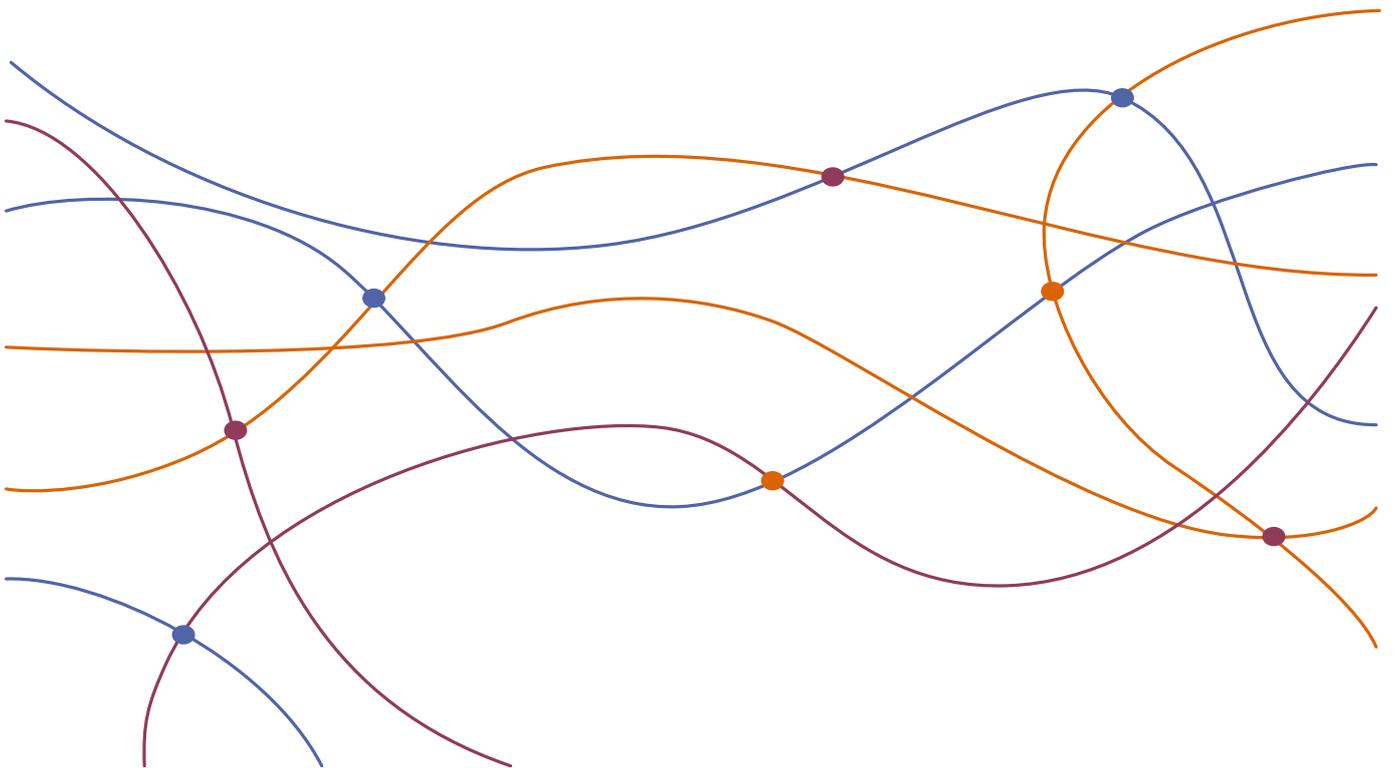


# SOCIAL MOVEMENTS OPPOSING MEGA PROJECTS

## A Rhizome of Resistance to Neoliberalism



### *Foreword*

In the last years, many mega projects have been faced by social movements of opposition that go beyond resident NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) struggles, in the sense that their opposition is based on considerations of common good rather than individualist interests. Protesting against a project often leads to questioning broader issues.

This document is a synthesis of a master thesis that I wrote between February and July 2014, in which I wanted to describe and account for the social movements opposing mega projects and the relations between them at the European scale.

I used research on the Internet, but also field observation during several visits of struggle sites, especially in Notre-dame-des-Landes, which was my main case study.

I met many brave, upstanding and inspiring people during this project, to whom I express my gratitude.

Feel free to comment, criticise and spread this paper!

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# A — Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects and neoliberalism

## *What are Mega Projects?*

Mega projects can be defined as large-scale investments in physical capital facilities. They not only include infrastructure projects dealing with transport, energy, water and waste management, but also mining or fracking facilities and projects aiming at urban regeneration, like for instance waterfront development projects, large-scale tourist resorts and commercial centres.

Mega projects are not new: they intertwine with the story of civilisations. For instance, one can think of the Egyptian Pyramids, the Great Wall of China, the cathedrals, the Moai statues of Easter Island... More recently, mega projects have proliferated with industrialisation era and they have played a key role in post-crisis periods. They are viewed as a means to stabilise capital, to foster growth and to raise living standards.

As a matter of fact, mega projects are deeply related to the ideology of progress. In the foreword of magazine *Insight - The global infrastructure magazine*, Nick Chism, Global Chair of KPMG's Infrastructure, Government and Healthcare line of business, writes: "One cannot help but be awestruck by mega projects. When huge budgets, massive footprints, unanticipated transformative benefits and all the thrills and spills of a theme park ride come together in one exhilarating project, it's hard not to be enthralled."<sup>1</sup>



INSIGHT The global infrastructure magazine / Issue No. 4 / 2013

Most of the times, this optimism isn't justified, though. Flyvbjerg even talks about "Machiavellian mega projects"<sup>2</sup>: After reviewing data from several hundred large projects, he nearly systematically encountered underestimated costs and overestimated benefits. He suggests that the reason why these projects are carried out despite these poor performances is that they bring profits to various categories of people: engineers, developers, bankers, lawyers, construction workers... Mega projects boost politicians' careers and they are instruments for city branding.

What I would like to highlight now is the relation between mega projects and neoliberalism, especially after the 1980s.

### **Notes:**

1 Nick Chism, 'foreword', *Insight*, Issue4, 2013, p.1

2 Bent Flyvbjerg, 'Machiavellian Megaprojects', *Antipode*, Vol.37(1), 2005, p.21

3 Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, 'Conceptualizing Neoliberalism', *Thinking Thatcherism*, Contesting neoliberalism urban frontiers, p.27

4 Made popular by J. Schumpeter, the term has been employed by D. Harvey, J. Peck, N. Theodore & N. Brenner

5 Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk, *Evil paradises - Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism*, The New Press

# What is neoliberalism?

Here are some core aspects of neoliberalism:

## A doctrine: unfettered market rule

Neoliberalism refers to a doctrine that celebrates unfettered market rule, according to which the market should control the political sphere, and market rule should penetrate all spheres of social life.

## "Post-political urban order"

Neoliberalism has affected democracy. The public has shifted from a collective identity to a sum of taxpayers and consumers.<sup>7</sup> With the help of the assumption of the superiority of the market to deal with public issues, the possibilities to make a political choice and to have a political conflict are brushed aside. The only thing left is a consensus around "global economic necessity"<sup>8</sup>. Swyngedow names this consensus the "postpolitical urban order". He explains that there is no choice or freedom outside this order and dissent can only emerge from the traditionalist or the fundamentalist<sup>9</sup>.

A neoliberal shift occurred in the 1980s: new financing techniques emerged; Public-Private Partnerships were increasingly adopted. Urban space became predominantly an arena

## "More Hydra than Goliath"

It is a project that is heterogeneously and partially achieved: it is hybrid, context-dependant; it is "more hydra than Goliath"<sup>3</sup>. In Greek mythology, the Lernaean Hydra is a monster with many heads that grow back when cut off. Similarly, neoliberalism has a plural and sneaky nature.

## "Creative destruction"

Some authors refer to neoliberalism as "creative destruction"<sup>4</sup>: the partial destruction of what hinders the application of the doctrine (which can be regulations or social welfare policies) and the creation of new infrastructure for economic growth and commodification go hand by hand.

## Social inequalities

Neoliberalism is accompanied by disparities: Davis even argues that social inequalities are the driving forces of contemporary economy, and not only mere collateral damage<sup>5</sup>.

## Spatial polarisation

Moreover, increasing transport speed and development of IT have involved more concentration of activity in metropolises and increasing spatial inequalities.<sup>6</sup> They create an image of a networked territory where the relations between nodes prevail over the relations between a node and its hinterland.

for market-oriented economic growth<sup>10</sup>, in a context of competition between cities. This has deeply affected mega-projects.

## Notes:

6 Pierre Veltz, *Mondialisation, Villes et Territoires*, p. 70

7 John Clarke, 'Dissolving the Public Realm? The Logics and Limits of Neo-liberalism', *Journal of Social Policy*, 2004, p.31

8 Jacques Rancière, 'Introducing disagreement', *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 2010, p.4

9 Erik Swyngedow, 'The Antinomies of the Postpolitical City: In Search of a Democratic Politics of Environmental Production', 2009

10 Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, 'Conceptualizing Neoliberalism, Thinking Thatcherism', *Contesting neoliberalism urban frontiers*, p.91

## Today post-crisis context – mega projects as an “asset class”

In today (post-)crisis context, large infrastructure development is promoted by national governments, multilateral development banks and international groupings, such as G20. Mega Projects are part of the plan to drag Europe from the crisis. Indeed the European Commission has developed guidelines for transport (TEN-T), energy (TEN-E) and telecommunication (ICT) networks. In some aspects this is similar to New Deal programmes that responded to the Great Depression of 1929 in the United States.



www.telegraph.co.uk

But the “New Deal” of today is clearly neoliberal: mega projects are financed through Public-Private-Partnerships and new financial tools like Europe 2020 Project Bond Initiative are developed to “transform infrastructure into an asset class”<sup>11</sup> for financiers and alleviate the constraints on investment related to mega projects, which cannot be free from uncertainties and whose benefits occur in the long run. Indeed mega projects are increasingly viewed as an area where to invest the huge sums of money accumulated in private wealth in search of hefty returns<sup>12</sup>.

According to the neoliberal doctrine, what is good for the market is good for society in general. But there are grounds to doubt it. These investments in infrastructure mega projects occur in an era when we know that natural resources are limited and radical change is needed to at least alleviate the disastrous consequences of climate change. Moreover, the social benefits of mega projects are highly contested and arouse strong opposition.

## “Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects”

By labelling mega projects “unnecessary” and “imposed”, opposition movements set each of their struggles in the broader frame of a fight against neoliberal consensus, which benefits a few individual and corporate interests while destabilising the economy and harming the environment and the social fabric of the place, in defiance of “real democracy”. This labelling gives their struggles visibility and enables to constitute a common basis for a “coalition of difference”<sup>13</sup>, from which they can deconstruct not only the very projects that they fight but also the logics behind them. Thus, they question a certain spatial rationale tied to mega projects.

### “Unnecessary”

Naming the mega projects “unnecessary” implies the question: “necessary for whom?” and introduces the issue of class struggle between the few beneficiary of the construction and exploitation of mega projects and the vast majority of people ripped off. By doing that, opponents point their fingers at the social disparities that go

### Notes:

11 Nicholas Hildyard, More than bricks and mortar. Infrastructure as Asset Class: A Critical Look at Private Equity Infrastructure Funds, 2012

12 Elena Gerebizza & Antonio Tricarico, Large infrastructure to overcome the crisis?, re:Common, 2013, p.3

13 Paul Routledge, Convergence space: process geographies of grassroots globalization networks, p.335

14, 15 Charter of Tunis. Forum Against Useless and Imposed Mega Projects, 2013

16 David Harvey, Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction, 2007

along with neoliberal projects. They suggest that rather than multiplying mega projects that are only necessary for small elite, “maintaining and optimizing existing infrastructure” is a better solution<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, they highlight the harmful character of the mega projects they are fighting: “mega projects permit the capitalist predator to increase its dominance on the planet generating irreversible damage to the environment and the populace”<sup>15</sup>. This statement thus echoes the double process of “creative destruction” that describes capitalism or neoliberalism.<sup>16</sup>

### "Imposed"

The adjective “Imposed” orients discussion towards the question of democracy. Mega projects look democratic from a distance: there has been a “Public Debate” before the project of building an airport in Notre-Dame-des-Landes was accepted, for instance. Many mega projects are led on a basis of a consensus gathering the main political parties that state the “obligation” to conduct them for the development of the region, a stance that is often conveyed by mainstream media. Then the opposition movements, who situate themselves outside this consensus, face situations of contempt or repression. Indeed the Charter of Tunis emphasizes “the militarisation and criminalisation of opposition”<sup>17</sup>. For instance, Chiara, Claudio, Niccolò and Mattia, who took part in a direct action of sabotage against the High Speed Railway between Lyon and Turin, are accused of act of terrorism, damage, violence toward police officers, possession and transport of war weapons, and they are on remand in Italian High Security Quarters. In these respects, mega projects are part of the “post-political urban order” described by Swyngedow and Rancière<sup>18</sup>.

<http://www.progettoalternativo.com>



## Mega projects and the process of metropolisation

Mega projects participate in the process of metropolisation: they contribute to creating a network territory where the centres are well-connected to each other at the expense of the connections between the centres and their hinterlands<sup>19</sup>. Some opposition movements highlight the relation between processes of metropolisation and desertification.<sup>20</sup> What is not a centre is doomed to decay.

Thus they raise awareness on the fact that competition between cities and regions is driving the cities’ policies instead of notions of general interest or the interest of the inhabitants. Similarly, the Charter of Tunis states that unnecessary imposed mega projects “increase competition between territories and always lean toward “bigger, faster, more expensive, more centralized”<sup>21</sup>. They imply unsustainable consumption of natural and financial resources.

### Notes:

17 Charter of Tunis. Forum Against Useless and Imposed Mega Projects, 2013

18 Jacques Rancière, Introducing disagreement, Erik Swyngedow, The Antinomies of the Postpolitical City

19 Pierre Veltz, Mondialisation, Villes et Territoires

20 See Nantes Nécropole N°3, Spring-Summer 2014, CNCA

21 Charter of Tunis. Forum Against Useless and Imposed Mega Projects, 2013

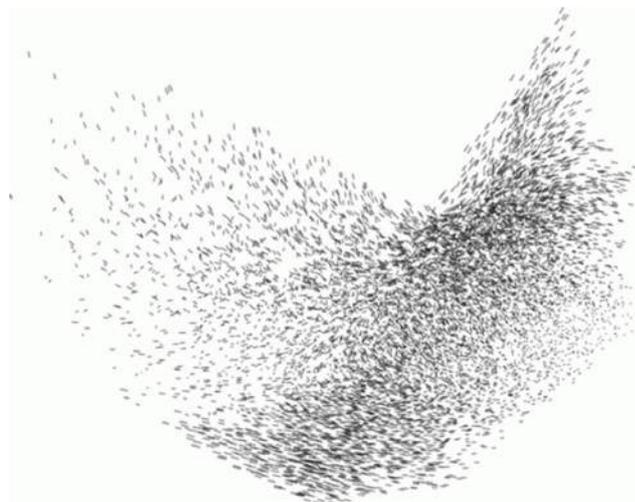
# B — The rhizome of social movements opposing Mega Projects

## *Social movements of today*

A definition of social movements can be this one: "collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities"<sup>1</sup>. Lopes de Sousa claims that their role is to put the State permanently under pressure.<sup>2</sup>

Social movements evolve with the society in which they take part. In industrial societies of the XIXth century, social movements were seen as associations of people with common interests embedded in structured social positions<sup>3</sup>. In the post-industrial, knowledge-based societies of today, the symbolic dimension is said to prevail over the attempt to achieve a specific goal (as it was the case in the XIXth century)<sup>4</sup>. Contemporary social movements enable to construct a collective identity. They try to practice the social changes they seek<sup>5</sup>.

Internet and cheap air flight have made personal contact easier between activists of different parts of the world<sup>6</sup>. Some "Grassroots globalisation networks" have emerged, in which relations are more flexible<sup>7</sup>; they tend toward horizontality and preserving heterogeneity, that's why these networks are named "coalitions of differences"<sup>8</sup>. More metaphorical terms are also used, such as swarms and multitude.<sup>9</sup>



The movements are still influenced by capitalist and traditional society. Categories like class, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc. continue to shape social relations<sup>10</sup>. Networks are characterised by power asymmetries: some hubs emerge, with more power and more influence<sup>11</sup>.

In some respects, these traits of today social movements can be seen in the movements opposing mega projects.

## *Rhizome?*

In botany, a rhizome is a horizontal, underground plant stem. The term has been taken up by Deleuze and Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*<sup>12</sup>. They defined some principles among which the principles of connection and heterogeneity stating that any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be, that there is no deep structure like there would be in a tree, and the principle of asignifying rupture: if you

### **Notes:**

1 Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, Third edition, 2011, p.9

2 Marcelo Lopes de Souza, *Social movements as 'critical urban planning' agents*, *City*, 2006, p.328

3 Alberto Melucci, as quoted in Joseph Gusfield, *Nomads of the present*, Alberto Melucci, Society, 1990

4, 5 Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, 198

6, 7, 8 Paul Routledge, *Convergence space: process geographies of grassroots globalization networks*

9 John Arquilla & David Ronfeldt, 2001; Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, 2004; Naomi Klein, 2002; *Notes from Nowhere*, 2003: as quoted in Andy Cumbers, Paul Routledge and Corinne Nativel, *The entangled geographies of global justice*, 2008

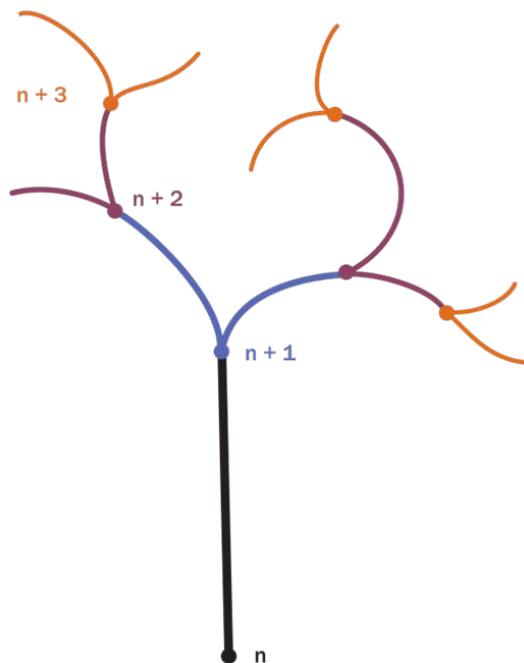
10 Andy Cumbers, Paul Routledge and Corinne Nativel, *The entangled geographies of global justice*, 2008, pp. 188-189

break it, it can start up again. To sum up, the rhizome is a network with characters of multiplicity, intense relation with its surroundings and transformative potential. There are several benefits in thinking of the social movements opposing mega projects, as well as of many contemporary social movements, in terms of rhizomes.

The social movements opposing mega projects are characterised by significant heterogeneity of and inside the different struggles, even though some profiles are to be seen more often than others (deep ecologists, retired people who have more time to dedicate to the struggle...). There is a tendency to multiply connections between both parts of and between the struggles against mega projects. However, due to variances in cultural, national and ideological proximity and to the influence of the context, every movement has some

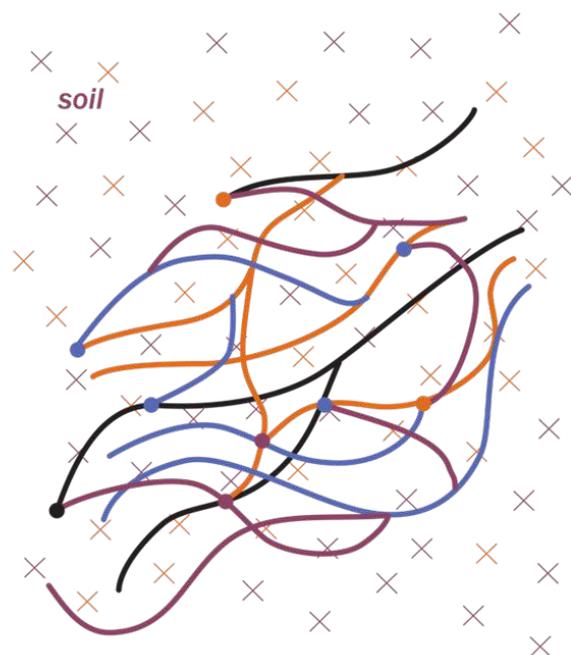
privileged connections. In addition, horizontalism is favoured in these movements over more traditional hierarchized structures, in spite of some unevenness in power and representation among the movements and the activists.

A major contribution of thinking in term of rhizome is that it highlights the multiple processes of exchange that the movements have with their “soil”, their context. On political and historical levels, there seem to be fewer contested projects in some countries especially post-communist countries in Eastern Europe<sup>13</sup>. The national scale seems to remain prevalent to bind the movements together. And culture and identity certainly play a key role: for instance, certain ways to dress and talk make some people more comfortable than other in every part of the movements.



### Tree

- binary
- hierarchical (verticality)
- has an order, an origin and ends



### Rhizome

- non-binary
- non-hierarchical (horizontality)
- no origin, no end
- heterogeneity
- underground (relation with the soil)
- ...

### Notes:

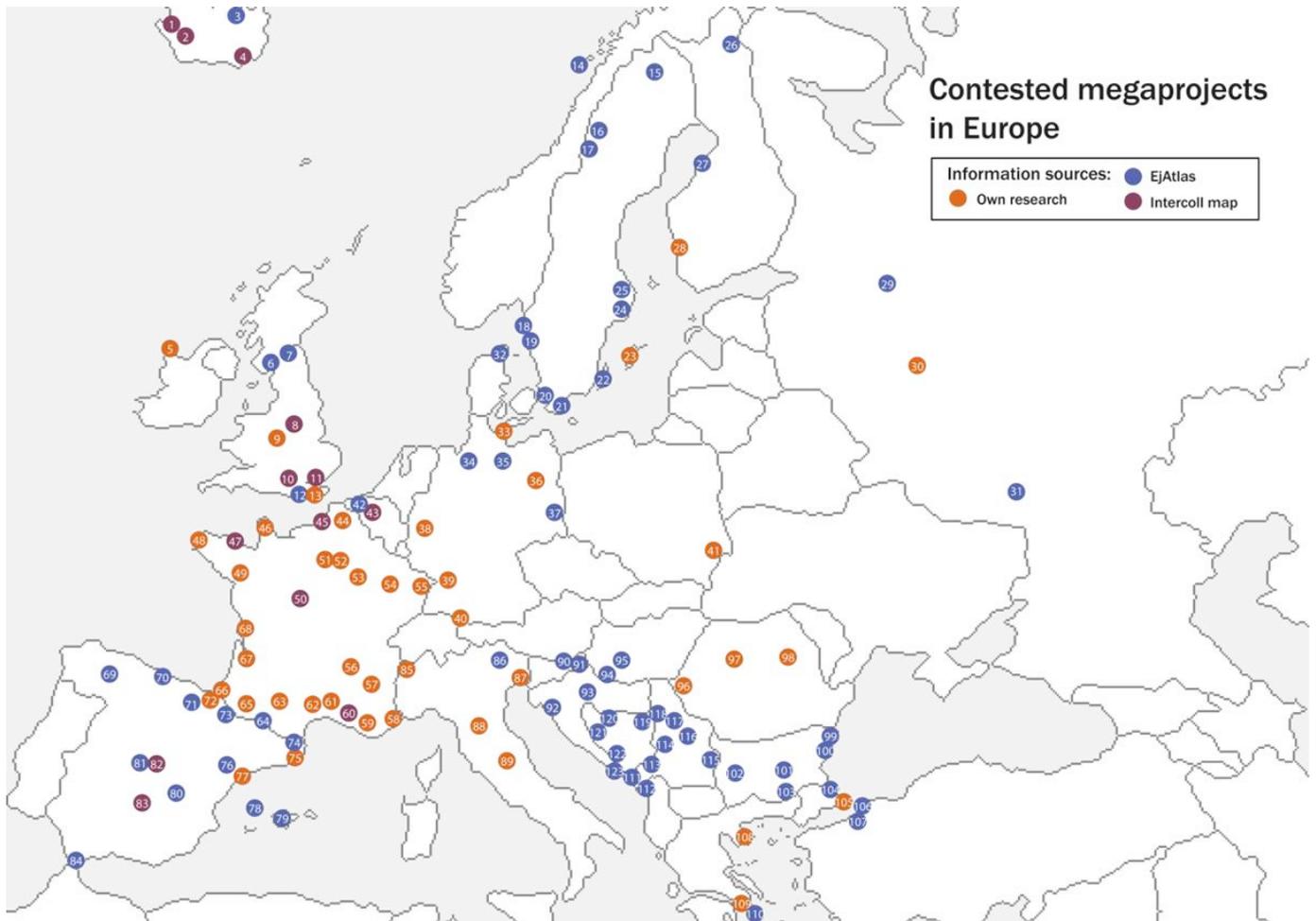
11 Graham Thompson, *Is the world a complex network?*, *Economy and Society*, 2004, quoted in Andy Cumbers, Paul Routledge and Corinne Nativel, *The entangled geographies of global justice*, 2008, p.189

12 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A thousand plateaus*, 1987

13 see the maps later in section B, and in sections C and D

## Multiple and diverse struggles against mega projects

The following map shows an inventory of contested mega projects in Europe (in a large sense) to illustrate the multiplicity and diversity of the struggles. It is non-exhaustive.



**Contested megaprojects in Europe**

Information sources: ● EjAtlas  
● Own research ● Intercoll map

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● Own research ● Intercoll map

- |  |                                       |                                     |   |
|--|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1 Hengill (+ in other locations)<br>Geothermal power plant | 11 Kingsnorth<br>Coal plant expansion | 21 Skåne<br>Shale gas               | 31 Voronezh, Black Sea<br>Massive agro Invest farming |
| 2 Farið (+ in other locations )<br>Dam                     | 12 Balcombe<br>Exploratory fracking   | 22 Öland<br>Shale gas prospecting   | 32 Frederikshavn<br>Shale gas fracking                |
| 3 Skútustaðahreppur<br>Hydroelectric Power Station         | 13 Bexhill-Hasting<br>Bypass          | 23 Ojnare forest<br>Lime stone mine | 33 Fehmarn<br>Bridge                                  |
| 4 Fjarðaál (+ in other locations )<br>Aluminium smelter    | 14 Lofoten<br>Oil drilling            | 24 Stockholm<br>Highway             | 34 Völkersen<br>Fracking                              |
| 5 Mayo<br>Gas pipeline                                     | 15 Gällök/Kallak<br>Iron mine         | 25 Uppsala<br>Airport               | 35 Gorleben<br>Nuclear waste                          |
| 6 Douglas valley<br>Opencast coal mine                     | 16 Vindelälven<br>Hydropower          | 26 Inari<br>Paper industry          | 36 Berlin<br>Highway                                  |
| 7 Cauldhall, Midlothian<br>Opencast coal mine              | 17 Rönnebäcken<br>Nickel mine         | 27 Pyhäjoki<br>Nuclear power plant  | 37 Welzow + other<br>Open cast lignite mining         |
| 8 Radcliffe<br>Coal plant                                  | 18 Bohuslän<br>Nuclear waste storage  | 28 Olkiluoto<br>Nuclear power plant | 38 Hambacher forst<br>Coal mine                       |
| 9 HS2 West Midlands - London<br>High Speed Railway         | 19 Ljungskile<br>Highway              | 29 Cherepovets<br>Steel plant       | 39 Stuttgart<br>Rail station                          |
| 10 Heathrow<br>Airport expansion                           | 20 Teckomatorp<br>Industrial waste    | 30 Khimki<br>Highway                | 40 Bodensee<br>Fracking                               |

- |  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| 41 Żurawiów<br>Fracking                    | 62 Millau<br>Wind energy   | 83 Ciudad Real<br>Ghost airport                         | 104 Istranca/Yildiz Mountains<br>Mines and quarries                      |
| 42 Antwerp<br>bypass + recycling metal     | 63 Sivens<br>Dam   | 84 Castellar de la Frontera<br>Luxury resort            | 105 Taksim, gezi, Istanbul<br>Urban development                          |
| 43 Lessines<br>Indoor ski arena            | 64 Pyrénées<br>rail tunnel                                       | 85 Val de Susa<br>High Speed Railway                    | 106 Istanbul<br>3rd bridge   |
| 44 Nord<br>High-Voltage Power Line         | 65 Oloron<br>Road  | 86 Mis Valley<br>Hydropower plant                       | 107 Yalova<br>Chemical storage terminal                                  |
| 45 Penly<br>Nuclear power plant            | 66 Basque country<br>High-Speed railway                          | 87 Friuli<br>High Speed Railway, Highway                | 108 Skouries<br>Gold mine  |
| 46 Flamanville<br>High Voltage power line  | 67 Le Barp<br>Nuclear research                                   | 88 Firenze<br>Underground Powerplant                    | 109 Keratea<br>Landfill  |
| 47 Baie de Saint-Brieuc<br>Windpower field | 68 Echillais<br>Incinerator                                      | 89 Abruzzo, Marche, Umbria<br>Pipeline                  | 110 Ellinikon<br>Luxury resort   |
| 48 Finistère<br>Gas plant                  | 69 Toral de los Vados<br>Waste incineration fuelled cement plant | 90 Sostanj<br>Coal power plant                          | 111 Gornji Grbalj<br>Quarries  |
| 49 Notre-Dame-des-Landes<br>Airport        | 70 Arquetu<br>Exploratory fracking                               | 91 Krsko<br>Nuclear waste                               | 112 Cetinje<br>Landfill  |
| 50 Saint-Maur<br>Car racing circuit        | 71 Enara<br>Shale gas fracking                                   | 92 Družba Adria<br>Oil pipeline                         | 113 Berane<br>Landfill   |
| 51 Montesson<br>Road, urban development    | 72 Spanish Basque country<br>High Speed Railway                  | 93 Topica Lešće<br>Hydropower plant                     | 114 River Lim<br>Hydropower plants                                       |
| 52 Grand Paris<br>Urban renewal            | 73 Yesa<br>Dam regrowth  | 94 Pécs<br>Uranium mine reopening                       | 115 Stara planina Mountain<br>Tourism resort                             |
| 53 Morvan<br>Deforestation                 | 74 Northeast Catalonia<br>High Voltage Power Line                | 95 Paks<br>Nuclear plant expansion                      | 116 Trstenik, Topola and Vrnjacka Banja<br>Nickel ore exploration mining |
| 54 Bure<br>Nuclear Waste                   | 75 Barcelona<br>High Speed Railway                               | 96 Timisoara<br>Fracking                                | 117 Savinac<br>Highway   |
| 55 Strasbourg<br>Bypass                    | 76 Teruel<br>Dam   | 97 Rosia Montana<br>Gold mine                           | 118 Zajača<br>Lead smelter   |
| 56 Décines<br>Stadium                      | 77 Castor project, Vinaròs<br>Gas off-shore storage              | 98 Pungesti<br>Shale gas                                | 119 Tuzla<br>Thermal power plant   |
| 57 Roybon<br>Leisure Center Park           | 78 Balearic sea<br>Oil and gas prospection                       | 99 Varna<br>Urban development                           | 120 Banja Luka<br>Urban development                                      |
| 58 Nice<br>Urban development               | 79 Son Reus, Mallorca<br>Incinerator                             | 100 Kamchiiski Piasatsi<br>Tourism resort, urbanisation | 121 Ribnik, Mrkonjić Grad<br>Hydro power plant                           |
| 59 Cadarache<br>ITER nuclear research      | 80 Villar de Cañas<br>Nuclear waste                              | 101 Stara Zagora, Yambol<br>Landfill sites              | 122 Trebinje<br>Hydro power plant  |
| 60 Nîmes<br>Tourist-casino complex         | 81 Morata de Tajuña<br>Waste incineration fuelled cement plant   | 102 Pazardzhik, Samokov<br>Landfill sites               | 123 Dubrovnik<br>Golf park   |
| 61 Avignon<br>Road                         | 82 Eurovegas, Madrid/Barcelona<br>Tourist leisure complex        | 103 Krumovgrad<br>Gold, copper & silver mining          |  |

This non-exhaustive inventory is based on:

- my own research, which takes into account the projects opposed by movements that have participated in the Forums against Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects and by movements in relation with activists of the ZAD in Notre Dame des Landes, from the information available on their websites and traces on site that I could find<sup>14</sup>.

- The website Ej Atlas, which presents an atlas of Environmental Justice that aims at “mapping ecological conflicts and spaces of resistance”. It is carried out by the global research project EJOLT (Environmental Justice Organisations, Liabilities and Trade).<sup>15</sup>

- The map of Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects published by the Intercoll project (social movements international collective intellectual) and French review Mouvements, initiated by activist and journalist Nicolas Haeringer.<sup>16</sup>

### Notes:

14 See section D

15 EjAtlas.org, About the Atlas of Environmental Justice, <http://ejatlas.org/>

16 Intercoll.net, Large and useless infrastructures, <http://www.intercoll.net/bdf/en/questions/question-3.html>

# c — A few examples

## Notre-Dame-des-Landes

The project of building a new “international” airport in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, a village in the vicinity of Nantes, is nearly 50 year old. The last time it resurfaced was in the late 1990s due to the overload of Parisian airports. This new airport was to replace current airport of Nantes-Atlantique and to be the major airport for the whole Grand-Ouest region. A series of public meetings over a period of six months in 2003 and in 2008 the project was Declared Public Utility, making the inhabitants of the area expropriable. In 2010, within the frame of a Public Private Partnership, the State signed a concession contract with AGO, a VINCI subsidiary company, which plans the construction of the airport in Notre Dame des Landes and its operating for 55 years.<sup>1</sup>



<http://aeroport-grandouest.fr>

Opposition to the project has also existed for a long time and it has strengthened and diversified in the last years. The oldest association is ADECA (Association for Defence of Farmers Concerned by the Airport), created in 1972. The biggest institutional association is ACIPA (Civic Intermunicipal Association of People Concerned by the Airport Project), created in 2000, which also coordinates dozens of

local supporting committees. The ZAD movement, which started around 2008, is comprised of the occupiers of the zone. It significantly grew following Caesar operation in 2012 when the police forces evicted and destroyed occupied houses on site. In response to it, a big demonstration was organised on 17 November 2012, which gained national coverage in the media and made the struggle a delicate matter for the authorities who established a truce. The ZAD became a space of experimentation, gardening, farming and collective living.



[pagesdesuie.wordpress.com](http://pagesdesuie.wordpress.com)

There are also other movements involved in the struggle against an airport in Notre-Dame-des-Landes: COPAIN44 who fight against the loss of agricultural land and for sustainable farming, a group of naturalists, a group of elected representatives (CédPA), a Nantes-based group that publishes newspapers (CNCA)... The opposition movement is multi-headed, inside which there are many conflicts, many different approaches and worldviews. However, they often act in common, organising demonstrations and also longer-term projects like Sème ta ZAD.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Jean Renard & Cécile Riolland-Juin, 'Le projet d'aéroport de Notre-Dame-des-Landes : les rebonds d'un aménagement conflictuel', Géoconfluences (ENS de Lyon/ Dgesco), 2013

<sup>2</sup> Ouest France, ND-des-Landes. Les images du centre-ville de Nantes dévasté, 23/02/2014; Ouest France, ND-des-Landes. Qui étaient les casseurs de la manifestation de Nantes?, 26/02/14; Challenges, Des "scènes de guérilla urbaine" dans les rues de Nantes, 23/02/14, etc.



Lemonde.fr



<http://paris-luttes.info/>

On 22 February 2014, a demonstration was organised in Nantes that gathered up to 50000 people and 500 tractors, sign of massive peasant mobilisation. Fights began between some demonstrators and forces of the security police who were massively present too: paved stones against stun grenades, tear gas, water cannon. Three demonstrators lost an eye. Mainstream media & members of the government emphasized the violence and material damage and stigmatised the demonstrators, even the ones who did not fight the police<sup>2</sup>.

## No TAV

The No TAV movement has been opposing a project of High Speed Railway between Lyon and Turin for more than ten years. The project is part of European policy Trans-European Network for Transport (TEN-T). A 235-kilometer international railway line is planned to be built for freight and passenger transport, including a 57-km tunnel under the Alps. There is already another railway between Lyon and Turin, effective today, but the project promoters claim that its implementation for freight transport would be less interesting than building a new line, although traffic flows are declining between

the two cities and it is unlikely that the demand rises in the future.<sup>3</sup> The project is expected to cost 26 billion euros, a figure that has more than doubled since the beginning of the project discussions. It is also highly criticised on ecological basis since for instance the mountains in which the tunnel is to be dug are filled with uranium, radon, and asbestos.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the risk of mafia infiltration is high.<sup>5</sup>

The opposition movement NoTAV is originally and principally located in Susa valley, Italy, even though other movements of resistance have emerged in other regions in Italy and France. Now the opponents claim that the movement of resistance about the High Speed Railway between Lyon and Turin is one Franco-Italian movement, not two national movements that show solidarity to each other.<sup>6</sup> Following the “rough escalation of the conflict during the winter of 2005, when the valley was militarized”<sup>7</sup>, a massive demonstration was organised, as well as actions to reconquer the sites of planned tunnel drilling by establishing “presidi” (garrisons) that became socialising places where the current model of capitalist development in general is constantly questioned. It is claimed that the movement “prefigured a possible social alternative based on a direct, communitarian self-government.”<sup>8</sup>

### Notes:

3 E.Armano, G. L. Pittavino & R. Sciortino, Occupy in Valsusa: The No TAV Movement, Capitalism Nature Socialism, 2013

4 E. Leonardi, Foucault in the Susa Valley: The No TAV Movement and Struggles for Subjectification, Capitalism Nature Socialism, 2013

5 Reporterre (Andrea Barolini), Série GPII – Le Lyon-Turin, nouveau terrain de jeu de la mafia, (Reporterre.net, 02/04/2014)

6 Paolo Prieri & Daniel Ibanez in Chambéry Evènements, Vélo-randonnée Convergence des luttes No TAV Chambéry, [video], 2014

7, 8 E. Leonardi, Foucault in the Susa Valley: The No TAV Movement and Struggles for Subjectification, Capitalism Nature Socialism, 2013

The last years of protest have been marked by violent repression and an intensified criminalization of the movement<sup>9</sup>. In December 2013, four activists, Chiara Zenobi, Claudio Alberto, Niccolò Blasi and Mattia Zanotti, were arrested and accused of terrorism following a direct action of sabotage of the machines on the building site of the exploratory tunnel in Chiomonte, Val di Susa. While some activists kept the police at a distance with Molotov cocktails, others fired a couple of machines. No one was injured and the No TAV movement as a whole claimed responsibility for the action. Chiara, Claudio, Niccolò and Mattia are now in jail in high security quarters. Their trial started in May 2014 and if accusations of terrorism are enforced, they risk sentences of 20 to 30 years of prison. Numerous demonstrations of solidarity have been expressed not only in Italy but also in other European countries.



<http://www.imperiapost.it/>

## Stuttgart 21

Stuttgart 21 is a twenty-year old railway and urban development project, part of TEN-T (Trans European Network of Transportation) policy that plans to rebuild Stuttgart rail station with about 60 km of new railway, half of them in tunnels. The predicted cost are 6.5 billion euros (higher now than during the negotiations), to be shared between German Railway Company Deutsche Bahn, the state of Baden-Württemberg, the German government and the city of Stuttgart.

The project has been controversial since the beginning but large grassroots mobilisation began in 2007-2008, after a petition that gathered more than 60000 signatures demanding a referendum, while only 20000 were necessary, was ignored. Thousands of people gathered on the street and their number continuously increased at the following demonstrations. On 30 September 2010, named “Schwarzer Donnerstag”, hundreds of people who were occupying the park where trees would be cut for the project were injured by the police, which used water cannon and pepper spray against the demonstrators. Thus the demonstration on 1 October 2010 gathered 100000 people.

The original mobilisation has been described as rather bourgeois, quite old and based on indignation as tax money would finance a badly budgeted project that plans to destruct a park in disregard of democracy. Many of the demonstrators became politicised by the opposition to Stuttgart 21 and reacted with much surprise to what they perceived as police violence. When some demonstrators occupied the project site on 20 June 2011, which led to fights with the police and material damage, many people distanced

### Notes:

<sup>9</sup> E. Leonardi, Foucault in the Susa Valley: The No TAV Movement and Struggles for Subjectification, Capitalism Nature Socialism, 2013

<sup>10</sup> Based on interviews with Julia von Staden, Andrea Schmidt and Sabine Manke, activists against Stuttgart21 project, in Stuttgart, 25/04/2014

from the opposition that they found becoming too radical. Following that, a referendum to decide whether the state of Baden-Württemberg should cease funding for the project gained nearly 60% of votes stating that it should not, so that the project was maintained. Now mobilisation has fallen and building work has started.<sup>10</sup>

## *Hambacher Forst*

Hambacher Forst is a forest located west of Köln in Germany, which originally covered 5500 hectares and hosts dozens of protected species, notably bats. Brown coal extraction has largely encroached on the forest and German Electricity Company RWE plans to extend the mining area. The forest has been periodically occupied since 2012, being evicted by the police several times. The last time was in March 2014 and four weeks later, on 26 April, a demonstration of reoccupation was organised, which was successful, following a Skill-sharing camp. I arrived there in the evening in the camp on a field. There were several dozens of (especially young) people of several nationalities, among them people from the ZAD in France. A collective kitchen had been built and people prepared a meal together and shared it, while a few people were spending the night hanging on trees. The occupiers want to raise attention on the forest destruction and the need for a radically different energy model by getting out not only of very polluting and inefficient coal mining but also of nuclear power. Local people tend to be wary of the occupiers and it is argued that stronger links should be made between the occupiers, the locals and other opponents to RWE, principally active in associations<sup>11</sup>. However, the opposition to RWE in Hambacher Forst has already gained attention at the national scale.

## *Rosia Montana*

Rosia Montană is a village in Western Transylvania and more specifically in the small and beautiful Apuseni mountains. Historically, the place has been a site for gold mining since the late Stone Age. After centuries of underground mining, the gold started to be extracted open-pit in 1975 by a state-owned company and this mine was closed in 2006. The current gold and silver mining project is initiated by Rosia Montană Gold Corporation, a subsidiary of Canadian firm Gabriel Resources, supported by the government. It consists of Europe's largest open-pit gold mine, using gold cyanidation mining technique. The protest has been very significant in Romania, with demonstrations gathering thousands of people<sup>12</sup>. Now the project is on-hold because of regulations regarding the environment and heritage.

These five cases of struggle are all different: they take place in different contexts, over disparate time lengths and generate contrasted outcomes. But they also share similarities: spectacular rises in the cost of the projects, collusion of interests at various levels between the government, the firms that are involved and mafious organisations, power asymmetries between the projects promoters and opponents, and different degrees of repression. One can also note that apparently, cohesion inside the movement and good relations with local people do help.

### **Notes:**

11 Based on interview with Thomas Puls, activist for the preservation of Hambacher Forst, in Buir, 26/04/2014

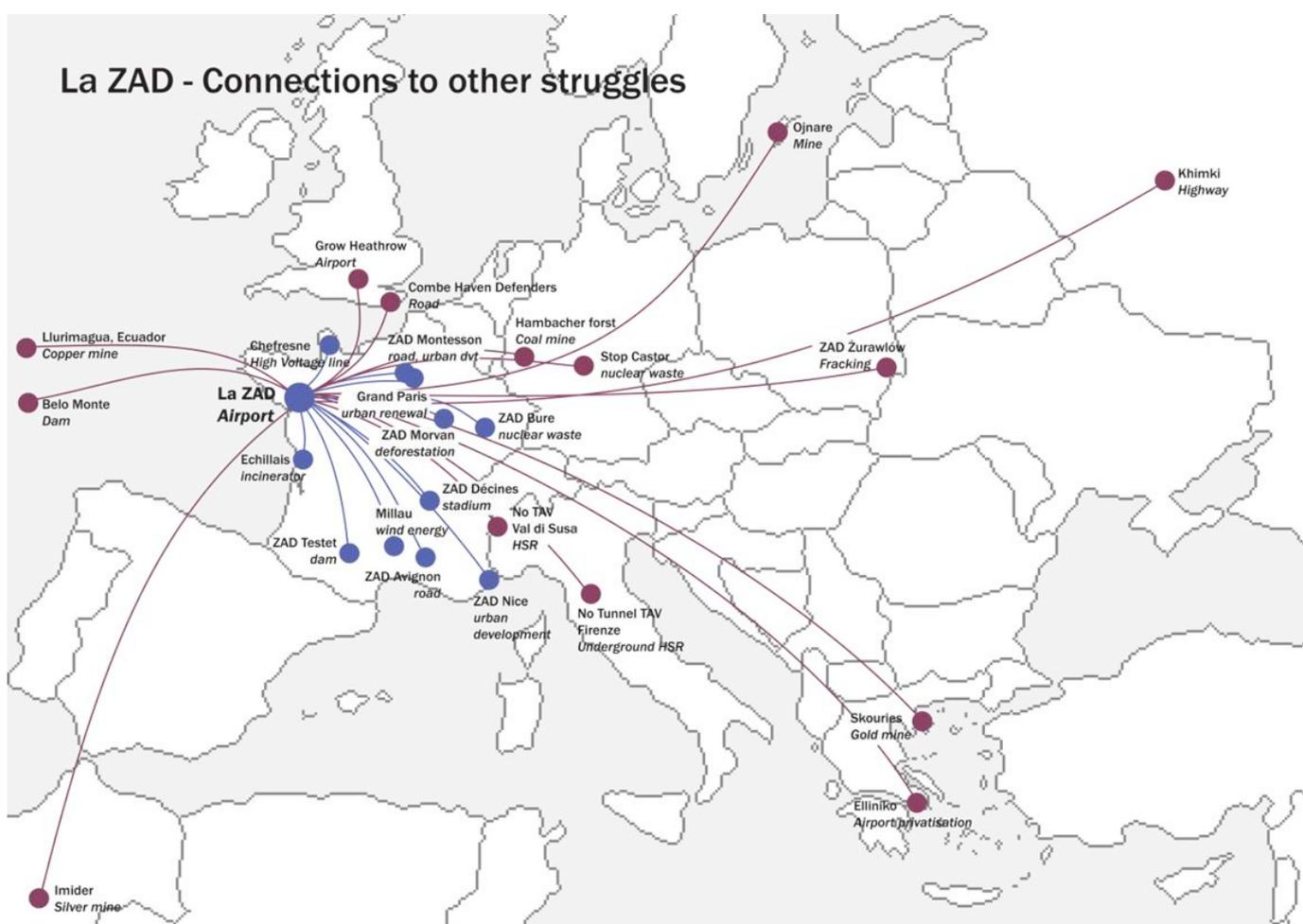
12 Based on a visit of Rosia Montana, 8-12/05/2014

# D – The Forums Against Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects

## Connections between the movements

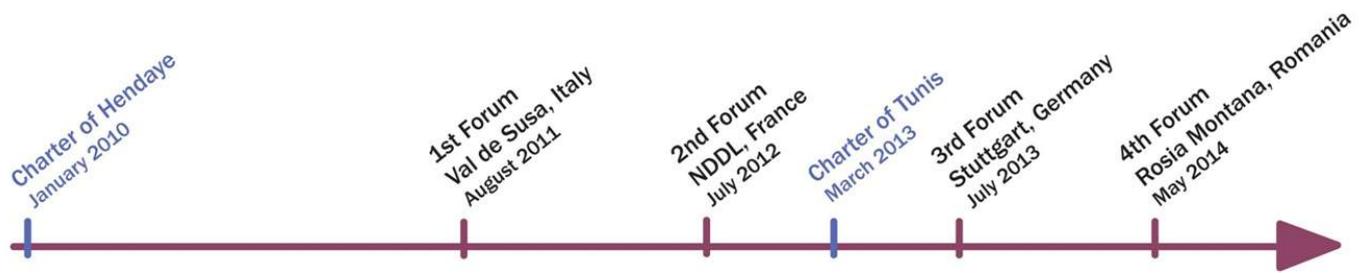
For several years, a number of movements opposed to mega projects have started to get in touch with each other, to exchange information and advice. References to other struggles are commonplace in numerous struggle sites. Some connections also exist

with other issues like the struggle against GMOs, the resistance of Zapatistas in Chiapas, the repression of migrants in Calais, urban squatting movements, antifascist groups, etc. The different movements also cooperate by the means of regular gatherings: the Forums Against Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects.



The previous map is a non-exhaustive inventory of the movements with whom the ZAD of Notre-Dame-des-Landes has shown solidarity, based on their official website and leaflets, banners and inscriptions found on site. It gives an idea of the extent of networking efforts.

Many struggles in France are also referred to as "ZADs": "Zones To defend". Indeed the ZAD in Notre-Dame-des-Landes has inspired other groups of resistance against infrastructure projects to occupy zones and develop "post-capitalist" communities, in the frame of a general movement – ZAD everywhere.



## *The origin of the Forums: the Charter of Hendaye*

The origin of the European forums against large infrastructure projects can be traced back to a gathering that took place in Hendaye close to the Spanish-France border in 2010, in which dozens of associations opposed to high speed railways from the states of France, Spain and Italy took part, in order to “join their forces and to make their voices louder and stronger, since the problems that they are facing are the same everywhere.”<sup>1</sup> The movements that were present released a text, the Charter of Hendaye, which was then presented to the European Parliament. The charter highlighted the main points of dissent toward high speed railway projects. Then the charter exposed the demands of the movements to the European institutions – to revision TEN-T policy and to governments – to stop the project and initiate real public debates on transport and territorial planning. Finally it proposed guidelines for solutions – to maintain and develop the existing infrastructure, to reduce transport and relocalise the economy and to establish an authentic local democracy.

## *The forums: an expansion trend*

Following this gathering in Hendaye, the Italian movement No-TAV initiated the first forum opposing “Unnecessary Large Projects” in August 2011 in Venaus, Val di Susa, where 10 opposition movements against large transport projects in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Ireland exchanged views about their struggles and decided to continue the process of networking and cooperating.<sup>2</sup>

The second forum took place nearby Notre-Dame-des-Landes, France, in July 2012 and up to 8000 people attended it. The adjective “imposed” was added to “unnecessary mega projects” in order to highlight the lack of democracy in the decisions made about the projects. The intention was to explain and popularize the concept broadly. Moreover, there was a thematic broadening out: from transport to energy production and waste.<sup>3</sup> The third forum took place in Stuttgart, Germany, in July 2013. It emphasized the relation between mega projects and the financial bubble. The participants reaffirmed their will to “promote the international movement against unnecessary imposed mega-projects of any kind.”<sup>4</sup>

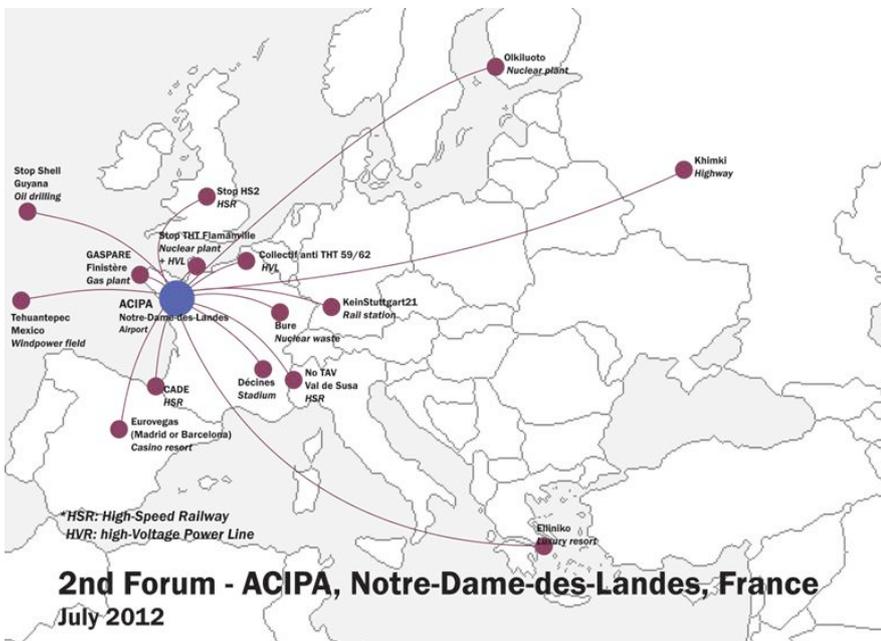
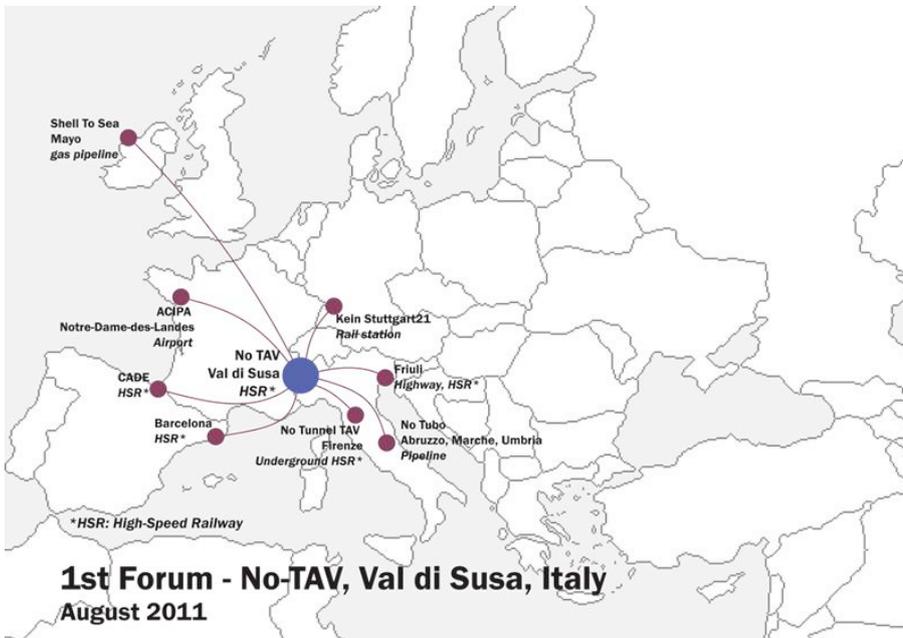
About 150 people attended the Fourth Forum in 2014 in Rosia Montania, Romania, which gathered protest movements against mining, fracking, and infrastructure projects. During workshops, lectures, debates, but also informal exchanges, other themes like waste incineration, energy in general, debt and financing, attempts of connecting with other struggles were discussed, as well as strategic issues for the movement itself: redefining “unnecessary” and “imposed”, the forms of struggle, legal issues, strategy with European institutions, perspectives, relations with political parties in the struggles against mega projects.<sup>5</sup>

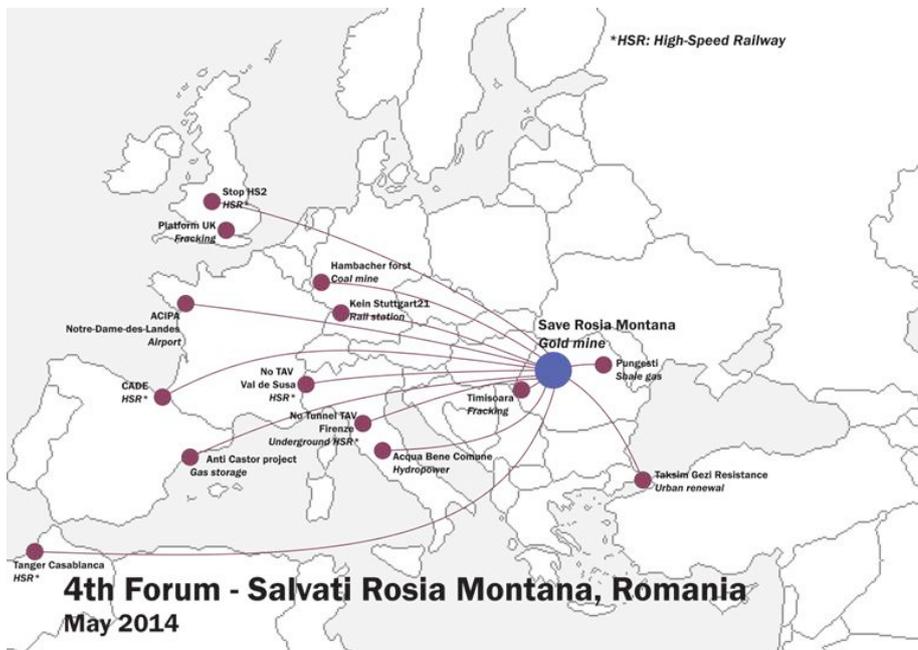
The maps account for the spatial evolution of the forums.

They show the social movements present at the different forums. They are based on the programs and accounts of the different forums.

It may well be the case that some movements that took part in the forums but didn't appear in the program haven't been registered for the map.

That's why the maps give a general view of which movements participated in the forums over time rather than a precise account.





## Relation with the Social Forums

The structure and the idea of the forums are intimately linked to the ones of the World and European Social Forums, which are annual meetings of civil society organizations that attempt to develop an alternative to neoliberal globalisation. Some forums were thematic and regional sub-forums with the process and approach of Social Forums. Moreover, inside World Social Forums like in Tunis in 2013, some days were dedicated to mega projects. It resulted notably in the Charter of Tunis that took up the Hendaye Charter and added or emphasized some aspects: the competition between territories that spur mega projects, the polarisation between the rich and the poor, the relation between mega projects, debt and the liberal economic system.<sup>6</sup>

A reason for these organisational similarities with the Social Forum or even integration into it is that many activists against large projects who organised the first forums against mega projects were also part of the alter-globalisation movement and the Social Forums. However, not everybody in the Forums against Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects is familiar with the Social Forums.<sup>7</sup>

### Notes:

- 1 The Hendaye Charter, Joint Declaration of January 23th, 2010
- 2 ACIPA, La lutte contre les grands projets inutiles s'organise en Europe, Reporterre, 10/09/2011
- 3 Geneviève Coiffard-Grosdoy, Interview on 23/02/2014, ZAD, Notre-Dame-des-Landes
- 4 Third European Forum against unnecessary imposed mega projects, Final declaration, 28/07/2014
- 5 Based on a visit of Rosia Montana, 8-12/05/2014
- 6 Charter of Tunis. Forum Against Useless and Imposed Mega Projects, 2013
- 7 Geneviève Coiffard-Grosdoy, Interview on 23/02/2014, ZAD, Notre-Dame-des-Landes

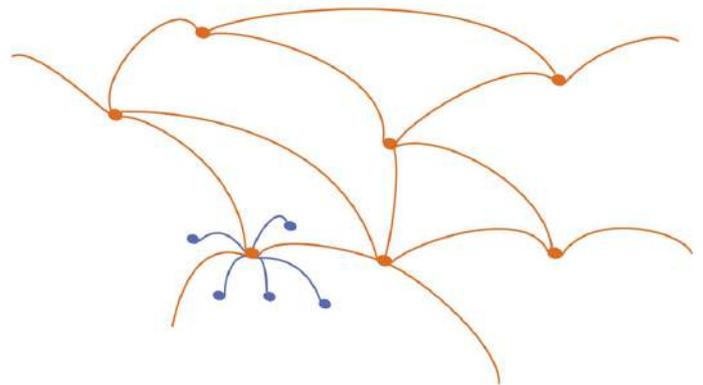
# E — Prospects

Social movements against mega projects do not only oppose them: their views, practices and organisational structures reflect a will to propose alternatives to the neoliberal hydra. Therefore they open up prospects that are worth examining for anyone interested in societal and spatial trends.

## *Spatial and social organisations*

Mega projects make tangible the neoliberal logics that are behind them in a specific site and specific context: following that, struggles against mega projects are concrete struggles that are anchored in the territory, unlike more general struggles against neoliberalism. Moreover, opposition movements to specific projects are related to each other. This establishes complex and multi-layered geographies of opposition to mega projects.

The rhizome of opposition to mega projects shares similarities with the networks that structure neoliberal economy. Indeed, as the latter, it is affected by certain unevenness, inequalities and polarisation. However, unlike neoliberal networks, the more polarised it is, the weaker: the most successful movements managed to bring together their diverse entities without a few dominating the others. In addition, opposition to mega projects is characterised by horizontalist will and mistrust toward hierarchized planning. It favours inclusiveness and cooperation rather than competition.



## *Personal fulfilment by collectively fighting neoliberalism*

Even though social movements opposed to mega projects struggle to bring them to an end, they also try to set spaces and situations for social relations that are not perverted by cold competition and the logic of profit and enable individual and collective fulfilment. Subjectivity is important: what is emphasised is lived experience rather than any claimed objectivity. Many things happen (or seem to happen) spontaneously: planning is seen as an alienating system where consumption is prevailing and as a process of rational locking up of people and of their desires.

The movements promote convivial sustainability. In many places that are occupied and during the gatherings, alternative practices of organisation and living are promoted: vegan or vegetarian local food with very little waste, collective kitchens, convivial spaces, dry toilets, accommodation in wood cabins, local people's homes or in tents...



## Deciding together the fate of the commons

Practices of decision-making in the movements are democratic in the terminology of Rancière<sup>1</sup>, in the sense that they are based on equality between the participants (or at least tend to be...). Rather than avoiding conflicts, they express them, which might make it hard for newcomers to engage at the beginning: one has to overcome shyness and fear of confrontation, but democracy should be understood as something for which to aim continuously rather than something already achieved. Moreover, these practices are diverse, depending on the different groups that are involved in the movements.

For example, in the struggle against the airport project in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, the ZAD movement and associations like ACIPA and ADECA, which are more institutional and structured, sometimes have

trouble establishing conditions for arenas for democracy that suit both of them: there are tensions involving representation, or pre-established or spontaneous order of speakers.

But the common goal of resisting the airport project and the necessity to find an arrangement for the territory of the ZAD in “Sème ta Zad” operation in the past, or today for its future once the airport project is cancelled for instance, force them to implement solutions. The territory of the ZAD, with its richness in biodiversity, activity, social relations and meanings, is a common that is constantly discussed and reinvented.

The movements opposing mega projects struggle for the right to decide collectively on the future of the commons, whether these are natural resources, energetic models, democratic processes or social relations.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Introducing disagreement*

# Challenges & perspectives

Although I tried to provide a fair and justified account of these struggles, some views that I expressed here are subjective and might be discussed. But I hope that you learned something by reading it and that it raised your attention to the struggles against mega projects.

Some challenges inherent in the movements are also worth debating and some already are.

## *Structure of the rhizome*

Some argue that establishing a kind of central structure to make information transfer, convergence and mobilisation easier would be useful and good for resilience: the rhizome of today depends on the benevolence and availability of its members; it appears unstable and hardly traceable.

But a central structure could also establish certain hierarchies, harm the openness, multiplicity and heterogeneity that is now present in the movement against mega projects: in short, it would cease to be a rhizome.

Developing tools to make connectivity and information transfer easier while keeping the openness, multiplicity, heterogeneity and richness of lived experiences of the struggle is therefore a big challenge for the growing rhizome of movements opposed to mega projects.

## *North/South*

Moreover, the rhizome of today is principally developed in Western Europe, although contested projects are present everywhere and the neoliberal logics that lay behind them are developed globally. The ties with movements in Eastern countries (except Romania) are still quite weak, and there are not many ties with movements of the Global South. Strengthening the links between movements of the Global North and the Global South is, I think, a relevant line of development for the rhizome. The expansion

could also be thematic, with stronger ties created with other non-place-based struggles. The potential is there, as struggles around mega projects question broad societal issues.

## *Laws, Partnerships*

Mega projects are related to economic structures, political decisions, laws that are being passed at many scales and levels. For instance, Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership could have an incidence on the framework in which mega projects are implemented, and environmental laws that are decided at the European scale can disrupt their progress... Surveillance and supervision of this political and economic context enables to better oppose mega projects. In the rhizome, some movements or activists seem to act on that level, by observing and criticising projects by the European Commission, for example.

## *Perspectives*

The opposition to mega projects can continue to be a source of proposals for personal and collective fulfilment outside neoliberal logics. Creativity – one that is not hijacked by neoliberal logics – is decisive for the future of the rhizome.

The success of some specific struggles could benefit the whole rhizome of movements opposed to mega projects, in a symbolic way. Contrary to broad political and societal struggles (against increasing job insecurity, against surveillance, etc.) that are necessary but where chances of success seem to be mitigated, it is possible to win (within a lifetime!) over a mega project. Some victories (like Eurovegas<sup>1</sup>) would be of strategic importance for movements opposed to mega projects all over Europe, as sources of inspiration and hope.

<sup>1</sup> Eurovegas, Spain, a casino/luxury resort/etc. project, was cancelled in 2013