

Call for Papers: “Sustaining the future: Addressing grand challenges through megaprojects”
Conference Name: MeRIT (Megaproject Research Interdisciplinary Team) Workshop
Conference Date: November 21st-22nd, 2024
Locations: *Nov 21st, 2024*
Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – Via Emilia Parmense, 84 – Piacenza (IT)
Nov 22nd, 2024
Politecnico di Milano (sede di Piacenza) @ Sala dei Teatini - Via Scalabrini, 9 – Piacenza (IT)
Website: <https://convegni.unicatt.it/merit>

Introduction

We are pleased to announce the Call for Papers for the upcoming MeRIT Workshop dedicated to exploring the theme of "Addressing Grand Challenges Through Megaprojects" This workshop aims to bring together researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and industry experts to share insights, exchange ideas, and discuss the transformative potential of megaprojects in addressing Grand Challenges for a sustainable future.

Background

Our society is faced with several unprecedented challenges (climate change, pollution, unethical/illegal acts, post-pandemic recovery, poverty alleviation, and not last war conflicts and geo-politics turbulences). Therefore, for society to tackle these ‘Grand’ challenges, a fundamental transformation is needed in the way governments, organizations, teams, and individuals behave and perform their activities. Grand challenges tend to be “glocal” puzzles that cut across the local and the global which, once recognized and embraced, provoke major, global, and complex project initiatives (Ika & Munro, 2022). As such, specific SDGs directly convey the realization of projects, as the one to build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation (goal 9) and the one to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable (goal 11).

Projects are often ‘agents of changes’ and pivotal to driving the innovation and change required to tackle grand challenges (Locatelli et al., 2023). As such, while projects as vehicles for change play a crucial role in society (Marcelino-Sádaba et al., 2015), project management research has increasingly investigated how, in the last two decades, projects contributed to change (Huemann & Silvius, 2017; Silvius & Schipper, 2014).

Taking into account how the share of project work in advanced economies is around one-third of the total work (Schoper et al., 2018), from which megaprojects are increasingly being proposed and introduced as the preferred delivery model for goods and services (Flyvbjerg, 2014), this call for papers aims to explore how megaprojects and their management tackle ‘Grand’ challenges from any perspective (e.g. considering different sectors, different level of analysis – micro/meso/macro, and different project management tools, approaches, and processes).

With their potential to shape landscapes, boost economies, allow for human self-actualization, and address pressing global challenges, megaprojects foster opportunity to create and distribute value (Gil & Fu, 2022; Gil, 2023). Megaprojects, characterized by their large-scale, capital-intensive nature and significant societal impact, are human-designed social tools that have become increasingly prevalent in various domains such as infrastructure development, urban planning, transportation, energy, defense, and technology to produce science (Cerić et al., 2021; Schindler et al., 2019; Söderlund et al., 2017;

Miller & Lessard 2000; Gil & Pinto, 2018) Provided their purpose is defined to go beyond a self-financing logic that disregards distributional concerns, these project-based enterprises can create positive change in the social, economic, environmental, technological, and political sphere, while attending to constraints on planetary resources and other grand societal challenges (Drouin & Turner, 2022).

However, despite high public and private expectations, the performance of megaprojects is far from being optimal (Juarez Cornelio et al., 2021; Denicol et al., 2020). These large-scale projects are not linear, sequential enterprises to be delivered by a supply chain as implicitly assumed by a legacy of social norms, regulations, and early scholarship (Merrow, 1988) (Flyvbjerg et al., 2016). Rather, megaprojects need to be seen as ‘wicked’ enterprises that impact materially large numbers of stakeholders and stimulate ideological opposition (based on perceived negative externalities) as well as well ideological support (based on perceived positive externalities). This nascent and more nuanced understanding of what a megaproject is refutes questionable claims that have traced megaproject stereotypical behavior (delays, budget blowouts, scope creep) to agency and capability problems. However, emerging thinking also raises the fundamental questions as to how the governance of megaprojects can be reconciled with the management of the supply chain and stakeholders (Brunet, 2021), while upholding norms that define ‘success’ by the ability to stay on target while addressing pressuring local and global needs (Di Maddaloni & Sabini, 2022).

In line with the latest debates at the nexus of project management and grand challenges and the invitation to develop a behavioral theory for “grand challenges projects” (Ika & Etzion, 2024) a possible way to deal with this topic is by looking at the bidirectional relationship between megaprojects and society. (1) Megaprojects and their management as a fundamental element to achieve ‘Grand’ challenges (e.g., energy reduction, sustainable development, social inclusion, and SDGs); and (2) Society as an agent that exerts (positive and negative) institutional pressures to shape ‘projects’ in terms of success, expectations, value, and benefits realization.

Conference Themes

The conference seeks contributions from researchers and practitioners across diverse disciplines (Organization, sociology, law, marketing, engineering, etc.) and sectors of economic production (public, private, nonprofit), with a focus on the following themes related to megaprojects as a vehicle to tackle grand challenges:

1. Purpose Beyond Financial Goals

- Tackling today’s grand challenges through megaprojects
- Stakeholder enfranchisement and participatory planning
- Social inclusivity and equity in megaprojects
- Cultural preservation and heritage management
- Job creation and economic development

- Value creation and Distribution through megaprojects
2. Governance and Policy:
 - Business-government (or public-private) collaborations in megaproject delivery
 - Legal and regulatory frameworks for megaprojects
 - Risk management and project governance
 - Financing models and investment evaluation methodologies
 - Ethical considerations in megaproject implementation
 - Effective leaders and leadership in megaprojects
 3. Sustainable Megaprojects:
 - Innovations in sustainable design and construction
 - Environmental impact assessment and mitigation strategies
 - Renewable energy integration in megaprojects
 - Water and waste management solutions
 - Social and economic sustainability considerations
 - ESGs implementation, benefits, and challenges
 4. Technological Advancements and Digitalization:
 - Digital technologies in megaproject planning and execution
 - Building information modeling (BIM) and virtual reality applications
 - Artificial intelligence and machine learning in megaprojects
 - Smart cities and IoT-enabled infrastructure
 - Data analytics for project management and optimization

A summary of the selected papers (minimum of 4500 words), presented by authors during the workshop, will be published by Springer (Scopus and WoS indexed).

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Important Dates

- Paper Submission Deadline: 4th of October 2024
- Notification of Acceptance: 4th of November 2024
- Registration deadline: 11th of November 2024

Submission Guidelines

We invite researchers, scholars, industry professionals, policymakers, and other interested individuals to submit original, high-quality research papers, case studies, or review articles addressing the conference themes. All submissions should follow the guidelines provided below and use the *paper template* available on the section “call for papers” on the conference’s website <https://convegna.unicatt.it/merit>

1. Submitted papers must NOT have been previously published and if under review, must NOT appear in print before the MeRIT 2024 Conference.
2. Each paper for the Merit Conference should be a full paper, with an abstract of between 150 and 200 words and a total length between 4,500 – 8,000 words, including references, title, index and taglines.
3. To facilitate the blind review process, remove ALL authors identifying information, including acknowledgements from the text, and document/file properties. (Any submissions with author information will be automatically DELETED; author information and acknowledgements are to be included in the submission form).
4. The entire paper (title page, abstract, keywords, main text, figures, tables, appendices, references, etc.), must be in ONE anonymised document created in PDF format.
5. Only submissions in English shall be accepted for review.
6. In case of acceptance, the author or one of the co-authors should be available to present the paper at the conference. A presenting author can only present one paper at the conference.

We look forward to receiving your contributions and fostering meaningful discussions on how megaprojects can change the world for the better. Join us at MeRIT workshop to share your insights, collaborate with like-minded professionals, and contribute to shaping a sustainable and prosperous future through transformative projects.

For further inquiries, please contact: merit@unicatt.it