



Concept Symposium 2018

Governing Megaprojects – Why, What and How

The Symbolic Value of Megaprojects

Megaproject organizations have become popular with public politicians and local officials as a way of creating attractive, sustainable and economically viable urban areas for citizens. Such projects have become great symbols of modern engineering and for politicians are an important political legacy, serving as highly visible, material results of public policy and officials at the local and national level. For a long time academic attention to the management of megaprojects was reserved to the engineering discipline. My aim is to further develop our understanding of megaprojects by studying these from a cultural perspective. With others, I position megaprojects to be as much the object and outcome of social interactions as any other form of organizing that occurs within a multiple context of socially interdependent networks.

Such an interpretative perspective focuses on processes of meaning, sense-making and social construction of megaprojects and recognizes the role of rituals, myths, artifacts, ambiguities, power, subcultures and spatial settings to be important. In my presentation I will present a cultural lens to study megaprojects and discuss how megaprojects can be perceived as modern symbols, crucial for the encapsulation of ideas, attitudes, and beliefs. Examples will be given of longitudinal studies of the Panama Canal Expansion Project and the Dutch High-Speed Train megaproject. These megaprojects encapsulate symbolic meanings which shape the megaproject's life cycle process. The findings show three symbolic meanings of a megaproject that can be valuable for managing megaproject.



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The Concept Symposia on Project Governance

The Norwegian Ministry of Finance and the Concept Research Program hosts every second year a symposium on project Governance. Project governance, in brief, is concerned about investments and their outcome and long-term effects. In view of the problem at hand, the aim is to ensure that the best conceptual solution is chosen, that resources are used efficiently and anticipated effects realized. Resource persons from ministries, governmental agencies, academia, international organizations, and industry are invited. In order to facilitate professional exchange and direct communication between participants, the number of individuals is restricted. The aim is to initiate further international cooperation and research on important issues related to project governance.

<https://www.ntnu.edu/concept/concept-symposium>

THE SYMBOLIC VALUE OF MEGAPROJECTS



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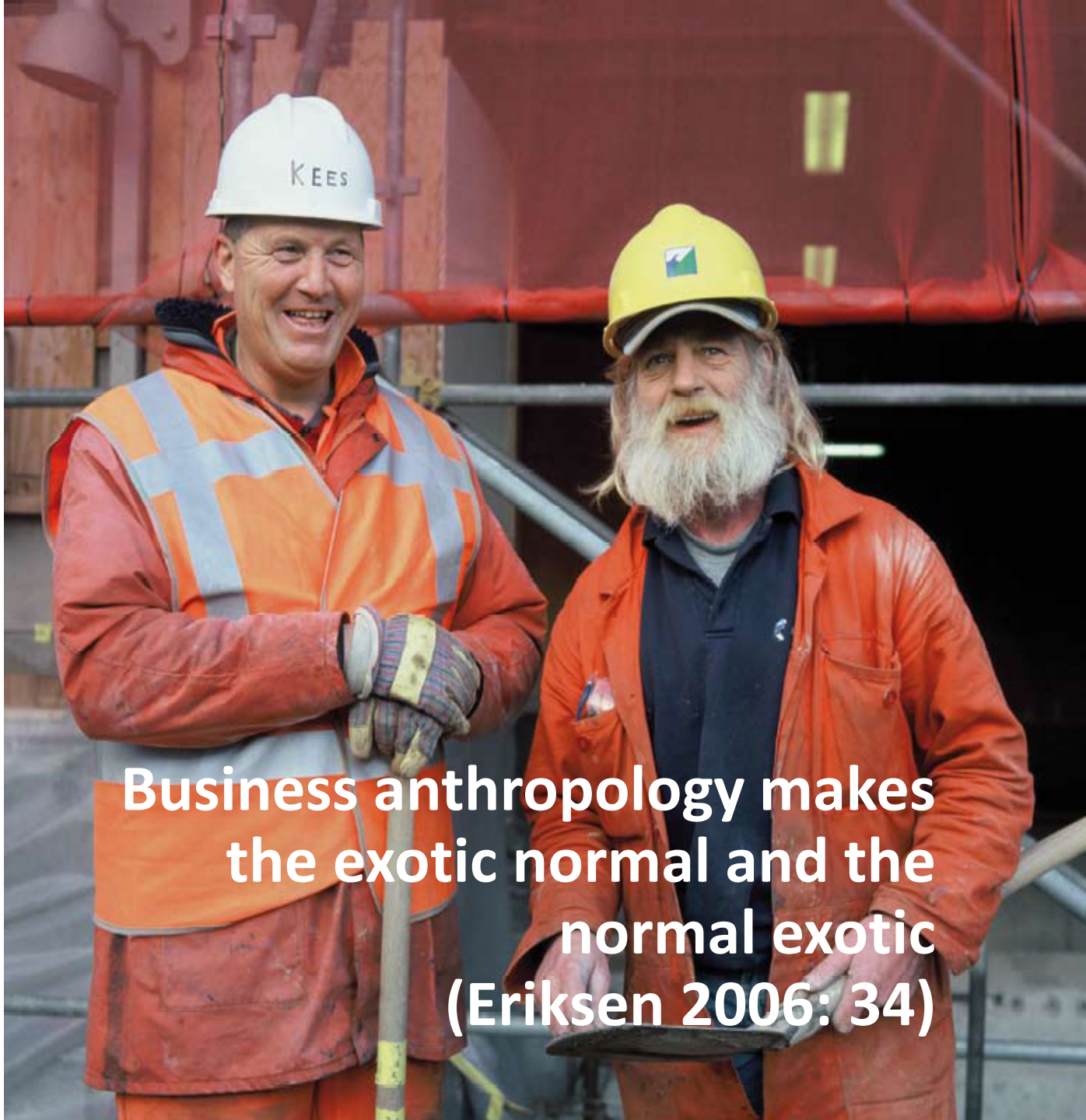
BUSINESS ANTHROPOLOGY

- Is the practical oriented scholastic field in which anthropologists apply anthropological theories, methods, and skills to identify, to study, and to provide solutions for solving business related problems (Baba, 1986; Jordan, 2003; Tian, Lillis and Van Marrewijk 2010)



BUSINESS ANTHROPOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

- Holistic perspective takes economic, historic and cultural context into account
- Interested in daily life of organizational members = emic understanding
- Focus at process rather than outcome
- Rituals, meaning, symbolism and unwritten rules in organizations are important
- Heterogeneity, differentiation and situational construction of cultural differences is assumed



**Business anthropology makes
the exotic normal and the
normal exotic
(Eriksen 2006: 34)**

MEGAPROJECT AS A CULTURAL PHENOMENON

- Large-scale, geographical dispersed, technically intricate constructs delivered through various public/private partnerships (van Marrewijk et al., 2008)
- Megaprojects are complex social (change) settings, suffused with political, social and cultural dynamics (Engwall, 2003).
- Megaprojects are as much the object and outcome of social interactions as any other form of organizing
- The value of a megaproject may appear in various economic, social and environmental dimensions (Martinsuo & Killen 2014).

SYMBOLS AND MEGAPROJECTS

- Anthropological theories on symbols and symbolism are interesting to understand the long term value and impact of megaprojects
- Symbols have capacity for communicating meaning (Firth 1973)

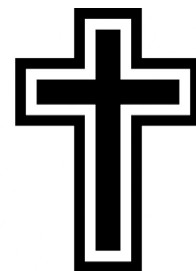
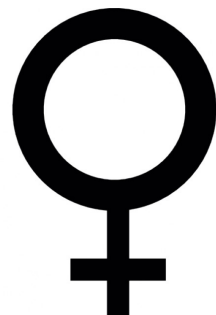


- Van Marrewijk, A.H. (2017). The Multivocality of Symbols. A longitudinal study of the Symbolic Dimensions of the Dutch High Speed Train Megaproject. *Project Management Journal* 48 (6), 47-59 **PMI Project Management Journal® 2018 Paper of the Year Award.**



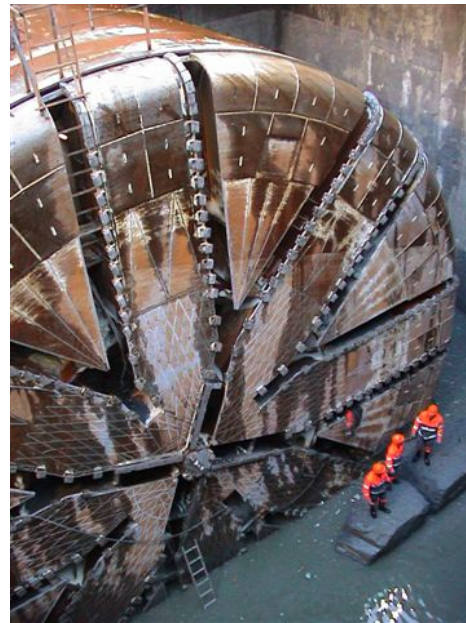
MEGAPROJECTS AS SYMBOLS

- “Symbols are tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experience fixed in perceptible forms, concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgments, longing, or beliefs” (Geertz 1973: 91)
- Exegetical meaning is the meaning derived from the local interpretation (Turner 1967, 1973)
- ‘Multivocality’ is the distinct interpretation of a complex profound representation by receivers



EXEGETICAL MEANINGS OF HIGH SPEED TRAIN

- The goal is to understand which exegetical meanings a megaproject can encapsulates for involved stakeholders and how this shapes the megaproject's process
- High-Speed Train Megaproject (1995–2015)
- Four public stakeholders involved:
 - > Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment
 - > Rijkswaterstaat
 - > Dutch Railways
 - > ProRail



Period	Dominant exegetical meaning	Organizations
1973–1991	Connecting Amsterdam to Europe Improving economic strength Opportunity for new megaproject	Ministry Ministry
1999–2003	Radical, innovative form of contracting Instrument to change the rail sector	Ministry, RWS Ministry, RWS
2003–2008	Instrument to change the rail sector Opportunity for strategic positioning	Ministry Dutch Railways, ProRail
2008–2013	Failed liberalization of the rail network Financial and economic disaster	Ministry, RWS Dutch Railways
2013–2015	Failed liberalization of the rail network Debacle for rail passengers	Ministry ProRail

THREE EXEGETICAL MEANINGS OF HIGH SPEED TRAIN

- HST as radical innovative contract
 - Trying to change the construction sector with PPPs
 - Strengthening the position of Rijkswaterstaat as dominant client of megaprojects
- HST as intervention in the Dutch rail sector
 - Trying to change the monopoly position of Dutch Railways and ProRail
- HST as an lynchpin of rail transport business
 - Strengthening the strategic positioning of Dutch Railways in the European rail market

MEGAPROJECTS AS SYMBOLS

- Three exegetical meanings influenced HST's process causing power struggles, time delays, cost overruns, and finally the failure to run high speed trains
- Strategic use of symbols in struggle over power by all four public organisations
- HST symbolizes both the dream of economic development and transformation, and the disappointment of failed ambitions, incompetence, and waste of public funding

THE VALUE OF MEGAPROJECTS

- Contribution to megaproject literature with an cultural perspective
- The value of megaprojects is beyond the traditional realm of cost, planning and scope
- Symbols has little staying power as they change over time
- Provide decision makers with a conceptual lens to better understand the value of megaprojects



Thank You