Introduction

Book Introductions should aim to answer three main questions, namely, why the book has been written (and thus relatedly why it might possibly be of interest to readers), what it is about and how its concerns and contents will be addressed and organised. In this Introduction I will address these three questions.

Rationales

The rationales for writing this book are at once personal, practical and intellectual. Hopefully the latter two rationales in particular also provide reasons why the book may be of interest to people concerned with the study of mega-events and events more generally, so I will begin with them. Firstly, on the practical front the field of mega-events, together with its hinterland of the world of less-than-mega cultural and sporting events in general, has developed and grown in various significant ways since the turn of the millennium. In recent times events have also become much more visible in policy terms, in media discourse and in public awareness than they were in previous decades. However, at the same time as they seem to be becoming more important to us than they have ever been, they are also becoming, in some cases and in some aspects, more criticised than ever before. We increasingly make mega-events part of our lives at the same time as becoming witnesses to the possibility that some of them might not have much of a future. There are significant problems both at the level of particular events and at the level of mega-event organisers. At the level of particular events the transmission of good practice within the world of mega-events remains weak and unreliable. For instance, in spite of the rise of public concern for mega-event legacies or long-term impacts, the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics had a negative impact on its region within Russia’s eastern Black Sea coast and Caucasus mountains; the planning of the 2015 Expo in Milan made
little clear, agreed and effective provision for an urban legacy; and the planning of the 2016 Rio Olympics suffered from a range of important and preventable political, economic and ecological problems.¹

Beyond the level of particular events, further problems of a serious and even existentially threatening kind have arisen in recent times at the level of a number of mega-event owner organisations. FIFA (the Fédération International des Football Association) in soccer and in athletics the IAAF (the International Amateur Athletics Federation) have long been suspected of having become mired in various forms of corruption.²  In 2015 and early 2016 these charges were definitively revealed to have substance, and the two organisations are now facing profound challenges to reform themselves in order to restore their international legitimacy and credibility. Academic perspectives on social realities can become complacent in their theoretical, empirical and moral orthodoxies and prejudgements, particularly in the social sciences, whether they are of a mainstream or of a critical kind. However when realities change, and also when they become challenging and even paradoxical, as is currently the case in the field of mega-events, then we need to be willing to renew our understanding of these changing realities and to be open to the new issues they raise.

Secondly, a rationale for this book lies in the developments on the academic fields of event studies in general and mega-event studies in particular. In the late twentieth century the academic literatures in these areas were arbitrary and patchy in their coverage and, to the extent that they did so at all, they tended to value information over understanding, and to accumulate knowledge slowly. However in recent years, and related to the practical changes and growth in events briefly noted above, this situation has changed a lot. Event-related literature both for academic teaching and for research purposes has begun to grow considerably. To a great extent this acceleration has been driven, particularly in Britain, by the growth of university courses and qualifications in the professional and practical field of event management, and thus by the growth of demand for intellectual resources from both teachers and students in this field. Thankfully, however, the new literature has not been restricted exclusively to management-oriented work serving professional and practical interests. It has also included discussions and studies embodying broader interests in the social contexts and politics of events. These have included contributions in allied areas such as event studies, event policy (studies), critical event studies and the critical political economy of mega-events.³ This book aims to make a contribution to contemporary interests in these fields, not least in re-emphasising the relevance
of sociological and related inter-disciplinary perspectives for the understanding of events and mega-events.

Finally, on the personal front a decade had passed since I had published a study of mega-events, *Mega-events and modernity: Olympics and Expos in the growth of global culture* (Roche 2000). This was the product of various lines of sociological and socio-historical work I had undertaken in the late 1980s and 1990s. While I continued to work on mega-events in the 2000s I also rebalanced my sociological interests to allow for the development of a project of work on the socio-historical and contemporary aspects of Europe. This resulted in a study of the socio-historical grounds of the European social formation (Roche 2010a), arguing for the possibility of a sociology of Europe. Work on this project remains ongoing (in spite of the 2016 British vote to ‘Brexit’ the EU, indeed because of it), and it also informs some of the analysis underlying this present book. At the time that it was published my mega-event book achieved what I had hoped for it, namely to make a contribution to the field of mega-events studies. However, in spite of this (or, perhaps better, because of it) as time went by and as major social changes began to make themselves felt in society in the first decade of the new century it became clear that it was increasingly necessary to update, renew and develop my earlier analysis, hence the present book.

**Subject matter**

We can now turn from rationales for the book, the ‘why?’ question, to address the ‘what?’ question, that is, the nature of its subject matter. As the title signals, the book is concerned with ‘mega-events’ and ‘social change’, and particularly with the sociological challenges involved in attempting to understand the former in relation to the latter. Chapter 1 explores the nature of each of these topics further in general terms, and the implications of these discussions are applied and illustrated in more detailed studies of mega-events in the body of the book. My perspective on the nature of social change is introduced later in the Introduction, when we also consider the overall nature of the book’s discussion and argument. However first we need to consider what mega-events are.

I conceptualise mega-events, in this book as in my earlier book, in broadly sociological terms and thus as being multi-dimensional. As such particular cases of mega-events are always potentially empirically fluid and variable along a number of axes, and they can have characteristics which, while they may be retrospectively comprehensible, were (whether by design or accident) unpredictable at the time. Some key sources of such variability among mega-events
are, for instance, dimensional axes running from self-conscious modernity to the incorporation of tradition, from the national level to the international and global levels, from city-based localisation to the dis-location of becoming media events, from short-term to long-term impacts and so on (see Roche 2000, pp. 8–10, ch. 1 passim, also ch. 8 passim). The implications of such an understanding of mega-events, in this book as in my previous book, are that we should recognise the risks of theoretical hubris if we aspire to some sort of social scientific omniscience about mega-events. The view taken here is that while the analysis of mega-events does need to be theoretically informed and to involve a systematic understanding of their contexts, none the less it also needs to remain open to their potential empirical fluidity and variability. The apparent predictability of many aspects of mega-events can be misleading; mega-events always have the capacity to surprise us and show us something new about our social world.

Given mega-events’ multi-dimensionality and their empirically variable character, we should be cautious and careful about prematurely fixing their features whether theoretically or methodologically. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this Introduction a rough and provisional definition of mega-events is relevant at this point, and the definition I offered of them in my earlier book on mega-events remains useful. That is: “Mega-events” are large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance’ (Roche 2000, p. 1). In my earlier study I located mega-events like Olympic Games and International Expos as ‘the most visible and spectacular examples of a dense social eco-system and social calendar of public events in modern societies’ (Roche 2000, p. 3). I suggested that the wider field of public events can also be analysed as including (at least) ‘special’, ‘hallmark’ and ‘community’ types of events (Roche 2000, p. 4, table 1.3). In this framework mega-events can be distinguished in terms of the global and international nature and scale of their target visitor markets and of the media interest in them. In complete contrast community events are organised to address local visitor markets and local television and press. Intermediary between the global and local levels are hallmark events (like national sport championships), and special events (like world regional sports events or single-sector events like Formula 1 Grand Prix motoring competitions). Hallmark events, which can have a role in identifying a nation, principally operate at the national level of visitor markets and media interest, whereas special events can address and be influential in both national and international-level visitor markets and media.
Event planners and managers might feel obliged to proclaim that an event is a mega-event when they bid and plan for it ahead of time. However the empirical variability of particular events suggests that researchers and analysts may be better advised to recognise the inherently provisional nature of such claims and to wait for the ‘delivery’ of an event and its outcomes before concurring that an event actually qualifies for this status. Relatedly the roughness of the public-event categorisation given above indicates that, in particular cases, mega-event characteristics sometimes may well be significantly shared with event cases in the non-mega-event categories, particularly ‘special events’. Given the growth and diversification of such events and event categories in recent years it may well be useful, for both theoretical and empirical purposes, to explicitly broaden the field of mega-event studies to take account of second-order mega-events as well as the first-order mega-events which it currently addresses, and to make the border between them more permeable.

An interesting step in this direction has been made in a contribution to mega-event studies recently by Martin Muller (Muller 2015a). Building on previous definitional discussions, including those noted above in my earlier work, Muller proposes a new more empirically based approach to determining whether or not an event can be judged to have had the scale and character of a ‘mega-event’. He recognises that such events must be understood as being multidimensional and focuses on four aspects, namely tourism, the media, finance and urban legacy. Muller specifies these respectively in terms of events’ visitor attractiveness, the reach of the audience, reach of the media, event-related cost and transformative impacts, and he suggests that they can be usefully measured, respectively, with reference to (ticketed) visitor numbers, the value of broadcast rights, total costs and the proportion of the total budget taken up by urban capital and infrastructural spending. Muller argues that the value of using his multi-indicator approach is attested to in his application of it to a range of large-scale events in the 2010–13 period.

This analysis generates a hierarchy among these events which is intuitively credible (for instance, the 2012 London Olympics is confirmed as being the largest in Muller’s sample of cases). It also suggests that the category of mega-events needs to be understood in a flexible way in the contemporary period, and that it is realistic to broaden it beyond the classic (and first-order) mega-event genres (i.e. Olympics and Expos, see Roche 2000). The FIFA World Cup soccer championships have long been viewed as being ‘mega-events, and also other large-scale events can be argued to have elements of a mega-event character. Muller’s analysis suggests that the mega-events in the 2010–13 period
which he is concerned with should be understood to include not only the 2012 London Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai Expo but also the 2010 FIFA World Cup soccer championship in South Africa, the 2012 UEFA European Nations soccer championship shared by the Ukraine and Poland, the 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou and the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver. Given this, in my view in the field of mega-event studies it is becoming useful, even necessary, to distinguish more clearly and consistently between first-order and second-order mega-events, and there is an increasing need to devote more research attention to the latter group. That said, in spite of this counsel of perfection the present book will mainly (although not exclusively) focus on the classic first-order genres of the Summer Olympic Games and Expos as exemplars of mega-events.

Finally, we can note that Muller’s analysis draws attention to the category of ‘major events’ which lie in the hinterland of the category of mega-events. An implication to be drawn from this might be that the links between mega-event studies and the hinterland of general event studies could benefit from being better recognised and cultivated in research and scholarship.

**Analytic approach**

Finally, there is the ‘how’ question, namely the issue of how I plan to understand, address and discuss mega-events. In this book, as in my previous work, my general approach to mega-events is to see them as products of a combinations of collective agency and structural factors. They are events which, initially at least, need to be seen as products of their times and places. As far as their times go, they can be usefully interpreted as particular reflections and refractions of the broader and deeper structural dynamics affecting their social contexts. And as far as their places go they can also be usefully interpreted, given their changing structural contexts, as projects by host communities to mark and symbolise collective identities and to influence the longer-term nature of urban environments. It is on the basis of these general understandings of mega-events as reflections and refractions of social contexts, and as marking and influencing projects, that I aim to explore the book’s general theme of the relationship between mega-events and social change in the contemporary period. At this point it is relevant to introduce some of the ideas about social change which will be discussed in more detail later in Chapter 1. They contribute to the rationale for this book and also provide its conceptual and theoretical framework.

In my earlier study of mega-events (Roche 2000) I was, of course, concerned throughout with the topic of macro-social changes, and this analysis provides a
basis on which to build in this present book. Where it is appropriate, I will refer to this and other aspects of that earlier study during the course of my discussion here. It is fair to say that the main social changes I was concerned to relate mega-events to in the earlier book, particularly in the socio-historical chapters making up its first part, were those associated with the main historical phase of the modernisation process, namely those of industrialisation and nation-state-building, particularly in the West. However, contemporary twenty-first-century macro-social changes are different from these first-phase modernisation processes, and thus they pose different problems of interpretation in relation to the mega-events they contextualise.

The contemporary changes (which I refer to as secondary-phase modernisation, see Chapter 1) include the digital revolution, the global ecological crisis and qualitatively new and more complex forms of globalisation. Respectively these refer to (1) the rise and worldwide social diffusion and permeation of digitally based information and communication technologies; (2) environmentally destructive processes such as global warming together with greening policy responses requiring the pursuit of environmental conservation and energy sustainability at all levels from the global to the local and (3) the acceleration of economic globalisation and associated reactions such as world-regional geopolitical structuring (e.g. the re-emergence of China) and ‘civilisational’ cultural conflicts (e.g. the re-emergence of Islam). These are deep and transformative macro-structural processes with both positive and negative impacts and implications for contemporary societies. It is conceivable that their progression might be capable of being channelled, with their positive impacts being encouraged, and their negative impacts being slowed. However the essentially adaptive character of such responses by nation-states recognises that, even if there was the will to do so, it is hard to imagine how these macro dynamics might be halted or reversed. In particular it is inconceivable that they might be influenced in such ways either in the short term or by forms of policy and action organised only at national and urban levels. For mega-event producers operating at the level of host nations and host cities, and within medium-term time frames, such changes present themselves as the given conditions in which they must design and deliver their event projects.

Since around the turn of the new millennium mega-events as particular types of social process have begun to change qualitatively compared with mega-events in the twentieth century. The perspective taken in this book focuses on this contemporary period, but, as noted above, in other respects it develops further the approach of my earlier book. That is, without implying any mechanical
determinism, the approach understands the collective agency exemplified in mega-events to reflect and refract the social contexts of their time. So in order to understand changes within the mega-event world we need to go beyond it and to explore the changing social contexts of events which lie in the deeper macro-structural changes indicated above. Given this perspective we can make the reasonable assumption that mega-events will continue to change further as we go forward in the twenty-first century, reflecting the continuing influences of their changing social contexts. To illustrate this we can point to three particular mega-event changes. These concern (1) the socio-technical nature of their mediatisation, (2) the ideological framing and content of their messages and also (3) their geopolitical location. The perspective taken in this book is that each of these reflects deeper social structural changes and poses major challenges in policy and practice to mega-event owners and producers, and also to social movements and host publics associated with them. Later in the book we need to consider in greater detail each of these ways in which mega-events, as social phenomena and social processes, are changing, and also how such changes at the level of mega-events relate to deeper changes in their social contexts. So both levels and types of change, both within the mega-event world and in its wider social context, should be briefly introduced here.

**Mega-event change and contextual social change**

Firstly, in the contemporary period we have witnessed *qualitative changes in event mediation*. In the second half of the twentieth century sport mega-events like the Olympics increasingly became accessible to mass public participation around the world by being televised as 'live' events. They also came to depend organisationally on income from the sale of live television rights. However the mass diffusion of internet access around the world in the early years of the twenty-first century is effectively a profoundly transformative and irreversible process, as transformative and irreversible as all previous ‘media revolutions’ have been (for instance such as those associated with the rise of radio in the interwar period and the rise of television in the early postwar period). It is beginning to qualitatively change the conditions of mediation of mega-events, whether for good or for ill. This is so both for sport mega-events like the Olympics and also for cultural mega-events like World Expos but particularly for the former.

Secondly, in the contemporary period we have witnessed a *greening of mega-events* and their messages. Traditionally mega-events have been legitimated
in relation to a number of key ideologies, particularly internationalist, host-
nationalist and commercial ideologies. In addition they have been used as
vehicles of communication of these ideologies from elite groups to mass publics.

In the contemporary period, because of the apparently inexorable growth of
the global ecological crisis, together with publics’ awareness and concern about
this, an additional ideology has tended to be added to this set of legitima-
tions and communications, namely that of environmentalism. To frame and
promote mega-events in ‘green’ terms of sustainability and conservations is no
doubt undertaken for defensive as well as for progressive reasons. That is, it
is done in the bidding and preparation phases to pre-empt and deflect public
unease and media criticism of large-scale projects. Because of their scale and
uniqueness from the host city’s perspective, they can inevitably carry a certain
degree of risk of wasting public financial resources as well as urban resources
of land, buildings and infrastructures. In addition the ‘greening’ of mega-events
can be undertaken for more progressive reasons to promote ecological values
and models both at event-time and also, in the post-event period, as event-
legacies, including such visible green legacies as major urban parks and public
spaces.

Finally, in the contemporary period we have witnessed geopolitical changes
affecting event location. From their creation in the late nineteenth century
and through the twentieth century the first-order mega-event genres tended
to be staged almost exclusively in nations of the West. However in recent years
a trend seems to have got under way which tends to undermine this de facto
Western monopoly. In addition this situation shows no signs of being revers-
ible. The probable new future of mega-events is that, whether for good or ill,
staging them will increasingly be shared with non-Western powers and world
regions.

Book structure and contents

The three sets of changes within the contemporary world of mega-events help
to contribute to the paradox we noted earlier in outlining the rationale for this
book, namely that of mega-events’ increasing popularity and yet the simultane-
ous vulnerability and riskiness which threaten their future. Thus they will
provide us with a thematic structure for the studies in the chapters which follow.
The book is organised into three main parts together with a general introductory
chapter (Chapter 1) on the relationship between mega-events and contemporary
social change which elaborates on the book’s thematic structure. The parts that
follow are concerned respectively with the three sets of mega-event and contextual changes, namely those concerned with the media aspects (Part I), the urban and the ecological aspects (Part II), and the locational and geopolitical aspects of contemporary mega-events (Part III) introduced earlier. It goes without saying that these changes are too large and complicated to be addressed in a comprehensive and exhaustive way in this book. Thus the discussion inevitably has an exploratory and provisional character which is aimed at reanimating the interest of event studies and mega-event-studies scholars and researchers in the sociological and contextual aspects of mega-events.

Chapter 1 outlines a framework for interpreting contemporary macro-structural social change and applies it in general terms to media, urban and locational mega-event issues. This framework of perspectives and ideas is then used and applied in the three parts. Part I consists of two chapters on media-related aspects of contemporary mega-events, particularly sports mega-events, in the context of the wider social impacts of the digital revolution. Chapter 2 reviews the established symbiosis between the old media complex based around television, the challenges posed to this by the rise of the new media complex based around the internet, and the search for a new basis of co-existence between old and new media in the sport mega-event field. Chapter 3 explores the problems that so-called internet piracy causes for sport mega-events, states’ policy responses to this and mega-event organisations’ search for a new symbiosis between events and the media.

Part II consists of three chapters on urban and environmental aspects of mega-events, in a period of rapid urbanisation in many parts of the world and also of ecological crisis. Chapter 4 outlines how mega-events can be understood as being material as well as performative spectacles which are physically ‘embedded’ in cities as legacies, not only for the short term but also for the long term. Thus the chapter is concerned with the association of mega-events with the construction of iconic and legacy-oriented buildings, infrastructures and places which are often ‘bequeathed’ as potentially positive inheritances to their host cities in the post-event period. However it also includes more negative aspects and impacts including those relating to the high security requirements (and thus security spectacles and security legacies) involved in staging mega-events in the contemporary period. With this as a background Chapter 5 focuses on the Olympic Games genre of mega-events and on their place-making urban impacts and legacies. By contrast Chapter 6 looks into mega-events’ simultaneous record of creating new public spaces in modern cities, and it does so mainly with reference to the Expo event genre. The chapter highlights the association of
contemporary mega-events with urban impacts and legacies which are both green and space-making, notably through their capacity either to create or to reanimate major urban parks and green public spaces in host cities.

Finally, Part III consists of two chapters reflecting on the contemporary global shift in mega-event locations and the wider context of this, notably in relation to the social dynamics of what I refer to as complex globalisation and the changing geopolitical relations between the West and non-Western world regions. This part does not aim to provide exhaustive and systematic coverage of these large and complicated contextual issues. Rather it aims to take advantage of some highly visible recent developments in the world of mega-events in very different and contrasting Western and non-Western contexts, to illustrate and reflect on them. Thus Chapter 7 focuses on the main non-Western region of East Asia, and specifically on its core, the People’s Republic of China. It looks into China’s economic development, its associated new and massive urbanisation processes, and the associated staging of a number of first- and second-order mega-events by Chinese cities. By contrast Chapter 8 focuses on a traditional and familiar Western mega-event host city, namely London, looking in particular at the 2012 Olympics event, and its concern to create legacies particularly involving urban regeneration.

Notes

1 Planning for Brazil’s 2016 Rio Olympics mega-event was long dogged by a series of apparently intractable problems, including those of water pollution (creating health risks for rowing and sailing competitors), inadequate security (for both competitors and visitors) and inadequate transport systems. In addition the event had the misfortune to coincide with a major political crisis in Brazil involving the suspension of President Dilma Rousseff, and also with a major health crisis which is of international significance involving the spread of the zika virus (see for instance Butler 2016b and Attaran 2016).

2 On the problems of FIFA and the IAAF (at least, as they stood in 2015–16) see for instance Apuzzo et al. 2015, BBC 2015b, Gibson 2015f and 2016, and Ingle 2016. For a critical sociologically informed analysis of FIFA as a flawed organisation by a social researcher with long experience studying it see Alan Tomlinson (Tomlinson 2014), and see the recent critical discussion of the organisation by the economist Andrew Zimbalist (Zimbalist 2015). Also see comments on FIFA in the final section of Chapter 1 later.

3 On event studies see Getz 2012, Bowdin et al. 2010 and the contributions to Page and Connell 2012; on event policy studies see Foley et al. 2012; on critical event studies see Rojek 2013 and Sprackler and Lamond 2016; and on the critical study of mega-events (including critical political economy approaches) see the contributions to

For a recent alternative engagement with the definition of mega-events see also Sprackler and Lamond 2016, ch. 4.

References relating to the three sets of changes introduced here are given in Chapter 1 and its notes.

On media changes see Chapters 1 and 2, and associated notes.

On urban and 'green' changes see Chapters 1 and 6, and associated notes.

On locational and geopolitical changes see Chapters 1 and 7, and associated notes.