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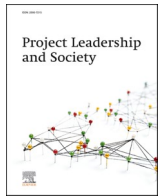
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Empirical Research Paper

Unravelling governmentality in project ecologies

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A R T I C L E I N F O	A B S T R A C T
	Under the rubric of project governance, governmentality has been defined as a general mode of governing people in projects, whether these projects are organized in an authoritarian, liberal, or neo-liberal mode in their approach to authority relations. We argue that governmentality is a specifically neo-liberal form of social integration, one that stresses the freedom of its subjects, and discuss how it extends governance beyond enforcing contracts and includes all stakeholders. Examples of governmentality in the modern era of projects are discussed as a proactive strategy conceptualized in five contexts in which the concept of governmentality, as governing through freedoms, has been applied in project ecologies. These include governance by *contract*, governance by *alliancing*, governance by *influence*, governance by *co-optation*, and governance by *incorporation*. The degree of governmentality in play increases through the sequence.

1. Introduction

We have organized this paper using framework for structuring a research article proposed by Lange and Pfarrer (2017).[1] We identify a common ground, a concern, a complication, a course of action and a contribution, implications and a conclusion. The paper explores governance and governmentality in the context of multiple firms and other agencies that are subjects and objects of relational governance in complex project ecologies, rather than a singular organizational population. The way that the governmentality concept has been applied in project governance framing as applicable to either authoritarian or liberal forms of governance is, we argue, problematic. A broad ideal typification, we argue, does not capture the essence of governmentality, albeit that the concept is 'essentially contested' (Gallie, 1955). Our research objective is to unravel the practice of governmentality in project ecologies to understand its implications for project governance.

We briefly review the literature of governmentality in projects as a means of governing the project 'beyond contract' (Fox, 1974). We consider the essential elements of trust and power relations in contracts beyond hierarchical and market approaches (Williamson, 1985). The specificity of governmentality to managing through liberties is argued, contrary to the notion of authoritarian or liberal governance through either hierarchies or markets. Governmentality always refers to specific populations and we define the appropriate population as that of 'project

ecologies' in which there are inter-organizational multi-project contexts with various professions working in different projects over time (Söderlund, 2004). A project ecology is a conceptual framework for analysing projects in context. Project ecologies denote a relational space in which projects are performed, encompassing interpersonal networks, intra- and inter-organizational collaborations and broad institutional frameworks (Grabher and Ibert, 2011).

The paper discusses four cases of governmentality. These occurred in the context of tunnelling in and around Sydney Harbour; the construction of a metro rail in India; the destruction of Juukan Gorge and its consequence for the mining giant, Rio Tinto and the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura people, in Western Australia (WA), and the case of East Kimberley Clean Energy, also in WA, which involves a partnership between three traditional owner groups to establish a $3bn green hydrogen project. What is distinctive about the latter project is that the traditional owners of the land on which the project is situated have been engaged as collaborators, developers and beneficiaries (Readfern, 2023). In conclusion, the 'contribution' is outlined, discussing how governmentality enabling social integration should be a major topic in project governance, harking back to a classic sociological contribution by David Lockwood in 1964. We shall begin with a discussion of the ways in which concepts of governance and governmentality have been used in projects.

2. Situating governance and governmentality

2.1. Governance

In recent years, with the development of a specific concern with corporate governance in management theory and practice, marked by the 1990 founding of *Corporate Governance: An International Journal,* societal conceptions of governance began to be translated to the organizational scale. The majority of governance concerns, as befits a market economy, was oriented to matters of finance, markets and shareholders, although broader conceptions of stakeholders were to develop (Clarke, 2023; Donaldson, 2012). Initially, the focus was very much on singular organizations and their corporate governance provisions, spurred by influential reviews such as the Cadbury Report (Cadbury, 1992). These theories of cooperate governance neglected normative concepts (Donaldson, 2012). Subsequently, the concern with governance spread to project management and the governance of projects comprising multiple organizations (Müller, 2017).

Governance has been defined as the formal and informal process through which actors regulates a multiplicity of social, political and economic practices (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009). It is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs (Carlsson et al., 1995). At a societal level, governance is broadly categorized as *authoritarian, liberal* or *neo-liberal*. In authoritarian governance, decision-making is centralized in the hands of a small elite and individual freedoms and civil liberties are restricted (Swyngedouw, 2000). Liberal governance is founded on the principles of rule of law, political pluralism, and respect for human rights (Dean, 2013). In neo-liberal governance, there is limited government intervention in economic affairs and there is focus on individual rights and freedoms (Evans et al., 2005).

2.2. Analogies of governance and governmentality

Analogy can be used as a key part of a theoretical explanation to advance an argument (Ketokivi et al., 2017). To explain the relation between governance and governmentality in projects, an analogy between hardware and software is used by the leading researcher of project governance (Müller (2017). Noting that a computer system's hardware is only useful when software is loaded, Müller represents the *hardware* as analogous to *governance*, the *governing* of *things*, while *software* governs the *user*, which is where he introduces the term 'governmentality'. Elaborating, in large scale infrastructure projects, *things* are that which is to be built, represented virtually in imaginaries constituted visually and textually in complex bundles of contractual and consulting specifications; these are the *software* of the project.

Let us explore software in a little more detail. Software consists of code. By analogy, project software should also be code. Following the analogy, contractual codes are the means of ensuring those things that are realized and how they will be realized using the affordances of the code. The code is represented in various ways and devices, in terms of cost, quality and schedule associated with projected things. These codes produce various language games in projects that, taken together, comprise its discourse (Clegg, 1975/2013a; Wittgenstein, 2010).

Where does the analogy leave governmentality? If the analogy was to be applied consistently then contractual and consulting specifications and recommendations would be the code in the analogy, comprising the software of governmentality. Contracts certainly frame projects but, given the inherent indexicality of any contract's inability to provide for its interpretation (Clegg, 1975/2013a), there are many opportunities for contrary interpretation and guilefulness in their despatch. Much of project management practice deals with these indexicalities, some of which end up as grist for the grind of lawyers. Governmentality is not determined by contracts; these contractual artefacts can only be enacted as actants by the interpretive understandings of interested actors. Contractual codes are not actants but occasions for enactment and sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Without sensemaking they do and achieve nothing in themselves.

Could governmentality be the governing of the user of the software? This seems to be nearer to what the analogy might be expressing but further reflection poses problems. The word 'reflection' was just mistyped by the author writing this passage but the software being used highlighted the error and the author corrected it. The software did not govern the author's agency in doing so; it merely alerted him, through one of its conventions, that an error in rule-bound application had just occurred, as this rule was constituted by dictionary protocols for spelling. The software did not self-correct; that was the task of the author as an actor exercising agency and interpretation. Agency was exercised in making the correction; the interpretation leading to the correction was an application of past practice in writing the word 'reflection' as well as an awareness, reflexively, that this particular author is liable to make mistakes when typing, due to a lack of facility in the practice – despite it being a practice engaged in daily. One's agency and interpretation do rely on the code embedded in the software that alerts one to the frequency of one's fumbling fingers hitting the wrong key. The code alerts one through a visual prompt.

No part of what is described in the previous paragraph accords with what one would understand as governmentality, precisely because of its largely stimulus-response nature. The underlining of error is the stimulus; one's correcting it through one's knowledge of the dictionary or the auto-response of the redlining is the response. Governmentality is not a stimulus-response relation. While one might, at a stretch, be able to see one's personal project of writing being shaped by the formal rules of the English language, it would not take us far. One writes, one wants to be understood; one is an English speaker, so one writes in English, respecting its conventions in practice. One could exercise one's freedom by writing in gibberish but there would be little point in doing so as one would be using a private rather than public language (Wittgenstein, 2010). No one else would understand what was written.

Is there an equivalent to the English language in large scale projects? Language is a discipline; we must abide by its rules if we wish to use it wisely as a communication tool for understanding rather than obfuscation. In projects, language is the overarching discipline in which code is conceived contractually. However, there are as many idioms in the language of projects as in any other substantively situated practice. In language as a discipline, if English is the overarching code, there are many sub-disciplines practiced, with some family resemblances to each other. At work in project management these sub-disciplines comprise the argot of professions and trades collectively collaborating in projects. As project ideas become manifest, as well as the professions and trades doing the social symbolic work of turning representations into realities, other stakeholders are involved in the temporal processes of their coming into being. There are the suppliers of equity capital in the project; the public sector regulators of the reality being constructed; the onlookers and activists in the communities being affected by this new manifestation, as well as the ecologies and environments being reshaped. In addition, there may be other meta-languages than that of English. Indeed, in some large-scale multilingual projects, a meta-language can be used as a political strategy (van Marrewijk et al., 2016; Vaara et al., 2005).

2.3. The genealogy of governmentality

Project governance has been defined as the "framework … within which management is executed" (Müller, 2017, p.5). It was through an innovation in organizing, the development of Alliancing as framework for project governance, that a new term entered the lexicon of project management: 'governmentality' (Clegg et al., 2002). The term was used to discuss a 'designer culture', created to produce culture of binding and positive obligations empirically investigated in a project to deliver a major piece of infrastructure using an Alliance approach. Conceptually, the term derived from Foucault's work, and it is worth considering the

genealogy and etymology of the term, things that cannot just be put aside and sundered.

The term, governmentality, was introduced by Foucault in a series of lectures on the 'Birth of Biopolitics' in 1979 (Marks, 2000, 128). The contest was the changing face of liberalism. The concept sought to capture new liberal approaches to political management. The focus was on the totality of practices, constituting, defining, organizing and instrumentalizing strategies that individuals choose 'in regard to each other' (Foucault, 1988: 20). du Gay (2000: 168) suggests that governmentality acts upon people 'through shaping and utilising their freedom.' The personal projects and ambitions of individual actors become enmeshed and form alliances with those of organization authorities (Clegg et al., 2002, pp. 318-9). The key is the freedom of subjects to choose and thus consent to practices.

The context in which Foucault's concept of governmentality was embedded was one in which self-governing autonomous subjects were exercising choices through which they governed themselves. Governmentality was conceived as a specifically neo-liberal form, as "the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this *very specific* albeit complex form of power" (Foucault, 1978: 102, our emphasis). How Foucault (2007) developed the concept is important because it is his work that framed its first use in project management (Clegg et al., 2002; Pitsis et al., 2003) and spurred its widespread adoption in the social sciences (Dean, 2002, 2009; see also 2013). As Dean (2015, p. 357) argues, "*analytical sensitivity to heterogeneity, multiplicity, contingency, locality, etc., over homogenizing, unifying, necessary and totalizing narratives*" is a hallmark of Foucault's work. Given this, one would not expect that a term such as 'governmentality' to be introduced as a general term, a concept for all occasions. It has specificity.

Words matter in their contexts and the context of governmentality is one in which subjects of governance govern themselves. Deploying the concept of governmentality in *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault (1973) studied the ways in which a normative universe was formed by how the 'truths' of practices, such as medicine, were constructed and taken-for granted. Rather than seeing power relations as a matter of different forces' positions and resources, Foucault saw it in terms of strategies, discourses and processes (Clegg, 1989, 2023). The focus was on 'the totality of practices, by which one can constitute, define, organize, instrumentalize the strategies which individuals in their liberty can have in regard to each other' (Foucault, 1988: 20).

Delivering projects of governmentality, suggested Foucault, always requires the willing, active participation of citizens, employees or consumers in "techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour" (Foucault, 1977:82). From its inception in Foucault's work, governmentality is tied to a relational view of power, a concern with how relations between people are arranged in which "freedoms, subjectivities and conduct play a key role" (Walters and Tazzioli, 2023, p. 4). Governmentality is conceived the means by which we think about governing others and ourselves in a wide variety of substantive contexts (Bonnafous-Boucher, 2001; Dean, 2009). The concept involves study of the complex relationship between subjects, their rationalities, motivations and the technologies through which governance occurs (Lawrence, 2020). The focus is very much on the practical arts of management of a specific population through specific techniques and strategies. Governmentality focuses on techniques embedded in specific rationalities that are oriented towards creating certain sorts of subject mentalities. Essentially, the objective is to constitute a population of subjects whose compliance is premised on their *freedom to choose, rather than their subordination.*

Foucault's focus was on the conditions under which we form a knowledge of and seek to govern everyday life (Dean, 2015). Foucault (2007, p. 108) describes three processes as the core of governmentality. The first process involves creating taken-for-granted practices, drawing both from existing institutions and procedures as well as *de novo* reflections, calculations, and tactics. Foucault (1977) emphasizes that

these practices are not invented by individuals but derive from the norms of cultures, societies, and social groups. The second process involves deploying knowledge via a power–knowledge nexus that includes the regulatory state and learned professional disciplines as well as more practical 'hands-on' capillaries of action embedded in disparate trades. The third process involves developing technologies of the self, positioning personal identities of those governed as agencies related to the overall project. These technologies revolve around the question: Who are we? (Foucault, 1982), and represent a broader epistemological shift in seeing actors as being "entrepreneurs of their selves" (Cooper, 2015). Together, these three processes help us understand the ways in which governmentality operates (Mitchell, 2006). They do so through meshing the personal projects and ambitions of individual actors so that they become entangled and form alliances with those of organizational authorities and dominant organizations.

2.4. Governmentality: authoritarian, liberal and neo-liberal

The concept of governmentality has been allied with general notions of project governance. In projects, governance has been defined as a multi-level phenomenon that encompasses the governance of the project, parent organization, contractors, suppliers, and the relationships between them (Turner and Müller, 2017). The aim of governance in project settings is seen to be ensuring consistent and predictable delivery of projects (Müller et al., 2013). In the project governance literature, governmentality has been defined "as the *mentalities, rationalities, and ways of interaction, chosen by those in governance roles to implement, maintain and change the governance structure*" (Müller et al., 2017). Governmentality in projects, it is argued, can be situated within a frame of governance that can be authoritarian, liberal or neo-liberal. Governmentality, Müller states, is a matter of enforcement:

> "[E]nforcement can be done, for example, through *authoritative* approaches, by penalizing project managers for not using it; or *liberal* approaches, by outlining the methodology's benefits for the organization and possible incentives for the project managers; or *neoliberal* approaches, by setting and influencing values that the member of an organization share and respect, and thus follow."

While the governors of a project can and do frame mentalities, rationalities and ways of interacting for project participants through contractual particulars, they cannot 'choose' or 'enforce' other actors' mentalities, rationalities, or ways of interacting; only the actors themselves can make existential choices. This is evident at the macro-level in discussions of governance, where regimes can topple, abrupt shifts in rule occur, where what was authoritarian become s more liberal. Governance as a macro-concept can be thought of as characterizing a political and policy regime. For instance, there are societies readily classified as authoritarian in their totality, such as Putin's Russia, that attempt to enforce consensus in the population of the rightness of authoritarian and elite rule as a project, a rule that is only imperfectly achieved. In societies that are classed as liberal in their totality, the rule of the market may be extensive but imperfect, as natural monopolies in private hands are created through the privatization of the ownership of utilities in which there is no choice of provider, such as water. Not only will markets as the basis for order be imperfect; they will also be patchy. Not everything that can be privatised will be.

Translating well defined terms such as 'authoritarian' (Cerutti, 2017) and 'liberal' (Locke, 2016) governance from the macro to the project level is not an easy translation. In macro terms there is a broad consensus that an authoritarian regime is based on the "non-acceptance of conflict and plurality as normal elements of politics, the will to preserve the *status quo* and prevent change by keeping all political dynamics under close control by a strong central power, and lastly, the erosion of the rule of law, the division of powers, and democratic voting procedures" (Cerutti, 2017, p. 17). Liberal governance is usually referred to in the manner of Locke (1847) as based on the rule of law, the rights of the

individual and the existence of a social contract.

How do these terms translate to the project level? The different authoritarian, liberal and neo-liberal regimes of governance at the project level (Müller, 2017) are elaborated with different implications of each type for governmentality. *Authoritarian governmentality* is seen to enforce process compliance and administer rigid governance structures, such as in major public investment projects (Klakegg and Haavaldson, 2011; Miller and Hobbs, 2005). *Liberal governmentality* emphasizes enforcement of outcomes controlled within clearly defined but, when needed, flexible governance structures, such as customer delivery projects (Dinsmore and Rocha, 2012). *Neo-liberal approaches* occur in community governed open-source development projects (Franck and Jungwirth, 2003). The goal here is to indirectly steer team members' behaviours through their desire to contribute to existing values and ideologies, which foster self-control within rudimentary governance structures (Müller, 2017, p. 114). The use of these macro-terms in relation to projects is quite different from their conventional use in political science., as might be expected. In translation from the macro to the project level, authoritarian project governmentality is characterized in strictly contractual terms; the liberal mode is more flexible but still contractual, while the neo-liberal mode is premised on more voluntaristic non-contractual relations, relations that are beyond contract (Fox, 1974) and open sourced.

The concept of governmentality is being used as a general and undifferentiated concept that can be expressed in variable form, depending on the extent of either market or hierarchy (Williamson, 1985). By definition, authoritarian regimes care little for the consent of their subjects, while liberal regimes care little for their freedoms, other than in terms of their role in markets. The notion of liberal governmentality which is defined as "decision making based on economic principles and general market-mindedness" (Müller, 2017, p. 114), is equally problematic. There is no freedom in obeying the dictates of the market. If one wants to buy one has to pay; on some occasions, in some contexts, one may be able to bargain over the cost or terms, yet one still must pay. The same considerations apply if one is selling one's labour on the market; one is a price-taker, not free to choose, other than to be employed on whatever terms are on offer or be unemployed, unless, of course, capital is 'working' for you (Marx, 1975).

Governmentality, in a strict sense of the term, is a facet not of all three types but only the neo-liberal case. du Gay (2000: 168) suggests that governmentality 'create[s] a distance between the decisions of formal political institutions and other social actors, conceive[s] of these actors as subjects of responsibility, autonomy and choice, and seek[s] to act upon them through shaping and utilising their freedom.' Only in this context is there a positive form of power that strives to build commitment, consent and trust in regimes of governance achieved by enhancing the 'freedoms' of its subjects. Of the three options of authoritative, liberal or neo-liberal approaches to enforcement, it is only the neo-liberal approach that is an exercise in governmentality.[2]

Neither authoritarian surveillance (Zorina et al., 2021) nor market incentives (Grant, 2002) are predicated on an essential freedom. Authoritarian approaches do not respect the liberties and freedoms of those being 'enforced'. Hierarchy relies on surveillance of the individual actor, through whatever means are used. In market approaches, transactions are seen to be enforced by the 'invisible hand' of impersonal market forces that determine subjects' transactional freedoms. An approach that stresses either market or hierarchy does not necessarily work well where project duration is typically longer than that of any

transaction in a market and more complex than any singular formal organizational hierarchy. Managing a complex project through the market is virtually impossible: too many transactions, in too complementary a relationship, with too many interdependencies, make the market model unsatisfactory for anything other than the simplest or most routine projects. Managing a complex project through hierarchy, where the key issue is that of not only systems but also social integration between distinct organizational agencies, is also problematic. Rarely is there a singular autocrat able to exercise authoritarian judgement. Instead, there are usually many distinct and separate centres of calculation and agency that require integration, rarely achieved autocratically.

Where there are multiple firms and organizations employed in a project there is no necessary alignment between the many governance doctrines that might be involved. There is governance beyond contract (Fox, 1974). High trust attaches to those we conventionally call 'professionals'; these are actors whom it is expected will enact professional codes of conduct in their practice. Such codes are 'knowable' in various ways; they are embedded in practices such as standards, curricula successfully incorporated and represented by credentials, as well as lived experientially through practice in a flow of projects. Knowability is both a delegated property of organizing, a recognition that there are sub-disciplinary experts responsible for specific works and practices as well as a practical collective consciousness of those involved in the project.

Professionalism is often shorthand for relations of high trust and low surveillance. These relations are both contingent and contractually framed. For example, while an airline pilot has a high trust role, it is one that is tightly framed by systems' routines that must be attended to, both prior to flying and in flight. Routines tend to be highly specified in high trust situations in which there is considerable complexity and capital at stake, such as commanding a battleship or flying an airliner. The same conditions can also be found in major infrastructure projects in which leaders must be aware of possible impacts of the intervention, including social and bio-geophysical displacements (van Marrewijk et al., 2023). Typically, large-scale projects are constituted by contracts that anticipate that agents to the contract may transact with guile; hence, contractors employ legal expertise to write contracts that are as watertight as possible. Contractual enforcement occurs through governance mechanisms that afford surveillance of work to check that work is completed in accord with the contract (Lundin and Söderholm, 1995).

Governance through contract can anticipate future action but its unfolding in practice, in the face of infinite contingencies, some of which may be yet unknown unknowns, remains 'quite vague and indeterminate compared to the real thing when it finally occurs' (Schutz, 1967: 59). Following Schutz (1967), the organization of a multiplicity of actors, with a multiplicity of interests, entails that a realistic grasp of the problematic meaning of that which is being projected must start from the actor's definitions of a project (also see Weick, 1969: 167). Typically, these are encoded as different professional and trade 'modes of rationality' (Clegg, 1975/2013a), constructed at the intersection of professional disciplinary and other knowledges with contractual codes.

The Project Management Body of Knowledge, in its successive editions, defines the practices through which project managers can become centres of calculation and agency as "entrepreneurs of their selves" (Cooper, 2015) in achieving project milestones. The practice *aspires* to create a common sensemaking frame (Colville, et al., 1999; Weick, 1995) in which project participants will voluntarily and willingly agree to be normatively governed in choices forming the subjectivity of their project selves (Barnett et al., 2014). However, there are not only people working for the project to be managed, such as managers and engineers, but also people affected by the project, such as communities, activists and other organizations that may affect project objectives (Tutt and Pink, 2019). These people, exterior to any project and its contracts, may also engage with the project by constituting a social relation with it.

People are at the centre of all interactions, irrespective of how the

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[2] Indirectly steering behaviours, through creating conditions of individual desire to contribute to existing values and ideologies, fostering self-control, echoes Weber's (1976) 'protestant ethic', which governed through its freedoms rather than through bowing to the authority of the church in Rome. Calvinism produced embryonically classical neo-liberal subjects riddled with anxiety in and about their freedoms and fate.

material thingness constituting the objects to be realized are being projected (Packendorff, 1995) and this is as true of project management as it is of all other forms of practice. Project charters, often used as a governance device to assist in achieving objectives, particularly when conflict between the short-term interests of the contractor and the long-term interests of the client and end users may be expected to arise, typically do not include the interests of people that constitute themselves as non-contractual stakeholders. No charter or contract can be all encompassing, all controlling, because of the potential for collisions between motivated people, obdurate reality and project imaginaries, plans and projects for their realization.

In project ecologies, dealing with small and quite specific populations, in whatever state context, the opportunities and occasions for total control by either authoritarian elites or market transactions will be far more specifically distributed. It would seem difficult to characterise a project ecology in most developed countries as either authoritarian or liberal in its totality. They are far more likely to be characterized by different forms of the arts of management depending in what actors and actants the project is attempting to manage, a point made clearly by Fox (1974). Hence, to assume that a project ecology can be characterized in its totality as either authoritarian or liberal would be as difficult as characterizing a project as neo-liberal in its totality. What we can do is to identify elements that draw, variably, on each of the ideal types. Bearing this in mind, we will conceptualize four contexts in which the concept of governmentality, as governing through elements of freedoms in a neo-liberal mode, has been applied in project ecologies. These elements include governance by *alliancing*, governance by *influence*, governance by *co-optation*, and governance by *incorporation*. The degree of governmentality in play increases through the sequence.

3. Four modes of neo-liberal governmentality

3.1. Governance by alliancing: Sydney Harbour's Olympic project

One way of delivering a project is to combine material incentives with a governmental project, something encountered while researching an alliance project to build some infrastructure for the Sydney 2000 Olympics (Clegg et al., 2002). The Alliance building the infrastructure for the Sydney Harbour Olympic project consisted of four lead organizations and numerous subcontractors. Lacking any overall alignment in their norms of governance the Alliance decided to design their own project culture. Hence, in doing so they could be seen to have enacted Foucauldian governmentality because they chose to design these commitments as *de novo* reflections, calculations, and tactics. What they sought to do was design a cultural set of commitments that opposed adversarial conflict; opposed self-interest on the part of contracting parties; opposed litigiousness and opposed a lack of care for the safety and well-being of communities, ecologies and employees, among others. In addition, they sought to adhere to norms of timeliness and cost control.

What characterized the projects relations with its partners, both those that were formal and (most of those) that were informal was the attention paid to governmentality in the project. The attention was authentic, premised not upon relations of *power over* but about creating a culture of trust in which the *power to* achieve the objectives of the project were widely shared both internally between project teams and externally between stakeholders formally and informally implicated in the project. As discussed in relation to Fox (1974), power over others and trust in others are frequently mutually opposed variables: where trust is low, projects will tend to strive to maximize power by various means; where trust is high, surveillance power may be relaxed.

In especially complex organizing that is technologically challenging and dangerous, high trust may also be accompanied by high surveillance of conformance to standards and routines. In relationships between project participants, trust can shift attention from self-interest to 'common interest' and help the parties share more knowledge and other

resources (see, among others, Smyth et al., 2010; Eskerod and Vaagaasar, 2014). Trust reduces transaction costs in terms of control and increases the opportunity for positive interaction. In the Alliance trust between the project and various stakeholders grew through repeated assessments of whether the other acted in accordance with what was agreed. When what is agreed is arrived at democratically, through deliberation, accountability and transparency (Crawford et al., 2008), there is far more likelihood of trust than when actors are told, commanded, direct what to do without having voice.

The governmentality devised was expressed through a culture that was democratically devised by the project leadership team, spanning the project owner and the organizations contracted to deliver the project KPIs. The project culture was used in acculturation processes of induction for all participants in the project, contractors, sub-contractors, professions and trades, union members and management, visitors to the sites. At the centre of this governmentality for these actors was a very simple proposition that made commitment to the values embedded in the culture not only ideational but also material. To the extent that the project came in on time, under budget, and met its other key performance indicators (KPIs) of ecological sustainability, maintaining and building social capital, and securing employee occupational health and safety, then all parties to the Alliance would benefit through the distribution of a profit share—the amount saved over the budgeted cost.

The KPIs recognized not only internal stakeholders of the project—such as the firms and organizations involved and the unionized employees on the project—but also the communities in which the project was being conducted and the ecologies it traversed: the harbour, foreshore, and the security of the dwellings under which tunnelling occurred. The budgeted savings came in part through the collaborative culture created and in part through the innovations it facilitated. Collaborative commitment and transparency were built into the moral fibre of the project. Each self-interested actor, both individually and organizationally, was constituted in such a way that they had something to gain from greater collaboration within the project. Individual and organizational bonuses were tied to performance on the KPIs defined in such a way as to ensure no trade-off between indicators: all had to exceed normalized benchmarks for bonuses to be activated. Indeed, performance became translated into performativity—an awareness of always being on view, on stage, and on show, in not only what one did but also in how one did it, through marking progress on KPIs on charts displayed on the project office walls. It was not individuals that were made panoptical subjects but the project; its progress became a panoptical subject.

Participants in the project achieved social integration through constant reiteration of ten project principles (see Pitsis et al., 2003, p. 577). In addition, there was a commitment to democracy through rotating leadership in the leadership team as disciplinary members of the team adopted roles championing activities other than that of their expertise. Doing this spread organizational learning, as ecologists began to see the world through engineering relevancies and *vice versa*. Underlying the organizational learning and social integration that was fostered was the role of the project culture in creating a common sensemaking frame (Weick, 1995; Colville et al., 1999) whereby project participants would voluntarily and willingly agree to be governed in their conduct by commitment to the project culture design. There was a collective interest in budget savings (Jackson and Carter, 1998, p. 51) because each saving translated into a disbursement to project participants as financial stakeholders, right down to the 'tradies' delivering the project work. It was the prospect of these that rendered the commitments tangible—people in the project knew that if they succeeded in meeting these commitments, they would benefit materially, both individually and organizationally.

In essence, the actors in the project were embedded in a project context which respected their freedoms to be creative and innovative and rewarded them for being so. They were not subject to punitive power relations that punished non-conformance, so much as positive

power relations that rewarded innovation. Innovation was encouraged through encouraging 'voice' (Cunha et al., 2019) on the part of subjects that were both culturally motivated *and* stood to gain materialistically by being rewarded for voicing innovations. The governmental approach fused the personal ambitions of those being governed, enmeshing them with those of the overall project management team, providing a material as well as ideational rationale for so doing. The project embraced neo-liberal governmentality.

3.2. Governance by influence: metro rail in India and social media

Creating a project culture designed to fuse system and social integration through democratic leadership principles, profit sharing by the actors and agencies involved, as well as explicit induction strategies for all participants, strives to enable positive governmentality. Positive, because it eschews autocracy in favour of democracy, inclusion of all in benefits rather than exclusion of most from them, while it prioritizes project organizational learning and innovation in favour of contractual conformance (Gordon, 1991) in contrast to negative governmentality, in which power is used to produce negative effects, such as fear, anxiety and self-regulation (Nasir, 2018).

Project governance overall involves the process of achieving project objectives by managing different stakeholders *involved* or *implicated* in project settings. The distinction between involved and implicated is significant. Those stakeholders involved are formally recognized as such by being associated with the project's governance, participating in its delivery. Those stakeholders that are implicated in project governance are not necessarily formally and legitimately involved; they may be asserting a stake that is not formally recognized. Significant consequences can flow from managing project relations only with those that are formal stakeholders, such as investors but not those whose stakeholding is not formally acknowledged but is, by any ethical metric, implicated. Moving beyond contract has implications not only for contractors and their agents; it also has implications for the wider world outside the confines of the project.

The concept of governmentality has proven useful to analyse how the reflexive management of people within projects is conducted. Forms of governmentality can be extended to less immediately involved stakeholders, in addition to those internal to a project. It is said that power can be most effective when it is least observable (Lukes, 2005), which governmentality facilitates, as Ninan et al. (2019) discuss in the context of a major metro rail project in India. Through strategic use of social media to affect external stakeholders branding extended a complex set of meanings, associations and experiences that created emotional, relational and strategic elements on the part of those with stakeholder interests. Subtle and mundane strategies used in infrastructure megaprojects to manage external stakeholders can also have an impact on internal stakeholders, especially the project team. Their normative universe is further shaped as strategies to manage external stakeholders in the project community are deployed. Social media articulates the reception of projects by specific audiences whose potential impact on the progress of the project can be significant.

Analysing the social media communications of the metro rail organization showed that strategies were used to promote the organization and give progress updates, appealing to and targeting sections of the community. The effect of this on the community was to build support and create community advocates. Not only was the project community influenced but also the project team, in large part recruited from the broader community. Project team effects included enhanced job perceptions, an ability to attract talent, as well as the production of project team advocates. As a result, team members' perceptions of the megaproject as socially committed, safe, clean, prestigious and iconic for the city were enhanced by positive social media feedback aligned with these messages.

The judicious use of social media in keeping communities well informed, so that they were prepared for and acquiesced in the project's

manifestations, eased the project's reception greatly. In addition, this project had a social media strategy for communicating effectively with the stakeholders outside the project that used largely image-based rhetoric such as 'transforming the city'. Painting competitions on the theme 'go green metro' were conducted for school children. Outreach activities in schools and elsewhere were posted on the social media platforms. Such neo-liberal thoughts and practices can bring about transformations in space and time (Brady, 2014) as seen with changes in the projects and people. For other studies on how social media can play a governmental role see also Ninan et al. (2023), Ninan and Sergeeva (2021) and Sergeeva and Ninan (2023).

3.3. Governance by co-optation: the Rio Tinto Juukan Gorge project

One of the key methods of learning is to receive praise for initiatives undertake; another way is to make mistakes, being deviant and learning better ways of performing because of the critical reception egregious error received. Governmentality can be deepened by both kinds of learning; what follows is an example of a project that learnt the hard way and improved governmentality in consequence, realizing that a public relations disaster made clear the parameters of actors' responsibility, autonomy and choice.

A case in point occurred in the corporate behemoth, Rio Tinto, the mineral and resources project company. Rio Tinto founded their iron ore business in the Pilbara, Western Australia in 1961 and the land around Juukan Gorge has been leased by Rio Tinto for mining since 1965. Rio Tinto had local knowledge on the importance of the 46,000-year-old site sacred for the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura (PKKP) people. However, in May 2020 Rio Tinto blasted a cliff face near its Brockman iron ore mine in the Pilbara, Western Australia to access iron ore backed by an authoritarian governance measure relying on the legal permission from the government of Western Australia. The blasting destroyed two ancient and sacred rock shelters in the Juukan Gorge which is of spiritual significance to the traditional owners of the land.

How did it happen? *Prima facie*, Rio Tinto broke no legal obligations because under West Australian law it had the legal right to mine the area. Iron ore prices were high and what could be shipped found ready markets. Rio operates autonomous strategic business units. Hence, it has a segmented organizational structure with product divisions, such as iron ore, in which responsibility, autonomy and choice to make decisions resides. Choice in this case led to decision-making with disastrous environmental and stakeholder consequences that threatened the legitimacy of the entire corporation. The mining violated the implicit law of the indigenous people by the widely reported destruction of a significant site of spiritual value. The furore that arose in the national press because of this event saw many corporate as well as indigenous and other voices raised in protest. Thus, their authoritarian governance measure failed, and the destruction of the sacred site generated widespread international media coverage and public outcry. The company faced significant repercussions, including three executive resignations, shareholder upheaval, a federal inquiry, and considerable damage to their reputation and social license to operate.

The company however resorted to quick action focused on the strategy of co-optation, the key strategy used by the TVA in cooling out resistance (Selznick, 1949). Rio Tinto explicitly addressed the Juukan Gorge crisis on its website, accepting, post-hoc, a degree of responsibility that is not often seen in corporate scandals. They also sought to co-opt those that they had betrayed. The following appeared on the Rio Tinto web site regarding the event:

> "This was a breach of the trust placed in us by the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura people and other Traditional Owners of the lands on which our business operates. We apologise unreservedly to the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura (PKKP) people, and to people across Australia and beyond, for the destruction of Juukan Gorge …

In allowing the destruction of Juukan Gorge to occur, we fell far short of our values as a company and breached the trust placed in us by the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we operate. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that the destruction of a site of such exceptional cultural significance never happens again, to earn back the trust that has been lost and to re-establish our leadership in communities and social performance" (https://www.riotinto.com/en/news/inquiry-into-juukan-gorge).

Significant governmental changes were enacted. For the future, the strategic business units such as the iron division have been assigned responsibility for Communities and Social Performance (CSP), partnerships and engagement. A central Communities & Social Performance area of expertise to build line management capability and provide support as well as deliver assurance was established. An Integrated Heritage Management Process was established so that all sites are surveyed and ranked for cultural significance, in partnership with the Traditional Owners of the land. Traditional Owners must be consulted prior to any material impact of Rio Tinto activity, the nature of which will be explicitly advised. In addition, a new approvals process for projects of 'high' or 'very high' significance was introduced under a new Integrated Heritage Management Process. Any decisions to mine must be approved by the heritage sub-committee of the Executive Committee or the Board. The process was designed to provide commitments to greater transparency and material benefit to Traditional Owners. The company also updated its community relations approach, and actions taken to address indigenous communities include recognition of cultural site significance and agreements with Indigenous communities regarding land access and mineral development. On Rio Tinto's website, an interview with indigenous man Brad Welsh, Chief Advisor to the CEO on indigenous affairs, is given prominence on the website (https://www.riotinto.com/news/stories/how-we-are-listening), stressing 'truth telling' and treating Traditional Owners as partners.

What these reforms signal is a realization in Rio Tinto that governance must be more than a formal instrument; it must extend to governmentality shaping the choices and dispositions of its executives in areas much broader than their technical and managerial expertise. The active choice of these subjects must now extend to an appreciation of anthropology and a respect for cultural traditions among those who are traditional custodians of the lands on which it operates; moreover, the voice of these custodians will be heard in agreements that have to be negotiated in advance of any project work. Rio Tinto learnt through a failure of governmentality how significant and costly such shortcomings can be, both internally and externally (Verrender, 2020). Destroying trust can occur rapidly (Kramer, 2009), as Juukan Gorge demonstrates. In contrast to previous authoritarian working, the Rio Tinto project has expanded its working to also embrace neo-liberal approach focusing on governance beyond contract and enforcing to embrace governance by alliancing including all stakeholders.

3.4. Governance by incorporation: the East Kimberley Clean Energy project

Rio Tinto's embrace of governmentality was embedded in profound reflection, post-deviance, occasioned by the widespread media coverage of their conduct in destroying Juukan Gorge. It seems that elsewhere in Western Australia, subsequent to the Juukan Gorge incident, learning sought to avoid the kind of deviance that made Juukan Gorge such a hard lesson for Rio Tinto.

The British, who created colonies and territories in Australia out of the complex of nations that already existed, never agreed any treaty with the indigenous owners of Australia, an ownership based on over 60,000 years of occupancy. They never sought to negotiate with the owners of this land. Instead, they claimed the land was Terra Nullius, empty, belonging to no one and they took it for themselves. After white settlement, indigenous peoples were treated with scant respect in both authoritarian and market relations. For the former, they were herded into missions that sought to instil a civilizing project, especially on the stolen generations. In these missions the civilizing process consisted of trying to train the inhabitant in domestic and pastoral skills to service the houses and lands of the occupiers while simultaneously destroying culture, language and spirituality.

On July 18, 2023, a long history unacknowledged was formally acknowledged in a Western Australian project that sets a governmental benchmark for the future. The East Kimberley Clean Energy Project, involving a giant 950-MW solar farm, is a landmark project. Its uniqueness resides not so much in its technological scope, although that is innovative, but in its governmentality. The project involves a first-of-its-kind equity partnership with traditional owners of the land on which it will be built. MG Corporation, representing the Miriuwung and Gajerron people, and Balanggarra Aboriginal Corporation will each own one-quarter of the project. The East Kimberley Land Council of indigenous people will also own 25 per cent, equal to the holding of Pollination, an advisory firm, meaning that the indigenous groups are shareholders rather than just stakeholders (Macdonald-Smith, 2023). A new company, called Aboriginal Clean Energy, funded by a direct investment of Pollination secured with a 50 million USD (73.4 million AUD) investment from the ANZ Banking Group will develop the project near the town of Kununurra.

According to a report in the *Australian Financial Review*, Rob Grant, the head of Pollination, said,

"[I]n the Western Australian environment, the ability to develop and deliver the scale of renewable energy projects that is going to be needed for decarbonising the Australian economy won't happen unless we have this sort of model in place, where the First Nations groups are placed as shareholders rather than stakeholders in the development phase … scoping studies have already been completed to define the project concept, and feasibility studies would now commence, including 12 months of environmental, engineering and approvals work, and native title and heritage work that is significantly "de-risked" due to the direct equity involvement of Indigenous groups" (Macdonald-Smith, 2023).

An important point was made by Trisha Birch, sister of Balanggarra Aboriginal Corporation CEO Cissy Gore-Birch, when she said of the project that "This is our choice – for once, this is our choice" (https://aboriginalcleanenergy.com/the-ace-video). A clear statement of governmentality in practice. The first stage of the project will involve a greenfield 900 MW solar farm, double the size of a similar project previously built, with a 50,000 tonnes per year hydrogen plant to be erected on MG Corporation freehold land near Kununurra. Hydrogen will be made by converting fresh water from Lake Argyle into green hydrogen using about 850 MW of electrolysis capacity powered by solar energy. Hydrogen will then be transported through a new 120-km pipeline to the Port of Wyndham, where it will be converted into ammonia using hydropower from the Ord River hydro system. About 250,000 tonnes a year of green ammonia is expected to be produced, for both domestic and export markets in the fertilisers and explosives sectors, with product to be shipped to Asia from Wyndham (Macdonald-Smith, 2023).

Wyndham is an "export ready" port which will be reached by a 120 km pipeline delivering green hydrogen created by sunlight on more than a million solar panels powering electrolysers to produce 50,000 tonnes of green hydrogen a year, using clean water from Kae Argyle and renewable energy from an existing hydroelectric facility (Readfern, 2023).

4. Implications

Implicitly, our analysis has focused on questions of social and system integration (Lockwood, 1964). Social integration refers to the principles by which individuals or actors are related to one another; system integration refers to the relationships between parts of a social system.

Governance strives to order system integration; it creates a framework of order, an ordering, of social relations as predictable and constant. In project governance, governance may be authoritarian, or it can be liberal but in Foucault's terms and those presented here, governmentality can only ever be neo-liberal. The reason is, as stated, that neither authoritarian governance nor liberal governance govern though the liberties of their subjects. Authoritarian governance is premised on power over subjects. It is inscribed in a hierarchy of variable legitimacy; at its most legitimate, those subject to it will attest it as legitimate authority. At its least legitimate they will know it as *Herrschaft*, domination. In authoritarian governance, social integration is achieved through subordination by which everyone is expected to know their place and stick to it and its rules and affordances. 'Power over' is emphasized. So, we posit that,

Proposition 1. *Project governance needs to go beyond authoritarian governance and enforcing to embrace governmentality.*

In liberal governance, social integration is achieved through a nexus of contracts. These contracts are of two kinds: employment contracts and project contracts. The former are terms of employment of individuals; the latter are contracts between organizational agencies designed to formalize and describe the project relations that will deliver the project outcomes. For the latter, the inherent indexicality and opportunities for indetermination and breach of these make social integration a potentially troublesome and litigious affair. For the former, social integration is best achieved through willing coordination and compliance on the part of individual employees. The trust entailed in this is highly stratified and differentiated rather than a general phenomenon. Individual 'power to' is emphasized in some instances while 'power over' is stressed for lower trust elements. The assumption is that social contracts, such as a designed project culture (Clegg et al., 2002) can produce some positive governmental effects. These establish the limits of individual employee sovereignty in exercising their power to do as they choose (see Clegg, 1979/2013b, 1989/2023 and Cunha et al., 2021 for further discussion of sovereignty and 'power to'), structuring these choices in terms that best for project.

Whatever is best for project may be delivered not only though binding obligation but also through material inducements that reinforce these, as in the case of the Olympic infrastructure example or it may be delivered through legal rational process, as in the case of Rio Tinto's revised post-Juukan Gorge procedures, supplemented by new organizational learning from previously marginal stakeholders, such as the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura people, striving to build trust and commitment both ways; in the stakeholders towards the company; in the company towards the stakeholders. So, we posit that,

Proposition 2. *Project governance needs to go beyond liberal governance and contracts to embrace governmentality.*

In neo-liberal governance, social integration is achieved through governmentality that fashions the individual dispositions of those who are its subjects, to share 'power with' each other to create new possibilities. The essence of governmentality is to govern though the freedoms of the subjects. So, we posit that, in view of the East Kimberly Clean Energy case, that,

Proposition 3. *Project governance needs to go beyond a neo-liberal focus on framing the freedom of key stakeholder subjects by including them as partners in projects, inside the governmentality of the project.*

Governmentality is not a general mode of enforcement of different types of governance; it is specific. The Sydney Harbour Alliance, embraced the natural ecology and communities around the harbour as stakeholders to whom they strove to do no harm; Rio Tinto moved in this direction after the disaster that was Juukan Gorge by co-opting those that had resisted its actions after the destruction of their site of significance; East Kimberly Clean Energy seeks to avoid any disasters in future of a similar kind by vesting the freedom of subjects that are key

stakeholders in the project as inclusive equity partners. A small detail but one with large consequences for the use of governmentality as a concept. It is not and never can be a general historical and acontextual concept suitable for authoritarian and market governance, as indigenous people know only too well from the history of settlement and expropriation. Nonetheless, for specific project designs, governmentality can be used in a mode that empowers subjects through *their* choice, as Trisha Birch said.

5. Conclusion

Foucault's governmentality is anchored in neo-liberalism, specifically in an analytical sensitivity to heterogeneity, multiplicity, contingency, locality, etc., over homogenizing, unifying, necessary and totalizing narratives. Here, governmentality is not something 'enforced' or based on authority; rather it refers to normatively institutionalized voice.

The discussion suggested that there are different degrees of governmentality being constituted by different forms of governance. In governance by *contract*, high-trust professionals will enjoy governmentality, as management through their professional freedoms. In governance by *alliancing*, governmentality is extended to all employees, contractors and sub-contractors, through a designed culture. In governance by *influence*, social media extends elements of governmentality to those in the project ecology that follow the project, enrolling them to its progress, and seeking to translate them to the project interests, as project governors define them. In governance by *co-optation*, resistance to projects is countered by co-opting the resistors into the organization's governance structures, providing an advisory role for them in relation to future projects. In governance by *incorporation*, those in the project ecology that might otherwise have suffered from and resisted the project are incorporated in its design from the outset. Each of the different forms of governance affords a greater degree of governmentality between all stakeholders.

Project ecologies include the governance of multiple agencies and are often more complex than is the governance of a single organization. Embracing governmentality requires relational governance based on choices premised on subjects' freedom to choose. They may do so for reasons of carefully designed self-interest, as in the Sydney Harbour project (Clegg et al., 2002); they may do so because of social media campaigns carefully designed to influence communities by presenting a positive image of a project, as was the case for the metro rail in India (Ninan et al., 2019); they may do so, because they realize that prior exclusion of the voice of key stakeholders in the search for market power created major damage through its reception as illegitimate and deviant practice, to the detriment of their shareholders, as did Rio Tinto and respond by co-optation for their future; they may do because they have learnt from prior examples, as Pollinator seems to have done, by establishing its major project in concert with the key stakeholder, making them key shareholders, as the in East Kimberley Clean Energy project. What is essential is that governmentality involves choices not enforcement. Understanding this point is key to successful projects. Governmentality in projects concerns not just the interior world of the project; it can be extended to its exterior including all stakeholders. We suggest that considering the ability of projects to create environmental, social, and political disruptions within local environments, researchers and practitioners should always consider the extent to which governmentality is afforded to all stakeholders. More research on governmentality, in the most inclusive neo-liberal forms discussed here, is important in its implications for project governance.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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