

- [News Home](#)
- [Harvard and Iraq](#)
- [Commencement 2008](#)
- [Cambridge Edition](#)
- [College](#)
- [Crime and Courts](#)
- [Faculty](#)
- [Science](#)
- [University](#)

Danish Prof Talks at GSD

Published On Tuesday, October 21, 2008 12:45 AM
By **NOAH S. RAYMAN**
Contributing Writer

Danish urban planner Bent Flyvbjerg has a love-hate relationship with the Sydney Opera House.

"It's my favorite building," he said. "But at the same time, I hate the project. The Sydney Opera House is a megaproject disaster."

ARTICLE TOOLS:

- ✦ [E-mail this Article](#)
- ✦ [Printer Friendly Version](#)
- ✦ **NEW** [Listen to this article](#)
- ✦ **NEW** [Download MP3](#)
- ✦ [Write a Letter to the Editor](#)

Flyvbjerg, a professor at Aalborg University, discussed the budget overruns that are common to large infrastructure projects, or megaprojects, at Harvard's Graduate School of Design last night.

According to Flyvbjerg, nine out of every 10 infrastructure projects have these fiscal problems.

"So don't believe that all projects have cost overrun," he joked to an audience of over 70 students and faculty from graduate schools across Boston. "That's an exaggeration."

He attributed the overstretched budgets to optimism biases and "strategic misrepresentation" in the original construction plans.

Flyvbjerg said planners often overestimate revenue and underestimate costs in order to ensure funding for their projects, comparing this "culture of misrepresentation" to pork barrel spending.

"You get rewarded for misrepresenting projects and you get punished if you are honest," he said, adding that he often receives e-mails from planners confessing this. "It's like I'm some Catholic priest."

The problem is pervasive, said Flyvbjerg. Boston's Big Dig—a 16-year project that spent an estimated \$22 billion on a 3.5 mile highway beneath the city—was one of the nation's largest and most expensive megaprojects, said Flyvbjerg, resulting in a 224 percent cost overrun.

And construction of the Chunnel, a tunnel connecting Britain and France under the English Channel, caused such high cost overruns that the British economy may have been better off without it, he said.

Flyvbjerg recommended that planners adjust their estimates based on budgetary overruns from similar projects in order to combat this problem.

He cited the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain as a successful project that resulted in a zero percent cost overrun.

Jerold S. Kayden, the co-chair of the GSD's Department of Urban Planning and Design, said that Flyvbjerg's expertise on the costs and benefits of megaproject construction is especially relevant today.

"Today, infrastructure is sexy," he said, explaining that these large-scale projects become fixtures in many cities but that budgeting them remains a big political problem.

Some members of the audience, however, were surprised at Flyvbjerg's approach.

"It's pretty rare to hear people criticize the consequences of engineers with big imaginations," said Travis P. Dunn, a civil engineering student at MIT. "His perspective is unique."

[close\(\)](#)

[status via twitter](#)

[recent comments \(follow comments\)](#)

[View Profile »](#)

Powered by [Disqus](#) · [Learn more](#)

[close](#) [Reblog this comment](#)

Powered by [Disqus](#) · [Learn more](#)



Add New Comment

Views	Comments
Most Viewed Articles	
1.	Harvard Junior Dies During River Run
2.	Friends Remember Cai as Aspiring Doctor, Dedicated Musician
3.	Al Gore's Inconvenient Diet
4.	POPSCREEN: The Killers
5.	Harvard Dean Stresses Free Speech After Vandalism of Right to Life Posters



ADVERTISEMENT:

Type your comment here.

[?] Unclaimed Register Login DISQUS

 [Record video comment](#)

Trackbacks

(Trackback URL)

Please be aware that unverified comments may take 24 to 48 hours to be approved.

PAID ADVERTISING:

Logo Floor Mats
Business Process Outsourcing
Scholarship Contest
Payday Loan

Mortgage Rates
T Shirts
T-Shirt Design
Make your own T-Shirt
Custom Magnets

College Football Tickets & NFL Tickets
Custom T-Shirts
Legal Tips

Promotional Products
Party Invitations
Charlotte Web Design
Memory Foam Beds

Your Ad Here

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms and Conditions](#) | [Archives](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Corrections](#) | [Deliveries](#) | [Subscriptions](#) | [RSS](#)

Copyright © 2008, The Harvard Crimson, Inc.