
22. Globalization and mega-events: thinking through flows

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INTRODUCTION

If we understand globalization as the coming together of people and things from different parts of the planet for a common purpose, mega-events such as the Olympic Games and the Football World Cup are its quintessential expressions. The people involved in staging a mega-event immediately come to mind: athletes and coaches from different nations, spectators from around the world, security personnel, journalists, VIPs. The activities of these people are broadcast to billions of viewers around the world, hammering home that, yes, the Christ the Redeemer statue stands indeed in Rio de Janeiro. Capital from international broadcasters and global corporations bankrolls mega-events. NBC, BBC and others compete for broadcasting rights and Coca-Cola, Panasonic, Dow Chemical and other blue chips sign sponsorship deals to get public exposure of their brands.

A systematic and agnostic way of thinking through globalization and mega-events is through the concept of flows. Metaphors make a difference in how we conceive space and spatialities (Simonsen, 2004) and flows have a number of specific characteristics. First, they are dynamic. Flows can increase and decrease, change direction and intensity, volume and speed. This is in contrast, for example, to the notion of 'circulation', which suggests both a circular movement and a measure of containment and order. Second, flows are material, encompassing a diversity of things that can move or be mobilized: people, money, images, knowledge, words, objects, technology, air, water. Third, flows have no origin and no end point; they are pure movement. This directs attention not just to the result of flows coming together (to the event), but to the before and after, and to the fixed pathways and conduits that facilitate and condition their movement (Santos, 1996: 274–279). Some scholars go so far as to elevate flows to the status of a foundational concept, where place, space, and scale only exist as a function of flows (Deleuze and Guattari, 1997; Shields, 1997; Urry, 2002).

For understanding the global nature of mega-events, flows come with several conceptual advantages. They allow examining the movement of images, knowledge, people, and capital – all of which are indispensable for mega-events (see Figure 22.1) – without changing register or concept. Flows cut across scales, obviating the need to speak of global and local as distinct or even opposed scales and focusing instead on the temporary articulation of arrangements in certain contexts – or de- and reterritorializations, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) would have it. With mega-events, there is never something that is purely local, as media transmit every second of the event to the farthest corner of the world. But at the same time, there is never something that is purely global, as mega-event hosts adapt knowledge, enact policies, and deploy capital

from elsewhere in their specific contexts. Finally, flows reflect that mega-events are inherently unstable, itinerant phenomena. Not only do they move from place to place every few years, but their very organization in one place relies on many short-term fixes and workarounds, as plans go wrong and crises strike. Each unexpected change necessitates a shifting of flows to accommodate new realities.

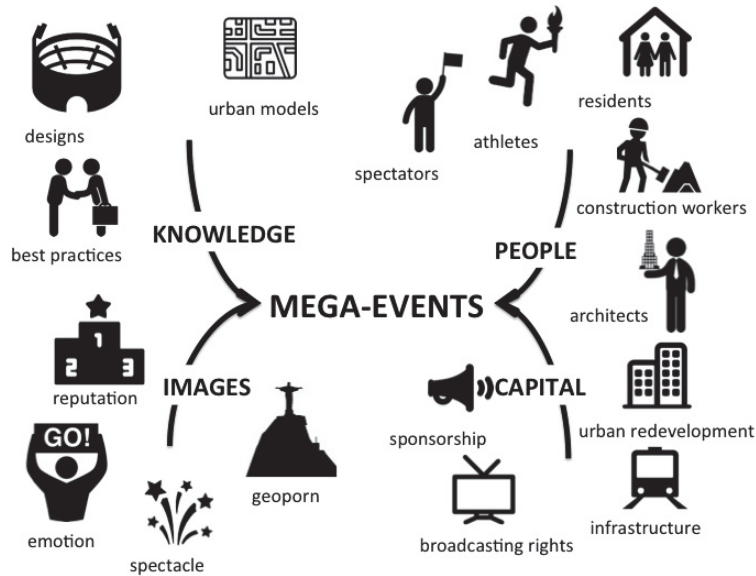


Figure 22.1 Flows in the organization of mega-events

Drawing on the available literature, the following sections examine the characteristics and patterns of the four main flows constituting mega-events today: people, images, capital, knowledge.

MEGA-EVENTS AS FLOWS

People

People first come to mind when thinking of flows that comprise mega-events. After all, the competition between athletes from different countries around the world is the main attraction of events such as the Football World Cup. But while important and visible, athletes are, in fact, the smallest group of people involved in staging a mega-event, as Figure 22.2 demonstrates. Spectators are by far the largest physically present group, indicating the importance of the global consumption of spectacle. Together with the representatives of the media, spectators and athletes are the drivers of the globalization of mega-events. All three groups choose, indeed are eager, to attend mega-events, often travelling long distances and spending large sums of money.



Sources: Rio 2016 Organizing Committee (athletes, temporary service workers); Brazilian Tourist Board (foreign spectators); Comitê Popular da Copa e Olimpíadas do Rio de Janeiro (people displaced); Brazilian Ministry of Sports (security personnel); International Olympic Committee (number of volunteers); O Globo (media; construction workers).

Figure 22.2 Size of people flows at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games

There are a number of other, less visible human flows that are shaped and directed by the globalizing forces of mega-events. These flows are indispensable for preparing and staging events, but are often overlooked. For construction workers, mega-events bring coveted jobs. Workers often migrate large distances, also crossing country borders, to build stadia, transport infrastructure, or housing. The World Cup 2022 in Qatar has been at the centre of a global campaign for workers' rights and is but the most egregious example of the exploitation of migrant workers that accompanies many mega-events, whether in Beijing, Sochi, or Rio (Amnesty International, 2015; Buchanan, 2013; Carter, 2017). Mega-events stimulate these labour flows because they lead to a temporary increase of construction activity and create jobs that can often not be filled from the local labour market.

Volunteers, security personnel and temporary service workers are also part of the temporary labour flows. They can number several hundreds of thousands, but many of them are just employed for the duration of the event. Here again, the temporary surge in demand for labour stimulates flows, mostly from within the host country, to meet this demand (Horne and Manzenreiter, 2017).

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A final human flow that is perhaps the most important one for the production of the event but, paradoxically, also the least visible and least well documented is that of people displaced. The size of construction for mega-events makes displacement almost inevitable. Displacement can happen through two mechanisms: through direct displacement, by moving people from the sites of construction projects (Porter et al., 2009), or through indirect displacement, for example through gentrification, which replaces poorer residents with wealthier ones and is a common side effect of mega-events (Gaffney, 2016; Watt, 2013). The size of these flows can reach staggering dimensions: for Rio 2016 an estimated 77,200 people were directly displaced (Comitê Popular, 2015: 20) and more than one million for the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008 (COHRE, 2007: 154; on Beijing see also Shin, 2009). While displacement usually does not make for flows over a long distance (often people settle not far from where they used to live), it is the most disruptive of the flows because it results in a permanent move. While most other flows of people for mega-events involve temporary physical movement, displacements result in profound and permanent changes to people's lives.

Capital

The flows of financial capital that accompany mega-events have grown in conjunction with the global reach and size of mega-events. The combined value of broadcasting contracts for the Olympic Games in Sochi 2014 and Rio de Janeiro 2016 exceeded USD 4 billion, while global sponsorship income ran to USD 1 billion (IOC, 2016). Despite the rising income from sponsorship and broadcasting rights, the majority of the capital to bankroll mega-events still comes from the public. This is true for neoliberal economies in the West, but even more for state-led economies such as in China, Russia, and Brazil (Preuss, 2004). While income from the private sector typically covers the operational costs, capital investments for infrastructure or urban redevelopment remain with the state.

Event boosters argue that the public financing of the event will stimulate flows of tourists, images, news, and money that can only be obtained through hosting. The logics of hosting the event are to invest public wealth with the goal of inserting a city or country ever more into global circuits of accumulation. It is through this process of accelerated globalization, the argument goes, that a city or country should risk its public resources in order to attract global flows of capital – which will benefit the population as a whole (Harvey, 1989; Lauermann and Davidson, 2013). Considered from a purely financial standpoint, however, research shows that there is typically a negative return on investment, indicating a large-scale public subsidy for private profit and public spectacle (Matheson, 2009; Zimbalist, 2015).

In order to develop a more complete understanding of how capital flows function in relation to the mega-event, we should also consider flows of political and symbolic capital. Politicians hope to accrue political capital from mega-events (Burbank et al., 2001). The presidents of FIFA and the IOC are accorded the status of heads of state, even though they are the elected representatives of small, private Swiss-based NGOs. Neither organization has more than 500 full-time employees, yet commands the world's attention for their events. In local and national contexts, mayors, ministers, even queens and presidents are keen to be associated with mega-events and be present at opening

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ceremonies, final matches, and preparatory meetings that have all of the protocols accorded to the highest ranking diplomatic missions.

Images

The Olympic Rings are among the most recognizable of icons and global brands pay top dollar to associate with them. For individuals, taking selfies in front of the Olympic Rings and sharing them on *Facebook*, *Instagram* or *Snapchat* has become a naturalized element of the mega-event experience. It is the global flow of images that creates this symbolic capital and structures global consciousness of events and the places where they occur (Roche, 2000). While contemporary mega-events are still dependent on the production of physical spaces for their realization, they are primarily mediated spectacles, distant events consumed by an ever-growing audience through increasingly diverse media.

The production and circulation of images is at the core of the current mega-event business model, and the monopoly rights holders of the event charge dearly so that companies can gain exclusive access. The laws and regulations that regulate the flow of images protect 'stakeholders' against ambush marketing, establish 'clean sites' within cities that are free of competitors' advertisements, and prevent athletes and spectators from capitalizing on their participation in the event. Of course, the exchange of selfies, production of *Instagram* photos, and *Facebook* updates from live sites are means through which individuals accumulate symbolic capital through the circulation of images. Yet when we consider the official production of images associated with mega-events we are presented with an aseptic vision of a city that has been produced for global consumption (Broudehoux, 2007; Gruneau and Horne, 2016; Waitt, 1999).

Knowledge

Global knowledge flows are a relative latecomer to mega-events. In the 1990s, at a time when talk of the knowledge society and knowledge as the critical resource for companies began to figure prominently in corporate and national strategies, knowledge was still not considered a major resource for organizing mega-events, let alone one that should be systematically managed, stored, or transferred. 'Knowledge transfer [between host cities of the Olympic Games] operated on a relatively unsophisticated basis, with future host cities sending numerous persons to literally look over the shoulders of the officials involved in staging one or another event' (Cashman and Harris, 2012: 4). The basic setup of mega-events as one-time occasions taking place in different geographic and cultural contexts with a different team of people every couple of years, however, offers a clear case for the mobilization of the experience and knowledge from previous hosts; it avoids reinventing solutions that have already been found elsewhere and it lends legitimacy to policies if other cities have applied them successfully before.

Work on global knowledge flows in mega-events has gained in currency together with the focus on policy mobilities in geography (McCann, 2011). It is therefore comparatively recent and a budding area of research. The travelling of global expertise and policy models in the bidding and planning process of mega-events has attracted particular attention. The importance of policies and experience from elsewhere in

bidding for and hosting mega-events is well-documented for cities such as Manchester (Cook and Ward, 2011), Rio de Janeiro (Silvestre, 2013), London (Allen and Cochrane, 2014), Vancouver (Temenos and McCann, 2012), and Sochi (Müller, 2015).

Global knowledge flows come on the back of the other flows discussed before. Consultants who advise cities in bidding and hosting spread models of ‘best practice’ and bring their own network of contacts. Various called, ‘the Olympic caravan’ (Cashman and Harris, 2012), ‘Gamers’ or ‘mega-event gypsies’, these experts travel from mega-event to mega-event and contribute to the emergence of a global mega-events industry. Capital flows play an important part in this, as knowledge turns into ‘policy commodities’ that are traded on the global market for urban and planning knowledge (Lauermaann, 2014). Finally, images such as architectural design or planning models contribute to the mobilization of knowledge. The iconic status of stadia such as Beijing’s Bird’s Nest or Munich’s Allianz Arena has increased the demand for designs of global architects as cities have increasingly sought to build brands and communicate through images (Ren, 2008).

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE 2014 FIFA WORLD CUP AND 2016 OLYMPIC GAMES IN RIO DE JANEIRO

While every mega-event is an apt case study for examining the convergence of global flows in a specific site, Rio de Janeiro is particularly interesting because it hosted the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics. An examination of the flows contained and conditioned by these two mega-events reveals the dynamism of the events themselves and their role in reshaping their host cities and countries.

Rio’s quest for the Olympics began in the mid-1990s with the contracting of a Barcelona-based consulting firm that proposed a strategic plan for Rio that included a bid for the 2004 Olympics. Even though that bid failed, the flows of knowledge from Spain to Brazil were established and would figure heavily in the eventual fashioning of Rio’s successful 2016 Olympic bid (Gusmão de Oliveira and Gaffney, 2010). Similarly, the much-publicised security paradigm that was implemented in Rio de Janeiro in the years leading up to the events, the Police Pacification Units (UPP – Unidades de Polícia Pacifcadora), was the fruit of knowledge exchanges between the government of the state of Rio de Janeiro with the municipal government of Medellín, Colombia, and with the Brazilian-led UN force in Haiti, MINUSTAH.

The flows of documents from FIFA and the IOC to the organizing committees in Brazil and three levels of government, conditioned the implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects for both events. Once the Brazilian government legalized hosting contracts, a series of knowledge exchanges and international observer missions helped to make the events a physical and social reality. For instance, the Brazilian World Cup organizing committee went to South Africa to observe their handling of security and event management during the 2010 World Cup. In the local context, these exchanges took the form of trade shows for stadiums, transportation, weapons manufactures, marketing agencies, and sports business interests. During the events themselves, these exchanges accelerated in the ‘national houses’ established by governments to showcase their major tourist attractions and industries. In addition to the acceleration and

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vectorization of capital flows of the event, an intertwined system of personal and professional relations functioned to consolidate the business opportunities opened by the spectacle. Global sponsors pay hundreds of millions to FIFA and the IOC in exchange for VIP and hospitality packages in which to conduct business, or expand networks of patronage. In this way, a localized event coalition of actors intersects with globalized agents to use the mega-event as a way to maximize exchange, flows, and accumulation possibilities.

The added stress that the flows of athletes, national delegations and hundreds of thousands of tourists bring to the urban infrastructure could easily overwhelm systems if provisions for increasing or changing flow capacity are not addressed. To this end, it is not uncommon for cities to declare public holidays on days of peak demand so that fixed infrastructures can handle the increased demand. For the 2014 World Cup, Rio de Janeiro declared a public holiday for each day that a match was played at the Maracanã stadium. This measure removed the normal flow load from the system and replaced it with more predictable, syncopated flows. While this kind of intervention is useful for the realization of the event, it is a form of dispossession as residents are prevented from freely using the systems that condition their urban movements.

One of the biggest challenges in hosting mega-events is to create transportation solutions for the event that will also serve the long-term needs of the city. In this sense, the building of mass-transport systems under the time pressures of an event will supposedly help to stimulate urban developments that would have otherwise taken many more years. Rio de Janeiro's transportation interventions for mega-events are examples of this tendency.

All of the transportation interventions undertaken in the city of Rio de Janeiro were orientated around the flows determined by the location of the four Olympic clusters. All levels of Brazilian government contributed to the financing of these projects, by far the most expensive elements of Brazil's BRL 40+ billion (ca. USD 12 billion) Olympic budget. By concentrating investment in these areas, the state contributed directly to a process of real-estate valorization within the Olympic zones. In addition to removing people from their homes and businesses through compulsory purchase orders, the city of Rio de Janeiro engaged in forced removals.

In the local context and in conjunction with unchecked real-estate speculation (Gaffney, 2016), the implementation of these specific transportation lines resulted in the dislocation of lower income residents from the nominal Olympic zones to the far west and north, where their displacement was justified through the provision of those self-same transport lines. In the words of one major real-estate developer, 'if the poor can't afford to live here, they can take the BRT [Bus Rapid Transit]' (Watts, 2015). In effect, the daily flows of the city were rearticulated through an urban planning agenda that was largely determined by the demands of the mega-event that happened to articulate with a coalition of vested interests that were using the events as a rent-seeking mechanism. While it is also true that FIFA and the IOC are also rent-seeking organizations, their capacity to extract monopoly rents is predicated upon the willingness of their hosts to collude and collaborate. In the local context, the mega-events serve to benefit the coalitions of actors that bid, build, and stage them, capturing flows of public money at the same time that they condition future urban development.

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As with every mega-event, Rio de Janeiro's event coalition articulated these substantial urban interventions behind closed doors and presented them to the IOC in the form of the Rio 2016 candidature dossier. Once the two parties signed a legally binding hosting contract in 2009, the federal government stepped in with subsidized loans and the city and state of Rio de Janeiro assumed significant debt as the cost of the infrastructure projects spiralled upwards. The Rio state government declared bankruptcy one month before the Olympics in order to guarantee federal monies for covering last-minute preparations. The public risk for implementing these projects was justified with the familiar refrains of post-event prosperity (a.k.a. 'legacy'), but in the year leading up to the 2016 Olympics, Brazil found itself in the midst of its worst-ever economic crisis, and the international flows of capital that made the country the darling of investors had slowed to a trickle.

CONCLUSION

Mega-events are among the most complex social phenomena of our time and no researcher can hope to understand the totality of any one event or its multifarious impacts on cities, populations, and political economy. What we have suggested here is to approach mega-events from the perspective of flows. This perspective takes away notions of fixity and stability, allowing us to read mega-events as a constantly unfolding web of relationships that provide key insights into processes of globalization. Within this perspective, we would highlight three elements of flow dynamics that will merit our attention in the coming years: extensity, intensity, and velocity.

The extensity of mega-event flows can be measured by examining patterns, nodes, and networks over time. For instance, when an event bid is under construction, a local coalition of actors will typically employ one of a handful of specialist global public relations firms. In the local context, these actors have specific interests that are tied to the real estate, construction, sports, and media sectors – each of which has an identifiable geographic footprint. The public relations firms are tasked with increasing the extensity of the city's flows by capturing the mega-event. If they are successful, a range of new actors begins to visit the city, bringing ever more flows and expanding the network of actors. These flows do not increase all at once, nor are they sustained indefinitely, nor do they only move in one direction. Rather, these flows move in a staccato rhythm, reaching their highest point of extensibility during the event itself: approximately one billion people watched the 2014 World Cup final. Measuring these flows has become increasingly complicated with electronic and social media, yet there are increasingly sophisticated tools for researchers to evaluate quantitatively the variegated flows of the event cycle.

But even if we were able to measure effectively the extent of mega-event flows at different scales, we would also need to consider their intensity. For instance, a tourist who visited Rio de Janeiro for the Olympics might have had an intense and memorable experience, but the impact of her visit on the city itself will have faded rather quickly: this is not an intense flow. On the other hand, if the same woman started an import–export business as part of her visit, then the flow of goods, capital, and people may become more sustained over time. The kinds of flows that are most intense for

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contemporary mega-events are associated with the media, which is the dominant force in their promotion, production, and consumption. Media, of course, mobilizes billions of dollars and global corporations depend on advertising to sell their products. During the event itself, the intensity of flows is matched by its extensiveness, though this too can be highly variable. For instance, the Summer Olympic media flows to Nepal (population 27 million) are not as intensive or extensive as those to Jamaica (population 2.7 million).

The velocity of global flows is strongly correlated to their intensity, but measures the degree to which the mega-event alters the status quo ante for a city. London is a hub of global tourism and finance, capital of a once-sprawling empire with one of the world's busiest airports. Images of London are well-known globally and the city's reputation as a cosmopolitan centre of learning and culture is well-established. London's flows did not significantly increase in the years leading up to the Olympic Games, but its media exposure (image and text flow) jumped during the Games themselves, before returning to pre-Games levels. Mega-events therefore do not necessarily lead to an acceleration of all flows, but speed up certain flows for a certain period of time.

As with most processes of globalization, global flows are not even or equal. In hosting mega-events there are primary flows, such as those of various forms of capital, that induce secondary flows – of service workers or displaced people – as a response. It would be misleading not to consider the flows of displaced people, workers and volunteers as part of how globalization is interwoven with mega-events. Although many of these flows do not cross national borders, they are a necessary requirement for the global flows of capital, athletes, media, and spectators to be possible in the first place. Displaced people make way for stadiums, security personnel protect athletes, volunteers contribute free labour to FIFA and the IOC, who profit from the event. A focus on flow and flux should therefore not seduce us into forgetting about the different characteristics of flows: whether they are voluntary or forced, whether they serve consumption or production and whether they are desirable or undesirable.

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