
Guest editorial: Rethinking infrastructure projects for the new normal

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For the two last years, the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 has created a new reality. It affected a huge number of persons around the world and showed the inextricable link between social, environmental and economic issues. The effects of the pandemic resulted in rethinking infrastructure among us. Infrastructure has a major role to play in resilience, but also in economic recovery, related to environmental and social new conditions. In the context of damage imposed to the environment and climate changes, resilience of infrastructure is starting to get to be part of the new normal.

Experience related to the COVID-19 crisis is reason for reflection. Profound questions about the governance, design, resilience and execution of infrastructure projects must be addressed by decision-makers and key players in the industry. It is important to seize this opportunity to think differently about infrastructure projects. For instance, with the pandemic, additional health protection measures are required on job sites, and the social dimensions must be taken into consideration more than usual, which means that project costs and turnaround times must be reviewed. This requires the integration of changes to ensure better governance and manage these projects' social and environmental impacts. Infrastructures are public goods, essential services that foster access to health care, education, energy, and in some cases to drinking water, sanitation and individual equality. They play a key role in solving problems related to sustainable development and the battle against climate change, which COVID-19 crisis started to unpack as well. How will our infrastructure projects be able to support us in this transition? Will we be able to reorganize to ensure that our infrastructures respond better to society's well-being? A paradigm shift was needed to take into account of the "right" resilience parameters and integrate them into project governance of major infrastructure projects?

Launching into infrastructure projects as an economic response to the COVID-19 crisis is fraught with the danger of jumping too fast "as haste makes waste" without a systemic view of the future of how people will live, travel and work that would create a different demand on infrastructure.

For instance, questions such as what will the predictions about smart cities change the current ways of urban infrastructure development when people are able to work more from home, use shared transport, be able to order on-demand transport using apps and experience a reduction in traffic due to autonomous vehicles? How will the new normal affect our patterns of commuting and travelling, water and sanitation, education and public health "track and trace" systems to understand patterns for prevention and control of infectious diseases? What kind of infrastructure will be fit for purpose in this "brave new world"? Very importantly, the pandemic has exposed the social inequalities, including class, race and gender, and the notion of "key workers" has further emphasized some of the less comfortable truths underpinning our modern societies in the Global North and particularly South. If anything, it looks like infrastructure projects to deliver social services are going to become more important than they were in the recent past and, the role of governments to provide support for those projects is set to become more central.



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The aim of this Special Issue was to unpack the various elements of the paradigm shift needed to achieve the infrastructure for the “new normal” and corresponding resilience parameters needed from the different research perspectives. We are proud to publish that Special Issue composed of seven papers that contribute to this aim.

The first paper on *Prioritizing risks with composition of probabilistic preferences and weighting of FMEA criteria for fast decision-making in complex scenarios* by Fábio Henrique de Souza, Luiz Octávio Gavião, Annibal Parracho Sant’Anna and Gilson B.A. Lima aims to develop a risk prioritization process using failure mode and effect analysis (FMEA) in association with composition of probabilistic preferences (CPPs) and weighting the risk analysis criteria. It develops decision-making considering the fast response necessary to achieve project objectives in complex scenarios, such as the pandemic of COVID-19. It provides a segmentation of what should and should not be prioritized.

The second paper, *Praxis of knowledge-management and trust-based collaborative relationships in project delivery: mediating role of a project facilitator* by Olubukola Tokede, Dominic Ahiaga-Dagbui and John Morrison, investigates the mediating role of a project facilitator in attenuating disruptions in knowledge flows during the delivery of an infrastructure project. The project facilitator provides a coherent context to reinvent the behaviours and events by creating a forum for understanding critical problems and stimulating constructive dialogue and intervention. As the authors said, “a facilitator is used as the knowledge broker in a multi-party infrastructure delivery team”.

The third paper, *Impacts of project complexity, trust in leader, performance readiness and situational leadership on financial sustainability* by Elfindah Princes and Ahmad Said examines the factors of financial sustainability of project management when they face complexities. This paper contributes to the limited research on the financial sustainability of project management in developing countries. It highlights that to overcome project complexities, the readiness of employees to perform is important.

The fourth paper, *Infrastructure and health: the salutogenic approach, interdisciplinarity and new challenges for planning and design* by Agnès Patuano, Ralitsa Shentova and Ana Aceska argues for a salutogenic perspective on infrastructure planning and design. With the COVID-19 crisis, the authors see it as an opportunity to revive the importance of infrastructure in promoting health and well-being.

The fifth paper, *Impact of the Coronavirus disease 2019 and the post-pandemic construction sector (Pakistan)* by Muhammad Ayat, Azmat Ullah and Chang Wook Kang aims to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on the construction sector and how to minimize the effect of the pandemic disruptions. It also proposes new directions for the construction sector and some mitigation measures to help manage these disruptions in construction-related projects to ensure the achievement of these project objectives.

The sixth paper, *Institutionalisation of sustainability in Indian megaprojects: an organisational field-based approach* by Nicola Thounaojam, Ganesh Devkar and Boeing Laishram explores the interactions and interventions of various actors in the megaproject field to institutionalize sustainability since the advent of COVID-19 has heightened the importance of sustainability due to its consequences on the global economy and business activities.

The last paper of the Special Issue, *Energy Justice Issues in renewable energy mega projects: implications for a socioeconomic evaluation of megaprojects* by Shankar Sankaran, Stewart Clegg, Nathalie Drouin and Ralf Müller, focuses on stakeholder issues created by large-scale solar and wind farms being built to keep pace with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 7 focused on clean affordable energy. Although these farms provide more sustainable forms of energy, they are also having a social impact on vulnerable population whose properties or livelihood are affected by these renewable energy megaprojects. These issues are likely to become more intense due to the impact of COVID-19 on poorer people’s health and ability to find

work. The onset of COVID-19 has also slowed down building these farms affecting the world's ability to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals set to be achieved by 2030.

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You may ask how the collection of papers in this Special Issue helps address the profound and complex questions that we posed at the beginning of the editorial. Rather than wanting to provide answers and guidance, we hope this Special Issue opens a number of conversations about the new perspectives and out of the box thinking that will be needed to reconceptualize the role of projects and project-based organizing in addressing the changes that come about through events that disrupt stability and predictability of the world in which we finance, plan, design, deliver and operate infrastructure systems. Rather than predicting how the “new normal” might look like for infrastructure projects, we should acknowledge an increasing need to embrace the continually accelerating pace of change and disruption replacing the old paradigm of stability, predictability and control as the management principle for project organizing. We hope that the eclecticism and diversity of contributions presented in this Special Issue help to achieve the intellectual transition to less conventional ideas and new perspectives that are needed to better manage infrastructure projects in this emerging and increasingly complex and fast paced reality.

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Nathalie Drouin

ESG Uqam, Montreal, Canada

Vedran Zerjav

Bartlett School of Construction and Project Management, UCL, London, UK

Shankar Sankaran

School of the Built Environment, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, Australia, and

Marie-Andrée Caron

Accounting Department, ESG Uqam, Montreal, Canada