

# ASSESSMENT OF THE INFLUENCE OF STAKEHOLDERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITHUANIAN AIRPORTS

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**Abstract.** Air transport is the only way to reach Lithuania from abroad in the short and medium term. Despite a well-developed road network in the country, connections to other European capitals are long and inconvenient. 2014 July, Vilnius, Kaunas and Palanga airports were merged into one state-owned company, Lithuanian Airports (LTOU). Since then, the efficiency and overall profitability of LTOU operations have increased significantly. However, maintaining the airport's current infrastructure is costly and needs upgrading and further investment. The company has repeatedly asked itself whether it can get more benefits by building one new Lithuanian airport or focusing on developing the existing three airports net. Stakeholders' views and recommendations should be heard to make timely and appropriate decisions without a new airport's technical and financial feasibility. An in-depth interview and secondary data analysis were selected for the empirical study. Thirteen employees of SE Lithuanian Airports and three of the Ministry of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Lithuania participated in the research. The following was used to analyse secondary data: SE Lithuanian Airport strategic plan, the material of strategic sessions, and a survey of the country's population on the need for a new airport. The study found that stakeholders positively assess the long-term development projects of SE Lithuanian Airports, fully understanding the importance of airports and their contribution to the welfare of the state. Stakeholders can significantly impact results, so airport managers must consider whether they effectively involve stakeholders and, if not, how they can improve or encourage stakeholder involvement.

**Keywords:** stakeholder involvement, influence, key stakeholders, airport development, airport development project.

**JEL Classification:** H54, L14, L93, O14, R41, H54.

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## 1. Introduction

People must combine their knowledge, resources, and different opinions to pursue sustainable development. Individuals, organisations, and even an entire segment of global society, acting in isolation, can only find and implement a development approach that meets the challenges facing humanity today. Thus, the need for interaction to solve these problems is relevant for each player and society.

Porter and Hawkins (2019), a well-known authority on business strategy and competitiveness introduced the concept of "shared value creation" to emphasise stakeholder collaboration and effective communication.

Stakeholder collaboration is a process by which groups with similar or different perspectives can exchange views and find solutions. Collaboration is not limited to the people involved (Porter & Hawkins, 2019).

According to Porter and Hawkins (2019), stakeholder collaboration includes cooperation and coordination, key process elements. Cooperation is a mutually beneficial relationship between two or more parties working toward common goals, sharing responsibility, authority, and accountability for achieving results. Coordination, in this case, is the coordination of specific actions.

By their nature, airports are a complex part of the transport infrastructure, influencing many internal and external stakeholders who often have different or competing needs and desires. Airport stakeholders include airlines, passengers, tenants and users, operators and managers, cargo and logistics providers, and local communities and localities.

With so many parts making up the whole, ensuring every stakeholder is included, heard and valued is as essential as ensuring day-to-day operations and implementing strategic plans.

The stakeholders' partnership agreements are evidenced when businesses forge strong relationships with external and internal stakeholders to help them plan, develop, promote and distribute products (Greco et al., 2022; Loučanová et al., 2022).

Stakeholders can significantly impact outcomes, so airport managers must consider whether they effectively engage stakeholders and, if not, how to improve or encourage stakeholder engagement. Effective stakeholder engagement directly impacts airport managers' ability to operate with full support from the country.

Major airport infrastructure projects typically involve multiple stakeholders, such as airlines, regulators, passengers, local communities, and airport users. New projects can create tension between interest groups, as different groups naturally have other interests and opinions. Profit is the main objective of the business. Regulatory authorities are subject to political constraints, and local communities protest any new developments (ACI Europe, 2024).

Gil (2023) claims that capital projects deal with two conflicting sets of evaluation criteria pre- and post-appraisal, where external stakeholder value becomes a major priority only after the initial project appraisal (causing time delays, budget overruns, etc.).

Stakeholders can influence the decision-making process of project management as the project progresses from the investment preparation phase to the project execution and operations phase through various methods such as protests, legal battles, and even illegal activities. Stakeholders can significantly impact project duration, costs, and the ability to implement final solutions (Porter, 2008).

Rethinking the purpose and definition of projects to generate better value for the affected places and people (Gil, 2021, 2023; Whyte & Mottee, 2022) requires a deeper consideration of the external stakeholders and a better understanding of their past, present, and future, together with the micro and macro politics that surround them.

In 2014, July. The airports of Vilnius, Kaunas and Palanga were merged into one state company, Lithuanian Airports (LTOU). Since then, LTOU's operational efficiency and overall profitability have increased significantly. However, the current airport infrastructure is expensive to maintain and needs to be upgraded and further invested. The company has repeatedly asked itself whether it is possible to get more benefits by building one new Lithuanian airport and, after it is built, to stop operations at the existing airports. To make timely and appropriate decisions without the new airport's technical and financial validity, the interested parties' opinions should be heard, and their recommendations should be obtained.

The attitudes and actions of the interested parties will affect the success of Lithuanian airport development projects. Since the interested parties are very different, they have other interests, attitudes, and priorities. Therefore, they will form a positive attitude towards the company and the project if effective communication is ensured. Stakeholder management benefits all parties with common

goals. This encourages more effective cooperation, sharing of influences, finding consensus and compromises between all interest groups, and increasing their commitments to each other. However, what is sufficient or insufficient attention to interested parties and their needs is still an unexplored field of organisational management. Therefore, identifying interested parties and their needs is one of the problem areas that requires a deeper investigation.

Considering the reasons mentioned above, the organisation should find a common language with the interested parties, primarily because they may decide to stop participating in the project or harm it in some other way if they do not receive the expected benefits. They can also terminate contracts with the company and try to implement projects with another partner. When the common interests of the company and the stakeholders diverge, the stakeholders can always find alternatives (De Pascale et al., 2021). A conflict of interest can affect the loss of resources, contractors, and project support, harming the company's performance and reputation (De Pascale et al., 2021).

Summarising the analysis of the importance of stakeholders to the company by various authors, it can be concluded that every company must know its stakeholders well because they may have advantages over the company both due to the available resources and the ability to influence the company's results and all activities positively or negatively.

The problem: How do we strengthen the involvement of interested parties in planning the long-term development of LTOU?

The purpose of the work: Identify interested parties, investigate their fields of interest, and offer recommendations for increasing the involvement of interested parties in planning the long-term development of LTOU.

Research tasks:

- To perform an analysis of the context of LTOU.
- To analyse the literature on the involvement of interested parties in national-level projects.
- Empirically investigate the priorities, interests, possible conflicts and expectations of interested parties when planning the long-term development of the LTOU.
- Provide recommendations for increasing the involvement of interested parties in planning the long-term development of LTOU.

## 2. Literature review

The term "stakeholder" appeared in 1963. A seminal Stanford Research Institute memo argued that managers needed to understand the concerns of shareholders, employees, creditors, and suppliers to create goals that stakeholders could support (Sinclair, 2010). It was a topic of debate for over thirty years before it was defined and has since been the subject of hundreds of articles, books and corporate studies. The term "stakeholder" is now widely used in business and has evolved into a strategy for managing the company's performance goals. This provided a

new perspective on corporate goals that contradicted the prevailing neoclassical understanding of business, where it was argued that managers should only consider shareholders when making decisions (Parmar et al., 2010).

Two frequently used terms can be found in the scientific literature:

- Stakeholders.
- Stakeholder groups.

According to Freeman (1984), the concept of stakeholders was first mentioned in the management literature in 1963 at one of the events of the Stanford Research Institute. Using this concept, the company's shareholders were brought to the fore as an essential group. When making certain decisions in the company, only the company's shareholders should be considered. According to Freeman (1984), shareholders are groups without which the support organisation would cease to exist. As Freeman (1984) writes, at that time the interested parties were called:

- Shareholders.
- Employees.
- Users.
- Suppliers.
- Creditors.
- Society.

Stakeholder scientists can be said to fall into two camps, which argue that:

- To influence the company, stakeholders must have power and directly influence its future; on the contrary, they are unlikely to be interested parties.
- Stakeholders have no real influence on the company and are powerless to influence the future of the company.

In recent years, large infrastructure projects, which are used as the primary means to solve existing infrastructure capacity problems or to create new business opportunities, have been of great importance for the development of society and the economy. Ninan et al. (2020) indicated that infrastructure is vital to the socio-economic development of any region and that there is a strong relationship between infrastructure availability and economic growth. Infrastructure projects provide capabilities such as the transportation, transmission, distribution, assembly and interaction of goods, services or people (e.g. pipelines, highways, bridges, etc.). In addition to this dominant type of complex or civil infrastructure, there is another type of urban infrastructure called soft or social infrastructure necessary to create cultural norms and promote a healthy population (e.g. courts, schools, hospitals, etc.). Infrastructure projects are underway worldwide today, whether developed countries are upgrading infrastructure capacity or developing countries are building vital infrastructure for the first time. McKinsey Global Institute estimates that by 2030, the world will have to spend 57 trillion euros on infrastructure.

In terms of scale, these projects typically cover a broad geographic region and affect multiple jurisdictions and stakeholder groups. Mok et al. (2017) describe major infrastructure projects as very complex, with high

risks, long implementation times and the involvement of various stakeholders at various levels. The uniqueness and dynamism of the business environment of large-scale infrastructure projects, such as the construction of airports and terminals, often result from their inherent social and environmental requirements. In pronounced cases, a high level of complexity combined with stakeholders with conflicting requirements can increase time and cost overruns.

Show this problem. Many argue that the results of those projects could be more satisfactory: the wrong projects are selected, the costs are underestimated, and the benefits are overestimated. More general studies show that about 70% of organisations implement projects that do not satisfy the interested parties or do not achieve the intended goals. Brunet and Aubry (2016) argued that the anatomy of large public projects is changing; stakeholders and supply chain relationships are becoming increasingly complex, and therefore, they require increased academic control of this emerging organisational phenomenon. Luo et al. (2017) concluded that more than traditional project management methods are needed to achieve successful project outcomes in complex infrastructure projects.

Stakeholder engagement includes goals, activities, impacts, moral, strategic, and pragmatic elements (Kujala et al., 2022; Sachs & Kujala, 2021). An example of the ethical component of stakeholder engagement is the extent to which all stakeholders are involved. Di Maddaloni and Davis (2017) argue that community stakeholders are consistently excluded from project communication plans, leading to adverse outcomes. Because of their lack of power and involvement, community stakeholders are often excluded from the project management structure. They are denied access to information and decision-making even though they have a legitimate claim to the project because they can be significantly affected. The lack of law makes it difficult for these stakeholders to voice their opposition to the project.

It goes without saying that to manage your stakeholders, the first step should be to identify them. Thus, this first step of stakeholder management is essential. However, here, it is necessary to maintain consistency. According to Barrow (2017), few companies consistently identify interest groups, often because they think they know who those groups are. Even those who take a consistent approach make mistakes, sometimes missing essential steps and leaving some stakeholders behind (Barrow, 2017), as illustrated in Figure 1. The purpose of this chapter is to present an approach to stakeholder identification.

When considering a large project, mature organisations usually prepare a business plan and a draft project description first. The project idea is then presented to an oversight committee or board to review the costs and benefits of the project. If the project is selected for implementation, the oversight committee or board approves the project description. Key stakeholders and decision-makers are already included in the inventory. Thus, the identification of stakeholders begins at the very beginning of the project.

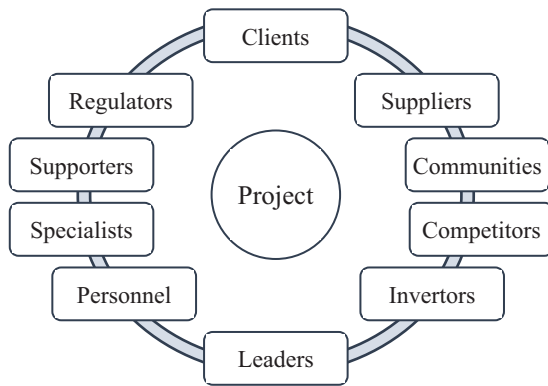


Figure 1. Stakeholder circle (source: Barrow, 2017)

Informing stakeholders, communicating project milestones, and periodic status checks to gauge interest and engagement are steps that need to be implemented throughout the project. An information management system provides the project manager with a standard tool for obtaining, storing, and distributing information about project cost, schedule progress, and performance. It also allows the project manager to consolidate information and facilitates stakeholder accountability. Examples of distribution formats include tabular reports, spreadsheets, etc. Graphical capabilities can be used to visually represent project execution information.

The main advantage of this process is that it maintains or increases the effectiveness and usefulness of stakeholder engagement activities as the project evolves and its environment changes. Any issues or concerns can be identified early and dealt with appropriately. The company aims to emphasise the importance of all parties' involvement. Engagement means building better relationships, resulting in better project initiation, planning, implementation, monitoring, and completion.

The more power, influence and interest a stakeholder group has, the more we want engagement and collaboration to be as effective as possible.

There may be limited two-way collaboration in which the project manager, company business analysts, or task manager ask questions and document the responses of stakeholders who are subject matter experts.

By developing effective stakeholder satisfaction measurement methods, project managers can assess how stakeholder expectations have been met during the project to indicate project success. The three methods considered are surveys, focus groups, and interviews. When conducting online surveys to collect and evaluate the satisfaction of interested parties with the progress of the project or the results, the first thing to do is choose a survey tool. Some tools are free, and some require a fee to create and run an online survey and aggregate the results. To make an effective survey, the project manager should develop a list of questions covering the critical areas he wants to measure regarding project outcomes (Project Management Institute, 2021).

Although survey responses may be anonymous, role and responsibility may still be captured. In this case, one

of the survey questions might be, "Has anyone involved in this project completed an environmental and occupational health and safety program?". For those who answer yes, the survey could refer them to an additional survey to find out what the participant thinks about the training. We may create a study that provides a menu of choices, such as a satisfaction rating scale, including options: completely satisfied, satisfied, undecided, dissatisfied, and ultimately dissatisfied (Project Management Institute, 2021).

The project manager should then provide clear instructions on completing the survey form when open-ended feedback is requested and how the input will be used. This method of measuring stakeholder satisfaction allows project managers to create complex response charts and analyse information to take decisive action. The number of interested parties who should have attended the training can be compared to those who attended. Data can then be collected on any work-related health and safety issues during the project to provide detailed analysis and determine the project's success in environmental and occupational health and safety.

Another set of numerical data can be collected by organising focus groups. These facilitated discussions may include the quality of status reports, engagement strategies, and project outcomes. Practical focus group activities typically involve extensive planning, including setting an agenda, preparing specific questions for stakeholders, fostering collaboration, and encouraging participants to act (Barrow, 2017). Project managers should encourage all participants to provide honest responses that reflect their perspectives. Thus, the operations manager can be asked detailed questions about his satisfaction with the project's health and safety statistics and training programs in the usual group methodology, confirming the input of all stakeholders, including himself, as this is his area of responsibility.

The results can also be evaluated by interviewing stakeholders individually, allowing the project manager to collect feedback privately without entering the public domain. This can happen because the information is sensitive, so by not discussing sensitive information in a public forum, we avoid a bigger problem. Key stakeholders may also appreciate this approach as their schedules may prevent them from attending other meetings.

Conducting regular and post-project surveys, meetings, and conversations with stakeholders increases the likelihood of success by allowing lessons learned to accumulate and necessary and desired improvements to be made. For this to happen, the project manager needs to monitor the project and ensure that the business analyst and the rest of the team have a complete list of stakeholders. The team and the growing list of stakeholders can help the company continue to develop the list to ensure that all stakeholders have been identified.

During the control stakeholder engagement process, some essential parts of the project life cycle are updated and changed, which are used again as input data in other project processes. This shows that there is an interaction between project phases and processes. As stakeholders

become involved in the project, the overall effectiveness of the stakeholder management strategy can be assessed. When necessary, changes in approach or strategy are identified, the affected parts of the project management plan may need to be updated to reflect these changes (e.g. Requirements Management Plan, Scope Management Plan, Stakeholder Management Plan, etc.). In addition, the stakeholder register is updated with information about stakeholders' changes, when new stakeholders are identified, if registered stakeholders no longer participate in the project or are no longer affected by the project, or if other updates are required for specific stakeholders.

According to Barrow (2017), to ensure that we have a comprehensive list of stakeholders, some of the following questions can be asked:

- Who has a financial or emotional interest in the results of your work?
- Who can be positively or negatively affected by the results of your project?
- Who are the clients or customers who will benefit from the results?
- Who represents the management and oversight of this project, both internally and externally?
- Who are service providers, suppliers of resources, consumables and equipment or components?
- Who will participate in project activities together?
- Who is not?

Once you have a list of stakeholders and to complete your stakeholder analysis, you can go through this checklist and ask yourself the following questions about each stakeholder:

- What is their financial or emotional interest in the results of your work? Is it positive or negative?
- What motivates them the most?
- What information do they want from you?
- What is the best way to get your message across to them?
- What is their current opinion of your work? Is it based on good information?
- What influences their opinion and their opinion of you? Does this make some of these opinion makers themselves essential stakeholders?
- If they are unlikely to be positive, what could change their opinion to a positive one?
- How will you handle their resistance if you do not think you can sway them?
- Who else might be affected by their opinion? Do these people become stakeholders in themselves?

Such questionnaires are likely to ensure that we have included stakeholders in all key categories: customers or clients, both internal and external, management groups in supervisory bodies, our own company and, if applicable, the company's client organisation, contractors, or service providers we engage through public procurement, core project team.

Checklists are a great way to stay on track and confirm that all the agreed-upon actions we set out to do when we started the project are being completed.

Summarising the analysis of the scientific literature, after identifying the stakeholders, it is possible to start analysing and documenting relevant information about their interests in the project and how they can influence the project's results. Do they care about, or can they influence, the political, economic, social, technical, legal, or environmental aspects of the company's operations?

Also, when the role of the stakeholders in the project is already known, it is possible to find out their interest in the company's activities simply by defining what they care about in one or two words or concepts. This will help determine the degree of their approval of our initiative:

- Are they potential ambassadors who will spread our message and purpose or outsiders who will observe?
- Could they resist the changes we create?
- Do they hold their positions for a reason, or can we change their minds?

Answering these questions can determine the impact their support, or lack thereof, will have on the project. By identifying and analysing stakeholder relationships with the project and with the project participants, companies can be prepared to leverage existing relationships and build a strong leadership coalition. This way of leading the coalition would facilitate the achievement of goals and help to develop understanding and support for the changes being created in the company.

Thus, after analysing the emergence of stakeholders in scientific literature and the importance of the concept itself, it can be stated that the concept of stakeholders in scientific literature is entirely subjective. However, based on the above logic, it is still possible to identify the interested parties and divide them into groups. Based on this and after the grouping, the main stakeholders of JV Lithuanian Airports were identified as customers, employees, and shareholders.

### 3. Research methodology

Qualitative empirical research is chosen to delve deeper into social phenomena to understand them from an internal perspective and consider the context in which they occur. This research method is often used in the social sciences, psychology, education, and other fields where the behaviour, attitudes, or experiences of various individuals, groups, or organisations are evaluated.

The purpose and questions to be investigated were determined at the beginning of the study. This approach made it possible to adapt to changing situations and flexibly change the course of the investigation. In-depth interview methodology, document analysis, and other tools were used to collect a rich and comprehensive data set. The selection of participants was based on the study's objectives to get diverse perspectives.

An important aspect was continuous communication with the participants to understand their experiences and context better. Qualitative data analysis methods, such as thematic or phenomenological analysis, highlighted

important themes and structures, allowing the researcher to understand the phenomenon from a theoretical perspective.

By choosing an empirical research methodology, it was possible to flexibly change the course of the research and the questions according to discoveries or received information. Although this study was not designed for statistical representativeness or generalizability, it provided a comprehensive perspective and understanding of the phenomenon under study. Such a methodological choice allowed a deeper understanding of social phenomena and revealed their complexity.

The theoretical basis of the study consists of Freeman (1984), Mok et al. (2017), Kujala et al. (2022), Sachs and Kujala (2021). Di Maddaloni and Davis (2017) and Barrow's (2017) theoretical assumptions about the importance and influence of stakeholders, the possible impact on the course of the project process, and the decision-making of corporate management. Stakeholders can significantly impact project duration, costs, and the ability to implement final solutions. Therefore, the importance of the influence of stakeholders on the organisation should be taken very seriously because the most influential stakeholders can influence the organisation's goals and, with their actions, can control or disrupt the organisation's performance. Identifying key stakeholders and determining their approach to the ongoing airport development project will allow the company to understand the importance of stakeholders to successfully implement the project and its day-to-day operations.

The research aims to identify the main interested parties of the Lithuanian Airports JSC participating in the airport development project to investigate their fields of interest.

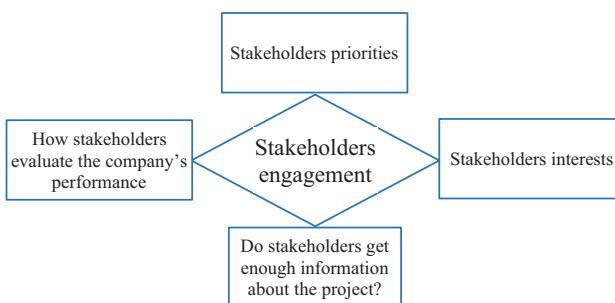
*Tasks of the research:* 1) to investigate the priorities of the parties interested in JSC Lithuanian Airports. 2) clarify the interests of interested parties in the airport development project. 3) to understand what the interested parties think about the company's activities 4) to determine whether the company pays enough attention and provides sufficient information to the interested parties participating in the development project.

The object of the research is the primary identified interested parties of JV Lithuanian Airports: customers (passengers), employees, and shareholders. Such a choice provides the prerequisites for researching and identifying the needs of stakeholders who have the most significant influence in setting requirements and expectations, selecting potential project executors, contractors and milestones, and understanding the value of the project in general. Stakeholders want to understand what the company aims for when initiating development projects. Communication creates an understanding of the goals and benefits for all parties and helps attract the support and proposals needed for essential investments. Unfortunately, planned changes are not always understood, well-received, and accepted by the local community. Understanding the airport's plans and day-to-day operations would allow the

public to feel more involved in the decisions. The public can be a good intermediary in communicating with local authorities and, if necessary, putting pressure on local political parties or individual politicians. Lithuanian airports are first establishing positive relations with special interest groups such as media and social networks. Press releases, interviews with journalists, and meetings with interest groups develop their understanding of the importance of the company's activities and ensure that the message disseminated reflects the company's point of view. By actively using communication tools, the company could more promptly respond to critical comments or correct misunderstandings arising from interpreting information. Communicating directly or via social media can spread a company's message further, as stakeholders are primarily social media users.

It is essential to examine how meeting the needs and expectations of stakeholders affects their engagement. Also, whether additional actions will be needed to increase the involvement of interested parties and how to promote the proper participation of interested entities in the project activities throughout the project life cycle, analysing the answers of the experts and comparing them with the relations between the company and the interested party summarised in the literature analysis, conclusions can be drawn as to how the experts see the level of their involvement and how important the airport development project is to the interested party.

This model (illustrated in Figure 2) will help analyse each respondent's answers, reflecting the interested party's point of view on the importance of the airport development project and their desire to participate, influence, be involved, and receive all the necessary information.



**Figure 2.** Research model (source: compiled by the authors)

It was important for airports to survey their passengers because, according to the airport business model, the passenger is the factor that makes the airports run. Passengers were also identified as critical stakeholders during the literature analysis and airport strategic sessions. To get to know the research object in more detail, the interaction of various research methods can give more detailed and reliable results (Tidikis, 2003). Freeman (1984), Mok et al. (2017), Kujala et al. (2022), Sachs and Kujala (2021). Di Maddaloni and Davis (2017) and Barrow's (2017) theoretical provisions about the importance and influence of stakeholders, the possible impact on the course of the

project process, and the decision-making of company management.

The research was carried out after analysing the scientific literature, formulating the main conclusions, and following the interview's assumptions as a data collection method (Gaižauskaitė & Valavičienė, 2016).

A targeted individual interview method was chosen for the qualitative research – the survey of the main stakeholders of Lithuanian Airports LLC, which, according to Patton (2002), is carried out when we want to learn from people what we cannot see directly – we cannot see (observe) feelings and thoughts; we cannot replicate past behaviour or interactions; we cannot feel the meanings that people give to the world around them and many other things (Gaižauskaitė & Valavičienė, 2016).

Questions for respondents:

1. What impact can the LT airport development project have on you, positive or negative? Explain why?
2. How can the results of the project (not) serve your business?
3. What is the potential involvement of your organisation/unit in the project?
4. What is your possible personal involvement in the project?
5. What is your financial or emotional interest in the work results of LT airports? Is it positive or negative? Explain why?
6. What motivates you the most in the LT airport development project?
7. What information do you expect from LT airports?
8. What is your current opinion about the work of LT airports?
9. Would you agree to be potential ambassadors? Why?
10. What could make you oppose the changes being made by airports?
11. What could change your opinion (positive or negative)?
12. What are the risks of a company not cooperating with a stakeholder?

For Lithuanian airports to successfully compete in the region and thus provide better, more efficient and higher quality services, it is necessary to assess the development possibilities of Lithuanian airports. The current airport infrastructure is expensive to maintain and needs to be upgraded and further invested. The state wholly owns the airport infrastructure, but its management, use and development are transferred and carried out by trust laws to JV Lithuanian Airports. All results achieved by this project will belong to the state, but different airport stakeholders have various business interests, services, and respective attitudes towards potential new investments. For example, they are shortening the passenger's travel time and route at the airport by investing in and improving infrastructure, updating equipment, etc., and, despite increased safety and security requirements, increasing passenger comfort by investing in employees and improving working conditions and the environment.

Only airport sector employees with expert knowledge and competencies who have accumulated many years of work experience in the aviation sector can assess the need and meaning of such changes and investments.

According to Flick (2014), an expert is a person who has specific knowledge and insights regarding his position and professional experience (Gaižauskaitė & Valavičienė, 2016). During the research, the biographies and personal characteristics of the experts should have been emphasised. Namely, possessing specific aviation and infrastructure management knowledge was the main factor in selecting expert interviews.

As Patton (2002) argued, qualitative research allows for collecting participants' open and representative views, opinions, and experiences. However, attention should be paid to the researcher's preparation and analytical abilities (Gaižauskaitė & Valavičienė, 2016). Using qualitative and secondary information, 15 aviation sector specialists were selected for the study (Table 1). Whose long-term

**Table 1.** Respondents

Respondents	Stakeholder	Organisation	Position	Experience
SM1	Shareholder	LR Ministry of Transport and Communications	Head of Department	< 10 year
SM2	Shareholder	LR Ministry of Transport and Communications	Head of Division	< 10 year
SM3	Shareholder	LR Ministry of Transport and Communications	Head of Division	< 5 year
LO1	Personnel	LTOU	Head of Department	> 5 year
LO2	Personnel	LTOU	Managing director	< 5 year
LO3	Personnel	LTOU	Head of Department	> 5 year
LO4	Personnel	LTOU	Head of branch	< 5 year
LO5	Personnel	LTOU	Head of Division	< 5 year
LO6	Personnel	LTOU	Head of Department	< 5 year
LO7	Personnel	LTOU	Head of Division	< 5 year
LO8	Personnel	LTOU	Head of branch	> 5 year
LO9	Personnel	LTOU	Head of branch	> 5 year
LO10	Personnel	LTOU	Head of Division	< 5 year
LO11	Personnel	LTOU	Head of Division	> 5 year
LO12	Personnel	LTOU	Head of Division	> 5 year

work experience allows us to be confident in their expertise. The group was selected based on the principle of forming target groups when persons with characteristics corresponding to the activity of the object under study are included. Since it is essential to determine the criteria of expertise for expert evaluation, this empirical study considered knowledge and experience, representation of interested parties, departments and divisions, and managerial experience.

### Respondents

For Lithuanian airports to successfully compete in the region and thus provide better, more efficient and higher quality services, it is necessary to assess the development possibilities of Lithuanian airports. The current airport infrastructure is expensive to maintain and needs to be upgraded and further invested. The state owns the airport infrastructure. Still, its management, use, and development are transferred and carried out following trust laws for Lithuanian Airports. The state will own all results achieved through this project, but different airport stakeholders have various business interests, services and respective attitudes towards potential new investments. For example, shortening the passenger's travel time and route at the airport by investing in and improving infrastructure, updating equipment, etc., as well as, despite increased safety and security requirements, increasing passenger comfort by investing in employees, improving working conditions and the environment.

Only airport employees with expert knowledge and competence and many years of work experience in the aviation sector can assess the need and meaning of such changes and investments.

A targeted individual interview method was chosen for the qualitative research – the survey of the main interested parties of Lithuanian Airports, which, according to Patton (2002), is carried out when we want to learn from people what we cannot see directly – we cannot see (observe) feelings and thoughts.

For this study, 15 aviation sector specialists whose extensive work experience in the field testifies to their expertise were carefully selected. The selection was based on the principle of forming target groups, ensuring that the group included individuals with characteristics relevant to the study. The criteria for expertise in this empirical study included knowledge and experience, representation of interested parties, departments and divisions, and managerial experience. The experts' biographies and personal characteristics were not emphasised during the research. Rather, possessing specific aviation and infrastructure management knowledge was the main factor in selecting expert interviews.

## 4. Results

After interviewing 12 aviation sector experts and three company shareholder representatives and analysing the interviews, six main themes emerged:

- Impact of airport development project (1);
- Direct, indirect participation in the project (2);
- Interest in the project (3);
- Motivation for participating in the project (4);
- Need for information (5);
- Opinion about the company (6).

Analysing the experts' answers and comparing them with the relations between the company and the interested party summarised in the literature analysis, it emerges that all the experts, both representing a specific interested party and expressing an opinion on their level of involvement, identified the airport development project as essential for both the company and the country.

In addition to the summarised data, it is worth examining each respondent's answers, which show the importance of the airport development project and the desire of interested parties to participate, influence, be involved, and receive all the necessary information.

*Impact of airport development project on stakeholder (Shareholder)*

Opinions of experts representing the shareholder about the importance of the project and its impact on the interested party. And the interested party's interest, motivation, and attitude towards the company.

"<...> One of the ministry's main goals is to improve residents' satisfaction with mobility. The development project of the new LT airport can positively impact the population's connectivity and create more promising opportunities for a wider range of direct flights. The project would undoubtedly be one of the largest and most important objects of transport development, both in terms of its cost and importance. This would give it special importance".

"<...> A new airport can create significant opportunities for the state. The first is the increase in accessibility, with the possibility of servicing large long-haul aircraft at the country's central airport. Until now, such an opportunity was limited for several reasons – compared to the short KTT of Vilnius Airport and the limited attractiveness of KUN to airlines for flights of this volume. The second positive possibility, or more precisely, a consequence, is the reduction of the consequences of aircraft noise for residents living in the vicinity of Vilnius and VNO if VNO's activities significantly decrease or its activities are transferred to the new airport in its entirety. In addition, creating a new transport hub opens up a completely new space for planning other activities related to the airport – MRO, cargo handling, etc., which could be modelled not by adapting to external circumstances but completely freely from a "clean sheet of paper".

For the state, new communication opportunities and business development at the airport would also mean additional value for economic growth (job creation, income from tourism, etc.).

"<...> The construction of the new airport near Elektrėnai provides opportunities to create a qualitatively new centre of air transport infrastructure and services, integrating the European gauge "Rail Baltica" railway, thus



raising the Lithuanian transport system to a new qualitative level. This would benefit Lithuanian society. However, decisions regarding the construction of such an object must be evaluated in a cost-benefit analysis, assessing whether the object will not become a financial burden compared to the benefits provided. Also, the decision regarding such an object must consider the perspectives of the existing LT airports (Kaunas and Vilnius)".

*Direct, indirect participation of the interested party in the project (Shareholder)*

The experts answered the questions related to the possible involvement of the shareholder:

"<...> Comprehensive: from the preparation, presentation and adoption of political/legal decisions to one of the leading roles in the implementation (construction) process of this infrastructure project".

"<...> The Ministry of Transport would directly participate in implementing the project. The project will likely be implemented by way of a concession. In this case, the ministry would prepare the drafts of the necessary legal acts to approve the project in the Government and the Seimas, conduct the concession tender for the concessionaire's selection, supervise the project's implementation, and be responsible for the project's results".

"<...> The Ministry of Transport, as a state institution authorised by LRV, prepares and forms essential decisions regarding this project, directs and manages the activities of the implementing institutions in implementing this project".

Interested party's interest in the project and motivation (Shareholder)

Also, it was essential to find out where the shareholder's primary interest is in participating in the project and what motivates him to get involved or support the project in general.

"<...> New opportunities, new quality, creating genuinely high-quality and modern transport and communication systems in Lithuania".

"<...> The Ministry is most motivated by the desired result in the LT airport development project – improving the country's accessibility, improving the population's satisfaction with mobility, and increasing the competitiveness and prestige of the country's transport".

"<...> Challenge and opportunity to contribute to realising historical solutions".

Opinion of the interested party about the company (Shareholder)

Summarising the shareholders' attitude to the project's importance and desire to get involved and implement it, it was interesting to find out what the shareholders' representatives think about the company, which is the project executor.

"<...> If we evaluate the work of LTOU in the current format (VNO+KUN+PLQ), it also has the right to exist because, as practice shows, even sometimes with limited opportunities (infrastructure, land area development, etc.) solutions for business development can be found. However, this currently resembles more a survival strategy and

maximisation of existing opportunities than long-term strategic development".

"<...> Good opinion. Efforts are visible, and so is the result".

"<...> The Ministry's opinion about the work of LT airports is good. Both maintenance and renewal of existing airport infrastructure are good. The number of destinations, flights and passengers is growing, and the economic indicators of LT airports are also good. Passengers' satisfaction with the services provided by LT airports is good".

Impact of the airport development project on the interested party (Employees)

The opinion of the employees representing the experts to the interested party about the importance of the project and the impact on the interested party. And the interested party's interest, motivation, and attitude towards the company.

"<...> Only positive influences. I see an opportunity to contribute to a strategically important project for our country. Interesting, new, many opportunities, self-realisation, the opportunity to do something important, significant, visible to everyone".

"<...> Positive influence would do a lot. A project with this mindset is an excellent opportunity for the entire organisation to create a new, great, world-class airport representing the entire country, even the region. Moreover, of course, it is a great place to work – keywords: challenge, meaning, pride".

"<...> The influence is positive since I am involved in implementing development projects; it would be one of the biggest projects in Lithuania, and I would like to participate in and contribute to its outcome".

"<...> Positive – professional development – in a larger airport, there is more complexity in managing peaks, other technologies are needed, and there is a possible greater need to have functions in-house and not depend on suppliers, for whom "somewhere in the countryside" at the airport may be too far for practical for the performance of works. There is a growing need for better risk management because, after closing branches, an actual backup airport for flights can only be abroad (PLQ capacity in the case of backup is limited".

Direct, indirect involvement of the interested party in the project (Employees)

The experts answered the questions related to the possible involvement of employees as an interested party:

"<...> It is very active because the experience of the branches in their daily activities can help prevent certain future problems. The business process department could be very involved in reviewing and optimising various processes".

"<...> Safety and Security activities have a powerful impact on airport operations. Therefore, the participation of the SSD division is extensive. They are starting with the organisation of flight safety, security procedures, implementation of passive and reactive infrastructure security measures, and cyber or public space security. Very broad".

"<...> Comprehensive in planning technical solutions and operations, preparing technical requirements".

"<...> The personnel department would handle employee issues: assembling a new team (if existing employees must be let go and look for new ones), training new employees, and introducing all employees to the new airport. He would also be responsible for taking care of the well-being of employees at the new airport – setting up staff rooms and workplaces".

Interested party's interest in the project and motivation (Shareholder)

Also, it was essential to find out where the main interest of the employees, as stakeholders, is to participate in the project and what motivates them to get involved or support the project in general.

"<...> Financial interest is always there, and my personal goal is to do the job as well as possible so the company can achieve the best possible results. Because the motivation of all employees depends on it. However, there is never one goal; if you feel emotionally sound doing your work, you have good engagement, motivation, and results".

"<...> Interest is positive, i.e. I am always personally happy when LOU does well – it is fun if you manage to solve the challenges that have arisen; it is fun both for your team and for the results achieved by the projects implemented by other colleagues. In addition, the variable part of the salary of all colleagues is directly linked to the company's overall results".

"<...> The success of airport projects is relevant to me because only in this way can I expect benefits for myself (financial and otherwise). The successful implementation of the project provides emotional satisfaction and creates fellowship with colleagues. This is very important for my team and me".

"<...> So much so that the entire return would not go to private individuals but the State. The work must be remunerated at market conditions; only the shareholders would differ. I am for a strong LOU, the results of which would make society proud".

Stakeholder opinion about the company (Employees)

It was interesting to find out what the shareholders' representatives think about the company, which is the project executor. They summated their attitude to the project's importance and desire to get involved and implement it.

"<...> We are a successful company with a united team working towards common goals. We have daily challenges but are ready to move forward and achieve higher and higher goals".

"<...> I think that they work efficiently. Can make and implement rational decisions".

"<...> The existing team successfully manages the existing VNO, KUN and PLQ airports, ensures high-performance results, has accumulated much experience in the implementation of massive projects and could successfully, with the help of other countries, develop the project of a new airport".

"<...> Excellent: professional team, excellent performance results, ever-improving communication".

"<...> There is teamwork, result orientation, competencies and professionalism. Political dependence is still felt".

From the interviews of experts, it is possible to single out an extremely positive attitude towards the development of Lithuanian airports and the desire to participate in the development project. Stakeholders recognise the importance of the involvement and cooperation of all stakeholders in planning, setting goals and making decisions. It emphasises the importance of collaboration based on trust, confidence, inclusiveness and constructive engagement towards a broad common goal. Differences in power, influence and status between project participants are not emphasised, and responsibility for the process is shared. Cooperation between participants under the right circumstances can facilitate solutions to complex problems, but this requires timely communication and information sharing. The shareholder and the employees must understand the need to seek cooperation to achieve the high goals set. To create value for the company, stakeholders, and the state.

Summarising the qualitative research, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Priorities of interested parties: increasing the mobility of the country's population, increasing the number of passengers and flights, implementing ambitious projects, raising the qualifications of employees, creating value for the country, and financial return.
2. The interests of interested parties in the airport development project are increasing the competitiveness of the Baltic region, adding additional value, increasing project size and significance, developing infrastructure, improving operational efficiency, and being representative.
3. Stakeholders' opinion about the company's activities: Successful company, efficient company, good team, good results, excellent performance.
4. Provision of information to interested parties: more involvement of interested parties in the planning stages, sufficiency of information and timeliness of submission, and transparency.

Based on the literature analysis and research material, it can be concluded that stakeholders' involvement in the project's successful development and its positive presentation and communication is essential. This work aimed to find out what the interested parties of Lithuanian airports think about their involvement and to deepen the company's knowledge about the methods of identification and participation of interested parties. The analysis of experts' answers shows that after starting to work on the airport development project and communicating it, the interest and involvement of interested parties increased accordingly.

After summarising the survey, several main themes emerged, namely the project's impact on the interested party, the interested party's direct participation, interest in

the project, motivation, need for information, and what the interested party thinks about the company in the context of the project.

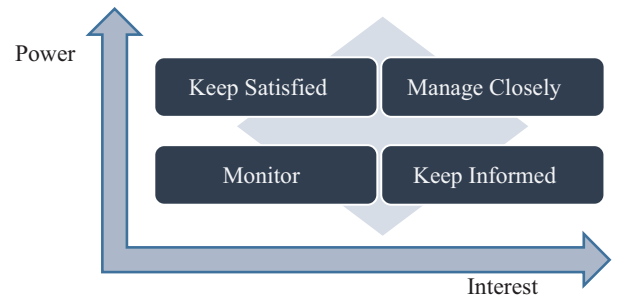
Long-term relationships with direct stakeholders have significantly contributed to the project's integration. The benefits of long-term relationships were deeply intertwined with the company's culture. They affected all organisational levels, so building a new airport was positively received and successfully integrated. Of course, it is still being developed and improved. Joint activities at this stage can encourage cooperation between the company and its stakeholders, increasing the company's competitiveness in the Baltic region while stimulating social and economic conditions in the communities.

The past ten years have seen increased demand for transparency from both direct and public stakeholders. In this regard, the challenge is the wide range of stakeholders that the company engages. As the experts emphasised in their responses, many stakeholders increasingly demand large amounts and different types of information. The number of interested parties affected by the project also increases proportionally. Due to the increasing attention and involvement of stakeholders, the company's awareness level has increased, which has also increased the need for information exchange within the company. According to the interviewees, stakeholders have their expectations and should, therefore, be subject to different tactics depending on their strategies, so it would be interesting to repeat such studies.

In a developing economy of free competition, governments are urged not to distort the market and to hand over airport development authority to private investors. The growing trend of airport privatisation to increase efficiency and productivity is forcing most airports to operate as purely commercial enterprises. Therefore, the attitude and role of the shareholder, the support of other interested parties and the state's ambition are critical here.

Also, given the scope and scale of the environmental impact of air transport and airports, it is expected that the growth of the aviation sector is often at odds with sustainable development goals. On the one hand, aircraft engines emit relatively large amounts of harmful pollutants that can contribute to climate change and affect the ozone layer. On the other hand, the significant contribution of the aviation industry to different aspects of sustainability, such as economics, can be seen by providing jobs, promoting trade, and increasing capital inflows from tourism and passenger revenue. Given this potential for economic development, air transport has transformed from a heavily regulated, state-owned, and subsidised mode of travel operated by public entities to an industry governed by economic market rules, increasingly to increase efficiency. This is where contradictions can arise between different stakeholders seeking different paths to sustainability. Therefore, the timely involvement of key stakeholders can provide a more practical basis for socially responsible decision-making regarding the development of Lithuanian airports. When planning the participation of interested parties, it

is essential to know how certain aspects of the project's activities can affect the interested parties and vice versa, what are the interests of the interested parties and how their neglect can affect the project or the company's activities. Various matrices and combinations can be used for this analysis (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Stakeholder matrix in terms of interests and power (source: Herremans et al., 2016)

Meaningful stakeholder engagement can Anticipate and manage conflict and Improve decision-making by management, employees, investors, and other external stakeholders. Also, it makes it possible to reach a consensus of different opinions, identify stakeholders with the company's performance, and build trust in the organisation. However, like other sectors, one of the biggest challenges facing airports is adapting a stakeholder engagement strategy to meet the requirements of non-core stakeholders. It is the process of managing the relationship between the company and its stakeholders to increase the effectiveness of the company's decisions and strategies. This involvement, as a basis for the effective management of stakeholder relations, is significant in the implementation of Lithuanian airport development projects, mainly because the main success factor of the project is primarily related to the decisions made by the company regarding the involvement of stakeholders and the control of their interests. Stakeholder participation in airport development project management contributes to the successful implementation of the project because:

- Through key stakeholders, mutually beneficial commitments will likely be met, and goals and agreements will be achieved.
- The process makes the people involved feel part of it, ensuring a common consensus on the development project's future course.
- Stakeholders see the project as transparent and accountable.

It is to be hoped that the following principles will help plan the involvement of interested parties in Lithuanian airport development projects:

Organisational:

- Explain the objectives of stakeholder engagement. The goal can be one or more – access to knowledge and skills; supporting interpretation of results and preparation of recommendations; supporting future influence and impact on policy and action; increas-

ing recruitment or sponsoring research; supporting knowledge transfer. Participants then break the goals down.

- Embed stakeholder engagement in the research using a framework or model. Several models and frameworks, such as the Liaison and Exchange Model, show how stakeholders can be involved in research utilisation policy and practice.
- Identify the necessary resources for stakeholder engagement. Resources to consider include budget, time, engagement management skills and expertise.
- Establish plans for organisational learning and effective stakeholder reward, such as assessing appropriate stakeholder engagement.
- Recognize that some stakeholders can play a crucial role.

Stakeholders who are particularly interested in engagement and those who can influence are identified. Given the purpose of stakeholder engagement, they may have the most significant influence and are likely to play a vital role in using the results, and their engagement should be particularly encouraged.

Valuable:

- Foster a shared commitment to value stakeholder engagement and values within the project team. Ideally, it makes sure that the commitment is applied from the start.
- Share that stakeholders are often understood as more than just individuals. Consideration needs to be given to their roles when they act as representatives – their power and influence within the organisations and networks they represent and how these change over time.
- Encourage individual stakeholders and their organisations to value engagement. The capacity of stakeholders and their organisations needs to be supported and strengthened.
- Be aware of the potential conflict between productivity and engagement. Engagement can lead to greater relevance and impact, but it can affect productivity in meeting project goals (for example, time). Engaging stakeholders based on their needs and input and adapting research design elements

based on feedback takes time and can slow down the research process.

- Create a shared commitment to ongoing and continuous stakeholder engagement. Project teams and stakeholders see the importance of linkages between research producers and consumers in creating ongoing collaboration to achieve goals. Activities:
  - Plan stakeholder engagement activities as part of the research program. This should be included in the project protocol or plan.
  - Allow for flexibility in the research process, adapting to inclusion and its outcomes. Develop mechanisms that allow researchers to self-define what is not applicable.
  - Consider how to collect input from stakeholders to achieve goals systematically.
  - Consider how stakeholder input could be benchmarked, analysed, and leveraged. This critical aspect of stakeholder engagement needs to be considered earlier rather than later.
  - Recognise that stakeholder identification and engagement is an interactive and ongoing process.
  - This can be achieved through the use of various stakeholder engagement channels (Figure 4).

*Shareholder.* Continuous cooperation with members of various departments, departments and committees of the Ministry of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Lithuania to communicate objectively and clearly about the purpose of the project, the works being performed, the decisions submitted for approval by the Minister and their importance for the timely implementation of the project, the benefits they provide, to ensure political support for both the decisions necessary for the implementation of the project approval, as well as the implementation of the project itself in a political context. Communicate in advance and coordinate the decisions necessary for the implementation of the project to support the implementation of the project goals.

Ideally, the highest possible agreement is achieved. Such an agreement is needed because the project lasts 12–15 years, 4–5 polar cycles. It is essential to depoliticise the need for a project to make its implementation more timely and complete.

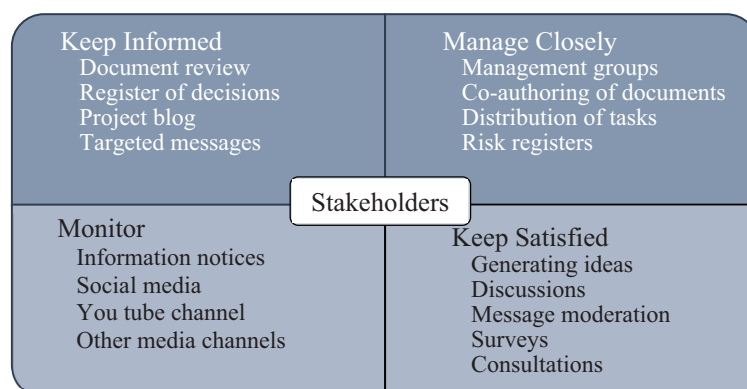


Figure 4. Stakeholder engagement channels (source: Herremans et al., 2016)

*Passengers.* Considering the phasing of the project development, provide information about the project itself, its benefits, and the opportunities open for the region. Communicate regularly to hear relevant issues, identify areas of concern, respond, clarify, and, if necessary, take necessary preventive actions to control risks that could cause significant harm. Conduct public consultations, implement communication plans, and present the project's benefits from both short-term and long-term perspectives.

*Employees.* Coordinate and coordinate decisions to ensure their completeness and timely approval, inform about project implementation progress, and provide fees to ensure project implementation. This requires the support of employees and internal consensus within the company. Also, it is essential to resolve conflicts of priorities promptly when there are conflicting opinions and positions of different departments. Include employees' views and suggestions in discussions regarding implementing essential decisions.

As mentioned, not all stakeholders play an equal role in the airport business. It is essential to understand whether their goals and expectations conflict with each other and the company. Of course, in any case, the goals, aspirations, and finally values of the stakeholders will undoubtedly influence the company's development projects and results in general. Therefore, it is essential to balance the influence of different stakeholders so that the values of the mission are aligned with the key stakeholders.

## 5. Discussion

The article's Discussion section delves into the concept of stakeholders concerning large-scale infrastructure projects, specifically focusing on the development of Lithuanian airports. It synthesises insights from existing literature and empirical research to understand the dynamics of stakeholder engagement and its implications for project success.

The literature review traces the evolution of the stakeholder concept from its inception in the 1960s to its current significance in business management and infrastructure development. It highlights the shift from a shareholder-centric approach to a broader stakeholder perspective, emphasising the importance of considering various stakeholders' interests in decision-making processes.

Ninan et al. (2022) indicated that infrastructure is vital to the socio-economic development of any region and that there is a strong relationship between infrastructure availability and economic growth. Infrastructure projects provide capabilities such as transportation, transmission, distribution, assembly, and interaction of goods, services, and people (e.g. pipelines, highways, bridges, etc.).

Moreover, the review identifies critical challenges associated with large infrastructure projects, such as stakeholder complexity, conflicting interests, and the risk of project failure. It underscores the need for effective stakeholder management strategies to mitigate these challenges and ensure project success.

Considering the reasons mentioned above, the organisation should find a common language with the interested parties, primarily because they may decide to stop participating in the project or harm it in some other way if they do not receive the expected benefits. They can also terminate contracts with the company and try to implement projects with another partner. When the common interests of the company and the stakeholders diverge, the stakeholders can always find alternatives (De Pascale et al., 2021). A conflict of interest can affect the loss of resources, contractors, and project support, harming the company's performance and reputation (De Pascale et al., 2021).

Drawing from empirical research, the article examines the specific case of Lithuanian airports and their stakeholders, including customers, employees, and shareholders. It explores stakeholders' interests, priorities, and levels of engagement in the airport development project. According to Freeman (1984), shareholders are groups without which the support organisation would cease to exist.

The findings reveal the critical role of stakeholder engagement in shaping project outcomes and fostering long-term relationships between the company and its stakeholders. Internal stakeholders are instrumental in achieving business goals, while external stakeholders contribute to project guidelines and community outreach efforts.

Furthermore, the research identifies a growing demand for transparency and information exchange among stakeholders. As project complexity and stakeholder involvement increase, effective communication becomes essential for maintaining trust and support throughout the project lifecycle.

The critical role of stakeholder engagement in shaping project outcomes cannot be overstated. This research underscores that internal stakeholders, such as employees and shareholders, play a pivotal role in driving the success of infrastructure projects. Their alignment with project goals and active participation in decision-making are essential for achieving business objectives and ensuring long-term viability. Internal stakeholders often possess valuable insights and expertise that can inform project strategies and implementation plans, making their engagement crucial for project success.

Moreover, external stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, and environmental organisations, also wield significant influence over infrastructure projects. Their input and support are integral to navigating regulatory requirements, securing funding, and addressing environmental and social concerns. External stakeholders contribute to developing project guidelines and policies, ensuring that projects align with broader societal needs and priorities. Additionally, they play a crucial role in community outreach efforts, helping to build positive relationships and garner public support for the project. Stakeholder engagement includes goals, activities, impacts, moral, strategic, and pragmatic elements (Kujala et al., 2022; Sachs & Kujala, 2021). An example of the ethical component of stakeholder engagement is the extent to which all

stakeholders are involved. Di Maddaloni and Davis (2017) argue that community stakeholders are consistently excluded from project communication plans, leading to adverse outcomes.

However, as project complexity increases and stakeholder involvement expands, so does the demand for transparency and information exchange. This research highlights a growing expectation among stakeholders for open and honest communication throughout the project lifecycle. Stakeholders seek access to timely and accurate information about project objectives, progress, and potential impacts, enabling them to make informed decisions and effectively voice their concerns.

Effective communication is essential for maintaining trust and support among stakeholders, particularly in the face of challenges and uncertainties. Clear and transparent communication channels help to build consensus, resolve conflicts, and mitigate risks, fostering a collaborative environment conducive to project success. By prioritising transparency and information exchange, companies can demonstrate their commitment to stakeholder engagement and build stronger relationships with all parties involved.

Furthermore, our research emphasises the need for proactive communication strategies that anticipate and address stakeholders' evolving needs and expectations. Regular updates, stakeholder consultations, and feedback mechanisms can help to keep stakeholders informed and engaged throughout the project lifecycle. By soliciting stakeholder input and feedback, companies can demonstrate responsiveness to their concerns and foster a sense of ownership and partnership in the project.

In conclusion, effective stakeholder engagement is essential for navigating the complexities of infrastructure projects and achieving successful outcomes. By actively involving internal and external stakeholders, prioritising transparency and information exchange, and implementing proactive communication strategies, companies can build trust, foster collaboration, and ultimately deliver value to all stakeholders. As projects grow in scale and complexity, the importance of stakeholder engagement will only continue to grow, making it a fundamental aspect of project management in the infrastructure sector. Given the critical role of stakeholder engagement in infrastructure projects, developing strategies that enhance communication and collaboration among all parties involved is imperative. This research suggests several essential approaches to improving stakeholder engagement and management, ultimately contributing to the success of large-scale infrastructure projects.

One crucial strategy is early stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes. Companies can tap into their expertise and insights by engaging stakeholders from the project's inception to inform project planning and decision-making. Early involvement also helps to build trust and rapport with stakeholders, fostering a sense of ownership and buy-in for the project's objectives. Moreover, by soliciting input and feedback from stakeholders early

on, companies can identify potential concerns and mitigate risks before they escalate, thereby improving project outcomes.

Regular progress updates are another essential aspect of effective stakeholder engagement.

Providing stakeholders with timely and transparent information about project progress, milestones, and challenges helps to keep them informed and engaged throughout the project lifecycle. Regular updates demonstrate the company's commitment to transparency and accountability, building stakeholder trust and confidence. Additionally, by maintaining open communication lines, companies can promptly address stakeholders' concerns, preventing misunderstandings and conflicts from derailing the project. Proactive risk management is also crucial for successful stakeholder management in infrastructure projects. By identifying potential risks and uncertainties early on, companies can proactively develop mitigation strategies to address them. This includes engaging stakeholders to understand their concerns and priorities and collaborating to create mutually beneficial solutions. By involving stakeholders in risk management processes, companies can build trust and confidence while minimising the likelihood of project delays or disruptions.

Effective stakeholder management is essential for navigating the complexities of large-scale infrastructure projects. By understanding stakeholders' interests, fostering collaboration, and promoting transparency, companies can create a conducive environment for project success. Companies can enhance stakeholder engagement by implementing early stakeholder involvement, regular progress updates, and proactive risk management strategies, ultimately delivering value to all parties involved. In conclusion, the success of large-scale infrastructure projects hinges on effective stakeholder management. Companies can build trust, foster collaboration, and successfully navigate complex project environments by prioritising stakeholder engagement and communication. Stakeholder collaboration is a process by which groups with similar or different perspectives can exchange views and find solutions. Collaboration is not limited to the people involved (Porter & Hawkins, 2019). As infrastructure projects grow in scale and complexity, the importance of stakeholder management will only continue to grow, making it a critical aspect of project management in the infrastructure sector.

Effective stakeholder engagement emerges as a critical factor in successful airport development projects. Stakeholders, including customers, employees, shareholders, and external entities, play diverse roles in shaping project outcomes and influencing decision-making processes. Research highlights the importance of understanding stakeholder interests, fostering transparent communication, and fostering collaborative relationships to garner support and ensure project alignment with broader societal objectives. Moreover, longitudinal studies emphasise the evolving nature of stakeholder expectations and the need for continuous adaptation and responsiveness to emerging concerns.

While recent research provides valuable insights into

airport development dynamics, several limitations warrant consideration. Firstly, the geographical specificity of the research may constrain its applicability to broader international contexts, necessitating comparative analyses and cross-country case studies. Secondly, data limitations, particularly regarding stakeholder perceptions and market trends, pose comprehensive analysis and decision-making challenges. Moreover, methodological constraints, such as sampling biases and reliance on self-reported data, may impact the validity and reliability of research findings. Additionally, the inherent uncertainties surrounding long-term airport development projects, including technological advancements and regulatory changes, underscore the need for adaptive strategies and scenario planning.

Several future research directions are proposed to address these limitations and advance knowledge in airport development. Firstly, comprehensive environmental impact assessments are needed to evaluate the sustainability implications of airport construction and operation, guiding decision-making towards environmentally responsible practices. Secondly, economic feasibility analyses should explore the comparative advantages of airport expansion versus new construction, considering factors such as return on investment and financial impact on local communities. Thirdly, research on stakeholder engagement strategies should investigate practical methods for addressing diverse stakeholder interests and enhancing transparency and collaboration. Moreover, comparative studies and market demand analyses can provide valuable insights into global best practices and emerging airport development trends, informing Lithuania's strategic decision-making.

## 6. Conclusions

1. The authors emphasise the importance of air transport as the only way to reach Lithuania from foreign countries in the short to medium term. The authors point out that despite the country's well-developed land road network, connections to other European capitals are long and inconvenient. Water transport needs to be faster and more developed to be considered an equivalent substitute for air transport.

Air transport is currently the only way to reach Lithuania from foreign countries in the short or medium term. Despite the country's well-developed land road network, communication with other European capitals is long and inconvenient. Water transport needs to be faster and more developed to be considered an equivalent substitute for air transport.

The capacity of the Vilnius airport terminal, reaching 3.5 million passengers per year, is currently exceeded by more than 40% (more than 5 million passengers were served in 2019). Lithuanian airports are planning and implementing an increase in passenger terminal and airfield capacity of up to 7.5–8 million. Passengers per year projects; however, the configuration and architectural solutions of the existing Vilnius airport passenger terminal (an object of cultural heritage) limit the effective further development,

so alternatives for the construction of a new passenger terminal at Vilnius airport and a new airport, in general, are being considered. The problem is exacerbated by the geographical position of the existing Vilnius airport, the runway's limited length, and the runway's direction, which determines that most flights are conducted over residential areas. The problem of aircraft noise at Vilnius airport is particularly relevant when assessing the predicted increase in the number of flights in the long term.

It is also very important to highlight that Kaunas Airport has the longest runway and the best-suited infrastructure to accommodate large D or E-class cargo aircraft compared to other Lithuanian airports. However, this potential source of business needs to be utilised. With cargo flows growing even more than 10% per year, it would take approximately 25 years to reach the total cargo capacity handled by Kaunas Airport. In addition, depending on the flight season, only 3–4 air carriers are constantly operating at this airport, and Palanga airport has regular flights only on a limited number of routes; its development possibilities and profitable activity in the long term are also quite limited. The number of passengers at Lithuanian airports is proliferating, and based on the forecasts of air transport passengers, further growth is expected. Maintaining the current infrastructure, divided into several airports, is expensive and requires additional investments. In the medium term, it will not be able to serve the forecasted passenger flows. Considering this, it is appropriate to implement a strategically significant decision regarding developing Lithuanian airports – to implement an entirely new airport construction project. Therefore, the best way to increase Lithuania's air traffic in the long term is to invest in constructing a new airport.

2. Once the stakeholders have been identified through a literature review, it is important to analyse and document relevant information about their interests in the project and how they can influence the project's outcome. It is important to ask whether they can influence the company's activities' political, economic, social, technical, legal, or environmental aspects.

Also, when the role of the stakeholders in the project is already known, it is possible to find out their interest in the company's activities simply by defining what they care about in one or two words or concepts. Are they potential ambassadors to spread our message and purpose, or are they outsiders just watching? Could they resist the changes we create? Do they hold their positions for some reason, or can we change their minds?

Answering these questions can determine the impact their support, or lack thereof, will have on the project. After identifying and analysing the relationships of the interested parties with the project and the project participants, Lithuanian airports can utilise existing relationships and create mutually beneficial cooperation. Cooperation will facilitate achieving goals and help develop understanding and support for the changes made within Lithuanian airports.

Thus, after analysing the emergence of stakeholders in scientific literature and the importance of the concept

itself, it can be stated that the idea of stakeholders in scientific literature is entirely subjective. However, based on the above logic, it was still possible to identify the interested parties and divide them into groups. Based on this and after grouping, customers, employees, and shareholders were identified as the main stakeholders of JV Lithuanian Airports.

3. The authors' empirical research showed that the partners understand that a public enterprise can operate successfully based on private business principles. Based on the study, the authors stress that the observations of many researchers on the importance of stakeholder involvement were confirmed.

The categorisation of stakeholders into three groups provided new insights into how the organisation engages with various stakeholder groups to implement the project and communicate its needs and value. While internal stakeholders were more involved in achieving collaborative and business goals, external stakeholders played a significant role in developing project guidelines and tasks. Involving these external stakeholders helps the company give meaning to the project and spread the need for the project outside the company. Long-term relationships with direct stakeholders have significantly contributed to the project's integration. The benefits of long-term relationships were deeply intertwined with the company's culture. They affected all organisational levels, so building a new airport was positively received and successfully integrated. Of course, it is still being developed and improved. Joint activities at this stage can encourage cooperation between the company and its stakeholders, increasing the company's competitiveness in the Baltic region while stimulating social and economic conditions in the communities.

During the research, an increase in the need for transparency from all stakeholders was observed. In this regard, the challenge is the wide range of stakeholders that the company engages. As the experts emphasised in their responses, many stakeholders increasingly demand large amounts and different types of information. The number of interested parties affected by the project also increases proportionally. Due to the increasing attention and involvement of stakeholders, the company's awareness level has increased, increasing the need for information exchange. According to the interviewees, stakeholders have their expectations and should, therefore, be subject to different tactics depending on their strategies, so it would be interesting to repeat such studies.

4. Coordinate and coordinate decisions to ensure their completeness and timely approval, inform about the progress of project implementation and the benefits provided, and seek to ensure political support for project implementation. This requires a political consensus and a fundamental consensus among key stakeholders. Constantly maintain communication between various interested parties to communicate objectively and clearly about the purpose of the project, the work being done, provide solutions and their importance for the implementation of the project on

time, the benefits they provide to ensure that it does not harm the expectations of the interested parties. Ideally, reach the highest possible agreement. Such an agreement is necessary because the project's duration is 12–15 years, a cycle often called long-term strategic planning in companies.

5. According to the authors, stakeholders should be involved as much as possible in the decision-making process to secure early support for project implementation. It is important to pay attention to the project's value and benefits to the country. Regular presentations on the project's progress are suggested to ensure that all parties have the same understanding of the situation. Participants should participate in discussions on implementing key decisions, assess opinions and proposals, and make timely decisions on potential threats to stakeholders' performance.

6. The authors emphasise the importance of providing information on the project itself, its benefits and the opportunities for the region, given the phased nature of the project development. Regular communication is important to hear relevant issues, identify problem areas, react, clarify, and, if necessary, take preventive action. Regular communication presents the aviation sector's specificities, challenges and context in the region, Europe and the world. In the context of project development phases, provide relevant information on planned and ongoing works and the benefits they generate for local communities, businesses and the country.

Effective stakeholder engagement emerges as a critical factor in successful airport development projects. Stakeholders, including customers, employees, shareholders, and external entities, play diverse roles in shaping project outcomes and influencing decision-making processes. Research highlights the importance of understanding stakeholder interests, fostering transparent communication, and fostering collaborative relationships to garner support and ensure project alignment with broader societal objectives. Moreover, longitudinal studies emphasise the evolving nature of stakeholder expectations and the need for continuous adaptation and responsiveness to emerging concerns.

While recent research provides valuable insights into airport development dynamics, several limitations warrant consideration. Firstly, the geographical specificity of the research may constrain its applicability to broader international contexts, necessitating comparative analyses and cross-country case studies. Secondly, data limitations, particularly regarding stakeholder perceptions and market trends, pose comprehensive analysis and decision-making challenges. Moreover, methodological constraints, such as sampling biases and reliance on self-reported data, may impact the validity and reliability of research findings. Additionally, the inherent uncertainties surrounding long-term airport development projects, including technological advancements and regulatory changes, underscore the need for adaptive strategies and scenario planning.

Several future research directions are proposed to address these limitations and advance knowledge in airport



development. Firstly, comprehensive environmental impact assessments are needed to evaluate the sustainability implications of airport construction and operation, guiding decision-making towards environmentally responsible practices. Secondly, economic feasibility analyses should explore the comparative advantages of airport expansion versus new construction, considering factors such as return on investment and financial impact on local communities. Thirdly, research on stakeholder engagement strategies should investigate practical methods for addressing diverse stakeholder interests and enhancing transparency and collaboration. Moreover, comparative studies and market demand analyses can provide valuable insights into global best practices and emerging airport development trends, informing Lithuania's strategic decision-making.

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