



# **ETHNOGRAPHERS OF MEGAPROJECTS: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL WORLDS OF LARGE-SCALE INFRASTRUCTURES**

**September 12-13, 2019**

Welcome to the symposium *Ethnographies of Megaprojects* facilitated by the Department of Social Anthropology in collaboration with Forum for Asian Studies and the Institute for Latin American Studies at Stockholm University, and with financial support from the Swedish Research Council and Marie Skoldowska Curie Actions 7.

The symposium bring together social scientists to discuss large-scale infrastructure projects from an ethnographic perspective. On the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pioneer study of the Yacyretá high dam by Ribeiro (1994) and drawing on the more recent infrastructural turn in anthropology and related disciplines (cf. Anand, Appel & Gupta 2018; Harvey, Jensen & Morita, 2017; Larkin 2013) the symposium puts the spotlight on one particular type of infrastructure, namely megaprojects. In different regions of the world megaprojects such as roads, bridges, railways, airports, dams, ports, telecommunication as well as energy systems, special economic zones and urban redevelopments proliferate. Megaprojects are characterized by the involvement of multiple public and private stakeholders, by a range of professions and expertise, and by their significant social and environmental impact. Infrastructure development at large promises greater connectivity and economic growth, and harbour longstanding modernist dreams of a more prosperous future (Hetherington, 2012; Harvey & Knox, 2015; Anand et al, 2018). Notwithstanding the short and long-term promise that megaprojects evoke, they are also met by fear and mistrust. A lack of transparency and accountability often fuel protest movements and popular mobilizations. Moreover, megaprojects are as prone to produce disconnection and reproduce inequalities as they are to create new opportunities. Also, regardless if we focus on the hidden work of infrastructures or its more spectacular dimensions, infrastructures as material processes of connectivity are always subject to potential breakdown. Not only are infrastructures such as power grids, roads, railways and hydraulic works dynamic and tightly coupled technological systems—constituted by materials that age and undergo constant processes of change and deterioration—they are also planned, built and operated in social, political and economic contexts that

are unstable and prone to punctuations and transformations over time. Hence, studying megaprojects entail different time scales, varying categories of professionals and expertise, and multiple publics. The symposium explores the potentiality of critical and comparative ethnographies of 'megaprojects' focusing on the following topics:

**Temporalities** Large-scale infrastructure projects are shaped by multiple temporalities, from project planning to execution/delivery and subsequently operation and maintenance. At the same time as they are firmly anchored in visions of and aspirations for the future, most, if not all, megaprojects also have a longer history rooted in older projects of modernization. Moreover, many large-scale infrastructure projects are characterized by delays while others are simply not executed. How can we relate to such apparent failures and their traces that linger in terms of material imprints including expectations and disappointment? How can we better understand gendered, legal, bureaucratic, ethical, affective, experiential and material dimensions of time and infrastructures?

**Experts** Contemporary megaprojects are assembled through the mobilisation of public agencies and private companies that are staffed by skilled professionals in different areas, ranging from the technical and scientific domains to the economic, legal, and sociological realms. As members of epistemic communities, they enact their expertise through practices of socialization, authentication, and institutionalization (Carr, 2010). In the making of the megaproject, experts interact in collaboration and conflict with multiple other experts who are also involved in designing, negotiating, planning, building, operating and maintaining such infrastructures, and with different publics who support or contest their endeavors. Which are the sites of interconnection, boundary objects, and calculative devices through which experts enact their knowledge and skills? How do experts navigate moral dilemmas and engage social values in their daily work and the politics of megaprojects?

**Publics** The definition of the population that will benefit from infrastructure investments (the 'beneficiaries') and by extension the definition of 'public interest' are central to how politics works through infrastructure. Moreover, once in place large-scale infrastructure systems mediate material and social relations, thus producing multiple publics, connecting some publics and disconnecting others (Anand 2017). It is thus crucial to ask what publics are made visible or invisible, excluded or included in large-scale infrastructure projects. In other words: how does infrastructure create different publics?

**Methodology** How do we study megaprojects ethnographically? Single-, multi- and translocal fieldworks have been undertaken in planning offices, government ministries, engineering companies, construction sites, among publics in urban and rural settings. Megaprojects seem to bring matters to a head, however, by way of their scale, scope, duration, and webs of actors. How do we conceptualize ethnographic fields that can grasp the multiplicity of scales, the punctuatedness of the long term and complexity? How do we get access to securitised spaces and classified information? Can we complement the ethnographic toolbox with innovative research methods to better grasp the megaproject?

## **VENUE**

**Aula Magna, Room Bergsmannen, at Stockholm University.**

## PROGRAMME

DAY 1 Thursday 12 September 2019			
9:00 -9:15	<b>Welcome and presentation</b> Gabriella Körling & Susann Baez Ullberg		
	<b>Session 1</b> Chair: Gabriella Körling		<b>Session 2</b> Chair: Susann Baez Ullberg
9:15-10:15	Keynote address <b>Gustavo Lins Ribeiro</b> <i>Anthropology and Development. Anthropology and Infrastructure</i>	13:00-14:00	Keynote address <b>Gisa Weszkalnys</b> <i>Paused Explorations: Oil, Time, and Capitalism in the African Atlantic</i>
10:15-10:30	Coffee	14:00-14:30	<b>Bilge Firat</b> <i>Infrastructural State and Energy-Transport in the Southern Gas Corridor</i>
10:30-11:00	<b>Theodor Aalders, Jan Bachmann, Per Knutsson &amp; Benard Musembi Kilaka</b> <i>What is Mega about Mega-Projects?</i>		
11:00-11:30	<b>Asta Vonderau</b> <i>Impressive Numbers, Contested Scales: How is the 'Mega' of Megaprojects Made and Unmade?</i>	14:30-14:45	Coffee
11:30-12:00	Discussion <b>Peter Schweitzer</b>	14:45-15:15	<b>Darcy Pan</b> <i>Storing data on the margins: making a big data valley in the mountains of Guizhou</i>
12:00-13:00	Lunch	15:15-15:45	<b>Ezgi Özdemir</b> <i>Owning the state: Politics of water and the infrastructural state(s) in north Cyprus</i>
		15:45-16:15	Discussion <b>Jerome Whittington</b>
DAY 2 Friday 13 September 2019			
	<b>Session 3</b> Chair: Hege Høyer Leivestad		<b>Session 4</b> Chair: Gabriella Körling
9:30-10:00	<b>Ilda Lourenco Lindell</b> <i>Transport infrastructure projects, unanticipated publics and the reconfiguring of authority in central Maputo</i>	13:15-14:15	Keynote address <b>Ashley Carse</b> <i>Unbuilt and unfinished: The temporalities of infrastructure</i>
10:00-10:30	<b>Gediminas Lesutis</b> <i>Infrastructure as Tehcno-Politics of Differentiation: Various Publics of the Standard Gauge Railway in Kenya</i>		
10:30-10:45	Coffee	14:15-14:45	<b>Cristiana Strava</b> <i>Projecting the Future: Temporalities of Mega-Infrastructure in Morocco</i>
10:45-11:15	<b>Olga Povoroznyuk</b> <i>Ambiguous Entanglements: Infrastructuring (Im)Mobility and Indigeneity along the Baikal-Amur Mainline</i>		
11:15-11:45	<b>Mateusz Laszczkowski</b> <i>Infrastructural Inversion as a Strategy of Resistance: Counter-Expertise in Anti-High Speed Rail Protest in Alpine Italy</i>	15:00-15:30	<b>Austin Zeiderman</b> <i>Fluid Security: Protecting Flows along a Colombian Logistics Corridor</i>
11:45-12:15	Discussion: <b>Peter Schweitzer</b>	15:30-16:00	<b>Susann Baez Ullberg</b> <i>Water Works: Temporal Assemblages of Hydraulic Infrastructures in Peru</i>
12:15-13:15	Lunch	16:00-16:30	Discussion: <b>Jerome Whittington</b>
		16:30-17:00	<i>Conclusion and Departure</i> Gabriella Körling & Susann Baez Ullberg