

# Tangible and Intangible Legacy of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Zappas Olympics and their Implications for Contemporary Sport Tourism

## Authors' contribution:

- A) conception and design of the study
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- D) manuscript preparation
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## ABSTRACT

As has been shown in the article, the Zappas Olympics generously contributed to the revival of the Olympic Games in the nineteenth century. The course of these competitions has been described, and a brief summary of Zappas's work, which does not often attract a lot of attention in, for example, Polish academics, has also been made. The fact that the Zappas Olympics mainly enhanced the national identity of the Greeks following Turkish captivity has also been highlighted. The Zappas Olympics allowed the Greeks to become more familiar with sports and fair play. The knowledge that the Greeks acquired from the organization of this event was useful for the organization of the first modern Olympic Games in Athens. These days, material remains of this event serve touristic and cultural functions. The significance of such facilities as the Zappeion and the Panathenaic Stadium have also been underlined. For example, the Zappeion and the Panathenaic Stadium host cultural events and welcome tourists interested in sports history or Greek culture. These are the authorities responsible for touristic policy in Greece and they may decide whether such historic sites and sporting facilities will be included in thematic routes for tourists. According to the authors of the present paper, these sites may effectively compete with mass and recreational attractions in Greece.

## KEYWORDS

Evangelis Zappas, Zappas Olympics, Zappas Olympics legacy, sport tourism

## Introduction

Prior to the modern Olympic Games, the Zappas Olympics took place within Greek territory four times before 1896: in 1859 (before Pierre de Coubertin was born), 1870, 1875, and between 1888 and 1889. These events pioneered international sporting competitions and precluded the cyclical Olympics, which have been held every four years to this day. The role of the Zappas Olympics in the history of sport and shaping of the Olympic Games is, hence, clear and undeniable.

During the lectures on Olympic studies held at the postgraduate seminar organized by the International Olympic Academy (in which the authors of the present paper participated in 2015 and 2016), Prof.

Konstantinos Georgiadis, who is the Honorary Dean of the International Olympic Academy, strongly emphasized that those responsible for the revival of the Games include Panagiotis Soutsos, Evangelis Zappas, William Penny Brookes, Demetrius Vikelas, and Pierre de Coubertin. Although many researchers do not mention the first four figures in their deliberations and only highlight the significance of the latter one, it is crucial that the roles of the other pioneers not be diminished while making detailed analyses. One of these pioneers is Evangelis Zappas, a wealthy businessman and philanthropist born in Albania in 1800. One could even claim that Coubertin was in Zappas's intellectual debt (Firek 2016, p. 37). The aim of the present article is to present the role that Zappas played in the process of reviving the idea of the modern Olympics and characterizing the tangible and intangible legacy that followed the Zappas Olympics. The paper also addresses the significance of historical venues and sports facilities related to the Zappas Olympics that contribute to the development of sport tourism in contemporary Greece.

### Materials and methods

The most relevant information concerning Zappas's life and the Zappas Olympics held because of his initiative was collected through the accumulation of the academic experience and use of the social character of academic activities. The research was conducted on the basis of pedagogical and historical methods. Source analysis was predominant, and techniques of content analysis were used to complete the research (Grabowski 2013, pp. 71-84). In order to obtain the most up-to-date information, on September 2, 2016, the authors took part in field work in Athens, where they were visiting the Zappeion (built between 1874 and 1888) and listening to Prof. Konstantinos Georgiadis, a top expert on the revival of the Olympic Games, who was asked a series of questions as part of an individual in-depth interview, which is one of the basic techniques of qualitative research (Nicpoń & Marzęcki 2010, pp. 247-248). Unfortunately, Polish academics have only barely discussed the emergence and history of the Zappas Olympics. Zappas's life has not been elaborated on either; the present article touches upon these issues. Since there are no Polish publications on this topic, background information for this paper was gathered mainly from foreign research. The crucial part of the article is, hence, based on foreign academic and popular literature. The authors decided that it would be valuable to prepare an article for a Polish journal on the founder of the Zappas Olympics and the characteristics of the event, as this would allow readers in Poland to become familiar with this topic. During the research process, David C. Young's article, "Evangelis Zappas: Olympian Sponsor of Modern Olympic Games," published in 2005 in the English-language and German-language journal *Nikephoros*, was heavily relied upon. The same author's monograph, *The Modern Olympics – A Struggle for Revival* (1996), also serves as a significant source. A number of important facts were found in Konstantinos Georgiadis's *Olympic Revival – The Revival of the Olympic Games in Modern Times* (2003), which includes a chapter devoted to the history of the Zappas Olympics. A good deal of materials, such as brochures and folders, were obtained during the authors' stay in Athens. As far as Polish academics, it is worth mentioning Wojciech Liponski's *Historia sportu (The History of Sport)*, in which a few pages are devoted to the Zappas Olympics. The present article, completed with key facts regarding the Zappas Olympics, should be treated as an introduction and inspiration for further research on the following issues, which have yet to be thoroughly discussed by scholars (especially Polish scholars).

### Evangelis Zappas – from Albania to Athens

Evangelis Zappas was born in 1800 to Vasileios and Sotira Zappas as one of three children. The family lived in a small Albanian village called Labova e Madhe, considered by Greeks to be a northern part of Epirus. At the age of thirteen, Evangelis decided to engage in military activities and joined the army of an Osman magnate, Ali Pasha oh Ioannina (Skiadas 1996, p. 34). Just before his leader's death, and after turning twenty, Evangelis became a soldier in the Greek army; he intended to contribute to the war of independence against the Turkish forces. Markos Botsaris, a famous Greek warrior and a national hero, became his commander. Together, they participated in the Third Siege of Messolonghi and the Siege of Souli (Goudas 1870, pp. 2-13). In 1831, after the end of the war, Zappas followed in his brother's footsteps and moved to Romania, where in no time he became one of the wealthiest people in the country by purchasing fertile farmland. In 1844, he

bought a big mansion named Brostheni, for which he hired many Albanians as guards (Postolache 1996, pp. 20-22). In March 1856, Zappas wrote a letter to the first king of the independent Greece, Otto I, via the office of the Greek Consul General in Romania, S. Skouphos (Young 1996, pp. 13-23), after he had taken part in a lecture delivered by G. Makkas entitled "On exercising the body as part of ideal education compliant with ancient Greeks' rules" (Lipoński 2012, pp. 466-469). The letter included a proposal to revive the ancient Olympics and an assurance that all costs would be covered by Zappas himself. Having received the letter, Otto I transferred it to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexandros Rangavis, who found the idea absurd and impossible to execute (Georgiadis 2003, p. 33). Zappas, however, insisted on a response. With the help of Panagiotis Soutsos, he reached Rangavis directly and exchanged letters with him discussing athletics (Young 2005, pp. 279-280). The ministry was interested in acquiring support from the Albanian-born philanthropist, yet found the sporting event primitive, and thus suggested that the Olympic Games be held in conjunction with industrial and farming initiatives (Hill 1992, p. 16). Finally, in 1858, the government announced the upcoming edition of the Zappas Olympics, and Zappas himself offered to rebuild the ancient stadium and furnish it with marble seats. He also indicated his plan to build a new Olympic facility (the Zappeion) to restore the Panathenaic Stadium to, among other things, store exhibits related to the Olympics (Mandell 1987, p. 15). Zappas was one of the richest people in nineteenth-century Eastern Europe, and he understood the importance of sports and fair play, which most Greeks had until then considered to be military training with sports (interview with Prof. K. Georgiadis, September 2016). Thanks to his financial support, many educational facilities, including schools and sport and exhibition venues, were able to be built in Greece. In his will, Zappas, who died in 1865, left his entire fortune to the Olympic Committee, which organized sporting competitions and financed sport and cultural facilities. The greatest goal of Zappas's life was to revive the Games (Young 1996, pp. 13-23).

### **The Panhellenic Games 1859-1889**

In 1829, after over 400 years of Turkish captivity, Greece, which had been the birthplace of ancient sport, regained its independence as a monarchy ruled by Otto I. It soon became obvious that the country would attempt to revive the Olympic Games as an important element of national Greek identity. As a result, in 1859, 1870, 1875, and 1888-1889, the Panhellenic Games took place: Games for all Greeks living in their motherland and abroad (Lipoński 2012, pp. 466-469).

On December 30, 1858, a new royal decree was published determining the program and rules for the first Zappas Games, the particular rule pioneering for those days due to the fact that there was not any other similar institution worldwide (Muller 2000).

When it comes to the first Zappas Olympics, one cannot call it a tremendous success. The event was criticized for numerous failures, insufficient security, and bad organization (Kanin 1981, pp. 12-13). Moreover, the participants were mostly Greek citizens (Porada 1980, p. 27). The winners were awarded with honorary medals and farming products. The Games were accompanied by an exhibition of Greek farming and industrial products, as well as works of art, which attracted approximately 1,000 exhibitors, 45 of them artists (Lipoński 2012, pp. 466-469).

Due to political issues in Greece, the next event, planned for 1863, did not happen. Zappas died in 1865, leaving most of his fortune in Greece so that the Zappas Olympics could be continued. His closest cousin, Konstandinos Zappas, was to ensure that the money was spent reasonably and organized the next editions of the Games. A significant amount was spent to create the Zappeion, a building that Zappas had insisted on constructing throughout his life (Psyhogeos 2000, p. 62).

The Olympic Committee began to prepare the next Games in 1869. Industrial fairs became part of the Games in 1870, since the Committee of Greek Industry supported them financially. The program consisted of wrestling, swimming, shooting, rowing, and ten athletic disciplines. A literary contest also took place. The athletic competitions were held at the Panathenaic Stadium (before its restoration, which was performed before the Games in 1896). Thirty thousand spectators watched these Games, which, unlike those of 1859, finished with significant success (Lipoński 2012, pp. 466-469).

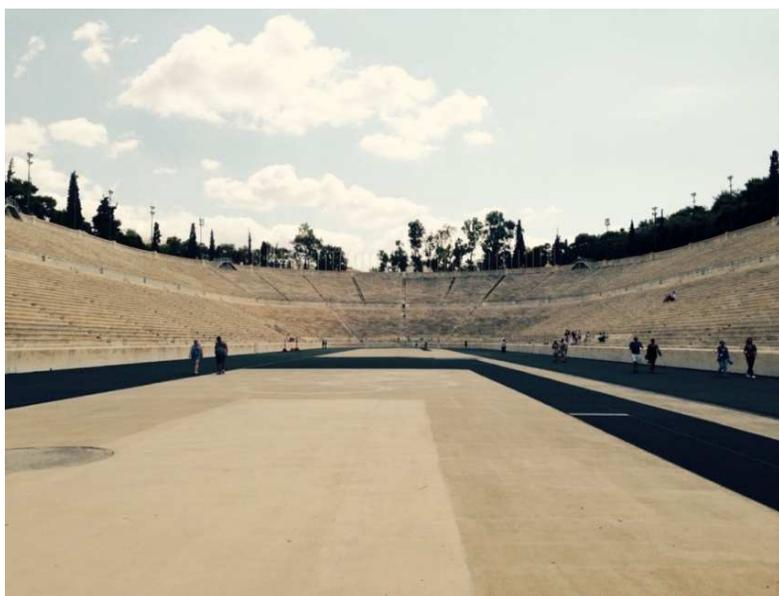


Image 1. Tourists visiting the Panathenaic Stadium

Source: Private archive (Athens, September 2016)

competitions. As in previous years, an exhibition that included traditional art and literary contests was held (Lipoński 2012, pp. 466-469).

In January 1888, the construction of the Zappeion, the greatest indoor sport hall in the world, was completed. The venue was named to honor E. Zappas, who had ensured a significant amount of money for this purpose (Psychogeos 2000, p. 62). Interestingly, during the next Games, the number of athletic competitions was limited due to Fokianos's decision. This may come as a surprise, taking into account their antic tradition and symbolic meaning.

The idea was that they would be a national Greek event; however, that edition appeared to be the last one. They could not compete with the international formula of the Olympic Games, which was soon to be presented by Pierre de Coubertin (Liponski 2012, pp. 466-469).



Image 2. Tourists visiting the Panathenaic Stadium

Source: Private archive (Athens, September 2016)

### **Tangible and intangible legacy of the Zappas Olympics**

One of the most impressive remains of sports history is undoubtedly the Zappeion, a neoclassical building built on Zappas's initiative and located in the National Gardens of Athens near the Panathenaic Stadium. Together with his cousin, Konstandinos, he transferred a huge amount of money for this purpose.



Image 3. The Zappeion  
Source: Private archive (Athens, September 2016)

The Olympia(d) and Bequets Committee not only highlights the historical milestones related to the Olympic activities, but also those related to the cultural identity of Greece in general. The Committee aspires to fulfil the aims of the Zappeion and to be conducive to the industrial, financial, and cultural growth of Greece.



Image 5. Tourists visiting the Zappeion  
Source: Private archive E.M.M. (Athens, September 2016)

During the 1896 Olympics, the Zappeion was used as a main hall for fencing competitions, and later, during the unofficial Games in 1906, it was a part of the Olympic village. Nowadays, it serves as an Exhibition and Congress Center. It is worth mentioning that a statue of Zappas is located nearby (Image 6).

**The meaning of the Zappas Olympics in modern sport tourism**

According to H. Gibson, whose definition of sport tourism is the most frequently quoted, sport tourism is a form of spending free time based on

*“traveling from one’s residence in order to undertake recreational or competitive sport activity, to watch popular or exclusive sporting events, and to sightsee at sport attractions like sport halls or halls of fame”* (Gibson 1998, pp. 155-179).

The Zappeion Megaron is part of the national heritage of Greek civilization and was designed by Danish architect T. Hansen (1874-1888). The Zappeion has a strong connection to E. Zappas, the patriot and benefactor from North Epirus who envisaged the rebirth of the spirit of ancient Greece and devoted his life to the revival of the Olympic Games and the promotion of the arts.

The Zappeion Megaron has been an active part of Greek history, and that of Hellenism, for the last 130 years. Cultural events of great importance have taken place within the precinct.



Image 4. The Zappeion  
Source: Private archive (Athens, September 2016)



Image 6. Statue of Zappas, Athens  
Source: www.atenistas.org

Researchers distinguish three different types of sport tourism: active sport tourism, sport event tourism, and nostalgia sport tourism. The last form is characterized by visiting important places for sports history, motivated by the nostalgic charm of sport. Not every visit to places and venues related to sport must be dictated by the need for a nostalgic journey to the past; it may be purely cognitive. This is why K. Buczkowska and E. Malchrowicz-Mosko coined the definition of the cultural tourism of sports:

*“traveling in order to learn about and experience sport as a cultural phenomenon in terms of cultural heritage (and its centuries-old history) and/or contemporary culture. It covers tourists’ interest with venues and facilities related to sports”* (Buczkowska & Malchrowicz-Mosko 2013, pp. 257-270).



Image 7. Statue of Theseas, Thiseio  
Source: Private archive; George Margaritis

Venues and facilities such as the Panathenaic Stadium, the Zappeion, or the statue of Zappas are important spots on the touristic map of sport and history amateurs. In addition, a number of works of art that could be seen at the Games adorning the Zapeion Megaron are still in Athens today. For instance, the statue of *Theseas* now stands outside the train station in Thiseio (Image 7); it was once part of the second Zappas Games in 1870 (Chrysanthos & Koumvalaki-Anastasiadi 1982; Chrysanthos & Koumvalaki-Anastasiadi 1994; Andreadis 1957; Kamvassinoy 2002, Kambouridis & Levounis 1999).

By visiting such places, tourists can become familiar with the tangible and intangible legacy of the Zappas Olympics and the role these Games played in the history of international sport. Similarly as in the nineteenth century when the Games successfully shaped the national identity of the Greeks, these places are nowadays feathers in the Greek cap and fulfil an important cultural and touristic function. This transfers into financial profit, too. As elements on the touristic sport map in the twenty-first century, these venues may attract international tourists just as beautiful landscapes and sandy beaches do.

## Conclusions

The Zappas Olympics allowed the Greeks to become more familiar with sports and fair play. In this period, gyms were established in Athens and in a number of other towns all over Greece. Between the third and fourth Zappas Olympics, the Greek government recognized the importance of sports and established lessons for physical education in primary and high schools and hired gym teachers. Furthermore, many artists who became known through these events contributed to the fine arts. In 1896, Nikolaos Gyzis painted the first Olympic Diploma and Spyros Samaras composed the Olympic Anthem; both took part in the Zappas Games. Finally, the knowledge that the Greeks acquired from the organization of this event was useful for the organization of the first modern Olympic Games in Athens (Tasoy 1980; Grapsa-Liakakoy 2002; interview with Prof. K. Georgiadis, September 2016).

As has been shown in the article, the Zappas Olympics generously contributed to the revival of the Olympic Games. The figure and life achievements of E. Zappas have also been presented. The fact that the Zappas Olympics mainly enhanced the national identity of the Greeks after they were freed from Turkish captivity in the nineteenth century was also highlighted. These days, material remains of this event serve touristic and cultural functions. For example, the Zappeion and the Panathenaic Stadium host cultural events and welcome tourists interested in sports history or Greek culture. These are the authorities responsible for touristic policy in Greece who may decide whether such historic sites and sporting facilities will be included in thematic routes for tourists. According to the authors of the present paper, these sites may effectively compete with mass and recreational attractions.

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