and 2009  
(Data source: Főnix Events Organizing Non-Profit Ltd.)

	<b>events</b>	<b>event days</b>	<b>number of visitors</b>
Concert	44	44	n.a.
Exhibition	34	91	n.a.
Conference	27	78	n.a.
Sports event	91	194	n.a.
Other event	101	167	n.a.
Total	297	574	1,681,630

A very important element of the development of *human infrastructure* is the identification of children with talent in various branches of sports, followed by the professional training and management of these young talents. The framework for this was exclusively provided for a long time in Hungary by sports schools, and the only solution for outstanding student athletes were the sports specialization classes offered by some primary and secondary schools, or becoming a private student in case of some youths pursuing individual sports.

Then, in the new millennium, the system of sports academies, following Western European examples, started to gain ground, in the framework of which the most talented student athletes live in separate dormitories and prepare mainly concentrating on sports. The system of sports academies mainly became widespread in Hungary in football, but it is planned that similar institutions would soon be established in basketball and ice hockey also.

The other important element of the development of *human infrastructure* is the creation of the *appropriate organizational background*. Act I of 2004 on sports prescribes several tasks for local governments (e.g. the maintenance and operation of the sports facilities in its ownership), which makes it necessary to establish appropriate institutions. Firstly, there are organizational units in the mayor's offices of larger settlements that are put in charge of activities related to sports (e.g. in Miskolc, the Sports and Civil Relations Group works in the framework of the Mayor's Cabinet, while in Debrecen it is the Department of Human Affairs that is responsible for the area). Secondly, the general assembly of the local government also often has a committee that deals with sports (e.g. Debrecen – Sports Committee, Győr – Committee of Education, Culture and Sports, Szeged – Committee of Youth and Sports Affairs).

Further, a very important task is the professional handling of the sports facilities owned by the local governments, which may be in the form of a unit of the local government having its own financial management (e.g. the Sports Directorate of the Municipality of Győr) or by a business organization owned by the municipal government (e.g. Debreceni Sportcentrum Non-profit Ltd., Szegedi Sport és Fürdők Kft.). The fourth important task is the performance of organizational tasks related to sporting events in a high quality, in connection with which success can be attributed to the following factors (Dancsecz, G., 2008; Szabó, L. – Dancsecz, G., 2009):

- setting of project objectives: e.g. drawing up of project objectives and structure of activities;
- project contract strategy: e.g. the division of responsibilities between the parties;
- project management: e.g. the professional and supervisory competence of the leaders;
- the organizational culture of the project team: e.g. supporting independent action, open communication within the organizing committee;
- cooperation and communication: e.g. the selection of suppliers; communication with supporters, national and international sports associations;
- cooperation: e.g. cooperation with the state, government agencies, the settlement, the local authorities and with the population.

### **Communication**

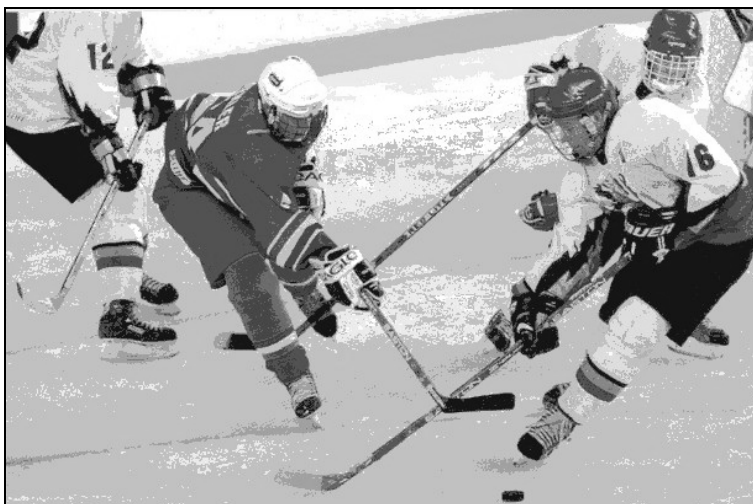
In the communication of the close link between city and sport, there are two major phases that can be distinguished: the formulation of the message and the conveying of the same to the target groups in an efficient manner.

In the course of the *formulation of the message* it is necessary to place it in the centre that local government considers sports an important thing, and therefore it provides both moral and financial support for its development and operation. The communication activity related to *disseminating the message* can be fundamentally divided into two parts: on the one hand it must be achieved that the mentioning of the name of the city the image of sports should be evoked in people, and on the other hand, it must be also promoted that sport-related events should remind people of the name of the city.

The *first task* can be achieved with the help of various kinds of communication tools. The *publications* issued by the cities, aimed at tourists and economic stakeholders, can include references to the very active sports life of the city (figure 2), with two fundamental objectives behind this: convincing the given target groups of the fact that settlements are also capable of meeting demands/expectations of this type, as well as



proving that they are capable of successfully organizing a sporting event requiring extensive organization efforts. In case of the *Internet* as a communication tool, commitment toward sports is evidenced by the fact that the home page of the website of cities features a direct link to the pages related to sports (figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Picture form the brochure of Debrecen “Your choice - Our success” targeting potential investors (2005 - IIHF World Championship - Division I) (Downloaded: 12-01-2010)



**Figure 4.** The home page of Győr

In the course of the second task related to the communication activity (the linking of sports and the city), several types of tools are used as well. *Advertisements* are predominantly related to the sporting events, and this is primarily the task of the sports associations concerned; at the same time, since in the majority of cases the name of the organizing settlement is also featured in the advertisements, it also has an advertising value for them (figure 4). With respect to the *Internet*, it should be mentioned that from the websites of the events in most cases one could easily get to the website of the city with the use of a separate link (figure 5).



**Figure 5.** The advertisement of the UEFA Futsal Championship  
(Source: Nemzeti Sport, 20-01-2010)



**Figure 6.** The home page of WOC2009  
(World Orienteering Championships) organised in Miskolc  
(Downloaded: 12-01-2010)

*PR (public relations)* activity, as a communication tool, encompasses several areas. Firstly, in case of both individual and team sports, the name of the cities is usually also shown together with their names, and therefore, the appearance and especially the successful performance (e.g. among top three) of these athletes also directs attention to the settlement. This effect can be further reinforced by the fact that in the names of the various teams (e.g. under a sponsorship agreement), the favourable endowments of the settlements with respect to various target groups are emphasised (e.g. DVSC-Aquaticum – spa and aqua park; MiZo Pécs 2010 – European Capital of Culture).

Secondly, at the press conferences preceding the various sporting events, the (deputy) mayor usually also appears who then as the (vice) president or member of the local organizing committee discusses the commitment of the settlement toward sports.

Thirdly, at the closing ceremonies and the press conference following it, the leaders of the international associations of the given branch of sport also appear, and in most cases they express their recognition to the high standard of the event organization, which also means the recognition for the city itself. At the Closing Ceremony of the Olympic Games, the president of the International Olympic Committee always uses an epithet to the given games: Juan Antonio Samaranch called the Sydney Olympics (2000) “the best Olympic Games ever” and the Nagano games as “the best organized” Winter Olympics ever.

Fourthly, the events (and here we should primarily think of high-profile sporting events) often raise the attention of the international media as well, and both the reports of the accredited journalists and the short films that are introducing the city and the venue provide good opportunities for communication. At the 107th session of the International Olympic Committee, held in Singapore in 2005 (where the location of the 2010 Summer

Olympic Games was decided), for example, the hosts had an opportunity to present the endowments of their city in 2 minutes before the decision and in 1 minute afterwards, and it is estimated that these 3 minutes of broadcast time was worth more than the whole year of advertising activity of the Singapore Tourism Board (Yuen, B., 2008).

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