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Driving forces for multinational construction consortiums: the case of a Greek mega-project

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Abstract: Multinational consortiums and teams are thought to be rather significant organisational structures in a globalised economy. Research in general, has exhibited four driving forces that strongly affect the successful deliverance of projects and that the project management team has to deal with: 1) power; 2) culture; 3) trust; 4) uncertainty and complexity. The aim of this study is to contribute to the area of successful collaboration of construction companies within multinational consortiums by investigating if the above-mentioned issues are also the driving forces for the successful multinational collaboration in construction consortiums and thus validate this theory. This paper deals with that issue, researching an emblematic mega project that demanded the alliance between two large construction companies of different nationalities (one Italian and one Greek). The results show that the driving forces of projects success can also navigate multinational consortiums to success.

Keywords: multinational consortiums; project; driving forces.

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1 Introduction

For several years now the quantity of multinational consortiums as well as of companies which deliver a variety of projects in an international context is growing steadily (Nippa *et al.*, 2007; Ling and Tiong, 2008). International joint ventures (IJV) is a typical and highly advantageous way of implementing such projects (Shen and Cheung, 2018; Chan *et al.*, 2020; Amirtash *et al.*, 2021; Sagar *et al.*, 2022). Multinational consortiums deal with special issues which demand a different approach from what traditional project management procedures require (Egginton, 1996) and research on cross-cultural projects like the Addis Ababa Light Rail Transit (Alade *et al.*, 2022) or the Moroccan high-speed rail project (Yuan *et al.*, 2020) highlight the uncertainties (for example cost-estimating risks) but also the benefits (e.g., structures with more flexibility) of multinational collaborations. Even though leadership issues concerning multinational consortiums have been demonstrated (Chevrier, 2003; Makilouko, 2004; Henrie and Sousa-Poza, 2005), little has been written about the necessary organisational structure that needs to be created behind the project leader, and which are the success factors that finally determine the overall project performance; this is the research gap that this paper attempts to cover. So far, driving forces that affect project success have been researched (Ika and Hodgson, 2014; Galvin *et al.*, 2021; Cerić *et al.*, 2021) but not thoroughly when it comes to multinational consortiums’ context. It is well established that multinational consortiums and teams are thought to be rather significant organisational structures in a globalised

economy (Neeley, 2015), thus making the issue of management in a multinational context of high importance and concern. Yates and Mukherjee (1993, p.42) argued accordingly:

“As the world increases in complexity, firms will be investigating... new and innovative forms of international alliances and financing techniques, [including] ways to perfect the current forms of risk management, project financing, privatization, BOT, joint ventures, partnerships and international alliances.”

Team performance is highly influenced by a multinational environment (Thamhain, 2010) and it is the project manager who is responsible for a constructive communication among all stakeholders of the project (Ramaswamy and Murphy, 2004). Moreover, Yates and Rahbar (1992) stated that:

“The success or failure of domestic or international engineering and construction projects is influenced by the quality of project management.”

The value of project management for implementing internationalisation in a company is debated (Midler, 2019). Addressing the cultural dimensions of a multinational consortium is of high importance as well as a key-point for success and the project manager must act and manage in a multicultural context (Zein, 2012) whereat culture and specifically managing multicultural communication is considered rather significant advantage of multinational firms and joint-ventures (Sousa and Bradley, 2006; Ang and Inkpen, 2008; Moon, 2010; Yitmen, 2013). The time period at the beginning of the project is essential for the parts of the consortium and a serious number of resources is spent in order to explore all kinds of aspects like cultural, political, technical, etc. (Gareis, 2000). Political risks of the international construction projects are debated through the relevant literature (Jakobsen, 2010; Deng et al., 2014). Moreover, the term of cultural intelligence or “how to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural differences” [Van Dyne et al., (2008), p.1, quoted in Henderson et al., (2018), p.954] is discussed as a trait to adapt in a multicultural context increasing thus project performance. In the same line of thought, Ochieng and Price (2010, p.449) stated that “one of the critical components of building multicultural project teams is the creation and development of effective cross-cultural collectivism, trust, communication and empathy in leadership.” It is worth saying though that multicultural professional teams are thought to be better achievers compared to teams of the same culture especially when variety of skills and percipience are prerequisite for project performance (Earley and Mosakowski, 2000).

This paper addresses these challenges highlighting the procedures of collaboration in a multicultural team and researching the key aspects, as seen in the relevant bibliography, that set the path for delivering a mega project on time and under budget. As above mentioned, little has been stated about the success factors of multinational consortiums and their organisational structure. Egginton (1996, p.172) argues why addressing this issue matters:

“An increasingly significant feature of large projects is the internationalization of project consortia [...] with the increasing preference of customers for fixed price, turnkey contract arrangements. [...] This combination presents challenges that stretch traditional project management methods to the limit.”

Research so far has exhibited four driving forces that the project management team has to deal with, meaning that project managers must be aware of the strong correlation of those

forces with project success, and that these forces strongly affect the successful deliverance of projects. These driving forces are

- 1 power
- 2 culture
- 3 trust
- 4 uncertainty and complexity (Chan and Tse, 2003; Van Marrewijk, 2015; Odediran and Windapo, 2018; Tetteh et al., 2020; Imam and Zareer, 2021; Tembo et al., 2022).

This paper adds to the understanding of culture, trust and power literature by studying a mega-project undertaken by an international joint venture and comparing the findings with the results of two other case-studies concerning multinational consortiums; this attempt highlights the significant impact that these driving forces have in projects which demand multinational collaboration. The aim of this study is to contribute to the area of successful collaboration of construction companies within multinational consortiums by investigating if the above-mentioned issues are also the driving forces for the successful multinational collaboration in construction consortiums and thus validate this theory. This aim is approached by answering the following research question:

RQ1 Are the driving forces, that the project management team has to deal with, and that lead to project success also the key elements for successful multinational collaboration in international construction consortiums?

This paper deals with that issue, researching an emblematic mega project that was delivered in Greece, on time and under budget during the Greek economic crisis and demanded the flawless alliance among two large construction companies of different nationalities (one Italian and one Greek), as well as a globally known philanthropic institution which was the client. The total budget of the project exceeded €450 million, employed over 2,500 people and numerous contractors or suppliers. The innovation of the joint venture was the establishment of a vertical integrated construction company based within the construction site with departments totally staffed, only for the purpose of the construction of the mega-project. This project was *strategic* for the Greek construction industry as it was the largest construction project ever built in Greece and, moreover, it proved to be *transformative* for the Greek construction company as it changed its way of organising projects. The researchers conducted an in-depth observation research for a four-month period. The research on the field took place at a crucial time of the project as it was concluded just three months before the final delivery. After all, research in similar mega-projects has shown that failure in project synergies is possible to occur (Van Marrewijk, 2005) and therefore it is of high value to demonstrate the reasons that drive to success the collaboration between two multinational construction companies and an international organisation as the client.

The structure of the rest of the paper is as follows: Section 2 demonstrates the literature review about correlation of forces, culture issues, trust and uncertainty in international projects. Section 3 points out the research methodology and Section 4 demonstrates the analysis of the collected data of the case study and reports the findings. Section 5 discusses the findings and compares them with case-studies of other mega-projects delivered by multinational consortiums and finally Section 6 concludes the paper and offers potential insights and contributions to the field.

2 Literature review

2.1 Correlations of forces

Power issues is a key element for thoroughly comprehending success factors of projects (Ika and Hodgson, 2014; Liu et al., 2022) and the success of a project is inextricably linked with power issues (Söderlund et al., 2017). Especially, when one speaks about megaprojects where the complexity of collaborating parties must be considered (Van Marrewijk, 2015) and should be taken for granted, power is shared among different stakeholders (Ninan et al., 2019). Power as well as politics as significant issues in projects are debated (Van Marrewijk and Van den Ende, 2022) and Kromidha (p.1589, 2017) quotes Clegg's (1989) distinctions of power, stating that:

“...facilitative power is related to system integration and domination [...] Dispositional power is about integration and rules that determine relations of meaning and membership. [...]. Causal power determines the interaction between social relations, agencies, standing conditions and outcomes.”

McClelland [1975, quoted in Chang, (2013), p.58] identified in his turn four types of power:

- 1 ‘trust vs. mistrust’ type which speaks about the one who depends on the *power source*
- 2 ‘autonomy vs. shame and doubt’ type which speaks about the person who desire power in order to act independently
- 3 ‘initiative vs. guilt’ type which is about the person who wants power in order to influence other people
- 4 ‘identity and intimacy vs. identity confusion and stagnation’ type which speaks about the person who wants power so as to serve other people as a way for fulfilling their duty.

In addition, French and Raven (1959) speak about five types of power:

- 1 coercive power which is the power to impose punishment thus creating fear of producing poor results
- 2 reward power which can be seen as the exact opposite of coercive power meaning that it is depended on rewarding based on good results
- 3 legitimate power which speaks about the power based on the individual's place on the hierarchy of the organisation
- 4 expert power which is based on someone's expertise or special knowledge
- 5 is the referent power which is about being an exemplar.

Lovell (1993, p.77) argues that “understanding the power environment within the organization and the position of the actors within it [...] is also crucial. [...] knowing when to build and form alliances, or move around road blocks by appealing to a higher authority, is important.” Flyvbjerg (1998) in his book *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice*, argued that when great power emerges, rationality comes second but from the other hand one of the most certain ways to influence power groups is by the use of

rationality (Clegg, 2008). In the same line of thought, Foucault (1977) stated that the notions power and knowledge are interwoven meaning that relations of power are based on knowledge and in reverse. In addition, research has shown that communication plays a significant part in utilisation of power and affect in an immediate matter project performance (Sarhadi et al., 2018).

Correlation of forces in multinational consortiums can be highly associated with stakeholder management, a key-skill for the project manager (Walker et al., 2008). Relationships among stakeholders are proved to be of high value for the success of a project (Diallo and Thuillier, 2004). The use of certain strategies so as to manage stakeholders is *sine qua non* and it is interrelated with power issues and relations (Ninan et al., 2019). Accordingly, it is argued that in International Development Projects there are significant levels of risk concerning rules, conflicts, etc. (Ika and Hodgson, 2014).

2.2 Culture issues

Culture is seen as a major issue when people of different organisations must collaborate for achieving the same objective and moreover [Galvin et al., (2021), p.397],

“... culture affects what is prioritized and what is valued, it tends to directly impact what is actually done. For example, an organization may value short-term financial performance whereas another may value learning opportunities that improve long-term competitiveness.”

Organisational culture is deeply influenced by the upper echelon of a firm thus strongly affecting the behaviour of employees (Hu et al., 2012; Yeung et al., 2013; Meier and Kock, 2023). Moreover, project performance is also strongly affected by the organisational culture (Gu et al., 2014). In addition, the effect of organisational culture in the delay of projects has also been stated (Arditi et al., 2017). The culture of an organisation seems to also affect areas like communication, decision making and moreover has significant impact in management strategies (Naoum et al., 2015) and be a variable of high value for the success of a firm (Cameron and Quinn, 2011). One other major influence of organisational culture concerns the sharing of knowledge (Agarwal et al., 2021) and “it is advocated that project managers should harmonize knowledge-sharing practices with organizational cultures in order for the practices to be supported and protected” [Ajmal et al. (2009), p.358]. Research in international projects has shown that cultural issues can create disagreements and lead to a disharmony among project team members (Chan and Tse, 2003).

It should be also stated that national culture plays an important role and strongly influences project team behaviour and mentality as well as management practices (Chen et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2015; Wei and Miraglia, 2017). Research on cultural factors and how these can affect the growth of a firm revealed that countries with low gross domestic product (GDP) show less deployment than countries with high GDP (Bredillet et al., 2010). Research conducted on the effects of culture in an international construction joint venture suggested “that differences in organizational culture have a greater impact on IJV performance than differences in national and host country culture” and moreover that “...similarity between the national cultures of IJV partners has a negative effect on IJV performance...” [Ozorhon et al. (2008), p.361]. Furthermore, a study on an IJV from partners of three different cultures (China, UK and Hong Kong) demonstrated that the dominant partner of the IJV diffuses in a way their organisational culture on the project

and the management practices (Liu and Fellows, 2008). Another study on how national culture influences international projects exhibits several cultural dimensions that can affect management practices:

- 1 power distance
- 2 uncertainty avoidance
- 3 individualism
- 4 long-term orientation
- 5 human treatment
- 6 performance orientation (Shore and Cross, 2005).

The importance of culture on establishing management practices and processes is strongly argued (Hofstede, 1980, 1994; Ryumshina, 2020). National culture influences also the planning stages of a project (Milosevic, 2002; Rees-Caldwell and Pinnington, 2013). De Bony (2010) argues that, in academic literature, there can be found three categories concerning the correlation of national culture and management:

- 1 the first category argues that national culture and project management are two concepts irrelevant
- 2 the second category acknowledges a possible correlation but also declares that national culture do not present high differentiation
- 3 the third category speaks about the strong singularity of cultures and offers a rather fertile ground for management research.

A study on an international joint venture comprised of French, Thai and Malaysian managers concluded that [Swierczek, (1994), p.46] “joint ventures inevitably encounter conflicts, because they begin from different cultural frameworks. [...] Understanding the main dimensions of culture and how they affect conflict assists in creating a common culture for joint ventures [...].”

2.3 Trust

The topic of trust is actually an immature field of project management research (Cerić et al., 2021). Seeing the subject from a social point of view, trust is a prerequisite for a productive collaboration among society members (Cook et al., 2005). Trust substitutes extensive control mechanisms meaning that assiduous control (e.g., detailed contracts) is needed when trust is not cultivated and developed (Rousseau et al., 1998). Moreover, trust is an important factor for the engagement and the bonding of a team (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993; Pavez et al., 2021), research has shown that trust among members of team opens the path for trust among teams (Cerić, 2015) and that trust is an element to be developed by individuals (Smyth and Etkins, 2007). On the contrary, it should be noted that there are also studies which argue that trust on the project manager does not guaranty project success (Nielsen, 2004) but trust in general has a significant effect on project success (Imam and Zareer, 2021; Vaez-Alaei et al., 2023) and in addition scholars have argued that trust is not a factor to be left to individuals but must be seen from the relationships among individuals (or firms) perspective (Blomqvist, 1997). Rogers (2019,

p.30) argues accordingly: “If the project manager assembles and supports the people with the right mix of skills to achieve the goal of the project, [...], these individuals may well trust the project manager and the ability of other individuals on the team to perform the project.” A longitudinal research on trust issues developed a twofold approach for building trust relationships that can last, evolve and overcome difficulties:

- 1 the so called decoupling which is about the creation of firm relationships among project team and stakeholders who rely on team members to improvise when needed
- 2 the re-engaging approach, is about re-connecting the project targets with the stakeholders giving them the chance to work on the project thus engaging with project team (Rose and Schlichter, 2013).

Trust building could be seen as a separate process with specific rules and procedures: two-way communication, feel of safety through monitoring project performance, gentlemen’s agreements (solving matters in a just and reasonable manner) and good faith between stakeholders among else (Xu et al., 2021). Research of a megaproject in Netherlands demonstrated certain processes established by the commissioner in order to develop trust relationships with the contractors; these processes concerned six types of workshops:

- 1 exploration of the necessary values of governing the project
- 2 exploration of fair ways of negotiating phases
- 3 defining possible misinterpretations
- 4 creation of common ground between parties by sharing knowledge and experiences
- 5 further development of relationships through the expression of personal opinions
- 6 preparation for unwanted incidents and situations (Ruijter et al., 2021).

In the same line of thought the development of trust is thought to be the way of removing obstacles in sharing knowledge and information (Wang et al., 2021). The project management literature identifies three types of trust:

- 1 intuition
- 2 integrity
- 3 competencies (Hartman, 2003).

A study on these three types argued that “typology for trust was effective [...] since relevant and significant relationships were found between all three types of trust and stakeholder management [...] & [...] the management of stakeholders of relational origin contributes positively to trust relationships [...]” [de Oliveira and Rabechini, (2019), p.142].

2.4 Uncertainty and complexity in international projects

In IJV issues have been observed concerning low levels of performance (Drouin et al., 2009) despite the fact that alliances are proved to obtain lessons learned throughout the whole process of collaboration (Anand and Khanna, 2000) whereas the impact of complexity in projects is argued (Kaufmann and Kock, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). Maylor

and Turner (2017, p.1083) argue that “although the literature is valuable and varied, it is evident that project complexity is far from being ‘solved’”, and this paper attempts to contribute towards this direction by investigating the complexity one of the most emblematic mega-projects of Greece. There is a significant number of obstacles that challenge the viability of the IJV which among else include deficiency in planning, poor management, disputes, interorganisational disagreements (Bourgault et al., 2014; Tetteh et al., 2020). The increased percentage of failure in joint ventures as well as the negative impact of multiple partners in alliances is discussed, highlighting the fact that low number of associates is beneficiary for the performance of joint venture (Gong et al., 2007). On the contraire, the phenomenon of disequilibrium is observed in international alliances having as primary cause of creation, the self-sufficiency the foreign associate achieves when has developed adequate levels of the local market (Inkpen and Beamish, 1997). Accordingly, it is revealed that “local and foreign IJV parties’ absorptive learning capacity decreases one party’s dependence on the other, while joint learning capacity in IJV increases both parties’ dependence on each other” [Fang and Zou, (2010), p.906].

Pinto et al. (2022, p.833) raise the question “how does interorganizational design affect the delivery of project success and benefits realization?” and this research provides data to address this question. Alliances are a new thread of modern capitalism and is a fruitful way of the individual firm to overcome objective difficulties thus opening the path to take advantage of its strengths (Dunning, 2015). Join Ventures offer the field where partner companies can benefit from the exchange of knowledge, resources as well the share of the risk (Lu et al., 2020). Concerning knowledge management, it is mentioned trust among partners is gained through the productive and explicit exchange of knowledge which moreover adds a significant advantage itself for the success of the project and produces additional knowledge in a perpetual constructive process (Atalay and Sarvan, 2014) but it is a fact that “little is known about the process of knowledge building within complex organisations” [Ratcheva, (2009), p.207]. Furthermore, it is researched that when the partners of the joint venture share common characteristics and possess complementary skills, there is an increased likelihood of success (Ozorhon et al., 2011). There is a recipe however suggested for achieving success which argues that “selecting a suitable complementary local partner and adopting a proactive risk management strategy are vital antecedents to successful venture performance” [Mohamed, (2003), p.619]. The performance of the international consortium lies in three axes:

- 1 the project performance
- 2 the consortium partners
- 3 the consortium itself (Ozorhon et al., 2008).

In addition, the relevant literature has shown a series of variables that affect the performance of the joint venture speaking about power and how it is negotiated, trust among partners, the distribution of justice, culture in a national as well as organisational context, conflict management, control management, sharing same vision and targets, etc. (Ren et al., 2009). For the foreign partner control is proved to be the key word for

reaching high levels of satisfaction and specifically control mechanisms that offer transparency, safety and protect their resources (Mjoen and Tallman, 1997). Moreover, scholars have argued about the high value in achieving targets control management has to offer (Han et al., 2019).

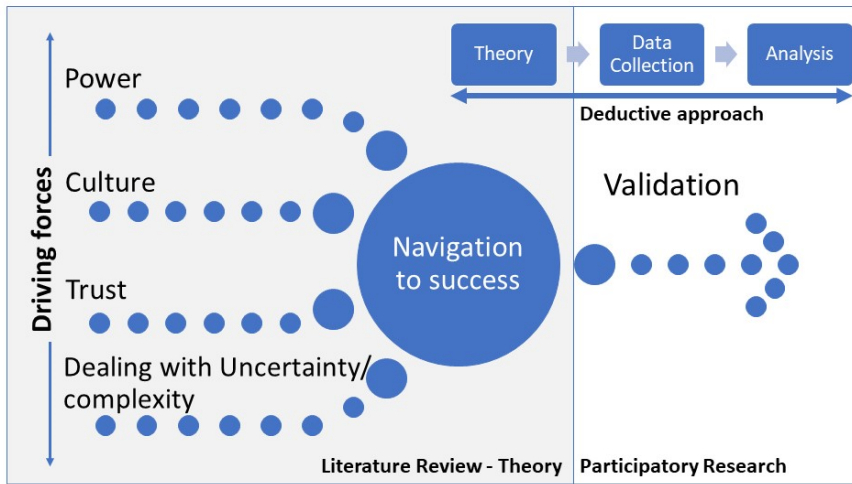
3 Research method

3.1 Research approach

The research method consists in a single case study, using participatory research, as this provides a productive approach for investigating and comprehending temporary organisations (Lundin and Steinhórrsson, 2003). Participatory research is an overall term that encompasses “research designs, methods, and frameworks that use systematic inquiry in direct collaboration with those affected by the issue being studied for the purpose of action or change” (Cargo and Mercer, 2008). Case study as research method has both advantages and disadvantages. Case-studies take a very close glimpse of the case, analysing deeply situations and facts (Flyvberg, 2006; Lindvall, 2007) and are also thought to offer additional knowledge to active theories (Stake, 1978) and explain social behaviours and incidents (Yin, 2009). Krusenvik (2016, p.9) relevantly argues that: “the advantages of using the case study method are that it’s grounded in, and applicable to, real-life, contemporary human situations and provide in-depth relevant data.” On the contraire, disadvantages do exist because case studies

- 1 do not provide the ability of generating knowledge
- 2 cannot be used solely for the creation of theories
- 3 are difficult to verify, etc. (Flyvberg, 2006).

The philosophical approach of this research is based on interpretivism. The philosophy of interpretivism uses the experiences of the research objects in order to analyse reality, social phenomena and types of behaviour, thus, it is the appropriate philosophy for this research (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). The research approach on theory development is based on deduction as this method is used for “drawing conclusions from what is known” (Konczak and Paslawski, 2013). Varpio et al. (2020, p.990) argue that “a theoretical framework is a logically developed and connected set of concepts and premises-developed from one or more theories – that a researcher creates to scaffold a study.” The theoretical framework of the research was created after defining the concepts that this research was based on and Figure 1 exhibits the theoretical framework of research: the literature review provided the driving forces that the project management team has to deal with and that can lead project to success and were utilised as the theory to be tested; then with the use of the collected data from a participatory research, this theory was validated through a deductive approach.

Figure 1 Theoretical framework (see online version for colours)**Figure 2** Sources of data (see online version for colours)

3.2 Data collection

Data for this case-study, as seen in Figure 2, were collected in the context of a larger research on project manager's sociological characteristics (Kalogeropoulous et al., 2020). The research was held in a very critical period for the project as it was executed for a four-month period that ended three months before the final delivery. One of the researchers was in a daily basis in the worksite for approximately four to five hours and

was constantly next to the project manager taking part in a series of meetings, like weekly meetings with the client, weekly worksite meetings, meetings with subcontractors, internal meetings of the joint venture, etc. The researcher witnessed several crucial incidents concerning cultural, trust and power issues and interviewed engineers of the upper echelon of the joint venture, including the project manager, the project executive, the president of the joint venture, members of the IJV project committee and others. The main characteristics of the interviewees are given in Table 1. An in-depth interview with the project manager, as part of the larger research as above mentioned, lasted for 15 hours and was analysed with the use of content analysis; specific findings of this in-depth interview were used for the analysis of this case-study. The document types that were used for the conduction of the research included website, emails, project brochures, company brochures, internet videos, articles, presentations, agreement documents, annual reports, tender documents, intranet, etc. (see details in Table 2). The findings were finally discussed and validated through an in-depth interview with the head of the Health, Safety, Environment, and Energy (HSEE) Department of the Greek partner of the IJV who had critical responsibilities for the completion of the project.

Table 1 Interviewees' details

<i>Partner of IJV</i>	<i>Role in partner</i>	<i>Title in IJV</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Tenure (years)</i>	<i>Duration of interview</i>
Tender documents	Member of BoD	Project manager	BSc	42	15 hours
Italian firm	Member of BoD	Project executive	MSc	25	45 minutes
Italian firm	Member of BoD	President of joint venture	BSc	38	35 minutes
Greek firm	Member of BoD	Member of IJV Executive Committee N01	BSc	35	35 minutes
Italian firm	Member of BoD	Member of IJV Executive Committee N02	MSc	29	25 minutes
Greek firm	HSEE manager	HSEE inspector	MSc	19	60 minutes
Greek firm	Assistant of Vice President	Project manager assistant	BSc	30	45 minutes

Table 2 Desk research collection

<i>Document type</i>	<i>Source of collection</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
Tender documents	Project management team-participatory research	2
Videos	Internet	10
Articles	Internet	8
E-mails	Project management team-participatory research	10
Sessions-conferences	Personal attendance	3
Annual reports	Project management team-participatory research	1
Agreement documents	Project management team-participatory research	4

3.3 Data analysis

Thematic content analysis (TCA) was used for analysing the collected data (Bronstein, 2014). The analysis that followed after the collection of data had two stages:

- 1 identification of quotes
- 2 grouping quotes into codes which were based on the four driving forces (power-culture-trust-uncertainty and complexity) as those were identified from the literature review in a type of provisional coding (Krypuy and McCormack, 2006).

In Table A1 exhibits certain indicative codes that confirm the provisional coding process. TCA is appropriate for [Anderson, (2007), p.1] “a descriptive presentation of qualitative data [...] A satisfactory TCA portrays the thematic content of interview transcripts (or other texts) by identifying common themes in the texts provided for analysis.” The constant comparative method was used during data analysis, meaning that there was a continuous comparison between codes and data in an attempt to identify differences and similarities (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

4 Case study: the Greek mega-project

4.1 Creation of the joint-venture: the first steps

The case study of this research concerns the largest scale construction project ever built in Greece and one of the most emblematic, which will be called from now on, the Greek mega-project. The architectural design of the project was assigned to a world-famous architect, after an international bidding process. The tender procedure also concerned an international bidding process and the client invited more than ten European construction firms from Germany, Italy, Great Britain, France, Greece, etc. The client, a globally known international philanthropic organisation which has made donations of almost three billion dollars the last 25 years, made clear that would prefer to assign the project to a joint venture that had one partner from Greece in an attempt to reinforce the Greek economy in that way too. The project was finally undertaken by a joint venture (IJV) which consisted of two firms:

- 1 an Italian firm, which employs over 80,000 staff of 100 different nationalities and is considered to be a world leader in the construction industry
- 2 a Greek firm which employs over 5,000 people staff, has presence in five continents and is one of the largest firms in Greece with more than 2 billion annual turnover.

The Italian firm controlled 51% of the IJV whereas the Greek firm controlled the rest 49%. The chairman of the IJV argued that: “a work that involved 6.000 people, 350 companies, an effort of colossal coordination, it was an alliance, a perfect synergy between Greece and Italy, a strong coalition of people and materials in one project.” It is of great value to mention that despite the fact that the Italian firm held the majority of the IJV, they understood very clearly that this was a very essential project for the Greek economy and therefore, the Italians approached the whole situation with respect for both Greece as well as the Greek partner. Accordingly, the project executive, who worked for the Italian partner mentioned that “the start-up of the project is like assembling different

tiles of a mosaic, we have to find staff, materials, suppliers, and sub-contractors and is important to understand the Greek production system. The workforce comes from Greece because the project is a donation to Greece, so it is essential to help the country back.” Furthermore, the client, after the project was completed, stated that it was rather significant that the IJV recognised the high value of this donation, as the client donated the work to Greece, and used the word ‘mission’ to emphasise the importance of his words. The architect of the project mentioned that the mutual trust developed among the IJV and his architectural workshop was nodal point for the successful completion of the project and moreover, he acknowledged the enthusiasm of the IJV for the project itself. There was also an international independent professional project management team, which worked on the behalf of the client and was in charge of project monitoring and control processes. Therefore, multinational cultures interacted in this mega-project

- 1 the Greek client as well as the Greek Partner of the IJV
- 2 the Italian partner of the IJV
- 3 the multinational independent project management team of the client
- 3 the international philanthropic organisation which was the client.

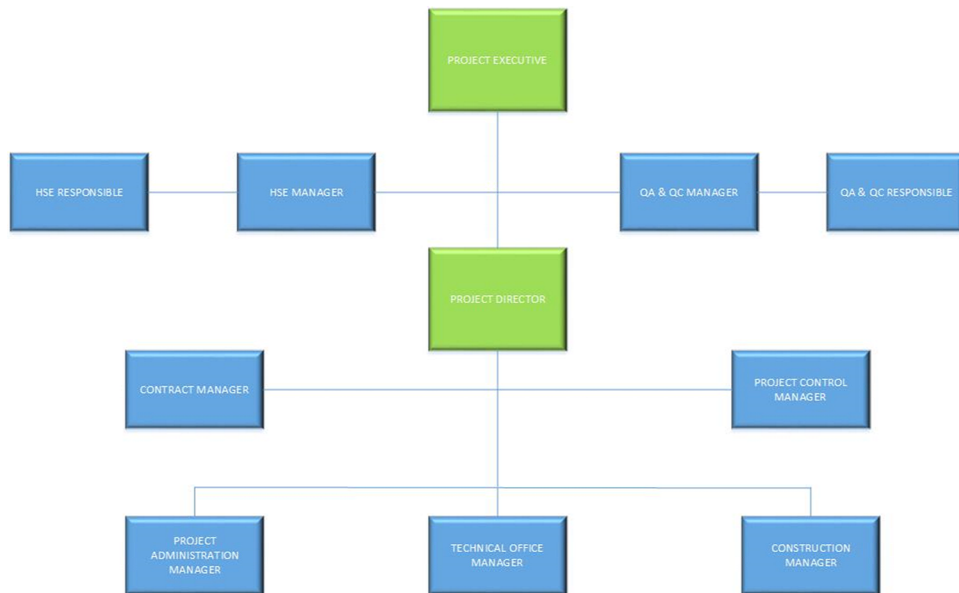
The quote of a member of the project management team of the IJV is indicative [Chelioti, (2013), p.75]: “Although a joint venture, the personnel from both companies had a very good professional relationship, which in my opinion helped the progress of the works immensely.”

4.2 On the worksite: organisation structure and governance

The project management team was comprised of 180 members. The majority of the IJV team was involved throughout the duration of the project, in an attempt of the two partners to create a solid environment, understand both cultures, share the way of thinking and develop a common mentality among Italian and Greek staff. The Italian partner of the IJV was in charge basically of monitoring the financial data of the project and moreover, had assigned the position of a project executive, who was next to the project director and had the high supervision of works, to one of its employees (see Figure 3). The construction responsibilities had been appointed to the Greek partner of the IJV, as they were familiar with the Greek market. This *modus operandi* of the IJV did not change and stayed the same throughout the whole development of the project. This was due to the trust relationships that were shaped since the early start of the project. The IJV established a verticalised construction company in the worksite, where all the departments needed for the completion of the project (commissioning, HSE, QA/QC, contracting, accounting, project controlling, procurement, etc.) were based. The Greek partner approached the Italian partner during the tendering process mainly because of its inability to procure performance securities. This was due to the client’s demand that such performance securities should be issued from banks with specific ratings; banks with those ratings did not exist at that time in Greece and, moreover, the international banks with these ratings would not issue performance securities for Greek firms due to the financial crisis. Therefore, the Greek construction firm did not have any other choice than collaborate with an international partner, strong enough to secure the issuance of the performance securities. Nevertheless, this partnership even though it started because of a

certain financial reason it was developed to a rather productive collaboration which delivered the project in time and within budget. This means that the Greek partner understood that it should not see the Italian partner as the necessary ‘weight’ to complete the project but as an equal partner which can offer important expertise.

Figure 3 IJV organisational chart (see online version for colours)



Trust among the two partners of the IJV was essential for the progress of the project. One employee of the upper echelon of the Italian partner acknowledged that “the project director [which was from the Greek side of the IJV] was the best project manager of Greece and has ethics as a main characteristic.” The same person mentioned to one of the researchers that “the IJV among those partners is not an easy thing to handle but there are certain persons that keep the balance and make the collaboration work successfully. It needs patience, being fair, clear mind, help each other when needed and not allocating responsibilities and throwing blame. The two partners must act like two circles that intersect.” Therefore, it did not feel strange for the researchers when they saw that in many difficult situations for the project manager, he would seek for the opinion of the project executive, speaking to him in a direct and honest manner. The project director quoted: “I think as an employee of the IJV and not of the Greek partner. In fact, my colleagues have said that I am more concentrated on the project than in the firm.” Every week there was the regular meeting with the client where executives from both partners participated but it should be noted that the leading role, from the side of the IJV, had the employees of the Greek partner justifying the fact that the construction works were entrusted by the Italian partner to the Greek partner. The good relationships among the two partners are proved by the following story narrated by the project director: “There was a time that the Executive Committee [the committee above project director and project executive, comprised from members of both partners] delayed the selection of a sub-contractor. Thus, I went on a meeting holding a nice bottle of champagne and said that I will open it when you finally choose.” The project director acknowledged the fields

of expertise of the Italian partner quoting for example that “SAP system was implicated from their side, the Greek partner worked in a more manual way.” Of course, the researchers witnessed moments of tension among members of the two partners, but they also witnessed certain people, from both sides that knew how to deal and overcome these difficult situations. Thus, it was not unexpected when the chairman of the IJV, and also chairman of the Italian partner, mentioned that “the project director [of the IJV] is in fact a peacemaker; he is self-collected, calm, gives solutions and sees thing from a birdseye perspective”, certifying the trust relationships but as well the mutual respect relations among partners. Moreover, there were times as well as meetings where the chairman took part in order to give solutions. In fact, there was a specific meeting which had a lot of tension and was about a sub-contractor who, due to his internal problems, did not keep the schedule of works; the project director mentioned to the chairman that this issue should be resolved immediately, and the chairman answered: “This is what I am here for.” There were also frequent meetings among the project executive and the project director; these two professionals seem to act complementary to each other. The project director was a calm, tranquil person whereas the project executive, professional of high experience, was stricter but at the same time fair. This cooperation worked through this balance. The researchers attended meetings where the project executive seemed to lose his temper but at the same time the project director knew what to do to keep things on track and produce results. The project director let the project executive express freely his opinions even at the point of condescension and intimacy but knew how to keep the necessary balance. The project executive from the other hand acknowledged the peacemaking capabilities of the project director and showed deep respect for his colleague. It was not unusual for the project executive to ask the project director to step into his office, after a work-site meeting was completed, to discuss the conclusions produced.

During the research, which, as mentioned, was at the last months of the construction that is a very intense period, the researchers viewed a man fully calm who never lost temper no matter what difficult situation he was facing; the project manager said to the researchers that he did not like interpersonal quarrels as he felt he did not feel the need of ‘winning’ something or had something to prove to his ego in that way; he only wanted the progress of the project. These exact characteristics, this ‘relaxed attitude’ (Geringer and Hebert, 1989) was recognised and appreciated by the members of the IJV, and the researchers viewed the calmness of the project manager spread to the whole worksite.

4.3 Completion of the mega-project: lessons learned for a multinational joint-venture

In a conversation of the researcher with the HSEE Department manager of the joint-venture, who worked for the Greek firm of the alliance, the later mentioned that the key success factor for him that contributed the most for achieving the milestones of the project was that the Italian firm, despite the fact that not only possessed the majority of the joint venture but was also a much larger firm than the Greek one, respected the locality and let the Greek firm to devise the appropriate strategy for delivering the project on time and under budget. Thus, the absence of insecurity or even narcissism, due to its size, from the side of the Italian partner and moreover, the trust that they showed to their Greek partner led the project to its success. The HSEE manager argued that it was of great importance the fact that the IJV showed trust to its executives and invested in

cultivating a good climate among them since the beginning of the project. In the first days at the beginning of the project the project director hosted a festive dinner for all of the employees of the IJV and repeated this kind of happenings frequently during the works. The HSEE manager mentioned that the employees acknowledged the effort from the upper echelon of the IJV to create a climate of mobilising and raising morale and this was reflected to the progress of the project. One other important factor for the success of the project was that the upper echelon of the two partners of the alliance participated actively during the project; it should be noted that the project director was also the Vice President of the Greek firm whereas the president of the Executive Committee of the project was also the president of the Italian firm. Therefore, decisions made during the project originated straight from the top management of the two firms that the IJV consisted of. Another factor that contributed to success, the project director argued, was that the verticalised structure of the IJV in the worksite gave a sense of autonomy to the employees and to the project director himself, establishing in that way the uniqueness of the project. The technical director of the client argued that one of the main reasons of the success of the project was the enthusiastic collaboration and understanding of the vision from the joint venture. Furthermore, the project director of the IJV quoted:

“I sincerely thank the client that gave us the opportunity to work in a prestigious project like this and outgrow ourselves. This project was so unique and pioneer that in order to deliver it successfully, we could not do anything less than outgrow ourselves. We loved this project and fought for its completion and, of course, the harmony that existed among the two partners of the IJV should be noted.”

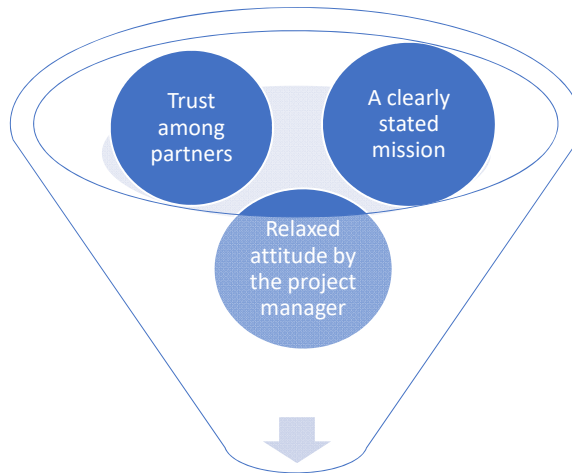
One other important factor that contributed to the success of the project was that both the firms of the IJV understood the value of building good relationships with the local community, one of the main stakeholders of the project. The technical director of the client argued accordingly: “There was not one formal complaint during the construction of the project. Respect on the local community was factual. The IJV daily and constantly through the use of aquifers, cleaned the neighboring streets.”

Trust among partners was *sine qua non* variable for the successful completion of the project. The Italian partner, who was a much larger firm than the Greek, significantly helped the Greek firm to overcome the lack of trust of European banking system to Greek companies due to the financial turmoil at the time, by not being afraid to issue guarantees for the project showing thus from the beginning trust to its partner. The president of the board of directors of the client, argued that partnerships and corporations at all levels, that may be taken for granted but that should not do, transparency and hard work are key success factors for the completion of the project.

Critical incidents occurred during the construction of the project, but the commitment of both partners was indisputable. The researchers witnessed various difficult situations where the two firms acted indeed as one and walked through together. For instance, there was on sub-contractor who was in the verge of bankruptcy and did not pay their employees and, consequently, relevant works delayed significantly. The president of the IJV (who worked for the Italian firm) held a meeting, after the request of the project director (who worked for the Greek firm), to solve this problem. At this meeting, which the researcher also attended, the commitment of both partners to overcome this obstacle was clear and moreover, it was crucial for the course of events that the project director let the president of the IJV to control the meeting, which was held in Italian, a language that

the project director did not know, and just said to him: “Just inform me about the results” showing absolute trust and reliance to his colleague. The lessons learned from the successful collaboration among partners of the multinational JV are synthesised in Figure 4.

Figure 4 Lessons learned (see online version for colours)



5 Discussion

Comparing this mega-project in terms of conflict and government with other mega-projects studied in the project management literature, both similarities and differences can be noted. There is for example the case of the environ mega project (Van Marrewijk, 2005) which was in fact a multi-billion project constructed for the improvement of coastal islands accessibility. In the environ mega project, due to its indistinct organisational structure, power issues created several problems for the development of the project and one of the most important causes was that there was not a clear role among the organisations that managed the project (Van Marrewijk, 2005). Furthermore, one of the main reasons for the successful completion of the Greek mega-project was the significant influence and participation of the main stakeholder of this mega project, the client that ordered and fully financed the construction. The client established their own project management team in the worksite, hiring a globally well-known firm, and organised regular weekly meetings within the worksite where they participated sending, besides the previously mentioned project management team, engineers from the upper echelon of its organisation. The client supervised not only the work progress but also the cooperation of the two firms that constituted the joint venture, as they wanted to be ahead of any problem that could step in the way of the completion of the project. In contrary, the poor record of cooperation between the organisations that managed the environ mega project was recorded and eventually affected the work progress. The client made also one more strategic move: set clear and specific goals to the joint venture making no room for different interpretations. On the other hand, in the environ mega project, the partners interpreted very differently the goals of the project

(Van Marrewijk, 2005). The main conflict of the environ mega-project was well argued from the project manager: "My most impressive personal experience with this project was the clash of cultures and structures." Moreover: "[...] considerations of power, cultural differences, different interests and project culture were not included when the management of the environ mega-project adapted a 'pure' project structure with little power given to the partners" [Van Marrewijk, (2005), p.100]. In the case of the Greek mega-project, the client after selecting through a thorough procedure the construction firms, entrusted them with the completion of the project and in addition the partners of the joint venture showed trust to each other from the beginning of the project. Of course, it must be acknowledged that in the environ mega-project the partners were not just the construction companies but also organisations from the ministry which was responsible for the project. Nevertheless, in the environ mega-project power issues concerning control among the partners and project organisation (Van Marrewijk, 2005) was observed, showing that the management of the project not only did not communicate appropriately the goals of the project but also did not correctly manage the commitment of the partners. The so-called 'relaxed attitude' (Geringer and Hebert, 1989) exhibited by the project manager of the IJV contributed to the success of the Greek mega-project. On the contrary, in the environ mega-project, where the opposite was observed, the anti-relaxed attitude concerning control as exhibited by project organisation and partners was rather counterproductive (Van Marrewijk, 2005).

The difficulty in establishing the correct hierarchy and avoiding non-productive power struggles is shown in the Panama Canal mega-project (Van Marrewijk et al., 2016). In this mega-project the two partners that worked together to construct the project, meaning

- 1 client
- 2 the program manager, were of the largest firms on their field; from the early start of the project, issues of dominance and control appeared among them.

This situation highlights the uncertainty and complexity in temporal organisations showing that conflicts, role confusion, lack of order may exist and put the completion of the project at risk. In the end, what saved the project was the exact thing that initiated the conflicts: the accumulated experience of the two partners. Van Marrewijk et al. (2016, p.1763) argues:

"Project partners harmonized collaborative roles and relations through social practices [...] Through various forms of harmony-seeking relational talk, ACP and CH members sustained and strengthened collaborative relations, smoothed out hierarchical differences and remedied potential frictions; for instance, by deploying the metaphor of 'marriage' and introducing the hierarchy-denying slogan 'One Team, One Mission'."

This was not the case in the Greek mega-project, where the mission was thoroughly communicated from the client to the two partners of the joint venture, by not only personal contact but also in the form of social events, workshops, etc. The selection of a Greek firm to participate to the IJV was also crucial as it was much easier for a local company to fully comprehend the importance of the project for the country, share this vision to its employees and moreover, to the Italian partner. The collaborating triangle of the project have undertaken clear roles and the context of organisation was set from the early beginnings leaving no place for dangerous misinterpretations.

During the interview with the HSEE manager of the joint venture, he shared with the researchers incidents that occurred in other joint ventures the Greek partner participated in and that did not have the same success. These incidents actually validate the assumptions made from the case study of this paper, as in that way the Greek partner identifies two sides of the same coin meaning the international joint ventures and what can go wrong or not in these collaborations. In the first case, the HSEE manager spoke about a French firm that had a problem to understand the way Greek engineers work and demanded that there should be one engineer for every aspect of the project and that multitasking should be prohibited. This fact of course raised the expenses of the project and did not come in line with the way Greek engineers work, meaning that they are used to multitasking. Unfortunately, this collaboration had problems in delivering the project on time and under budget. The other unsuccessful case, that the HSEE manager shared with the researchers, was about a collaboration of the Greek firm with an international firm which had a different kind of problem: the international firm could not understand that it is wise to establish close relationships with the local agencies which were also stakeholders of the project, so that things on the work site could flow more smoothly. The international firm argued that they would go strictly according to plan and the laws and that they did not need anything else. Therefore, they did not respect neither the locality of their partner nor the cultural issues that existed, driving the project to failure.

6 Conclusions

The aim of this study, as above-mentioned, is to contribute to the area of successful collaboration of construction companies within multinational consortiums by investigating if issues like

- 1 power
- 2 culture
- 3 trust
- 4 uncertainty and complexity, that affect the successful completion of projects, are the driving forces for the successful multinational collaboration in construction consortiums and thus validate this theory.

The research investigated these driving forces in the case of the multinational consortium that was established for the creation of largest construction project ever built in Greece: the client which was a multinational world leader philanthropic organisation and the two construction companies that formed the joint venture meaning an Italian firm and a Greek firm, both top enterprises in their countries. Researchers of this paper used participatory research that was governed of a deductive approach with the aim to validate the theory that power, culture, trust and dealing with uncertainty and complexity, were indeed contributing factors to multinational joint venture projects' success. The research revealed that the Italian partner of the IJV though it was a larger firm that the Greek partner, understood the value of the locality (culture) and not only showed trust to its partner but also, did not show any signs of insecurity concerning power issues. Both partners welcomed and embraced the vision of the Client and after selecting the project

director and the organisational structure of the construction team, committed to the successful completion of the project.

The first finding of the research concerns the mission as originally set by the client. The client, even before the tender procedure, set clearly, by perspectives, the target, the stakeholders, and the grandiose vision of this emblematic project. One of the reasons that the joint venture won the tender process, which was not a discounted tender, was that the IJV created a video, worth of more than 100,000 euros and was not a prerequisite for the tender procedure, that maintained and fully expressed this vision. Therefore, even before the construction began, the client knew that the IJV had understood the purpose of the whole effort and the IJV shared exactly the same vision with the client. This was the result of a thorough and clear communication process between the members of the multinational consortium.

The second finding of the paper is the validation of the condition of the 'relaxed attitude' which is a prerequisite for success as quoted by Geringer and Herbert (1989). The project manager of the Greek mega-project was a well-known engineer and the Vice President of the Greek firm of the IJV. The research has shown that he was fully appreciated from the employees of both partners of the IJV, and it should be mentioned that the Italian partner suggested from the early beginnings of their cooperation, during the tender procedure, that he was the right man for the job. His relaxed-attitude enable his co-workers not only to trust him, as this attitude revealed a manager with confidence, but also to take initiatives and be more creative thus evolving the project and its deliverables. Moreover, through this relaxed attitude the project director shown to his Italian partners that his was not there to be enforced but to lead, placing any power issues to its appropriate value.

The third finding of this research originates from the distinct boundaries set from the two partners that formed the IJV before the start of the process. The Italian firm had 51% of the joint venture but acknowledging the advantage of its Greek partner due to his locality undertook only the financial supervision of the project leaving the construction responsibilities to the Greek firm. This kind of trust that was shown from the Italian firm, which as mentioned above was a much larger enterprise from its Greek partner, effectively obliterated any power struggles that could jeopardise the partnership and the joint venture. Moreover, the president of the Italian Titan was also the president of the joint venture and was always next to the project manager when needed in order to overcome difficult situations. Nevertheless, the researchers witnessed situations that the Italian project executive shared strong doubts about certain employees of the Greek firm which had highly ranked positions, but in a connection with the second assumption of the research, the relaxed attitude of the project manager assisted in overcoming these doubts and continuing the construction processes smoothly.

This research attempted to validate that the driving forces that affect project success, can lead multinational construction consortiums to success by delivering a project both in time and under budget. The research has shown how issues of trust, power, culture, and uncertainty can be overcome and not become obstacles for multinational construction consortiums. Future research should explicitly investigate the tender process that basically starts the cooperation between the client and the construction company, which was the first step of success in the Greek mega-Project and then investigate the continuous organisational ferments for the start of the project from the construction company's side.

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Appendix

Table A1 Coding list

<i>Code#</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Quotes</i>
Tr-01	Trust	"A work that involved 6.000 people, 350 companies, an effort of colossal coordination, it was an alliance, a perfect synergy between Greece and Italy, a strong coalition of people and materials in one project."
Tr-02	Trust	"Our mission is to help where and as we can."
Tr-03	Trust	"Working with this wonderful architect inspired all of us."
Tr-04	Trust	"Although a joint venture, the personnel from both companies had a very good professional relationship, which in my opinion helped the progress of the works immensely."
Tr-05	Trust	"I think as an employee of the IJV and not of the Greek partner. In fact, my colleagues have said that I am more concentrated on the project than in the firm."
Tr-06	Trust	"I sincerely thank the client that gave us the opportunity to work in a prestigious project like this and outgrow ourselves. This project was so unique and pioneer that in order to deliver it successfully, we could not do anything less than outgrow ourselves. We loved this project and fought for its completion and, of course, the harmony that existed among the two partners of the IJV should be noted."
UC-01	Uncertainty-complexity	"The start-up of the project is like assembling different tiles of a mosaic, we have to find staff, materials, suppliers, and sub-contractors and is important to understand the Greek production system."
UC-02	Uncertainty-complexity	"There was a time that the Executive Committee [the committee above project director and project executive, comprised from members of both partners] delayed the selection of a sub-contractor. Thus, I went on a meeting holding a nice bottle of champagne and said that I will open it when you finally choose."
UC-03	Uncertainty-complexity	"Since my door is always open I am always ready to face unscheduled and unexpected events. I deal immediately with the urgent ones; I take notes and prioritize the rest."
Cu-01	Culture	"The workforce comes from Greece because the project is a donation to the Greek State, so it is essential to help the country back."
Cu-02	Culture	"The architect, the IJV, the supplier, the sub-contractors, everybody appreciate the mission of this project, which is real grant to the people, for the benefit of society."
Cu-03	Culture	"One single vision, one thousands of people to make it real."
Cu-04	Culture	"the project director [which was from the Greek side of the IJV] was the best project manager of Greece and has ethics as a main characteristic."

Table A1 Coding list (continued)

<i>Code#</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Quotes</i>
Cu-05	Culture	“There was not one formal complaint during the construction of the project. Respect on the local community was factual. The IJV daily and constantly through the use of aquifers, cleaned the neighboring streets.”
P-01	Power	“The IJV among those partners is not an easy thing to handle but there are certain persons that keep the balance and make the collaboration work successfully. It needs patience, being fair, clear mind, help each other when needed and not allocating responsibilities and throwing blame. The two partners must act like two circles that intersect.”
P-02	Power	“The project director [of the IJV] is in fact a peacemaker; he is self-collected, calm, gives solutions and sees thing from a birdseye perspective.”
P-03	Power	“I am always very careful with the objectives I set to my colleagues. I consider their personal competence skills. I ask them to give 100% of their effort and indeed my subordinates do achieve the maximum of their possibilities because they know I will give also 100% of my power, because they feel safe with me, they do not feel the fear of getting fired or anything else.”
P-04	Power	“You must understand that I have done everything in my powers to be more than fair with you. It is a matter of principle. If I steal a dime from you, I will not be able to sleep at night.”