



## Approaching paradox: Loving and hating mega-events



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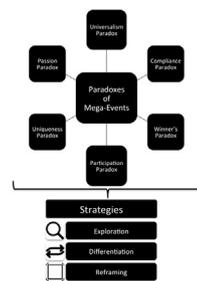
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### HIGHLIGHTS

- Tourism is predicated on paradoxes.
- Six key paradoxes constitute mega-events as expressions of modernity.
- There are 3 strategies to approach paradoxes: exploration, differentiation, reframing.
- Paradoxes should not be resolved, but harnessed for their creative potential.

### GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of paradoxes in research and proposes strategies of engaging with them. For this purpose, it analyses the ways in which six paradoxes are constitutive of sports mega-events such as the Olympic Games: the universalism paradox, the compliance paradox, the winner's paradox, the participation paradox, the uniqueness paradox and the passion paradox. It then develops three strategies of how researchers and practitioners can approach paradox. The first, exploration, examines the consequences and effects of the ambiguity of paradoxes. The second, differentiation, enquires into the spatio-temporal and social make-up of paradoxes. The third, reframing, recasts paradoxes by shifting theoretical perspectives. Instead of pressing to resolve paradoxes, researchers and practitioners alike should make productive use of their ambiguity.

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## 1. Introduction

Mega-events are, in many ways, mirrors of late modern life. The Olympic Games, the Football World Cup and other large public spectacles reflect the janus-faced nature of the late modern world: the ethos of individualisation and competition, the primacy of the

mediatised spectacle, the consumption of symbolic goods, the global mobility of capital, people and information, the extension of economic relations into ever more spheres of life (Horne & Whannel, 2016; Roche, 2000; Spracklen & Lamond, 2016).

Like no other human endeavour, 'the biggest show on television' (Billings, 2008, p. 1) relies on modern mass media to captivate a worldwide audience in the society of the spectacle (Debord, 1967), earning billions of dollars with the attention of their viewers. Mega-events embody the turn to the symbolic economy (Lash & Urry, 1994), with the primacy of consumption over production

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and the importance of symbolic narrative and imagery. They intervene in the rituals and rhythms of everyday lives (Roche, 2003). Work is something to be fitted around World Cup games; conversations on the next day invariably turn to the match; iconic moments remain forever burnt into collective memory. The mobility of globalised life is a *sine qua non* of mega-events, with their multiple flows of people, capital, knowledge, policies and images across the globe (Bauman, 2006; Castells, 1996). Mega-events are key motors and expressions of nationalism, which is once again on the rise around the world (Smith, 1998). Finally, mega-event hosting often goes in lockstep with the entrepreneurial policies of global competition for capital and attention between cities and nations that characterise neoliberal urbanism (Hall, 2006).

Creatures and reflections of modernity, mega-events also share another key feature with late modern life: their paradoxical nature. 'To be modern', philosopher Marshall Berman (1988, p. 13) wrote, 'is to live a life of paradox and contradiction'. The Olympic Games celebrate universal humankind, yet nowhere is a division of the world into nations starker. Organising a mega-event looks to future legacies, yet nowhere do we see such an extreme focus on the here and now. Sport is rule-bound, yet rule-bending and corner-cutting are a core practice of Olympic achievement. Mega-events can be inclusive and communal, but rarely do we find such a high degree of exclusion and exclusivity. It is with good reason that mega-events have been called, paradoxically again, forces of creative destruction (Gotham, 2016): they destroy – neighbourhoods, communities, old infrastructure – but they create at the same time – new stadia, new communities, new images. Like tourism (Minca & Oakes, 2006b), mega-events are characterised by contradictory statements, sentiments, and tendencies that are not easily resolved.

This paper discusses ways in which to approach the various paradoxes that confront scholars in tourism and event research. It does so by using the paradoxical constitution of mega-events, focusing on sports mega-events among the different types of events (Getz & Page, 2016b, pp. 594; 596). Six paradoxes mark mega-events at various levels: in the performance of sport, in the consumption of the event and in its planning and staging. But rather than trying to resolve these paradoxes or ignoring them, the paper suggests three strategies for dealing with them in a creative fashion so as to create new avenues of thinking: the first strategy, *exploration*, encourages researchers to probe into the ambiguities of paradoxes and the kinds of social action they afford. The second strategy is *differentiation* and advocates an analytical parsing of the component parts of paradoxes, whereas the last strategy, *reframing*, examines paradoxes from a new conceptual angle that accommodates the opposing terms.

## 2. Paradoxes: engines and brakes of research

Paradoxes are at the heart of scientific inquiry and represent the very enigmas research grapples with. Philosophers have long used paradoxes as a cornerstone of their inquiry; as a way of disciplined speculation and (dis-)proving hypotheses by contradiction. As such, paradoxes can be regarded as 'the atoms of philosophy' (Sorensen, 2003, p. xi) – the basic elements from which philosophical insight springs. The chicken-and-egg problem – did the egg come first or the chicken? – is the first recorded paradox and, with its underlying question about the origin of things, has vexed humans ever since antiquity (Sorensen, 2003). In the natural sciences, physics, for example, thrives on paradoxes and while many have been resolved, others have remained key riddles defining the discipline for decades (Al-Khalili, 2012). The grandfather paradox, which revolves around the impossibility of time travel and parallel universes, continues to divide physicists and Schrödinger's cat remains

a central, yet unresolvable thought experiment on undecidability in quantum mechanics.

Paradoxes are also at the heart of the social sciences. Their unresolved contradictions make them popular objects of research. For Berman, quoted in the introduction, there is one key paradox at the heart of modernity: that humankind's greatest inventions, meant to grant it freedom, have become its most oppressive forces. He is referring, among other things, to rationalisation, standardisation and marketization – developments speeding up the rhythms of everyday life and driving a cycle of relentless creative destruction, as Schumpeter (1942) would have it. For Bauman (1999), the simultaneous increase of individual freedom and collective impotence is the defining paradox of modernity. As individuals have achieved ever more freedom to act, so has the power of collective action declined.

Berman's and Bauman's paradoxes of modernity are just two of many paradoxes in the social sciences. The paradox of belonging refers to how humans become integral members of a group while at the same time retaining their individuality (Lewis, 2000). The Allais paradox describes that people avoid risks, even if they receive a chance for higher expected payoffs (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). The diamond-water paradox asks why diamonds command a higher price than water, although water is more useful (Stephenson, 1972). The meat paradox grapples with the apparent contradiction that people love animals but at the same time do not mind slaughtering them and eating them for lunch (Loughnan, Haslam, & Bastian, 2010).

Although literature sometimes uses the two concepts interchangeably, 'contradiction' and 'paradox' have different meanings. A contradiction describes two opposing statements that cannot both be true; only one can prevail. A paradox, by contrast, accommodates two opposing statements; both can prevail. A contradiction therefore operates on an exclusive either/or logic, whereas a paradox operates on an inclusive both/and logic. A contradiction presses for resolution; a paradox is suspended in a state of undecidability where 'what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect' (Massumi, 1995, p. 91). Although often based on binaries, paradoxes can also arise from two non-binary but opposing statements. Consider the example of the concept of 'landscape', a central paradoxical concept in tourism. 'Landscape' both refers to an object and its representation, as Minca (2007, p. 433) notes, to material world and visual image. These are not binary views of landscape, because they do not operate according to the binary principle of a/not a; but they constitute a paradox nevertheless.

The social paradoxes at the heart of the social sciences show an important difference from the so-called logical paradoxes. Logical paradoxes are abstract, often intractable and tend to be the domain of philosophers and logicians. Consider the classical liar's paradox: 'This sentence is a lie.' If this sentence is true, then the sentence is false; but if it is false, then it is not a lie and therefore has to be true again, and so on. Social paradoxes, by contrast, are grounded in space, time and social relations. Unlike logical paradoxes, they do not lead to a standstill or self-referential loop. In fact, social paradoxes are often 'de-paradoxified' in practice (Luhmann, 1993). They do not have so much a logical resolution as a practical workaround. The paradox persists, but social action continues, not so much *despite*, but *because* of the paradox. Minca (2007) demonstrates how tourists deal with the unresolvable tension between landscape as object – as inhabited space – and landscape as meaningful representation, used in glossy brochures and travel films to stoke desires. Unable to resolve the landscape paradox, which is central to the formation of the travelling subject in the first place, tourists seek to negotiate the tension between landscape as object and representation through embodied practices in place.

But their role as central puzzles and engines of scientific inquiry

is just one side of paradoxes. Paradoxes play an ambiguous – dare I write paradoxical – role in research. While they may be engines, they are almost as often brakes. Paradoxes sit uneasily with the precept that theories must be consistent, conclusions logical, decisions rational. When we begin with paradoxes, we are expected to resolve them. Being the basis of scientific reasoning, formal logic requires that opposing statements be avoided. It relies on dualistic either/or thinking that urges us to resolve contradictions and forces decisions between two alternatives (Hampden-Turner, 1982). 'Our natural inclination when confronted with paradoxes', Richard Farson (1997, p. 16) observes, 'is to attempt to resolve them'. The nature of meaning construction in language buttresses such dualistic thinking, because structuralism tells us that meanings derive from difference (Saussure, 1916): a signifier is always one thing and not another.

Tourism research is no stranger to paradoxes. Indeed, it may be fair to claim that the whole endeavour of tourism is built on a paradox: that tourists never fully attain what they seek – whether that is unspoilt nature, ultimate pleasure or adventures off the beaten track (see Enzensberger, 1958; Minca, 2007). The tourist's eternal search for authenticity makes the object of desire retreat the more one tries to capture it (Cohen, 1988; Gotham, 2007). Minca and Oakes' *Travels in Paradox* (2006b) is a book-length exploration of paradox in tourism and travelling. The paradoxical mass consumption of seeming uniqueness in tourism results in the creation of hyper-real simulacra and the commodification of place under the tourist gaze (Minca & Oakes, 2006a; Urry, 2002). Another paradox of tourism revolves around the tension between home and the foreign land. While tourism and travelling are about leaving home behind, tourists are unable to ever shed 'home', as they (and their hosts) continue to use it as a reference for perceiving and presenting their destination (Minca & Oakes, 2006a).

The resource paradox is at the heart of many forms of tourism. It describes the paradoxical role of tourism towards nature and natural resources, degrading and consuming nature, while depending on its integrity at the same time (Williams & Ponsford, 2009). The positive experience of visitors contrasts with the often negative impacts on those visited: animals, vegetation or indigenous populations (Wilson, 1997). Eco-tourism is a particularly paradoxical form of tourism, if we follow Higham (2007): ostensibly ecological, it often involves long-haul travel and can open up sensitive ecological areas to development. Encapsulating the role of paradoxes as engines of research, authors have used paradoxes to generate agendas and throw up challenges for tourism research (see, for example, Ashworth & Page, 2011).

This piece capitalises on the generative thrust of paradoxes. It aims to show that we can harness paradoxes for deeper insight, without having to resolve them. Paradoxes help us focus on tensions and contradictions, inherent to the late modern condition, and they can push us to change the frameworks we employ to understand our objects of inquiry. Paradoxes can sensitise us for complexity and contribute to accepting opposing claims rather than pushing for resolution.

### 3. Six paradoxes of mega-events

Mega-events such as the Olympic Games are a particularly rich vein of paradoxes, not least because of their paradigmatic encapsulation of late modernity's conflicting tendencies (Roche, 2000): the speeding up of the circulation of people, capital, information and commodities around the globe; the commodification of ever more aspects of our lives such as sport; the primacy of global (symbolic) consumption, for example as spectators in front of the television; the centrality of individualisation and competition, whether between people, cities, or nations (Bauman, 2006; Lash &

Urry, 1994). As late modernity *en miniature*, mega-events provide a cross-section of many areas of modern life and encapsulate, at the same time, many of its conflicting tendencies.

Such a critical conceptual perspective on events and their paradoxical constitution takes up the call for more theoretical engagement in research on events. This call entails a move from event tourism and management to event studies and to the creation of theory that 'explains the roles and importance of planned events in human society and culture' (Getz & Page, 2016a, p. 13). The emerging field of critical event studies is even more explicit in its drive towards embedding events in their political, cultural and historical context and analysing the often ambiguous or even detrimental outcomes and outcomes of events (Lamond & Platt, 2016; Spracklen & Lamond, 2016). The goal is not to make the management of events more efficient, but to enquire into their conditions of possibility, social constitution and social effects. This is precisely what the concept of paradox does by questioning binaries and exposing them as contingent constructions.

It is the emblematic role of mega-events for late modern life that makes them ideal objects for exploring the role of paradoxes and strategies of dealing with them. This contribution explores six central paradoxes of mega-events (see Table 1). This is not a number set in stone. One could make the case for fewer or more paradoxes. For instance, the co-existence of a philosophy of amateurism and sport for sport's sake with a professional athletic class combined with crass commercialisation is a candidate for another paradox of the Olympic Games (MacAloon, 2011; Wagg, 2012). The professed a-political nature of the Olympic Games as compared to their overt use for political purposes is another one (Boykoff, 2016). The by now obligatory claim to organise green, sustainable events and the failure, in many ways, to do so is another opposition (Gaffney, 2013). I would argue, however, that these seeming oppositions are not so much paradoxes as myths: enduring ideas that may at some time (or perhaps never) have been true and continue to dominate rhetoric. A paradox, by contrast, requires both sides of the opposing statements to be valid and current.

#### 3.1. Universalism paradox

The universalism paradox is probably the oldest and the most enduring paradox of mega-events. It describes the conflict between a universalist philosophy and the simultaneous reinforcement of a world divided into nations. While mega-events foster universalism – most evident in Pierre de Coubertin's maxims of 'all sports for all people' and 'all games, all nations' (Coubertin, quoted in Parry, 2006) – they rely on and reinforce national difference (note Coubertin's use of 'nations' in the previous quote). The universalism paradox has marked the modern Olympic Games since their inception. Mandell (1976) refers to it simply as 'the Olympic paradox', although it also applies to most other sports mega-events.

Olympism is indeed one of the best examples of this paradox. Its principles are laid down in the Olympic Charter, which enshrines anti-discrimination, multiculturalism, fair play and mutual understanding as key principles. The universalism of Olympism remains at the heart of the Olympic Movement, both as a general principle and as an everyday experience. Everyone who has attended a big sports event will have experienced the power of the event to transcend language, ethnic and social barriers. Fans whose national teams just fought a gritty battle on the pitch can end up celebrating joyously through the night. Residents of a host city welcome complete strangers into their homes and make friends for life. The passion for sports can indeed build serendipitous bridges across some of the deepest national rivalries.

At the same time, the very setup of mega-events reifies a

**Table 1**  
Six paradoxes of mega-events.

Section	Paradox	Explanation
3.1	Universalism Paradox	Mega-events transcend yet reinforce national differences.
3.2	Compliance Paradox	Mega-events require strict following of rules, yet cannot do without violating rules.
3.3	Winner's Paradox	Whoever wins the bid for a mega-event makes a net loss.
3.4	Participation Paradox	Mega-events include people, yet exclude them all the same.
3.5	Uniqueness Paradox	A 'once-in-a-lifetime' phenomenon, mega-events consist mostly of repetition.
3.6	Passion Paradox	We love them, we love them not.

division of the world into nation-states, with some authors going so far as to argue that sports itself is predicated on national difference (Rowe, 2003). Medal counts celebrate national, not individual achievement. The Olympic Parade of Nations during the opening ceremony stages national delegations. For the World Cup, the nationality of players determines in what team they can play. Fans wave national flags and support 'their' teams. Rivalries between athletes are interpreted as rivalries between nations. One of the most studied manifestations of nationalism are the opening ceremonies (e.g. Hargreaves, 1992; Hogan, 2003). In one way or the other, these spin narratives about the host nations, sometimes 'unashamedly patriotic to the point of crude ethnocentrism' (Tomlinson, 1996, p. 592). A World Cup without national teams but with teams composed according to, say, players' weight, would still be a formidable event; but it would draw nowhere near the attention it draws now, missing the identification of the audience with the team. Universalist in aspiration, mega-events cannot function without national difference.

### 3.2. Compliance paradox

The compliance paradox describes a situation where an expectation of strict compliance with rules is pitted against the regular and intentional disregard of rules. Observing rules is at the heart of sports and sports mega-events. Sports has developed an intricate institutional network to safeguard rule compliance, whether that is through international sports federations (ensuring compliance with the rules of the individual sports), the World Anti-Doping Agency (ensuring fair competition) or the Court of Arbitration for Sport (punishing rule violation). The hosting of mega-events, too, is strictly bound by rules. Host city contracts include voluminous annexes specifying detailed operational and infrastructural requirements. Mega-event governing bodies mandate and enforce strict legal protection of marketing and branding rights (Louw, 2012).

Yet, nowhere do we witness such widespread flouting of rules at the same time – both in the sport and the planning of the events. Doping has reached systemic proportions in some countries. In 2016, the World Anti-Doping Agency found that Russia ran a co-ordinated doping programme at the national level across a majority of Olympic sports (McLaren, 2016, p. 89). Mega-event preparations often lead to a suspension of the rule of law and the introduction of exceptional legislation. Special mega-event bills, such as the Brazilian 'Lei Geral da Copa' for the 2014 World Cup and the Russian 'Olimpijskij Zakon' for the 2014 Olympic Games, contained provisions that interfered with all fields of legislation, including taxation, immigration, urban planning, policing, property rights and social protection (Müller, 2015; Sánchez & Broudehoux, 2013). Socially, mega-events can effect a significant curtailing of essential citizen rights. Expropriation and relocation have become common for mega-events and targeted legislation facilitates these (Davis, 2011). Where proper environmental impact assessments, full tenders or due diligence are considered too cumbersome or take too long, exceptions to the normal rule of law permit fast-tracked

planning, circumventing the checks and balances normally in place.

### 3.3. Winner's paradox

The winner's curse, one of several paradoxes in economics, describes how the winner of an auction can be the loser by paying too high a price (Thaler, 1994). This occurs when there is incomplete information on the value of the auctioned good, that is, the value of the right to host a mega-event. This is usually the case, since mega-events are a complex good and their values extremely difficult to determine. Benefits from mega-event hosting are routinely overestimated, while costs are underestimated (Müller, 2015). As a consequence, prospective hosts are likely to overestimate the net value of a mega-event and therefore to overbid. The more bidders there are, the more aggressive the bidding and the higher the risk of overbidding (Andreff, 2012). The winner's paradox occurs at the moment of signing the hosting contract: believing to have won, the host, in fact, signs off on a net loss.

The winner's paradox is exacerbated by the monopoly position of event governing bodies such as the IOC and FIFA. Because there is no direct competition from other events (if you want to host the Olympics, no one but the IOC will 'sell' them to you), event governing bodies will tend to ask too high a price. This can happen, for example by setting excessive infrastructure requirements or by not sharing enough of the revenues. The result of the winner's paradox is a net wealth transfer from hosts to event governing bodies. If you win, you lose.

### 3.4. Participation paradox

Mega-events move the masses. They have a unique quality of gripping people, no matter their social status, education, race or physical ability. This characteristic makes them coveted prizes for engaging citizens in a way no other public policy could (Lamberti, Noci, Guo, & Zhu, 2011). The Olympic Games in London 2012, for example, made it their mission 'to inspire people to get involved and to change the way they live their lives. We want to motivate everyone' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2007, p. 1). Participation in a mega-event can take different forms: it can be direct, through volunteering or through providing input into urban planning, or indirect, for instance by being inspired to take up sports or by taking part in educational programmes. Participation may therefore go well beyond participation in decision-making to include many other forms of participation. Mega-events thus follow a communicative rationality of participation and reaching out.

Yet at the same time, mega-events are subject to a second type of rationality, which could be called 'action rationality' (Ibert, 2007). Action rationality works towards pre-specified goals and milestones and prioritises getting things done. It is a key feature of mega-events, since their strict planning deadlines and fixed contractual commitments do not allow for extensive changes of plans, which could easily derail the preparation schedule. Action rationality sits uneasily with the communicative rationality of participatory planning, which may lead to prolonged debate,

revisions or even cancellations of projects. Even where participation is an explicit goal, action oriented rationality will hamper its effectiveness. In view of the participation paradox, it is little surprise that while mega-events may start off with good intentions to spread benefits across all social groups, socially marginalised groups are often sold short (Minnaert, 2012).

### 3.5. Uniqueness paradox

Mega-events are often considered ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ events. Indeed, once a city has hosted an Olympic Games, for example, it is unlikely the event will come back within the lifetimes of most of its citizens. This uniqueness of mega-events allows rallying people, visitors, politicians and businesses around the event so as to bask, for once, in the global limelight (Bob & Swart, 2009). It manifests itself in the rhetoric of making one’s dreams come true and realising a unique opportunity that pervades bidding and hosting discourse (Almeida, Bolsmann, Júnior, & Souza, 2013). But it is also evident in the magnitude and novelty of the project of hosting a mega-event for cities, whose complexity and uncertainty make it unlike any other large project (Grabher & Thiel, 2014).

But uniqueness and routine are close cousins in mega-event hosting. Organising a mega-event is a routine activity for many actors involved in it: the hosts change, while most of the people and rules stay the same. Athletes, coaches, officials, sponsors, event management professionals, suppliers – even visitors – travel from event to event. This has been described as a caravan, setting up shop in another city or country every couple of years (Cashman & Harris, 2012). At any given time, for example, the IOC is involved in organising between three and four different Olympic Games, not counting smaller events such as the Youth Olympic Games. The central code governing large events, the hosting agreement between the event governing body and the host, changes little from one edition of an event to the next. This is one reason why mobility of individuals is so widespread within the events industry (Salazar, Timmerman, Wets, Gama Gato, Luana, & Van den Broucke, 2017): expertise travels more smoothly if the requirements of hosting stay more or less the same. Uniqueness and routine are thus two sides of the same coin of hosting mega-events.

### 3.6. Passion paradox

Mega-events trigger conflicting feelings, often within the same individual. I am aghast at the waste of money and the political machinations, yet I cannot help but be enraptured by the atmosphere in the stadium. I may hate mega-events for the disruptions, for the extravagance, for the pomp, but love them for the fuzzy warm feeling and the festive mood they create. Residents in Vancouver reported an ‘emotional roller coaster’ (Toderian, 2012), where they were gloomy at the prospect of hosting the Winter Olympics in 2010, but could not help but be enthralled by the vibe once the Games had come to town.

These conflicting feelings in the same person challenge prevalent models of cognition and behaviour. Residents of Sochi, host of the 2014 Winter Games, exhibited the passion paradox when stating that they thought the event would have an overwhelmingly negative impact, but that they still supported hosting it (Müller, 2012). This goes against the grain of social exchange theory, a widely used approach underpinning rational choice models. It posits that a person will reject an exchange (such as hosting a mega-event) if the costs outweigh the benefits (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006).

Similarly, the theory of cognitive dissonance would predict that people experience uncomfortable inconsistencies when watching a sports mega-event that takes place in a country with a questionable

democratic and human rights record, since pleasure gained while others are suffering would be considered morally unacceptable. Research shows, however, that while television audiences of mega-events disapprove of hosts’ human rights violations, this does not lead to cognitive dissonance (Flemming, Lünich, Marcinkowski, & Starke, 2016). Instead, audiences seem to hold the two cognitive perceptions but not feel the need to reconcile them: one can happily enjoy a football match, while strongly disapproving that people had to be relocated to make way for the stadium. Mega-events thus spark the perhaps most fundamental of human paradoxes: a love-hate relationship. We love them, we love them not.

## 4. Three strategies of dealing with paradoxes

What are we to make of the insight that paradoxes pervade mega-events? Our first reflex may well be to try and resolve them by tilting them towards one or the other side: either we love them, or we love them not. We could also declare them unresolvable and move on. Both courses of action settle the matter and close the case. Three other strategies hold, I think, more promise. Rather than doing away with the paradox, or moving it out of sight, they engage with it and work through it in one way or the other – conceptually and practically.

### 4.1. Exploration

The first strategy is to maintain the ambiguity between the opposing statements and to investigate its consequences. It means taking the paradox seriously in what I call *exploration*. Exploration as a strategy takes inspiration from Gilles Deleuze, who used paradoxes in his *Logic of Sense* (Deleuze, 2015 [1969]) to challenge facile conclusions and premature closure. Paradox means openness to becoming and change – and to different, fleeting interpretations and actualisations. Brian Massumi (1992, pp. 20–21) sums up Deleuze’s take on paradox as ‘serious attempts to pack meaning into the smallest possible space without betraying it with simplification. [...] A paradox] does not negate, it compounds. The unity, duality, and multiplicity of meaning are not mutually contradictory. They are moments or aspects of a process’.

The idea of multiplicity is a rather useful one for coming to terms with the paradoxes of mega-events. Mega-events can be appropriated for very different purposes, different meanings can be actualised at different times and in different situations. Paradoxes accommodate these multiple and shifting meanings much more than any clear-cut distinctions. They keep everything *in suspensa* – undecided, open to being taken this way or that. In this sense, paradoxes are part and parcel of mega-events’ wide appeal – to blue chips and green activists, to athletes and couch potatoes. Were it not for their paradoxical nature, mega-events would never have had such wide reach and would never have become such quintessential features of modernity. Exploration suggests that unresolved and unresolvable paradoxes are the condition of possibility of mega-events. For mega-events that would be either universal or national, either loved or hated, either rule-obeying or rule-flouting would be hard to imagine. Mega-events require both terms of the paradox to hold in order to come together as they do (cf. Minca, 2007).

Exploring multiplicities as researchers we would thus ask: How are paradoxes essential for constituting mega-events as they are? What kinds of inclusions and exclusions do paradoxes in mega-events make possible? How and where does meaning shift? How are paradoxical tensions negotiated or circumnavigated? How does switching between two sides of a paradox, say from planning to improvisation, occur? These questions also imply a shift towards explaining processes rather than outcomes, as Massumi suggests in

the quote above. Paradoxes are, after all, not steady states but fluid arrangements.

For organisers of mega-events, exploring paradox means making space for ambiguity rather than sweeping it under the carpet. This implies embracing uncertainty and undecidability as important dimensions of mega-event organising and developing strategies of dealing with them. Paul Deighton, the CEO of the London 2012 Olympics, did so when making the provocative statement that he was trying to 'get 70% of [the Olympics] right – but not 100%' (McRae, 2010). The complexity of mega-events means that organising them involves dealing with unpredictable events. Rather than trying to avoid this uncertainty (which is impossible), exploring paradoxes encourages to develop strategies of dealing with them – to celebrate rather than deprecate imperfection.

#### 4.2. Differentiation

A second strategy inquires more deeply into the architecture of the paradox. I call it *differentiation*, since it separates a paradox into its constitutive parts and analyses the differences between them in greater depth. Such differentiation examines the temporal, spatial and social aspects of a paradox. It could, for example, investigate the temporal sequencing or overlaps of the terms of a paradox. One element might hold at one time, while another one holds at another time. One element might be the precondition for the other to occur (Poole & van de Ven, 1989). The terms of a paradox may have different geographical references whose relation to each other can be illuminated. They may operate at different scale levels, from the global to the local, or in different locations and regions. Finally, the terms of a paradox may vary in their social dimension: they might refer to different social groups or involve different actors.

Differentiation is a useful strategy when it comes to better understanding the paradoxes of mega-events. Differentiation by time might show that the two sides of the passion paradox are a function of time: scepticism dominates when the event is still further away, whereas euphoria carries the day when the event eventually arrives. Differentiation by social groups gives us a better handle on the participation paradox. The opportunities for shaping mega-events through participation are unequally distributed across social groups, where poorer people often experience a disproportionate amount of the costs of mega-events, whereas positive legacies tend to accrue to wealthier people. Geographical differentiation, finally, analyses the terms of a paradox according to their spatial reference. This is helpful for developing a better understanding of the uniqueness paradox. Mega-events will be unique at the local level, for the city administration, the organising committee and citizens. But they will have routine character at the global level, for event governing bodies, sponsors and suppliers.

Differentiation as a practical strategy encourages mega-event organisers to develop a more acute awareness of the differential effects of mega-events across space, time and social groups. It involves recognising that mega-events are essentially contested phenomena. This makes it necessary to admit and deal with difference, for example in opinions about whether mega-events are useful and desirable. Differentiation in this sense involves moving from an antagonistic stance, where those who are against the event are considered as hostile or are ignored, to an agonistic pluralism, which admits different positions and seeks a constructive dialogue. Instead of negating the politics behind mega-events, differentiation invites it in.

#### 4.3. Reframing

A third strategy involves moving to a different theoretical perspective that can account for the paradox – or at least provide a

new perspective on it. I refer to this strategy as *reframing*. It departs from the assumption that what may appear paradoxical in one theoretical frame might not be so in another. Reframing involves the search for theoretical explanations that are able to accommodate the seeming oppositions in paradoxes.

Reframing can provide us with a different perspective on the winner's paradox. For the winner's paradox to be paradoxical we need to assume faithful agents with complete information. If we relax this assumption, the paradox can be reframed. We can then assume agents with incomplete information, who simply do not know or are unable to evaluate the value of the right to host a mega-event. A principal-agent perspective adds another explanation here. It assumes, rather realistically, that the agents behind a bid for a mega-event do not represent the interests of the host population (the principal), but often just their own (Zimbalist, 2015). So while the cost-benefit calculation of a mega-event may be negative for the host population as a whole (and result therefore in a winner's curse), it may be positive for the agents (say, construction companies or sports federations) and therefore the bid will go ahead.

The passion paradox is another candidate for reframing. It holds as long as we assume humans to be rational actors who would not willingly engage in loss-making undertakings. Yet, mega-events appeal not as much to the rational mind as to the body and the senses. The power of events does not lie in an economic weighing of costs and benefits, but in how they grip our bodies and stoke our emotions (Rojek, 2013). When we party, we do not care much about the hangover, after all. This suggests a shift to an affective register of analysis where people love mega-events not because they are a good investment, but because they are a good party. Torn between these competing logics – one rational, the other affective – people's feelings towards mega-events oscillate between love, ambiguity and hate.

Reframing can also be an important strategy for event organisers, since it allows stepping outside one's dominant frame of reference. Organisers, for example, typically consider events as projects and utilise tools from project management, from budgeting to scheduling to quality control, in managing events. But conceptualising events as projects produces a rather constrained view of mega-events, which tends to isolate them from the cities and societies around them. Projects are managed according to indicators, but events are socio-cultural occasions and require urban interventions that have repercussions far beyond the project itself. Reframing the mega-event could result in a broader view that focuses not so much on the necessities of the event, but includes its wider embeddedness in society.

The availability of strategies and the intended purpose will determine the choice of approaches to cope with paradoxes. Sometimes not all three strategies can be applied to the same paradox; we might only be able to explore the paradox, but not differentiate it or reframe it, for example. The purpose of our investigation will also have an influence on our choice of strategies. If we want to get a better sense of the work that paradoxes do, of how they shape the social world, we will want to explore them. If we seek to better understand the exact nature of the paradox and why it arises, we will want to differentiate the paradoxical terms. And if we are interested in explaining the paradox, we might choose to reframe it. Either way, all three strategies present a way of engaging with and working through paradox rather than trying to avoid it or get over with it.

### 5. Conclusion

Do we love mega-events or do we love them not? If we adopt the strategies of dealing with paradoxes developed in this article,

this is not a question we need or indeed should decide one way or the other. We love them and we do not love them at the same time. We hate them for the disruptions, for the extravagance, for the pomp – but we love them for the fuzzy warm feeling and the festive flurry. Unlike contradictions with their exclusive either/or logic, paradoxes present us with an inclusive both/and logic. Paradoxes are suspended in undecidability.

That mega-events are shot through with paradoxes anchors them firmly as an integral part of the experience of modernity, itself a paradoxical phenomenon. Taking this insight seriously asks us to develop a new way of thinking about mega-events: the multiple opposites that mark these events are not flaws to be resolved, deficiencies to be done away with or hypocrisies to be exposed, but they constitute the very essence of mega-events as we know them. This means that we need to adjust the questions we ask about mega-events. Perhaps we should be interested not so much in whether these events are exclusive or inclusive, compliant or exceptional, unique or repetitive – in other words, in resolving paradox; but more in what these paradoxes help mega-events achieve and how they help create mega-events the way they are.

This shift in thinking has important implications for tourism and event researchers at large, who are confronted with paradoxes on a regular basis: whether it is the simultaneity of mobility and immobility, consumption and protection of natural resources, or simulacrum and authenticity. Rather than trying to resolve these paradoxes (which may well be impossible), this paper has suggested to examine what kinds of action the ambiguities of mega-event paradoxes make possible and the social processes of coping with paradoxes in practice, of de-paradoxification. This strategy, which I have called *exploration*, can be complemented by *differentiation*. Differentiation disaggregates the opposing terms of a paradox and locates them in time, space and social relations. In so doing, it seeks to situate the terms of the paradox. The opposing terms may apply, for example, to different geographical scale levels or to different time periods. *Reframing* is the last strategy of dealing with paradoxes. It introduces a new theoretical perspective on a paradox, seeking to accommodate mutually exclusive statements.

From the practical perspective of managing events, *exploring* paradox means admitting ambiguity and uncertainty – whether that is in the organisation of the event, in its public perception or in its outcomes – rather than ignoring them. *Differentiating* paradoxes calls on event organisers to create a space for difference and acknowledge the differential effects of mega-events across space and time. *Reframing*, finally, involves not just a change in perspective but also in the process of event organisation. This would see organisers move away from considering events primarily as business projects to deliver to thinking of them as collective social occasions to safeguard.

All three strategies of dealing with paradoxes harness the creative impulse of paradoxes. As such, they take us one step closer towards more reflexive research on events, whether under the label of critical event studies (Lamond & Platt, 2016; Spracklen & Lamond, 2016) or otherwise (e.g. Horne & Whannel, 2016). A paradoxical perspective on mega-events avoids demonising, glorifying or just uncritically accepting them, as is the case too often. Sparking irritation and tension, paradoxes help us create questions rather than provide answers. Raising new questions may even be the most useful function of paradoxes. To conclude with one final paradox: the best answer is often to ask the right question.

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