

An Olympian Task

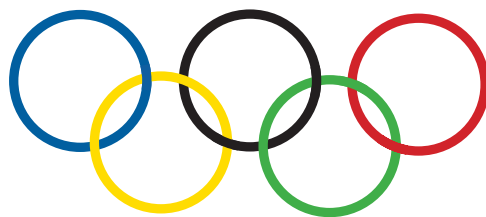


Sestriere, one of the most well known ski resorts in the western Alps

Anna Prat, our resident consultant in Rome, investigates how Turin is facing up to the task of hosting the Winter Olympics in 2006

Torino, Turin to most Brits, is a city badly in need of a change, fresh vision and imaginative perspectives on the future. The troubles of local car giant Fiat are forcing the entire city into crisis - and to rethink its economic base, identity and expectations. The traditional background - the distant royal past, the historic role of capital of the country, the intellectual tradition and, especially, the more recent manufacturing core - on which the city has built its position in Italy and Europe - is gone forever.

To face the challenge of an uncertain future, the city is moving in many directions, especially towards growing industrial sectors that take advantage of the surviving technological capacity. It is also embracing new fields and approaches in culture, art, tourism, and public and private services. The region is trying to find new development opportunities, connected for example with eco-tourism and the successful culinary Slow Food concept. In this framework, the 2006 Winter Olympic Games are seen as the most important way for the city to communicate locally and internationally that a process of change is underway, and especially to make it happen in a coordinated way.



The Games will mean large investments and tightly scheduled public works. It will require top organisation capacity and produce a large amount of sport facilities and accommodation to manage afterwards. Of course it will also mean, in the end, a brief world-wide appearance for a few days in February 2006.

But how can a few minutes of fame on winter sports TV provide the city with what is needed to come out of a major crisis? This article explains how the city is reflecting on the benefits and risks involved in this 'Olympian task'.

Ancient glories

Any European will usually associate the city with a few key features: the Fiat company, the Juventus soccer team, the Holy Shroud, and - at least in Britain - the movie "The Italian Job". Very few foreigners actually visit Torino and have a richer picture of the city in their mind. For many Italians the city conjures up images of a smoggy, cold and boring place, where people are hard workers and almost untouched by the sunny, sweet and more sociable way of life that is generally connected with Italy.



Top left: The fountain in Torino's Piazza Castello

Top right: Torino's skyline

Below: Fiat and The Italian Job - both famously associated with Torino

But the city has an important past. It was the first capital of Italy in 1861. The Kingdom of Piedmont was central to the reunification of Italy. Torino has always played an important part in the political history of the country. It has also developed an intellectual core and a capacity for social experimentation and innovation. The city and the region are also well known for more hedonistic pleasures: chocolate, red wine and good food in general. And winter sport, of course.

Torino is indeed deeply connected with its industrial soul. In this sense it is the Italian capital of technological innovation and of the manufacturing industry, more than Milan (which has a more diversified economic structure). The Province of Torino has now a population of over two million, Piedmont of over four million. During the 60s and 70s, Fiat meant work for hundreds of thousands of workers from Italy's poor South, who flocked to its car factories and other industries.

Modern Despair

No more. The auto branch of Fiat, which includes Lancia and Alfa Romeo, has been wracked by crisis for a long time. But now the crisis has been going on for so long that the difficulty is more psychological than anything else. The ex



political capital of Italy and ex industrial capital of Italy needs to find new directions, a new third big phase. The saying "Fix It Again, Tony" (FIAT) no longer applies only to the car. Now it's applicable to the entire city.

Emerging new forms of life

Despite the common grey and sleepy image of the city, the last years have meant the sudden emergence of a different city: more open, attractive and culturally alive. The renovation of some central old neighbourhoods brought new life to the city centre. New professional activities, bars, restaurants and cinemas opened - and changed both day and night life scenes. The local authority was very proactive in launching events on contemporary art, music, cinema. Very successful fairs on art, books and foods are held each year. The Museum of Cinema attracted 500,000 visitors in the opening year. Events such as the 'Luci d'artista' - urban lighting designed by contemporary artists - give the impression of a new city that wants to take advantage of the crisis to shake it's stuffy image. Even the smog seems to have diminished.



An example of 'Luci d'Artista' by German artist, Rebecca Horn



Image by Adriano Bacchetta

No longer a boring grey town - Torino's night life is thriving



The logo of the XX Winter Olympic Games, based on the silhouette of famous landmark, Mole Antonellia

A wake up call from the Winter Olympics

The Winter Olympic Games are the most important winter sport event. Winter sports have become more and more popular, partly thanks to the greater affordability of these sports and the growth of winter breaks, and the fact that new activities such as snowboard, free-style and extreme alpine sports in general have provided a renewal boost to the alpine sport concept in the eyes of a younger market. Incorporating sports like snowboarding into the programme, the Olympic movement hopes to attract this new generation to the Games.

The XX Winter Olympic Games of Torino will take place in February 2006 in the area that includes Torino and the "Olympic Valleys" around the city. Partly thanks to the disparate political imperatives – and the EU's funding requirements – the city has chosen to organise the games in seven different venues, located on a vast territory (see map below). This implies relevant organisation a capacity in terms of transport and logistics and to ensure that the athletes, the journalists and the Olympic staff can easily access the sites. Valleys may only be a few miles apart as





Sestriere's main piste

the crow flies – but to get between them may involve miles of sluggish transport by road or rail. Significant public works are urgently needed to improve the present infrastructure.

The Olympic Valleys

The 2006 Torino Games will mainly take place where the mountains and the snow can be found, which means in the valleys west of Torino, next to the border with France: Val di Susa, Val Pellice, Valli Chisone e Germanasca. This is a diversified territory, partially on the major transport routes towards France, partially of very limited accessibility. These areas are characterised by: some industrial, service and commuting functions in the lower parts, closer to Torino (Pinerolo, Torre Pelice, Avigliana); some villages and small cities in the middle part, that have had a harder socio-economic time (Susa, Bussoleno, Perosa Argentina); and the tourism resorts at the higher altitudes (Sestriere, Bardonecchia, Sauze d'Oulx, Pragelato, Clavière).

In terms of tourism, the higher valleys are much more developed, but still less developed than other parts of the Alps. Sestriere, built in the 30s (thanks to the patronage of the Agnelli family), is more a more internationally famous

resort. But statistics indicate that 50 per cent of tourists come from the North West of Italy. Traditionally places like Bardonecchia, reachable also by train from Torino, are destinations for a Piedmontese tourism. Only recently charter flights to Torino have attracted more visitors from abroad.

On the whole, tourism has lived on the certainty of the local market, but this economic stability has produced an inertia, limiting renewal and innovation. And this, in turn, has led to a stagnation: simply harking back to past glories is insufficient to guarantee that tomorrow's tourists will come. There is been insufficient renewal of the ski facilities and slopes, of the entertainment activities complementary to the traditional sky and alpinism activities, and more flexible holiday packages (such as France is able to offer). The heavy residential development has environmentally compromised some resorts. Up to 90 per cent of homes are second, holiday properties – meaning that two houses out of three are empty most of the time. Despite this, accommodation is one of the main deficiencies in the area, since there are not enough places in hotels, bed & breakfast and other forms of residence. Finally, environmental hazards such as the 2002 floods compromise the current development approach.



The Olympic Arena

The expected outputs

Beside the expectation of realising a successful event that will be seen on television by millions of people, the local system expects some additional concrete outputs of different kinds:

- the improvement of mobility and road accessibility in the valleys and in the city (the tube line) will help the tourism system and the local economy in general;
- the Games are an extraordinary opportunity to coordinate different actions that were planned but not tightly scheduled;
- hotel accommodation will be expanded and improved, again giving a boost to local tourism;
- basins for snow accumulation will be created for the Games, which will help with the unpredictable climate conditions and volumes of snow in the main resorts.

The expected outcomes

More effective marketing of Torino and the region at a national and international level is the main aim. Torino's

strategic plans aim to change the image of Torino – but also to foster economic development, attract investment in growth sectors and give a boost to local tourism. For the valleys themselves, the ambition is to position themselves more visibly on the international map of winter tourism.

Local administrators hope to build an effective series of mega-events. Torino wants to become known as a well-organised, equipped and experienced location for national and international events. 2008 will be the year of the XXIII World Congress of Architecture. 2011 is the 150th Anniversary of Italy's reunification – and Torino intends to be the main focus for the celebrations.

One man, above all, has to deliver this ambitious menu. Torino's ex-mayor, Valentino Castellani, is chairman of TOROC, Turin's Olympic organising committee. He'll be speaking to me for the next edition of Locum Destination Review.

The Winter Olympics 2006 in figures

3 Olympic villages: in Torino, Bardonecchia and Sestriere;

7 venue locations (Bardonecchia, Pinerolo, Pragelato, Cesana, Sauze d'Oulx, Sestriere, Torino) and two training locations: Claviere and Torre Pellice;

15 sports: Biathlon, Bobsleigh, Nordic Combined, Curling, Freestyle, Ice Hockey, Figure Skating, Speed Skating, Ski Jumping, Alpine Skiing, Cross-Country Skiing, Short-Track, Skeleton, Luge, Snowboard;

17 days of events: from 10 to 26 February 2006;

78 medals to be awarded;

80 National Olympic Committees;

650 judges and referees;

1,400 technical and national team accompanying staff;

2,300 representatives from IOC, NOC and Federations;

2,550 athletes;

6,000 guests invited by sponsors;

9,600 journalists and media operators;

1 million visitors expected;

1.5 million ticket sales provided for;

970 million euro cost to TOROC to organise the games.

