

An Olympian Task Revisited



In the last issue of *Locum Destination Review*, **Anna Prat** described some of the preparations which Turin is undergoing to prepare for the 2006 Winter Olympics. Now she meets the man who's fashioning those plans, former mayor **Valentino Castellani**



AP: How was the decision to bid for the Olympics arrived at?

VC: From a professional viewpoint it is a fascinating experience. Having launched the challenge as mayor of the city, I can now see the creature growing, follow the direction we designed for it. It is really satisfying. Then let's hope everything goes well, and as usual people say that the Games will be the best in history! The idea of nominating Turin for the Olympics was at first suggested in the Autumn of 1997. It was actually thrown in by a Generale dei Carabinieri - a Head of the National Gendarmerie. Generale Romano had been in charge of the security in the World Championship in Sestriere and

got passionate about the experience. In the Autumn of 1997 he called an informal meeting and told us: 'why don't we bid for the Olympics?' We took it as a very interesting opportunity, something worth exploring.

AP: So how did Turin win the candidacy?

VC: It is a peculiar story. We won, despite the fact that it was the first time we'd ever bid - and we had to work under a very prohibitive time schedule. The Bid Committee was established in March 1998, and the bidding document had to be presented in August 1998. In other words, the bidding document was



TOROC Executive Board: from left, standing, Paolo Rota (CEO), Evelina Christillin (Deputy President), Valentino Castellani (President). Sitting, the three vice-presidents: Gianni Petrucci, Rinaldo Bontempi, Bruno Rambaudi, and the two members Raffele Pagnozzi, Francesco Jayme.



prepared in only 5 months. We were selected in June 1999. I can assume we made a quality submission, but it was still very sketchy and much more work had to be done. Why did we win? I think, like always in life, that there was a convergence of many circumstances. Our proposal was credible, well prepared, trustworthy. In addition the city had an institutional and entrepreneurial capacity that provides some guarantees. The Organising Committee did extraordinary work to credit our position in the international sport world. But we were also lucky in terms of timing and the 'geopolitical' approach of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The strongest competitor was

Sion, in Switzerland. But the Swiss had been involved in a series of misadventures and had denounced some Olympic scandals, and this might have not been particularly appreciated. In this situation, the Italian CONI, the Italian members of the IOC worked very well and cooperatively.

Pulling together all these factors - professionalism, luck, timing - we won by far, leaving a big gap between us and our competitors. This happened in June 1999. In the first days of February the Organising Committee was set in place. At the beginning of 2001, after time-consuming parliamentary activities, the national co-financing law was approved and the Agency started to work.





AP: How has winning the bid affected the city?

VC: At that time there were many important transformations starting in city. The 'Passante Ferroviario' is the centre of a major urban transformation strategy by which a significant part of the city, where now used to be the train tracks, will be given back for development use: it provides the backbone through city of an urban-wide regeneration strategy. The first line of the tube was also under definition. The ex industrial site Lingotto (Fiat), a huge area and unique building, was being redeveloped.

In a sentence, I could say that our choice to bid for the Olympics was connected with a far-seeing strategy of development of the entire local system. I will not undervalue the sport component of the Games, the athletes and so on. But the theme of the Olympics inheritance, of 'the after 2007', was written in our mind from the designing phases. We had the intuition that bidding for the Olympics could become a sort of 'glue'. It would not solve all our



problems at a stroke. But we had – if you like - a very good and well built car but no more petrol. In this metaphor, the Olympics event is a powerful injection of petrol that could help revitalise the city.

We had to face the question of the transformation, or at the least of the improvement of the identity of the city. Turin will no longer be seen only as an industrial city, but will have to become also a capital of the Alps, of tourism, culture, sport, leisure time. We have to better integrate the city with its alpine surroundings. In

preparing the Games, we always have to think about 'what's the use of what we build'. The media villages will become university halls and make up for the deficiency in temporary accommodation, also for international exchange activities. There will be 1200-1300 additional rooms at the end of the Games, which means doubling the current offer.

AP: What does it mean for the city to have the Olympic Winter Games?

VC: The Olympics in Turin is like putting together and mediating between the Summer Games in Barcelona and the Winter Games in Albertville. It is indeed the first time that the Winter Games are associated with a vast city like ours. Before the Games took place in places such Chamonix, St Moritz, or Lake Placid. The largest cities where the Winter Games took place in the past are Salt Lake City, Sarajevo and Oslo. This is a different model of Winter Olympics, far from the Christmas crib image in a small mountain village. Nothing against that model, I think it is a very



attractive one, but it is like the international sport world moves there and covers the local real character. Instead, with a big city like Turin, it is a different challenge, slightly more similar to that of the Summer Games, that are always placed in more populated areas.

Thanks to the Olympics, one day people may associate more closely Turin with the Alps and winter sports, and say 'let's go skiing in Turin'. But Turin as a destination for tourism and business is trying to be more than this. I think a large urban area is competitive if it manages to be multi-functional, to show many faces. The historic face of Turin, that means that of the industrial heart, is a bit faded and neglected at the moment, but remains a valuable resource. But until now we only had that face, or at least we were only showing that. We have so much to offer - particularly by hooking up with Milan. For example we could offer more on tourism, giving the presence of the mountains, the countryside, the food and wine tradition, etc. Turin itself offers more than in the past, and tourists are



slowly discovering this. But I think there is still a lot to be done. It does not make sense that so many hotels still only offer a very basic continental breakfast and no other options, or that so few waiters speak English.

AP: Do you feel pressured by time?

VC: An estimated 3-4 billion people will watch the Olympics opening ceremony. Turin cannot get it wrong. The Games will last only 17 days, though they are followed in March

2006 by the Paralympic Games for athletes with disabilities. We are working in a very resolute way, within the time schedule. We don't have at the moment any emergency situations, 'alarms'. We have some situations I would define as 'critical', by that meaning that the timing is just about right. We had to face some problems along the way. For example we had to change the site of the bobsleigh facility because there was a concentration of asbestos at our first choice site. It would have taken too long to reclaim the site. So we relocated the facility and lost some money and time. But the point is that the problem is not due to incompetence and it was solved in 60 days. With determination and skills - we will do it in time.