



The politics and changing paradigm of megaproject development in metropolitan cities[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Although not a recent phenomenon, megaproject building is currently enjoying renewed popularity in large cities across the world. Policy-makers are undertaking major investments in the form of large-scale urban development projects to position their metropolitan cities on a global scale and to scale-up urban infrastructure to meet basic needs of housing and transportation. The aim of this special issue, of which this article is the introduction, is to examine this trend, with a focus on four cities: Cape Town, Durban, Delhi, and Lima. On the basis of empirical case material, the articles analyse the challenges that megaprojects throw up for urban sustainability and discuss the peculiar issues facing cities characterized by extreme social inequalities, limited mobilisation of community groups and growing pressure on governments to implement neoliberal urban development policies. They illustrate how institutional contexts and specific policy instruments in conjunction with territorially grounded social dynamics give rise to distinct patterns of megaproject development. The articles engage critically with recent literature that has postulated the emergence of a new paradigm of megaproject building. The research is an outcome of work conducted in the framework of the “Chance2Sustain” project, funded under the European Commission's 7th Framework Programme.

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Introduction

To position their metropolitan cities on a global scale and enhance their ability to compete with other spaces, policy-makers undertake major investments in the form of large-scale urban development projects (Swyngedouw, Moulaert, & Rodriguez, 2002). This has been interpreted as a response to the restructuring of global capitalism, wherein large cities have emerged as key ‘accumulation nodes’ (Harvey, 1989; Brenner, 1998, 2004). Although megaproject building is not a recent phenomenon, there is currently renewed interest, a trend observed in countries of the North and the South (Altshuler & Luberoff, 2003; Barthel, 2010; Bezmez, 2008; Díaz Orueta & Fainstein, 2008; Flores Dewey & Davis, 2013; Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius, & Rothengatter, 2003; Pinson, 2009). Such urban development policies involve space-based interventions designed to enhance the economic ‘viability’ of cities e.g., by building transport infrastructure for improving

communications or establishing production platforms in the form of enterprise parks or export zones to engage with global markets.

A body of literature has emerged on the politics of megaproject development, which examines governance arrangements and patterns of influence, as well as the social and spatial implications of large-scale urban projects.¹ One strand of this literature, mainly based on cases from Europe and North America,² has postulated the emergence of a new generation of megaprojects, which is partly the consequence of the political fallout from the disruptive model that dominated during the Fordist era in the US and Europe (Díaz Orueta & Fainstein, 2008; Fainstein, 2008; Lehrer & Laidley, 2008). That model was characterized by large-scale displacement of residents, and destruction of neighbourhoods. The new paradigm is characterised by efforts to minimize popular resistance, achieve ‘planning legitimacy’ (Flores Dewey & Davis, 2013: 535) and avoid displacement of residents by locating, for instance, on former industrial lands (Díaz Orueta & Fainstein, 2008: 760).

The papers in this special issue undertake to engage critically with this literature as they analyse the politics of megaproject

[☆] A preliminary version of this introductory article was presented at an international conference in Paris: “Governing the Metropolis: Powers and Territories. New Directions for Research”, City of Paris/CEE Sciences Po/LATTS, Univ. Paris-Est, 28–30 November 2012.

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¹ See for instance Altshuler & Luberoff, 2003; Flyvbjerg et al., 2003; Díaz Orueta & Fainstein, 2008; Swyngedouw et al., 2002.

² Notable exceptions are Bezmez (2008) and Barthel (2010).

development in four metropolitan cities located on three continents: Cape Town, Durban, Delhi, and Lima.³ Through detailed case material, they examine the challenges that megaprojects throw up for urban sustainability for instance by fuelling land speculation, exacerbating urban sprawl, displacing local populations and livelihoods, and increasing environmental risks, features of megaprojects across the world (Gellert & Lynch, 2003). At the same time, they discuss the peculiar issues facing these four cities characterized by extreme social inequalities, limited mobilisation of community groups and growing pressure on governments to implement neoliberal urban development policies.

The cases illustrate how institutional contexts, mainly inter-governmental relationships, and specific policy instruments in conjunction with territorially grounded social dynamics give rise to distinct patterns of megaproject development. Framed within a similar research design, the papers undertake to identify the actors, situated at various spatial scales, that are driving megaproject development. They examine for instance to what extent megaproject politics and planning are open to democratic negotiations with the various stakeholders concerned, and the manner in which organised groups in society (NGOs, private business, local community groups) bring their knowledge into the process and their scope for negotiation. They examine how, in a context of competition over space and resources, tensions between competing agendas are managed politically. Several papers specifically investigate the interactions between megaprojects and settlement dynamics. In the discussion of these cases, the authors engage with the issue of contestation and political constraints to megaproject development, and question the paradigm of a 'new generation' of megaprojects (Díaz Orueta & Fainstein, 2008; Lehrer & Laidley, 2008) and its relevance for large cities in the developing world.

The research presented in this special issue is the outcome of original research work conducted in the framework of the "Chance2Sustain" research project (2010–14), funded under the European Commission's 7th Framework Programme.⁴ This project, covering ten cities in four countries,⁵ used knowledge management systems as a key analytical tool for engaging with issues of participation and urban governance. Megaproject development and substandard settlements were two thematic areas specifically examined in the study.

Megaprojects as a prism for apprehending urban governance

This set of papers adopts a loose definition of the term megaproject, following Susan Fainstein: "(e)ssentially it involves a costly scheme for development of a contiguous area, requiring new construction and/or substantial rehabilitation. Implementation may take a number of years and may be the responsibility of a single or multiple developers. Mega-projects always include a transformation of land uses" (2008: 768). Among the criteria used in choosing specific case studies, a key consideration was the capacity of the project to shape future development in the metropolitan area. This resonates with the broad definition offered by Paul

Gellert and Barbara Lynch: "projects which transform landscapes rapidly, intentionally, and profoundly in very visible ways, and require coordinated applications of capital and state power" (2003: 15–6).⁶ This need for coordination between public and private actors or between different types of state actors, is one of our justifications for studying megaprojects, i.e., *they are a prism through which urban governance can be apprehended*. This was expressed by Alan Altshuler and David Luberoff, who studied megaprojects in the United States: "efforts to realize large-scale investment projects often provide an unusually revealing window on patterns of influence in urban development politics. Such projects involve huge commitments of public resources and often entail significant threats to some interests and values even as they promise great benefits to others" (2003: 4).

The diversity of the cases discussed here (cf. Table 1) allows us to explore various aspects of urban development processes in large cities of India, Peru and South Africa. One entry point concerns megaproject development in relation to 'ordinary' governance practices. It has been remarked in the literature that by virtue of their size and their capacity to transform, megaprojects usually fall outside the realm of 'normal politics'. Their governance is often characterised in the literature as 'exceptional', and funds and implementation are entrusted to agencies "well insulated from normal politics" (Fainstein & Fainstein, 1983: 248, cited by Altshuler & Luberoff, 2003: 251).⁷

This literature on megaprojects emphasizes for instance their 'exceptional' nature, the 'special regime' that accompanies their implementation. Thus, megaprojects "normally require special authorizing, funding, revenue, land acquisition, and regulatory actions by two or more levels of government" (Altshuler & Luberoff, 2003: 267) and "(c)ivil society does not have the same say in this arena of public life as it does in others; citizens are typically kept at a substantial distance from megaproject decision making" (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003: 5). Key problems that have been identified then are lack of accountability, the absence of clear objectives and arrangements for measuring how they are met and for rewarding/punishing poor performance. Various studies also concur to denounce the tendency for megaprojects to generate cost overruns and to grossly overstate the "projected benefits, notably in terms of positive regional development, [which] often turn out to be insignificant or even negative" (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003: 5).

The seven papers presented here are interested in the various types of actors involved in megaproject development, situated at various scales, and their respective influence over the processes of conception and implementation. This includes attention to the issue of democratic participation in megaproject conception and implementation, as well as organised forms of contestation. For each case, the aim is to understand the balance between the structural forces that bear upon cities and local political agency.

In *all* of the cases discussed here, without exception, megaprojects are not primarily, or not at all, a city-level initiative.⁸ This is an important reminder that city development is a strategic issue that surpasses the city. Although this is the case to some extent everywhere in the world, it appears to be more prevalent in our

³ Preliminary drafts of the papers in this special issue were presented at the EADI/DSA conference in York in September 2011, in a panel entitled "Reconfiguring the Fast Growing City: Exploring the Interaction between Urban Governance, Mega-Projects and Settlement Dynamics in Cases from India and South Africa".

⁴ "Chance2Sustain" is an eight-country research consortium coordinated by Isa Baud, University of Amsterdam. For more information on the Chance2Sustain project, as well as access to publications, see the project website: <http://chance2sustain.eu>.

⁵ These are Rio de Janeiro, Salvador and Guarulhos in Brazil, Delhi, Chennai and Kalyan in India, Lima Metropolitana and Arequipa in Peru, Durban and Cape Town in South Africa.

⁶ However, their more detailed definition, which underscores important potential features, appears too restrictive: "[Mega-projects] use heavy equipment and sophisticated technologies, usually imported from the global North and require coordinated flows of international finance capital ..." (Gellert & Lynch, 2003: 16). These characteristics must be established on a case-by-case basis.

⁷ See also Graham (2000).

⁸ This was in fact the case with all the megaprojects studied in the ten cities of the Chance2Sustain project. See Kennedy (2013).

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