



Conference on Pharaonic Projects, Istanbul, 26-27th October 2013

Taxim Hill Hotel

Saturday, 26th October 2013

10:15 - 10:40 Keynote Speech

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Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects Network

“The Construction of the Forum against Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects: An Historic Necessity”

Paolo Prieri

Dear friends,

It is certainly very exciting to be here with you in Istanbul, a city whose name has resonated around the world this year as a symbol of the will and action of citizens to take charge of their future.

I am here to represent the **Forum against Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects**, an international network of communities across Spain, France, Italy, the UK, Germany, Romania, Morocco, and beyond.

I would first like to thank the organizers for inviting me, both personally and on behalf of the organizations that make up the Forum.

My presentation aims to give you some information on the nature of Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects, on why we must commit ourselves to saying **STOP Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects** and encourage you to reflect on this paradigm of modernity and progress at full speed.

Movements and associations that collaborate in the Forum against Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects actively oppose the imposition of massive infrastructure projects such as the HS2 rail scheme in the UK, the new Lyon-Turin rail line, the airport of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, the Stuttgart 21 train station, the tunnel under the fixed Fehmarn Belt link, the Bordeaux-Spain high-speed train, the tunnel under Old Florence and more.

The projects that we oppose are:

Unnecessary because they do not meet the real needs of the populations but instead divert vital public funds to mega schemes that are first and foremost about generating private mega profits,

and **Imposed** because citizens are excluded from real influence in both the analysis of the transport problem, and in the democratic identification of ways to address that.

The official justification for these new infrastructure projects is in every case based on false cost-benefit analyses, fanciful capacity and demand figures and mythical job creation claims - a situation of permanent deception.

These mega projects are framed so as to guarantee exorbitant profits for large industrial and financial groups, guaranteed by public funds and leading to public debt. On the other hand they destroy small and medium-sized enterprises and locally-based economic systems, which generally create more employment and permit more equitable local development.

These projects criminalise dissent while giving privileged access to powerful interests through lobbying and political influence. In some cases this certainly extends to the mafia.

Faced with the serious social conflicts that these projects cause, governments and administrations have operated arrogantly behind closed doors and treated proposals by citizens with contempt.

We can use this summary to apply to all these projects: ‘No business case, no economic case, no environmental case, no democratic case, no social case, no money to pay for it’.

The **symbol of our Forum** is the “**white elephant**” which, in parts of Asia, is an idiom for gifts that are useless, likely to bankrupt the recipient, called sacred, and cannot be refused. A perfect symbol for so many of the TEN-T projects that we oppose.

The story of Mega Projects has its roots in the distant past, in the archaeological remains of the civilizations of the Mediterranean are examples.

But without a doubt today when we speak of Mega Projects we are not referring to the monuments erected for the glory of gods, pharaohs and emperors.

Those powerful individuals built these grand projects during their reign for their own glory and to be remembered for what they gave to their people - using the work of their subjects! - ports, roads, aqueducts and bridges.

Projects that were certainly necessary and useful at the time and still largely are today.

Based on these references to the past we can say that the notion of necessity and usefulness of realizing great projects has changed over time and space.

Over time, because many countries on our planet, over the centuries, have developed sufficient infrastructure networks to meet their needs, which must naturally be maintained and, in some cases, modernized.

Over space because even in the "southern hemisphere - once called "Developing Countries" or "Third World" - where you imagine that there is a great need for infrastructure - the Mega Projects of today are only useful to those who realize them and have never sought the opinion of local citizens.

This premise is necessary to understand that the theme of Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects is valid in the northern and southern hemisphere. It 's a theme that runs across the planet.

I recall the struggles against dams on the Narmada River in India. A project of the 80s, initially financed by the World Bank, which provided for a system of more than 3,000 dams along the Narmada River, which flows for more than 1,300 km through three different states of India, and was intended to totally change the hydrology and the morphology of the Gujarat Valley.

This is but one example, tens, hundreds and thousands of others can be given, for every part of the planet.

As stated by Luca Mercalli, an expert on the processes of modification of territories as a result of climate change, in the 90s there was a shift: a large project was no longer an answer to a problem, shared with a local or national community, and an unnecessary project no longer embodied the need for sublime beauty, rather, it became a monster that lived on its own and turned itself into a mere opportunity for profit.

We have now entered the age of the Unnecessary Mega Projects. This is possible because of the fusion between technological possibilities and financial shenanigans, bogus money, created on paper through loans, that will rest on the shoulders of future generations.

Most of the large projects of the 21st century are promoted exploiting the rhetorical trend of progress and modernity.

Money is absorbed by the taxpayer in a hidden way, without any explanation about the weight of infrastructural excess on public finance.

So damages become irreversible: national debt, overbuilding agricultural land, air, water and soil pollution, waste of energy and valuable raw materials, waste production, landscape devastation.

An Unnecessary Mega Project turns itself into a bottomless pit that absorbs resources and produces new damage and critical situations in an overcrowded world.

This invasion of large-scale projects hails from the affirmations of neo-liberal globalization that has redefined and limited time and space on our planet.

In this sense, the relations between countries are no longer negotiated through experiences, traditions and bilateral negotiations, but by the rules of the neo-liberal policies imposed by the World Trade Organization which is involved in every human activity and goes far beyond trade.

Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects have become part of the method - along with information technology - to increase the speed and fluidity of economic trade by land, sea and air in accordance with the principle of growth as the only positive value.

In many parts of the planet, citizens are rebelling against the grand projects that have been imposed on their lives.

Their struggles, geographically distant from each other and often mutually uninformed, need, however, to be known to increase the chances of being successful.

A fight that has no name, a struggle that is little known beyond its scope, has less chance to create solidarity around it and be successful.

These reflections are the basis of the establishment, in 2011, of the Forum against Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects.

Faced with the changes, combating Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects is, therefore, a real historical necessity, as it is to fight against nuclear power, against the privatization of water, etc.

I come from a struggle that began 24 years ago in an alpine valley in north-western Italy, on the border with France.

At the end of the 80s, political parties and a group of businessmen decided that it was necessary to construct a new railway line to give the north-west of Italy access to Europe, deliberately forgetting that there was already a largely underused railway line.

And to be really truly modern, they imagined a high-speed passenger service so that they could go from Milan to Turin and then to Lyon or Paris more quickly.

Over time, project promoters realized that the passengers would have been too few, so they decided to modify the plan turning it into a freight line.

But even so the goods were so few that the promoters eventually presented it as a mixed line, with a significant increase in costs.

The project plans to build, among other things, a tunnel of 57 km. Its cost is estimated, to date, at € 26.1 billion, equivalent to three nuclear power plants, and is inevitably destined to grow.

The citizens of Val di Susa realized the nature of this project and the damages that would be sustained by their valley, and immediately organized their opposition.

Lisa Ariemma will talk about the movement in detail in the Panel "Overview of Mega Projects in Turkey and in Europe" later today.

I would like to remind you at this juncture that the mass mobilization of the people of Val Susa could not in any way remain within a small territory.

Almost by accident, in 2009, we came into contact with the reality of a similar struggle in the south of France, on the Atlantic, 800 km from Val Susa. Citizens of the Basque Country, French and Spanish, fought against the construction of a new railway line.

Together we developed a document called the Charter of Hendaye from the name of the town where it was signed on January 23, 2010, which contains the first joint reflection against these mighty projects, not only of railways but also motorways, airports and super-ports.

This document contains a summary of the reasons for our opposition, stating that these projects:

- constitute an ecological, socioeconomic and human disaster for the territories they cross,
- will destroy natural spaces and agricultural lands, and represent a new barrier with harmful effects and degradation for the environment with important negative impacts for local residents,
- are unable to lead to the participation of the population in decision processes,
- are imposed by the governments and the administrations opaquely to the exclusion of the arguments and proposals of citizens.

In addition:

- the official justification for the construction of these new lines is presented adopting false hypotheses about the traffic and underestimation of the costs of accomplishment in order to "sell" better a project whose real utility has not been demonstrated;
- the priority granted to high-speed rail, or HSR, is done, at a colossal cost, to the detriment of the traffic of proximity and of priority given to the maintenance and development of existing railway networks; which are neither maintained nor optimized so as to develop a transport of freight that would support the territories and a public transport service that is accessible to all;
- the construction of HSR falls under a perpetual search for large infrastructure (motorways, enlarging of the airports, super-ports...) and is contrary to the concept of sustainable development.

We oppose the aberrant expansion of transportation networks provoked by globalized capitalism, and which does not allow for uniform local development, but on the contrary supports abnormal concentration of traffic and production and a savage delocalization.

But the citizens are not only opposed, they also present specific proposals saying they want:

- the regeneration, maintenance and optimization of the existing lines, which is the most acceptable alternative solution from an environmental point of view, and with much lower financial costs than the construction of new lines;
- the decrease of transportation, together with a major transformation of the economic and social model, particularly by giving priority to proximity and to re-localizing the economy; and especially:
- the restoration of the capacity of making decisions to the most directly affected populations, the foundation of an authentic democracy and local autonomy in front of an imposed development model.

Hundreds of organizations in France, Spain, Italy, Germany, the UK and elsewhere have adopted the Charter of Hendaye as a point of reference for their actions.

Over the last 3 years, our Forum has held a series of international meetings where citizens have discussed these mega projects. We have found that the problems that we face are not unique to each different situation but all have common features.

In the summer of 2011, Presidio Europa No TAV, the working group that I belong to, and which maintains contact with other struggles on an international level and relations with the European institutions, organized the first Forum against Useless and imposed mega projects in Val di Susa.

The purpose of this first international meeting was to begin to analyze the UIMP from different points of view and at the same time allow for an exchange of experiences on the forms of struggle implemented.

Among the topics examined it's appropriate to mention a few.

The democratic problem

According to **Alessandra Algotino**, a professor of Constitutionalism, those who struggle against Unnecessary Mega Projects are fighting for an effective democracy, exercising what is the essence of democracy: participation, active participation from below.

Student movements, the struggles of temporary workers, the popular sites in defence of territories like in Taksim Gezi Park here in Istanbul, they are all forms of popular struggle that evoke social democracy or the common good.

They remind us that democracy is conflict, above and beyond the rhetorical mystification of governance, that democracy can't survive without disagreements and tension, with socio-economic conditions that are equal and worthy of everyone; a pre-condition for every form of pluralism and difference that isn't discrimination but freedom of expression.

At the same time I should mention that the incommensurability of Mega Projects represents a democracy deficit as citizen participation is always excluded, it is stated that "they are not in a position to judge their value."

On 25 June 1998, in Aarhus, Denmark, a framework of the UN Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters was signed.

This Convention enhances the possibility for citizens to intervene in the decision to build a Mega Project and give them priority to act on their input before the point of no return, as stated in Article 6.4 of the Aarhus Convention. "Each Party Shall Provide for early public participation, When All options are open and effective public participation can take place."

The Turkish Government should ratify this convention since Turkey is neither a party nor a signatory of the Aarhus Convention but only participates, as a member of the UN, as an observer in the meetings of the Convention.

The problem of costs that are always immense.

It is important that people know all the costs of a Mega Project because, as stated by Sergio Ulgiati, a professor of environmental sciences, the hidden environmental, energy and social costs of any development have been clearly pointed out by the scientific community, shedding light on misleading assessments that only account for direct, operational energy costs and disregard all the indirect, upstream and downstream impact categories over the entire life cycle of a given development.

Disregarding or not properly accounting for indirect costs makes any assessment unreliable and actually opens the way to "solutions" that are much worse than the problem to be solved.

Once further and more reliable information is made available, the usual process of top-down decision-making must be converted into a participatory procedure that involves all the stake-holders and the affected communities.

In particular, the concept itself of "feasibility" must be converted from "technical and economical feasibility" into a more complex framework that includes aspects of "post-normal" science, namely the shift from the expert community to an "extended peer community" consisting of all those affected by an issue who are prepared to enter into dialogue on it.

In our analysis we have paid significant attention to understanding how the large companies that realize Mega Projects are structured.

According to **Ivan Cicconi**, an expert on public works, these companies are large virtual businesses and are structurally oriented toward a product that is attainable only by breaking it down into a virtual pyramid of work tied to a web of contracts and sub-contracts.

The “Mega Project” is the only product that allows this corporate model of a virtual company to maximize profits.

Mega Projects encouraged by these large companies (also called post-Fordist companies) must have a value linked to the present, irrespective of the past or the future: it is the substitute for an inability to project into the future and a total disengagement from a past that is negated or removed entirely.

The Mega Project is the most desired and consumed plate on the table of the new kick backs in which these post-Fordist companies can eat into public goods and resources together with the crooked virtual political parties of the post-Keynesian state.

To close this rapid analysis of the Forum against the Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects, it is useful to introduce the term post-normal science, i.e. the process of democratization from a perspective of sustainability and equity.

As stated by Elena Camino, a Professor of Foundations of Sustainability, post-normal science uses the systemic approach and the provisional and undetermined character of knowledge: it underlines that facts are uncertain, values are under discussion, the stakes are high and decisions are urgent.

And it does not look for a demonstration but for a dialogue, and the working method includes not only the experts but a larger peer community is involved and legitimated to bring its own knowledge.

In this context even local know-how becomes very important as it comes from experiential knowledge that has settled for a long time in different cultures and it has not been formalized in scientific, abstract and quantitative terms.

The qualitative knowledge becomes a useful means to communicate in an open and democratic process aiming at solving disputes and making decisions.

At the end of the first Forum, in 2011, there was a final discussion to introduce this new category of Unnecessary Mega Projects into struggles and political and social debate on an international level.

The goal arose to give life to a process which began well and should spread, initially in Europe.

This objective seems to have been achieved if we are here today in Istanbul to talk about the struggle against Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects.

In December 2011, the first European Day against Useless Mega Projects was celebrated. It has become a recurring appointment.

In December of this year we will celebrate the fourth day against the Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects.

In November 2011, during an organizational meeting in Paris that preceded a demonstration against a mega airport in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, it was decided that the second Forum should take place in the summer of 2012 in France. In July 2012, this second International Forum of Notre-Dame-des-Landes was a spectacular success, with the participation of thousands of citizens.

The debates were numerous and at the end a Declaration was approved that launched, among other things, the new name of the Forum with the addition of “Imposed”.

In the month of February the World Social Forum in Tunis a meeting was held that endorsed the Charter of Tunis which you can find easily on the web.

The third Forum Against Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects took place in Stuttgart, Germany, this past July and by the end of this year we will decide the location for the next Forum in 2014.

I will now affirm **What we want.**

- We do want investments to improve infrastructure BUT
- We want infrastructure that prioritises the needs of people, not one that prioritises the production of super-profits for a few during the construction period and debt to the population afterwards.
- We want infrastructure that is environmentally responsible, that adopts a Life Cycle Assessment and that applies the precautionary principle.
- We want a developmental process that is honest, open to scrutiny and based on reliable and independent evidence, not one that fabricates data and hides decisions.
- We want a governance system that does not criminalise dissent and militarise the areas where we live as has occurred in Susa Valley and Notre-Dame-des-Landes. Instead we want a system that understands that dissent is a central part of democratic governance.

What we want governments to do:

- To maintain and optimize existing infrastructure which, from an environmental, cost and job creation perspective, almost always represents a better alternative compared to the construction of new infrastructure.
- Given the profound transformation of the socio-economic model that is in deep crisis, we want Governments to give preference to the re-localization of the economy, to the protection of agricultural land, to the moderation of energy-use and to further the transition toward decentralized, renewable energy sources.
- To place the interests of the communities directly affected at the heart of the decision-making process.

In conclusion :

We do not have to develop Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects that are prohibitive for our economies and environment in order to have effective and sustainable infrastructures for the welfare of the people and to save the Planet.

Now, in 2013, we must change the priorities.

Thank you.