



FIND Faculty, publications, topics

FACULTY RESEARCH FEATURED TOPICS ACADEMIC UNITS

WORKING PAPER | HBS WORKING PAPER SERIES | 2014

Sharing Design Rights: A Commons Approach for Developing Infrastructure

by Nuno Gil and [Carliss Y. Baldwin](#)

- PRINT
- EMAIL

About the Author



Carliss Y. Baldwin
Finance

[VIEW PROFILE »](#)

[VIEW PUBLICATIONS »](#)

Abstract

This study empirically investigates the relationship between design structure and organization structure in the context of new infrastructure development projects. Our research setting is a capital program to develop new school buildings in the city of Manchester, UK. Instead of creating a controlled, hierarchical organization, which would mirror the buildings' design structure, the Manchester City Council created a "commons organization," and chose to share decision-rights with local claimants. Each school's faculty was thus given rights equal to Council staff to participate in the design process and to approve the school's design. In the natural resources literature, commons theory predicts that, if a robust governance structure is created, this complex form of organizing gives claimants incentives to contribute to the enterprise whilst dampening collective action problems (Ostrom 1990). Here we extend this claim to the production of man-made artifacts. The design commons induced teachers to volunteer time and effort to communicate their practical knowledge, but created corresponding tensions over interdependent choices for the final design. Yet, none of the projects succumbed to collective action problems in the form of budget overruns, bogged-down processes, or users feeling disenfranchised. Applying Ostrom's (1990) principles of robust commons governance, we show that the Manchester design commons organization was robust by her criteria and propose that robustness contributed positively to the outcome. We also discuss design flexibility as an intervening variable that was critical in reconciling differences that governance alone could not resolve. We conclude with the rudiments of a theory describing when and why a commons organization can be advantageous for production of designs.

Keywords: [Design](#); [Buildings and Facilities](#); [Education](#);

Language: English | Format: Print | 42 pages

[SSRN](#) [READ NOW](#)

Citation:

Gil, Nuno, and Carliss Y. Baldwin. "Sharing Design Rights: A Commons Approach for Developing Infrastructure." Harvard Business School Working Paper, No. 14-025, September 2013. (Revised January 2014.)

[Export Citation](#)

Contact

Division of Faculty & Research

Harvard Business School

[Map/Directions](#)

Related Links

[Christensen Center for Teaching and Learning](#)
[Global Research Centers](#)

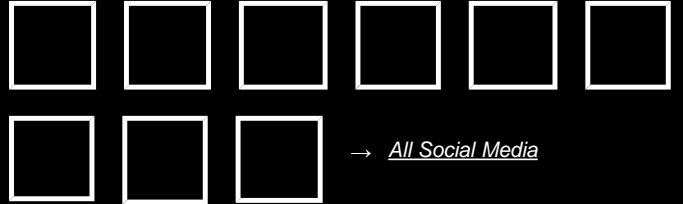
[Global Research Centers](#)
[Asia-Pacific Research Center](#)
[Japan Research Center \(English\)](#)
[Europe Research Center](#)
[Latin America Research Center](#)
[India Research Center](#)

[Initiatives & Projects](#)

[Initiatives & Projects](#)
[Business & Environment](#)
[Business History](#)
[Entrepreneurship \(Rock Center\)](#)
[Forum for Growth & Innovation](#)
[Global](#)
[Healthcare](#)
[Institute for Strategy & Competitiveness](#)
[Leadership](#)
[Networked Business](#)
[Public Education Leadership Project](#)
[Social Enterprise](#)
[U.S. Competitiveness](#)



Harvard Business School
Soldiers Field
Boston, MA 02163



→ [All Social Media](#)

[Map & Directions](#)

[More Contact Information](#)

[Site Map](#)

[Jobs](#)

[Harvard University](#)

[Trademarks](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)