

EVENTS, GLOBAL

A global event refers to a large-scale, mass-mediated collective happening that may be planned or unexpected, with limited duration and significant transformative capacities that reach well beyond its physical location. Known variously as mega-events, public events, hallmark events, televised spectacles, or simply public rituals, such planned occasions are spectacular demonstrations of the power to rationally design and then meticulously perform in a controlled way the planned order of collective human activity, in a particular place, during a specific period of time, on an ever growing scale. In contrast, unexpected events tend to have a shocking effect, underscoring vulnerability, unpredictability and the limits of human capacity to control nature and sociality, often in the face of collective efforts to mitigate loss and damage.

Paradigmatic examples of planned events, the Olympics and the World Cup, are cyclical occasions scheduled decades in advance on multi-year cycles. One-time happenings such as weddings, funerals, or state visits of dignitaries are non-cyclical planned events. The latter may be losing the media spotlight and public attention to disasters, accidents, wars, terror, and scandals. Such unexpected events are extreme phenomena of sudden intended or unintended destruction of human and natural resources at various levels of complexity. Global events are interruptions into the daily routine life that may implicate millions of people around the world. They are intensively felt, cognitively processed and emotionally experienced for a relatively short period of time while their consequences tend to be longer lasting. Their intensity may have a potential to promote awareness that the world is interconnected and interdependent. Global events also illuminate tendencies, trajectories, and capacities for organization, governance, power, and control at the global level.

The sheer physical scope of global events and their digitally transmitted communication enable a variety of subevents to occur simultaneously and make it possible for millions of people to be connected to the event in a variety of ways. For locals and visitors from numerous countries around the world who are present on site, such occasions are lived and phenomenally experienced events. Internet surfers, television audiences, and newspaper readers, wherever in the world they may be located, are able to follow the transmission of what is happening on the ground via worldwide broadcasting and news media systems. In situ participants and viewers of transmitted images may be in multiple locations at the same time. While sitting in the comfort of their home environment, television audiences can view broadcasts that allow them to follow the event in minute details that are often not available to in situ participants. Cellular phones, in turn, allow those present on site to transmit their own images and narratives to family and friends wherever in the world they may be. Such multiplicity of communication flows detailing the process of the event as it transpires allows audiences to create a subevent of their own, uniting friends, family, or community organizations around the occasion.

Planned Global Events

Planned events are carefully orchestrated and executed projects of synergy between various governments, non-governmental organizations, private enterprise, professional elites, on site participants, media audiences, and performers to produce cultural, political, economic, and sporting types of global events. Their cyclical nature structures cultural time for global audiences in a similar way that national holidays structure a nation's calendar. There is a high degree of certainty regarding their rhythm, structure, content, and participation patterns. Their time and duration are known, the space they occupy is made familiar, their symbolism is readily

recognizable, and their participation patterns easily anticipated. The Olympics, for example, are scheduled decades in advance, the host cities begin their preparation as soon as the bidding process is complete, the five Olympic rings are recognizable to most people, and they attract large regular following of on-site participants for the live event as well as television audiences and Internet viewers. Such events help propagate global spread of media cultures, competition, tourism, and consumerist lifestyles. They also contribute to articulation of worldviews of global society that relate to ideas of universal human experiences and interests.

The origin of these types of global events is attributed to the invention of tradition as part of the effort to create nation-state awareness during the spread of modernity. They have grown out of the late nineteenth century European experience of empire, state, and nation building. Sports competitions, festivals, parades, expositions, and other such highly visible public rituals contributed to the articulation of the idea of the modern state and the emerging state system. High-profile expositions featured great inventions in science, architecture, and technology as examples of high cultural achievements of Western civilization. They attracted domestic and international visitors and cultivated consumer culture, sports culture, and mass tourism. Imbued with political and cultural symbolism, parades, festivals, and sports events played a seminal role in the process of national identity formation and recognition by other emerging nation-states. They were occasions that enabled the newly forming states to imagine their past glory, demonstrate their present success, and anticipate their future progress. Much effort was dedicated to the continuation of these events even during the hardest of times, from the 1870s depression and the 1930 depression to the reconstruction periods of both world wars, not the least because such events were clearly seen as opportunities to articulate dominant political ideologies and historical and cultural narratives associated with nation building.

The appeal of public events as arenas for state self-promotion remains as high as ever, as major urban centers around the world engage in fierce bidding wars over the rights to host such events. Cities and their state governments see global events as opportunities to capture the world's attention and to be prominently positioned as a destination on the global map of what has become a highly competitive global market for consumer attention, political recognition, and corporate investment. Such events are seen as an opportunity to reposition the host city and its nation in terms of global inter-city and inter-state comparisons in economics and consumer culture. They project and promote the status of local power elites in the global network of governing power structures. They are used to invent and reinvent tradition, history, and culture for the purposes of global branding whereby a state seeks to feature itself as a unique, compelling, and authentic destination for international tourism and foreign investment. They stimulate highly ambitious projects of urban regeneration that physically transform whole parts of a city and, at the same time, legitimate marginalization of poor areas and public objection to such undertakings. Despite frequent domestic protests and extremely high costs, these events tend to be heavily subsidized by the national government and the projections of short- and long-term economic benefits for the locale are often highly exaggerated.

As their scope has expanded, the bureaucratic ethos of the organization and performance of planned global events has become more pronounced. Such events are exercises of quantification, measurement, discipline, coordination, and control. Everyone and everything is to be positioned in their proper place assigned by the organizers, their role executed under controlled conditions according to the plan, and the outcome evaluated by professionals according to detailed specified criteria. In this push for perfection in performance and competition under controlled conditions there seems to be less and less tolerance for unregulated

playfulness, spontaneous collective effervescence, and unsupervised creativity. In the eyes of the corporate interests, global organizational bodies such as the International Olympic Committee, as much as in the eyes of the consumer public, recognition of a strong candidate state for hosting such events seems to be closely connected to its ability to control collective human sociality. Planned global events are therefore also performances that demonstrate order and the confidence in the ability to design and maintain order. Failure to meet these expectations is a high price to pay, especially if tourists cancel their trips and investors redirect their finances to destinations that project themselves as stable and secure.

Particularly in the West, the idea of security has a deep resonance with the expectation on the part of the public that the state can and must act in the face of potential disturbance during public events. Efforts to provide security are based on the ambition that collective public activity can be made safe by the use of scientific and technological advancements to control collective public behavior. The increasingly conspicuous nature of the security apparatus and its surveillance technologies and procedures in the planning and performance of all kinds of global events suggests that these sentiments and expectations are being promoted and spread worldwide. Planned public events are subjected to security meta-framing of order by surveillance and security experts. Those who attend global events in situ are subjected to varying degrees of identity checks, metal detectors, body searches, fingerprinting, and surveillance cameras. These procedures are used for inclusion and exclusion: to separate insiders from outsiders and those who are safe and may attend the event from others who are deemed dangerous and are barred from entering the performance space. Surveillance and security expertise is built on efforts to facilitate cooperation between states and their surveillance and security professionals by transferring this knowledge and experience between current and future host cities. Every

successive planned global event becomes a new opportunity to test old surveillance technologies in real time and prominently showcase new inventions and achievements. This synergy between security and surveillance experts of different states and corporate interests is fast emerging as a new form of global governance, promising to deliver security in the context of all kinds of global events if the public follows their vision of order and their understanding of what it takes to bring about safety.

Unexpected Global Events

In light of these developments, unexpected global events are particularly interesting phenomena. They erupt suddenly and forcefully in a particular location, causing a large number of human casualties among locals and visitors alike. Tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, acts of terror, and widely publicized allegations are traumatic events, the aftershocks of which reverberate in numerous locations around the world not only virtually as the media transmit the images of suffering but also physically as people respond to the news. While planned global events grew out of traditions of modernity and its celebration of state power and human ingenuity, unexpected global events emerged from news reporting practices as such events began to be broadcast outside regularly scheduled newstime. While the former exhibit the capacity to create order and maintain control over collective human sociality, the latter expose serendipity, unpredictability, and vulnerability.

Unexpected global events are sudden and intensive interruptions of regular media reporting and our routine daily life, beginning with a dramatic announcement and continuing with the recycling of minute details of the event, hour after hour, day after day, for a particular period of time. Such repetitions are accompanied by images and narratives from victims at the

scene, stories of heroic rescue missions, demonstrations of international relief efforts, speculations of experts of what might have gone wrong and why, and attempts by state institutions, such as the police and the military, to restore order . Such events appeal to the human sense of compassion and often stimulate the global public to act in response. Experts fear, however, that the increasing frequency of such events may have an effect of compassion fatigue as these interruptions take on the rhythm of a routine rather than exception.

Global events are empirically and theoretically interesting phenomena through which we can study dynamics of globalization, particularly as these pertain to visions of order and governance and capacities to exert power to control human behavior at a massive scale. On the one hand, there are indications that organization and control of planned global events as well as communal and institutional responses to unplanned global events exhibit tendencies toward standardization and homogenization. On the other hand, we observe unique, culturally specific elements in dealing with order and disorder in the context of global events. Detailed cross-cultural comparative studies of such tendencies and trajectories may reveal how different cultural understandings of uncertainty, safety, chaos, and order are being reshaped through global events in different social environments.

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See also Connectedness, Global; Floods, Tsunamis; Global Culture, Media; Global Communications and Technology; Humanitarianism; Media, Global; Olympic Movement; Television; World's Fairs

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