

Mega-Events and Globalization: Capital and Spectacle in a Changing World Order.

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Mega-events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup serve as important historical markers to examine the prevailing socio-political and the national and sub-national contexts in which they are produced. In the past, scholars have examined the association of hosting experiences with fascism, the Cold War, or developmental regimes. More recently, these events came to be seen as a strategic instrument for urban development in Western cities given the possibility to leverage funding, legitimize mega-projects and to serve as a platform for city marketing. However, as this strategy is globalised, mega-events present opportunities to test and re-examine theoretical frameworks to investigate urbanization processes in the cities of the Global South. The collection of chapters in *Mega-Events and Globalization* is a welcome addition to the literature of urban geography of mega-events where analyses on the experiences of the cities of the South are still scarce. It brings contributions from across the social sciences with the aim to offer 'a unique range of critical angles' on mega-events and globalization.

In the introductory chapter the editors contend that academia is partly to blame for the presentation of mega-events as forces working for the public good. They claim that under an increasing entrepreneurial academic culture, scholars working in partnership with the international sports institutions have tended to take uncritical positions that downplay the negative and unjust features associated with these events. In opposition to that, the aim of the book is to 'map the main lines of criticism directed towards mega-events' and to explore 'theoretical explanations of the increasing prominence of mega-events in contemporary life, especially in non-Western contexts' (p.6). Furthermore, the editors intend with the collection to

'make a plea for a critical analysis of mega-events' (p.22). The comments below concentrate on those chapters concerned with the urban dimension of mega-events in the cities of the south, which nonetheless constitute the majority of the contributions.

The volume is organised in three parts. The first part '*creative destruction, modernization and spectacular capitalism*' brings together theoretical reflections around some of the core issues present in the organization of mega-events: capital accumulation; media coverage; development agendas; and politics. The opening chapter by Gotham sets the theoretical framework for most of the analyses that follow. Borrowing the concept of 'creative destruction' from Schumpeter via Harvey he argues that mega-events act as forces in the revalorization of space by reassigning roles to unprofitable areas in the construction of new spaces of spectacle and consumption. As such, mega-events represent one of the ways through which cities pursue redevelopment schemes to restructure local economies and attract investment, affluent tourists and a skilled workforce. The constitutive destructive dimension of such strategies comes through the erosion of democratic accountability and the displacement of marginalized groups. However, just as mega-events present a global platform to showcase city marketing they can also be co-opted by protesters to call attention to the struggles and injustices caused by them. Darnell and Millington provide a comparative analysis of the discourses surrounding Mexico with the 1968 Olympics and Rio de Janeiro with the coming 2016 Games. According to the authors both bids were dressed with a developmental reasoning and the wish of their promoters to showcase an advanced stage of modernity. Despite being decades apart both bids reveal the paternalist relationship between the largely white and aristocratic membership of the International Olympic Committee and developing nations. The authors then reproduce the media coverage in the North that highlights prejudicial stereotypes, and a focus on poverty and violence. In the last chapter of the first part Desai extend the theme of the developmental allure attributed to mega-events as 'shortcuts into modernity' to review the experience of South Africa during the Mandela

years. The analysis contextualises the events within the particular circumstances of the country in the post-apartheid period and the collective euphoria that gave support to them only to be met with profiteering by construction companies, unrealistic expectations of inward investment, and empty and expensive stadiums to maintain.

The analyses in the second part are grouped around the theme of '*states of exception*' where contributors explore the meso-level between theory and the concrete manifestations of the dark side of mega-events: legal exceptionalism, social exclusion, repression and high security. More theoretically informed, Vainer's chapter contrasts the premises of urban planning in the Keynesian city with that of neoliberal strategic planning to argue that mega-events are part and parcel of the naturalization of a state of exception. Accordingly, the shock (or crisis) caused by the urgency of mega-events legitimizes a series of undemocratic measures that violate the sovereignty, the legal system and the social contracts of the hosting city and nation. In similar lines Broudehoux discusses how the construction of sanitised images of the hosting city is pursued at the expense of the poor and vulnerable groups through a series of measures ranging from rendering them invisible in official and media discourses to their outward eviction. Less theoretically-informed Boykoff's chapter describes the escalating clampdown on protest in Russia leading to the 2014 Sochi Winter Games and how homophobic legislation and public statements were responded with mild athlete protest.

In the final part '*economies of events and experiences*' the reader finally gets a clearer view of the effects of mega-events on the ground. In his review of the urban impacts of the 2014 FIFA World Cup on twelve hosting cities, Gaffney exposes a more deeply embedded Brazilian affair. His informed narrative about the selection of sites; the cosy relationships between party leaders, football bosses and developers; project (mis)management; speculative developments for quick profit; and the top-down handling of social matters, highlights the political dynamics of the preparations for the event that have a longer trajectory in the country's history only exacerbated

by the sense urgency of the preparations. In the following chapter, Shin presents a comparative analysis of the experiences of Guangzhou in China and Incheon in South Korea with the recent hosting of the Asian Games. Despite the event (and the Pan American and the Commonwealth Games for that matter) being much less 'mega' than the others examined in the book it shows just as well how political elites in regional cities also make use of the mega-event strategy for ambitious urban projects. The chapter details how the events served to boost and legitimate plans for large-scale development projects aimed to build new central business districts and modern transport infrastructures. Despite the differences in the political contexts of the two cities Shin notes that their approaches deepened practices of state entrepreneurialism and similarly resulted in high levels of local public debt.

Overall the volume has two shortcomings. First is the lack of different perspectives other than political economy. The editors are clear with this intent when they state their aim to 're-engage with critical political economy that fell out of fashion in academic writing on globalization and mega-events during the 1990s and early 2000s' (p.8). However, rather than a 're-engagement' what is seen in many contributions is a 'return' to the same theoretical frame without reflecting on the places and circumstances two decades later. Taking Gotham's chapter as an example, it is largely written in the experience of US cities that turned to mega-events in the face of 'fiscal austerity, adoption of cost-cutting measures ..., privatization and industrial deregulation' (p.41). Despite displaying many of the entrepreneurial features seen elsewhere other authors point to the specificities of Brazil, China or South Africa that beg for a more diverse set of theoretical lens. Rather than opening questions about the new geography of mega-events the political economy frame largely adopted reminds one of Ong's (2011) criticism of the approach extended to the postcolonial world for treating 'different sites as instantiations of either a singular economic system or the same political form of globalization' (p. 2). What is lost on the way are more subtle analyses that can account for the complexity of urbanization processes and the

opportunity to 'decentralise' the production of theory and to include alternative insights (see Roy, 2009; Parnell and Robinson, 2012). In this sense, the limited contribution of scholars from the Global South to the volume is a worrying feature.

Second, a point already hinted at, is the limited number of contributions offering detailed case studies that could point to some of the recurring topics across experiences. Recent events have produced substantial impacts to the landscapes of Beijing, Cape Town or Rio de Janeiro. However, the book offers a somewhat blurred picture as many chapters privilege theory at the expense of grounded analysis. The absence of contributions on the experience and pretensions in India, Turkey, the Middle East and Central Asia is particularly noteworthy.

Nonetheless, *Mega-Events and Globalization* is a laudable effort to rebalance critical analysis and direct the academic gaze to the new urban geographies of mega-events. As the strategy is taken globally it is hard to convey a theoretical frame that can account for such a diverse range of experiences. In this sense, this book can be taken as the first attempt to try to grapple with this pressing phenomenon.

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