LABYRINTH OF LABELS: PROMOTERS' AND PROTESTERS' NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN MEGAPROJECTS

ABSTRACT

Labels as part of narratives are instrumental in the process of organising, particularly in megaprojects that seek to garner legitimacy and support of external stakeholders. While organisation scholars acknowledge that the process of labelling is contested, research on how different organisations navigate these labels remain limited. Within megaproject settings, labels such as largest, sustainable, efficient, etc., are frequently exercised and there is currently a dearth in megaproject management literature on how these labels come into becoming, are contested, and are maintained. Using the case study of the shaping phase of the High Speed Two Limited (HS2) megaproject in the UK, this research explores the multiple labels given to the megaproject, people, and practice by the promoters and protesters, and the ways labels play a role in shaping organisational identity. The processes that maintain and contest the labels such as using the same label, using other labels, explaining the label, and using labels in the title of the organisation are discussed. Thus, labels exist in megaproject arenas as a labyrinth with multiple labels for megaproject, people, and practices, from different agencies, which are then contested and maintained through more labels. This research therefore theorizes label creation, maintenance, and contestation in megaproject settings.

KEYWORDS

External stakeholder management, Identity, Labels, Megaproject narratives, Organising, Resistance

1. INTRODUCTION

Megaprojects, projects which cost more than one billion USD (Flyvbjerg, 2014), involve multiple stakeholders with conflicting interests between them (Biesenthal et al., 2018). These types of projects provide value addition (Söderlund et al., 2017) and jobs (Flyvbjerg, 2014) while at the same time displace people (Gellert and Lynch, 2003) and disrupt local environment (Sturup, 2009). The conflicting interests can be broadly classified into either support for or resistance against the megaproject (Williams et al., 2015). The promoters are interested in supporting the completion (Ninan et al., 2019) while the protesters are interested in derailing the megaproject (Aaltonen et al., 2008). There is a need to understand the dynamics of interaction between the promoter and the protester groups to engage stakeholders effectively and enable the completion of the project within an environment of conflicting interests. Since these projects take a long period of time, stakeholders may adopt differing strategies over its life to propel their vested interests (Aaltonen and Sivonen, 2009; Ninan et al., 2020). In such situations of high ambiguity, megaprojects strive to create an organisational identity (Sergeeva and Roehrich, 2018). Constructing a favourable identity is of paramount importance here, as the inability to garner legitimacy and support of external stakeholders can affect the delivery of the infrastructure asset (Ninan et al., 2019).

Identity is a social and cultural phenomenon that encompass macro-level categories, temporary and interactionally specific stances, and cultural positions (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). The concept of identity is central to organising as it helps in the development of shared interests and goals (Hietajärvi and Aaltonen, 2018). It affects how an individual, organisation, industry or nation interprets and responds to institutional forces (Kodeih and Greenwood, 2014). Due to this, organisational identity is referred to as a 'close-to-the-bone' concept by Gioia et al. (2013) as they call for more empirical work to better understand its origins and transitions. The development of an identity in an organisation enables stakeholders to articulate shared interests and commit to preferred outcomes thereby necessary action (Ashforth et al., 2008). Identity stimulates stakeholders to commit themselves to the megaproject (Van Marrewijk, 2007). This commitment is based on the membership to the group combined with the emotional value that is attributed to this membership (Veenswijk et al., 2010).

Identities at the individual and the collective levels are social constructions (Gioia et al., 2000), often constructed by language through personal and shared narratives (Humphreys and Brown, 2002). Marketing plays an important role in navigating complex and turbulent environment by creating an identity (Christensen, 1995). The most obvious way to constitute identities is through the overt introduction of referential identity categories such as labels into discourses (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). Theorists who explore labelling argue that organisations use labels to selectively assign negatively-valued social identities such as 'poor credit risk' to those whom they disfavour (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1997) and, conversely, to assign positively-valued identities such as 'fair employer' to those whom they prefer (Albert and Whetten, 1985). By projecting a label, an organisation stakes a claim to a status or identity similar to the category it claimed (Pontikes, 2018) that might be difficult to establish by other means (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1997). Thus, labels are a tag for defining an organisation's identity (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1997). Labels as identity shaping narratives improve the legitimacy of the megaproject and their action with the different stakeholders (Brown, 1998).

Since labels are one of the narrative artefacts through which identity is created, megaprojects are prone to labelling, both from the promoters' as well as from the protester groups' perspectives.

As Sergeeva (2017) notes, narratives that shape megaproject identities are discursive and are constructed, reconstructed and maintained through multiple processes of contestations. Of these, the promoters and protesters narratives are significant as they strive to shape the identity of different parts of the project by attaching labels to them. Labels are generic in development policy and there is a need to investigate which labels are created and how they prevail (Wood, 1989; Eyben and Moncrieffe, 2006). This research uses the case study of the shaping phase of the High Speed Two Limited (HS2) megaproject in the United Kingdom to contrast the labels given by the promoters (such as government, megaproject team and other supporters) and the protesters (such as opposition, interest groups and other resistances). The contested nature of the shaping stage of the HS2 megaproject affords an opportunity to theorize project labelling, its maintenance and its contestation by answering two research questions (1) What are the labels employed in a megaproject setting by the promoters and protesters? and (2) How are these labels maintained and contested?

To address these questions, the next section explores the current research on labels and highlights the theoretical gap which necessitates answering the two research questions. Subsequently, the article discusses the research methodology including the reasons for selecting the HS2 as the case study and news articles as the data source along with details of how data was analysed. Following this, the article discusses the different labels from the HS2 megaproject along with how these labels are maintained and contested. The paper concludes with the contribution to theory and practice, along with the limitations of the study and directions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

For megaproject organisations, establishing an identity and packaging the megaproject in that identity has become an important strategy. Van Marrewijk (2007) notes how employees are labelled as the 'Gideon's gang' - a biblical metaphor for a brave group of men that knows no fear and uses creative, innovative methods to reach their goals. Through this labelling, the Environ megaproject employees considered in the work by Van Marrewijk (2007) were able to strongly identify themselves with the innovative and entrepreneurial culture. Labels used as part of creating a megaproject narrative can shape and sustain the individual's and organisation's identity, such as, being perceived as 'innovative' or 'largest' (Sergeeva, 2014; Sergeeva and Zanello, 2018; Ninan et al., 2020). Labels are used for different purposes in megaprojects and labels highlight various elements such as its 'novelty' and 'originality' (Sergeeva, 2017). Building on organisational identity theory (Schultz and Hernes, 2013), Sergeeva and Roehrich (2018) focus on identity labels and their associated meanings in megaprojects. They found that megaprojects socially construct their identities as 'learning organisations' via spoken, symbolic, and written forms of narratives: sharing stories and videos via digital platforms and also by writing reports and blogs. However, their study is limited in exploring counter-narratives and identity labels constructed by both promoters and protesters. Labels such as 'largest', 'sustainable', 'efficient' etc. are doing rounds in the megaproject arena, but literature seldom addresses how these labels come into being, are contested, or are maintained. Contestations of megaproject narratives are not new, with multiple projects falling victim to contestations to the megaproject narrative, the recent of which is Melbourne's East-West link road in Australia which was called off after the Government spent $1.1 billion (Edwards, 2015). Similarly, van den Ende and van Marrewijk (2019) record that communities resist and struggle to legitimatize megaprojects. The megaproject narrative is an important element in creating and maintaining an identity which would decide whether a megaproject is accepted or not by the external stakeholders including the community. The role of labels employed by the promoters and protesters in these narrative contestations needs to be investigated as labels shape the identity of the megaproject and thereby their success or failure.

The conflicting objectives of the promoters and the protesters in a megaproject and their use of labels provide us an opportunity to explore this in sensemaking. People in identity crisis use sensemaking to extract cues and make plausible sense while enacting order into ongoing circumstances (Weick et al., 2005). Multiple literature notes that language and the variety of communication instruments such as labels are treated as a building block of sensemaking (Boyce, 1995; Watson and Bargiela-Chiappini, 1998). Afterall, according to Weick (1995), Weick et al. (2005) and Weick et al. (2010), sensemaking is about noticing and labelling. Activities may be labelled in ways that predispose practitioners to find common sense. To find the common sense, labelling ignores differences amongst actors and deploys cognitive representations. Weick et al. (2005: 88) articulate especially clearly that "*the labelling itself fails to capture the dynamics of what is happening*" because the label follows after the completed act. Corley and Gioia (2004) and Gioia et al. (2000) reinforce that although the descriptive labels that are used to describe "*who they are*" and "*what they are doing*" may be sustained over time, the meanings and interpretations associated with these labels may change. As the process unfolds over time, activities may be re-labelled. Weick (1995: 31) suggested that when individuals enact, they:

> "Undertake undefined space, time, and action, and draw lines, establish categories, and coin new labels that create new features of the environment that did not exist."

The Webster dictionary defines a label as 'a word or phrase that identifies something or someone.' Labels are quasi-objects that easily travel and translate ideas from one place to another (Czarniaswka and Joerges, 1995). It directs attention and helps audiences perceive an emerging pattern (Kennedy, 2008). Existing research claims that labels shape identity along with defining memberships and bestowing legitimacy to the organisation. Sergeeva (2017) notes that identity is linguistically indexed through labels. Ewing (2004) records that when an agent attaches a label to the subject position they have occupied, the label becomes an identity. Abrams (2003) notes that both identity and labels are mutually reinforcing. Vergne and Wry (2014) record that labels are crucial when organisations seek membership into an existing category. Labels have significant effects on the functioning of markets and help people make sense of organisation and their activities (Porac et al., 2011). Logue and Clegg (2015) highlight that labels may work to legitimate (or make illegitimate) organisations and practices. Due to the importance of labels, they are treated as a resource in organisations (Granqvist et al., 2013) and can be called as a 'technology of control' (Suchman, 1994). Labels are also an instrument of power through which the relationships between class interests and institutional processes are constructed and sustained (Wood, 1989). Labels are even used as marketing tools and have marketing implications (Benders et al., 1998). Douglas (1986) had long back called for more studies on the role of labels in organisation studies as they are used to build, reinforce, and reflect broader systems of value, meaning, and power.

Labelling is 'the process of giving a name to emerging phenomena based on a common set of attributes and roles (Negro et al., 2011). It is carried out for a person, place, group, event or any other key element in a narrative (Baker, 2006). In labelling, organisations use the cultural, material and social resources to influence perception resulting from the label (Slavich, 2019). On the strategic intent of labelling, Sergeeva (2017) notes that some labels are used meaningfully, while others are used purposefully to achieve a goal, such as to shape the identity of an organisation as ‘innovative’. These labels can be maintained or contested. When labels are maintained, everyone in the organisation understands the label, its relevance and benefits (Sergeeva, 2014). Labels are also contested, which leads to labelling inconsistencies (Vergne and Swain, 2017). Controversies in a label can destabilize an organisation and hamper its survival (Slavich et al., 2019). The strategic intent of labelling also involves manipulation of existing labels, thereby resulting in the stigmatized identity of the competitors being diluted (Vergne, 2012). Thus, the labelling process is of significant importance for the process of megaproject organising and disorganising.

Regarding agencies involved in the labelling process, Pontikes (2012) records that labels are not a product of a single actor, rather a product of competing claims from multiple audiences. Different parties in an organisational setting campaign and compete, to shape meanings of and in the organisation, gain acceptance for a preferred account, or subvert the status quo and therefore there are tussles and tensions of sensemaking (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). Labelling contestations occur when two or more stakeholders attempt to define divergent realities for a given audience (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1997; Slavich et al., 2019). To navigate these contestations, direction in the form of top-down sensemaking is important (Ancona, 2011) as leadership is the ‘management of meaning’ (Smircich and Morgan, 1982). This top-down approach is also referred to as guided sensemaking (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007) or sensegiving (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). Logue and Clegg (2015) studied how organisations make sense of events by exploring the politics of labelling. They highlight that the continually contested nature of competing labels and so-labelled practices can be understood through the circuits of power framework (Clegg, 1989). The circuits of power framework include the interaction between the episodic circuit, the dispositional circuit, and the facilitative circuit through the obligatory passage points. The episodic circuit focuses on the overt day to day interactions of actors through practices. The dispositional circuit stipulates the covert rules which dictate the overt practices in the episodic circuit. The facilitative circuit constitutes the covert techniques of discipline which too dictate the overt practices in the episodic circuit. Anchoring on this circuits of power framework, Logue and Clegg (2015) contrast between labelling of practices in the episodic circuit, labelling of organisations in the dispositional circuit, and labelling of fields in the facilitative circuit. We seek to extend this work on the politics of labelling by exploring the different processes through which these labels are maintained and contested. For addressing this gap, megaprojects offer a unique setting as it involves the use of multiple labels by different agencies. In addition, from a megaproject context, the role of labels in the struggles of meaning, the organisations involved or the process through which these labels are maintained and contested are not explored in a megaproject organisational setting.

3. RESEARCH SETTING AND METHOD

The aim of this research is to identify the labels employed in a megaproject setting and explore how these labels are maintained and contested. For this, inductive research is apt as the researchers start with data, probe patterns and then explain these patterns from a theoretical perspective. Inductive research delivered through qualitative methods is useful to reveal new phenomena as well as capture their depth and richness (Ariño et al., 2016). Qualitative research addresses questions about how meaning and experience is created in social settings (Gephart, 2004) and hence is apt for our study on the dynamics of organisational labelling. Within the diverse methods in qualitative research, single case studies provide excellent opportunities to enhance contextual understanding because of their depth in data collection and analysis (Lundin and Steinthorsson, 2003). Also, as noted by Ragin (1992: 225) single case studies are not inferior to multiple case studies as even single case studies, especially in the case of megaprojects 'are multiple in most research efforts because ideas and evidence may be linked in many different ways.' That is, since these cases are investigated in detail, they have a compendium of mini-cases and therefore even one case can give sufficient insights for theorization. These mini-cases from a single case study are called micro-stories (Boje, 2001), vignettes (Stake, 2010), embedded case study (Mui and Sankaran, 2004), or even examples (Flyvbjerg, 2001), which are then analysed for theory building.

We chose the single case study of the shaping phase of the HS2 megaproject in the UK. The project was proposed in 2009 as the second network of high-speed trains after the channel link project which was commissioned in 2003. The first phase of the HS2 project, expected to cost £30 billion, proposed to connect London and Birmingham in 45 minutes through trains traveling at speeds of 225 mph. Even though there was an existing rail connection between the two cities, this greenfield project was proposed with an objective to increase the capacity of the rail network in the country and offer fast and sustainable transport throughout the country. The HS2 project, currently undergoing enabling works, is scheduled to be operational in 2026. It was selected for theoretical reasons in this study, for its ability to answer the research questions. Firstly, it had evidence of using labels in multiple forms, even as name-calling, as highlighted in a quote collected during our primary investigation:

> *"The MPs [Member of Parliament] also said what should have been a serious and factually-based debate [about the project] had "too often been reduced to name-calling and caricature"* (BBC article 'HS2: Good case for high-speed rail link, say MPs' dated 8th November 2011)

Secondly, as evident from the same quote, since the project was in its shaping phase, it had multiple struggles to maintain and contest existing labels in attempts to shape the narrative, i.e., whether the project is ‘good’ or ‘bad’, both from the perspectives of promoters as well as the protesters. Thus, the contested nature of the shaping stage of the HS2 project offers an opportunity to theorize megaproject labelling.

To study labels employed in the HS2 megaproject, we chose to analyse news articles published during the shaping phase of the project due to the following reasons. Firstly, megaprojects attain extensive media coverage (Van Marrewijk et al., 2008; Strauch et al., 2015) because of its colossal and controversial nature (Frick, 2008). Also, news articles due to their significant reach are an effective way for the promoters and protesters of the megaproject to reach the widely dispersed stakeholders involved. Secondly, news articles continue to be one of the common sources in narrative research (He, 2002; McMullen and Braithwaite, 2013). The role of news media in shaping the narratives of organisations is well established in the literature (Kim et al., 2012). Thus, labels employed in the news article have potential to create a megaproject narrative and shape the identity of the megaproject. Finally, news articles are an important form of retrospective data as they systematically document how the megaproject has evolved during the study period. They are also called as ‘naturalistic’ data (Silverman, 2015) because they exist naturally without the interference of the researcher. Many conversations relating to projects are only evident in sources such as news media and these can be captured and analysed to understand how projects behave in the 21st century (Ninan, 2020). Here, we try to make sense of the original text as the actors wrote or said it (Whittle et al., 2008) as opposed to their recollection and question bias issues observed in the data collected through interviews.

We collected the news articles relating to the megaproject through a key word search in the 'google news' repository as it is one of the major aggregators of news on the web (Bandari et al., 2012). With the use of the aggregator, we were able to study news related to the HS2 megaproject from all daily newspapers and thereby reduce the bias of studying a single newspaper agency. We were also able to get a pan UK perspective on the megaproject, not restricted to London or Birmingham. We initially sought out to study the news articles published during the shaping phase of the HS2 megaproject from 2009 to 2017, but for the research question that we are exploring in this paper, we attained theoretical saturation with 4 years of data as data collection and analysis was carried out simultaneously. Thus, we selected 113 news articles from different newspaper agencies such as the Telegraph, British Broadcasting Company (BBC) and Daily Mail. The number of news articles from different media houses considered for this study is tabulated in Table 1.

Table 1: Media agency and the number of news articles studied

Media agency	Number of articles
The Telegraph	32
British Broadcasting Company (BBC)	29
Daily Mail	7
Bucks Herald	5
Others (with less than 4 articles each)	40
Total	113

Our aim is not to offer a summary of all the news articles during the period of time considered. Rather, it is to identify the labels used and understand how these labels and maintained or contested. To identify the label used, we adopted the working definition of a label as 'a word not created by the user, but their use tags the subject to a well-known category.' Labels are usually 'nouns' that are used to name a topic or issue (Surber, 2001). When organisations claim the label of a well-established category, it triggers assumptions of its products and practices similar to the category it claimed (Pontikes, 2018).

For analysing the labels from the news articles, we relied on an inductive qualitative research approach used for generating theory from natural situations (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). It is apt for areas where a concept is not well developed and there is a need to generate the phenomenon's major concepts and constitute a theoretical framework' (Jabareen, 2009). Our approach was informed by the levels of labelling such as labels of practices, labels of organisations and labels of fields from the work of Logue and Clegg (2015). We related the labels generated from the case study of the HS2 megaproject in the circuits of power framework (Clegg, 1989) to analyse the politics of labelling. Our analysis involved the use of open coding, axial coding and constant comparisons simultaneously to generate the theoretical model (Groat and Wang, 2002). Open coding involved breaking down, examining and categorizing the data into open categories (Strauss and Corbin 1990). During this process, we went through each news media article to identify the use of labels. Each identified label was coded, assigned to a category and aggregated as shown in Figure 1. For example, when people opposing the megaproject was called 'NIMBY,' we coded it as 'labels of protesters' and categorized it as 'labels of people.' For this, we relied on manual coding as automatic methods can create a barrier to understanding (Kozinets et al., 2014). Through this systematic coding and categorizing of labels, we were able to arrive at broad categories of labels that were employed in a megaproject setting such as labels of megaproject, labels of people, and labels of practice. Axial coding involved putting categories back together in new ways to provide new insights (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). While open coding fractures the data, axial coding allows theory to emerge from data as the researcher investigates 'what is really going on' in the data (Tie et al., 2019). For example, when the same label classified earlier with open coding was repeated multiple times in different occasions, we categorized it as 'use of same label,' and highlight it as one of the processes for maintaining and contesting the labels. Constant comparison involved comparing codes generated from the open codes and axial codes with the new data as data collection and analysis are taken up in parallel. The codes are refined by constant comparison between the generated codes and new data, thereby improving the quality of the theory generated and arriving at theoretical saturation. Constant comparisons are not just made with the previous data but also with the literature as per the suggestions of Strauss and Corbin (1990). The process of comparison of concepts and findings from the study with the literature helps make meaningful contributions to knowledge (Stablein, 1996). We anchored our findings in the isolated instances of use of labels in the megaprojects and organisation studies following the guidance of Eisenhardt (1989). Thus, by systematically analysing the data collected, we were able to understand the labels used in the HS2 megaproject along with how these labels are maintained and contested. The coding process is summarized in Table 2, which shows the first-order concepts and summarizes the second-order themes on which we built our findings on labels in megaprojects.

Table 2: The first- and second-order coding process

First order concepts	**Second order themes**	**Aggregate category**
Megaproject provides fast service	Labels of megaproject	Different labels in a megaproject
Megaproject is rich man's toy		
Megaproject is transformative		

Megaproject is world-class rail network		
Megaproject is a once-in-a-generation opportunity		
Megaproject is a costly white elephant		
Megaproject is eye-wateringly expensive		
Protesters are NIMBY	Labels of people	
Protesters are friends of earth		
Promoters are railway enthusiasts		
Promoters are driven by national interests		
Protesters are railway lunatics		
Protesters are driven by greed		
Protesters are defenders of Chilterns		
Consultation is transparent	Labels of practice	
Consultation is farce		
Selection process of project is very impressive		
Selection process is a betrayal		
Compensation scheme is unprecedented		
Compensation scheme is sinister		
Repeat the same label	Using the same labels	Process of maintaining and contesting the label
Contest the same label		
Synonyms of the label	Using other labels	
Antonyms of the label		
Explain why the label	Explaining the labels	
Explain why not the label		
Acronyms in the title of the organization	Using acronyms	
Acronyms in the title of reports		

Acronyms in the title of websites		

Even though many labels were present in the megaproject, we represent only those labels that help in theory building. For example, the label of protesters 'nimby' was repeated as 'not-nimby' to contest, an antonym of the nimby label as 'national nature' was used to contest, explained as 'people nearby object vigorously drawing on wider arguments' to maintain, and abbreviated as 'AGHAST' to contest. Along with the description of 'power quotes' of the codes such as 'nimby' in the body of the article which are central for our theory building as highlighted above, we also display 'proof quotes' of other codes in tables to show the prevalence of the category following the suggestion of Pratt (2008). Thus, we discuss only those labels that provided realism to our theories and/or portrayed dramatic moments to make the story more interesting following the guidance of Golden-Biddle and Locke (1997).

4. PROMOTERS AND PROTESTERS LABELS

The analysis of the news articles of the HS2 megaproject during the study period enabled us to understand the promoters and protesters labels given to the megaproject, the people, and the practices. We discuss indicative labels for each of these categories below.

LABELS OF MEGAPROJECT

Labels of megaproject highlight what the megaproject stands for or seeks to achieve. While the promoters labelled the megaproject as 'fast' and 'low-carbon,' the protesters labelled it as a 'vanity project' and as a project 'for the rich.'

The main objective of the megaproject was to provide ‘fast’ transport between the two major cities and thereby increase the economic activity in the area. While there was an existing rail connection between the two cities, this megaproject differed in being a ‘high-speed’ connection. The transport secretary of the UK in a statement to the House of Commons said:

> *“A modern and reliable and fast service between our major cities and international gateways befitting the 21st Century will transform the way we travel and promote Britain's economic and social prosperity”* (BBC article ‘HS2: High-speed rail go-ahead prompts mixed reaction’ dated 10th January 2012)

Another label attached to the megaproject was that it is a ‘low-carbon’ means of transport. The HS2 being a rail megaproject operated on low-carbon electricity offers a sustainable means of transport in comparison to the motorway or the flight network, both operated on fossil fuels connecting the two cities. The chief executive of the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) said:

> *“The commitment that all three parties have shown to HSR [high-speed rail] is a vote of confidence in the industry, and will help place train travel at the heart of a successful low-carbon economy”* (BBC article ‘High-speed rail plans announced by government’ dated 11th March 2010)

The protesters labelled the megaproject as a ‘vanity’ project and highlighted that the megaproject would bring minimal financial benefits and makes no sense. Through this label, the protesters highlighted that the megaproject has no business case and would not achieve any economic benefits or social benefits. A senior Member of Parliament (MP) said against the megaproject:

> *"This is a huge, expensive vanity project that makes no sense at all."* (Telegraph article 'Middle England on the march as revolt over 250mph rail link grows' dated 14th November 2010)

The protesters of the megaproject also labelled it as a 'for the rich' megaproject. They criticized the likely high fares of rail travel and highlighted that the network might only benefit the select few, i.e., the rich who can afford the high fares. By the use of this label, the protesters highlighted that the megaproject would not benefit the stakeholders who sacrifice, such as giving their land, to make the megaproject happen. A news article reported:

> *"Labour [opposition party to the UK government] said it backed plans for a high-speed rail network, but had concerns about the route and likely ticket prices. Miss Eagle said there was a danger the new network would become a 'rich man's toy"*. (Daily Mail article 'Middle England in revolt: Tory shires furious as high-speed rail link gets go-ahead' dated 11th January 2012)

Labels such as 'fast' and 'low-carbon' seek to make the megaproject attractive while labels such as 'vanity' and 'for the rich' strive to make the megaproject repulsive. In all cases, labels change the identity of the megaproject and influence the interpretation of the organisation (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994). Labelling at the organisational level seeks to modify the identity, image and reputation of the megaproject organisation (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1997). While positive labels such as being 'innovative' and 'learning' can improve the acceptability of the megaproject organisation (Sergeeva, 2017; Sergeeva and Roehrich, 2018; Sergeeva and Zanello, 2018), negative labels such as ‘regime’ which implies an authoritarian kind of ruling have a negative connotation to the organisation (Shahi and Talebinejad, 2014). Other representative instances and support quotations for the category labels of megaproject are recorded in Table 3.

Table 3: Support quotations for labels of megaproject

Labels of megaproject	**Support quotations**
Transformative	“The Prime Minister, David Cameron, claimed that the line would have a “transformative” effect on the economy” (Telegraph article ‘Benefits of HS2 were exaggerated secret report reveals’ dated 10th June2012)
Once-in-a-generation opportunity	“Outlining the case for HS2 - which is planned to be extended to Manchester and Leeds and will cost a total of £32bn - at a conference in Birmingham, he [UK’s Transport Secretary] said high-speed rail offered a "once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform the way we travel in the 21st Century"” (BBC article ‘Government starts high-speed rail consultation’ dated 28th February 2011)
Costly white elephant	“We should expect the country to get poorer as a result – it [HS2 megaproject] is a costly white elephant” (Dailymail article ‘Middle England in revolt: Tory shires furious as high-speed rail link gets go-ahead’ dated 11th January 2011)
Eye-wateringly expensive	“*** [name of person], MP for South Northamptonshire, said the proposals were “eye-wateringly expensive” and did not represent value for money at £1,000 for each family in Britain” (Financial Times

	article 'Nimbys' begin struggle over High Speed 2' dated 18th April 2011)
The worst waste of public money for generations	"Every conceivable argument – commercial, economic and environmental – seems to be against what has been called "the worst waste of public money for generations". The scheme makes no practical sense at all. And yet our Government seems determined to railroad it through regardless" (Telegraph article 'The continent is the final destination for HS2' dated 14th January 2012)

LABELS OF PEOPLE

The promoters of the megaproject labelled a section of the protesters as NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard), a common label used for a person who objects an endeavour because it is harmful to their own neighbourhood (Lake, 1993). A news article read:

> *"The protesters, who include a handful of ministers, have been cast as nimbys by supporters, who include scores of large business leaders"* (Financial Times article ''Nimbys' begin struggle over High Speed 2' dated 18th April 2011)

The protesters in contrast labelled themselves as 'Friends of the Earth,' which was one of the names of the campaign group effective in the megaproject. Through this label, the protesters identify themselves as fighting for earth and against the environmental damage the megaproject is causing. Labels such as 'NIMBY' or 'friends of the earth' create personal identities to the groups labelled. Eyben & Moncrieffe's (2006) record the use of label 'citizen' for claiming an identity card which dictates resources, status and services. Moncrieffe and Eyben (2013) highlight that the way people are labelled matters as it has a long-standing influence on how the groups perceive themselves, respond to opportunities, make claims and exercise agency. So, positive labels such as ‘friends of the earth’ can awaken pride and help in organising, negative labels such as ‘NIMBY’ can shame people and result in disorganising. Other representative instances and support quotations for the category labels of people are recorded in Table 4.

Table 4: Support quotations for labels of people

Labels of people	**Support quotations**
Defenders of Chilterns	“As a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Chilterns have some formidable defenders who won't let HS2 proceed without a fight” (Independent article ‘Walk of the month: the Chilterns’ dated 23rd October 2011)
Economically privileged	“*** [name of person] said many of those living on the proposed route were "economically privileged" while poorer people further afield would benefit from the scheme.” (BBC article ‘Critics of high-speed rail are 'well-off nimbys’ dated 28th June 2011)
Driven by national interests	“This Government was elected to make difficult decisions in the long-term national interest, however tough our political going gets” (Telegraph article ‘HS2: the fast-track fix for bridging the North-South divide’ dated 28th July 2011)
Caring for environment	“As someone who cares deeply about the environment, the opportunity to dramatically expand rail, a greener form of transport than aviation or road is very exciting indeed.” (Bucks Herald article ‘Train service

	from Aylesbury via Winslow to Milton Keynes gets the green light' dated 16th July 2012)
Obsessed with speed	"They [the Government] seem to be obsessed with speed. It is a very old-fashioned view. What we as passengers are looking for is connectivity, certainty, punctuality and comfort" (Telegraph article 'HS2 route should be moved to M40 corridor says high speed rail expert' dated 12th August 2012)

LABELS OF PRACTICE

The promoters labelled the stakeholder consultation practice as 'transparent,' while the protesters labelled it a 'farce.' During the stakeholder consultation, the megaproject talks to the stakeholders and megaproject community in the area to minimize the effects of the megaproject on their lives. An official spokesperson said in one of the news articles regarding the consultation practice:

> *"We're here to provide clear and transparent information to members of the public."* (Telegraph article 'HS2 high speed rail consultant sacked after cretin row caught on video' dated 13th June 2011)

The director of one of the action groups against the megaproject describing the consultation practice as 'farce' recorded:

> "*The Government has already held a consultation into HS2 and it was a farce. People were excluded from meetings. People were tightly controlled so they could not speak freely about*

this terrible plan" (Telegraph article 'HS2 sparks a jobs boom for a quango' dated 7th April 2012)

Here we see that the same practice of consultation is labelled as 'transparent' by the promoters of the megaproject while it is labelled as 'farce' by the protesters. Labelling of an issue or practice as a threat or an opportunity affects subsequent information processing and even the motivations of key decision-makers (Dutton and Jackson, 1987). Cohen (2007) notes that labels of practice as 'routine' seek to guarantee that the execution of choices will be pretty much automatic. In the case of labelling the consultation practice as 'transparent' or 'farce,' the proponents of the label try to highlight that the label 'is' or 'will be' the practice. Other representative instances and support quotations for the category labels of practice are recorded in Table 5.

Table 5: Support quotations for labels of practice

Labels of practice	**Support quotations**
Planning process was very impressive	"It had been thought that the Chancellor was supportive of HS2. Last year he said the £33 billion scheme would "change the economic geography of Britain" and that the plans were "very impressive" (Telegraph article 'Treasury delays put HS2 plan in jeopardy' dated 19th May 2012)
Planning process was a betrayal	"With a timetable stretching out into the 2030s this project is going to need an agreement between Labour and the Conservatives, who welcomed the plans by calling them "a betrayal", "lacking in ambition"

	and unable to grasp "basic truths" (Londonist article 'HS2 Has Terminal Consequences Around Euston' dated 12th March 2010)
Passenger forecasting is laughable	"The business case (for HS2) does not promise economic growth that will benefit the country. It is London who will be the winner overall. What about Wales, what about the South West, what about the rural economies? It relies on laughable passenger forecasts and takes no account of the changing world we live in" (BBC article 'High-speed rail campaigners gather for national meeting' dated 19th February 2011)
Compensation scheme is unprecedented	"What we are talking about here is going wider, I think this is unprecedented, paying compensation to people who do not have their properties taken, but who will suffer a significant diminution in value" (Telegraph article 'Philip Hammond high speed rail will be a pleasant surprise for many' dated 11th December 2010)

The labels of the megaproject, people and practice recorded from the HS2 megaproject are summarized in Table 6 for quick reference.

Table 6: Promoters and protesters labels from the HS2 megaproject

	Promoter's labels	**Protester's labels**
Project (objectives)	Fast; Low-carbon	Vanity; for the rich
People (opposition)	NIMBY	Friends of the earth
Practice (consultation)	Transparent	Farce

Even though existing literature, in isolated instances, discusses the labels of the megaproject, people, and practice, they fall short of discussing the opposing labels. By analysing both the promoters and protesters labels of each of them, this section highlights the diverse opposing labels evident in the megaproject environment that are instrumental for project organising.

5. MAINTAINING AND CONTESTING LABELS

We observed from the news articles of the HS2 megaproject that the labels were maintained and contested using the same processes. These were through using the same label, using other labels, explaining the label, and using the label in the title of the organization. These processes are discussed below.

USING THE SAME LABEL

The labels were maintained by repeating the same label while the labels were contested by using the same label and directly confronting it. Both the promoter's and protester's labels were maintained by themselves or contested by the other. The 'low-carbon' and 'for the rich' labels were repeated so as to maintain the narrative created with the label. These repetitions were in different situations and another period of time. These are highlighted below:

> "*It is the low-carbon, sustainable transport of the future*." (BBC article 'High-speed rail plans announced by government' dated 11th March 2010)

> "*But opponents say HS2, which will almost certainly charge premium fares, will be a "railway for the rich" and the priority should be lines which are overcrowded already, such as the commuter services round London and other cities*". (Telegraph article 'Benefits of HS2 were exaggerated secret report reveals' dated 10th June 2012)

The labels of the promoter or the protester were contested by the other by using the same label and directly confronting it. Indicative quotes for the label 'NIMBY' and 'vanity' megaproject are highlighted below:

> *"This is not NIMBY-ism. It is about protecting a vital piece of heritage which has survived more than two centuries"* (Daily Mail article 'Britain's largest wild pear tree axed 250 years high speed rail link' dated 23rd February 2011)

> *"This is not in any way a vanity project, this is a key and vital investment in Britain's future"* (Telegraph article 'High-speed rail just 1.2 miles of railway in Chilterns will be above ground' dated 10th January 2010)

Here we see the promoters repeating the same label, while the protesters repeat the label with non-compliance embedded into it. The use of the same label maintains the labels and the resulting narrative from it. Supporting this, Surber (2001) records that frequent repetition increases the likelihood that the label is listed as the main topic, regardless of the importance of the topic. While Dailey and Browning (2014) highlight that narratives are repeated and Boje (1991) highlights that stories are repeated, this study records that even labels are repeated. Similar to our findings, Dailey and Browning (2014) mention that the repeated narratives can cause stability or change in organisations. Directly attacking the label and non-compliance can result in a contested narrative and can be a form of resistance (Tripsas, 2009).

USING OTHER LABELS

Synonyms of the labels which stress the existing labels are used to maintain the label while antonyms of the labels are used to contest the label. The promoters maintained the 'low-carbon' label by using synonym labels such as 'green.' The protesters maintained the 'vanity' label by using synonym labels such as 'waste.' Some indicative usages from the news media articles are recorded below:

> *"This investment will help people to choose trains over cars, reduce carbon emissions and provide a rail system that is faster, more reliable and greener."* (Bucks Herald article 'Train service from Aylesbury via Winslow to Milton Keynes gets the green light' dated 16th July 2012)

> *"Campaigners trying to block the new rail route, which will initially run between London and Birmingham, described many of the new positions as a "gross" waste of taxpayers' money"* (Telegraph article 'HS2 sparks a jobs boom for a quango' dated 7th April 2012)

Antonym labels which stress which undermine the existing labels were used to contest the labels. To contest the 'NIMBY' label, the protesters used the labels of 'national' to argue that their interest is not of their backyard but of the nation as highlighted below.

> *"But much as campaigners have countered that their concerns are of a national nature - quoting the cost and business case amongst others".* (Northampton Chronicle article 'The chron looks at what it will mean to Northamptonshire if the HS2 is created' dated 16th January 2012)

Waldman (2013) notes that counter-labelling is used by agencies to remove the pejorative connotations of a label associated with them. In the organisation studies, Corley and Gioia (2004) record the process through which same labels that sustain over time, end up with different meanings and interpretation during organisational change. Here, we discuss how different labels are used with the same meanings and interpretation in the process of maintaining and contesting these labels. We also record the circumstances when new labels are created in megaproject organisations, i.e., in the process of maintaining or contesting the existing labels.

EXPLAINING THE LABELS

For maintaining the label, the users of the label provide additional information on why the label is used thereby rationalizing the label. To support the 'NIMBY' label, the promoters explained that in infrastructure projects, people who live near the project always object by drawing in wider arguments, as highlighted below:

> *"It always happens when you have infrastructure projects, that those who live near where they're being proposed object vigorously and, of course, what they do is to try and draw in wider arguments".* (BBC article 'High-speed rail campaigners gather for national meeting' dated 19th February 2011)

In the same way, the protesters supported the rail 'for the rich' label by claiming that building a railway for the wealthy few while ordinary commuters suffer is not acceptable, as highlighted by the director of campaigns of one of the interest groups against the megaproject as below:

> *"We need to revolutionise travel away from roads and planes, but pumping £32bn into high-speed travel for the wealthy few while ordinary commuters suffer is not the answer".* (BBC article 'HS2: High-speed rail go-ahead prompts mixed reaction' dated 12th January 2012)"

For contesting the label, the resistor of the label provides additional information on why the label is not acceptable through a rational argument. For example, the protesters explained that contrary to the claims of 'transparency' in the land acquisition practice, land was acquired without any consultation as below,

> *"Written on the plan in black letters, they subsequently discovered, were the sinister words 'Permanent Land Required', with an arrow pointing at Chiltern Cottage. No official letter to warn them. No explanation. No apology. Nothing."* (Daily Mail article 'Home-owners booted make room rail link Buckinghamshire' dated 13th November 2011)

Similarly, the protesters through a rational argument, of the project causing severe environmental impact, explained why the 'NIMBY' label should not be used for those residents opposing the megaproject,

> *"We hope that this recommendation [of the project causing severe environmental impact] extinguishes, once and for all, any charges of nimbyism directed at people who wish to see our most-cherished landscape preserved for future generations"* (BBC article 'HS2: Good case for high-speed rail link, say MPs' dated 8th November 2011)

Describing the rationale of the label to support the label can maintain the label. Similarly, by explaining why the label is not appropriate, labels can be contested. Here, we see using the example of the 'NIMBY' label how the promoters maintain the label by explaining that those living near the megaproject will always oppose, while protesters contest the label by explaining that they are fighting for a cause more than NIMBY-ism.

USING LABELS IN THE TITLE OF THE ORGANIZATION

To maintain the label, the label is made into the title of the organisation. The channel link megaproject was renamed as High-Speed one (HS1) to incorporate the label of 'fast' into the organisation title. This was followed for the HS2 megaproject also. Similarly, the 'fast' label was incorporated into the title of the consultation paper of the project - 'fast track to prosperity.' In contrast, to contest the label of 'transparent', one of the protester groups named themselves AGHAST (Action Groups Against High Speed Two) highlighting the fear and dread because of the megaproject. Few protesters operated a website labelled 'www.betterthanhs2.org' showing that alternatives to the projects are better. The use of such titles to contest the label can be seen in other megaprojects worldwide. In the case of the Westconnex project in Sydney, Australia, the protesters named themselves 'westCONnex' contesting the benefits from the megaproject and labelling it a 'con' megaproject. Thus, the titles of the organisation send a strong message in them – either to maintain the label or to contest the label.

Thus, the labels are maintained and contested through the same linguistic processes. The process of maintaining and contesting the labels from the HS2 megaproject is summarized below in Table 7.

Table 7: Process of maintaining and contesting the labels

	Maintaining the label	**Contesting the label**
Using the same label	Repeat the label	Repeat the label and confront
Using other labels	Use of synonym labels	Use of antonym labels
Explaining the label	Information to support	Information to disrupt

Using labels in the name	Label in the title of organisation

6. DISCUSSION

As highlighted earlier, the role of labels in the sensemaking process, the organisations involved or the process through which these labels are maintained and contested are not explored in an organisational setting. The conflicting objectives of the promoters and the protesters in a megaproject setting and the prevalent use of labels in them provides us an opportunity to explore this theoretical gap. Project management literature highlights marketing as part of stakeholder management and discusses the project convincing the stakeholders that the benefits from the project is greater than the losses (Turner et al., 2019). Our research highlights the marketing efforts of the protesters who try to convince the megaproject team that the losses is greater than the benefits from the megaproject. Different promoter groups such as the UK Government, project spokesperson, Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC), etc., and different protester groups such as opposition party MP's, members of interest groups, action groups, etc. were all involved in the labelling process. Thus, marketing is not exclusive to the promoters of the megaproject. We extend the findings of Turner and Lecoeuvre (2017) by including protester organisations such as interest groups and action groups to the existing list of organisations involved in marketing of megaprojects such as project itself, investors and contractors. It should also be noted that the focus of project management has shifted from the project manager to the whole of the project team (Crawford, 2000) and hence project marketing should be performed by all members of the organisation (Turner and Lecoeuvre, 2017).

It was seen that both promoters and protesters employed labels to market themselves in situations where there was conflicting interests and identity crisis for giving direction and guiding sensemaking (Ancona, 2011). While project management literature discusses favourable labels such as ‘novelty,’ ‘innovative,’ and ‘largest’ (Sergeeva, 2017; Sergeeva and Roehrich, 2018; Ninan et al., 2020), the literature falls short of discussing unfavourable labels. We note that while the promoters assigned favourable labels such as ‘fast’ or ‘low-carbon’ to the project, the protesters assigned unfavourable labels such as ‘vanity’ or ‘for the rich.’ Contrary to the findings of Negro et al. (2010) that organisations whose identity spans multiple labels tend to be less legitimate, here we see the promoters and the protestors creating multiple identities for the megaproject by employing different labels. Our findings back the contributions of Pontikes (2012) who highlight that organisations in emerging markets with multiple and ambiguous labels are like chameleons as they are able to respond easily to changes. We argue that megaprojects are similar to organisations in emerging markets and use multiple labels to adapt easily to changes in the megaproject environment.

Wood (1989) records that labels of people such as ‘poor’ are often used in development policy. We record from the case of the HS2 megaproject, that labels were assigned to the megaproject, people, and practice in order to shape the meaning of the megaproject, people associated, or the practices followed. This is similar to findings of Baker (2006) that labelling is carried out for a person, place, group, event or any other key element in a narrative. Anchoring the findings in Logue and Clegg (2015), the labels of practice are in the overt dimension while the labels of megaproject and the labels of people are in the covert dimension. As highlighted earlier, labels of people assign an identity card which dictates resources, status and services (Eyben and Moncrieffe, 2006). Such use of labels of people is used to discipline and cast specific attributions of identity to people (Foucault, 1977). Labels of people such as ‘NIMBY’ in our instance, can be a means of moral disciplining (Logue and Clegg, 2015). Adding to this, labels of megaproject change the identity of the megaproject and influence the interpretation of the organisation (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994). Labels of megaprojects such as ‘for the rich’ in our instance, can shape the rules of meaning and can have implications for decisions regarding the megaproject. The use of labels of people and megaproject covertly shape the obligatory passage points thereby shaping the identity of people and megaproject respectively. Labels of practice are dependent on the identity labels of megaproject and people and can result in different treatment from those to whom the label or not applied (Dix et al., 2020). For example, the label of consultation practice as ‘farce’ or ‘transparent’ can be explained through the label of megaproject as ‘for the rich’ or the label of people as ‘NIMBY’ respectively. If the megaproject is identified as ‘for the rich’ and unnecessary, then the consultation practice will be seen overtly as ‘farce’, while if the identity of the protesting people are seen as ‘NIMBY,’ then the consultation practice will be seen overtly as ‘transparent’. Thus, the labels of practice only make sense in the context of labels of people and labels of megaproject. It should be noted that the labels of practice can also affects subsequent information processing and even the motivations of key decision-makers (Dutton and Jackson, 1987) by shaping the labels of megaproject and people in a circuitry fashion. From the study of the HS2 project, we highlight how the use of same label, the use of other labels, explaining the labels, and using labels in the tile of the organization are used to maintain and contest the labels in the circuit. The different labels in the overt and covert dimensions along with the processes for maintaining and contesting these labels are depicted in Figure 1.

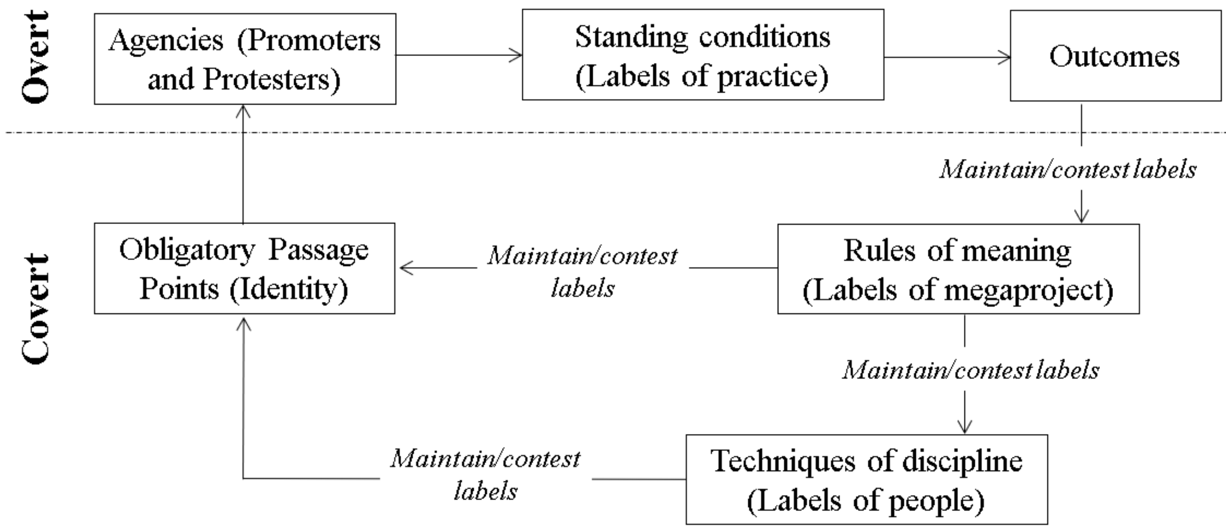

Figure 1: Labels in the overt and covert dimensions

It was seen that the promoters and protesters tried to maintain the label when a favourable label such as ‘fast’ or ‘friends of the earth’ was used with them. Similarly, when an unfavourable label such as ‘NIMBY’ or ‘vanity’ was used, they tried to contest them. As shown in Table 3, similar processes were employed for maintaining and contesting the labels by both the promoters and protesters of the megaproject. While maintaining or contesting the labels, the agents use synonyms and antonyms of the main label. Thus, we highlight the process of maintaining and contesting of labels as also circumstances when new labels are created.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper sought to explain the multiple labels given to the megaproject, people, and practice by the promoters and protesters of the megaproject. Thereby, we highlight that labels exist as a labyrinth, making it quite difficult to navigate as diverse labels, agents and strategies interplay to maintain and contest them. From the case study of the HS2 megaproject, we highlight how the promoters and protesters label the megaproject, people, and practice in attempts to shape the identity narrative. The promoters and protesters strive to maintain their own labels and contest the opponent's labels. The different ways through which these labels are maintained and contested as also recorded. The same label is repeated to maintain the label while it is repeated and confronted to contest the label. Synonyms of labels are used to maintain the label while antonyms of labels are used to contest the label. It was also seen that explaining the label by providing additional information to support the label can maintain the label, while providing additional information to disrupt the label can contest the label. Labels were incorporated into the title of the megaproject organisation to maintain it or contest it. Thus, by outlining the different types of labels and the processes through which they are maintained and contested, this research takes a few steps towards navigating the labyrinth of labels. This understanding of the practice of labels in megaprojects will help us manage external stakeholders and thereby deliver megaprojects successfully.

The research offers empirical evidence on labels in megaproject organisations and the dynamics around them. Theoretically, first, we highlight that labels are maintained and contested through the same processes. Second, we highlight the role of labels (the same label, synonym label, or antonym label) in maintaining and sustaining existing labels. Third, this paper contributes to an understanding of the circumstances when new labels are created, i.e., in the process of maintaining or contesting an existing label. We also make multiple contributions to practice, first, we record labelling efforts by protester groups and therefore highlight that project labelling and project marketing are not exclusive to the promoters of the project. Second, labels are effective in megaproject settings at three levels – megaproject, people, and practice. Third, we highlight that labelling in megaprojects are a collective effort with actors from different organisations and from different levels. Finally, successfully navigating the labels assigned to the megaproject by the protesters can help in stakeholder engagement. This research also records news media as an arena where labels are maintained and contested by the promoters and protesters of the megaproject.

One of the limitations of this study is it considers only one meaning of a label while the literature suggests that same labels can have multiple meanings attached to it (Gioia et al., 2000). Also, the meaning of labels can evolve (De Haan, 2013) during the life cycle of a megaproject and this is not considered for this research. Future research can explore these diverse definitions on the use of the same label and how they evolve through a longitudinal study of a megaproject. Future research can also explore the relationships between the four strategies identified through which labels are maintained or contested. Another limitation of this study is that all news media sources may not be represented in the 'google news' repository even though it is one of the major aggregators of news on the web (Bandari et al., 2012). In the future, other media sources such as social media can also be used for studying labels and the interaction between promoters and protesters in megaproject settings.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council Grant ES/R011567/1.

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