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Call for Papers: **“Bridging Public and Private Interests in Megaprojects: Practical and Theoretical Implications”**

Conference Name: MeRIT (Megaproject Research Interdisciplinary Team) Conference

Conference Date: November 20th-21st, 2025

Location: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – Via Emilia Parmense, 84 – Piacenza (IT)

Website: <https://convegni.unicatt.it/merit>

Introduction

We are pleased to announce the Call for Papers for the upcoming MeRIT conference dedicated to exploring the theme of "Bridging Public and Private Interests in Megaprojects: Practical and Theoretical Implications". This conference aims to bring together researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and industry experts to share insights, exchange ideas, and discuss the transformative potential of megaprojects in harmonizing Business/Government interactions in Megaprojects.

Background

Projects are often ‘agents of changes’ and pivotal to driving the innovation and development required to boost economies and social welfare (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).

With their potential to 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). 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 their popularity, megaprojects entail fundamental challenges, especially as they require intense collaboration and coordination among actors from various sectors and institutional domains with disparate interests, professional identities, and organizational procedures (Stjerne et al. 2019; O’Mahony & Bechky, 2008). It has been known for a long time that interorganizational collaboration in complex projects often takes place in the form of meta-organizations whereby

multiple actors cooperate on joint outcomes (Gulati et al., 2012) in structures with distinct features of temporary organizing (Bakker et al., 2016; Bakker, 2010) and multi-level configuration of supply chains and relationships (Stefano et al., 2023).

One type of collaborative arrangements are collaborations between organizations from at least two different societal sectors (i.e., business, government, and nonprofit) that work together in the strive for economic, social, and environmental welfare (Vogel et al., 2021). These collaborations across organizational and sectoral lines can range from dyads to multiparty arrangements, local to global levels, short to long time frames, and totally voluntary or fully mandated. Nonetheless, these result necessary and desirable to tackle large scale, persistent problems that seem impossible without collaborations or partnerships among organizations (Page et al., 2015).

Different scholars in project management have highlighted how interorganizational projects, in which multiple organizations work jointly on a shared activity for a limited period of time, are increasingly used to coordinate complex products/services in uncertain and competitive environments (Davies, 2017). However, these actors are immersed in diverse permanent and temporal structures from which they draw when performing their daily work (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002). Nonetheless, although organizations in every sector face changing pressures and evolving public expectations that encourage them to interact with other sectors, when actors from different sectors focus on the same issue, they are likely to think about it differently, to be motivated by different goals, and to use different approaches (Selsky & Parker, 2005).

Despite high public and private expectations, the performance of megaprojects is far from being optimal (Denicol et al., 2020; Flyvbjerg, 2014; Juarez Cornelio et al., 2021), prompting critical consideration of alternatives to megaprojects (Brunet, 2025). Emerging thinking also raises fundamental questions about the “megaproject governance trap” (Gil & Beckam, 2025), and how the governance of megaprojects can be reconciled with the management of supply chains and stakeholders (Brunet, 2021), while upholding norms that define ‘success’ as the ability to stay on target and address pressing local and global needs (Di Maddaloni & Sabini, 2022). Therefore, among the tensions investigated and challenges within megaprojects, are those caused by differing public and private interests. As such, this conference seeks to explore new divisions of responsibility between the public and private actors in megaprojects, their governance interactions at the national and local level, and how these interactions can be devised to bring about a better future including resilience, equality and well-being of people and planet.

While public-private partnerships (PPPs) are often the preferred delivery model for infrastructure development and megaproject delivery (e.g., Tang et al., 2010; Selsky & Parker, 2010; Zheng et al., 2020), they have also been contested for nearly as long as they have existed (Bovaird, 2004). As such, researchers have noted that business-government interactions require and shape new forms of governance (Davis, 2021; Gil and Pinto, 2018; Gond, et al., 2011; Kourula et al., 2019) to explain the contexts, contingencies, and impacts of these renewed relationships, specifically in the context of megaprojects more comprehensively. As the fracture between public and private interests might lead to a poor legacy for the megaproject (Di Maddaloni et al., 2025), too often the role of government is simply ignored (Knudsen & Moon, 2022). This is evident in the stakeholder view from its emergence to contemporary manifestations (e.g., Freeman, et al., 2023) which barely recognizes government, and in which public and private are treated as separate worlds.

Conference Themes

The conference seeks contributions from researchers and practitioners across diverse disciplines (Organization, sociology, law, public administration, marketing, engineering, etc.) and sectors of

economic production (public, private, nonprofit), with a focus on the when/where/how/under which conditions business-government interactions might effectively work in serving the purpose of megaprojects and to achieve their full potential. The possible questions include, but are not limited to:

Questions about business actors

1. How can project organizations best support public governance for improved megaproject outcomes?
2. Do business interactions with non-democratic governments have different dynamics and implications for megaprojects?
3. What role can be played by different corporate governance systems in creating for positive interactions with government?

Questions about government actors

4. How can public actors enable efficient and effective business contributions to megaprojects?
5. When and how is government regulation impacting either positively or negatively the performance of megaprojects?
6. What government actions are required to facilitate private investments and megaprojects positive outcomes?
7. How local governments and public administration contributes to the planning, delivery, and long-term benefits of megaprojects?
8. How does global economic turmoil affect the performance and delivery of megaprojects, and what strategic governmental interventions are necessary to ensure their successful execution?
9. How are megaprojects adapting to global economic crises, and what government responses have proven most effective across different contexts?

Questions about all governance actors

10. What processes, metrics, labels, and standards enable government-business interactions for megaproject delivery issues?
11. How are these actors motivated and equipped to address the challenges of multi-level and multi-actor relationships and governance in megaprojects?
12. How do public regulation and private authority interact differently across countries or regional contexts, including the Global South?
13. To what extent does global economic disruption challenge the viability of megaprojects, and how can both businesses and governments recalibrate their roles to mitigate risk and improve outcomes?

Publishing Opportunities and Dissemination

Full Papers:

The review committee will invite the authors of the best papers to expand their work into a full article (8,000–10,000 words) and submit it to a fast-track review process for the *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, one of the world's leading journals in project management.

Short papers:

Selected papers (minimum of 4,500 words), presented by authors during the workshop, will have the opportunity to be published by an international publisher (Scopus and WoS indexed).

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Important Dates

- Paper Submission Deadline: 17th of October 2025
- Notification of Acceptance: 3rd of November 2025
- Registration deadline: 10th of November 2025

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://convegni.unicatt.it/merit>

1. Submitted papers must NOT have been previously published and if under review, must NOT appear in print before the MeRIT 2025 Conference.
2. Each paper for the Merit Conference should be a short paper, with an abstract of between 150 and 200 words and a total length between 4,000 – 6,000 words, NOT 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**