

The influence of local community stakeholders in megaprojects: Rethinking their inclusiveness to improve project performance



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KEYWORDS

- Megaproject
- Local community
- Benefits realisation
- Body of knowledge

Article Highlight:

This paper seeks to identify connections and major assumptions on the influence of stakeholders in major public infrastructure and construction (PIC) projects at the local community level, through looking at the literature on a number of different research projects.

The authors particularly look at how the interests of the local community affected by major PIC projects often differ from those of the project.

What does the paper cover?

Infrastructure spending is mainly driven by large-scale projects (megaprojects), as more and larger PIC projects are proposed and introduced to deliver goods and services.

Construction megaprojects attract attention because they have high impacts on people, budgets and urban spaces. They can be seen as producing local impact but not local benefits, have improved little in recent years and are often blighted by misrepresentation and flawed decision making.

Research has generally overlooked the human social needs around PIC project developments, which are essential for ethical and sustainable development over time. Project managers need to be attuned to the cultural, organisational and social environments surrounding projects.

A better and more inclusive approach to stakeholder management could improve the performance of these projects. It could reduce planning misjudgement and increase transparency and accountability in decision-making processes.

Methodology:

The authors looked at 91 papers published between 1997 and 2015 in a broad range of English language peer reviewed journals.

They developed an organising framework of the papers, with three areas to investigate: megaprojects; stakeholder analysis; and local community.

Among the 91 selected papers, the markets investigated were predominantly in Europe (22 per cent), America (13 per cent) and Asia (11 per cent), though another 16 per cent looked at multinational major PIC projects.

Research findings:

Local opposition is a common threat for megaprojects whereby external groups try to influence the implementation of projects; often referred to as 'not in my backyard' (NIMBY).

But rather than dismissing NIMBYism as blanket opposition to any kind of megaprojects, it can be argued that it should be recognised as an expression of people's needs and fears. There is therefore a need for project managers to better understand and analyse the concerns, needs and moral issues of local people, and to do so throughout a project's entire duration.

Practitioners and academics have generally focused on how megaprojects relate to national government and large organisations. Local community stakeholders are usually excluded from a project's communication plan, with negative implications for the success of projects. Very little research has so far examined the social implications of megaprojects at the local community level.

Conclusions:

- There is limited knowledge about the broader involvement of local community stakeholders in PIC projects, which is perhaps due to the methods used to engage with them.
- Stakeholder management in PIC projects usually focus on those stakeholders who control project resources, such as suppliers, sponsors and customers.
- Seeking the opinions of the local community in the early stages of a project and monitoring its impact at the local level can help secure the project's success.

Significance of the research:

The conclusions of this paper provide academics and practitioners with suggestions for further research and practical implications for an approach to stakeholder management that is more inclusive than is usually the case today.

Future research could, for example, look into the social effects of megaprojects on the local community during different phases of a project.

Comments from the authors:

This paper has been further developed into a more recent article:

Project manager's perception of the local communities' stakeholder in megaprojects: an empirical investigation in the UK, published in the *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol number 36.3. F. Di Maddaloni and K. Davis (2018) p. 542–565, available at: [sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0263786317307871](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0263786317307871).

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Complete article

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Glossary:

Megaproject

A set of projects which together support a common strategic goal, cost many millions, and take many years to complete.

Benefits realisation

The identification, definition, planning, tracking and realisation of business benefits.

Body of knowledge

A set of standard terminology and guidelines for project management.



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