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Local government projectification in practice – a multiple institutional logic perspective

Mats Fred

Faculty of Culture and Society, Department of Global Political Studies, Malmö University, Malmo, Sweden

ABSTRACT
During the last couple of decades, we have witnessed a proliferation of the project as an organizational solution in sectors as diverse as IT, housing, social services, education and culture. Despite a growing interest in the phenomenon, we know surprisingly little of how processes of public sector projectification unfold in practice, especially at local government level. This article uses an institutional logic perspective to illustrate and argue that public sector projectification can be understood and conceptualized as the enactment of multiple, co-existing institutional logics, but where one particular logic is of growing importance – the project logic. It is argued that even though the project form is often perceived as more flexible than that of the bureaucracy, the practical outcome seldom represents a radical break with traditional, bureaucratic management models. Rather, it appears to aid a rediscovery and reuse of central bureaucratic practices and procedures such as reporting, documentation and standardization.

KEYWORDS Projectification; institutional logics; local government practices; Bureaucratization; ethnography

Introduction
During the last couple of decades, we have witnessed a proliferation of the project as an organizational solution in sectors as diverse as IT, housing, social services, education and culture. Research on the increasing use of project and project management (PM) techniques in the public sector (Godenhjelm 2016; Maylor et al. 2006; Grabher 2002) has commendably been captured in the concept of public sector projectification (Hodgson et al. 2019). However, projectification has also been conceptualized in broader terms where the phenomena and the consequences of its multitude go far beyond the sheer number of project organizations (Packendorff and Lindgren 2014; Büttner & Leopold, 2016) to also insinuate cultural and societal changes (Lundin et al. 2015), as well as more fundamental changes...
of projects as a ‘human condition’ (Jensen, Thuesen, and Geraldi 2016, 21). But what does this mean in practice for public sector organizations and their employees? How does the increasing use of projects or projects as a ‘human condition’ change, if at all, the conditions for and actions of public officials and civil servants? This perceived shift towards non-permanent structures in the public sector has been argued to be ‘one of the most important – although still very much neglected – administrative changes of the past decades’ (Sjöblom 2009, 165). Despite a growing interest in the phenomenon, we know surprisingly little of how processes of projectification unfold in practice, especially at local government level.

In this article, I use an institutional logic perspective (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012; Smets, Morris, and Greenwood 2012) to argue that public sector projectification can be understood and conceptualized as the enactment of multiple, co-existing institutional logics. Moreover, I use it to illustrate how one particular logic is of growing importance: the project logic.

Institutional logics ‘represent meaning systems that shape problem perception […] they are seen as sense-makers […] motivational forces […] and guides to behaviour’ (Fincham & Forbes, 2015:658). Hence, the project logic may prescribe not only how specific projects are run but also how ‘ordinary’ public services day-to-day activities are organized and executed. Projectification then is not only a reference to the increasing number of projects but also a wide range of processes of change in which organizational and individual actors transform and adapt to practices, assumptions, values, beliefs and rules associated with projects and PM technique. When researchers try to measure projectification (see: Schoper et al. 2018; Wald et al. 2015), they tend to miss a great deal of its importance and impact as the effects of projectification are not traceable solely via the number of projects undertaken in different industries, fields or societies. Instead, I argue that processes of projectification are to be found in the growing reliance on a project logic – in all areas of local government practices. How these processes of projectification unfold is the subject of this article.

Although the institutional logic perspective has been criticised for neglecting the microlevel origins and initial moments of institutional change, in this article I ‘pay closer attention to the unfolding of change as it arises from the day-to-day actions of individuals at work’ (Smets, Morris, and Greenwood 2012, 877). Through ethnographic fieldwork of observations and interviews, I study local government organizational development work as it aims to increase municipal efficiency and collaboration, and how the involved organizations and civil servants’ efforts enact multiple, co-existing institutional logics. I investigate how institutional change, in terms of the growing importance of project logic in the public sector, emerges from project inspired actions in the everyday work of civil servants, and how that change is strengthened within the organizations and also
radiated to the field level of municipal organizational development (cf. Smets, Morris, and Greenwood 2012).

The article’s main contribution is directed towards the literature on public sector projectification, particularly how processes of projectification unfold in practice. In addition, it focuses on theories of institutional logics and how multiple logics interacts. The article is organized into seven sections. Following this introduction is a theoretical discussion of institutional logics in practice and public sector projectification. Thereafter, I introduce the Swedish case and develop a framework for analysis where local government practices are described through four different institutional logics. How the institutional logics are studied and with what empirical material is then described in some detail, followed by the analysis of the case. The article ends with a concluding discussion.

**Institutional logics and organizational practices**

In this section, the institutional logic perspective and its relations to local government practices and processes of projectification is described. Thereafter, I present an analytical framework of Swedish local government institutional logics and how civil servants and politicians act upon these and translate them into organizational practices.

Institutional logic is first and foremost a field-level concept. It was introduced by Friedland and Alford (1991), who conceptualized Western society as an inter-institutional system comprising ‘the capitalist market, bureaucratic state, democracy, nuclear family, and Christian religion’ (p. 323). Society, they argued, is made up of several institutional logics that ‘are interdependent and yet also contradictory’ (1991, 250), meaning that several institutional logics are ‘available,’ and possibly often in conflict. Thornton and Ocasio (1999, 804) define institutional logics as ‘the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality.’ Earlier research with an institutional logic perspective has described and analysed ‘how to interpret organizational reality, what constitutes appropriate behaviour, and how to succeed’ (Thornton 2004, 70) within the confines of a specific field. Studies have emphasized the co-existence of different logics, and institutional change is often explained as a movement from one dominant logic to another (see Purdy and Gray 2009; Dunn and Jones 2010; Fincham & Forbes, 2015). In tandem with researchers like Lindberg (2014), Pache and Santos (2010) and Reay and Hinings (2009), I regard organizations as places where co-existing institutional logics – in combination with local, embedded meanings – produce a variety of local practices. I also embrace what Greenwood et al. (2011, 322) call ‘the nestedness of field-level logics’. This ‘nestedness’ implies vertical complexity (several levels of interplay:
field-, organization-, individual-), as well as horizontal complexity (several logics at play in the same field or practice). Greenwood et al. argue that a logic might very well be represented within an organization, but what matters for the logic to function as a source of organizational change is ‘the thickness of the ties’ between organizational members and field-level actors, or activities. Finchham and Forbes (2015:658) describe this in terms of ‘bridging the gap’ between meta-logics, at a societal level, with the meso and micro level – they see logics working at an ‘organizational level and within workplaces as well as for larger cultural systems.’ Hence, institutional logics carry meaning, but meaning also arises through social interaction in concrete settings (Hallett and Ventresca 2006). Here I embrace Binder’s (2007) idea of the organization as not ‘merely the instantiation of environmental, institutional logics “out there”… where workers, seamlessly enact preconscious scripts valorized in the institutional environment’ (p. 551). Instead, she argues that organizations are places where people and groups ‘make sense of, and interpret, institutional vocabularies of motive, and act on those interpretations’ (ibid.). Organizations then are places where employees gather and interpret information and make decisions ‘that sometimes depart from official policy, but also sometimes embrace institutional logics for all variety of reasons, and in all variety of ways’ (ibid.). Field-level institutional change may then ‘emerge from the mundane activities of practitioners […] becomes rationalized at the level of the organization […]and] then moves to the field […] and instigates institutional change’ (Smets, Morris, and Greenwood 2012, 877). Organizational practices are continuously subject to change; and to zoom in on the dynamics of practices is therefore imperative to understanding stability and change in institutional logics (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012, 132).

The growing reliance on projects and project management techniques to structure activity was first termed ‘projectification’ by Midler (1995) as he described the transformation of Renault from a classical functional organization to that of ‘autonomous and powerful project teams’ (Midler 1995, 36). This focus on the single organisation as a unit of analysis has later been referred to as ‘organisational projectification’ (Maylor et al. 2006) and described as a ‘narrow’ definition of the phenomenon (Packendorff and Lindgren 2014). Following this research, various studies have been made indicating similar developments in other businesses or organisational fields. However, in recent years, some researchers suggest that there are ‘broader’ fundamental discursive changes accompanying this ‘narrow’ projectification as projects and PM techniques ‘become embedded, naturalised, and institutionalised across organisations, societies, and in everyday lived experiences’ (Hodgson et al. 2019). At its broadest, the phenomenon is referred to as ‘the project society’ (Lundin et al. 2015), or even ‘the projectification of everything’ (Jensen, Thuesen, and Geraldi 2016). Hence, the growing reliance on PM techniques and tools has been observed at a societal level as
well as a meso and micro level. Here I understand the growing reliance on PM techniques as an institutional logic of growing importance in local government practices.

Swedish local government practices and institutional logics

In Swedish local government one might come across multiple logics ‘and how these relate to each other, and are acted upon, varies from situation to situation’ (Lindberg 2014, 486). In this section, I describe Swedish local government practices to a varying degree, corresponding with a political logic, a bureaucratic logic and a market logic. In addition, I propose the argument of projectification as the growing importance of yet another logic – the project logic. This logic emphasizes somewhat different (compared to other logics) ways to interpret, practice, describe and prescribe what is and should be going on in local government. The project logic may influence and change some aspects of the other logics; moreover, it may amplify and complement some characteristics in those logics while clashing with or preventing others.

Compared to most other countries, local self-government is strong in Sweden – there is great freedom for each municipality to decide about its own activities and organization, and they have independent powers of taxation stated in The Instrument of Government. (cf. Montin and Granberg 2013; Larsson and Bäck 2008). Swedish municipalities, employing approximately 25 percent of the total national workforce (roughly 760,000 persons), have comprehensive responsibilities and activities (cf. Bäck and Johansson 2010).

Bureaucratic logic

In terms of institutional logics, Swedish local government organizations are heavily inspired by a bureaucratic logic, described by Styhre (2007, 6) as the outcome of ‘a rule governed process of organizing complex undertakings.’ The bureaucratic logic is characterized by routines, stability, efficiency, predictability and transparency (see Poulsen 2009; Ellström 2009; Fisker 1995). The idea of public sector bureaucratic organizations corresponds greatly to Weber’s legal-rational model, which describes bureaucracy as hierarchical, rule enforcing, impersonal in the application of laws, and constituted by members with specialized technical knowledge of rules and procedures (Weber 1948). However, Peters (2003) argues that ‘contemporary public administrators find it difficult to give voice to values of Weberian public bureaucracy without appearing to be anachronistic’ (in Byrkjeflot and Du Gay 2012, 87). Bureaucracy is presented as so thoroughly antiquated ‘that to invoke its name is to be labelled at best nostalgic, and at worst, irrelevant’
However, several researchers show how the values and practices of bureaucracy are as relevant today as ever before (Olsen 2017; Goodsell 2004; Parker and Bradley 2004; Peters 2003; Styhre 2007, Hodgson, 2004). Efforts to eradicate bureaucracy from the map of public administrations appear to have failed in many respects (Ibid.).

In relation to projects, the logic of bureaucracy is often represented by ‘permanent’ or ordinary organizations, while the projects are viewed as ‘temporary’ organizations (Lundin and Söderholm 1995) or post-bureaucratic organisations (see Styhre 2007; Parker and Bradley 2004). To organize in project form is described as a way to avoid ‘all the classic problems of bureaucracy’ (Packendorff and Lindgren 2014, 7). In local government, bureaucracy stands for stability and durability, and projects are used as experiments to develop specific methods, tools or new routines that are intended to develop and change local government organizations and practices.

**Market logic**

In the late 1970s, Western societies began to introduce a whole range of ‘new’ ideas and reforms advocating results orientation and value for money as key public administration management concepts. The reforms, subsequently known as New Public Management (NPM), consist of several conflicting elements, but the common core is the marketization and corporatization of public administration inspired by the firm as an organizational model (Hall 2012). This means organizing public administration like any other company in a market of different public-sector services and using management techniques from the private sector to do so. This is the market logic (Thornton 2004; Karlsson 2019), a logic that emphasizes the accumulation of personal – as well as organizational – wealth and income. Market logic is based on the idea that citizens, often referred to as the clients, should be the ones making the final decision regarding services, and their criteria of quality is the guiding reference point (see Thornton and Ocasio 1999). The market logic is also based on ideas of competition: between ideas, employees, organizations and funding, for instance (see Nyberg 2017, 82). In countries where the adaptation to NPM has progressed a great deal (New Zealand, the UK, the Nordic countries), the market logic is also more relevant (Skelcher and Smith 2014). Examples of practices associated with market logic are outsourcing and the ‘expansion of public authorities’ purchasing of goods and services through competitive tendering’ (Hansson 2010). Regarding the market logic and the relationship to project organizations, the increasing focus on performance and (financial) efficiency that is significant for market logic also resonates well with ideas of project organization.
**Political logic**

Local governments are also governed by political logic: a logic that is more change-oriented and perhaps more flexible than the logic of bureaucracy (Styhre 2007; Byrkjeflot and Du Gay 2012). Political logic is characterized by democratic ideals, decisiveness and the ability to act (see Larsson and Bäck 2008). Moreover, it is a logic that encourages the visible aspects of change and development efforts (Fred 2018). However, it is a logic of conflicting entities in which different parties may want completely different things (Larsson and Bäck 2008). While bureaucratic logic encapsulates a perception of time as more or less infinite and the project logic as temporary (Lundin and Söderholm 1995), political logic is more closely related to specific time frames regulated by elections. In Sweden, elections are held every fourth year, and political logic may influence politicians and civil servants differently, depending on whether an election is on the horizon or has just been held. Through elections, political logic is also bound to several political institutional levels, such as the European, the national, the regional and the local levels. Actions (and decisions) taken at any level in local government in Sweden must, to some degree, directly or indirectly please the city council and fulfil the overarching political objectives of the municipality. (Not least because they are responsible for decisions regarding the budgets.)

**Project logic**

Compared to the other logics, the project logic encompasses two almost contradictory features: one innovative, flexible feature expressed as a break with bureaucratic ideals and practices; and the other supporting control, standard operating procedures and hierarchical structures. Sahlin (1996) describes the former as projects as process and the latter in terms of projects as form. Viewed as a form, the project may be used to legitimize project initiatives (Ibid). Defining open-ended objectives (increasing employability, reducing social exclusion) that appeal to common values may encourage cooperation between different groups of actors or organizations. A well-designed and well-formulated project that expresses an appealing vision of the future is likely to receive a great deal of support, especially before the project is launched (Sahlin 1996, 252). Viewed as a process, projects could be a great power and management tool to control and direct the organization and its processes (Sahlin 1996). A practical example of this are the calls for project proposals by the many different EU funds (Büttner & Leopold, 2016). These calls are great ways not only to direct the attention of the organization but also to get employees to think about and work toward the goals proposed in the calls.
In a public sector context, projects have often become associated with development and innovation (Sjöblom 2009), but at the same time they are also associated with the notion of control, clarity and output. This duality makes projects even more attractive. Practices associated with a project logic can be regarded as exercises delivering both ‘controllability and unpredictability,’ promising a solution to clearly defined objectives, plans of how to reach them, and techniques for how to evaluate them, at the same time as they can be argued to deliver innovation and organizational change (see Sahlin 1996). However, the duality of the project logic has also led to contradictory organisational outcomes, where a project’s promise of debureaucratization results in rebureaucratisation, for instance (see Hodgson, 2004; Rhodes and Milani Price, 2010).

Coexisting logics competing for attention

In their day-to-day work, local government employees continually face situations that call for various actions to be taken: actions that are guided by institutional logics. The logics are to be understood as coexisting – competing, one might say – for attention, but they need to be acted upon to be relevant to practices (Lindberg 2014). This means that the logics do not exist per se, but must be performed; thus they are continuously re-constructed in practice. I regard institutional logics as sets of expectations regarding social relations and behaviour (cf. Goodrick & Reay, 2011). However, individual and organizational actors may also choose to act – or not – upon them. In this respect, the different logics offer ‘…ways of imagining organizations, their inner lives and how they are to be coordinated… In the process, other ways of thinking, acting, calculating and organizing are displaced’ (Clarke et al. 2015, 97).

Research design, fieldwork techniques and analysis

In this study, I have used an institutional ethnographic approach because it allows me to combine multiple data sources to capture the linkages among local settings of everyday life, organizations and translocal processes of administration and governance (Scott, in Devault and McCoy 2006, 15). In other words, it captures the interplay of the practical activities of civil servants and institutional logics in their organizational and institutional context (Smith 1999). Institutional ethnography does not restrict the fieldwork or the analysis to organizational boundaries. Rather, it places the experiences and practices of individuals within a multilevel organizational and institutional setting in which actions taken at one site – in my case Eslöv, a Swedish local government entity – affect and are affected by the organizational and institutional environment. Eslöv was chosen as a starting point for my research for several reasons. On the
one hand, Eslöv is a ‘typical case’ (Seawright and Gerring 2008) as it is an average Swedish municipality in terms of its organization and number of employees, and in terms of its size, population, age, median income and unemployment rates. On the other hand, Eslöv appears to be a rather ‘extreme case’ (Ibid.) in its fascination with projects, both on the political level and among the managers and civil servants. For a period of about six years, I followed and interviewed civil servants, politicians and consultants in Eslöv, and its institutional and organizational environment. In total, I conducted well-planned scheduled research interviews with 52 people: of which 25 were employed in Eslöv (as politicians, civil servants at a strategic level, or as project managers); 18 came from other municipalities (employed as civil servants at a strategic level, or as project managers); 8 were employed by a regional or national agency (employed at a strategic level); and 1 consultant. As an institutional ethnographer, I have been ‘driven by a faithfulness to the actual work processes that connect individuals and activities in the various parts of an institutional complex’ (Devault and McCoy 2006, 32). Consequently, I have interviewed people in Eslöv and people in the regional and national context of their work. Eslöv has functioned as a starting point from which I have followed the actions related to the project logic. The methodological ambition of my work has been to describe the institutional complex of local government projectification, as held together not only by the actions of local government civil servants and organizations but also by project conferences, project networks, project and PM publications, project consultants, and PM associations and project training programs. The stronger the connections between these actors and activities, ‘the more likely the [project] logic will insinuate itself into the organization’ (Greenwood et al. 2011, 342–343).

The case – projectification of local government

Suddenly it all exploded – everybody started to talk about projects, even about things that were not projects, and that was great! (Interview, city manager, 2015).

This quote, from the city manager in Eslöv, illustrates my impression of the organization when I was first introduced to it. In my introductory interviews, the project logic appeared to be disseminated, at the expense of the other logics, throughout the entire organisation in various ways. Civil servants talked about their daily operations in terms of projects: they were referred to as project managers, ordinary activities had project plans, and there was talk about gatekeepers, steering groups and stakeholders – concepts usually associated with PM, and perhaps not so much with traditional bureaucratic local government.
When asked about the background to the seemingly heavy focus on projects, the city manager described the development of a project model as particularly important in that process. The project model arose as a result of a trainee program implemented in the year 2000 and focused on finding future leaders within the organization.

The trainee program led to several actions being taken by the municipality that edged it toward an increasing reliance on the project logic. First, the trainee program itself introduced project methodology as an important skill for future leaders in Eslöv. These skills, in turn, were carried by the 40 trainees to different parts of Eslöv. Even though not all of them became leaders in Eslöv, the bulk of them continued to work there. Secondly, those who applied but were not accepted to the trainee program (roughly 60 civil servants) were given PM courses. Third, a project model was developed and disseminated within the organization as a management tool/policy.

The development strategist in Eslöv spoke of the project model as a solution to a fragmented organization in need of significant reorganization, but also of an organization without the energy and resources to implement it:

> Organizationally, we are heading toward more hierarchy. This very flat organization does not function anymore. The society has changed. You want more hierarchy, but at the same time to have influence on working procedures and the capacity to do something, and I think that the particular structure from the project has exactly that: clearly defined project owners, project leaders who lead distinct groups with defined tasks. [The project model] should act as a bridge between these two systems. The project model is implemented in the old organization, because you do not want to change the organization, since organizational change is costly (Interview, development strategist, 2015).

In this example, the project logic is directed towards the ordinary organisation and operations, not specific projects. Moreover, the objectives for the actions call for more hierarchy, order and control – objectives perhaps traditionally thought after through a bureaucratic logic. The project logic is as such to be acted upon in order to ‘move’ the organisation closer to the ideal model of bureaucracy. The development strategist views the organizational principles of a project as something that can help the organization in need of transformation. This is, according to him, the reason for Eslöv investing so much energy and resources into a project model and the associated project training programs. Several project courses directed at civil servants, as well as politicians, have been organized since the trainee program. A consulting firm has been responsible for most of these courses. They describe how the courses were designed to take the day-to-day assignments of civil servants into account and to introduce a project perspective to them:
People in these [local government] organizations are doing lots of work in the project form, but they don’t always label it as projects for some reason. But they are projects, and they [the organizations] benefit immensely from the project form. So, we bring that with us [into the PM courses]. We take their day-to-day work and tweak it a little bit to fit it to the project format, and that also gives them some tools to help them understand how everything holds together (Interview, consultant, 2014).

Here the project logic is viewed not only as something that already permeates much of local government work but also as something that can (and should) be made more explicit. Other features of the organisation may also be ‘tweaked’ a bit, adapted, to fit the project logic more thoroughly. The PM courses have left the municipality with quite a few staff highly skilled in PM: ‘[t]here are even more project managers than there are projects in our organisation’ (Interview, development strategist, 2013). Despite this, there is still a demand for more project courses. The courses have not been exclusively aimed at civil servants but also at managers and politicians, thus encouraging all levels of the organisation to adapt to, or act upon, the project logic.

As illustrated in the quotation above, a more linear model of top-down implementation is not only demanded by managers but also desired by ‘ordinary’ civil servants. The ability to work according to a project logic is desired both from ‘above’ and from ‘below.’ However, while specific projects often represent a break from the ordinary bureaucratic work, the use of a project model and the encouragement of project methodology appear to be directed at achieving organizational clarity, order and control, thereby encouraging a bureaucratic logic.

A project model becoming an organizational policy

The project model is described as having a policy-like status for the entire organization. The project model is described in a 23-page document entitled ‘Guidelines for projects.’ The project model is not exclusively a tool for clearly defined projects:

…the daily work should also have clearly defined objectives, a plan for the use of time and resources, be documented and, to some extent, be limited in time and scope (Guidelines, 2014: 4).

The model consists of four phases, each with document templates attached, prescribing what is to be taken into consideration and what to achieve at each step: project proposal, project plan, status reports, final report, etc. There is also a ‘gatekeeper’ at each step with the authority to make decisions about whether to continue with the project or not.
The consultant involved in the development of the model argued that the model is to function as a guide to plan, structure and document work without letting these things take over: ‘Some of the classical PM tools or models include 80 templates and 45 different checklists, and then it becomes too much documentation’ (Interview, consultant, 2014). He continues to explain how they wanted to find a balance in which the project model could guide the employees without exposing them to too much work: ‘[t]he model that Eslöv bought from us is probably the smallest on the market’ (ibid.).

There is also pressure from departments within the municipality to work more according to plan and through the specific project model:

...if you compare the softer policy areas, especially education, where you can initiate a huge project without a visual plan, no target scenario and no procedures on how to go about it, with construction and real estate where you have plans stating exactly how things will turn out with a margin error of perhaps 3 mm, one becomes absolutely appalled. They know nothing about how to run a project in the soft sector (Interview with manager, Service Department, 2016).

The ‘harder’ policy areas (infrastructure, buildings, traffic and IT) have a long tradition when it comes to organizing work in project form, and people responsible for the project model, including the city manager, have a background in these departments. When they moved, they brought with them the imperative of the project logic. Eslöv’s leading politician confirms that these departments have a long tradition of project work. Further, she acknowledges the diffusion of the project format to other parts of the organization and embraces the clarity it brings:

They [the technical departments] work a lot with projects ... There is orderliness, they know exactly what to do and they have been to us [the City Council] and reported, and it is a true joy listening to them. Our manager of the business department also runs a couple of projects according to the model, and she reports to us what she is doing. Through the work of the model, her work can be presented in an orderly fashion; it then becomes easy for her to communicate to us what she is doing and where she is in the plan (Interview with Chairperson of the City Council, 2015).

The enactment of the project logic in this example is also an alignment with the political logic. To describe what you are doing in terms of projects appears to enhance your ability not only to communicate across organizational borders, and attract attention from managers and politicians, but also to create bonds between the political and the administrative parts of the organization.

A common language is regarded as a major benefit coming from the project model:
...it has become easier to agree upon what to do and also easier to understand each other across borders. The benefit of our project model is that you have to think before you act; everyone is on-board and everyone speaks the same language (Interview, civil servant/project manager, 2014).

The development strategist exemplifies the significance of a common (PM inspired) language with the concepts of ‘impact objectives and ‘deliverables.’ These concepts have been introduced through the PM courses. They aim to help politicians and civil servants to speak commonly about what should be done, by whom, for how much money and when (Interview, 2016). Due to the imperative of a common PM-inspired language, the budget procedures in all departments are now organized using these phrases.

The project logic in ordinary operations

The project model appears to be well known, at least in the central parts of the organization, among politicians and civil servants at management level. However, there are also examples in which the model is used at a ‘lower’ organizational level. One civil servant describes how regular activities in her department now are organized as if they were projects (Interview, civil servant, 2015). The project model is used to ensure that a common work procedure is followed, and she refers to their common PM language as useful within ordinary operations. Once again, the project logic is enacted to produce control and predictability rather than innovation and change. My material is full of similar examples. One of which comes from the department working with the exploitation of land for new buildings. This department, the City Manager argues, started to view its work from a project perspective – with the help of the project model – which caused it to reformulate its function as a department and, in doing so, also change work practices and presentations:

...If we set up our work as if it were a project, then we wouldn’t speak about exploitation, but perhaps about our target objective being 20 houses: we are going to have houses there, or new municipal residents! (Interview, City manager, 2014).

For yet another civil servant, an investigator at the Department for Children and Youth, the project model ‘fits right into my way of working and the way I think. It’s more a way for me to put words to the different parts of my work’ (Interview, civil servant, 2014). Here the civil servant refers to the broader fundamental and discursive aspects of the project logic and how it has become embedded and institutionalised in the everyday experiences of local government employees:

...first-line managers, principals and preschool directors might not use the same lingo, but they have the same mind-set. In our system for monitoring
and quality, we force them into this kind of thinking. So, even if you might not use the specific terminology from the project model, you still have that way of thinking (Interview, civil servant, 2014).

Although the project logic is imperative in my material, I did come across some resistance to project work, and I also found some project fatigue. The fatigue was aimed first and foremost towards clearly defined, often externally-funded, projects. People responded critically to these projects, which promised a lot when launched but were perceived as amounting to nothing. However, when the project logic was put forward through project models and project methodology in ordinary activities, there appeared to be less critique and more praise of the clarity and order it brings. One manager argued that “with a project mind-set, throughout the organization we become more prone to carry out ideas without seeking external funds (Interview, 2015.). There is a assumption that the project logic can solve all sorts of dilemma.

**Concluding discussion**

Using Swedish local government as a case and an institutional logic perspective, the aim of this article has been to argue that public sector projectification can be understood and conceptualized as the enactment of multiple, co-existing institutional logics and to illustrate the growing importance of the project logic.

One ambition was to contribute to the understandings of how processes of projectification unfold in practice, and I argue that many attempts to measure or make sense of projectification miss a great deal of its importance and impact as the possible long-term effects of projectification are not traceable via the number of projects. Instead, processes of projectification take on many, and not seldom contradictory, forms in all areas of local government practices. In Eslöv we found projects to add activities and resources to ordinary operations. Additionally, we found ordinary activities transformed to be organised and executed, or ‘just’ presented, as projects, which required adaptations on the part of the rest of the organization. Encompassing all these project practices were also activities encouraging further project activities and facilitating the growing importance of project know-how. This study shows how local government future-proof their organizations in terms of PM techniques and practices through the creation of project models, project courses, the use of a project language and the involvement of project consultants.

In Eslöv, a great deal of influence related to PM comes from the departments working with infrastructure, IT and technical services. The practices of these departments appear suitable for what Sahlin (1996) described as
'projects as form,' that is, they are characterized by the importance of planning, the focus on output and clearly pre-defined objectives. However, policy areas such as health, social care, work and livelihood have also been increasingly subjected to project organization over the years. Projects in these ‘softer’ departments are often described as devices for organizational transformation and change, what Sahlin refers to as ‘projects as process.’ With the introduction of the project model throughout the entire organization, the project-as-form perspective was imperative. It is designed to deliver guidance for planning, consistency in working procedures, a common language, and clarity regarding the roles of civil servants, as well as managers and politicians.

Another ambition with this article was to contribute to our understandings of how different logics interact. In this case, we observed a combination of all the logics, but perhaps most frequently the political, the bureaucratic and the project logic, in which specific features of ‘the project’ were used to enhance either the bureaucratic logic or the political logic. In order to show decisiveness or the ability to take action, the political logic and the project logic go hand in hand when it comes to initiating activities. However, when the practicalities of the initiated change and reform initiatives transpire, the project logic appears to relinquish the political logic and supports, instead, the bureaucratic logic. While the specific projects often represent a departure from the ordinary day-to-day work of civil servants, the use of a project model and the encouragement to use project methodology and a project-inspired language appear to be aimed more at organizational clarity, order and control, thus strengthening the bureaucratic logic. Ironically then, the bureaucratic organization appears to combat bureaucracy with more bureaucracy.

Even though the project form is often perceived as more flexible than that of the bureaucracy, the analysis here indicates that the practical outcome of the project logic does not necessarily represent a radical break with traditional, bureaucratic management models. Rather, it appears to aid a rediscovery and reuse of central bureaucratic practices and procedures, such as reporting, documentation and standardization (see Hodgson, 2004; Fred 2018). This point of ‘rebureaucratization’ have been made before, by Hodgson (2004), but in a private sector setting. I add to this argument the practical details of how this happens (even) in a public sector context.

As described by Diefenbach and Todnem (2012), despite change management rhetoric, teamwork and projects, ‘hierarchical order and control continues to rule the organization’ (p. 8). Even when explicitly trying to work according to the imperatives of innovation, collaboration and organizational change – often encourage by the political logic or reform initiatives aided by a market logic – Eslöv embraced the project logic, but did so to produce more clarity, order and control. ‘We are heading toward more hierarchy,’ as one manager pointed out. He continued to argue that managers and civil servants ‘want more hierarchy, but at the same time have influence on working procedures and the capacity to...
do something, and I think that the particular structure from the project has exactly that.’ More hierarchy is welcomed and even sought after by civil servants as well as politicians. The critique against the increasing use of projects – and the project society as contributing to organizational structures dissolving in favour of more temporary, flexible, organizations with fluid boundaries (see Löfström 2010; Ahne and Brunsson 2008; Powell 2001) – appears to neglect at least parts of the actual practices as well as the duality of the project logic. Though the intentions of organisational reforms may be innovation, change and transformation, there are evident examples of project practices encouraging the bureaucratic logic, albeit in the name of ‘the project.’

Perhaps one can talk about two separate, and maybe even competitive, bureaucracies: the first a more traditional bureaucracy manifested in practice by hierarchy, rule enforcement, a silo mentality, permanence and a cyclical perception of time in which phenomena are recurring time and time again; and the second project bureaucracy in which PM techniques of rationality and planning are used to bring order and clarity to organizations through a linear perception of time in which phenomena are planned, executed and then terminated. Or perhaps one should view projects as a way of moving closer to the ideal model of bureaucracy – an attempt to bridge the gap between official hierarchy and effective authority (See Bailey et al. 2017). The values and practices of bureaucracy are somewhat disguised in concepts such as social investment or social innovation, implying innovation, flexibility and transformation. However, the case studied here indicates that the project logic is not an ideal that exceeds or surpasses bureaucracy, ‘but acts as another marker for the bureaucracy’s ability to survive and adapt’ (Rhodes & Milani Price, 2010:241).

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Notes on contributor

Mats Fred is a post-doctoral researcher at the Department of Global Political Studies at Malmö University, Sweden. His interests include the role of change agents and experimental techniques and tools of governance in local government. Recently he co-edited *The Projectification of the Public Sector* (Routledge, 2019) and published his dissertation ‘Projectification, the Trojan horse of local government’ (Department of Political Science, Lund, 2018).

ORCID

Mats Fred http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2108-0973

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