Re-thinking megaproject governance through a cultural political economic perspective: using governmentality theory to critique client decision-making

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Abstract
This paper develops an analytical model based upon cultural political economy theory and the concept of governmentality to re-examine megaproject client governance. Results of a case study client involved with the finance, design, build and operation of a megaproject in Singapore are presented. The findings indicate that although formalised structures and protocols were established decision-making was deeply influenced by informal communication embedded in multi-level networks. A typology of instruments of power is developed through a narrative analysis of stories of resistance and compliance to provide insights into how stakeholders realise their aims on megaprojects through the exercise of power.

Introduction
More than ever before, architectural, engineering and construction (AEC) firms are working on megaprojects composed of multiple key partners from various countries. The megaproject environment offers a range of opportunities for both clients and project teams. However, it is also characterised by a high level of risk, technological and social complexity, strategic behaviour and cost overruns (Priemus et al, 2008). While the past decade has seen a sharp increase in the magnitude and frequency of megaprojects built it is becoming clear that many of these projects have strikingly poor performance records (Flyvbjerg et al, 2003). A global surge of megaprojects in the 1990s set the agenda for developments in the AEC internationalisation discourse, which have typically sought to describe market entry strategies (Crosthwaite, 1998), barriers to international construction (Gunhan and Arditi, 2005) and success factors for international firms (Mawhinney, 2001; London and Siva, 2010).

Project success is significantly impacted by the internal workings of clients and its relationship with decision-making which is often beyond the control of project teams (Crawford et al, 2008). Yet the focus of past research has tended to be on the industry’s role instead of the client’s (Siva and London, 2012; Crawford et al, 2008). In their role as project...
initiators and financiers, clients are considered to be the driving force on projects. Clients establish a unique culture that project team members work within by setting the boundaries within which decisions affecting budgets, design and procurement come to be made. The values that clients ascribe to their everyday practices inevitably condition how they act economically, which in turn impacts upon megaproject decision-making. Past research has shown that high cost overruns and disappointing operating results can be linked to clients’ political economic decisions (Flyvbjerg et al, 2003).

The client’s centrality within a project network has long been recognised. Since 1944 there has been a continued trend in the quest for improved construction industry performance through client-driven strategies but with little evidence that the issues have been resolved (Simon, 1944; Egan, 1998). The various investigations and policy directions reflect a preoccupation with the development of prescriptive government standards, and best practice guidelines which assume that the economy can be structured and controlled with little reference to the social networks and cultural norms which influence project decision-making (Siva and London, 2010). A scenario is painted where project issues derive from incompetent planning and administration and that the achievement of positive change is related to the implementation of comprehensive plans and policies based on rational and democratic argument. Although recent studies have demonstrated that large complex projects tend not to conform to the rational model, the ideal lives on (Miler and Lessard, 2008).

The overall aim of this research is to describe the structure and nature of power relations underpinning client decision-making on megaprojects. There has been little recognition within the megaproject discourse of the power structure and social networks which affect client decision-making and the influence clients have in shaping the political economy of megaproject collaborative practice. Decision-making on construction projects is not wholly predetermined by contracts but instead often emerge from the use of power. Client decision-making on megaprojects is deeply embedded in networks comprising formal and informal practices, rituals and culture whereby power is constantly exercised and exchanged.

Although there is extensive literature on briefing and client participation methods seeking to guide clients as well as tools and methods to achieve successful megaprojects there is little theorising that links these issues coherently. There appears to be little research that approaches the problem from a cultural political economy perspective. This research seeks to address this gap by investigating the diverse forms of power, authority and subjectivity exercised in the client’s everyday practices related to megaproject decision-making. Early observations of one case study of a megaproject client in Singapore are reported. After outlining the research methods, a collection of stories are presented which reveal various types of instruments of power employed by stakeholders in their attempt to realise their objectives. Prior to this an analytical model based upon cultural political economy theory and the concept of governmentality is proposed to frame the exploration of power relationships in relation to megaproject governance. This paper is part of an ongoing PhD study which seeks to address the following two research questions:
RQ1: What is the nature and structure of the power relations underpinning the client’s decision-making environment related to the cultural political economy of megaprojects?

RQ2: To what extent can the merging of the concept of governmentality with narrative inquiry and social network analysis techniques assist in the description and analysis of megaproject client decision-making?

The specific aim of this paper is to develop a typology of instruments of power which reveals ways in which stakeholders identify opportunities and constraints on megaproject decision-making and achieve foreseen and intended effects through the exercise of power.

Cultural political economy

Cultural political economy (CPE) is defined as one which (Sayer, 2001, p. 688): “emphasises the lifeworld aspects of economic processes – identities, discourses, work cultures and the social and cultural embedding of economic activity, reversing the pattern of emphasis of conventional political economy with its concern for systems...[it] deals with the level of concrete and hence with firms, bureaucracies and households embedded in the relationships and meanings of the lifeworld...it should combine and “work up” abstractions of both system and lifeworld”. The term lifeworld encompasses the informal aspects of life which is the product of the relation between embodied actors and the cultures into which they are socialised. Systems are the formalised rationalities which have a logic and momentum of their own, going beyond the subjective experience of actors to routinise or govern specific actions through signals and rules such as prices, money, bureaucratic processes and procedures (Sayer, 2001). A key characteristic of CPE is its examination of the “embedded” nature of economic action in terms of how they are set within social relations and cultural contexts that impact upon those economic processes (Sayer, 2001). CPE analysis offers a way of demonstrating how the advancement of specific interests is facilitated by the political economic decisions of key players in positions of power (Anderson, 2004).

The CPE of megaproject environments is composed of power relations among a diverse range of stakeholders such as clients, project managers, architects, users, property owners, financiers, regulatory bodies, local communities – each attributing their own value at various stages of a project. A range of activities and processes are typically conducted particularly on such large undertakings as megaprojects including briefing, stakeholder management and community participation, aimed at aligning project objectives and stakeholder requirements. Such efforts, however, may not prevent stakeholders from pursuing their self-interests. Power differentials on projects cause stakeholders to employ various strategies or tactics to place them in positions of advantage. A series of questions to this research follows:

- How do ideas get disseminated, accepted or rejected on megaprojects?
- How is power created, nurtured and employed on megaprojects?
- What other forms of power are available for various stakeholders on megaprojects?
- How do responsible AEC professionals who can contribute to the quality of built environments enhance their power on projects to improve project performance?
Governmentality

The concept of governmentality, developed by Foucault (1979) in the 1970s through his investigations of political power offers a useful language for exploring both the macro spaces of megaproject governance frameworks as well as the confined locales of client workplaces and the everyday practices and networks where various forms of power come to be created, distributed and exercised. Foucault (1993) defined government as “the conduct of conduct”, which is a form of activity seeking to shape or guide the actions of others through the exercise of various techniques (Christie, 1982). While the word government may imply a strictly political meaning today, Foucault (1993) placed the problem of government in a more general context embracing philosophical, religious, medical and familial sites (Lemke, 2008). By widening the context of governmentality the conception of “governmental authorities” is extended to include families, churches, experts, professions and all the different powers engaging in “the conduct of conduct”.

The concept of governmentality deepens our understanding of power by demonstrating that power not only resides at the centre of a single body but is also present in diverse locales (Garland, 1997; Rose et al, 2009). Power is visible in both everyday life and institutions (Rose and Miller, 1992; Donzelot, 1979). It should not be assumed that the mere existence of a structure within a network implies an acceptance or implementation by members. Whilst such formalised structures appear highly visible, there are also other less visible relationships and dealings occurring where power is constantly exercised and exchanged. Foucault traced a movement between the 16th and the 18th century and identified two distinct rationalities of governing practiced by state and other agencies: the sovereign and family model, which he positioned at opposite ends of a spectrum. Whilst the former was concerned with abstract and rigid ways of thinking about power the latter model was devoted to matters to enrich the small family unit (Foucault, 1979). Distinctly, he identified a third form of rationality which took place from mid 18th century onwards – governmentality – which viewed power in terms of its populations with its own realities, characteristics and requirements; independent of government yet at the same time requiring government intervention (Rose et al, 2009).

These populations cannot simply be controlled by implementation of the law or programs nor be thought of as a type of extended family. Foucault highlighted that populations have their own characteristics which need to be understood through specific knowledges and it is through these emergent understandings that the “art of governing” is formulated.

The practices within the social realm of government are undertaken in their complex relations to the various ways in which “truth” is conceived by the different agents (Dean, 2010). Within the context of megaproject decision-making, how clients govern themselves and others relies on what they see to be ‘true’ about who they are which is in turn influenced by the rich and complex social networks, cultural norms and social obligations they are embedded within. It is thus important to capture what rationalities of governing are implicit in the client’s practices and how they relate to those of project team members working on megaprojects. How do clients who are at the top of the governance structure of megaproject decision-making understand their powers and the impact of their practices? Governmentality should not be viewed as a theory of power or governance. Instead “it asks particular
questions of the phenomena that it seeks to understand, questions amenable to precise answers through empirical inquiry” (Rose et al, 2009, p. 3). The governmentality perspective seeks to pose questions relating to power without attempting to prescribe a set of principles or ideology for governing others and oneself. In doing so, we are practising a form of criticism which makes explicit the taken-for-granted character of these practices (Foucault, 1988) in terms of how clients govern and are governed and in the ways by which they do. Through this we open up for analysis various forms of strategic games or tactics in terms of power contestations and negotiations between stakeholders on megaprojects.

Power

The word power is used often and in a variety of ways whereby there is often an assumption of what it means with little seeming need for a definition (Galbraith, 1983). Perhaps though it is worthwhile to briefly consider some key characteristics of power and outline a working definition for the purposes of this research. Power refers to the possibility to have one’s will or decision accepted by others, the ability to influence or control the behaviour of others or more informally to “get one’s way” (Brislin, 1991, p.2). By drawing upon a common pool of diverse resources one is able to consciously realise foreseen and intended objectives or effects in a social transaction (Wrong, 1979; Ewick and Silbey, 2003). Power is, however, not an object that can be possesed whereby it is a “probabilistic social relationship, a series of transactions whose consequences are contingent upon the contributions of all the parties” (Ewick and Silbey, 2003, p. 1333). In outlining how to study transactional processes of power Foucault offered the following conception of power:

"Power, if we do not take too distant a view of it, is not that which makes the difference between those who exclusively possess and retain it, and those who do not have it and submit to it. Power must be analysed as something which circulates; or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised in a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always the elements of its articulation” (Foucault, 1980, p. 98)

Whilst power relations are largely asymmetrical in that those having greater access to resources can exercise greater control over the behaviour of others this does not necessarily mean that the dynamics or the givenness of situational power relations cannot be challenged or shifted. Variously referred to as secondary adjustments (Goffman, 1961), tactics (de Certeau, 1984), weapons of the weak (Scott, 1985) or acts of resistance (Ewick and Silbey, 2003), these everyday strategic games represent the ways in which those in relatively powerless positions accommodate to power while simultaneously protecting their interests (Ewick and Silbey, 2003). Power is a part of our everyday and professional lives. Whilst it is not the only factor it certainly plays a central role in decision-making and in how megaprojects are shaped. It is suspected that successful megaprojects have project stakeholders who recognise the critical role of power in decision-making and think of power in terms of its usefulness in relation to achieving desired project outcomes or put simply,
how to “get things done” (Brislin, 1991). Various tactics, strategies or acts of resistance have been identified as ways in which people go about imposing their will onto others. Within the context of this research these tactics, strategies and acts of resistance will be referred to as instruments of power. Although these instruments of power have been largely drawn from other fields their underlying principles are a useful starting point for this study on megaproject decision-making to provide insights into how stakeholders “get things done”.

Some instruments of power include:

- Rule literalness: based on the premise that all transactions are governed by rules which provides opportunities to both achieve compliance and resistance (Ewick and Silbey, 2003). Any incompleteness or vagueness in systems offers opportunities for resisters to exploit (Beckert, 1999).

- Masquerade: manipulated roles used to influence transactions which tend to involve some degree of deception (Ewick and Silbey, 2003). An example of a masquerade is to present oneself as a less experienced or knowledgeable worker in order to avoid work.

- Disrupting hierarchy: this refers to those individuals who purposely ignore hierarchy of systems or processes and with it the lines of authority, respect and duty attached (Ewick and Silbey, 2003). By skipping levels of hierarchy individuals can realise their objectives

- Friendship and social ties: this refers to an individual’s emotional relationships with others. It is widely known that deals are often made because certain people had warm ties with one another (Brislin, 1991). It is based upon the premise that people are more willing to comply with the requests of friends or others whom they have warm ties with and thus individuals often find it easier to gain the support of those they have warm ties with

- Information: this refers to specialised information, usually in the form of expert advice in the context of megaprojects, which places certain individuals in positions of legitimacy or authority

- Scarcity: this refers to individuals who make use of their access to scarce goods for eg. networks, expertise, etc. At times the individuals themselves may possess specific scarce skills, knowledge or expertise which can be used as an important resource whereby these individuals can pick and choose in terms of who they decide to provide their services to and in making their choices become powerful figures

Research methodology

This study employs a case study strategy through the use of the narrative analysis and social network analysis methods for collecting and analysing empirical material. This paper specifically reports early observations made from one case study of a megaproject client in Singapore. Sixteen interviews have been conducted to date with a range of participants (refer to Table 1). In keeping with the narrative inquiry approach, the interview instrument was designed to be broad and open-ended to provide participants the opportunity to express themselves in their own words without being influenced by suggestions from the researcher
as well as to invite participants to tell their own stories. Participants were asked questions in relation to three broad areas: their role in the organisation and on the megaproject; stories in relation to project issues experienced and how decisions were made to resolve issues and their relationship with other project stakeholders.

Stories told by individual participants relating to the hidden and mundane everyday practices employed to challenge or reinforce social structures were identified and “open coding” was conducted based on the loose association of themes and concepts. A main criteria for identifying the stories was that the acts or events described must be intentional and purposeful whereby the ultimate goal was to impose one’s will by achieving compliance or a reversal of power. Following an identification of stories axial coding was conducted involving the arrangement of data according to dominant themes that emerged. A systematic examination of stories about everyday events helps to unmask how the governmepntality concept works in the decision-making environment of clients on megaprojects. The stories depict firstly, the narrators’ recognition of social structure and secondly, their understanding of how to operate within existing conditions towards realising their objectives. Through the analysis the complex and fluid relations of power are made visible and a typology of instruments of power employed on megaprojects can be established.

**Case study background**

The case study is a 1.33 billion SGD multi-use, multi-sport and entertainment complex in Singapore. The project seeks to encourage large numbers of people to adopt and pursue sports and to draw international events to its world class facilities, which is part of the government’s broader vision of creating a thriving sports, entertainment and lifestyle ecosystem (Sporting Singapore, 2001). The project involves the demolition of an existing National Stadium and the construction of new buildings including a national stadium, multi-purpose indoor arena, aquatic centre, water sports centre, Singapore information and resource centre, sports promenade and commercial space/retail mall. It also incorporates the use of an existing multi purpose indoor arena. It is the largest sports facilities infrastructure Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) project in the world (SSC, 2012). The project is also the first PPP project in Singapore. A Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), SportsHub Private Limited, was formed to finance, design, build and operate the facility in partnership with the Singapore Sports Council (SSC) over a 25-year period. The SPV invests in equity and utilises bank debt financing to build the facilities (Singapore Parliament Report, 2009). Upon completion of the contract the facility will be handed over to the SSC.

PPP projects have multiple ‘clients’. In this study the client network comprises the sports government agency responsible for setting up the project framework, SSC, and the various PPP consortium partners which have varying levels of involvement. All the PPP partners are bound to the Project Agreement and the various protocols set out in an Interface Agreement.

Formalised structures and protocols have clearly been established by the SSC and SPV for project coordination which are aimed at achieving control of accountability of decision-making as well as respecting the roles and boundaries of various parties. Indeed these formalised structures and protocols offer clear traceability in terms of lines of official
document exchange between project stakeholders. However, what these official documents fail to record are the informal negotiations and dealings occurring in multi-level networks whereby power is constantly exchanged and exercised. Past research has identified that these informal networks and communications are equally, if not more, important than pre-established structures (De Blois et al, 2011). Preliminary analysis of the SportsHub case study supports these past findings in relation to two key areas: indirect or non-expert participants can sometimes act informally as client representatives and influence the direction of projects; and informal communication and decision-making are often made outside pre-established structures (Siva and London, 2012).

**Narrating instruments of power**

This section presents a collection of stories told by the interviewees – of both resistance and compliance – as the ways in which they understood and responded to various social transactions within the context of megaproject decision-making. In these stories the narrated instruments of power represent the ways in which stakeholders accommodate to or exercise power to protect their interests. Each story recounts how an aspect of the structure of social relationships, whether it’s a rule, role or hierarchy, was mobilised to reinforce an existing condition or reverse a more probable outcome (Ewick and Sibley, 2003). These stories reveal the narrators’ clear awareness of the ways in which opportunities and constraints are embedded in the largely taken for granted structure of social relationships. The stories also reveal the narrators’ detailed understanding of how to respond in terms of the resources available to them in the form of a variety of instruments of power. The method for discussion is completed in either of two ways. Firstly a theme is articulated through a comparative discussion of the way participants described a given theme. Secondly, the intricacies of a theme are best exemplified through a more in-depth discussion of how one particular participant experienced the theme where only one exemplar quote may be provided although a series of quotes were considered in the analysis. In all cases the themes discussed were dominant in the interviews across participants.

**Rule literalness**

Rule literalness was raised as an instrument commonly used by the local government agencies to enforce project requirements. The power and authority associated with local government agencies was consistently discussed by the participants as a significant “force to be reckoned with”. The Technical Director of the Design and Construct Contractor firm clearly understood the hierarchy of power within the Singaporean context and that the expectations of the local agencies needed to be placed as their top priority in progressing the project.

> The authorities of Singapore have got very strong power. We got to meet their expectations first. Everybody needs to compromise a bit but usually the authorities are difficult to compromise

Whilst in some situations or environments rules can be counted on to provide opportunities for resistance where this may involve identifying loopholes or gaps with a network of rules, this was clearly not the case in the highly rationalised setting of the Singaporean ruling government authorities. The very nature of an innovation necessitates a change from the
norm whereby it is unlikely that project innovations will comply with existing codes or regulations. Given that megaprojects are characterised by innovations, code compliance and achieving regulatory approvals can often pose as a key challenge.

The project team found themselves in a difficult position of getting a specific innovation accepted by the local authorities even though the efficiency of the system far exceeded the basic requirements of the building regulations and codes. This gives rise to a situation where those responsible for providing regulatory approvals are placed in a powerful and dominating position to dictate and impose their requirements upon other stakeholders who in turn become highly vulnerable. Ultimately the drive to successfully deliver project innovations falls onto the responsibility of key stakeholders within the project team. The power domination of the regulatory context associated with the approval of innovations in Singapore does not appear to be a conducive or encouraging environment for innovations to be successfully delivered.

As the following Senior Manager of the SSC’s SportsHub team explained, the officers working in local government agencies can be “more tight” and demand that standard local requirements be complied with even though the project may have unique features which may contradict the regulations.

Sportshub has a lot of unique feature that’s new...so that’s why within the local context codes doesn’t give that kind of flexibility to be applied. They may contradict to the code’s requirements... some of the officers would be slightly more tight. They say that OK you can show me, ya I know you can meet this but you still have to meet mine.

In the case of this specific innovation, hierarchy was eventually disrupted to enable the innovation to be implemented and this will be discussed in the following section. Rule literalness can also be used as a tool to manage competing interests. As expected of any large complex project, the SportsHub involved a variety of stakeholders during the tender evaluation phase which could have made it a potentially difficult situation to manage. The Project Director used rule literalness as his way of controlling the stakeholders whereby the project vision and objectives was his "biggest tool" when dealing with competing agendas or stakeholders.

We had 60 odd people in our evaluation team. So as the stakeholder manager and project director the vision and objectives was the biggest tool that I had to control my stakeholders because in the room when we were arguing about a legal clause or how to write a specification I always brought it back to does this meet the objectives and the desired outcomes? If not we’re not talking about it anymore...because I had very, very senior government people who had never been told what to do before but then that was my tool to control that so that not a single stakeholder was more important than the project objectives.

**Disrupting hierarchy**

Stories were told about how participants consciously ignored hierarchy and with it lines of authority and duty attached. In recognising the strictly regimented rules of the Building Control Authority (BCA) the Senior Associate from the architectural firm explained that the
project team knew that there was a need to bypass hierarchy to “bring it up to a higher level” where negotiations to achieve a compromise can be undertaken.

The system is so regimented...the way that BCA is very strictly doing something and when you do something different people don't know how to deal with it. So it means you’ll have to bring it up to a higher level...So that level of thinking is thinking about how can we reach a compromise – one that satisfies government issues as well as helps you to mitigate something that is going to cost ridiculously or become a real big issue and that compromise can only be discussed at that high level.

In dealing with such situations the project team clearly recognised that there was a limit to what they were able to achieve in terms of being able to undertake the necessary negotiations with the appropriate people at a higher level of the BCA. In this case the Design Manager from the Design and Contractor firm highlighted that there was a need to ensure that the government client, SSC, was well aware of the critical role they needed to play in assisting with the successful implementation of the innovation by working “behind the scenes” with the BCA.

So at one point, I mean we're confident now, but at one point we didn’t have clarity that we were in violation of regulation as BCA was interpreting it and SSC was working behind the scenes to work through that. They weren't involved with the day-to-day technical aspects but we keep them very aware and they do kind of help go to government departments and help smooth things out. So if there’s something really at that level they try to help us behind the scenes.

The Senior Manager from the SSC SportHub team also highlighted the importance of disrupting hierarchy by going ”to the top" to achieve a degree of flexibility that the bureaucratic processes of government agencies normally stifle. He explained that as a government agency client they were able to bypass the regular channels to negotiate with the higher-ups in the BCA towards achieving a compromise.

Sometimes when they think that they need some help and some backing and SSC being one of the government agencies to come in and maybe just stand behind there and lend them some support, we always do that... We know that they're having some issue with an agency we will either go together with them sometimes and even in parallel we'll go behind them and talk to the agency...But of course we had to pre-agree with them on some agreements on how we can operate it and things like that.

Legitimacy or position power was demonstrated to be an important form of power whereby the SSC, by virtue of being a government agency, were able to exercise their invisible rights to engage in negotiations with the BCA on the same level of authority. Approval for the innovation was only provided following SSC’s private discussions with the BCA. Even though the design team had spent considerable amount of time and effort defending the scheme the BCA appeared to place much more weight in SSC’s justifications in regards to the system.

The process in which the bowl cooling system achieved regulatory approval demonstrates that the exercise of political power can overrule rationality in certain situations. The design team’s expert power in presenting an innovative and efficient system was less effective than the SSC’s legitimate power related to their position within the network of government agencies. This is of course not to say that stakeholders should ignore the environmental, social, moral and professional arguments based on rationality in support of their respective positions. Rather a strict adherence to rationality and logic alone without adequate
acknowledgement and understanding of other forms of power will unlikely lead to successful outcomes. It is thus important to understand the various instruments of power stakeholders employ in megaproject decision-making and how this influences project outcomes.

**Swapping deals**

The social position of the local government agencies brings with it certain expectations whereby it is important for the BCA – as well as other agencies – to be seen as “doing the right thing” by the general public. BCA has been actively discouraging the spillage of air conditioning from indoor spaces to outdoors, both through improved regulation and enforcement, and advised that they were considering further retroactive regulation to control this practice. The project team, despite putting forward an argument in support of a proposed innovation based on a rational and technical perspective was unable to achieve regulatory approval from the BCA as it would potentially be misinterpreted by the general public as “throwing air con into an open space”. Providing regulatory approval for the use of the bowl cooling system may thus be seen as a precedent for provision of air conditioning to outdoor spaces thereby undermining BCA’s efforts to eliminate this unsustainable practice.

Through extensive computer modeling and calculations the project team presented what they worked out to be the most efficient means of providing spectator comfort. However, it was felt that a less innovative scheme using “four times the energy” would have been better received by the authorities simply because it would not create a public relations problem for the BCA as the proposed innovation presumably would.

One of our arguments...to the BCA is...we could’ve arrived at a solution which would’ve used our modelling and calculations 2 or 3 times as much energy...but that generally wasn't accepted because to the authority they’re still looking at us documenting the project where we’re bringing cool air into an outside space...they also don’t want to get into a situation that there is criticism...There are comparisons to other projects where semi outdoor spaces have been cooled and the BCA hasn’t allowed that and that is part of the reason why this has become sensitive issue

Eventually the BCA granted regulatory approval for the use of the innovation as the previous discussion in the section “disrupting hierarchy” has shown. The BCA advised the project team that the energy usage of the bowl cooling system must be 100% offset by renewable or waste-generated energy sources. The issue of a major project associated with the Singapore government creating a public relations problem for BCA’s enforcement efforts to stamp out purposeful spillage of air conditioning to the outdoors is thus resolved by the ability to advise the public that energy used for the bowl cooling system is completely offset by renewable energy. In this case there was a “straight swap” of deals to satisfy the needs of involved parties.

It flies in the face that something that BCA is trying to restrict... so how do you mitigate but the good thing about it is at least maybe the balance is that there's a balance has been struck. OK this is the value to the developer who needs to pay. OK so BCA accepts that there’s a straight swap of what they can to satisfy BCA, to cover the situation.
**Friendship and social ties**

Even though the megaproject environment involves professional relationships between individuals within organisations, it is important to note that most of the individuals involved have emotional needs that can be satisfied only through warm ties and social relationships. People in general enjoy cordial and pleasant relationships with those they work with. Success in gaining the support of others in professional matters is often reliant upon personal friendships and networks. One way to develop social relationships in the professional environment and to generate general everyday cordiality is to take part in office social occasions such as contributions to baby showers and participation in project team lunches. For this Chief Financial Officer of the SPV, interactions at a personal level with project stakeholders at various levels was felt to be an important part of making them feel engaged.

Even though I’m the COO I have to deal with the immediate level because all of them they are government servants and we need to engage them...You have to engage them informally as well and go out to lunch with them. When you go on holidays buy them some nice chocolates when someone gives birth you send them a congratulatory note and things like that. So you try to interact with them at a personal level.

Existence of prior relationships was also seen as a valuable resource by the participants. The Design Manager of the Design and Construct firm explained that prior relationships helped to build trust and provides the other party they are working with the assurance of their ability to deliver a promise, ie their credibility.

Most of the authority are the same ones I worked with on the Marina Bay Sands. So the person I dealt with in the LTA is the same one I dealt with here and people in MHA, Ministry of Home Affairs, they’re the same people...that’s the I think important thing here...in fact greenmark to some degree XXX has a relationship with ABC and myself I think its very interpersonal with Land and Transport Authority. MHA its very much based on trust and having seen maybe how we operate and how we tend to deliver what we promise. That’s a big part of it...They tend to be the people I know are dealing with are kind of the same age or are a little bit younger but you kind of maybe have similar levels of interests

Furthermore understanding the dynamics of social relationships can also be beneficial in helping one realise their aims. Brislin (1991) classified this as a knowledge base and this was certainly the case for the Senior Associate in the Sports Architecture firm who knew specific individuals with different areas of expertise or in positions of power who could help his cause. The Senior Associate indicated that conversations were often "held quietly" to "attune" others to provide him with the information he required.

Some conversations are held quietly to try and prepare to get someone else ready to be bringing the information out in the form which is going to work for everybody...but the people who are doing the work...they’re not necessarily attuned to precisely the message that we want to hand over to the authority. So we do a little bit of work in making sure that they become attuned to that...Sometimes we have to use other people to help us get the message across and that’s where someone like XXX has a great degree of influence in holding it together...We can use people like XXX...to help our cause and we do and he is a very effective operator in that position.

The use of certain relationships and networks can thus be more effective than others depending on situational needs. This demonstrates that there are ways in which those in weaker positions of power can achieve stronger positions through smart linkages. This also
demonstrates that despite the importance of organisational and project structures in formalising communication flows and coordination, how work is carried out on a daily basis tends to have more to do with the informal relationships and interactions between members within and across organisations as they strategically assess and “work out deals” to better achieve what they require.

**Information**

The analysis highlighted the consistent use of information in the form of technical rationality by stakeholders in gaining the support of others towards realising their aims. For the project team, using technical rationality to support their argument was often seen as a more “black and white” way to demonstrate the characteristics of a proposal solution.

What we have at our disposal are our technical ways of showing something. So technical solutions are although they’re not real – they’re theoretically proven so that’s quite good in some ways ...to a certain degree it’s more black and white to be able to show that something works or doesn’t work.

When aligned well, technical rationality can also be used to help support an argument towards achieving one’s hidden agenda. The Senior Associate from the architecture firm told a story about how they were experiencing difficulty convincing the client to accept the design team’s proposal to disconnect an existing train station from a new walkway. The client had requested for a large canopy to be built between the station and the walkway so that people would remain under cover as they exited the station. The design team’s proposal was largely driven by an aesthetic desire in that maintaining the integrity and outlook of the existing station was seen as important whereby connecting it to the walkway would destroy the architectural language of the structure. The client, on the other hand, was more concerned about the functional use of the canopy to protect the public from inclement weather. In the end additional canopies were proposed to the side of the station rather than to have the one large canopy at the main entrance which was accepted by the client. The argument put forward though was one centred around the importance of crowd control whereby it was necessary to disperse people from multiple exits and hence side canopies rather than the single large canopy even though the underlying aim was an architectural reason to maintain the “fantastic gesture view” of the station.

In the end we managed it technically by saying that the big opening to the station, the big door that big mouth of the station that’s too big to allow that many people to come in...So the whole system is actually of a limited capacity... but from a functional point of view we’re saying we’ll put canopies to the side which is what we did. We had to demonstrate why it was not unreasonable to not have this huge canopy sitting over the main station....So meeting with SSC with LTA with URA as well and doing technical studies like pedestrian modelling to show where people move, to look at, the rate at which people are taken away from the station, on the trains to show that you don’t need that, to show that you cant deal with that capacity and we cant force people in, they don’t know where to go. So therefore you allow that fantastic gesture view to still be there. If we put a roof on it you take away a lot of that. So the idea is that when you stand as you come out of the station you see the window which is framed by that big view and from that window you see west plaza so that’s your window and you frame that view so that was the architectural reason for doing it...aesthetics...it is a better solution architecturally.

Whilst the use of technical rationality may not work on every occasion as demonstrated in the earlier discussion in “disrupting hierarchy” it can sometimes work in favour of specialists
on projects. In this case, specialist knowledge relating to crowd control became particularly powerful as it offered the design team a way to justify their aesthetic desire.

Using crowd control as a diversion to an aesthetic which has been to some degree is true...we probably didn't like it...we couldn't bear the look of this thing. And the argument of crowd control it just happened to align with what we wanted aesthetically. I mean really with crowd control we've done a lot of crowd control work. You wouldn't put a station at that spot but since it's pre-existing. It's a machine to get people coming out quickly and safely. Architects, we have an aesthetic desire or like doctors have credibility

Summary and future research

This paper described an analytical model which was developed based upon cultural political economy theory and the concept of governmentality to examine megaproject client governance. Various instruments of power were drawn from other fields such as business to inform the analysis of how stakeholders go about imposing their will onto others on megaprojects. The early observations of the case study of the Singapore SportsHub in relation to the use of various instruments of power confirmed initial assumptions made that although formalised protocols were established for project communication and coordination decisions were often made outside of the pre-established structures.

Furthermore decision-making was influenced by informal communication embedded in multiple levels of social networks comprising various stakeholders in positions of power. These observations highlight the significant influence of the structure of networks on decision-making. Project stakeholders drew from a common pool of sociocultural resources including organisational, disciplinary, symbolic and professional. Some stakeholders, however, were advantaged by having greater access to the resources which were then effectively employed in transactions towards realising their aims. Therefore even though power can never be possessed categorically, some individuals enjoy a greater probability of realising their goals or objectives simply by virtue of their location within a social structure.

Megaproject decision-making is thus a network problem requiring an understanding of social structures. Different types and forms of social networks may be essential for achieving different project outcomes at various stages of project decision-making. The structure of social networks embedded in the multilevel environment in which client decision-making is undertaken may contribute towards understanding the way decisions and actions occurring at the confined locales of client workplaces can impact on project outcomes at higher levels. However, to date there is still little known in terms of the nature and structure of power relations in megaproject client decision-making where various forms of power come to be created, distributed and exercised.

The stories presented in this paper are evidence of the narrators’ consciousness of structure and of how social structure works and further to that their understanding of how at times it can be exploited to serve specific purposes. Within the stories the narrators expressed how power was reversed or compliance was achieved through the use of various instruments of power. A typology of instruments of power was developed to make explicit what had largely been taken for granted previously. Through the telling of stories of the narrators’ success
with or against power an understanding of how to disrupt social structure has been achieved which makes clearer how instruments of power can be used in other situations to achieve better project outcomes. Further work is required though to explicitly map the social ties between stakeholders to demonstrate how the structure of power relations influences decision-making. Therefore the next stage of analysis involves a social network mapping of the informal links between stakeholders through the stories collected.

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