



Pros and Cons of 'Open' Olympic Ceremonies

(ATR) The opening ceremonies of upcoming Olympic Games being turned into "open" parties outside an Olympic stadium would be "a new creative challenge".

Award-winning Italian artistic director Marco Balich, who has been responsible for several Olympic ceremonies, gave his thoughts to Around the Rings on the recent statements by IOC President Thomas Bach.



Marco Balich was Rio 2016 ceremonies producer (ATR)

Bach wants to explore the possibility that the opening ceremonies of future Olympic Games change their traditional format and follow the lead of the recent Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires.

The European producer and his company Balich Worldwide Shows most recently took charge of the ceremonies of the Para-Asian Games in Indonesia earlier this year. They are currently at work in preparation for the opening ceremonies of the Pan Am and Parapan Am Games in Lima, which begin in seven months.

His talk with ATR included the pros and cons of Bach's idea of turning Olympic ceremonies into parties for the host city.

ATR: Around the Rings understands that you proposed an "open" ceremony on the seaside of Botafogo for Rio 2016...Is that correct?

MB: Yes, it's true. It was our dream. When I was in Rio to produce the Ceremonies, together with Abel Gomes and Cerimonias Cariocas 2016, we made a proposal for the Opening Ceremony in Botafogo Bay.

The Maracanã Stadium is a historical sport monument and it was an honor to be there, but it is also an old building that could not be changed and the small size of the gates to enter in the stadium did not allow us to realize all we wanted from a creative point of view.



Rio 2016 Opening Ceremony at Maracanã Stadium (ATR)

The props for instance could not have the same dimensions of those we used in Sochi. Botafogo and its iconic Sugarloaf Mountain would have been the most amazing set to celebrate the beauty of Rio.

Unfortunately the security costs for this kind of ceremony were out of budget in Rio 2016.

ATR: Before Buenos Aires 2018, has there ever been an "open" ceremony at any other multiple sport games?

MB: There have been Paralympic Closing Ceremonies in the squares of the cities that hosted the Games, for example in Torino 2006 and also Lillehammer 1994, which hosted an "open" Ceremony. But the Buenos Aires 2018 Opening Ceremony is the only example of an open access show in modern Olympic history.

The Youth Games were the perfect moment to experiment with a new format of Opening Ceremony. The Obelisk was the best vertical stage for this spectacular city center ceremony, while the size of the Plaza de la Republica,



The Obelisk featured prominently in the Buenos Aires Opening Ceremony (ATR)

Avenida 9 de Julio and surrounding streets permitted a completely inclusive event open to all members of the public.

ATR: What are the pros and cons of an "open" ceremony in Olympic Games?

MB: I like to always see the positive side first! Among the pros there are a new creative challenge, the joy and a more informal style. All the Opening Ceremonies made inside stadiums have been great shows, but already in London and Rio there were excursions out of the stadium space to reach other parts of the city.

In an "open" Ceremony there is the possibility of representing the identity of a city much more deeply through its architecture and its people. This innovative kind of ceremony would be a moment of true joy for the athletes, especially during the parade, which would become a triumphal procession with the warmth of the live audience to welcome the greatest champions of the world. It would all be more informal, without the backstage reserved to the institutions and VIP guests, but more democratic and friendly.

Among the “cons” there are security, budget and broadcast. For sure the first issue is about security. Everything would become more complex and expensive. The income for the organizing committee would be reduced and we should invest a lot more from the broadcast to have a perfect show for the global audience as well. But everyone in the public could become a broadcaster, sharing images from their smartphone.

ATR: Is the "open" idea more feasible in an Olympic Closing Ceremony?

MB: Probably an “open” Closing Ceremony would be more feasible, because the institutional protocol is easier. However, lighting the cauldron in the heart of a city, visible to everyone, would be a really wonderful and emotional moment.

In Milan this year we brought a real Formula 1 circuit in the city center, along the Navigli. The public's response was fantastic and the security worked very well. So I'm convinced you can do very nice things, provided that the safety of people involved remains a top priority.

ATR: What will be your main challenge of 2019?

MB: We are working on the Pan and Parapan American Games of Lima 2019. Together with a great domestic team of talents we are working to deliver four ceremonies focusing on Peruvian history, creativity and cultural diversity, but also sending a statement for the future. Ceremonies are always an unparalleled communication tool to convey the values and unique qualities of a country, and to position it globally and regionally.

Reported by Miguel Hernandez.