



Athens Olympics - the symbol of ancient Olympism with some shadows

According to the IOC, the 2004 Athens Games were the biggest in terms of number of National Olympic Committees (201) and number of events (301). Their popularity also broke all records with 3.9 billion viewers (against 3.6 billion in Sydney). The celebration was possible thanks to the 45,000 volunteers mobilized. Back to the ancient sources but with a touch of modernity- the female wrestling for the first time on the program. The Ancient Games were for men only – women could not compete or even attend the show.

The 2004 Athens Games are associated with a double regret – not having celebrated the Centennial of Olympism (in 1996) and not having succeeded in reconverting all the sports facilities. Greece was the smallest country to host the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games. But neither countries nor athletes are equal in the Olympics- American competition won in 1996; the Greek bid could not compete against the economic strength and influence of Coca-Cola. The second regret is that of the mess after the event- only 30% of the infrastructure found buyers. In the absence of effective planning by the Greek authorities and the Steering Committee for the 2004 Olympic Games, the majority of the sites have been abandoned.

For the French public the Games are those of the revelation of the swimmer Laure Manaudou who won at 17 years on 400 m freestyle. She was the second French Olympic swimmer champion after Jean Boiteux in Helsinki in 1952. She won two more medals: silver in the 800 m freestyle and bronze in the 100 m backstroke, an unprecedented feat for a French swimmer at the Olympics, and became a national star. In 2024, his brother Florian is one of the flag bearers of the French delegation. A beautiful family story.

The emblem of the 2004 Olympic Games is a crown composed of an olive branch (kotinos in Greek) which was the official award given to Olympic champions in ancient times. The olive tree was also the sacred tree of Athens. The colors (white and blue) recall the Mediterranean. Other Mediterranean countries have also adopted this bicolor; it is also the dominant color of Portuguese azulejos.

The Olympic Games in Athens recalled that good financial management is a prerequisite for the success of the Games. Athens did not learn from an absolute counterexample in the organization of the Olympic Games Montreal in 1976 where the city had indebted for several decades. In Athens, the budget slipped from 4.6 billion euros to 11.2 billion, according to official figures, in fact 20 billion euros according to independent estimates. The sums spent on Athens 2004 dealt a fatal blow to Greece, which was unable to overcome the global financial crisis (born in the United States with the subprime scandal). The country almost left the Eurozone and had to undergo a shock therapy imposed by the European Central Bank (ECB), the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) between 2010 and 2019.

Once again, the 2004 Games are actual-. They highlighted two basic rules – sustainable development (infrastructure conversion) and balance and integrity of financial accounts. The stakes are far from being purely sporting at the Olympics.

- (1) Documentaire de Mickaël Gamrasni « Olympiques ! La France des Jeux », France, diffusé le 16 juillet 2024 sur France 2
- (2) Site officiel du CIO- <https://olympics.com/fr/olympic-games/atlanta-1996/logo-design>
- (3) Kevin Bernardi « Le gâchis olympique grec, dix ans après », 13 août 2014, in « Sport et société »- <https://sportetsociete.org/2014/08/13/le-gachis-olympique-grec-dix-ans-apres/>
- (4) « JO d'Athènes (2004) : XXV^e jeux Olympiques d'été » - https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/JO_dAth%C3%A8nes_2004_XXV_e_jeux_Olympiques_d%C3%A9t%C3%A9/185486

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