DISRUPTIVE AND CONTENTIOUS ENTERPRISES: MEGAPROJECTS IN BILBAO, ISTANBUL AND HONG KONG

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Abstract

In order to increase their global visibility, many cities have undertaken in the past two decades' strategies of revitalization and re-development that in many cases include the construction of emblematic megaprojects, often iconic buildings from an architectural point of view. The expectation was that such iconic buildings and structures would internationalize the city, put it "on the map", attract global investments, visitors and tourists, and thus contribute to solve the perennial problem of improving the welfare and prosperity of urbanites. The city of Bilbao, Spain, is a legendary example (one that is more successful than others) of this focus on urban development via construction of spectacular architecture in times of globalization.

This paper discusses contentious aspects in the planning and development of megaprojects in three cities around the world: Bilbao, Istanbul and Hong Kong. Our purpose is to lay out the variety of controversies, difficulties, obstacles, negative impacts and civic opposition associated to the construction of urban projects in the three cities. We will show that the nature and the shaping of projects owes to the socio-economic, developmental, institutional and geographic context where they emerge. However, we will also see that urban megaprojects, regardless of context, constitute *disruptive and contentious enterprises* and have an intrinsic potential (often realized) to elicit substantial controversy and criticism that fundamentally questions the parameters of the projects as envisioned and publicly presented by their promoters. As a result, it is possible to highlight – as will be done in the conclusion to this paper -- some suggestions for future research and policy practice aiming at urban sustainability that can be applied to the planning, design, management, implementation and development of megaprojects worldwide. The list of negative impacts of megaprojects is long: cost overruns, negative environmental impacts, gentrification risks, drawbacks of top-down cultural engineering, neglect of local cultural identities, an uncertain economic success, population displacements, the spoiling of cities´ visual and structural uniqueness, rise of congestion and overpopulation, political gridlock, threats for ecosystems, environmental risks of many kinds, etc.

In this paper, we specifically claim that megaprojects are disruptive and contentious enterprises. They are *disruptive enterprises* in that they substantially modify the physical appearance of cities and their urban fabric, often triggering socio-economic imbalances and realignments in urban power arrangements in growth machines and civil society. Megaprojects also require substantial financial investments which, in practice, may drain out local budgets and substantially alter the priorities of local governments. Megaprojects are also *contentious enterprises* because of the complex make up of stakeholders with conflicting interests in their planning, construction, management and governance. This often results in major obstacles for megaproject implementation, the strategic misrepresentation of costs and benefits, optimism bias among planners and promoters about megaproject impacts and, as a result, a widespread perception among urbanites that these structures are negative for their cities.

In view of all of these drawbacks, it seems reasonable to think that better investment opportunities exist for cities, but very often these opportunities are not priorized given the hegemonic neoliberal urban discourse that focus on growth, international visibility and competition in the global arena. Based on the evidence in the three cases (Bilbao, Istanbul, Hong Kong) we highlight some of the keys to ensure that urban leaders (and urbanites themselves as creators and re-creators of the places they inhabit) cease to prioritize neoliberal development models based on megaprojects and work to organize sustainable urban ecosystems from an ecological, environmental and socio-economic perspective.

Keywords: Disruptive megaprojects; contentious megaprojects; Bilbao; Istanbul; Hong Kong

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1. Introduction

For the past few decades, scholars have tried to make sense of an "urban moment" of increasing global attention to the relevance of cities for the evolution and development of nations. The unstoppable population growth in the cities of the planet has only intensified this interest in the urban realm. Cities are today analyzed as lenses through which we can observe and study the main socio-economic phenomena tied to globalization, which marks the evolution of humankind in the beginnings of the 21st century. Further, cities are no longer understood exclusively as individual and discontinuous places, but rather as nodes in networks and flows of transnational capital, matter (goods and services), energy, information and people. Strategically positioning cities in the global network has become a major strategy of economic development for urban elites.

In order to increase their global visibility, many cities have undertaken in the past two decades strategies of revitalization and re-development that in many cases include the construction of emblematic megaprojects, often iconic buildings from an architectural point of view. The expectation was that such iconic buildings and structures would internationalize the city, put it "on the map", attract global investments, visitors and tourists, and thus contribute to solve the perennial problem of improving the welfare and prosperity of urbanites. The city of Bilbao, Spain, is a legendary example (one that is more successful than others) of this focus on urban development via construction of spectacular architecture in times of globalization.

We are heirs to the globalized city, in which it is not possible to conceive anything but the regeneration of areas adjacent to rivers and bays, the recovery of zones previously dedicated to storage and manufacturing, the construction of new transportation infrastructures or the extension of existing ones, as well as the renewal of historical centers. However, the Manhattanization of the world – and the urban political economy that sustains it – also presents difficulties and can create several structural obstacles with direct consequences for the design and implementation of megaprojects in globalizing cities and regions.

2. Disruptive and Contentious Enterprises

A case in point is Dubai, a megaproject set in crisis after the recession that started in 2008. After years in which one could regularly find news about the new architectural marvels of the world constructed in Dubai (including sets of artificial residential islands), the situation has been one of hypertrophy for this onetime urban vision. The bubble burst, and the model of Dubai became yesterday's news. Beginning in September 2008, real estate prices fell, and those who had gotten accustomed to positive news on the emirate were rubbing their eyes in disbelief. The glowing reviews about a permanent acceleration in megaproject construction – when Dubai was considered to be the dynamic and innovative center of the Arabic Peninsula – had turned into disbelief, first, and an admission of defeat not exempt of irony, later. The Emirate was bailed out by Abu-Dhabi, and the economic situation has improved in recent years, but a big weakness for Dubai remains: the city lacks a consistent concept of society, with more than 90% of its immigrants having very limited rights and unlikely to reside there permanently (Chan, 2015; Elsheshtawy, 2009).

Situations of economic recession are only one of many obstacles faced by megaproject construction. Another is of a political nature, in particular the lack of strong metropolitan

governments provided with the necessary instruments to undertake big projects that can transform the urban image and the urban fabric. Such is the case of Mumbai, which is determined to "Shanghaize" itself, although major challenges loom. Unlike in China – where the redistribution of local, regional, and national power has not been a zero-sum game in which the local governments have gained power at the expense of the central government – the deliberate "Shanghaization" of Mumbai has seen the competition between different scales of government result in the concentration of power and resources at the metropolitan level, creating a power gap for the development of urban megaprojects. In China, the redistribution of power has taken place between the different levels, enabling the country to proceed with UMP construction and generally to better adapt to the requirements of the global economy (Weinstein & Ren, 2009).

The organizational obstacles in megaproject development are not minor. Bent Flyvbjerg (2003) already warned of these problems in *Megaprojects and Risk* with examples of big infrastructure projects in Europe. The development of an urban megaproject is usually completed in various phases, and therefore many rearrangements, corrections, additions, and errors occur, not to mention the usual incapability by developers to limit the final expenses to the initial budget (so-called "cost overruns"). All this produces a lack of transparency that is increasingly difficult to support in view of the increasing activity of civil society, which organizes itself to face the ambitions of the political and economic elites. To cite some examples, megaprojects under construction in Budapest, New York, Paris, and Sao Paulo all illustrate the idea that, in the absence of clear and diaphanous planning – and although the state and the promoters try to explain the genesis and the impacts of the megaprojects – the whole process is perceived as dark and secret. Sometimes, this circumstance is used by the state to violate agreements and contracts of public interest and to reverse previous decisions, as has happened with the National Theater of Budapest, according to Judit Bodnar and Judit Veres (2013).

We cannot forget either that sometimes UMPs develop in conflict situations – as shown by Alexandra Miller´s work on the Afghan Ring Road (2013) – and that organized resistance to megaprojects can be of such a caliber that the state and the promoters fail to carry them out. This happened to Mexico City´s proposed international airport project, which has been defeated because of the divisions between and within the political class and citizens initially triggered by the progressive democratization, decentralization, and globalization of the country. Diane E. Davis and Onésimo Flores Dewey (2013) argue that, in the Mexican case, it is also necessary to bear in mind the increasing power of the local state, which favors the civil opposition. The authors also underscore the importance of factors such as cultural identity, historical allegiances, and the geographical location in the mobilization of a wide array of local, national, and international allies against the airport.

A lesson of the Mexican case can be that bureaucratic ambiguities and tensions exist with regard to who is responsible for the principal projects of infrastructure in countries that experience a democratic transition. Such ambiguities and tensions can debilitate the proponents of a project and reinforce its opponents. This political and institutional baggage can also prevent urban planning authorities from learning how to respond to past experiences with citizen participation and civil opposition. Thus, the authors argue that the defeat of the airport megaproject in Mexico City was as much a reflection of a precarious moment in the political and economic development of the country as it was of the validity and legitimacy of the protests against the project itself.

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Another contentious aspect of megaprojects is the planning, design and implementation of their iconic character, and the benefits that are assumed to be associated with such iconicity. Capturing a share of the world's mobile wealth is foundational to the justification of megaprojects. Protagonists embrace a narrative of international competitiveness, framing a project discourse that is dominated by the rhetoric of economic competitiveness for survival and development.

From an urban-spatial perspective, this entails that cities need to become "visible" and attractive to international capital. The "icon project" (Sklair, 2017), that is, the widespread construction of architectural icons in globalizing cities around the world, accomplishes these goals. The construction of iconic urban megaprojects (IUMPs) has grown into a standard policy choice by urban and regional elites in globalizing cities. Politicians, business leaders and others in local and regional growth machines fulfill their personal and professional ambitions by investing in and promoting iconic urban megaprojects, aspiring to reach global status and positive economic change for their cities.

In what follows, we discuss contentious aspects in the planning and development of megaprojects in three cities around the world: Bilbao, Istanbul and Hong Kong. Our purpose is to lay out the variety of controversies, difficulties, obstacles, negative impacts and civic opposition associated to the construction of urban projects. We will show that the nature and the shaping of projects owes to the socio-economic, developmental, institutional and geographic context where they emerge.

However, we will also see that urban megaprojects, regardless of context, constitute *disruptive and contentious enterprises* and have an intrinsic potential (often realized) to elicit substantial controversy and criticism that fundamentally questions the parameters of the projects as envisioned and publicly presented by their promoters. As a result, it is possible to highlight – as will be done in the conclusion to this paper -- some suggestions for future research and policy practice that can be applied to the planning, design, management, implementation and development of megaprojects worldwide.

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3.   Shadows of the Bilbao Effect

Many urban elites worldwide have been greatly influenced by the so-called "Bilbao effect" – the perception that the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao resulted in a "Cinderella transformation" of the Northern Spanish city and economic capital of the Basque Country. In the dominant discourse concerning architecture's surrender to capitalism's commercial goals, the Guggenheim Bilbao has been and remains to be mistakenly and repeatedly portrayed as the "catalyst" for the city's radically successful transformation from industrial powerhouse to regional service center.

However, many cases around the world, for example the new Ordos Art Museum in Inner Mongolia, beautifully designed by MAD, a prestigious firm of Beijing architects, suggest (not too surprisingly) that just building a terrific museum is not enough to ensure success. The city of Ordos has sprung up fast and is relatively wealthy, thanks to discoveries of oil and gas, but the museum has no collections and precious few plans for exhibitions. No wonder it is devoid of visitors. As Michael Kimmelman put it:

"The truth is; the Bilbao effect is largely a myth. Frank Gehry's museum alone didn't turn around that city. It capped decades of civic renewal. Flashy, even brilliant buildings rarely rejuvenate neighborhoods or guarantee crowds and cash just by virtue of their design [...] Sadly, museums, like cities, have squandered fortunes praying to this false idol. They still do" (Kimmelman, 2012, 31).

As I have shown elsewhere (del Cerro Santamaría, 2007), the Guggenheim Bilbao has been a positive addition to the city, but far from the "miracle" that would turn Bilbao into a successful urban economy.

The debate on the "Bilbao effect" (how iconic megaprojects can successfully bring about urban transformation, development and competitiveness), however, continues. The Guggenheim in Abu Dhabi, scheduled to open in 2017 but still pending as of March 2019, will be twice the size of the museum in Bilbao, twelve times the size of the Frank Lloyd Wright Guggenheim in New York. Carol Vogel in The New York Times refers to this Gehry design as "a graceful tumble of giant plaster building blocks and translucent blue cones" (Vogel, 2014). The outcome of the Guggenheim Helsinki's international competition was known in June 2015, with the winning project going to the Paris-based firm Moreau Kusunoki Architectes (by Fall 2016, the city of Helsinki voted against the project and construction never started).

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These two projects have attracted significant criticism; they have been questioned along three main lines: (1) iconic architecture is no longer the hegemonic visual discourse in urban revitalization; (2) the franchise model imposed by the Guggenheim means that local officials have no autonomy to make major decisions on matters from exhibition calendars, to budgets and investments; and (3) local cultural identities are usually neglected under a foreign global arts model. In addition, the environmental impacts of the projects may not be negligible. The Abu-Dhabi project has also been controversial around issues of workers's rights and labor conditions. In spite of mounting criticism, if the new Guggenheim Museum in the United Arab Emirates results in even half the impact of that of Bilbao's, the term "Bilbao effect" will continue to carry weight on both sides of the debate.

To be sure, the Bilbao effect faced significant criticism and skepticism among numerous architecture and art connoisseurs. Chicago Tribune critic Blair Kamin noted that the rise of "starchitects" poses a broad set of questions about the impact of globalization on an art that is ultimately local. The critic located the beginning of the trend in the 1976 Houston Pennzoil Place, dubbed by the residents "the milk cartoons." He noted that the fashion spread to other cities such as Chicago in the 1980s, where architects were put in charge to,

"design eye-catching creations that would enhance a building's marketability […] There is something […] to be gleaned from starchitects, but only if they are willing to look deeply at [a city] and to adapt their work to the city's essence and its economics" (Kamin, 2002, 56).

Architectural critic Witold Rybczynski asked whether the cities commissioning new museums by starchitects can become the next Bilbao in terms of visitors. He noted that attendance at the Experience Music Project in Seattle, designed by Frank Gehry for Paul Allen in 1996, decreased by a third eighteen months after the museum opened, while the number of visitors to the local art museum increased by more than a third during the same period. Recently a portion of the building was converted into a science-fiction museum. Despite its unusual architecture, consisting of colorful, rounded forms said to be inspired by electric guitars, the museum of rock music and Jimi Hendrix memorabilia, the Experience Music Project has not proven to be a success. Rybczynski was

"skeptical that designing in the full glare of public competitions encourages architects to produce better buildings. The charged atmosphere promotes flamboyance rather than careful thought, and favors the glib and obvious over the subtle and nuanced" (Rybczynski, 2002, 65).

More recently, Rybczynski has argued that "perhaps the Bilbao effect should be called the Bilbao anomaly," since "the iconic chemistry between the design of a building, its image and the public turns out to be quite rare, and somewhat mysterious" (Rybczynski, 2008, 81).

"Herzog & de Meuron's design for Beijing's Olympic Stadium is ingenious, for example, but instead of the complex engineering, it was the widely perceived image of a "bird's nest," a nickname that did not originate with the architects, that cemented the building's international iconic status. The woven steel wrapper seemed to symbolize both China's ancient traditions and its rush to modernization. However, for every bird's nest there are scores of building failures that are not only costly, but fail to spark the public's imagination. Failed icons do not disappear though, which is indeed problematic. Since the Bilbao effect mistakenly teaches that unconventional architecture is a prerequisite for iconic status, clients have encouraged their

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architects to go to greater lengths to design buildings that are unusual, surprising and even shocking. The shock, however, will inevitably wear off, and 100 years from now most aspiring iconic constructions will resemble a cross between a theme park and the Las Vegas strip" (Rybczynski, 2008, 84).

Despite the media success of the Bilbao Guggenheim, the Bilbao effect has proven to be difficult to replicate in most places, even for Frank Gehry. On the other hand, some architectural icons, such as Gehry's Stata Center at MIT, work well with no Bilbao effect -- most MIT scientists working in the building praise its playful and inventive feel (Campbell, 2007). Cooper Union alum Daniel Libeskind's jagged edges, sharp angles and complex geometries (the extension to the Denver Art Museum, the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto or the Danish Jewish Museum in Copenhagen) have not had the universal acclaim of his Jewish Museum Berlin, an illustration that success, impact and visitor attraction are not necessarily a function of a building's spectacular design. Many works by Shigeru Ban or Tadao Ando are excellent examples of highly admired and successful architecture in the antipodes of iconic buildings designed to stun.

The jury is still out in 2019 regarding not only Gehry's highly anticipated Guggenheim Abu-Dhabi but also the massive West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) in Hong Kong, which stand among the most prominent cultural megaprojects in recent years. The WKCD is a project of such scale and ambition that it could "define the nature of the public realm in the 21st century," according to a rather hyperbolic statement by Rem Koolhaas (Koolhaas, 2013). The WKCD has met significant criticism from the planning to construction phases. Though a Guggenheim is not part of the project, the WKCD replicates all the expected controversies associated with IUMPs, including cost overruns, negative environmental impacts, gentrification risks, drawbacks of top-down cultural engineering, neglect of local cultural identities, and uncertain economic success, as we discuss below. None of these externalities bode well for cities that are counting on instant icons to salvage them during times of economic malaise.

4. The Controversial Rebuilding of Istanbul

When the Haliç, or Golden Horn, a major urban waterfront and the primary inlet of the Bosphorus in Istanbul, started to be developed, there were views that the project would not yield significant economic benefits nor improve the quality of life of the residents, but would rather create a risk for gentrification of the urban area. The emphasis on creating shopping malls, parks, luxurious hotels and convention centres to attract tourists led to the demolishment of housing and the displacement of local populations. The Fener and Balat Rehabilitation Project is a good example of this phenomenon. The aim of this project was to improve the housing quality of the residents in the Fener and Balat area by providing 225 buildings with basic levels of comfort over a four-year period. It was started in 1997 with a joint intervention by the Fatih District Municipality, UNESCO and the European Union (Bezmez, 2008). Seventy percent of the buildings needed to be demolished due to their physical conditions, resulting in the removal of 900 families (Columbia, 2015).

Also, the development of large infrastructure increased the land market values of the surrounding areas, making the land unaffordable for the middle class. According to Gunay et al, "an investigation of land market values in Beyoglu and Fatih Municipalities has proved that the value per square meter in Karaagac Street reached $2,200 in 2011, while it was $195 in 2009

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and $120 in 2004. One square meter in the residential areas, toward the slope of the hill, has increased in value from $50 in 2009 to $800 in 2011. In commercial areas, the prices begin at $6,500 per square meter. A similar increase in the land values can be seen in the neighborhoods surrounding Kadir Has University, Rahmi Koc Industrial Museum, and even in the renewal areas of Ayvansaray and Fener–Balat. For example, in the Leblebiciler and Mursel Pasa Streets of Ayvansaray, the value of one square meter of land is $900; in Balat's Vodina Street it is $620. The prices of historic buildings are between $162,000 and $650,000; and the rents for restored ones are between $970 and $2,600" (Gunay et al, 2012, 216).

4.1   Resistance from the Local Population

In the Fener Balat Rehabilitation Project, although there have been measures taken by the government to prevent gentrification, such as excluding buildings that were bought after 1997 from the rehabilitation project and preventing owners from selling their properties within five years of completion of the restorations, the measures were vague and hence the local community still voiced out their dissatisfaction against the government. As Bezmez explains,

"there were several reasons for their protest. First, the idea that their houses were restored without any contribution from their part seemed unrealistic, making them fear that they were going to be gentrified and forced to cover the expenses. Second, most residents transformed the buildings such that a house could fit several families, therefore a return to the original building would provide them with much inconvenience. Third, a restriction that the residents could not sell their house in the next five years seemed impossible given their financial situation. Fourth, there were rumors that the project started with the intention to revive Istanbul's non-Muslim past and not to improve the living standards of the residents. Due to opposition of the project, the rehabilitation was halted and delayed" (Bezmez, 2008, 823).

4.2   Preservation of the Golden Horn Identity

The Golden Horn Cultural Valley Project has attracted significant tourism to the area. Miniaturk reached 494,835 visitors in 2010, the Rahmi Koc Museum reached 134,000 in 2011; the Feshane Exhibition Centre receives 2 million visitors per year and the Pierre Loti Hill has been receiving around 1,000 visitors per day. Although the development of green areas and tourism improved the quality of the area, there were also threats that the public area might eventually be privatized by the surrouding cultural complexes. The Rahmi Koc Industrial Museum expanded by purchasing Tekel land, and the Kadir Has University also started to occupy more public spaces, such as changing the name and closing the street in front of the local university.

The Fener-Balat renewal project has also been criticized as being a land development project rather than an identity-conservation project. A UNESCO/WHC committee also critcized the urban renewal projects as a potential threat to the Horn's integrity. More than 600 historical factories and warehouses were demolished for reconstruction of larger complexes. In addition, the Golden Horn metro bridgen involved the construction of two towers that looked like horns and obstructed the views of the historical peninsula. Tellingly, the committee proposed to include the area in the "List of World Heritage Sites in Danger" (Gunay et al, 2012; Seibert, 2011). According to Gunay et al:

"Waterfronts are important resources for creating economic boosters such as tourism, business development and inward investment; and culture may provide a profitable and powerful instrument for city governments to acquire a competitive advantage in a world marked by globalization [...]. However, culture-led approaches can act as a driving force within urban development agenda only if they are integrated with other urban policies [...]. To maximize the benefits, there is a need to balance cultural production and consumption, to make culture accessible to the community and attractive to visitors, and to generate vibrancy to draw the interest of potential stakeholders" (Gunay et al, 2012, 45).

4.3 Public Private Partnerships

First, developments of the private sector led to cultural monopoly of the district. Despite efforts from private flagship projects to develop cultural icons on the Golden Horn, this role is not reflected into the urban structure of the area, instead, they became cultural monopoles of their districts. For instance, despite the strong cultural infrastructure of Beyoglu, which is agglomerated mostly at Galata and Taksim districts, Rahmi Koc is still a cultural node in Beyoglu, shifting the cultural focus of other vibrant districts. The Rahmi Koc museum is the first major museum in Turkey dedicated to the history of Transport, Industry and Communications. Although the collection in the museum and international events they organized, they still stand as monopoles of their district. It is because these flagship projects serves as a symbolic landmark rather than a cultural institution for the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods.

For instance, while the inhabitants consider the Rahmi Koc Museum as a landmark, this feature did not go beyond merely describing the space in which they work. Local citizens have only visited the museum once or twice and never participated in the cultural activities which are far from their interests. Second, the private sector acted as the dominant actor of the development of the Golden Horn. "In the case of the Rahmi Koc museum, the ministry of culture wanted to privatize Lengerhand and Haskoy Shipyard but there wasn't any specific function to put forward within the Golden Horn cultural valley concept. Yet after demands from the Rahmi Koc Foundation, the government adopted the demand and accepted the Rahmi Koc Foundation's project" (Bakbasa et al, 2013, 526).

4.4 Political Confrontations

When different mayors and parties were in charge of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM), the central government embraced different values and views towards the development of the Golden Horn, hence affecting the effectiveness and efficiency of development. In Mayor Dalan's term, the Turkish Clothing Manufacturers Association was interested in Feshane, a historical site of textile factories around the Golden Horn. The association was planning to use the building as an exhibition centre for the products of the association's members and also to rent out to exhibition organizers. The IMM would retain ownership of the building and rent it to the association on a long lease, therefore enjoying part of the profit. Dalan approved of this project hastily and even started restoration work before an initial agreement was signed.

However, the social-democratic mayor Nurettin Sozen was elected before Dalan could sign an official contract with the association, even if the association had already incurred significant expenses. As a result, Sozen called the operation to a halt by delaying the project with "every possible obstacle." At last, the association decided to give up the project. In the 1990s, the

Eczacibasi Group, an industrial group in Turkey, wanted to turn Feshane into Istanbul's Museum of Modern Art. Similar to The Clothing Manufacturers Association, the Eczabasi Group was supposed to sign a long lease with the IMM and cover all the financial expenses of the redevelopment. Yet tension rose between the IMM and the industrial group after a plan including substantial expenses was put forward to restore Feshane. The project was abandoned (Bezmez, 2008, 830).

4.5   Vision 2023: Environmental Issues

In 2017, UNESCO declared Istanbul a "design city," pursued by the Turkish government as part of their "Vision 2023," which aims at the centennial of the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey. The threefold mega-development in Istanbul associated with the government's "Vision 2023" defines a set of goals centered around the further economic growth of the city and its nomination as a global hub.

"The first part of this development is Istanbul's Third Bridge in conjunction with the Northern Marmara Motorway. The second part consists of the Third airport situated in the North-West of the city, which is to become the world's biggest airport. In the same part also falls a plan concerning the development of a new city near the airport including multiple facilities (e.g. hotels, retail and commercial office space and logistic centers), which is to be connected with the existing city via high-speed underground and aboveground fixed-track infrastructure. The third part is Kanal Istanbul, located west of the Bosporus Strait, providing an alternative passage for vessels. This canal essentially bisects the European side of Turkey and creates a new island between Asia and Europe" (Dogan & Stupar, 2017, 284).

The above megaprojects represent serious challenges ranging from huge funding requirements, mostly undertaken by taxpayers, to significant impacts on urban structure, the natural environment and the community. As far as impacts on urban structure are concerned, according to Dogan & Stupar, "they are probable to be adverse by spoiling the visual and structural uniqueness of the city's environment and intensifying urban activities, leading to a further rise of population as well as a shift in urban density. The latter is expected to have synergetic effects with the construction of the Third Bridge, concerning the exacerbation of traffic congestion caused by the promotion of private vehicles" (Dogan & Stupar, 2017, 286).

The environmental issues are probably the biggest concern of this mega-development: "The Third Bridge and its associated motorway passes through the northern border of the Belgrad Forest (adjacent to Istanbul) at the European side and the Bosporus Biodiversity Area, creating serious threats for a wide range of local habitats and intensifying the heat island effect. At the same time, noise and air pollution are expected to increase due to Istanbul New Airport (set to start in March, 2019, and with no official name yet due to political controversy), which is also to be placed on the migration routes of birds. The Kanal Istanbul is likely to trigger irreversible environmental disaster, taking into account the inversion of the hydrologic balance between the cold and fresh waters of the Black Sea and the warm and salty waters of Mediterranean Sea. Finally, the lack of community engagement as shown by the low level of public awareness of the above risks as well as the potential need for expropriations in order to empty lands for construction are characteristic of the impacts of this mega-development on the local community" (Dogan & Stupar, 2017, 287).

5. The Business of Culture in Hong Kong

In spite of oficial statements about the focus on culture for Hong Kong's motivation in the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD), the project is viewed as largely focused on economic values, emphasizing tourism.

"The development of tourism has not been intended to promote culture, but instead to enhance Hong Kong as a 'traditional economic stronghold' as declared by the first Chief Executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Tung Chee-wah. He stated in his 1998 policy speech, during an economic crisis in Hong Kong, that it was the government's plan to distinguish Hong Kong as 'Asia's world city' and 'Asia's entertainment capital' through megaprojects. After the Asian financial crisis in 1997-99, the "promised" outcomes of megaprojects, as shown in Bilbao, Pittsburgh, Baltimore and other cities attracted Hong Kong leaders" (Lui 2008, 65).

5.1 Favoring Globalized Art Industry, Excluding Local Artists

Major museums such as the Pompidou Center and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation became interested in building a museum in Hong Kong as a part of the WKCD (Vogel 2005). President Jacques Chirac of France visited Hong Kong in October 2004 to express the Pompidou Center's interest, while Thomas Krens, former Director of the Guggenheim Foundation, had publicly described the initiative as "the most exciting opportunity in the world because of the scale and the location." (Bradsher 2006) The WKCD project

"has hired expertise from world-class art museums and faculties from prestigious higher education institutions as consultants for the project. For example, Lars Nittve, a former Director of the Tate Modern in London and the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, has been appointed Executive Director of the M+ Contemporary Arts Museum" (Chen 2013, 38).

The involvement of Western cultural institutions concerned local artists, "as these institutions emphasized global artists' works and thus new arts collectors and revenue for the city at the expense of local artists and cultural groups" (Sum, 2010). Local artists were aware of Hong Kong's status as a sort of "cultural desert" in past decades and "aimed to cultivate a unique, locality-based set of initiatives for cultural industries within the city" (Chu, 2010).

Some scholars argued that the development proposals for WKCD fail to enhance the local heritage as the project focuses on "the bundle sale of the development of creative industries" (Lui 2008). Civic groups such as Project Hong Kong and Citizen Envisioning a Harbour have expressed the locals' concern "over a project that will only benefit the real estate developers and the urban elites with a marked preference for Western tastes" (Sum 2010).

Local artists and civil society in Hong Kong "doubt whether the new billion-dollar arts facilities will exhibit meaningful Works" (Lau, 2011), and others even argue that such facilities are an outdated concept in the 21st century (Van der Kamp, 2014). With these concerns over the necessity of large constructions, there is a voice from civil society to develop 'software' (social institutions that support cultural industries) rather than 'hardware' (Wong, 2004).

While the developments in WKCD were in progress for years, international art fairs such as Art Basel have been strengthening Hong Kong's position as one of the main artistic hubs of Asia, thus overcoming prior marginalization from mainland China. Indirectly,

"the fairs have been helping the galleries to come in the city and leading to globalization of the art market in Hong Kong. In 2012, a majority of China's 25 percent share of the global art market was based in Hong Kong. The city is now the third-largest art auction center in the world. The perception of Hong Kong and its position as a major art hub has been strengthened as a result of the fair and positive cultural developments throughout the city" (Chen 2013, 112).

5.2   Donors and Museum Directors

When Lars Nittve, the famed Swedish museum curator, was hired as the Executive Director of M+ (the museum of visual culture in the WKCD), he lobbied Uli Sigg, a former Swiss diplomat and an important private collector of contemporary Chinese art. The lobbying paid off in 2012, when Mr. Sigg donated 1,463 works worth HK$1.3b, or about $165m (Lau, 2014). Sigg chose to donate to the museum in Hong Kong in order to avoid censorship from Chinese government. For art works that can be questioned for their politically charged intentions, Hong Kong is the safer ground in China. Due to this, some artists support the WKCD project in spite of all the controversies and negative effects for the local art community.

5.3   Developers and Politicians

Populist politicians in Hong Kong denounced the early versions of the plan as too generous to developers. Tung Chee-hwa, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, initially planned to hand over the entire project to one large developer as expressed in his annual policy address. The plan was decried as a subsidy to the city's wealthiest developer, Li Ka-shing. Even many of Tung's longtime allies among business leaders did not support him in his plan for the WKCD. The plan was revised in October 2005, calling for a lead developer to build half of the residential and commercial real estate on the WKCD Peninsula, while other developers could bid for the rest. The revised rule was objected by the three wealthy developers who submitted proposals under the initial rules (Bradsher 2006).

The project was also criticized as property development rather than cultural project due to its connections to the large scale retail industry as well as commercial and residential development interests (Sum 2010).   The government funding primarily supports shopping, dining and entertainment facilities with expectation of revenues, which is beneficial to the city's wealthy developers. Not surprisingly, raising prices of properties in the neighborhoods could be detected as early as 2010, and continue today (Lau 2011).

Helen Siu and Agnes Ku, Sociology professors at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, examined the WKCD project and the Hong Kong's attempt to build a "global city." They explain the relationship among different sectors involved in the project with the local institutional structure and processes, defined by "the cultural policy and institutional framework in colonial times — characterized by non-interventionism and top-down drive under a fragmentary yet centralized structure" (Siu and Ku 2008). Siu and Ku articulate that

"top-down decision-making structures and the lack of voice from cultural practitioners under globalization has undermined cultural citizenship and civil society in the dominant discourse of globalization. For instance, the People's Panel on West Kowloon (PPWK) was set up by activists in the cultural sector and civic organizations to re-examine the project, seeking cooperation among government, property developers, and civil society. Yes, this Panel never became operative" (Siu & Ku, 2008, 81).

A Consultative Committee (CC) and a Core Arts and Cultural Facilities Committee were also established to oversee the provision of cultural infrastructure along with the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority (WKCDA), which oversees the WKCD project. With the WKDCA, the government attempted to distance itself from the awarding of development contracts with the intention "to be seen as more 'democratic' and engaged with a newly 'liberated' citizenry" (Raco & Giliam, 2012). The public outcry forced the government to reconsider and to fix the original project plan. Yet, the trust in government from the locals is substantially lacking in Hong Kong, and the widespread bribery scandals between developers and politicians generated increased criticism toward the project.

"A corruption trial involving former Chief Secretary Rafael Hui Si-yan in 2014 worsened the public perception of public officials by Hong Kong citizens. Hui allegedly received tens of millions of dollars from Sun Hung Kai Properties (SHKP) as a token of appreciation for his work to favor of SHKP's interests in the West Kowloon Project" (Chiu, 2014, 27).

5.4 Price of the Project: Need a Larger Budget

Working poor citizens bear the burden of paying the rising costs of the WKCDA's construction. A total of HK$950m has been spent on the WKCD project since 2008, and officials have announced plans to invest an additional HK$21.6b in the Project (Chow, 2013). The price increases are attributed to amendments and plan delays. Global ambition by urban elites has taken precedence over local concerns, which is a criticism that multiple civil society organizations have expressed over the years. Criticism also came from natural allies: the real estate industry questioned the success of the construction and accused the government of damaging their interests with excessive regulation in response to public protests in 2005 (Bradsher, 2006).

5.5 Academic Opinions of the Project

The WKCD project is a controversial megaproject, which seeks to globalize Hong Kong as an art hub city. Professor Tai-lok Lui, as many scholars who criticize the WKCD project, describes the proposal as an example of entrepreneurialism and neo-liberalism:

"The proposal was a typical package of urban entrepreneurialism, with an emphasis on chasing after mega-projects, iconic buildings and media visibility. But it avoided questions concerning the substance of the entire project, consensus from below and the vision of cultural development. Its failure shows that, without addressing these basic questions, city competition by means of developing global architecture, mega-projects and fabricated urban culture is inevitably futile" (Lui 2008, 82).

Moreover, some scholars point out that the WKCD has already failed to "globalize" Hong Kong, as the project has largely ignored the history, culture and identity of the city. The Brand Hong Kong program of which WKCD is part bears the mission "to provide a greater focus to the international promotion of Hong Kong as 'Asia's world city.'" The marketing strategy of the city's Brand Hong Kong program has, in its preoccupation with these values, marginalized others, according to Stephen Chu (2010). The Donald Tsang administration was keen on developing Hong Kong into a hub of Asian creative industries, but not a base for local creative industries to grow in. As long as the development of creative industries is being framed by the "Brand Hong Kong" concept, vernacular hybrid cultures and spaces cannot surface (Chu, 2010).

"The overwhelming emphasis on branding Hong Kong has ironically led to the loss of Hong Kong's intrinsic uniqueness: the blending of the global and the local into a hybrid emerging culture which is significantly 'glocal.'" […] "It attempts to assess the implications of the Brand Hong Kong program's failure in recognizing that the distinguishing characteristic of Hong Kong was its emergent community where genuine cosmopolitanisms found the space to emerge" (Chu 2010, 46).

5.6   Degradation in Surrounding Water Quality due to Reclamation and Sewage

The WKCD is constructed by reclamation of the Victoria Harbor. It was initially a trading harbor, and eventually became a tourist spot and an important transit path between the Kowloon Peninsula and Hong Kong Island. The Victoria Harbor provides a natural scenic asset to Hong Kong, claiming itself to be the "Pearl of the Orient" by the panoramic view seen from airplane windows or skyscrapers in Hong Kong. The Victoria Harbor has attracted 55% of the tourists coming to Hong Kong in recent years (Chan, 2000). Reclamation activities became intensified since the 1980s. The amount of land reclaimed from 2000 – 2005 is equivalent to the amount of land reclaimed in the last 100 years, and significant pieces of land reclaimed include 250 hectares of land for container terminals in the port.

The West Kowloon Project has reclaimed 40 hectares of land around the Victoria Harbor (WKCDA, 2013). During the construction phase it was expected "construction site runoff, pumped groundwater discharge, drainage diversion, sewage effluent and accidental spillage that contain high levels of suspended solids and chemicals such as oils, solvents and cement-derived materials." (WKCDA, 2013) The process of dredging is needed to remove unsuitable foundation and replace with large volumes of dredged sand, exacerbating water pollution in Hong Kong. Dredging reduced primary productivity in the sea, affecting the marine ecosystem since they are dependent on plants for sustenance (Chan, 2000).

"There is also a loss of sensitive species such as filter-feeding organisms, including scallops, mussels and oysters, which are essential to a vibrant seafood business around Hong Kong. There is also evidence that the Chinese White Dolphins, which is an endangered species unique to Hong Kong, is threatened since dredged materials compromise the well-being of Dolphin Sanctuary neighboring to East Sha Chau Contaminated Mud Pit, where the dredged contaminated mud is disposed of. There are only 85 Chinese Pink Dolphins out of the original 300, and those that survived were not expected to survive further reclamation" (Chan, 2000, 52).

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5.7   Poor Air Quality During Construction and Operational Phases

The WKCD is located next to the Western Tunnel Crossing, which connects West Kowloon across the harbor to Hong Kong Island and is one of the busiest locations in Hong Kong. It has one of the worst air qualities with average PM 2.5 concentration around the tunnel crossing at 63 micrograms/cubic meter, which far exceeds the World Health Organization's (WHO) air quality maximum threshold of 25mg/m3 (Clean Air Network, 2018).

During construction, activities such as excavation, stockpiles, the movement of vehicles, concrete batching and the activities of other plants during the loading and unloading operations added onto the already poor air quality around the area (WKCDA, 2013).

Other major infrastructure construction, such as the Western Harbor Crossing portal, the additional roads and car parks with the WKCD are also affecting the air quality surrounding the area. Since the newly reclaimed land would also accommodate for large number of people during mega events, the resulting pollution, traffic congestion and over-concentration will also aggravate the existing air pollution problem (Chan, 2000).

5.8   Landscape Impact on the Victoria Harbor

The project promised to build better landscape in the surrounding area of WKCD, including additions of ornamental plants, a piazza, park and avenue through innovative design. (WKCDA, 2013). Yet, the effects of greening the space might not be able to compensate for the other landscape impacts. For instance, along with the nearby Kowloon MTR station, Elements Mall International Commercial centers and several enormous apartment buildings are being constructed (Dewolf, 2011). Further plans show the construction of skyscrapers in the WKCD, further obstructing the view of the Victoria Harbor (Dewolf, 2011).

6.   Conclusions

This paper has presented and discussed evidence in three cities (Bilbao, Istanbul and Hong Kong) showing that megaprojects are disruptive and contentious enterprises triggering important economic, socio-political and environmental challenges that are often hard to resolve for the benefit of urban communities. The list is long: cost overruns, negative environmental impacts, gentrification risks, drawbacks of top-down cultural engineering, neglect of local cultural identities, an uncertain economic success, population displacements, the spoiling of cities´visual and structural uniqueness, rise of congestion and overpopulation, political gridlock, threats for ecosystems, environmental risks of many kinds, etc.

We have specifically claimed that megaprojects are disruptive and contentious enterprises. They are *disruptive enterprises* in that they substantially modify the physical appearance of cities and their urban fabric, often triggering socio-economic imbalances and realignments in urban power arrangements in growth machines and civil society. Megaprojects also require substantial financial investments which, in practice, may drain out local budgets and substantially alter the priorities of local governments. Megaprojects are also *contentious enterprises* because of the complex make up of stakeholders with conflicting interests in their planning, construction, management and governance. This often results in major obstacles for megaproject implementation, the strategic misrepresentation of costs and benefits, optimism

bias among planners and promoters about megaproject impacts and, as a result, a widespread perception among urbanites that these structures are negative for their cities.

In view of all of these drawbacks, it seems reasonable to think that better investment opportunities exist for cities, but very often these opportunities are not priorized given the hegemonic neoliberal urban discourse that focuses on growth, international visibility and competition in the global arena.

Under the "green capitalism" label, recent megaprojects are presented as "sustainable." However, it remains unclear under what conditions these allegedly sustainable megaprojects can foster widespread growth and shared prosperity. Will they simply symbolize, once again, the grandiose vision of political and economic leaders in their attempta at nation-building to effectively compete on the global board? Will those megaprojects yield economic benefits to the cities that host them and not only to the promoters who build them? We do not know yet, although there is growing evidence that the benefits could be very limited (as is increasingly the case with Olympic mega-events).

Growing skepticism about spectacular and large-scale urban development, as well as the multiple impacts of the Great Recession of 2008, have triggered a rethinking of urban revitalization strategies in the West, and new paradigms, such as "smart cities," have come to the forefront of the discussions. Advocates of the "smart city" idea, who rightly stress the importance of digitalization and technology for a better management of urban areas, seem to overlook the fact that it is the governance models, not just the tools, that need to be improved.

Jane Jacobs rightly reminded us almost half a century ago that cities are organized complexity that cannot be addressed as a conventional problem of hierarchies and visual or mechanical order planned exclusively by leaders and experts (her diatribes with Robert Moses, the great modernizer of New York, are legendary). Jacobs understood cities as a complex problem of interrelated factors in an organic whole, and recommended urban planners and architects to show respect for the intrinsic order of the city and discard the demiurgic, spectacular and traumatic interventions that they often put into practice. Under the inspiration of Jacobs, we would like to offer some ideas we believe would help urban planning and cities to assuage the negative impacts of megaprojects.

The first is that cities have the capacity to promote creative and dynamic growth and at the same time reduce the destruction of resources. It has long been known that the city is more efficient than other types of human settlements from the point of view of energy, consumption of resources and emission of greenhouse gases. The reason is that urban ecologies are organized through exchange networks organized in spatial proximity whose synergies have positive and multiple effects. In other words, cities are complex, dynamic and variable human clusters that can favor efficiency, competitiveness and ecology.

Second, we know that networks and proximity flows and casual encounters in defined spatial environments foster multiplier effects and thus explain the impact of creativity on the economic strength of cities. We are not advocating for the presence of a creative class that allegedly serves as as the engine for urban prosperity, but rather for valuing and promoting the configuration of the ecological character of the city as a place for the exchange of knowledge, information, experiences and affections. This area of exchange needs public or semi-public

spaces, and hence the crucial importance of preserving squares, sidewalks, parks, terraces, cafés and other meeting places where economic rationality does not prevail. Online connections can supplement, but not replace, this primary network of face-to-face human exchange.

Third, like any network, cities benefit geometrically from the number of existing connections. If the economic disparity between urbanites condemns certain citizens and neighborhoods to socio-spatial segregation, the prosperity of the city as a whole will be compromised. For reasons of social welfare, economic prosperity, and, increasingly, for reasons of survival of the planet and our species, it is essential to advance in the planning of integrated cities on a human scale that respect the close and multiple interaction of their neighborhoods. This constant process of human interaction -- the intrinsic order of the city -- allows urbanites to shape their own identity by appropriating their environment and endowing it with meaning, a fundamental factor that contributes to individual and collective well-being, and indirectly also to prosperity.

Fourth, what is truly fundamental for urbanites is to ensure that their leaders (and urbanites themselves as creators and re-creators of the places they inhabit) work to organize sustainable urban ecosystems from an ecological, environmental and socio-economic perspective. The good form and efficiency of the city are not enough to guarantee a good urban life. Improving macro-economic magnitudes is not enough if there is no effort at achieving higher levels of social welfare. Urban visibility (megaprojects) and urban connectivity (smart cities) strategies, by themselves, present as many risks as benefits for urban populations.

Cities need to ensure that the above ideas, which flesh out the urban order as organized complexity, become the driving force behind sustainable urban development, and also frame planning and implementation whenever urban leaders still choose megaproject construction for their cities. When urban ecologies are organized through exchange networks organized in spatial proximity, when urban planning values and promotes the configuration of the ecological character of the city as a place for the exchange of knowledge, information, experiences and affections, and when planning aims at advancing integrated cities on a human scale that respect the close and multiple interaction of their neighborhoods, then megaprojects could possibly work for the welfare of the community; at a minimum, they would turn from disruptive and contentious enterprises into feeble artifacts.

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