Syllabus

Specialization Module: Analyzing Mega Projects

Room: FMA/00.06
Time: Monday, 14-16 h
Start: 16th of October 2017

Notes:
The seminar will be taught in English.

Registration:
Via FlexNow! From September 1st until November 5th, 2017 or during the first lesson.

Office hours:
Wednesday, 14-16 h and by arrangement

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Course description:
The infamous delays and cost-overruns of the Berlin-Brandenburg Airport, Stuttgart 21 and the Elbphilharmonie have created the idea that somehow Germany does not get big projects done properly any longer. But while people such as Mario Barth may find it hard to believe, ‘failure’ in this sense is the rule rather than the exception for such ‘mega projects’ worldwide. This is due to the unique combination of actors, technological aspects and complex context conditions preventing the application of any simple and general formula. That said, the successes and failures of mega projects can be studied and understood adequately when their complex nature is considered. By providing the necessary conceptual and methodological tools, this seminar will teach you how.

First, we introduce the topic of ‘megaprojects’ by exploring how they can be defined, why they exist and what typical sources of failure haunt them. Then we take a look at the ‘conventional’ approach to engaging in megaprojects and learn about the basics of risk management in construction projects.

Before the background of these basics, we look in more detail at the ‘performance drivers’ of megaprojects, namely governance structures, accountability, and the way complexity is coped with. While empirical examples will be frequently referred to for illustration purposes, this block of sessions is largely theoretically focused.

Next, we will have a brief interlude on methods used to study megaprojects. Depending on the research question, both qualitative and quantitative methods can be fruitfully
applied. It is important, however, that the complexity of these endeavours is duly accounted for. Thus, while methods you have mastered elsewhere might still be used in this course, we focus here on two ‘complexity-informed’ approaches here.

In the final and longest part of the seminar, we will focus on a couple of case studies. The individual sessions always centre on one particular aspect of megaprojects that the cases studies in question illustrate particularly well.

**Learning goals:**
- To obtain an overview of the ins and outs of megaprojects
- To summarize the main factors contributing to the complexity, success and failure of such projects
- To understand the complex mechanisms at work in megaprojects
- To enable students to empirically analyse megaprojects independently and to develop general and specific policy recommendations
- To solve problems, rather than reproducing texts in their original form
- To improve your command of the English language by actively participating in classroom discussions and writing an (academic) paper.

**Situating the course in the wider educational programme of the Chair**
Students wanting to participate in the course should have completed one of the Bachelor seminars taught at our Chair, i.e. either “Why Things Are Complex” or “From Plan to Practice in Public Policy”. These seminars offer helpful and necessary, but different starting points for successful participation in the specialization module (*Vertiefungseminar*): While students having completed “Why Things Are Complex” will be familiar with notions such as risk management and Public-Private Partnerships, students who have followed “From Plan to Practice” might approach megaprojects from an implementation perspective, amongst others. Moreover, the teaching method used in the course will already be familiar.

**Teaching method and test**
The course is built on a teaching method known as ‘Problem-Based Learning’ (PBL). Most importantly, this includes active participation in classroom discussions of the assigned readings – often with a division of labour among the group – focused on so-called ‘Learning Goals’ centred on a broader problem or puzzle. Hence, in order to pass this course, students will be asked to regularly and actively participate in the classroom discussions, and to take over the ‘chairing’ of one of the sessions (25% of the overall grade) rather than individually presenting the readings assigned. Students further have to conduct a small research project of their own and write a respective paper (8,000 words; 75% of the overall grades) (see below for details). There will be ample room for individual feedback during the research process, with two sessions being reserved for student presentations on the state of their research (one before Christmas, the other at the end of the lecture period). Further details on PBL will be provided in the introductory session as well as in the Rules of the Game provided on the Virtual Campus.

**Rules of the Game**
Find more detailed information about PBL, requirements for presenting and the final paper by following the respective link (on the Virtual Campus).
Course schedule

(1) 16.10.2017: Introduction & Organization

(2) 23.10.2017: Megaprojects – Why bother?
   Fiedler, Jobst; Wendler, Alexander (2016): Berlin Brandenburg Airport, in: Genia Kostka & Jobst Fiedler (Eds.): Large Infrastructure Projects in Germany – Between Ambition and Realities, pp. 93-103.

30.10.2017: No session!

(3) 06.11.2017: Basics of Megaprojects

(4) 13.11.2017: Performance Drivers I: Governance and Actor Structures

(5) 20.11.2017: Performance Drivers II: Information and Accountability

(6) 27.11.2017: Performance Drivers III: Coping with Complexity


**Reading Group A:** Fiedler, Jobst; Schuster, Sascha (2016): The Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, in: Genia Kostka & Jobst Fiedler (Eds.): Large Infrastructure Projects in Germany – Between Ambition and Realities, pp. 39-86.

**Reading Group B:** Fiedler, Jobst; Wendler, Alexander (2016): Berlin Brandenburg Airport, in: Genia Kostka & Jobst Fiedler (Eds.): Large Infrastructure Projects in Germany – Between Ambition and Realities, pp. 87-147.


(12) 22.01.2018: Case Studies IV: Managing Unplanned Events


(13) 29.01.2018: Case Studies (V): Unintended Effects


(14) 05.02.2018: Feedback Session II

Present your final drafts