

The Diverse Economies of Mega-Projects: An Anthropological Perspective

Emerging Subjects of the New Economy Project
University College London
Department of Anthropology

Rebekah Plueckhahn, PhD
Lauren Bonilla, PhD

Emerging Subjects of the New Economy Project

- Collaborative 5-year project (2014-2019) between UCL and National University of Mongolia, funded by the European Research Council
 - *Credit and loans; property and ownership; trade; mining sector; nationalist and environmental movements*
- What kinds of 'subjects' are emerging in Mongolia's rapidly changing economy?
 - *human subjects*
 - *subjects of concern*
- How do the actions and strategies of Mongolians shape the economy and economic futures?



Definition of Mega-Projects

- Promise transformation
- Ambitious in design
- Capital- and resource-intensive
- Involves many different groups of people with different interests and expectations
- Long-time horizons
- Significant impacts

Reality rarely
(if ever)
matches the
project
model or design

The Diverse Economies of Mega-Projects

Economic Diversity versus Diverse Economies

The Diverse Economies of Mega-Projects

Economic Diversity versus Diverse Economies



- Diversification (mix of industries, employment opportunities, etc)
- Economy mainly understood as the profit-generating activities that are part of the *market*
- Private and public entities operate within the market

The Diverse Economies of Mega-Projects

Economic Diversity versus Diverse Economies



- Diversification (mix of industries, employment opportunities, etc)
- Economy mainly understood as the profit-generating activities that are part of the *market*
- Private and public entities operate within the market



- Economy is always a mix of market and non-market activities (e.g. barter)
- Blurred boundaries between public and private

Tavan Tolgoi - Mega-Project Ambitions

- Coal deposit comprised of six-subfields
- 3 separate operators with very different ownership structures:
 - **Mongolian Mining Corp** (Hong Kong-listed, publically traded)
 - **Erdenes Tavan Tolgoi** (state holding company)
 - **Tavan Tolgoi JSC** (51% provincially owned, 49% private domestic and international shareholders)
- Debate over the future development of the deposit

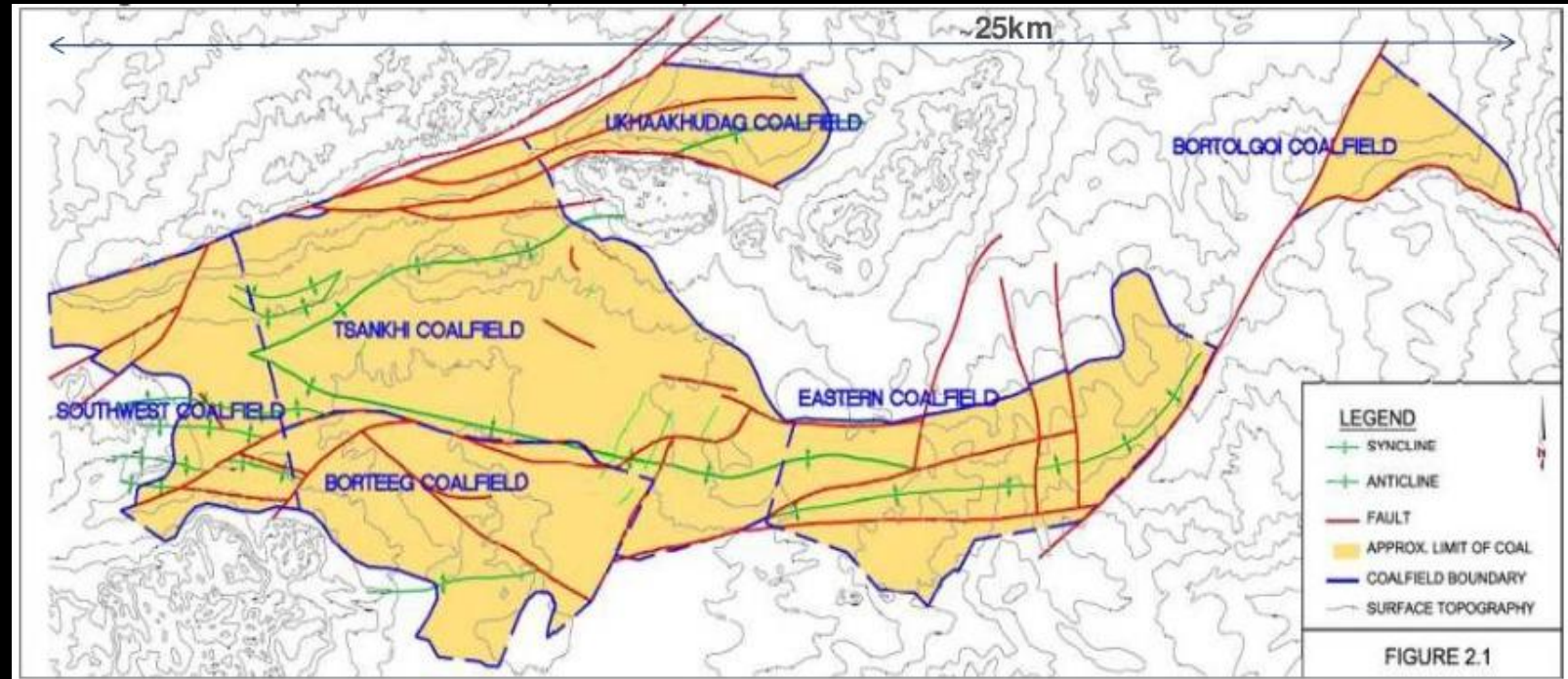


Image Source: Norwest/Erdenes Tavan Tolgoi



Tsogttsetsii
feeling the
coal market
slowdown,
March &
April, 2016

- Internal diversity of a mega-project can be very important, especially when the project is associated with volatile and unpredictable markets, like the mining sector.
- Diverse economic activities always exist alongside mega-projects and should be taken seriously in planning.



Herding household that relocated near Tavan Tolgoi to take advantage of temporarily out of work engineers and professionals from MMC to comb goats for cashmere. April 2016.

The City as 'Mega-Project'



---- The case of Ulaanbaatar ----



In a 'middle space' between built areas and the *ger* districts lie half finished buildings.

Extending beyond housing developments

Diverse economies continually shape Ulaanbaatar



Right - People use their plot of land to grow an expanded garden of vegetables they sell for a profit.

Left - A person sets up a Korean auto repair business on their land.

Urban planning efforts that take into account existing diverse economic activities are more likely to have a wider positive impact.