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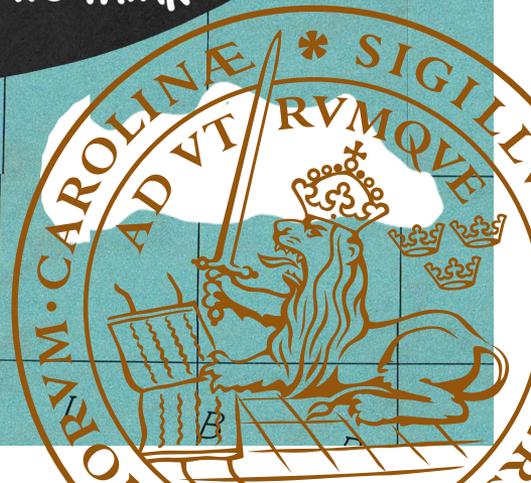
PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00



Navigating Open Politics for Change In Swedish Bilateral Development Cooperation Projects

JENNY IAO-JÖRGENSEN | FACULTY OF ENGINEERING | LUND UNIVERSITY

it's not starting from scratch:
it's building upon practices and ideas
that have flourished in the cracks
Of Crises. Redefining development
means challenging how we know,
how we work, how we relate,
how we divide resources,
and how we think.



Navigating Open Politics for Change in Swedish Bilateral Development
Cooperation Projects

Navigating Open Politics for Change

In Swedish Bilateral Development Cooperation Projects

Jenny Ngaichan Iao-Jørgensen



LUND
UNIVERSITY

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Abstract:

International development cooperation is undergoing a transformation, driven by the urgent need for more effective, holistic approaches to address enduring global challenges. This thesis explores the paradigmatic shift towards complex adaptive systems (CAS) thinking in Swedish bilateral development cooperation project management, in response to these challenges. This shift mirrors a broader evolution of the field from traditional project management approaches to encompassing more adaptive, inclusive and integrated management approaches and partnership models. Focussing on Swedish central governmental authorities, key implementers of Swedish bilateral public sector development cooperation projects, the research investigates their navigation through the evolving landscape of global development agendas, like the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, as they seek to balance traditional managerial approaches with emerging institutional logics. Employing an open-polity perspective, this thesis delves into the internal and external organisational political dynamics influencing the authorities' everyday project managerial practices in the context of these global agendas. Through multi-method data collection over four years, the research uncovers the dynamic interplay of managerialist, developmental, and collaborative logics in the authorities' interactions with their funder, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), and their organisational adaptation processes amidst complex challenges. It highlights how these logics are socialised and negotiated in their unique principal-agent relationships, providing a nuanced understanding of the application of CAS thinking in practice. Real-time observations of a multi-country project during the COVID-19 pandemic provide further insights into the growing importance of adaptability, co-agency, and multidimensional complexity management for enhancing the transformative potential and effectiveness of bilateral development projects. This thesis contributes with a nuanced theoretical perspective and new case material to public administration, development research, and project studies, underscoring the importance of collaborative rationality, multidimensional resilience, and cross-disciplinary learning in navigating the open polities for organisational change in contemporary development cooperation projects. It enriches the understanding of the socialisation and negotiation processes in Swedish bilateral development cooperation, laying a foundation for future CAS-informed research and practices in development cooperation.

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Navigating Open Polities for Change

In Swedish Bilateral Development Cooperation Projects

Jenny Ngaichan Iao-Jørgensen



LUND
UNIVERSITY

Supervisor:

Associate Professor Henrik Hassel, Lund University

Co-supervisors:

Professor Misse Wester, Lund University

Associate Professor Marcus Abrahamsson, Lund University

Faculty Opponent:

Associate Professor Susanna Alexius, Stockholm University

Examination Committee:

Associate Professor Joana Geraldi, Copenhagen Business School

Associate Professor Jörgen Sparf, Mid Sweden University

Associate Professor Jesper Sundewall, University of KwaZulu-Natal/Lund University

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Faculty of Engineering, Division of Risk Management and Societal Safety, Department of Building and Environmental Technology, Lund University

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MADE IN SWEDEN 

Dedicated to Johan, Christian, David
爸、媽和星忠伯父

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Before transitioning into academia, I was at the forefront of development cooperation. Like many of my peers, I grappled with complex issues, navigated a diverse and often misaligned set of stakeholder demands, and sought solutions that would hopefully and meaningfully impact people's lives. However, the deeper I delved into the field, the more I became aware of a pervasive issue – we were consistently entangled in intricate, evolving challenges, juggling a mix of top-down (donor-driven) and bottom-up (locally-led) approaches. This often resulted in a disconcerting gap between our noble intentions and the actual outcomes of our efforts.

Progressive concepts such as 'Doing Development Differently', 'whole-of-society' efforts, and 'decolonising development' began to resonate with me. These ideas, which advocate for context-specific, innovative, adaptive, collaborative, and locally-led solutions in the post-aid and sustainable development era, seemed to address our core issues. However, translating these progressive notions into the everyday realities of development practice, dominated by persistent linearity and the interests of powerful actors, was no simple task.

I found myself inspired by practitioners' enthusiasm to challenge persistent institutions to make space for these new ideas; yet frustrated by the often narrow views and taken-for-granted assumptions in research of either the opportunities or challenges for change in development cooperation practice. So I embarked on this journey, not as a detached observer but as an engaged scholar with a vested interest to find out 'what's actually going on?'. My goal was to understand the rules of the game, the potentials and pitfalls of these progressive ideas from a ground-up and multi-stakeholder perspective.

This thesis, therefore, is my 'stretch-the-envelope' endeavour to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge, policy rhetoric, and on-the-ground realities. I hope this work will prove valuable to public administration, project management and development researchers, fellow practitioners, educators, and consultancy firms working to enhance the quality and effectiveness of development practice in a rapidly changing world. This thesis is my humble contribution to the ongoing conversation about making development cooperation more effective and relevant to real-world challenges.

It would be impossible to acknowledge everyone whose ideas and encouragement helped me complete this thesis. However, I must mention my supervisory team, Henrik Hassel, Marcus Abrahamsson, and Misse Wester, for their invaluable advice and encouraging feedback. I was immensely indebted to Phu Doma Lama for her camaraderie and intelligence in our uncharted engaged scholarship journey. I extend my gratitude to Mats Fred, Per Becker, Tove Frykmer, Henrik Tehler, Monika Berg, and Wen Pan Fagerlin for their thoughtful and constructive feedback at various stages of this thesis work. I also thank Maria Andrea Nardi and Magnus Hagelsteen for our enriching discussions on incorporating complexity thinking into educational curricula and teaching methodologies. Lastly, I gratefully acknowledge the unconventional funding support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, which has made this thesis possible.

Summary

This thesis delves into the evolving landscape of international development cooperation, particularly focusing on how Swedish authorities apply complex adaptive systems (CAS) thinking in their bilateral development cooperation practices. This shift towards CAS is accelerated by ambitious global policy frameworks like the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. These frameworks advocate for adaptive, locally-led, and inclusive strategies, thereby challenging traditional managerial practices in the field.

At the core of this research is the open-polity perspective, which views project organisations in bilateral development cooperation as open, adaptive political entities. This perspective is crucial for analysing the internal and external organisational political dynamics that influence the realisation of CAS thinking in these projects.

Swedish government's proactive engagement in global development agendas, combined with the unique role of over 20 central governmental authorities in implementing bilateral development cooperation projects provides a rich empirical ground for exploration. These authorities' experiences are invaluable for understanding the practical application of CAS thinking currently underexplored in development cooperation.

The thesis is driven by two primary research questions:

- (1) How is complex adaptive systems thinking realised in bilateral development cooperation projects?
- (2) In what ways does it affect their transformative potential and effectiveness?

Employing a pragmatist inquiry approach and a multi-site case study methodology, the thesis draws on extensive data collected over four years, including interviews, surveys, focus groups, observations, and archival documents. Four interconnected studies form the core of the thesis, each shedding light on the nuances of integrating complex adaptive management into development cooperation projects.

The key contributions and reflections of the thesis are as follows:

The open politics of hybridisation: This research reveals how different managerial, collaborative, and developmental logics interplay in the authorities' everyday project managerial practices. It emphasises the need for a holistic and anticipatory CAS management approach to handle complexity and adaptability.

Multidimensional resilience for fundamental change: By integrating multidimensional resilience with CAS thinking, this research challenges traditional management paradigms in development projects. It highlights the importance of

adaptable and collaborative strategies for effectively navigating complex development challenges, offering significant insights into transformative project management practices.

Collaborative rationality vs. the ‘Iron Cage’: The research demonstrates how collaborative decision-making and planning can challenge and reshape entrenched bureaucratic norms, offering a new perspective on managing diverse logics in development projects.

Knowledge integration and cross-disciplinary learning: The thesis emphasise the value of cross-disciplinary learning in development cooperation, showing that integrating diverse insights not only enriches understanding but also enhances the CAS discourse and practices.

The thesis bridges loosely coupled organisational change perspectives across public administration, development studies, and project studies. It offers detailed conceptual and empirical insights into the organisational political dynamics in contemporary bilateral development cooperation. It emphasises the importance of adaptability, collaboration, and knowledge integration among organisational actors. This focus on multi-dimensional complexity management sets the stage for future research and practice, particularly in bilateral development cooperation. Insights from the Swedish case exemplifies the potential and challenges of adapting to new project management paradigms, offering valuable lessons for other global development initiatives.

Populärvetenskaplig sammanfattning

Denna avhandling undersöker den föränderliga världen av internationellt utvecklingssamarbete eller bistånd, särskilt hur svenska myndigheter anpassar sig till förändring genom att tänka utifrån perspektivet på komplexitetstänkande. Denna förändring, som drivs av globala riktlinjer såsom Agenda 2030 och Parisavtalet, främjar anpassningsbara och lokalt utvecklade strategier och utmanar därmed traditionella metoder för bilateralt bistånd.

Trots att över 5 000 miljarder amerikanska dollar har investerats i bistånd globalt under de senaste sex decennierna, kvarstår fattigdom och ojämlikhet, förvärrat av kriser som COVID-19-pandemin. Sveriges unika roll, med över 20 centrala myndigheter som aktivt genomför bilaterala biståndsprojekt, ger värdefulla insikter kring denna förändringsprocess.

Kärnan i forskningen är 'Open-Polity'-perspektivet, som ser biståndsprojektorganisationer som öppna, anpassningsbara politiska enheter. Detta perspektiv är avgörande för att förstå de komplexa organisatoriska dynamikerna som påverkar hur komplexitetstänkande kan tillämpas i projektledningen.

Avhandlingen fokuserar på två huvudsakliga forskningsfrågor: hur komplexitetstänkande realiseras i biståndsprojekt och hur det kan påverka deras transformerande potential och effektivitet. Forskningen använder en pragmatisk undersökningsmetod och fallstudiemetodik, baserad omfattande data insamlat under fyra år.

De viktigaste slutsatserna inkluderar:

- **'Open Politics' och hybridisering:** Avhandlingen utvidgar 'Open-Polity'-perspektivet till en mångaktörs- och interorganisatorisk ram och belyser samexistensen av olika institutionella logiker i svenska bilaterala biståndsprojekt.
- **Mångdimensionell motståndskraft för grundläggande förändringar:** Forskningen integrerar komplexitetstänkande med mångdimensionell motståndskraft, vilket understryker behovet av holistiska och anpassningsbara strategier i utvecklingsprojekt.
- **Kollaborativ rationalitet kontra 'Iron Cage':** Forskningen visar hur samarbetsbaserat beslutsfattande och planering kan utmana och omforma inrotade byråkratiska normer och begränsningar, och erbjuder ett nytt perspektiv på hantering av olika logiker i biståndssamarbete.

Avhandlingen överbryggar löst kopplade perspektiv på organisatorisk förändring inom offentlig förvaltning, utvecklingsstudier och projektstudier. Den erbjuder detaljerade konceptuella och empiriska insikter i den organisatoriska politiska dynamiken i samtida bilateralt utvecklingssamarbete. Forskningen betonar vikten

av anpassningsförmåga, samarbete och kunskapsintegration mellan organisatoriska aktörer. Detta fokus på hantering av multidimensionell komplexitet banar väg för framtida forskning och praktik, särskilt inom bilateralt utvecklingssamarbete. Insikter från det svenska fallet exemplifierar potentialen och utmaningarna med att anpassa sig till nya paradigmer inom projektledning, och erbjuder värdefulla lärdomar för globala utvecklingsinitiativ.

Appended publications

This thesis is based on four sole-authored papers, two published and two under review. I was primarily responsible for their data collection, design, analysis, and writing. These papers stemmed from two main research-practitioner collaboration projects, as detailed in the Methodology section. In my capacity as the research coordinator and principal investigator, I was deeply involved in all stages of these collaborative projects, from their inception to the development of related publications, which are marked with (*) in the list below. These publications were crafted for practitioner-focused engagements and have been disseminated in forums focussed on facilitating collective sense-making and discussing practical implications. Within these collaborative projects, I worked alongside several research assistants and contributors from our university and external partners. Their contributions are duly acknowledged in the respective publications.

The papers presented in this thesis, while drawing from the empirical data of these collaborative projects, explore distinct research questions and are underpinned by unique conceptual frameworks I developed. They have undergone rigorous and iterative analyses, benefiting from the guidance of my thesis supervisory team and additional insights from journal peer reviews. These four appended papers represent my original contributions to the field.

The decision to author these papers independently was made to maintain a consistent theoretical narrative and address practical challenges, as further explained in the Methodology section. Despite the collaborative nature of the underlying collaborative projects, the sole-authorship approach to the four appended papers was necessary to cohesively address the distinct research questions and conceptual frameworks that I developed for each paper and this thesis. Contributions from research assistants and external partners are duly acknowledged in the respective publications.

Each paper represents my original contribution to the field, tackling different facets of the research topic and collectively providing comprehensive understanding of the complex issues within my research field. The decision to publish these papers in various journals was strategically made to encourage interdisciplinary discourse and to offer a broad spectrum of insights into the complexities of the research area.

Paper I. Jenny Iao-Jørgensen (forthcoming). Institutional Hybridisation in Swedish Public Sector Development Cooperation. *Public Administration and Development*, 43(4). <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.2035>

Paper II. Jenny Iao-Jørgensen (2023). Doing ‘Us-Them’ differently: the identity work of frontline aid bureaucrats in translating aid effectiveness policy rhetoric into practice. *Development Studies Research*, 10(1), 1-12
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21665095.2023.2186210>

Paper III. Jenny Iao-Jørgensen (2023). Antecedents to bounce forward: tracing the resilience of inter-organisational projects in the face of disruptions. *International Journal of Project Management*, 41(2), 102440
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2023.102440>

Paper IV. Jenny Iao-Jørgensen (2023). Networking in Action: Taking Collaborative Capacity Development Seriously for Disaster Risk Reduction. Manuscript under review by an international scientific journal.

Related publications

Iao-Jørgensen, J. (2023). Knowledge Integration in Aid Bureaucracies: Navigating Organisational Politics and Power Dynamics in Sida. Manuscript under review by an international scientific journal.

Englund, M., André, K., Gerger Swartling, Å., & Iao-Jørgensen, J. (2022). Four Methodological Guidelines to Evaluate the Research Impact of Co-produced Climate Services. *Frontiers in Climate*, 119(4). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fclim.2022.909422>

*Iao-Jørgensen, J. (2021, November). *Keys to making a last difference: Project Sustainability Study Summary Report*. Developmental Evaluation Report for Sida-funded ITP-DRM 2019-2024. Lund University.

*Salzenstein, L., Iao-Jørgensen, J., & Lama, P. D. (2020, December). *Project Continuity in times of COVID*. Developmental Evaluation Brief #3 for Sida-funded ITP-DRM 2019-2024. Lund University.

*Salzenstein, L., Iao-Jørgensen, J., & Lama, P. D. (2020, August). *Synthesis of Cycle 1 Evaluation*. Developmental Evaluation Brief #2 for the Sida-funded ITP-DRM 2019-2024. August 2020. Lund University.

*Salzenstein, L., Iao-Jørgensen, J., & Lama, P. D. (2020, June). *Developmental Evaluation*. Developmental Evaluation Brief #1 for Sida-funded ITP-DRM 2019-2024. Lund University.

*Iao-Jørgensen, J., & Lama, P. D. (2020, May). *Cycle 1 Evaluation Report*. Developmental Evaluation Report for Sida-funded ITP-DRM 2019-2024. Lund: Lund University.

- *Iao-Jørgensen, J. (2020, May). *Baseline Study – Cambodia: Focus on conditions for change and absorptive capacity*. Developmental Evaluation Report for Sida-funded ITP-DRM 2019-2024. Lund University.
- *Iao-Jørgensen, J., Morales Burkle M., Anger J., & Hamza, M. (2020, February). *Working paper 2: how Swedish public authorities understand, approach and operationalise their capacity development work abroad*. Report for Sida-funded SPACAP 2019. Lund University.
- *Iao-Jørgensen, J., & Lama, P. D. (2019, November). *Outcome Harvesting Study*. Developmental Evaluation Report for Sida-funded UNDP-SEPA Environmental Governance Project 2014-2019. Lund University.
- *Iao-Jørgensen, J., & Lama, P. D. (2019, November). *Baseline Study - Bangladesh, Nepal and the Philippines: Focus on conditions for change and absorptive capacity*. Developmental Evaluation Report for Sida-funded ITP-DRM 2019-2024. Lund University.
- *Iao-Jørgensen, J. Lama, P. D., Anger J., & Hamza, M. (2019, September). *Working paper 1: How Swedish public authorities understand, approach and operationalise their capacity development work abroad*. Report for Sida-funded SPACAP. Lund University.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research context

On the 14th of February 2018, a day traditionally dedicated to love and partnership, Sida, Sweden's government agency for international development cooperation, hosted an event in Stockholm titled 'Reclaim the Results – Development Talks' (Sida Sverige, 2018). The gathering attracted over 100 specialists, policymakers, researchers, consultants, and practitioners from Sweden and across the world. The opening remarks by Sida's Director-General underscored the Swedish government's dedication to pioneering a new paradigm to enhance its cause of enabling poor people to improve their living conditions. The event featured a diverse array of voices from both the Northern and Southern hemispheres, highlighting a shared understanding that old ways of managing development are not up to the task of tackling complex global challenges like social inequality, climate and disaster risks. The speakers from Sida emphasised a consensus on the need to shift towards embracing uncertainty and to perceive Results-Based Management (RBM) in development cooperation projects not just as a method, but as a mind-set and an adaptive learning culture to manage uncertainties. This perspective encourages moving away from rigid adherence to established rules, tools, or standardised reporting templates. The objective is to continually refine RBM practices within Swedish development cooperation (Sida Sverige, 2018).

These discussions at the Sida event echoed a broader movement in the field. In the last decade, academics and practitioners advocated for shifting from traditional, linear project management approaches towards adaptive management approaches, emphasising responsiveness and learning in changing environments (Brinkerhoff et al., 2018; Gutheil, 2020). Some even went further and advocated for complexity-inspired approaches to adaptive management in development projects (see, e.g., Ramalingam, 2013; Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2017). This nuanced understanding aligns closely with the principles of complex adaptive systems (CAS) thinking, as conceptualised by McEvoy, Brady, & Munck (2016), which views development interventions as part of a complex, evolving system where elements interdependent, new patterns and structures can emerge from the interactions within the system, and outcomes are emergent and often unpredictable. However, we know little about how CAS thinking is applied in real-work systems however.

While there was a clear sense of optimism and a universal recognition among the audience at the event of why a complexity-inspired approach to RBM is crucial for better development outcomes, there was less clarity on what this shift really means in practice, if and how it actually leads to better, lasting development results. These lingering questions, shared by Sida staff and others in the audience during the Questions and Answers session, pointed to the ongoing ambivalence surrounding the practical application of the adaptive management approaches in everyday project managerial practices and their effectiveness in meeting desired long-term objectives of development cooperation.

My personal experiences at this Sida event, leading to this thesis work, was emblematic of a broader paradigm shift within development cooperation—to re-evaluate and re-envision how development cooperation initiatives are conceptualised, implemented, and managed to address the complexities of global challenges of our times.

1.1.1. The evolving landscape of development cooperation

The landscape of international development cooperation is transforming, driven by the urgent need for more effective, holistic approaches to global challenges. Despite substantial investments exceeding 5,000 billion US dollars over the past six decades, global poverty and inequality persist, exacerbated by recent crises like the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2022; Develtere et al., 2021). Historically rooted in the post-World War II era and formalised by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1969, the concept of development cooperation was synonymous with official development assistance (ODA), or foreign aid (*bistånd*). The allocation of 0.7% of their Gross National Income to poverty alleviation initiatives (OECD, 2023a) has been the benchmark for many affluent OECD nations like Sweden. However, the concept has since evolved from primarily being about financial aid to encompassing a broader spectrum of initiatives. These initiatives now include capacity development, knowledge sharing, trade, and multi-stakeholder partnerships, reflecting a shift towards more inclusive and integrated approaches (Janus et al., 2014; Chaturvedi et al., 2021; Develtere et al., 2021). This shift is aligned with global policy frameworks like the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, challenging traditional paradigms and emphasising the need for adaptive, locally-led strategies (Alonso & Glennie, 2015; Chaturvedi et al., 2021).

Despite this evolution, significant challenges remain. Bilateral government-to-government financial flows, such as those from donor countries like Sweden, continue to be pivotal in shaping development cooperation. Sweden's ongoing reform efforts in its development cooperation, reflective of the global shift towards adaptability and inclusiveness, warrant continuous scholarly attention. This thesis

focuses on these efforts, particularly examining the complexities and adaptabilities in Swedish authorities' development cooperation project managerial practices.

More specifically, development cooperation initiatives today often encompass multiple economic, environmental, social, political and ecological dimensions, and extends beyond mere financial aid and technical assistance as in the past (Chaturvedi et al., 2021) to include, for instance, knowledge sharing, capacity development, trade, investment, and collaborative efforts on global development issues (Janus, Klingebiel, & Paulo, 2014). It involves diverse actors and forms of partnerships between countries, including private entities, foundations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and more, fostering 'whole-of-society' efforts and innovative solutions to complex global challenges (Develtere et al., 2021). Additionally, the contemporary framing seeks to promote balanced partnerships among all parties involved, moving away from the traditional donor-recipient relationship, where only a handful of countries of the Global North (aid donors like Sweden) traditionally determine the rules of the game and engage in one-way relationships with Global South (aid recipients) (Chaturvedi et al., 2021). However, as Develtere et al. (2021) note, with bilateral financial flows still making up a significant portion of ODA, donor countries like Sweden and their development cooperation efforts continue to play a significant role in determining how national and international development cooperation policy frameworks are put into concrete actions and impact poor people's lives. Their reform efforts as showcased in the Sida event hence deserve continuous scholarly attention.

1.1.2. Navigating complexities in project management

In the realm of development cooperation projects, traditional project management methodologies have long provided a structured approach (Diallo & Thuillier, 2005). As in other organisational fields, this conventional approach is often characterised by its rational-analytical model with clear objectives, fixed timelines, and allocated resources (Gerald & Söderlund, 2016). In development cooperation, this approach often employs tools like the logical framework approach (logframe) (Dale, 2003), logical models and other results framework like RBM (Mikkelsen, 1995). It has been favoured for its predictability and ability to measure project success, making it a common choice for donor agencies and NGOs (McEvoy et al., 2016).

As the scope and intricacy of bilateral development cooperation projects, particularly those process-led capacity development and policy implementation, have expanded, the limitations of these traditional approaches have become increasingly evident (Ika, Diallo, & Thuillier, 2012; McEvoy et al., 2016). Critics argue that such methods often overlook the multifaceted political, economic, and social dimensions inherent in development work (Escobar, 2012). These traditional approaches have been ineffective and, in some cases, even detrimental (Brinkerhoff, 2002).

Consequently, the growing demand for a more holistic and adaptive approach has spurred interest in CAS thinking in policy and research. This perspective, that takes into account the dynamic and unpredictable nature of the systems in which projects operate, is characterised by interdependencies, emergent behaviours, non-linear interactions, and self-organisation (Eppel & Rhodes, 2018; Ramalingam, 2013). This alternative approach recognises the importance of context, adaptability, and learning, and emphasises the need for a broader understanding of project outcomes beyond just measurable results (McEvoy et al., 2016). Projects adopting a CAS perspective are assumed to navigate better the complexities and uncertainties inherent in development cooperation projects and achieve more effective and sustainable outcomes (ibid).

However, despite the central role of projects in development cooperation and the burgeoning complexity theory literature, research does not provide a fine-grained understanding of how to effectively integrate this thinking into existing development cooperation project managerial practices, and what role power dynamics play. We know change does not happen in a vacuum and “no project is an island” (Engwell, 2003). Understanding the historically and culturally institutional context is crucial. In this thesis, institutions are broadly defined as the formal and informal rules, norms, and structures that guide and constrain behaviour in organisations and society (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Ocasio, 2023), underscoring the importance of their historical and cultural context. Prior research in development cooperation has suggested that rational-analytical models tend to lock projects into rectifying global political and economic problems through oversimplified administrative and technical measures (Escobar, 2012). This has resulted in ‘excessive managerialisation’ (Gutheil, 2020, p.129), ‘professionalisation’ (Scott, 2021, p. 22) and ‘technification’ (ibid, pp.260-279) which weaken the ability to articulate conflicts and inequalities related to power, and render projects either failing or performing below expectations (Golini, Landoni, & Kalchschmidt, 2018; Ika & Donnelly, 2016). Armstrong (2013) states that about 70% of development cooperation projects fail to achieve their goals or maintain benefits post-project (p. xii). This is often due to the prevalent ‘standard model’ of assessing, planning, implementing and evaluating capacity development (Armstrong, 2013; Ika & Donnelly, 2016; McEvoy et al., 2016; Kacou, Ika, Munro, 2022).

Emerging empirical evidence examining adaptive management approaches in development cooperation suggests multiple factors and agents at play in determining how projects are appraised, managed and evaluated (Gutheil, 2020; Scott, 2021; Kumi & Saharan, 2021). If indeed capacity development or other grand challenge projects in development cooperation are characterised by interdependencies, emergent behaviours, non-linear interactions, and self-organisation, complexity theory research would have to pay more attention to how co-agency and the interplay of the social, political and institutional factors manifest in alternative development managerial practices (McCourt & Gulrajani, 2010;

Honig & Gulrajani, 2017; Gutheil, 2020; McEvoy et al., 2016). Co-agency recognises that no single entity has complete control or influence over the system's outcomes, but rather, it is the collective efforts and interactions of the agents that shape the system's behaviour and development (Ramalingam, 2013; McEvoy et al., 2016). This line of inquiry remains largely discursive (McEvoy et al., 2016) and an in-depth understanding is needed of the distinct institutional realities to inform policy and practice in a specific development cooperation system (Gutheil, 2020; Kumi & Saharan, 2021).

This thesis examines how CAS thinking is applied in Swedish bilateral development cooperation. The Swedish case, highlighted by the Sida event, offers a fresh perspective on these research challenges. The study will delve into the processes, outcomes, and conditions for success in applying such approaches to Swedish bilateral capacity development projects, contributing to a deeper understanding of practical institutional realities in applying a CAS thinking in development cooperation project managerial practices. Otherwise, there is a risk that it could become the latest in a series of management fads, adopted in rhetoric more readily than in reality (Brinkerhoff, 2002).

Before proceeding to the research purpose and questions of the study, I first explain why Swedish bilateral development cooperation presents an interesting context for this research and why I consider Swedish authorities' project managerial practices a suitable case for the research.

1.2. Swedish development cooperation

1.2.1. Swedish bilateral development cooperation system

Sweden is one of the leading donors among the OECD countries, renowned for its commitment to strengthening capacities and institutions in partner countries to achieve their poverty reduction and sustainable development objectives (OECD, 2019). Swedish development cooperation is globally recognised for its pioneering approach to RBM and continuous reforms (ibid). The Swedish development cooperation system is characterised by a multitude of bilateral and multilateral modalities. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) sets the overall policy direction and coordination of Swedish development cooperation, with Sida's implementing development cooperation programmes and projects in partnership with a range of public entities, including the Swedish central governmental authorities, NGOs, private firms, research institutes, international and regional organisations (Openaid.se, 2023; Sida, 2023a).

Over the years, Sida has developed various management frameworks (including RBM and guidelines for capacity development) and actively promoted their use by implementing partners. The evolution of these frameworks often reflected the shifts in international and Sweden's development cooperation policy frameworks. For instance, adopting the 2005 Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness (OECD, 2023b) prompted a significant shift towards improving existing structures, organisations, and institutions from within, based on partner countries' nationally-owned strategies. Commitments to other global policy frameworks (viz. the Agenda 2030, the Paris Agreement for Climate Change, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction) are also reflected in the myriad of five-year strategies with a specific geographic or thematic focus. These strategies then subject most of the project proposals to competitive procedures where the feasibility of project proposals is appraised (Scott, 2021). Today, Swedish development cooperation projects operate in approximately 30 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe (Sida, 2023a), making this research in such diverse institutional contexts particularly relevant and insightful for others in similar contexts.

At the time of this study, Sweden introduced new management directives and strategies, emphasising 'whole-of-society' efforts, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and an expanded resource base, aiming for more synergistic development results and impact. Moreover, adaptive programming and adaptive management approaches were piloted in some parts of Sida, although these approaches had yet to be a standard practice (OECD, 2019). Some of these reforms were undertaken to address shortcomings identified earlier in the system.

For example, contrary to the rhetoric in the management framework, RBM practices in recent studies of some Asian and African projects were found to prioritise short-term results over long-term impact and became overly bureaucratic and inflexible (Brolin, 2017). The demand for demonstrating results could also limit collaboration with other development actors and shift focus from outcomes to outputs, misaligned with the projects' strategic objectives (Sjöstedt, 2013). Gyberg and Mobjörk (2021) also note that conceptual diversity and differing organisational preconditions within Sida could create overlaps and challenge integrating cross-sectoral issues such as gender, environment, and conflict into all development cooperation projects. This evidence suggests that the on-the-ground realities are more complex and manifest more the mentality of management by results rather than for results, which are seen as deterrents of Swedish development cooperation interventions in challenging environments like Fragile and Conflict-Affected States (Sjöstedt, 2013). At the macro level, although not exclusive of Sida or Swedish development cooperation, scholars (see, e.g., Gulrajani, 2015; Easterly & Williamson, 2011) suggest that the management frameworks of donor agencies, including Sida exhibit significant path dependency on administrative traditions, and they have implications for how global policy frameworks to be translated into development cooperation project managerial practices. Easterly and Williamson (2011) further suggested partial evidence of

worsening fragmentation and selectivity in bilateral development cooperation efforts despite escalating Aid Effectiveness rhetoric to the contrary.

The previous OECD (2019) peer review of Sweden identified similar challenges, specifically concerning coherence and coordination between Sida and the MFA, and the lack of integrated knowledge management systems which limited sharing of learning within Sida and between Swedish cooperation partners. A more recent peer review (OECD, 2023c) praised Sweden for its progress in addressing these identified shortcomings. However, recent policy changes also raised concerns in the international development cooperation and development research community about Sweden's transformative poverty reduction ambition and leadership (OECD, 2023c; Söderbaum, 2023, 6 July). The new Swedish government introduced, among others, the arbitrary and abrupt overhaul of the development cooperation policy and development research funding policy, signifying a critical junction from the relatively stable 'solidarity motive' since the 1960s (Danielsson & Wohlgemuth, 2005; Vähämäki, 2017). These changes illustrated the intricate connection between national and global policy frameworks in donor countries but also presented an evolving landscape for Swedish development cooperation research and policy implementing organisations involved (Söderbaum, 2023, 16 April; 6 July).

In essence, the intricate and evolving context of Swedish development cooperation system provides a compelling and fertile ground for the empirical exploration. Insights from the case research can further inform ongoing policy discussions.

1.2.2. Swedish authorities' project managerial practices as a case

More than 20 Swedish central governmental authorities played a significant role in the Swedish development cooperation (Allen et al., 2020). Every year, the authorities receive around SEK 600 million (around 57 million USD) of Swedish bilateral ODA for implementing a wide range of development cooperation projects (Allen et al., 2020). These projects often focus on strengthening institutions and capacities across various public administration fields (e.g., land administration, taxation, environment protection, statistics, peace and security, police, employment, crisis management). They work with MFA, Sida, international, regional and local state and non-state actors in line with Sweden's development cooperation strategic geographical and thematic areas in dozens of low- and middle-income countries (Sida, 2023a).

Many of these authorities have a long history in Swedish bilateral public sector development cooperation (Sida, 2023b). However, knowledge about their development cooperation project managerial practices is limited. Their engagement, for example, in the Balkans, can be dated back to the 1990s. Around the time this study started, 27 authorities were actively involved in bilateral (Sweden's) and EU-

funded regional projects¹ in the Balkans region alone. Unlike the NGO sector, whose engagement is mainly initiated through competitive calls, authorities may have a government directive that allows or obliges them to work internationally (Allen et al., 2020). Their growing prominence is also evident in the ‘Team Sweden’ initiative led by the MFA (GOS, 2023). This initiative focuses primarily on economic and trade promotion abroad. The new five-year (2018-2022) development cooperation strategy² dedicated to capacity development, partnerships and methods (GOS, 2019) (hereafter, the Strategy) further promoted the authorities’ role in Swedish ‘whole-of-society’ efforts to deliver on the country’s global commitment to poverty reduction and the Agenda 2030. At the time of writing this thesis, at least 40 authorities were actively involved in Swedish development cooperation (personal communication with Sida staff, June 2023). However, despite their increasingly significant role and extensive thematic and geographic reach, knowledge about how the authorities operate, manage, and adapt to the evolving development cooperation landscape as an organisational field is limited, except in commissioned evaluation research (e.g., Carneiro et al., 2015; Hydén et al., 2016; Allen et al., 2020). As documentation about the authorities’ development cooperation practice was fragmented, finding official accounts offering an aggregated view of their scale and scope of work has been challenging. This research’s informal register via Google Form in early 2019 distributed to the authorities noted at least 830 professionals (including full-time and part-time experts, consultants and local hires in partner countries).

Additionally, the evolving strategies and initiatives aimed at enhancing the authorities’ development cooperation process and results underscore the importance of studying their project managerial practices. The Strategy tasked Sida and its training centre in Härnösand, Sida Partnership Forum, with creating conditions to better equip the authorities and other Swedish cooperation partners to adopt adaptive management approaches. This is a crucial step in aligning the operational practices of the authorities with the broader objectives and reforms in the Swedish development cooperation. In 2021, to further strengthen cooperation and promote more coordinated and innovative approaches to Swedish development cooperation, Sida established a government authority hub (*Myndighetsnavet*) to more formally complement various other self-organised, regular networking and collegial exchanges of development cooperation experience between the authorities (Sida, 2023b). The hub aims to facilitate exchanges of knowledge and experiences among different authorities with regular meetings, joint activities, and the development of standard guidelines and procedures (Sida, 2022).

¹ Examples are the European Union-Twinning or Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX) initiatives, often coordinated through Sida and Swedish embassies (Sida, 2023a)

² The Strategy was halted in 2023, as part of the overall policy change to Swedish development cooperation.

By examining the internal and external organisational political dynamics through which these reform strategies and initiatives are operationalised within the authorities' day-to-day managerial practices, we can derive valuable insights into the practical implications and challenges associated with embedding CAS thinking within the evolving landscape of development cooperation. Such an understanding is pivotal in uncovering the nuanced realities on the ground and can significantly contribute to the broader discourse on the complexity and adaptability themes introduced at the outset of this thesis.

1.3. Research purpose and questions

Given the preceding research background and empirical context, this thesis aims to contribute to a more fine-grained understanding of the complexities, adaptability and the influential internal and external organisational political dynamics at play in the evolving development cooperation context. Specifically, it seeks to examine how internal and external influences manifest in the realisation of CAS thinking in existing project managerial practices, with a focus on the experiences of Swedish authorities.

This research is premised on shared historical past, concerns and interests in CAS thinking in public administration, development research and project management research. Historically, these fields have seemingly emphasised a rational, objective approach that often fails to account for the complex realities of societal and public sector challenges (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Ika et al., 2010; Eppel & Rhodes, 2018). Increasingly, these fields recognise the importance of considering both the macro and micro political and ideological contexts that influence project governance, strategic management, stakeholder accountability and societal benefits (Golini et al., 2018; Locatelli et al., 2022; Esser & Janus, 2023; McCourt & Gulrajani, 2010). This research aims to employ organisational sociological thinking by weaving together concepts from various literature streams to foster an interdisciplinary dialogue across the fields, to enrich the theoretical and practical understanding of CAS thinking in public-sector projects, particularly those aimed at addressing grand challenges (George et al., 2016; Ika & Munro, 2022; Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015).

The research is guided by two main research questions:

- (1) How is CAS thinking realised in bilateral development cooperation projects?
- (2) In what ways does CAS thinking affect their transformative potential and effectiveness?

These questions address a significant gap in understanding how CAS thinking is operationalised in practice, particularly in the context of Swedish bilateral

development cooperation projects implemented by the Swedish authorities, a critical area that remains under-explored.

This thesis distinctively delves into the academically underexplored authorities within the Swedish development cooperation system, sharing a thematic resonance with emerging literature (e.g., Gutheil, 2020; Scott, 2021) that problematises the often displaced politics in development projects' managerial practices (Mosse, 2004; Béné, Newsham, & Davies, 2008; Eyben, 2010; McCourt & Gulrajani, 2010). Here, the literature has predominantly focussed on donor agencies, Northern or Southern NGOs. This study broadens the scope to include Swedish authorities, entities gaining prominence in the 'whole-of-society' and increasingly broadened development cooperation conceptualisation (Develtere et al., 2021).

The anticipated theoretical and empirical insights seek to reconcile differing perspectives where public administration, project management and development research have previously loosely intersected. The findings are intended to equip policy-makers and practitioners with practical insights to translate the principles of CAS thinking into concrete development outcomes.

In essence, this research not only aims to bridge theoretical insights with practical applications but also aspires to inform future policy-making and project management practices in the face of evolving global challenges.

1.4. Thesis outline

The thesis is structured into seven main chapters, including the current introduction. The next chapter first situates the thesis within the existing body of work on the distinct institutional characteristics of development cooperation projects. It then introduces the open-polity perspective, which views organisations as open systems deeply interconnected with their external environments, while also functioning as dynamic polities with evolving internal interests and structures. This novel lens is used to examine how external political influences and internal organisational dynamics interact within Swedish development cooperation.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological framework of the study, centring on the pragmatist approach that informs the research design, data collection, and analysis. This approach is chosen for its emphasis on context-specific solutions and understanding the complex interplay of social, political, and institutional factors in development cooperation. It aligns closely with the open-polity perspective adopted in this thesis, enabling a nuanced exploration of CAS thinking in the project managerial practices of Swedish authorities. The chapter also addresses ethical considerations and the challenges encountered during the research, reflecting the adaptability and reflexivity of the pragmatist methodology.

Chapter 4 summarises the four appended papers that form the empirical foundation of this thesis. Paper I examines the relational complexity between the Swedish authorities and Sida in the changing bilateral development cooperation context. Paper II investigates the shifting identity narratives among Sida staff in relation to the challenges facing the authorities. Paper III explores the emergence of transformative resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic in one authority's development cooperation project involving multiple stakeholders. Set in the same empirical context as Paper III, Paper IV investigates the factors influencing the effectiveness and sustainability of multi-stakeholder networks beyond the project's lifespan. The four appended papers should be read in the order they are listed in the thesis as they build on each other, even though they constitute case studies in their own right.

In Chapter 5, the results from the four papers are synthesised to address the two research questions of the thesis. Chapter 6 discusses the findings in relation to the literature in the research fields. Finally, the concluding chapter articulates the main theoretical and practical implications of the research, and offer directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter positions the thesis within the existing landscape of research and theory across public administration, project management, and development research. These fields, interconnected through their shared focus on complexity theory and commitment to addressing grand challenges, are central to understanding development cooperation as both policy and organisational field. Recognising the inherently complex, multi-dimensional, and cross-disciplinary nature of development cooperation, this thesis constructs a theoretical framework drawing upon established theories from these diverse yet interconnected fields. This ensures that the theoretical and empirical insights are academically robust and grounded in the realities of contemporary development cooperation.

Contrary to informing the initial design of the four appended papers, this theoretical framework emerged from a reflective and iterative process within this qualitative case research. It evolved through synthesising theoretical constructs and empirical findings across these papers, providing a comprehensive understanding of the formal and informal rules at play in the research context. This evolution signifies a dynamic and adaptive approach to theory-building, responsive to the empirical realities encountered in the research (Van de Ven, 2007; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). Specifically, the framework integrates institutional complexity strands from hybridity in public administration scholarship (Denis, Ferlie, & van Gestel, 2015), the logics of practice in project management literature (Ika & Munro, 2022), and the theoretical constructs of capacity development as CAS in international development discourse (McEvoy et al., 2016). This integration offers a nuanced synthesis that provides a novel perspective on the complexities and adaptability of development cooperation projects.

The chapter begins by exploring the distinct institutional characteristics of development cooperation projects, which represent the prevailing organising forms and present unique practice and policy implementation challenges. This exploration sets the empirical context for the research, linking the theoretical underpinnings directly to the research questions and providing a foundation for understanding the implementation, effectiveness, and outcomes of these projects. Next, it delves into a comprehensive contextualisation of institutional complexity, drawing upon concepts of institutional logics and open politics from organisational management literature. These concepts serve as critical integrative elements, bringing together insights from the three research fields to form a unique theoretical framework to

operationally explore and elucidate the realisation of CAS thinking in practice, and affect the transformative potentials and effectiveness of project success and outcomes.

2.1. Complexity of development cooperation projects

Development cooperation projects exhibit unique characteristics that are pivotal in this research. According to the Project Management Institute's Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) Guide (PMI, 2017), a project is a "temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result" (p. 245). Mainstream project management literature increasingly recognises the distinctions between projects, programmes, and portfolios and the complications arising from their confused use (Pollack & Anichenko, 2021). Simply put, a project is a standalone endeavour with a specific objective, a programme is a collection of related projects managed together, and a portfolio is a collection of programmes, projects, and other work managed at a higher level as strategic goal alignment in addressing grand challenges (Ika & Munro, 2022) implied in aforementioned global policy frameworks. These distinctions are crucial for various reasons: understanding the paradoxes at macro- and micro-levels, such as defining project success, short-term and long-term benefits, and the stakeholders and contestations involved in development cooperation (Ika, 2015; Lannon & Walsh, 2020). In this vein, this research regards all development cooperation initiatives grand challenge projects (Ika & Munro, 2022).

In this thesis, the term 'development cooperation projects' refers to all temporary endeavours with a dedicated manager or management team, whether projects or programmes, aimed at addressing specific development challenges or contributing to specific development outcomes (e.g., reducing poverty, improving healthcare, reduced vulnerability to disasters, or promoting sustainable livelihoods). These are time-bound, multidisciplinary endeavours, often involving formal or informal partnerships with multiple stakeholders, and operating across various policy areas, sectors, sites and scales (such as local, national, regional and global) (Pilbeam, 2013; Ika et al., 2020). They often have to navigate networked, inter-institutional environments with complex interdependencies, necessitating methodological considerations and theorising in case study research.

Traditional donor-funded projects range from tangible infrastructure projects supervised by entities like the World Bank to less tangible ones focused on capacity development, a central feature of Swedish bilateral development cooperation (GOS, 2019; Ika & Donnelly, 2016). These capacity development projects aim to enhance individual competencies and collective capabilities, contributing to societal, economic, or ecological value (McEvoy et al., 2016; Kacou et al., 2022). They often

involve training local staff, improving public service delivery, and strengthening internal and inter-organisational processes. Operating within multifaceted landscapes, these projects can vary in terms of institutional characteristics, partnership configurations, governance structures, and relational dynamics (Ika & Donnelly, 2016; McCourt & Gulrajani, 2010). Capacity development may also serve as a complementary ‘cross-cutting component’ in the design of many projects, serving as a means, process, and end within these projects (Ika & Donnelly, 2016; Kacou et al., 2022).

In this context, development cooperation projects stand apart from traditional projects in other sectors. They focus on broader, often intangible goals like capacity development, institutional strengthening, and community resilience (Ika & Donnelly, 2016; Kacou et al., 2022), stakeholder engagements and accountability mechanisms (Brolin, 2017; Esser & Janus, 2023). Their multidimensional nature involves a diverse range of stakeholders including governments, NGOs, international and regional organisations, and local communities (Pilbeam, 2013; Ika et al., 2020), adding layers of complexity. Moreover, development cooperation projects often operate in environments characterised by uncertainty and flux. Political, economic, and social changes can significantly impact the scope and direction of these projects, demanding a flexible and adaptive approach to project management (McEvoy et al., 2016; Ika & Donnelly, 2016).

The complexities and dynamic environments characteristic of development cooperation projects present significant challenges to traditional reductionist approaches, particularly in managing intricate interactional processes and measuring project outcomes or impacts. Such environments demand strategic adaptability, coordination, and astute decision-making from project managers. McEvoy et al. (2016) and Ika & Donnelly (2016) highlight the need for project managers to navigate these complexities with agility and foresight. Furthermore, effective leadership, stakeholder coordination, and collaboration are crucial. Project managers play a pivotal role in guiding, motivating, and ensuring the active participation of various stakeholders, as emphasised by Brinkerhoff (1992) and Brinkerhoff et al. (2018). To manage these complexities effectively, a nuanced understanding of the local context is essential, along with the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. This includes paying close attention to the multiple principal-agent dynamics, a challenge that is well-recognised in the literature (Brinkerhoff, 1992; Brinkerhoff et al., 2018; Ika & Munro, 2022). Notwithstanding the multiple principal-agent relationships evident in the broader Swedish development cooperation system, within this thesis, the principal-agent relationships refer primarily to the dynamic between Sida (principal) and the Swedish authorities implementing bilateral development cooperation projects (agents). This relationship is characterised by the delegation of project responsibilities and oversight by Sida to the authorities and concern their interactions and negotiations surrounding goal alignments and implementation

strategies to ensure efficiency, accountability, and effectiveness of bilateral development cooperation (Brinkerhoff, 1992).

As introduced, the shift towards CAS thinking reflects the demands to better manage the complexities and adaptability in the development cooperation context. This thinking emphasises governing arrangements and management approaches that promote context-responsive adaptability and continuous learning for effective and sustainable project outcomes (Ramalingam, 2013; McEvoy et al., 2016). It also calls for a more integrative and reflective approach to balance the need for structured governance for stakeholders accountability with dynamic managerial practices for organisational learning to respond to anticipated or unanticipated adversaries challenging project performance and success (Esser & Janus, 2023; Ika & Donnelly, 2016; McCourt & Gulrajani, 2010).

In line with Ika & Donnelly (2016), project success should be evaluated based on the establishment of effective, sustainable systems and capacities that can continue to yield benefits long after the project's conclusion. Success in development cooperation projects is often evaluated in terms of their strategic alignment with broader-development outcomes and sustainability, not just immediate outcomes (Ika & Pinto, 2023).

Emerging evidence highlights the critical role of the boundary process between management directives from principal donor agencies and the everyday managerial practices of policy implementing agents. For instance, in studying a new Dutch adaptive management approach, Gutheil (2020) found that well-intended rules or management frameworks by principal donor agencies are not always directly translated into practice of implementing agents and can instead be counterbalanced by the broader institutional realities of the development cooperation system. Gaming (cf. Pollitt, 2013), such as intentionally producing vague indicators to minimise risks, and diverse interpretation of rules are common (Gutheil, 2020). While adaptive management can enhance operational flexibility for specific organisational actors, it might not bring about significant changes if only the symptoms, not the root causes in the system, are addressed. Additionally, some entities might have more leeway than others to adapt. This shows that while the theoretical underpinnings of CAS thinking are gaining traction in policy and practice, the practical application can remain mired in legacy systems and mind-sets (Daniel & Daniel, 2018; Davies, 2017). Research understanding how internal and external factors influence managerial practice in development cooperation projects is thus essential.

Moreover, CAS thinking emphasises learning and adaptation. Research on organisational learning suggests, "being for the learning organisation also means being against it" (Vince, 2018, p. 273). Esser and Janus (2023) observe that managerial accountability requirements in German development cooperation are often overly formalised. This formalisation can impact the effectiveness of project

management practices. They also note that organisational and professional learning can pose threat to established identities and norms as learning introduces new information and practices that challenge existing beliefs and ways of doing things, creating discomfort and uncertainty (ibid). In other words, integrating CAS thinking into entrenched rational-analytical management paradigms in development cooperation will likely reveal tensions and contestations. It is, therefore, essential for complexity theory research to pay attention to potential conflicts with established organisational cultures and practices, and how the existing cognitive and cultural institutions shape organisational and professional material practices, enabling or hindering the realisation of CAS thinking. In other words, the everyday operational project management practices (i.e., informal enactment of these frameworks in practice) can only be comprehensively understood in their intersection with the strategic-level management frameworks (i.e., formal rules, directives, and guidelines for managing development projects) in which projects reside (Gutheil, 2020).

However, the existing literature shows a limited understanding of how CAS management directives and policy frameworks influence project practices. Development cooperation projects are often complex social and political endeavours, and their institutional exception of frequently encountering adversaries and institutional complexity is widely recognised given the complex web of actors with diverse interests and resources and their interdependence for project success (see, e.g., Ramalingam, 2013; Ika et al., 2016). Much has also been written about development cooperation management frameworks (Cooke & Dar, 2008; Brinkerhoff et al., 2018) and prior research has even viewed projects as policy experiments necessitating adaptive administrative approaches (Rondinelli, 1994). We know well that experiments need feedback loops. However, we still know very little about the internal and external organisational political dynamics influencing the feedback loops in development cooperation projects' managerial practices.

Ika et al. (2020) emphasise the unique challenges and opportunities in development cooperation projects, highlighting areas where project management and development, and I add, public administration research, can cross learn from each other. This research seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities and adaptability in managing development cooperation projects that deliver global public goods.

2.2. Institutional logics

To thoroughly understand the internal and external organisational dynamics around the authorities' bilateral development cooperation practices, this thesis conceptualises these authorities as evolving into hybrid organisations. This

perspective, influenced by Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury (2012) and Battilana, Besharov, & Mitzinneck (2017), highlights the coexistence of multiple institutional logics within these entities. Hybrid organisations are marked by diverse institutional logics — cultural symbols, practices, assumptions, values, and beliefs — crucial in shaping daily organisational life (Thornton et al., 2012; Ocasio, 2023). This challenges the traditional Weberian categorisation of state, market, and society as distinct entities, suggesting a more interconnected relationship in today's world (Thornton et al., 2012; Battilana & Lee, 2014; Greenwood et al., 2011; Furusten & Alexius, 2019).

In the context of development cooperation, these institutional logics offer a framework of 'embedded agency' for networks of role practitioners (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Practitioners in these environments become pivotal in moulding and responding to these logics, thus influencing organisational actions and behaviours. The concept of embedded agency encompasses more than individual actions; it includes integration within societal institutions, geographic communities, organisational fields, and societies (Ocasio, 2023, p.14). Embedded agency allows role practitioners to navigate, interpret, and enact the prevailing institutional logic, thus being shaped by and shaping these logics in turn (Ocasio, 2023, p.13).

The impact of institutional logics in hybrid organisations is significant, as they shape goals, strategies, roles, and practices, thereby influencing development cooperation outcomes (Fjerskov, 2016). Central to the functioning of hybrid organisations is the concept of 'hybridisation', which has gained traction in public administration and development studies (see, e.g., Denis et al., 2015; Heeks et al., 2020). Hybridisation involves the combination of different organisational forms, logics, or identities (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Denis et al., 2015; Aoyama & Parthasarathy, 2016; Skelcher & Smith, 2015), critically influencing how principals (such as Sida) and agents (the authorities) interact and negotiate goals and strategies.

In this context, generating a dynamic and institutionally pluralistic perspective is vital for addressing the multifaceted demands of the evolving global development paradigm (Chaturvedi et al., 2021). As hybrid organisations adapt, they integrate foundational norms, identities, and logics with various actors and demands, seeking innovative solutions and adaptive strategies. This perspective is particularly pertinent in understanding the principal-agent dynamics between Sida, the authorities, and local partners, as they interact and negotiate goal alignments and strategic decision-making in managing these projects (McEvoy et al., 2016; Ika & Donnelly, 2016; Brinkerhoff, 1992; Brinkerhoff et al., 2018).

In essence, the multiplicity and hybridisation of institutional logics within development cooperation project management practice represent diverse mind-sets towards multiple co-existing and conflicting demands and the social construction of decision-making roles and structures among stakeholders. This thesis employs the concept of multiple logics of practices to comprehend the nature of the authorities'

development cooperation practices, their hybridisation decision-making processes, stakeholder interactions, and accountability mechanisms for projects' development effectiveness.

2.3. The open-polity perspective

Building on the diverse institutional logics and hybridisation concepts from earlier sections, the open-polity perspective, as articulated by Weber and Waeger (2017), provides a nuanced lens to dissect the interplay of these logics within the broader environmental and political context of development cooperation projects. While hybridisation and institutional logics clarify organisational behaviours, they fall short in capturing the internal and external organisational political dynamics, a gap addressed by the open-polity perspective in the CAS view of development cooperation projects.

This perspective emphasises the complex negotiation processes and coalition dynamics in development cooperation projects, viewing them as arenas where various stakeholders with different institutional logics, goals, and resources converge (Weber & Waeger, 2017). In these political coalitions, the goals and composition of development projects are continuously negotiated and bargained, reflecting the fluid nature of these projects as political entities (*ibid*). This dynamic is especially relevant in development cooperation, where diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, and local stakeholders in partner countries, bring their distinct objectives and resources to the table, necessitating ongoing negotiation and re-negotiation of project goals, methods, and adaptations to changing circumstances (McEvoy, 2016; Ika & Donnelly, 2016).

The open-polity perspective offers deeper insights into how negotiations shape the strategic objectives and routines of development cooperation projects, revealing the underlying political and power dynamics that influence decision-making (Weber & Waeger, 2017). It recognises that agents are not passive recipients of principal's institutional pressures but are active participants in shaping their environment and protecting their interests.

An illustrative example, though not directly in a typical development project context, is provided by Khan, Munir, and Willmott (2007) in their study of the soccer ball stitching industry in Pakistan. This case showcases how external pressures and the interests of both organisational and external elites led to significant industry changes, which sometimes adversely affected vulnerable stakeholders. The study highlights the critical role of networks of role practitioners, who actively participate in shaping the industry's response to challenges, resulting in outcomes that favour powerful coalitions at the expense of less influential groups (*ibid*).

The role of these networks becomes crucial in development cooperation. Practitioners, as agents who enact institutional logics and navigate hybrid environments, are instrumental in the negotiation and coalition-building processes within development projects. They embody the fluid dynamics of institutional logics and hybridisation, actively participating in shaping and reshaping project goals and practices.

Aligning the open-polity perspective with the attributes of CAS, as described by McEvoy et al. (2016), enriches our understanding of development projects. CAS views projects as contingent, emergent, and adaptive, constantly adjusting to new realities and unforeseen circumstances. This aligns with the open-polity view, acknowledging the fluid, negotiated nature of project goals and structures within complex environments.

Integrating the open-polity perspective with institutional logics provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the multi-level interrelationships within development cooperation. This framework acknowledges the dynamic and sometimes contentious nature of negotiations within projects, highlighting the significant role of power dynamics and the potential for both positive transformations and dysfunctional adaptations (Birkinshaw, Hamel, & Mol, 2008). It invites a more adaptive and reflexive approach to understanding the 'black box' of embedded and co-agency of actors and projects in the dynamic interplay of internal and external contingencies.

Operationalising the open-polity perspective requires a focus on the interplay between internal organisational dynamics and external environmental influences within project organisations. This approach is crucial for addressing the main research questions of this thesis: how is CAS thinking realised in bilateral development cooperation projects, and how does it affect their transformative potential and effectiveness? The research will examine:

- (1) Internal organisational dynamics: investigating how internal decision-making processes and structures are influenced by different logics and how these dynamics contribute to or hinder the application of CAS thinking within organisations.
- (2) External environmental influences: focusing on how external factors such as policy frameworks and stakeholder interests impact organisational strategies and practices. It is pivotal in understanding how external pressures and opportunities are navigated and incorporated into organisational decision-making.
- (3) Boundary processes: examining the interactions between the organisation and its external environment, crucial in understanding how organisations mediate between internal structures and external influences. These processes are important to reveal how organisations negotiate, adapt, and

align their internal goals with external expectations and resources. They are vital in managing the complex interdependencies in development cooperation.

This theoretical foundation guides the synthesis of the empirical exploration in the appended papers. It provides a lens through which the complexities of Swedish development cooperation projects are analysed. The integration of the open-polity perspective with institutional logics enhances our theoretical understanding of organisational behaviour in development cooperation and offers practical insights for managing complex development projects.

3. Methodological Considerations

This chapter outlines the methodological underpinnings of the thesis, building on the theoretical foundations of dynamic understanding of open politics in development cooperation project managerial practices established in the first two chapters. I will first present the pragmatist research approach, case research design, data collection methods, and analysis strategies used in the four appended papers. The chapter concludes with reflections on the research approach and process, including trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

3.1. A pragmatist research approach

The pragmatist research approach adopted in this thesis is deeply influenced by my experiences in project management with the United Nations, European Union, and the Red Cross. Witnessing the ‘dark side’ and power imbalances in traditional development cooperation, I became intrigued by the discursive shift at Sida’s event towards CAS thinking and adaptive management approaches. However, my understanding evolved through immersion in neo-institutionalist literature (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991), leading me to appreciate the importance of context-specific solutions and the interplay of social, political, and institutional factors (Mosse, 2005; Eyben, 2014; McCourt & Gulrajani, 2010; Ramalingam, 2013).

This pragmatist stance, informed by the works of Dewey (1986) and Morgan (2007), views theory and practice as interrelated, with knowledge validated through action (Creswell, 2014). In project management literature, scholars have emphasised the importance of understanding projects as social processes and practices embedded in and shaped by their institutional and socio-political contexts (Buchan & Simpson, 2020; Cicmil, 2006; Tywoniak et al., 2021). This resonates with what Gerdal and Söderlund (2018) describe as ‘Type 3’ project management research, which combines theoretical development with practical engagement to contribute to a critical yet pragmatist understanding of the nature, dynamics, and challenges of organising and managing projects, as well as their impact on individuals, organisations, and society (p.12).

This ‘Type 3’ project management research aims to explore and comprehend how the internal and external influences, and boundary processes influence the realisation of CAS thinking in everyday project managerial practices, focusing on the Swedish authorities’ experiences. Aligning with Geraldi and Söderlund’s (2016) recommendation, this research combines theoretical development with practical engagement to contribute to a critical yet pragmatist understanding of the nature, dynamics, and challenges of organising and managing projects. This allows the research to steer clear of metaphysical debates about the nature of truth and reality (Morgan, 2007) and avoid becoming blindly locked into a particular philosophical position to the neglect of seeing new possibilities (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). The focus is on practical understanding of concrete, real-world issues (Patton, 2005, p. 153). This view also aligns with the open-polity perspective.

Epistemologically, pragmatism at its core recognises the existence of multiple perspectives, shaped by social, cultural, and personal interpretations and interactions (Greenhalgh & Papoutsis, 2018). For pragmatists, what matters is not unquestionable truth but belief in and commitment to practical action (Dewey, 1986) to offer valuable solutions to an existential problem or motive (Tywoniak et al., 2021, p.300). However, this commitment to actionable knowledge from research does not entail that pragmatism is simplistic.

In fact, such an approach has, on some occasions, made the research process complex (more discussed in 3.3.4.). In a complex and adaptive system, human nature is “inherently holistic, social, relational, complex, and temporal [...] plural and paradoxical [...] capable of both following rules and doubting or questioning them” (Farjoun et al., 2015, p. 1790 in Tywoniak et al., 2021). Pragmatism encourages ontological considerations to reveal the complexity in and of contemporary organisations (Tywoniak et al., 2021). The first is a process view that considers the world as a constellation of processes that ultimately emerge, flow, develop, and grow, and that structures and processes are interconnected (Farjoun et al., 2015, p. 1789). The second is a relational view that suggests our individual characteristics are shaped and influenced by the social context in which we exist. The third is a recursive view which posits that individuals, structures, and their environments are engaged in ongoing, cyclical, iterative, and cumulative processes of co-creation (Tywoniak et al., 2021). This perspective challenges traditional dichotomies such as mind/body, thought/action, theory/practice, agency/structure, and means/ends, and extends to complexities in or of projects (ibid). This view, as argued by Dewey (1986), James (1950), Mead (2006), does not define the social world by binary oppositions. Instead, it is characterised by triadic relationships among elements that are often seen as opposites. It is therefore important to understand the interplay and interdependence of multiple factors, moving beyond a simplistic dualistic view (Tywoniak et al., 2021). This pragmatist stance in applying the open-polity perspective emphasises the interconnectedness between the internal

and external, the micro and the macro, through meanings that research participants assign to the issues and situations in the larger contexts.

Moreover, recognising that complete objectivity or subjectivity is impossible, pragmatism recommends a balance between subjectivity in theories' own reflections on research and objectivity in data collection and analysis throughout the inquiry (Shannon-Baker, 2016, p.322). Researchers must work iteratively between various frames of reference, as reflected in the diverse theoretical constructs of the four appended papers, where the pragmatic emphasis on an intersubjective approach creates a fuller understanding of organisational practices (Cunliffe, 2010). The pragmatist approach provides ontological flexibility and openness to subjectivity and objectivity through the possible use of multiple methods, data sources, and multi-level analytical perspectives across different temporal and organisational units (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Shannon-Baker, 2016). It thus emphasises transferability and offers a paradigm that can revise previous or create new disciplinary theories based on a particular context but can still be analytically generalisable to others (*ibid*). This allows valuable insights to inform development management policy and practices in similar contexts.

These ontological possibilities lead me to choose engaged scholarship (Van de Ven, 2007) as a form of pragmatist enquiry in recognition of the multifaceted and emergent nature of challenges and opportunities in development cooperation projects, as well as the need for innovative, adaptive, and reflective research practices to understand them.

According to Van de Ven (2007), understanding a complex problem or phenomenon can be enhanced by engaging and communicating across different philosophical perspectives. Engaged scholarship emphasises the importance of non-hierarchical, process-focused research practices. This approach ensures a first-hand, in-depth understanding of the phenomena under study, as the researcher is not a detached observer but an integral part of the unfolding organisational processes. A pragmatic stance allows a critical stance on the different assumptions and theorising concerning the subject of study while not being constrained by the strict either-or choices (such as quantitative and qualitative, inductive or deductive) (Stebbins, 2001).

In the context of this research, the engaged scholarship has involved collaborating with various project stakeholders, ensuring their voices and perspectives are heard and valued. As Mertens (2003) argues, a pragmatic approach should not simply be used because it is practically based but for its transformative-emancipatory perspective to intentionally collaborate with those whose voice is not typically heard on particular issues or reflected in the governance structures of organisations. This perspective allows me as a researcher to bring forth the open politics by attending to power, privilege, and voice throughout the research process (Mertens, 2003) and

make explicit my own values, ethics, and paradigm(s) (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Mertens, 2010).

The engaged scholarship approach also focuses on understanding projects not only as technical endeavours but as social processes embedded in a wider context (Geraldi & Söderlund, 2016). While not dismissing the contributions of critical development or critical management studies, they can only take us so far and may not reach the practice world. In the research context, I aim to not simply describe the complexity and adaptability of their project managerial practices but also work with research participants to develop practical insights to inform actionable solutions, at least as early attempts. This aligns with the pragmatist emphasis on practical problem-solving and actionable knowledge; hence, my research also involves presenting the preliminary findings to practitioners in accessible and relevant ways (as reflected in the related publications), although I was not involved in implementing changes as in action learning research. This approach ensures that the research findings about the realisation of CAS thinking and its impact on projects transformative potential and effectiveness can in one way or another contribute to theoretical knowledge and practical problem-solving.

My active engagement in the case study has necessitated continuous reflection on my role, influence, and potential biases throughout the research process. Collaborating closely with research partners in larger projects where my research was embedded, I have emphasised the importance of reflexivity. This reflexivity has been a guiding principle in my decision to be the sole author of the four appended papers, each targeting different academic fields. This approach is not only about maintaining the integrity of my interpretation but also ensuring that the findings transcend my preconceptions and are deeply anchored in the realities of the respective fields, as emphasised by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009). Furthermore, this approach to reflexivity is in line with third-order theorising in pragmatist inquiry. It underscores the recursive interplay between ontology and epistemology and highlights the significance of double-loop or deeper learning, as discussed by Tywoniak et al. (2021).

In essence, balancing theoretical depth with practical implications was central to the research. The pragmatist stance facilitated this balance, ensuring both theoretical robustness and practical relevance in the findings (Greenhalgh & Papoutsis, 2018).

3.2. Research design and process

3.2.1. Case study design

This research adopts a case study design as its primary research methodology, directly aligning with the CAS and open-polity perspective outlined in the Theory chapter. This approach is particularly well-suited for exploring and explaining complex phenomena within their real-life contexts (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009; Flyvbjerg, 2011), such as the complexities and adaptability in the Swedish authorities' development cooperation projects. Unlike a single case study, which focuses on dynamics within individual settings to uncover unique case features (Eisenhardt, 1989; Knights & McCabe, 1997), a multi-site case study design broadens the scope, enhancing the analytical generalisability and transferability of the findings to wider contexts (Yin, 2009; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 1995).

I selected a multi-site case study design to align with the dynamic nature of development cooperation, crucial for addressing my research questions regarding the complexities and adaptabilities in this field. It enabled a comprehensive understanding of the varying political dynamics within the authorities, providing insights into the practical application of CAS thinking across diverse contexts (Yin, 2009), as the authorities encounter, adapt to, and reconcile multiple co-existing logics of practices. This approach enables the examination of multiple levels and units of analysis, encompassing the distribution of power, decision-making processes, and the alignment of different groups' logics of actions and strategies. Consequently, it contributes to a more pluralistic and dynamic understanding (Baxter & Jack, 2008) of the authorities' realisation of CAS thinking in their everyday practices and how it affects project success and outcomes.

The open-polity framework serves as a single overarching framework to capture the internal and external influences, and the boundary processes in exploring the realisation of CAS thinking and its potential to affect development cooperation projects' outcomes. It allows for a holistic understanding, ensuring that the insights gained are reflective of the complex realities of these projects. This approach aligns with the pragmatist research stance of this thesis, emphasising the importance of practical, actionable knowledge that spans across different theoretical domains.

The multi-site nature of this research is manifested through four appended studies, each exploring different aspects of the open-polities in the authorities' development cooperation projects. This design promotes a pluralistic views, allowing for diverse theoretical perspectives to illuminate the complexity of projects (Geraldi & Söderlund, 2016). For instance, Paper I focuses on the authorities' institutional hybridisation (blending of multiple institutional logics) in the principal-agent dynamics between the authorities and Sida, Paper II on the multi-identity narratives of

Sida staff towards the complexities and adaptability in the authorities' development cooperation practice, Paper III on transformative resilience in the decision premises during the COVID-19 pandemic of an authority's real-life project, and Paper IV on how CAS thinking can be realised in networking strategies and sustainable outcomes in the same focal project. Each study, while employing distinct theoretical constructs, contributes to a holistic understanding of the authorities' experience in realising CAS thinking in their everyday practices and its potentials of enhancing project success and outcomes.

The selection of the authorities' experiences integrating adaptive logics in their development cooperation projects as the single case was driven by the opportunity for learning (Stake, 1995). This selection aligns with the pragmatist research approach, emphasising actionable knowledge and practical problem-solving, resonating with the research's aim to comprehend and navigate the evolving realities in development cooperation projects.

The multi-site case study design allows for multiple units of analysis (individual, organisation, and institution/organisation field) to address the varied nature of research questions, ultimately converging to fulfill the research purpose. The initial studies explore the experiences of three purposively sampled authorities, while the subsequent ones extend the design to a real-life project by another authority experienced with capacity development projects, employing a process-oriented study (Langley, 1999) to contrast and build upon initial findings.

In essence, this multi-site case study design aims to facilitate nuanced theorising by drawing in-depth insights from real-life phenomena and their contexts, using multiple data sources (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). This approach is crucial for bridging practical and theoretical knowledge, advancing theory, and informing practice in complex real-world scenarios (Corley & Gioia, 2011). In this research context, scenarios are understood from strategic management perspective to encompass both historical events and future possibilities and anticipated outcomes (Ramirez, & Wilkinson, 2016). The insights derived from the four papers (Papers I and II focus on past events; Papers III and IV focus on past and evolving events and future possibilities) are particularly pertinent for realising synergies among diverse and intersecting global policy frameworks and addressing the intricate dynamics of development cooperation.

3.2.2. Research process

The research process of this thesis spanned over four years, beginning in mid-2018, with the research topics iteratively emerging between the literature and empirical observations. The research process involved two main research sites. The first research site, explored in Papers I and II, focused on the realisation of CAS thinking in the Swedish development cooperation system. This site involved an in-depth

examination of three authorities and their interactions with Sida bureaucrats in the fields of data management, environmental protection, and land administration. The second research site, explored in Papers III and IV, focussed on the generating useful insights into the pathways of how complex adaptive system thinking affects the transformative potential and effectiveness of development projects. Each site reflects on different aspects of the organisational political dynamics the authorities encountered in the Swedish development cooperation system.

Initiated in 2018, the first research site emerged from a shared research interest to understand the opportunities and challenges the authorities faced in contemporary development management context. This research primarily explored in this research site the institutional characteristics of the authorities' project governance structures and their influence of the open politics on their development management practices. It involved an in-depth examination of three purposively sampled authorities in the public administration fields of data management, environmental protection, and land administration, resulting in Papers I and II.

Access to the first research site was facilitated through connections with a senior consultant, a university colleague, and a representative from the authorities' informal learning network. Despite an initial setback with a funding application at the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA)³, referral to the Sida Partnership Forum by the authorities' network led to the successful launch of the one-year research-practice collaborative project, Swedish Public Authorities Capacity-development Project (SPACAP), funded by the new Strategy to support the 2030 Agenda (GOS, 2019).

As detailed in Table 1, data collected at Research Site 1 (Dec 2018-Dec 2019) comprised interviews with 34 staff of the authorities and Sida, two focus group discussions, and analysis of 30 archival documents.

The second research site involved a complex network coordination structure and social processes of a real-life project, ITP-DRM, which explicitly attempted to realise CAS thinking in project managerial practices for more effective and sustainable development outcomes. The second research site, detailed in Papers III and IV, focused on the ITP-DRM project. As shown in Table 1, this site provided real-time data from 2019 to 2022, including 44 semi-structured interviews, 38 online survey responses, five focus group discussions, observations of 9 project events, and analysis of 41 archival documents. This extensive empirical material included real-time observations of during the COVID-19 pandemic of the project's decision-making, coordination actions and strategies, and organisational adaptations to emerging internal and external challenges and dynamics over time.

³ EBA is a government committee mandated to evaluate and analyse the direction, governance and implementation of Sweden's ODA, with a specific focus on results and efficiency.

Access to this second research site was obtained through a developmental evaluation (Patton, 2010) (*följeforskning*) collaboration agreement between Lund University and MSB that coordinated the ITP-DRM, funded by Sida. My evaluative research engagement started with the project's initiation in early 2019. My role in the MSB-university collaboration was as an independent evaluator, providing real-time observations and insights to support adaptive management in the ITP-DRM project. The focal project was a new multi-stakeholder, multi-scalar, and multi-site ITP-DRM project, funded by Sida. MSB, with its involvement in multiple government mandates for development cooperation, has an extensive pool of development cooperation personnel of diverse expertise, and a wide range of project sites across the globe. The authority is highly regarded for its leadership and innovative approach to capacity development in development cooperation within the authorities' network. MSB has recently updated its methodologies with more context-adaptive approaches to capacity development projects in development cooperation (MSB, 2019).

ITP-DRM (and the developmental evaluation research collaboration with my university) exhibited Sida and MSB's commitment to the 'whole-of-society' paradigm in implementing global policy frameworks and CAS thinking to ensure collaborative problem-solving of grand challenges. Details of the ITP-DRM are given in Appendix II (stakeholders in the project network) and Appendix III (formal and informal project interventions in one cycle's lifespan).

The MSB-university agreement granted me academic independence in the pragmatist and engaged scholarship ambition of this thesis. The role positioned me not merely as a distant researcher but as a trusted, independent witness to the project's both front- and back-stages (Goffman, 1963), allowing real-time observation of evolving contexts, interactions, and decision-making processes to help the project improve practice (we will reflect on some drawbacks later). Throughout the collaboration, I conducted various studies of mutual research interests. I was given rather unlimited access to wide-ranging project artefacts, events and stakeholders involved. I stepped down from my leading role in early 2022 to complete my doctoral project, which others, had a clear time bound. I have, however, continued to support my university colleague who took over the lead role on a needs basis.

These two research sites allowed the four appended papers to explore various research questions and theoretical constructs. Together, they allowed for a holistic exploration of CAS thinking in Swedish development cooperation. The four studies do not follow the chronological order of academic writing and publication but are presented in the order they were initiated for member-checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000) on first- and second-order analysis with research collaborators and practitioners in related publications.

Table 1
Research Methods and Empirical Data in the Four Studies

	Paper Title	Research Methods	Empirical data analysed	Geographical focus
Research Site 1	Paper I: Institutional Hybridisation in Swedish Public Sector Development Cooperation	<i>Purposive & snowballing sampling</i> Semi-structured interview Focus group Documents review Thematic analysis	34 semi-structured interviews (22 authorities' staff & 12 Sida staff: 9 in headquarters & 3 in embassies), 30 archival documents, field notes from 2 focus group discussions with (17+17) Sida and authorities' representatives.	Sweden Global An Asian country An Eastern African country and regional A Balkan country and regional
	Paper II: Doing 'Us-Them' differently: the identity work of frontline aid bureaucrats in translating aid effectiveness policy rhetoric into practice	<i>Purposive & snowballing sampling</i> Semi-structured interview Focus group Thematic analysis	12 semi-structured interviews with Sida staff (9 in headquarters & 3 in embassies), field notes from 2 focus group discussions with (17+17) Sida and authorities' representatives (based on a subset of data used in Paper I)	Sweden Global An Asian country An Eastern African country and regional A Balkan country and regional
Research Site 2	Paper III: Antecedents to bounce forward: A case study tracing the resilience of inter-organisational projects in the face of disruptions	<i>Purposive & snowballing sampling</i> Online survey Semi-structured interview Focus group Documents review Thematic analysis Content analysis	Field notes from non-participant observation of 7 project events & meetings, 18 survey responses from project participants, 15 semi-structured interviews with project stakeholders (2 Sida staff, 2 managers, 5 experts, 6 participants), 18 archival documents, 1 focus group discussion with 7 project team members.	Sweden Bangladesh Cambodia Nepal The Philippines
	Paper IV: Networking in Action: Taking Collaborative Capacity Development Seriously for Disaster Risk Management	<i>Purposive & snowballing sampling</i> Online survey Semi-structured interview Focus group Document review Thematic analysis Content analysis	23 archival documents, 29 semi-structured interviews (10 project team members, 9 project participants, 10 other project stakeholders), field notes from non-participant and participant observations of 2 project events, 20 survey responses from project participants, field notes from 3 country-specific focus group discussions.	Sweden Bangladesh Nepal The Philippines

3.3. Research methods

In alignment with the pragmatist inquiry approach and the principles of engaged scholarship, the research methods employed across the four studies in this thesis were selected for their adaptability and capacity to capture the depth and nuance inherent in the two research sites. The choice of methods was informed by my

background and experiences, ensuring a reflexive and context-sensitive approach to data collection and analysis. This methodology enriched the data, providing depth and authenticity to the findings (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009).

Table 1, presented above, offers a comprehensive overview of these methods. It categorises and delineates the types of empirical data collected and analysed, the specific methods employed, and the geographical focus for each of the four studies. This table provides a snapshot of the methodological diversity and the depth of the empirical material across different contexts

3.3.1. Sampling

The sampling strategy for each study was dynamic and adaptive, informed by the methodologies of purposive and snowball sampling as outlined by Creswell (2007), Babbie (2015) and Morse (2015). This approach was crucial in ensuring the richness and depth of the empirical material, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the two research sites. It facilitated the examination of the respective research questions in a manner that contributed effectively to the overarching research objectives of this thesis.

For the first research site (Papers I and II), the sampling focused on selecting authorities from the broader network, documents, and respondents that were central to understanding the governing arrangements and the managerial practices in Swedish bilateral development cooperation projects. This selection, guided by the principles of purposive sampling (Creswell, 2007; Teddlie & Yu, 2007), was based on their roles in implementing innovative, adaptive, and/or collaborative approaches in development projects across diverse contexts. The authorities, respondents and project artefacts chosen were involved in various fields, including statistics, environmental protection, and land administration, providing a diverse perspective on the system's functioning across levels of analysis.

In Papers III and IV, the sampling centred on the focal ITP-DRM project, particularly under the challenging conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic (Paper III), and the collaborative and sustainable outcomes the project aspired to achieve through CAS thinking (Paper IV). The selection of informants, project events, and artefacts here was based on capturing a comprehensive view of the project's response to the pandemic, including its institutional characteristics, governance structures, and social processes. This approach was in line with the purposive sampling technique, focusing on units and individuals that could provide the most pertinent information related to the research objectives (Babbie, 2015; Creswell, 2007).

Throughout the research, the sampling process was dynamic, often expanding through recommendations from initial respondents, aligning with the snowball sampling technique (Creswell, 2007; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). This approach was

particularly effective in identifying key individuals and documents that offered deeper insights into the interconnectedness and complexities within the project networks. The dynamic nature of this sampling allowed for an adaptive response to emerging insights, a hallmark of qualitative research that enriches the depth and relevance of the findings.

In this research, the sampling process was designed to maintain independence and objectivity. The selection criteria for respondents, documents, and events were clearly defined at the outset, ensuring that choices were aligned with the research objectives and not influenced by external suggestions. While recommendations from authorities and Sida representatives were considered, the final decision on each inclusion was made independently by me, the researcher, based on the established criteria. To ensure a balanced perspective, efforts were also made to reach out to a diverse range of sources, including less prominent stakeholders in partner countries and those with differing viewpoints in challenging and dynamic times as the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach was instrumental in capturing a comprehensive understanding of the realisation of CAS thinking in practice and how it affects the transformative potential and effectiveness of bilateral development cooperation projects.

Moreover, the entire process was documented, detailing the rationale behind each selection. This level of transparency in the decision-making process serves to reinforce the trustworthiness of the research. Additionally, the research methodology incorporated triangulation, utilising multiple methods and data sources to validate the findings. This approach helped in confirming that the results were robust and not overly dependent on specific sample choices. Furthermore, the sampling choices and process were validated through discussions with research collaborators, adding another layer of verification to the decision-making process. These discussions provided valuable feedback, influencing the refinement of the sampling strategy and ensuring a comprehensive and balanced approach.

3.3.2. Data collection

To thoroughly address my research questions within the multi-site case study framework, I employed a combination of interviews, questionnaires, document analysis, and observations, as typically done in case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989). These combined efforts aimed to explore the different forces behind the multiple logics—planner, searcher, and in-between—and the socialisation processes within the authorities' project managerial practices to unveil the open politics. As outlined in Table 2, the detailed application of these methods provided a comprehensive overview of the research methods and empirical data analysed in each of the four studies presented in this thesis.

In Research Site 1, a pilot study workshop and an online survey were initiated as foundational steps before employing the core data collection methods. Conducted within the authorities' network, these methods aimed to gather preliminary insights into the nature of authorities' projects, the prevailing management frameworks and logics of practices, and the Sida-authorities relationship. The pilot study workshop, conducted in Stockholm in December 2018 with the authorities' network, including Sida, solicited general views on the role and significance of adaptive logics in the authorities' development management practices and the Sida-authorities relationship. The workshop also addressed potential bias from the research funding source and my (and other SPACAP research team members') prior academic and practical experience. Subsequently, a pilot online survey using the Qualtrics survey platform was conducted for quick, broad, and quantitative insights into the authorities' everyday project management practices. Analysis of 150 anonymised responses revealed some commonalities and differences in the source, sense-making, and application of logics in the authorities' development cooperation practices. These insights informed the design of a more in-depth exploration of the governance structure and networked relationships and boundary processes inherent in the authorities' project governing arrangements and managerial practices.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary source of empirical data throughout the research process in the four studies, with other data collection methods serving a complementary purpose. In Papers I and II, semi-structured interviews were used to understand the complex dynamics within the authorities' capacity development projects. In Papers III and IV, they were used to explore the ITP-DRM project's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the network coordination strategies that influenced the sustainability of development outcomes. Interviews were conducted with respondents in person, via Zoom or Teams, or telephone, depending on the physical location and preference of the respondents. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours. All interviews adhered to ethical considerations, obtaining informed consent from all respondents in written and verbal forms. The study also ensured confidentiality and anonymity to mitigate the risk of "social desirability bias" (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960, p.32). Given the male dominance of the DRM sector in partner countries, conscious attempts were made to have an equal number of male and female respondents and diverse sectoral perspectives for interviews in Papers III and IV.

Archival document analysis was used in all four studies. It provided complementary perspectives and, albeit not always necessarily more formal and factual details to triangulate or complement interview data (Martinsuo & Huemann, 2021a; Martinsuo & Huemann, 2021b). This method included the analysis of documents such as Swedish development cooperation strategies, capacity development guidelines, performance reviews of the authorities' practices, and project-specific information. Document analysis provided historical and technical details and helped identify formal structure and sources of logics in the authorities' practices, as well

as tensions, and decide inclusion criteria in the case selection for further exploration. In Paper III and IV, access to ITP-DRM archival documents was fully granted through ITP-DRM's formal and informal communication platforms (both internal and external to the project management team), email request and an online file-sharing platform (Sharepoint), user community platform (Basecamp) and social media platform (WhatsApp), and the project learning platform for various iterations (Moodle). Mainly documents from email exchanges with the project management and from the Sharepoint and Moodle were used.

Online surveys using the Qualtrics survey platform were also employed in Papers III and IV to collect data from the large, geographically dispersed population of ITP-DRM project participants quickly and efficiently (Creswell, 2014). This method mainly included closed questions to gather quantitative data and a few open-ended questions for unanticipated qualitative insights. The survey results gave general views of the long-term outcomes of integrating adaptive management logics in a complex development cooperation project.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in Papers I and II to validate the research findings' accuracy, credibility, and trustworthiness and to generate collective insights. This method facilitated intersubjective understanding by allowing participants to interact and build upon each other's responses (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017). In Paper III, an FGD was used with seven ITP-DRM project team members to understand the logics of ITP-DRM response to disruptions from COVID-19 and identify good practices and the blind spots or oversights. In Paper IV, country-specific FGDs were conducted at the end of the formal ITP-DRM support with the first cycle project participants to generate collective insights into perceptions and expectations for addressing complex development challenges through ITP-DRM coordinated efforts.

Finally, field observations were conducted in the natural settings, onsite and online, of the ITP-DRM project in Paper III and IV to provide first-hand accounts of the on-the-ground realities of project implementation. This method provided an intersubjective perspective on the project's coordination mechanisms and adaptive processes (Musante & DeWalt, 2010). Observations offered a first-hand account of the on-the-ground realities of the authorities' project implementation, revealing anticipated and unanticipated, routine and non-routine aspects of development management practices.

Together, these methods allowed for a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the research questions, capturing both the subjective experiences of the participants and the objective realities of the projects. Managing the extensive data from engaged scholarship required meticulous reflexivity. My background and experiences influenced data interpretation. Hence, reflexivity was maintained throughout, allowing both a critical yet open stance of the diverse realities throughout the

analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Reason, 1988). This approach enriched the data, providing depth and authenticity to the findings (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009).

3.3.3. Data analysis

The data analysis for each of the four studies in this thesis was conducted using a systematic and iterative approach, inspired by the Gioia methodology (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). This method, prominent in studies of complex organisational processes, offers a structured yet flexible way to analyse qualitative data. It involves a multi-stage process of coding and categorisation, starting with first-order codes (based on respondents' own terms), progressing to second-order themes, and culminating in aggregated dimensions that reflect the researcher's interpretation and theoretical insights (ibid). This approach is particularly beneficial for inductively developing theory from qualitative data, emphasising transparency, rigour, and reflexivity. Throughout this process, a gradual shift from purely inductive to more abductive reasoning was observed, as insights began to form a reflective dialogue with theoretical constructs in each study. This reflexive approach to the data analysis offered to go beyond pattern recognition to gain a deeper understanding grounded in the data and account for the social, cultural, and historical particularities, complexities and contradictions of the case (Alvesson, 2011; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

Familiarisation and summarisation of data: The initial step in each study involved familiarising myself with and summarising the data, considering the complex and dynamic institutional environments of the authorities. This preliminary content analysis summarised all gathered data, including interview transcripts, archival documents, field notes, and survey results, providing an overarching view of the respondents' perspectives and experiences. During fieldwork, field notes were taken during interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations, and exchanged with research collaborators. This step captured the multi-dimensional and dynamic nature of complexities and adaptability in the authorities' project managerial practices for further probing (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It also helped determine when data saturation was reached, suggesting no further data was needed as additional data no longer provided new insights or information relevant to the research questions (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The iterative process involved constant comparison and reflection on the collected data, ensuring that all relevant aspects of the research questions were thoroughly explored. This step also directed the subsequent literature review towards a broader conceptualisation of, for instance, decision premises inherent in the authorities' managerial practices and their strategies to balance various institutional demands.

First-order coding and second-order themes: The coding process began with first-order coding, focusing on bundles of words and ideas conveying similar themes. Thematic analysis categorised all the interview transcripts. An 'in vivo' coding

approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to stay as close as possible to respondents' own words. Subsequently, second-order themes were developed by connecting the dots among categories and uncovering new themes. A reflexive gaze, guided by questions of Why, What if, So What? (Gabriel 2018, 152), directed the interpretation of coding techniques. This step complemented the theoretical perspective to attend to the significant details of the narratives dynamically interrelated to the institutional circumstances the respondents were subjected to. Field notes from observations were used to triangulate information mentioned during interviews. The coding process in this step was dynamic and iterative, acknowledging the interconnectedness between experience, knowing, and acting, a key pragmatist principle (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020).

Aggregated dimensions and theorising: In the final stage of each study, the second-order themes were transformed into aggregated dimensions, providing a comprehensive view of the research findings. This step involved integrating the findings from different data sources and interpreting them in light of existing literature and theoretical frameworks. Aligning with the pragmatist approach, this step also allowed me to uncover subconscious influences of which the researcher and respondents were unaware at the start of the research (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). For example, in Paper III, one FGD with the ITP-DRM project team served not only to validate the research findings but also to identify any blind spots or hidden logics or practices. This step involved conceptualising novel contributions from simultaneous data analysis, emergent themes, and integrating theoretical insights to advance the conceptual framework in each study.

Guided by the analytical framework presented in the Theory Chapter, the synthesis of the empirical findings across the four studies began to draw broader conclusions for the thesis. This phase was marked by a more pronounced transition from inductive to abductive reasoning, as the research engaged in a continuous, reflective dialogue between the observed data and theoretical frameworks. This synthesis phase allowed for the evolution and adaptation of the theoretical understanding in response to the empirical revelations of the studies, making it particularly effective for exploring the complex, multi-dimensional phenomena of development cooperation. By integrating these findings with the theoretical framework, the research provided a comprehensive understanding of the open politics for realising CAS thinking and how it affects the transformative potentials and effectiveness of bilateral development cooperation projects, offering valuable insights for both complexity theory research and practical application.

3.4. Reflections on methodological choices

This scholarly journey, rooted in pragmatist philosophy and engaged scholarship, has been marked by significant learning and the navigation of emerging challenges. This experimental methodological framework, aimed at exploring the complex realities of project managerial practices in development cooperation, unveiled unexpected challenges, requiring researchers to embrace complexity in both methodology and practice.

Balancing practical implications with theoretical foundations was a continuous endeavour. The focus on pragmatism, often critiqued for prioritising actionable knowledge over theoretical depth, required vigilant reflexivity to harmonise theory and practice. For instance, while developing theoretical constructs for assessing project effectiveness and sustainability (Paper IV), I had to constantly navigate between theoretical models and their practical applicability in diverse real-world scenarios.

Deep and active engagement with research participants enriched the research from a systems perspective but also introduced unique challenges. The evolving nature of development cooperation and the increasing role of knowledge co-creation required dynamic trust-building and effective communication throughout the research process.

Managing the extensive data from engaged scholarship necessitated meticulous reflexivity to maintain the integrity of the fieldwork and data collection inherent in pragmatist inquiries. The iterative nature of this approach, supported by the invaluable patience of my supervisors, demanded flexibility in research design.

My background, born in rural China and growing up in a Portuguese colony of Macau, with prior practical experiences in the field and academic experience during my master's in International Development and Management specialised in rural development, influenced my perspectives. I was aware that I participated in the making of meaning. My knowledge of the field meant that I was able to negotiate my position in the field and navigate my way and broker different social worlds. To demonstrate 'critical subjectivity' (Reason, 1988) and self-awareness (Rennie, 2004), I engaged critically and subjectively, rather than being a passive observer in the field.

Awareness of respondents' political agendas (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009) was crucial in my research. I navigated these landscapes, ensuring that my research remained objective despite these influences. Triangulation, combining data from interviews, document analysis, and observations, was employed to enhance credibility and address challenges such as the absence of comprehensive documentation from authorities. Interviews with experienced authority

representatives who had personal documentation supplemented the available records, mitigating over-reliance on interview data.

In Research Site 2, my dual roles presented challenges. I had to delineate a clear-cut boundary between the three open-polity dimensions (internal, external influences, and boundary process). My North-South broker identity was useful in activating voices and expressing realities that might not be shared with Northern researchers. I reminded respondents of my research role to build trust and rapport, avoiding the privileging of a single perspective and acknowledging ambiguity in the phenomena.

The decision to be the sole author of the appended papers was primarily driven by the need to ensure a consistent theoretical narrative and a personalised synthesis of insights, as suggested by Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2009). This approach became particularly important due to the challenges I encountered in earlier co-authorship attempts with Papers I and III. Additionally, the departure of a key research collaborator from the university, coupled with the limited time remaining in my doctoral program, necessitated a more streamlined approach to authorship. This was essential to meet the publication requirements for my doctoral degree while maintaining the integrity and coherence of my research.

In conclusion, this thesis represents an initial exploration of a novel methodological approach in development cooperation research. The journey, while challenging, led to the rewarding integration of actionable knowledge co-created with practitioners and collaborators. I hope these reflections inspire future researchers to pursue innovative research and knowledge co-creation opportunities, advancing discussions inherent in pragmatist methodological endeavours and contributing to the broader evolving field of development cooperation research.

3.5. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

In this section, I detail how I ensured the trustworthiness and ethical integrity of my study, key to establishing its credibility (Maxwell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness, in qualitative research, refers to the “correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanations, interpretation, or other sort of account” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 122). Huberman and Miles (2002) argue that if qualitative studies cannot consistently produce valid results, then the studies cannot be relied upon. This is a long-standing issue in debates on the legitimacy of qualitative research.

I documented my choices of research methods and biases in my research journal, preliminary findings as reflected in the related publications, and feedback from practitioners’ engagement events for self-reflexivity. Specifically, this thesis

observed Huberman and Miles' (2002) three types of validity: descriptive, interpretative, and theoretical validity, as explained below:

Descriptive validity refers to the factual accuracy of the account, ensuring that the description of events, behaviours, and circumstances is correct and corroborated (Huberman & Miles, 2002). In a pragmatist approach, descriptive validity is linked to the principle of actionable knowledge, focusing on the findings' practical relevance and factual accuracy. Since all four studies in the thesis were primarily concerned with the practitioners' lived experiences, efforts were made to ensure the accuracy of my account of what the interviewees shared during an interview. Hence, all interviews (except in a few instances by local research collaborators in Paper IV) were transcribed verbatim. A pragmatist research approach acknowledges the existence of multiple realities and perspectives shaped by social, cultural, and personal interpretations and interactions (Greenhalgh & Papoutsi, 2018). Descriptive validity was ensured through multiple sources of data and evidence, including interviews, observations, and document analysis (that is, data triangulation). Investigator triangulation was also used to help validate the factual accuracy of the findings. For example, in Research Site 1, I collaborated with three other researchers and a research assistant with different academic and practical backgrounds in the design, data collection and initial analyses. Similarly, in Research Site 2, I collaborated closely with one experienced researcher until she departed from the university. I was also supported at different stages of the research process by four research assistants in Sweden and three collaborators in Bangladesh, Nepal and the Philippines.

Interpretive validity refers to the researcher's ability to accurately capture participants' perspectives and meanings of events and behaviours (Huberman & Miles, 2002). Interpretive validity aligns with the pragmatist emphasis on the interconnectedness of experience, knowing, and acting. It recognises the multifaceted nature of practice and the importance of understanding participants' perspectives. In maintaining attention to interpretive validity, I was critically aware of respondents' political agendas. This awareness informed the employment of triangulation, combining different data sources to address potential biases and limitations in data collection (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Furthermore, active member-checking with research collaborators and practitioner organisers (Creswell & Miller, 2000) was conducted to obtain critical reflection and feedback during the inquiry and preliminary analytical processes. This approach ensured a balanced interpretation of the data, respecting the complexity of the political landscapes navigated during the research. Moreover, the iterative analytical processes, reflexivity, and cultivating ongoing relationships with respondents ensured their voices were accurately represented. The aforementioned dissemination strategies also strengthened the interpretative validity of the studies.

Theoretical validity refers to the extent to which a theory explains, predicts, or interprets the phenomena under study (Huberman & Miles, 2002). In the pragmatist

stance, theoretical validity is concerned with the applicability and usefulness of the theory in explaining real-world problems. It looks at how well the theory works in practice. In the four studies, theoretical validity was achieved through the inductive-abductive analytical transition (Gioia et al., 2013). This approach facilitated a dynamic interaction between theoretical frameworks and empirical data, ensuring that the theories applied were not only relevant but also effective in explaining the real-world phenomena observed. Focusing on ‘what works’ and integrating findings with existing literature and theoretical frameworks ensured the theory was grounded in practice.

Although ethical approval was not institutionally required at the time of conducting this research, I strictly observed principles of ethical considerations in qualitative research throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained, respondents’ anonymity maintained, and data used and stored responsibly. I engaged with respondents in a culturally sensitive, respectful and responsible manner. I made it very clear to all research participants, and especially those in Research Site 2 given my dual roles, that this research was conducted independently from the funders and the data collected were used for both practitioner knowledge co-creation engagements and academic purposes. Although the limited information provided in the papers about the respondents can pose some limitations in comprehending their background or profiles, I view it as my duty as a researcher to ensure to the best of my ability in every step and stage of the research process that this research would not cause harm or distress any research participants. This commitment to ethics ensured the integrity and credibility of the study, addressing potential sensitivities with respect (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This research’s methodological approach represents an innovative exploration in qualitative development cooperation research. It potentially inspires future research, particularly in engaging with complex, real-world issues (Maxwell, 2013), and contributes to the ongoing discourse on methodological rigor in qualitative studies.

4. Summary of the Appended Papers

This chapter presents the main empirical findings of the four appended papers, each contributing distinct insights into my thesis's exploration of CAS in development cooperation. Reflecting a deliberate and strategic approach, these papers were published in varied academic fields, including public administration, development studies, project management, and disaster risk management as a dedicated global policy implementation field. This selection was driven by a commitment to cross-disciplinary research, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of development cooperation which intersects with diverse academic domains. This cross-disciplinary dissemination of research findings ensures a richer, more holistic understanding of the CAS at play in development cooperation.

Each paper, while making distinct contributions to its respective field, collectively advances a comprehensive understanding of development cooperation projects as complex adaptive and political systems. This interdisciplinary approach to disseminating research findings is in line with the overarching purpose of the research: to reconcile differing perspectives where public administration, project management, and development research have historically intersected only loosely.

The papers are presented in the sequence they were initiated, not in the chronological order of their publication. This order reflects the evolving nature of the research questions of the thesis, as well as the theoretical and empirical insights that developed throughout the thesis' research process. Each paper makes a unique contribution to CAS thinking underpinning the two main research questions of the thesis. Their collective empirical contributions to a multifaceted view of CAS in development cooperation are further discussed in the next chapter.

4.1. Paper I

Institutional hybridisation in Swedish public sector development cooperation

Paper I contributes to our understanding of the institutional hybridisation in development cooperation by exploring the complexities of principal-agent relationships within Swedish public sector development projects. The intricate dynamics of principal-agent relationships are underexplored in the evolving 'whole-of-society' paradigm in international development cooperation (Develtere et al.,

2021). The study centres on the authorities, aiming to elucidate the mechanisms of hybridisation and its implications for the broader landscape of development cooperation. This focus on exploring the complexities of institutional hybridisation in the shifting context of the authorities delivering bilateral development cooperation addresses the first research question of the thesis. It explores how different institutional logics are negotiated and reconciled in bilateral projects, offering insights into the internal dynamics shaping the realisation of CAS thinking (research question #1 of the thesis). The study's findings make the case to suggest that the transformative potential (research question #2 of the thesis) lies in the foundation of such hybridisation, aligning diverse organisational forms, identities, and rationalities.

Hybridisation, as conceptualised in the study, refers to the blending of diverse organisational forms, identities, and rationalities that traditionally may not coexist (Denis et al., 2015; Kumi & Saharan, 2021). While this concept has gained attention in public administration research as a lens to understand inter-organisational dynamics in the public sector, its empirical exploration within the context of development cooperation remains relatively unexplored.

To investigate these dynamics, the study adopts a case study design, utilising a combination of semi-structured interviews, archival document analysis, and focus group discussions involving Swedish authorities, Sida, and other stakeholders. The paper addresses two central research questions: (1) What are the prevailing institutional logics in the authorities' development cooperation practices? And (2) How do the principal-agent dynamics manifest in the hybridisation of these logics?

Findings from the study reveal a complex interplay of dominant logics, including developmental, managerialist, and collaborative logics. The paper identifies two types of hybridisation. The first is specialisation-centric hybridisation, wherein authorities blend technical expertise with cultural understanding and pedagogical skills to meet evolving external demands, particularly from Sida. This type reflects how authorities adapt and specialise their internal capabilities. The second is integration-centric hybridisation, which highlights the challenges authorities face in aligning their interests and approaches with downstream agents in partner countries. It underscores the necessity for authorities to integrate various interests and logics to achieve cohesive development outcomes, considering the complexities of global-local interactions.

In the broader thesis, this paper's exploration of the hybridisation types contributes significantly to understanding the internal, external, and boundary processes in development cooperation. It offers essential perspectives on actualising CAS thinking in practice, particularly in navigating organisational complexities and managing stakeholder boundaries. The study advocates for a collaborative approach that acknowledges the intricacies of hybridisation, fostering mutual respect, collaboration, and collective decision-making within the development cooperation

system. It emphasises the importance of balancing multiple institutional logics through hybridisation and highlights the potential of hybridisation in fostering organisational innovation and responsiveness. This paper advances our knowledge on CAS by demonstrating how the hybridisation of organisational forms and rationalities influences the effectiveness and adaptability of development cooperation projects

4.2. Paper II

Doing 'Us-Them' differently: the identity work of frontline aid bureaucrats in translating aid effectiveness policy rhetoric into practice

Paper II offers insights into the role of frontline aid bureaucrats in Sida, shedding light on the external influences on realising CAS thinking in the authorities' (referred to as SGAs in the paper) bilateral development cooperation projects. Paper II examines the evolving roles of Sida bureaucrats and their impact on implementing global norms into the authorities' bilateral development cooperation project managerial practices. It focuses on the perceptions, roles, and responsibilities of individual frontline bureaucrats in Sida headquarters and embassies. The study seeks to illuminate the often-overlooked role of these bureaucrats in actualising global norms of aid effectiveness principles into development cooperation practices. This paper's findings contribute to understanding how frontline bureaucrats interpret and enact their roles, significantly influencing the external dimensions of CAS thinking in bilateral development cooperation projects (research question #1 of the thesis). The identity narratives revealed in this study show how Sida's frontline bureaucrats facilitate or hinder the transformative potential and effectiveness of these projects (research question #2 of the thesis).

While existing literature acknowledges the discretionary power of donor agencies (e.g., Brinkerhoff 2002), the emphasis has been predominantly on policy design and structural determinants. Paper II explores the nuanced role of frontline aid bureaucrats using an organisational identity (OI) perspective. This perspective, defined as the collective understanding of organisational members about their organisation's essence, distinctiveness, and continuity (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Fiol, 1991; Ellis & Ybema, 2010), is intertwined with institutional logics and hybridisation. It serves as a lens to comprehend Sida's evolving objectives and roles in the dynamic development cooperation institutional landscape.

The study employs a qualitative research approach, analysing data from interviews and focus group discussions to delve into the experiences and interactions of Sida bureaucrats with the authorities. The research questions addressed are: (1) How do frontline bureaucrats in Sida perceive and enact their roles amidst shifting

institutional demands? And, (2) how do these roles impact the translation of aid effectiveness principles into practice?

Findings reveal multifaceted identity narratives among bureaucrats, such as the ‘dialogue partner’, ‘problem-fixer’, ‘knowledge broker’, ‘true partner’, and ‘team player’. These narratives reflect varied interpretations and enactments of their authority and roles amidst ambivalent organisational transformations with multiple co-existing and conflicting logics of practice. A discernible shift towards hybrid orientations is evident, moving beyond the traditional ‘donor-recipient’ dichotomy and highlighting the negotiated, reciprocal, and collective nature of the sense-making process within Sida’s organisational cultural context.

In the broader thesis, Paper II’s exploration of the identity work of frontline aid bureaucrats contributes to understanding the external influences and boundary processes in development cooperation. The study enhances our understanding of the interdependences between principal and agents in realising complex adaptive system thinking to implement global policy agenda in development cooperation. This study enriches our understanding of CAS by revealing how the identity narratives and roles of frontline bureaucrats impact practically the translation of aid effectiveness into bilateral development cooperation initiatives.

4.3. Paper III

Antecedents to bounce forward: A case study tracing the resilience of inter-organisational projects in the face of disruptions

Paper III examines transformative resilience in MSB’s inter-organisational projects, IT-DRM, specifically focusing on how the project adapt and evolve during significant disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic. It responds to a specific call for exploring organisation resilience in project studies to better understand organisational performance variabilities in complex project management environments (Naderpajouh et al., 2020). This study conceptualises project resilience as the capability of projects not merely to adapt but also to thrive (bounce forward to fundamentally alter pathways) towards strategic goals amidst disruptions (Folke, 2006; Folke et al., 2010; Lengnick-Hall, Beck, & Lengnick-Hall, 2011; Linnenluecke, 2017; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). It involves adapting, learning from, and fundamentally altering project pathways and strategies to meet and exceed strategic goals amidst external shocks. This paper contributes to understanding how transformative resilience is an essential aspect of CAS thinking in development cooperation projects (research question #1 of the thesis). The study outlines practical strategies for enhancing project success and adaptability, thus directly addressing the second research question regarding the transformative potential and effectiveness of these projects (research question #2 of the thesis).

A longitudinal design (Langley, 1999) is applied to capture the evolving cross-individual and cross-institutional social interactions within the IT-DRM project network during the COVID-19 pandemic. Real-time data collected through interviews, document reviews, event observations, and surveys are analysed to trace key mechanisms of resilience.

The study identifies three critical social mechanisms that facilitate transformative resilience. The first is a contextual mechanism, requiring project managers to proactively set up a shared, common picture and centralise their linkages for efficiency. The second is behavioural, necessitating stakeholders to engage, commit, and distribute agency and decision making throughout the network, despite any ambiguity. The third is cognitive embeddedness, which involves acknowledging the impact of diversity and reflexivity of actions on bias, tensions, and trade-offs. This study demonstrates how a distributed system can affect coordination and resilience management, even in non-centralised institutional structures.

Paper III contributes to resilience research in project studies by elucidating the role of CAS thinking in enhancing project success and outcomes, especially amidst uncertain and disruptive variabilities in internal and external environments. The study highlights the importance of multi-dimensional adaptability, stakeholder engagement, and cognitive alignment in CAS. It provides practical strategies for resilience and adaptability in inter-organisational projects typical of development cooperation context, reinforcing the thesis's broader themes of adaptability and complexity in development cooperation project managerial practices. The paper contributes to the discourse on CAS in development projects by identifying key social mechanisms that enable transformative resilience, demonstrating the capacity of projects to adapt strategically amidst external shocks.

4.4. Paper IV

Networking in action: taking collaborative capacity development seriously for disaster risk management

Paper IV explores the role of networked approaches in collaborative capacity development within disaster risk management, aligning with the global policy framework of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR, 2015). It addresses the needed for a deeper understanding of the operational dynamics and contributions of multi-stakeholder networks, a critical yet underexplored aspect in the literature (Djalante, 2012; Few et al., 2016). Paper IV offers crucial insights into how strategic resource mobilisation, institutional embeddedness, and coherent network governance underpin the realisation of CAS thinking in bilateral capacity development projects in development cooperation (research question #1). The findings from this study illustrate how these factors collectively affect the

transformative potential and effectiveness of development cooperation projects (research question #2).

Grounded in network governance literature (Ansell & Gash, 2018; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Provan & Kenis, 2008; Blythe et al., 2022), the paper examines the institutional conditions and early capacity development outcomes fostered by the ITP-DRM in Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Philippines. A longitudinal design guides the study, using a mix of surveys, interviews, document reviews, and observations to investigate network dynamics and project strategies.

The study highlights the essential role of strategic resource mobilisation for scalability of emerging and self-organised collaborative capacity in multi-stakeholder networks. It demonstrates that while the focal project did not directly finance implementation, it could play an indirect role in promoting diverse funding sources. The study also emphasises the importance of institutional embeddedness and coherent network governance, acknowledging the early formation stages of networks and the necessity for purpose-driven governance structures. Furthermore, the study demonstrates how informal networks can develop a strategic collective voice and establish new professional norms to influence the field's practices and politics, provided that social learning spaces are diverse and inclusive.

Paper IV contributes to novel insights into institutional embeddedness, network governance, and strategic resource mobilisation, and self-organisation capacity as critical factors for fostering effective multi-stakeholder collaborations and enhancing Sendai policy implementation outcomes. It advocates for a nuanced understanding of network dynamics, strategic resource allocation, and governance structures to foster collaborative capacity development, directly aligning with the global policy implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

In the broader thesis context, Paper IV's insights into networked capacity development, particularly in terms of stakeholders' institutional integration and coordination, in realising the potential of CAS thinking for enhancing project success and outcomes in development cooperation. This study provides valuable insights into CAS by highlighting the role of strategic resource mobilisation, institutional embeddedness, and network governance in enhancing the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder collaborative efforts in development projects.

5. Empirical Contributions

This chapter presents a synthesis of the empirical findings of the four appended papers in the thesis. Papers I and II contribute mainly but not exclusively to answering the first research question of how CAS thinking is realised in bilateral development cooperation projects. While Papers III and IV build on and add further insights to answer the first research question, they mainly address the second research question on the ways in which CAS thinking affects the transformative potential and effectiveness of bilateral development cooperation projects. References in brackets indicate details of the findings, supported by examples drawn from Papers I-IV.

5.1. Realisation of CAS thinking

This section synthesises insights primarily from Papers I and II, complemented by insights from Papers III and IV, to provide a comprehensive understanding of how CAS thinking is realised in the Swedish authorities' bilateral development cooperation projects. The combined findings from these papers present a multifaceted view of how CAS principles are interpreted, negotiated, and operationalised within diverse institutional contexts and through varied stakeholder interactions.

5.1.1. Interplay of institutional logics and their dynamics

This research underscores the dynamic interplay among three dominant institutional logics—managerialist, collaborative, and developmental—within Swedish bilateral development cooperation (Paper I). The managerialist logic, with its focus on “efficiency, results, and performance metrics”, often conflicts with the broader developmental goals, indicating a tension within the system. The collaborative logic, emphasising “partnerships, joint decision-making, shared responsibilities”, often intersects with the managerialist approach, especially regarding the scope and depth of collaborations. The developmental logic, though less explicitly mentioned, is crucial, underpinning a commitment to creating lasting positive change in partner countries and efficient resource use within the authorities.

The research, particularly encapsulated in Paper I, presents a nuanced exploration of the dynamic interplay among three dominant institutional logics—managerialist, collaborative, and developmental—shaping Swedish bilateral development cooperation in the authorities’ managerial practices. This interplay crucially shapes strategic and operational decisions, highlighting the inherent complexities of CAS.

The managerialist logic, primarily driven by “efficiency, results, and performance metrics” (Paper I), often finds itself at odds with broader developmental goals. An instance in Paper I where this logic manifested was in a project emphasising quantifiable outcomes, inadvertently side-lining intangible developmental impacts that may take time to emerge and difficult to measure. This logic, while ensuring operational excellence, sometimes risks overlooking long-term developmental outcomes. There was a shared notion among some informants about the tension that their pursuit of efficiency and tangible results sometimes overshadows their capacity to foster sustainable change (Paper I).

The collaborative logic, centring on partnerships, “joint decision-making, and shared responsibilities” (Paper I), operates within a spectrum of collaboration depths. This logic often intersects and, at times, clashes with the managerialist approach, particularly concerning the extent of collaborations. Paper I provides an example where collaborative efforts between a Swedish authority and local NGOs navigated through these intersections, balancing efficiency with inclusivity. The aspiration for further enactment of the collaborative logic was expressed in the FGD between Sida and the authorities (Papers I and II) and manifested in the realisation of CAS thinking in the institutional design and strategic goal alignment of the ITP-DRM with global policy commitments (Papers III and IV). Nonetheless, there was also a clear understanding that enacting this logic would imply demand more than shared goals, requiring also the alignment of project management processes and stakeholder expectations (Papers I-IV).

The developmental logic, though less explicitly articulated in Papers I and II and more in Paper III and IV, underpins many strategies, diverse politically-steered systems, contexts, actors, change processes and variability of outcomes that the authorities are increasingly expected to work with. In Paper I, all sampled projects had to fulfil cross-cutting issues (e.g., gender, environment, human rights, anti-corruption, and conflict prevention) and align with one or a set of specific sustainable development goals representing specific Sida’s funding strategies. As Paper I and II reveal, there was no commonly agreed approach to measure the development effectiveness of the authorities’ development cooperation initiatives in attaining “long-term impact and sustainable change”. Yet this logic often serves as a backdrop to operational decisions, influencing how projects by the authorities are appraised, resources are appropriated for their organisational adaptation, and used for long-term benefits (Papers I and II).

These logics do not operate in isolation but rather in a dynamic state of negotiation and balance (Papers I-IV). Paper I illustrates this through diverse real-world scenarios where the focal authorities navigated between operational efficiency and sustainable development goals, a balancing act emblematic of CAS. Paper III, in exploring the COVID-19 pandemic's awareness and absorption phase of the focal project ITP-DRM, showcases the application of these logics in real-time, reflecting both the immediate response to current crises and the anticipation of future challenges. This phase covers the initial response period, focussing on enhancing situational awareness, involving immediate activation of pre-defined risk-mitigating measures and broad consultations with project stakeholders (Paper III).

Paper IV extends this analysis by examining networked environments and capacity development, underlining the need for adaptive and interconnected strategies that respond to the evolving complexities of multiple principals and agents across sectors, sites, and scales. It highlights how the complexities of development cooperation, as introduced in the thesis, require adaptive and networked approaches for effective and sustainable capacity development practices.

In summary, the interplay of these institutional logics within Swedish bilateral development cooperation, as depicted in Papers I and III, demonstrates the adaptive, multifaceted nature of complex systems. These logics guide, conflict, and complement each other, shaping how authorities respond to and evolve with the changing landscape of development cooperation.

5.1.2. Hybridisation as an adaptive strategy

The research highlights two types of hybridisation prevailing in the Swedish bilateral development cooperation (Paper I). These two hybridisation approaches manifest the realisation of CAS thinking as the resulting response strategies in the pluralistic institutional environment of the Swedish bilateral development cooperation. The two approaches are: specialisation-centric hybridisation and integration-centric hybridisation.

The specialisation-centric hybridisation approach leverages internally specialised knowledge and skills to address specific challenges within specific development cooperation contexts (Paper I). This approach is expected of the authorities to deepen their expertise to inform their project design in various cooperation settings. A Sida informant captures this complexity and necessity in complex environments where traditional development models were insufficient, stating:

“How to handle the dynamics whereby civil society has taken over a huge chunk of the work and responsibilities of the state...when you have [self-declared] states within the states and ... a subtle civil society working alongside the clans and ...the national government. So the authorities working in that context would require really to balance all these sectors.” (Paper I).

This quote highlights the growing political pressures for authorities to navigate specific complex terrains, indicating the importance of specialised expertise.

The integration-centric hybridisation approach (Paper I), in contrast, emphasises amalgamating multiple institutional logics to promote collaboration and overarching objectives with upstream and downstream stakeholders in the system. An authority's project manager reflects on the necessity and the complexities of this hybridisation:

“It’s complex enough to have bilateral government-to-government projects. The more organisations and change agents you involve, the more intricate it becomes, especially as we diversify our project approaches.” (Paper I).

This perspective showcases the multifaceted nature of integration-centric hybridisation. The evolving identity of Sida, transitioning from a traditional funder to a dialogue and knowledge-sharing partner, influences this hybridisation (Paper II), indicative of integration-centric hybridisation (more discussed below).

Further complexities of hybridisation are highlighted by internal tensions within some authorities despite political demands over more authorities' development cooperation involvement (Papers I and II). An authority's programme manager notes why they strive to justify their involvement in development cooperation:

“Development cooperation is not really our agency’s core business. So it is always going to be a side thing and not prioritised within the organisation... We always have to justify why we are doing it, why it is good for the organisation, and what we gain from this kind of work, financially of course...it is a battle always.” (Paper I).

The three critical resilience phases that Paper III describes of the ITP-DRM during the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., awareness and absorption, adaptation and renewal, and learning and feedback) exemplify dynamic responses to leverage the authority's specialised knowledge in crisis management and immediate response strategies. Here, the authority proactively engaged in risk assessment, mitigation, and iterative learning. The adaptation of pre-defined risk-mitigating measures and proactive stakeholder engagement during these phases echoes the need for hybrid strategies that balance specialised knowledge and integrated collaboration (more discussed below in 5.2.)

The multi-stakeholder capacity development aspect, Paper IV reveals of the ITP-DRM's institutional design, also resonates with integration-centric hybridisation principles. It enables authorities to engage with a broader range of stakeholders, leveraging collaborative DRM resources and expertise to affect development cooperation effectiveness. The emphasis on institutional embeddedness and network governance in Paper IV underscores the need for authorities to integrate activities within broader organisational contexts to address nuanced challenges and

opportunities. This aligns closely with hybridisation strategies (more discussed below in 5.2.).

In summary, Papers I to IV collectively provide a nuanced understanding of hybridisation as an adaptive strategy to the co-existing institutional logics inherent in Swedish bilateral development cooperation (Papers I and II). This approach enables authorities to navigate the complexities inherent in bilateral development cooperation, balancing specialised expertise with integrated collaborative efforts. The insights from Papers III and IV demonstrate the importance of adaptive resilience and continuous learning in navigating CAS, underscoring the transformative potential of these development projects.

5.1.3. Principal-agent dynamics and evolving expectations

The empirical insights from the research show that CAS thinking in the Swedish bilateral development cooperation is realised in the evolution of the relationship between Sida and the Swedish authorities (Papers I and II).

As briefly mentioned previously, in Paper II, the revelation of principal-agent dynamics showcases how Sida's evolution from a traditional funder to a strategic collaborator embodies CAS thinking. This progression acknowledges the multifaceted nature of international development, recognising that the partnership between Sida and Swedish authorities transcends mere funding. It has gradually become more about fostering synergies and a shared pool of expertise, reflecting the interconnected and interdependent elements crucial to complex systems (Papers I-III).

Sida's new trajectory towards a dialogue-driven approach (Papers I-III) is evident in the reflections of a Sida informant who underscores the importance of the authorities being considered true partners:

“We have hired the SGAs [the authorities] to do that job and need to think of them as true partners, and we are players in the same team. By playing our different roles, we are more likely to reach the results we all want. Development cooperation is not SGAs core competency. But we can pool our knowledge and share our development cooperation competence. When we adopt an ‘us and you’ position or hold up information and knowledge from them, we are in trouble.” (Paper II)

This quote encapsulates the ethos of collaborative engagement that has come to define the relationship between Sida and the authorities. This shift in dynamics speaks to the adaptability of the system, indicating a co-evolution of roles where the focus is on strategic engagement and knowledge sharing.

Moreover, the call for trust and flexibility in managing development projects signals a departure from traditional control mechanisms towards a more decentralised and

dynamic form of governance (Papers I-IV). Another informant from Sida, advocates for this change and lays out a vision,

“In practice, we need to build a bulk of trust with [the authorities] to look at new ways of doing things...take advantage of Sida field offices to build partnership of mutual benefit...This is a balance, of course, since we have a rigid kind of control and follow-up of taxpayers’ money. It demands getting to know the agency you work with, their project details and progress...as a team member...share context-specific knowledge to help them stand on their own and build local partnerships in the long run independent of aid to build real sustainability. We have so much to gain as a public sector in the North from contexts different from ours.” (Paper II)

This narrative reveals a system that is learning and adapting in multiple ways and on various levels (viz. individual and organisational), where feedback informs decision-making and reinforces the importance of mutual trust (Papers I, II, III and IV). At the heart of this evolving landscape is the recognition that “In bureaucracy, we are individuals” – a sentiment expressed by a Sida official, reminding us that even within the most structured organisations, the individual’s role is paramount and each person’s actions contribute to the system’s adaptive and evolutionary capabilities (Paper I, II, III). The learning and feedback phase in Paper III reveals how evolving expectations and roles, necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, further could facilitate (or complicate) these principal-agent dynamics, prompting a reevaluation of strategies and stakeholder engagement from a CAS perspective beyond the immediate project network.

As Sida and the authorities navigate this evolving environment, their roles, professional, organisational and collective identities continuously adapt, embodying the complexity inherent in bilateral development cooperation (Papers I-IV). The mutual learning process, trust-building, and shared decision-making are pivotal to this evolution, aligning with the hallmarks of CAS. They represent the system’s capacity for innovation, emphasising the need for flexibility and adaptability in pursuit of effective and sustainable development initiatives (Papers III and IV) (more discussed below).

This approach aligns with CAS thinking, which suggests that robust systems are not static but rather characterised by their ability to adapt, evolve, and respond to changes within their environment. The dialogue between Sida and the authorities, as well as the emphasis on collaboration and partnership, signifies a complex system in action, one that is far more nuanced and responsive than the traditional, hierarchical models of development cooperation (Papers I-IV). Through this lens, the principal-agent dynamics in the Swedish bilateral development cooperation context offer a vivid example of CAS realised in practice, and that the principal-agent dynamics are actively shaping the field of development in tangible ways.

The evolution in Sida’s role, as depicted in Paper II, also brought about a realignment in project expectations and outcomes. This shift from a hierarchical to

a more collaborative model marked a significant change in how development projects were conceptualised, executed, and evaluated, reflecting a more interconnected and responsive approach.

In summary, the synthesis of findings from Papers I and II, complemented by insights from Papers III and IV, provides a comprehensive depiction of how CAS thinking is actualised in Swedish bilateral development cooperation. This realisation manifests through the navigation and balancing of multiple institutional logics, adapting strategies in the face of evolving environments and expectations, and the intricate task of integrating new policies into pre-existing frameworks. Particularly, insights from Paper III illustrate the crucial role of adaptive resilience in response to unforeseen challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes the distinct resilience phases – awareness and absorption, adaptation and renewal, and learning and feedback – which showcase the dynamic nature of response mechanisms in complex systems. These phases exemplify how authorities can rapidly mobilise and recalibrate resources, strategies, and stakeholder engagement to manage crises effectively.

5.2. Pathways and consequences of CAS

5.2.1. Embracing uncertainty and strategic navigation

The response of the ITP-DRM to the COVID-19 pandemic, as examined in Paper III, showcases a strategic navigation of uncertainty, encapsulating the essence of CAS thinking. This approach effectively steered the project through internal and external disruptions, paving the path for potentially transformative adaptation and effective development cooperation. The strategic postponement of activities and the rapid revision of the risk matrix by the ITP-DRM team, as detailed in Paper III, exemplify the application of CAS thinking in real-time crisis management. These decisions reflected a nuanced understanding of the need to balance immediate crisis response with long-term project sustainability.

In the face of the pandemic, the ITP-DRM project swiftly transitioned into an awareness and absorption phase (Paper III). Project managers undertook proactive measures, including extensive stakeholder consultations and risk assessments. This phase was characterised by rapid assimilation of diverse perspectives, consulting with public health authorities to evaluate the feasibility of continuing planned activities. The agility shown in this phase underscored the project's preparedness and adaptability to unforeseen challenges.

Sida's transformative journey from a traditional funding agency to a collaborative partner (Papers I and II) positively impacted the ITP-DRM project (Papers III and

IV). This evolution, evident in the governing arrangements between Sida and MSB within the ITP-DRM, underscores a broader shift to strategic dialogue and shared expertise. The dialogical approach fostered by Sida created a fertile ground for the ITP-DRM to co-adapt within its project network, enhancing the project's relevance and potential for transformative impact (Papers III and IV).

The adaptation and renewal phase represented a strategic pivot from immediate reaction to forward-looking planning (Paper III). The decision to postpone key activities and revise the risk matrix was more than a crisis management tactic; it signified the project management's commitment to long-term resilience and adaptability. Reflecting this strategic shift, a project manager noted, "I think there was initially much anxiety... But after making the decision, we can now explore: what are our options?" (Paper III).

The learning and feedback phase was crucial for introspection and collective knowledge building (Papers III and IV). The project conducted routine after-action reviews and strategic evaluations, integrating diverse stakeholder perspectives into its future strategy (Paper III). This reflective approach was pivotal in fostering innovation even in times of uncertainty.

Paper IV deepens our understanding by emphasising the significance of multi-stakeholder collaboration and resource mobilisation, crucial in the ITP-DRM's scalability efforts in partner countries (e.g., expanding and adapting capacity development initiatives from the ITP-DRM to a larger or broader scope). The transition to digital platforms initially a reactive measure (Paper III), evolved into an innovative strategy, enhancing the project's scope and impact. This proactive adaptation was integral to the project's ability to expand and modify its reach effectively.

Moreover, the evolution of Sida's identity (Paper II), particularly in its interaction with the MSB, exemplified the necessity of balancing global priorities with local project realities (Papers III and IV). The dynamic between Sida and MSB within the ITP-DRM context reflected a nuanced understanding of resource allocation and strategy recalibration, essential in a complex adaptive system (Papers I-IV).

In short, the strategic resilience phases of the ITP-DRM during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate an effective approach to managing uncertainty (Paper III), using CAS thinking in development cooperation projects. This approach, enhanced by insights from Papers II and IV, underscores the importance of adaptability, strategic goal alignment and resource mobilisation, and embracing a dialogical approach in development cooperation projects. The ITP-DRM's journey through these phases presents a model for navigating challenges and driving transformative change in dynamic cooperation contexts.

5.2.2. Networked solidarity and collaborative governance

The ITP-DRM, as detailed in Papers III and IV, exemplifies how CAS thinking affects the transformative potential and effectiveness of development cooperation projects. Central to this is the emergence of networked solidarity and collaborative governance among diverse stakeholders from different tiers, which proved instrumental in navigating the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, and in contributing to project resilience and success (Papers III and IV).

During the pandemic, the ITP-DRM showcased remarkable resilience, underpinned by a robust sense of networked solidarity (Paper III). This was evident not only within the core project team but also among the wider network of participants, mentors, and partner organisations. An informant from the ITP-DRM project team with no dedicated project risk management responsibilities encapsulates this spirit:

“I have worked on pandemic preparedness before... I felt that we were going into a global lockdown for quite some time. So I came back several times to the management team that we have to think about adjusting everything, even though I was not involved in actually making those decisions.” (Paper III)

This proactive involvement beyond formal roles exemplified the network’s collective response to the crisis. An instance of this effective collaboration is highlighted in Paper IV, where network members collectively engaged in resource pooling and information exchange, significantly enhancing the project’s ability to respond to and mitigate the impacts of the pandemic.

The governance structure within the ITP-DRM, as reflected in both Papers III and IV, was not rigid but adaptive, allowing for a more inclusive and participatory decision-making process. Stakeholders at various levels were involved in both strategic and operational decisions, ensuring that diverse perspectives were considered, and collective intelligence was harnessed. This structure facilitated distributed decision-making, strategic and operational. This approach, detailed in both Papers III and IV, ensured inclusivity in decision-making, with accountability and responsibility shared across the project network. Paper IV highlights the importance of multi-tier stakeholder engagement in improving programme effectiveness. For instance, 65% of ITP-DRM participants indicated that their organisations have improved their ability to engage with a broader range of stakeholders as an indirect collaborative result of their ITP-DRM capacity development support (Paper IV). This showcases the project’s networked approach in enhancing coordination and information exchange.

In Paper III, the distributed agency among network members played a critical role in the project’s adaptability in times of challenges. For instance, project participants exhibited a strong commitment to resilience tasks, with many expressing a willingness to continue their involvement in the network and implement their local change initiatives despite the pandemic’s disruptions (Paper III).

Paper IV underlines the necessity of resource mobilisation for scalability. Although the ITP-DRM did not finance implementations directly or have resource mobilisation as a strategic capacity development area, the support could be available from the ITP-DRM mentorship. An informant from Paper IV appreciates such support,

“Building our capacity [mentors] in resource mobilisation and management has been a game-changer for our network, allowing us to secure more funding and resources and, ultimately, achieve greater impact” (Paper IV).

This quote underscores the importance of resource mobilisation for the successful implementation and scalability of local initiatives, especially for smaller NGOs.

Both papers also stress the importance of integrating the network within broader organisational and institutional contexts, as mentioned in Paper IV, is a key aspect of institutional buy-in, accountability and sustainability. It ensures that the network’s actions are aligned with, and accountable to, the larger organisational goals and strategies. Moreover, the network’s approach to leveraging collective intelligence and ensuring inclusive decision-making underpins the idea of accountability, where each stakeholder’s contribution is recognised, and their role in decision-making is valued. Paper IV notes the integration of activities within broader organisational contexts, aligning with the concept of collaborative governance where decisions are made in consideration of the broader institutional landscape.

Furthermore, Paper II provides additional context to this theme by revealing Sida’s transformation from a traditional funding entity to a collaborative partner, which aligns with CAS thinking. This transition reflects a proactive adaptation to interconnected development challenges, enhancing both the project’s relevance and transformative impact.

In summary, the empirical contributions from Papers III and IV demonstrate how CAS thinking is realised through networked solidarity and collaborative governance in development cooperation projects. The ITP-DRM’s response to the pandemic, marked by collective engagement and resource pooling, underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration for enhancing project effectiveness and adaptability. This approach fosters distributed decision-making and inclusivity in strategy development and execution. This methodology not only addresses immediate challenges but also lays the groundwork for sustainable and scalable impacts in development cooperation work.

5.2.3. Leveraging diversity for transformative learning

Papers III and IV provide another comprehensive example of how CAS thinking affects the transformative potential and effectiveness of development cooperation projects. This key aspect is cognitive embeddedness – the process of incorporating diverse perspectives and knowledge to promote transformative learning and resilience to challenge one’s previously held beliefs and assumptions in order to gain new insights and experiences. This theme reflects the ITP-DRM’s commitment to participatory and reflective practices, which have been instrumental in fostering a more inclusive and effective approach to capacity development.

Cognitive embeddedness, as detailed in Paper III, emphasises the importance of acknowledging and integrating a variety of viewpoints in the decision-making process. The ITP-DRM project stands out in its approach to embracing the heterogeneity of stakeholders’ perspectives, ensuring that the diversity of opinions and experiences significantly informs project strategies and outcomes. An informant from Paper III encapsulates this notion, stating, “The [COVID-19] situation has encouraged rethinking old and generating new ideas, both for the project team and participants.” This statement highlights the project’s ability to leverage diverse viewpoints as a source of strength and innovation.

The ITP-DRM’s resilience process was characterised by proactive stakeholder engagement, as described in Paper III. This involved creating spaces for dialogue where stakeholders could share insights and experiences, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of challenges and potential solutions. For example, during the learning and feedback phase, the project conducted strategic evaluations and after-action reviews, which were pivotal in integrating diverse stakeholder perspectives into the project’s strategy. Such practices not only addressed immediate project needs but also laid the foundation for long-term transformative learning.

A crucial aspect of cognitive embeddedness is the ability to critically examine and address biases, tensions, and trade-offs. Paper III sheds light on this by highlighting how the ITP-DRM project navigated complex social dynamics and power imbalances. The project’s reflective practices facilitated the identification and mitigation of potential biases and tensions, ensuring more equitable and effective decision-making processes. An informant in Paper III reflects, “There is a lot of fog and we are more short-sighted for now,” indicating the continuous challenge and necessity of addressing cognitive biases in complex project environments.

Feedback mechanisms play a crucial role in the ITP-DRM’s approach to transformative learning. Paper IV emphasises the importance of incorporating feedback from various stakeholders to ensure that decisions and strategies are inclusive and reflective of the network’s collective intelligence. The project’s ability to adapt its methodologies in response to stakeholder feedback, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, showcases its capacity for adaptive learning

and innovation. The strategic evaluations, as mentioned in Paper III, served not just as a feedback mechanism but as a transformative learning tool. It enabled the team to integrate diverse cultural and professional insights, thus enriching the project's strategy and enhancing its impact in the communities it served.

In summary, cognitive embeddedness, a key theme in Papers III and IV, stresses the importance of integrating diverse perspectives for transformative learning. The ITP-DRM project's reflective practices, including strategic evaluations and after-action reviews, facilitate the identification and mitigation of biases and tensions. This approach promotes inclusive decision-making and fosters a culture of continuous learning and proactive adaptation, essential for CAS to achieve effective and sustainable outcomes in development cooperation.

The empirical contributions from these studies provide a nuanced understanding of CAS thinking in Swedish bilateral development cooperation. The insights from Papers I-IV demonstrate the multifaceted nature of CAS, encompassing the interplay of institutional logics, hybridisation strategies, evolving principal-agent dynamics, strategic navigation of uncertainty, networked solidarity, collaborative governance, and leveraging diversity for transformative learning. These findings invite broader contemplation on their implications for future development cooperation efforts and will be further explored in the following discussion chapter.

6. Discussion

In the Introduction, I presented the intricate landscape of development cooperation project management, underscoring the knowledge gap in understanding and managing complexities and challenges that permeate this domain and seemingly undermine adaptive management approaches. My research purpose was to understand the complexities and adaptability of development cooperation from below to shed light on the often overlooked organisational political dynamics in the entrenched ‘technification’ and bureaucratic norms of projects as development cooperation’s organising forms. I set off to understand how CAS thinking is actually realised with focus on the experience of the Swedish authorities implementing bilateral development cooperation projects.

The preceding chapter provided a comprehensive synthesis of the empirical findings. Key observations included how CAS thinking within Swedish bilateral development cooperation projects is mainly realised through: (1) the dynamic interplay of institutional logics, (2) the hybridisation strategies adopted as adaptive responses to complexities and adversaries, and (3) the evolving principal-agent dynamics between Sida and Swedish authorities. Empirical insights from observing the ITP-DRM suggest three main organisational strategic approaches through which CAS thinking affects the transformative potential and effectiveness of bilateral development cooperation projects. These strategic approaches include: embracing uncertainty and strategic navigation, networked solidarity and collaborative governance, and leveraging diversity for transformative learning.

This chapter delves into the discussion of the empirical findings in relation to the literature in the research fields and presents the three main contributions to the literature in the research fields.

6.1. The open polities of hybridisation

In addressing the first research question of my thesis, “How is CAS thinking realised in bilateral development cooperation projects?” I propose a novel theoretical contribution by broadening the application of the open-polity perspective from organisational studies (Weber & Waeger, 2017; Waeger & Weber, 2019). This perspective, traditionally confined to an intra-organisational context, is extended to

explore multi-stakeholder, inter-organisational political dynamics in development cooperation. This theoretical and empirical extension illuminates the interplay of multiple co-existing institutional logics—managerialist, collaborative, and developmental—in Swedish bilateral development cooperation projects, as highlighted in Chapter 5.

Specifically, these findings align with Kumi and Saharan's (2021) observations in Kenyan advocacy-based civil society organisations, where managerialist logic often overshadows the intended social transformation principles. This dominance leads to a hybridisation of logics by implementing organisations in development cooperation, where the desired policy goals of donor governments are diluted due to the overpowering influence of managerialism (ibid; Scott, 2021; Gutheil, 2021).

In project studies, Ika and Munro (2022) underscore the inherent complexities and uncertainties in managing grand challenge projects, a category that closely aligns with development cooperation projects. Their insights into the varying nature of projects—from the predictable 'planner logic' to the emergent 'searcher logic'—resonate with the empirical findings of this research. The need for strategic execution, adaptability, and collaborative engagement in the decision-making of these projects underscores the antecedents for realising CAS practices.

This research has contributed a fine-grained understanding of the hybrid nature of Swedish bilateral development cooperation projects as evolving organising structures, norms, practices, and the increasingly hybrid organisational identity of traditional bureaucratic organisations like Sida and the authorities. The research enhances our understanding of hybridisation in networked multi-stakeholder environments, demonstrating how strategic resource mobilisation, institutional embeddedness, and coherent network governance are pivotal for the realisation of CAS thinking in development cooperation. These dynamics illustrate the evolving complexities and the need for a nuanced approach to managing multiple institutional logics in the context of global-local interactions.

Similarly, in public administration, Denis et al. (2015) advocate for more research into hybridity of logics to gain a deeper understanding of its manifestation in public organisations and the factors that influence it. This research contributes to this call by offering an institutionally embedded view of the interplay of multiple logics of practices in bilateral development cooperation projects, where role practitioners' individual agency prevails in a decentralised development cooperation system, resulting in diverse hybridisation types (i.e., specialisation- or integration-centric). These hybridisation types are evidently a result of social constructions between role practitioners in their principal-agent interactions to try to balance between adaptability, performance, and accountability.

Thus, this research underscores the dynamic and intricate process of realising CAS thinking in bilateral development cooperation projects. It reveals how continuous negotiation between diverse institutional logics different role practitioners enact and

the historical imprinting dominance of managerialism (Waeger & Weber, 2019) in the system shapes the projects' strategic and operational facets. This complex interplay, as evidenced in the empirical findings, highlights the challenges involved in harmonising efficiency, collaboration, and developmental objectives in development projects. Therefore, the open politics of institutional hybridisation unveiled in this thesis emerge as a fundamental aspect in understanding the practical application of CAS thinking, making significant contributions to the fields of development cooperation, public administration, and project studies in tackling global challenges.

6.2. Multidimensional resilience for fundamental change

In addressing the second research question, “How do CAS thinking affects the transformative potential and effectiveness of bilateral development cooperation projects?”, this thesis provides a novel theoretical contribution to public administration, project studies and development studies research. By integrating CAS thinking with multidimensional resilience research in project studies, this approach catalyses organisational transformation in bilateral development cooperation, as evidenced in the empirical findings of Chapter 5.

Drawing upon a comprehensive analysis of Swedish bilateral development cooperation projects implemented by the authorities (Papers I-IV), this research challenges traditional results management paradigms and the often rhetoric commitment to adaptive management in development cooperation. It advocates for a CAS approach that recognises the inter-dependencies, interconnectedness and the dynamic interplay of various factors influencing project outcomes, including the need for adaptability, strategic execution, and collaborative engagement in decision-making. This perspective resonates with the empirical findings (viz. Papers III and IV), where diverse scenarios in development cooperation projects necessitate flexible and fundamental change in times of turbulence and uncertainties.

The concept of transformative resilience (Paper III) extends McEvoy et al.'s (2016) CAS theoretical constructs and Gutheil's (2021)'s CSO experiences to emphasis holistic, adaptable, and context-sensitive approaches to bounce forward, not backward, in navigating the open politics inherent in development cooperation. This research demonstrates the necessity of embracing complexity and resilience for effective organisational transformation and development results.

This perspective is also supported by Eppel & Rhodes (2018) in public administration, who emphasise the need for complexity-informed public administration to address complexities in the public sector. This research bridges these ideas, demonstrating the necessity of embracing complexity and resilience in

bilateral development projects for effective organisational transformation and public policy implementation results.

Specifically, this research exemplifies the theoretical integration of CAS thinking with multidimensional resilience, as demonstrated in Paper III. The ITP-DRM's and Sida's proactive responses to challenges, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, showcase their capacities as open systems adept at adapting and evolving – key hallmarks of multidimensional resilience within a CAS framework. This case study provides empirical evidence of the efficacy of this integrated approach in diverse development scenarios, contributing valuable insights to the fields of development cooperation and public administration.

In particular, the ITP-DRM project's prompt and institutionally embedded response to the pandemic, which included rapid adaptation of project strategies and enhanced stakeholder collaboration, serves as a practical embodiment of this theoretical integration. Furthermore, the research, as illustrated in Paper IV, showcases how networked approaches and collaborative governance mechanisms underpin the transformative resilience and effectiveness of capacity development projects within disaster risk management. These approaches align with CAS principles and highlight the importance of network dynamics and strategic resource allocation in fostering adaptable and effective responses to complex challenges in development cooperation.

The research findings contribute novel conceptual and empirical insights to resilience research in project management literature, especially in advocating for reconceptualising of success in projects with intangible outcomes and multiplicity of logics of practice (Ika & Donnelly, 2016; Ika & Munro, 2022). Notably, the empirical findings in the thesis echo the views of Ika and Donnelly (2016) and Ika and Pinto (2023) to argue for such projects' results or performance management frameworks to account for factors such as efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, complexity, time, and stakeholder views, as conditions for success (Papers III and IV). Together, the empirical findings of this thesis suggest that realising CAS thinking in Swedish development cooperation projects would entail Sida, implementing organisations and local partners to collaboratively manage uncertainties and complexities by employing strategies that are adaptive, collaborative, and resilience-oriented. This approach substantiates the argument for a results or performance management framework in project management that acknowledges inter-connectedness, emergence and self-organisation (McEvoy et al. 2016; Eppel & Rhodes, 2018) and encompasses the strategies or key elements in the pathways presented in Chapter 5, if development projects are, as intended, to address grand challenges effectively and sustainably.

Resilience research is an emerging field in project studies (Nadpajourh et al., 2023). This research (Paper III) contributes empirical and processual insights into the conceptual building blocks of resilience in projects (Nadpajourh et al., 2023) from

a CAS thinking to highlight that the sum of multiple parts, such as stakeholders' cognitive characteristics (Paper III) deserves more attention than ever in times of complexity with disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic. An important takeaway from this research, as acknowledged by Nadpajourh et al. (2023), is that despite the non-centralised structure of the institutions involved in the Swedish bilateral development cooperation project (i.e., ITP-DRM), a distributed system was able to affect inter-project coordination and take on resilience management. Conceptualising project resilience as not just adaptability but also the ability to thrive and foster fundamental change (Folke, 2006; Folke et al., 2010) towards strategic development goals through broaden the knowledge base and social interactions, this research contributes to understanding resilience as a multi-dimensional phenomenon – a dimension that has been less explored in the literature of all the research fields.

In essence, integrating multidimensional resilience with CAS thinking offers a fresh perspective for recalibrating success metrics in bilateral development projects. This approach highlights the importance of adaptable, context-sensitive, and collaborative strategies in managing the complexities of development cooperation. My research contributes significantly to advancing our understanding of navigating global development challenges, offering a nuanced understanding of critical success factors for more effective and transformative project managerial practices.

6.3. Collaborative rationality vs. the 'Iron Cage'

This section forms the third and pivotal thematic contribution of this thesis, exploring the interplay between collaborative rationality and entrenched bureaucratic norms, often conceptualised as the 'Iron Cage' (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), inherent in development cooperation projects. The empirical insights into different real-life scenarios of bilateral development cooperation project resonate with the diversity and heterogeneity in project types and logics of practices highlighted by Ika and Munro (2022). These authors highlight the importance of identifying and acknowledging that the diversity in project types within grand challenges can range from 'run-of-the-mill' projects, which may align with 'planner logic' due to their predictability and need for detailed planning, to complex 'stretch-the-envelope' grand challenge projects that require 'searcher logic' to navigate uncertainty and emergent conditions. Moreover, they propose an 'in-between logic' for projects that embody elements of both complexity and predictability, suggesting a more nuanced approach to project management in development cooperation (Ika & Donnelly, 2016; Ika & Munro, 2022).

As a commitment to Type 3 project studies research (Geraldini & Söderlund, 2018) conducted through a pragmatist stance, this research stands out for its integration of

practical project management complexities with theoretical insights, thus enriching the existing body of knowledge on managing complex development cooperation projects which tend to fail in achieving or sustaining their intended development outcomes (Armstrong, 2013).

Development cooperation project management is inherently complex, interlaced with socio-cultural, political, and technical intricacies. The ‘Iron Cage’ metaphor (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) succinctly encapsulates the constraints of bureaucratic structures, yet this thesis advocates for the potential of collaborative rationality, as conceptualised by Ika and Munro (2022), to challenge and reshape these constraints.

Ika and Munro (2022) emphasise the importance of collaborative rationality (Innes & Booher, 2010) in grand challenge projects, where diverse stakeholders engage in inclusive and authentic dialogue, fostering collaboration and shared understanding in complex, multi-stakeholder environments. This approach, essential for handling the diverse logics of practice within the network of role practitioners in development projects, adds a unique dimension to established theories and practices, resonating with the ethos of Type 3 project studies research, and contributing new theoretical and empirical materials.

Empirical findings (viz. Papers III and IV) from this research, interlink with theoretical concepts explored in earlier chapters, revealing how institutions evolve through social interactions, specifically in principal-agent relationships in development cooperation context (Mosse, 2004, Eyben, 2010). This aspect, drawing upon institutional logics research of Ocasio (2023) and critical development project studies research of Scott (2021) to focus on the politics, enriches our understanding of collaborative rationality within the politicised context of bilateral development cooperation policy implementation projects as open and adaptive systems with historically imprinting salience of managerialist logic. The thesis extends their theoretical and empirical insights by demonstrating how collaborative rationality can not only challenge, but also adapt to and reshape, the institutional context in development cooperation, thereby making a novel contribution to this field.

Gutheil’s (2020) assertive claim that adaptive management alone “cannot save us” (p.129) in development cooperation echoes the need to transcend bureaucratic boundaries and adopts CAS-informed policy and practice. Collaborative rationality, as argued in this thesis, emerges as a transformative force for redefining institutional norms as an interconnected, multi-dimensional and inter-dependent organisational culture and capacities, supporting and expanding upon the empirical insights of this research.

In Chapter 5, the successful navigation of operational complexities in projects like ITP-DRM through contextual, behavioural, and cognitive embeddedness strategies is showcased (Paper III). These strategies challenge traditional bureaucratic managerial practices, stressing the need for a holistic approach that encompasses both technical and strategic concerns in project management.

The thesis contributes to the discourse on cognitive and decision biases in public administration, building upon the work of Bach and Wegrich (2019) and Pilbeam (2014). Insights from the research further substantiate the argument for collaborative rationality by demonstrating how networked solidarity and resource mobilisation strategies can effectively navigate and transcend bureaucratic constraints. The thesis advocates for a more inclusive, adaptive, and networked approach to project management in development cooperation, offering a practical pathway to overcome traditional bureaucratic limitations and foster transformative change. Specifically, it proposes integrative strategies that align project activities with the socio-political and institutional dynamics of partner countries, offering practical pathways for mitigating these inherent biases and blind spots (neglects or oversights) which often lead to a mismatch between logics and types of projects (Ika & Munro, 2022), thus extending existing literature.

The thesis thereby also adds empirical material to the arguments by Archibald et al. (2018) that all development practitioners as ‘knowledge brokers’, echoing the rise of ‘hybrid professionalism’ (e.g., Noordegraaf, 2020) and ‘cross-sector strategies’ (Kanon & Andersson, 2023) in the Nordic countries’ public administration literature. It underscores the critical role of development and public sector practitioners in adapting their professional and organisational identities to contemporary challenges (Papers I and II). This boundary-spanning professional and organisational dynamics are key elements in enacting individual agency to realise CAS practices. The research provides rich empirical material on the evolving organisational, professional and systems dynamics of project environments towards this direction. These insights align with and deepen the discussion on inclusive and collaborative decision-making processes as ideal organisational types. Doing so, the research also enriches the understanding how absorptive capacity and knowledge integration, emphasised by Berggren, Sydow, and Tell (2017) in boundary-crossing environments, can facilitate development organisations navigate institutional constraints through reflective agency and dynamic capabilities in organisational change in times of complexities for achieving the greater good (Papers III and IV).

In summary, this thesis, positioned as a Type 3 project studies research, provides profound insights into how CAS thinking is realised and affects the transformative potential and effectiveness of bilateral development cooperation projects. It highlights the potential of collaborative rationality as a promising approach for navigating the open politics and transcending the invisible ‘Iron Cage’ of cultural and cognitive institutions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) inherent in public organisations and development cooperation. Echoing arguments by proponents for doing development differently and adaptive management (Honig & Gulrajani, 2018; Brinkerhoff et al., 2018), this research’s core tenets emphasise the importance of actualising donors’ good intentions through a systematic and holistic consideration of institutional factors across levels. However, this research proposes that such

strategic shifts are more likely to achieve and sustain transformative development outcomes through a CAS perspective that critically attends to the influence of historical imprinting features, internal and external organisational political dynamics. In essence, this thesis bridges the theoretical aspirations and practical realities in the field, offering a comprehensive roadmap for assessing the readiness and fostering antecedents through collaborative rationality to operationalise CAS practices.

7. Conclusion

Reflecting on the Sida's 'Reclaim the Results – Development Talks' event on Valentine's Day 2018, this thesis began with a deep dive into the nuanced and intricate landscape of Swedish bilateral development cooperation project management. This research sought to improve the understanding and management of the complexities and challenges that underlie the realisation of CAS thinking in bilateral development cooperation, highlighting the need for enhanced adaptability and resilience in project managerial practices. This journey, grounded in the unique Swedish context of bilateral development cooperation involving a network of Swedish authorities, has been pivotal in shedding light on the often overlooked organisational political dynamics.

The key contributions and reflections are:

The open politics of hybridisation: By extending the open-polity perspective to the often multi-stakeholder, inter-organisational context of development cooperation projects, the research sheds light on the interplay of multiple co-existing and competing institutional logics (managerialist, collaborative, and developmental in the Swedish case) influencing practices. It highlights the nuanced dynamics within these cooperative ventures, highlighting the challenges in integrating CAS thinking with the historically dominant managerialist approach. In doing so, the thesis asserts that while applying RBM adaptively is a step forward, it alone is insufficient to fully address the deep-seated complexities and power dynamics inherent in the management of development projects for tangible results on the ground. Embracing CAS thinking and practices underlines the importance of proactive, as opposed to reactive, project management strategies in navigating these intricacies. The thesis thus advocates for a recognition of the need to foster a balance of diverse institutional perspectives, promoting holistic and anticipatory project management approaches that are adaptable to complex and dynamic environmental changes. This approach aims to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of development projects by aligning them more closely with the realities and challenges they aim to address.

Multidimensional resilience for fundamental change: This thesis establishes a crucial link between proactive adaptation and multi-dimensional resilience in the context of development cooperation projects. It explores how multidimensional resilience can inform fundamental organisational change. A significant insight is

how proactive adaptation to complexities and adversarial events, underpinned by a broad and inclusive knowledge base, can propel projects forward. This strategy addresses blind spots and risk-averse tendencies in development cooperation while capitalising on the potential opportunities presented by disruptive scenarios. The thesis emphasises that integrating multiple institutional perspectives is vital for achieving multidimensional resilience and fundamental organisational change, crucially addressing co-agency imbalances in fragmented project, programme and portfolio responsibilities. It argues for the prioritisation of multi-dimensional resilience-building in project design and evaluation. Furthermore, the development of robust and inclusive knowledge management systems is advocated to foster a culture of innovation and continuous learning. This approach enhances projects' capacity for transformative adaptation, ensuring they are fit for purpose especially in multiple principal-agent project environments.

Collaborative rationality vs. the 'Iron Cage': This research underlines the potential of collaborative rationality to challenge and reshape entrenched bureaucratic norms and constraints, offering a novel approach for balancing the diverse logics of practice in development projects. It sheds light on the evolving nature of institutions, encompassing formal and informal rules, norms, identities and practices, and underscores the significance of embedded co-agency within principal-agent relationships. These insights deepen our understanding of the necessity to balance structured, bureaucratic organisational methodologies with the need for flexibility and innovation in development cooperation. Moving beyond transcend bureaucratic confines in development cooperation, this thesis advocates for a shift towards more inclusive and collaborative decision-making processes. This approach, integrating various stakeholders and institutional perspectives at all stages of project management (conceptualisation, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation), aims to cultivate shared understanding and collective ownership. The role of effective and distributed leadership in collaborative projects is essential for navigating challenges like resistance to change and the inherent open politics in contemporary development project management. This reorientation towards collaborative rationality, in concert with the insights gained from the earlier discussions on multidimensional resilience and proactive adaptation, underscores the imperative to repoliticise the management of projects as a means to genuinely reclaim development results.

Knowledge integration and cross-disciplinary learning: Emphasising the need for integrating insights from diverse disciplines, the thesis highlights how cross-learning, facilitated by the open-polity and CAS perspectives, can provide comprehensive insights and enrich the discourse within Swedish development cooperation. The research champions a multidisciplinary approach to grasp and navigate the complexities inherent in development cooperation projects, recognising the value of diverse perspectives and engaged scholarship in understanding complex social-political system dynamics. The emphasis on cross-disciplinary collaboration

and knowledge exchange is equally important for enhancing the understanding and management of complex development projects. This thesis encourages donor agencies and implementing organisations to actively support and foster initiatives that promote cross-disciplinary collaboration and learning across a broad spectrum of academic and practical fields. This multidisciplinary approach aligns with the principles of CAS and proactive project management, as presented earlier, particularly in its focus on harnessing diverse institutional perspectives, multidimensional resilience, and collaborative rationality. From a pragmatist perspective, it emphasises seizing emergent opportunities for learning and adapting within evolving development policy and funding environments. Cultivating a more holistic and responsive epistemic community is crucial not only for effectively addressing the global challenges of our time but also for tackling reflexively inherent power imbalances within these contexts.

While offering novel insights, the research acknowledges limitations. It recognises the need to further explore the practical implications of shifting from project-based adaptive management to CAS thinking in bilateral development cooperation. Moreover, the research primarily focussed on the micro foundations of Swedish bilateral development cooperation projects implemented by the authorities as a sub-field, leaving room for deeper exploration of the collective agency and decision-making of the network in the authorities' development cooperation practices. A more thorough investigation into the socio-political dynamics, emotional responses of stakeholders, communication and knowledge-exchange patterns, and power dynamics within these projects could enrich our understanding of the factors influencing decision-making in bilateral development cooperation.

Additionally, the extension of the open-polity framework was primarily focused on particular logics and the managerial perspective in Swedish RBM context at a specific time when the authorities were gaining significance in development cooperation. Future studies could explore other more nuanced logics in another temporal context or other donor countries' results management frameworks for a more comprehensive understanding of realising CAS in development cooperation practices. Moreover, the emphasis on collaborative rationality would be enriched by balancing it with other relevant decision-making paradigms in specific North-South and North-South-South development cooperation contexts. The generalisability of the findings poses a question for future research, especially concerning authorities with different historical imprints or those engaged in varied development cooperation initiatives. Future research in Swedish development cooperation should consider employing innovative methodologies and engage in cross-disciplinary collaborations.

Reflecting on the broader implications of this research, the need to navigating a complex interplay of societal, political, and ethical dimensions is paramount in development cooperation. This thesis contributes to the academic discourse on development cooperation project management and responds to the call for a more

profound reconceptualisation of adaptive management from a CAS and open-polity perspective. Future explorations could build on the groundwork of this thesis to advance our understanding and management of the complex endeavours in development cooperation.

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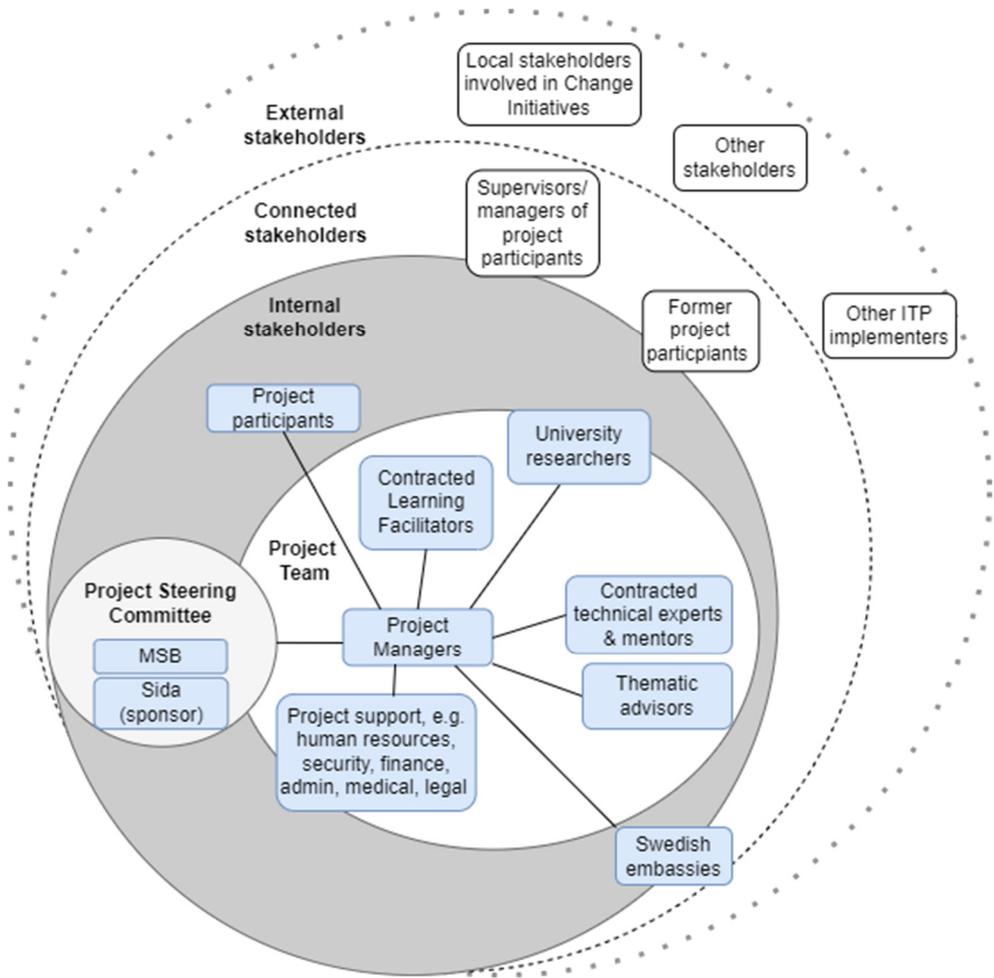
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Appendix I: Profile of three focal authorities

Authorities (pseudo name)	2018 Sida disbursement (SEK)	Main project sites 2018-2019	Development Cooperation Experience	Staff involved in 2018
ALPHA	53,2 million	9 projects: global, regional and 14 countries mainly in Eastern Europe and Africa	Since 1980s	115
BETA	54,5 million	11 projects: global, regional (Balkans) and 8 geographically spread countries	Since 1980s	212
GAMMA	37 million	15 projects: global, regional and 11 countries mainly in Eastern Europe	Since early 1990s	78

Appendix II: ITP-DRM project network



Appendix III: ITP-DRM cycle lifespan

Phases	Approximate duration	Main networking activities
Formal ITP-DRM support		
Preparatory	2 months	A regional physical workshop with all network members in one of the partner countries to contextualise learning content based on their needs
Implementation	7-9 months	A series of learning events, e.g., an advanced 2-week workshop in Sweden with all participants, coaching support, experts' follow-up visits to each program country, refinement and implementation of local change initiatives.
Phasing-out	3-6 months	Individual network members and their mentors' final reports to capture their experience, capacity changes and lessons, a final physical workshop in one of the program countries with all old and new network members to share experiences, and identify self-organised continuous learning and networking opportunities in respective countries.
Informal ITP-DRM support		
Formal exit	During ITP-DRM project period	Participation in ITP-DRM regional network events, limited ad hoc financial support to participate in other regional networking events. Swedish embassies in the country hosts some networking events.

Paper I



Institutional Hybridisation in Swedish Public Sector Development Cooperation

Jenny Iao-Jørgensen

Division of Risk Management and Societal Safety, Department of Building and Environmental Technology, Faculty of Engineering, Lund University, P.O. Box 118, 22100 Lund, Sweden.

Email: jenny.iao-jorgensen@risk.lth.se

Abstract: While the concept of hybridisation (blending of different organisational forms, logics, or identities) in public administration has gained traction, its interplay with principal-agent dynamics, especially within development cooperation, remains underexplored. Recent shifts towards the “whole-of-society” paradigm in Swedish development cooperation introduce complexities in the inter-organisational dynamics between actors involved. However, our understanding of how these dynamics influence the manifestation of hybridisation in everyday practices is limited. Drawing on the development cooperation experience of Swedish national authorities and data collected from interviews, focus group discussions, and archival documents, this study identifies the interplaying dynamics of three coexisting logics (managerialist, collaborative, and developmental), and two types of hybridisation (specialisation-centric and integration-centric). These findings shed light on the challenges and opportunities the inter-organisational dynamics induce for translating the “whole-of-society” policy paradigm into development practice and outcomes. The study’s theoretical and practical implications for hybridisation in public administration and development studies are discussed.

Keywords: Hybridisation, Principal-Agent Dynamics, Development Cooperation, Whole-of-Society Paradigm, Swedish Authorities

Introduction

Like many contemporary public sectors, the development cooperation landscape is swiftly evolving. Transitioning towards a post-aid era (Alonso, 2016), development cooperation underscores broader engagement, domestic and foreign policy coherence, and development effectiveness to address global sustainable development challenges (Gulrajani, 2022; Nilsson, Chisholm, & Giggs, 2018; Chaturvedi et al., 2021). This era, mirroring broader public sector trends, is marked by a shift towards hybrid governance (Denis, Ferlie, & Van Gestel, 2015), where the “whole-of-society” (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2007; Develtere, Huyse, & Van Ongevalle, 2021, pp. 187–232) approach becomes paramount. In the development cooperation context, such a shift emphasises collaborative, adaptive problem-solving through the mobilisation of both traditional and novel resources, actors, and sectors for impactful global public policy outcomes (Brinkerhoff et al., 2018; Chaturvedi et al., 2021; Develtere et al., 2021). It underscores the increasing policy overlap between development, global challenges, and global public goods, necessitating robust and adaptable development effectiveness principles (Gulrajani, 2022).

As the development cooperation landscape shifts towards hybrid governance, organisations often navigate the multifaceted demands of an evolving global development paradigm with new opportunities and contestations (Chaturvedi et al., 2021). They must reconcile their foundational organisational norms, identities, and logics with the diverse actors and sometimes conflicting demands of a “whole-of-society” approach. This approach presents a unique set of practical implementation challenges, prompting organisations to seek innovative solutions, adaptive strategies, and strategic resources.

Amidst these shifts, hybridisation emerges as a promising avenue of sociological thinking to explore the interconnectedness between donors (principals) and their policy intentions and the implementation realities of non-conventional development cooperation organisations (agents) within the development cooperation system. Hybridisation entails the combination of different organisational forms, logics, or identities (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Denis et al., 2015; Aoyama, & Parthasarathy, 2016; Skelcher & Smith, 2015). According to Denis et al. (2015), hybridisation offers a way for public service organisations to reconcile diverse, sometimes incompatible, conflicting demands, organisational norms, identities, and practices in response to policy shifts.

The institutional logic and hybridisation lens are prevalent in the business sector and are gaining traction in development studies (e.g., Heeks et al., 2020; Kumi & Saharan, 2022). Institutional logic refers to the values, beliefs, and norms guiding the actions and decision-making of individuals and organisations (Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury, 2012). Although the concepts are not necessarily new to public

administration, they are still as theoretically undeveloped as in development studies (Denis et al., 2015; Fejerskov, 2016; Heeks et al., 2020). The focus in the existing hybridisation literature has predominantly been on macro-level structure, as manifested in shifts of coordination and corresponding management and governance modes, or conventional principals or agents.

The sector-specific intricacies of hybridisation within single organisations are not fully understood (Denis et al., 2015; Laihonen & Kokko, 2023). A broader and multi-level understanding (including organisational strategies and the role of public managers and professionals) is needed as public sectors increasingly rely on inter-organisational and inter-sectoral collaboration and decision-making (Denis et al., 2015). Moreover, how agency and social interaction processes shape hybridisation in various public sectors remains limited (*ibid.*).

In the contemporary development cooperation context, such understandings are crucial to unveil the ‘black box’ of how the principal-agent dynamics influence global policy outcomes and development effectiveness despite donors’ well-intended reforms (McCourt & Gulrajani, 2010; Gulrajani, 2011). The principal-agent dynamics are often discussed in development studies in terms of the relationships between donors (principals) and recipient governments or implementing organisations (agents) (see, e.g., Martens et al., 2002; Dietrich, 2011). It is well recognised that the historical imprints of power imbalances in development cooperation shape its practices, outcomes, and relationships between actors such as donors, implementers, and beneficiaries (Mosse, 2014; Eyben, 2010). Understanding principal-agent dynamics in hybridising multiple logics, forms and identities is vital to unpacking the intricate interplay of global policy commitments and local implementation realities in the post-aid era.

In this research context, this article seeks to improve our understanding of the role of principal-agent dynamics in the hybridisation of multiple institutional logics by adding new empirical case material in Swedish central government authorities. The authorities are underexplored non-expert development organisations in the development cooperation context. These authorities, including sectors such as police, employment, crisis management, statistics, land administration, environmental protection, and tax agencies, have been deeply embedded in the Swedish development cooperation system. With over 20 authorities actively involved, they manage a total of around 600 million SEK (around 57 million USD) of annual funding allocations from the government’s bilateral development cooperation (Allen et al., 2020). Collaborating with a range of stakeholders, from the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) to EU and international partners, they align with Sweden’s global, geographical and thematic development strategic areas in numerous low- and middle-income countries.

Historically, their involvement in Sweden development cooperation can be traced back to initiatives from the 1990s. Unlike the NGO sector, some of these authorities operate based on government directives, either allowing or mandating development cooperation work. Their significance is further emphasised in the new five-year strategy dedicated to realising the Swedish “whole-of-society” efforts towards global commitments like the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development (UN, 2015). Despite their expansive role and reach in development cooperation, comprehensive knowledge about their operational dynamics remains limited. The recently established inter-authority hub (*Myndighetsnavet*) in 2021 within Sida underscores the authorities’ growing significance in the Sweden’s post-aid era and recent “whole-of-society” development cooperation policy discussions. With Sweden’s flexible approach to development cooperation, hybrid public administration models, and commitment to policy reforms and sustainable development (OECD, 2019; GOS, 2018; Bexell & Jönsson, 2017), the Swedish system offers a compelling case for studying the authorities’ hybridisation.

Given this context, this research poses these two main questions: What are multiple institutional logics in the authorities’ development cooperation practices? How do the principal-agent dynamics manifest in their hybridisation of these logics?

The empirical foundation of this research is rooted in interviews with 34 key informants (including project managers and personnel from the authorities and Sida aid bureaucrats) and an analysis of other complementary data (two focus group discussions and 30 archival documents) collected between December 2018 and December 2019.

The study contributes to the public administration and development literature by elucidating the principal-agent dynamics in the “whole-of-society” development cooperation policy orientation context. It identifies three coexisting yet often conflicting logics: managerialist, collaborative, and developmental. These tensions highlight the authorities’ challenges in reconciling their longstanding practices with evolving expectations from donors like Sida and their internal legitimacy and resource challenges. The research underscores the complexities of hybridisation, where global policy aspirations sometimes clash with local implementation realities. By exploring these inter-organisational principal-agent dynamics within the Swedish development cooperation system, the study offers insights into the intricate negotiations and agency challenges inherent in contemporary hybrid structures in development cooperation.

The article proceeds as follows: The subsequent section delves into the theoretical underpinnings of hybridisation and its interplay with principal-agent dynamics in the context of the “whole-of-society” paradigm. This is followed by the materials and methods section. The findings section presents the identified dynamics of coexisting logics and types of hybridisation. The discussion elaborates on their

implications for theory and practice in development cooperation, and it also addresses the study's limitations and offers recommendations for future research.

Theoretical Background

According to Develtere et al. (2021), the landscape of development cooperation has undergone a radical transformation, evolving from its colonial origins to its current forms. The authors highlight that this institutional field, from a European perspective, has transitioned from a system of interstate transfers, influenced by political allegiances, market access, and regional stability, to a “whole-of-society paradigm”. This paradigm reflects an emergent institutional pluralism in the field, characterised by the increasing involvement of new non-state, non-expert actors in development cooperation, each bringing new organisational principles, resources, interests, norms and practices. For example, non-expert actors could include grassroots organisations, community-based groups, social movements, trade unions, faith-based organisations, and philanthro-capitalists (Develtere et al., 2021). These actors may not have formal training or expertise in development theory or practice but contribute to development efforts through their local knowledge, mobilisation, advocacy, and resource allocation. Although Swedish authorities have engaged in development cooperation since the 1980s, the recent policy and administrative reforms have imposed new institutional demands on Sida’s coordination role and the authorities’ development cooperation practices. In this context, the concepts of institutional logics and hybridisation to explore the role of principal-agent dynamics in the authorities’ development cooperation practices become increasingly relevant.

Institutional logics in development cooperation

Institutional logics serve as the foundational blueprints that guide and shape the actions of organisations and individuals within them (Ocasio, 2023). Defined as “socially constructed historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules,” they influence acceptable goals, organising principles, and consequently, the priorities, strategies, and practices of organisations (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999; Pache & Thornton, 2021).

Within the realm of development cooperation, the institutional logics perspective can illuminate the underlying motivations, priorities, and interactions of various actors, including donors, recipient governments, implementing organisations, and other non-conventional development actors (Kumi & Saharan, 2022; Ocasio, 2023). Central to these logics are dominant cultural symbols and practices, which in the context of development cooperation, might encompass norms such as

accountability, transparency, efficiency, or local ownership (Kumi & Saharan, 2021).

Mair et al. (2015) highlight that contemporary organisational fields often encompass various institutional logics. This coexistence gives rise to hybrid organisations (Pache & Santos, 2013), like the authorities in the present research context. Such organisations, while navigating the complexities of multiple logics, often face tensions arising from differing cultural symbols and practices. Recognising these tensions is crucial for understanding the alignment or misalignment between the expectations of principals and agents, offering insights into potential areas of conflict or collaboration.

In the current “whole-of-society” development cooperation context, with its emphasis on broader engagement and collaboration, underscores the importance of understanding these institutional pluralism, and consequent tensions. The “whole-of-society” approach challenges the field’s self-referentiality, where there is a pronounced focus on traditional development actors’ internal discourse and practices, often sidelining complex inter-organisational issues (Develtere et al., 2021). Such tendencies can potentially limit organisations’ adaptability and institutionalisation of new logics, making it imperative to explore how macro-level approaches manifest in everyday micro-level dynamics. This self-referentiality and the associated biases, as highlighted in public sector literature, manifest as the politics of non-coordination in public bureaucracies (Bach & Wegrich, 2019), potentially reinforcing dominant bureaucratic or managerialist logics and sidelining collaborative, and outward-looking development logics.

In this article, three main institutional logics are derived from the framework of Kumi and Saharan (2021) and Develtere et al. (2021) in the context of Swedish authorities’ development cooperation practice:

- (1) Managerialist logic: A top-down, apolitical, and technocratic approach to development, emphasising efficiency in achieving development goals.
- (2) Development logic: Aiming for equitable and sustainable development outcomes, this logic focuses on processes that address the root causes of underdevelopment and poverty, promoting social change and transforming power structures.
- (3) Collaborative logic: This logic prioritises shared goals, mutual respect, and joint decision-making, fostering an environment where each actor’s strengths are leveraged for the collective good (Develtere et al., 2021).

Understanding these logics, especially in the context of hybrid organisations like the authorities, is pivotal for exploring the intricacies of principal-agent dynamics in the “whole-of-society” development cooperation context.

Hybridisation in development cooperation

Hybridisation concerns the combination of different organising forms, logics and identities. This often arises in response to external pressures or policy shifts (Denis et al., 2015). In development cooperation, hybridisation is a tangible reality, evident in integrating traditional development practices with innovative approaches or reconciling donor priorities with local needs and contexts. The “whole-of-society” approach, emphasising inclusivity, partnership, and collaboration, necessitates a pronounced degree of hybridisation.

Organisations and actors in inter-organisational environments grapple with reconciling multiple, often conflicting, institutional logics to achieve shared objectives. The challenge is twofold: managing these inherent tensions while ensuring the collaborative ethos of the 'whole-of-society' approach remains intact. The involvement of non-expert actors, such as the authorities in this research context, introduces additional complexities (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2011). While not steeped in formal development expertise, these actors contribute unique perspectives and local knowledge, challenging and reshaping traditional development paradigms.

According to Kumi and Saharan (2021), hybridisation is a pivotal aspect of transitioning from one dominant logic to another in development cooperation. However, even amidst the dominance of a new logic from a high-level order, the historical imprints of the old logic can persist, subtly influencing organisational behaviour. This coexistence of multiple institutional logics, as highlighted by Kumi and Saharan (2021), drawing insights from Reay and Hinings (2009), suggests that competing logics can coexist, rather than completely overshadowing the other. Such coexistence can sometimes lead to resistance against a dominant logic, with institutional remnants associated with the old logic persisting even amidst a shift in the dominant paradigm (Zilber, 2011).

Denis et al. (2015) posit that hybridisation often emerges as organisations navigate the multifaceted demands of evolving paradigms. They must reconcile foundational norms, identities, and practices with a changing environment's diverse and sometimes conflicting demands. For instance, in exploring the government-civil society organisation (CSO) relationships in joint community development initiatives in South Korea, Min (2022) further elucidates that the distinctive logics different collaborating organisations represent can create incompatibilities. Such incompatibilities, often stemming from differing cultural symbols and practices, can lead to tensions, necessitating mechanisms for alignment or negotiation. In development cooperation, where multiple institutional logics coexist, hybridisation is prevalent (Kumi & Saharan, 2021; Heeks et al., 2020). The introduction of the collaborative logic or rationality (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) as manifested in the “whole-of-society” paradigm further accentuates this hybrid nature (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2007; 2011). This research, therefore, employs the concept of

hybridisation to explore how these logics – managerialist, developmental, and collaborative – manifest in the practices of Swedish authorities in their development cooperation activities.

In line with Denis et al. (2015), it is essential to note that hybridisation is not just a top-down process influenced by overarching institutional logics. The agency of individual organisations and their members involved in the principal-agent dynamics plays a significant role in shaping this process, as they navigate the complexities of multiple logics in their everyday practices (Falanga, 2019; Bach & Wegrich, 2019). Their actions and decisions can challenge or perpetuate the self-referentiality (Develtere et al., 2021) and cultural-cognitive bias (Bach & Wegrich, 2019) observed in the broader development cooperation field.

In this vein, as Denis et al. (2015) highlight, understanding agency and social interactions is crucial in exploring hybridisation. Central to this exploration in this research is the understanding of power dynamics and principal-agent dynamics. As widely recognised in development studies, power dynamics shape the relationships and interactions between donors, recipient governments, implementing organisations, and other actors, and subsequently, development effectiveness (Eyben, 2010). These organisational, and political dynamics influence decision-making, resource allocation, and the overall direction of development initiatives (McCourt & Gulrajani, 2010; Gulrajani, 2011). The principal-agent dynamics delve deeper into the relationships between donors (principals) and their implementing partners (agents) (Martens et al., 2002) and is, therefore, crucial for understanding how the macro-level “whole-of-society” approach manifests in everyday micro-level interactions, especially in the face of potential conflicts. By exploring these dynamics in the hybridisation of the case context, this research seeks to offer nuanced insights into the intricate negotiations, agency challenges, and power dynamics inherent in hybrid governance structures inherent in the “whole-of-society” development context.

Materials and Methods

Case study approach and setting

This research employs a single multi-site case study approach (Yin, 2009) to explore and explain how principal-agent dynamics manifest in the authorities’ hybridisation in everyday development cooperation practices. This study chose this design due to the underexplored nature of the hybridisation phenomenon, a unique and intricate area requiring nuanced exploration (Eisenhardt, 1989). This multi-site approach is suitable for this research, enabling exploration and explanation of the hybridisation across different authorities, principal-agent dynamics, and professionals involved.

It facilitates examining varied experiences, perspectives, and contextual factors, contributing to a richer and more diversified understanding of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The Swedish central governmental authorities, integral to the Swedish development cooperation system, bring sector-specific competencies and peer-to-peer solidarity to the field. Their unique strategic advantage in Swedish development cooperation is their sector-specific public administration and management expertise and peer public-sector status with their governmental counterparts in cooperation countries. However, this strategic advantage is being challenged in the evolving landscape of development cooperation that often requires integrated rather than specialised expertise (Janus, Klingebiel, & Paulo, 2014). The authorities' significance in the Swedish development cooperation system, their historical involvement, and their evolving role in the face of new institutional demands are detailed in the introduction. This research focuses on how these authorities navigate the complexities of the novel "whole-of-society" development cooperation context. While their annual budget appropriations for development cooperation projects from Sida might seem like a limited budget for such a vast network of authorities, it is essential to understand that their value is beyond monetary. Their sector-specific expertise and long-standing involvement in development cooperation projects make them pivotal players in the Swedish development cooperation system (Sida, 2023). They often need to clarify their distinct organisational identity from that of their principal donor agency, Sida or MFA. In the Balkans, for example, the authorities' development cooperation can be dated back to the 1990s, and in 2019, 27 authorities had active development cooperation in the region (Allen et al., 2020).

In 2018, the Swedish government launched a new five-year (2018-2022) strategy dedicated to capacity development, partnerships, and methods (GOS, 2018) (the Strategy). This Strategy augmented the authorities' role in public-sector support. It was integral to Swedish "whole-of-society" efforts for realising the country's global policy commitments, including the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development. An informal survey of this study registered around 830 professionals (including full-time and part-time experts, consultants, and local hires in partner countries) as of 2018. When writing this article, at least 40 authorities are involved in Swedish development cooperation (personal communication with Sida). They traditionally organise their practices around bureaucratic twinning arrangements and technical knowledge transfer from Sweden to state actors in institutionally stable contexts. In recent years, more diversified collaborative forms (viz., cross-sector partnerships with non-state, private, regional, and global actors) have emerged in response to increasingly complex institutional demands. Among these demands were the pressures to shift to social transformational (Kumi & Saharan, 2021) or developmental logic to encompass broader concerns such as democracy, human rights, gender equality, and environmental sustainability; and collaborative logic, such as multi-scale (local to global) and multi-stakeholder partnerships. This

exploratory case research is central to advancing our understanding of how these demands manifest in a highly decentralised and hybrid development cooperation structure and the role of agency in hybridisation.

Sampling, data collection and analysis

Given the intricate dynamics of the Swedish development cooperation system and the growing significant role of the authorities, a methodological approach tailored to capture these complexities was employed. Purposive sampling was employed to select authorities that are representative of the diverse development objectives, roles, and responsibilities within the Swedish system. Three authorities (pseudo names: Alpha, Beta, and Gamma) were chosen based on their representation in terms of public sectors, geographical spread, and institutional design. The three sampled authorities (pseudo names: Alpha, Beta, and Gamma) (see Appendix A for an overview) were identified at a regular authorities network meeting when the present study was introduced.

A combination of purposive and snowballing sampling identified key stakeholders with knowledge about the authorities' development cooperation practices. Initially, the study used purposive sampling technique and identified the project managers in the sampled authorities and professional staff involved in a typical development project. Subsequently, the study employed the snowball sampling technique and identified other participants who would otherwise be difficult to locate or identify (Noy, 2008) in often multi-sited development cooperation practices, such as Sida bureaucrats based in the Swedish embassies, long-term experts of the authorities in partner organisations, and short-term experts mobilised from the domestic realms of the authorities. While the sample may not entirely represent the entire population, the diverse professional categories of the sampled participants and research sites represent a range of authorities' staff and Sida bureaucrats and practices typically involved.

In total, the study conducted 34 semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B for the interviewee list). These interviews provided in-depth qualitative and historical accounts of experiences with the institutional pressures, opportunities, and challenges for hybridisation. Each interview lasted between 40 minutes and 1.5 hours, conducted in English in the informants' offices in Stockholm or virtually via Zoom. The interviews adhered to ethical considerations, obtaining informed consent from all participants in written and verbal forms. The study also ensured confidentiality and anonymity to mitigate the risk of "social desirability bias" (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960, p.32). The interviews were conducted following an interview guide with open-ended questions, allowing flexibility and adaptability in exploring the research topic (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Archival document analysis further supplements these primary data sources by providing contextual and historical information and mitigating informants' recall bias. A total

of 30 archival documents were reviewed (see Appendix C for an overview). The database comprised strategic and operational documents, including 1) relevant Swedish development cooperation strategies, capacity development guidelines, and performance reviews of the authorities' projects implemented in the last 2-3 years; and 2) project-specific information (e.g., project proposals, partnership agreements, fact-finding mission reports, concept notes, monitoring, and evaluation reports) from six sampled projects (two projects from each of the three focal authorities). The research also conducted two focus group discussions (FGDs) as a reflexive research practice (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017) and a member-checking process for further reflection, alternative interpretations and synthesis (Doyle, 2007; Harvey, 2015) to ensure the research findings' accuracy, credibility, and trustworthiness. The FGDs, held in September 2019 and in December 2019 in Stockholm, provided valuable contextual insights into the principal-agent dynamics and the coordination mechanism between Sida and the network of authorities. The FGDs each lasted one day, were open-ended and guided by a set of questions related to the preliminary findings. The insights and perspectives from the FGDs were invaluable in refining the study's interpretations and ensuring a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the hybridisation phenomenon and the role of principal-agent dynamics between Sida and the authorities.

The Gioia methodology (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013) guided the initially inductive and subsequently abductive data analysis protocols. This methodology offers a structured yet flexible approach to analysing qualitative data, emphasising transparency, rigour, and reflexivity ground on data while contributing to theoretical understanding. It involves several main steps: initial coding, grouping of codes into broader themes, continuous refining of themes through reflexive interpretation and contextualisation (Gabriel, 2018), and integration of the findings with relevant theoretical perspectives.

During the initial coding, patterns and recurring themes of practices, as well as sources of tensions underlying the three institutional logics in the authorities' development cooperation practices, were identified. Several first-order codes, which highlighted challenges faced by agents in aligning with principals, steered the study towards a broader theme about the compatibility and incompatibility of the three logics. The final analysis illuminated the multilevel nature of hybridisation and the pivotal role of principal-agent dynamics in its manifestation within the authorities' everyday development cooperation practices. This stage further unveiled how different themes interrelate and fit within larger theoretical frameworks, particularly how distinct institutional logics interact to create compatibility or incompatibility in principal-agent dynamics.

Engaging with supplementary public administration and development literature, the analysis spotlighted two primary types of hybridisation within the "whole-of-society" development cooperation context: specialisation-centric and integration-centric. The former emphasises the depth of expertise, echoing discussions around

non-expert actors, while the latter underscores the breadth of knowledge integration across various domains. These insights stand in contrast with other public administration literature suggesting non-hybridity or resistance to hybridisation (Fossetøl et al., 2015). The analysis unveiled the dynamic influence both internal and external factors influencing the authorities' hybridisation types in the evolving development cooperation landscape.

While this study received funding from Sida, they exerted no influence over the research's direction, findings, or conclusions. The study was conducted with complete autonomy, and a reflexive approach was maintained throughout to ensure results are grounded in empirical data and free from external biases.

Results

This section presents findings on the sector-specific characteristics of dominant institutional logics shaping Swedish authorities' development cooperation practices. It delves into the authorities' unique strategic advantages in Swedish public sector development cooperation, which differentiate their identities, logics and organising forms in their principal-agent dynamics between Sida and the authorities.

Dominant institutional logics in action

The study revealed the distinct characteristics of the three dominant logics in the case context: managerialist (focusing on efficiency and results), collaborative (valuing partnerships and joint decision-making) and developmental (emphasising long-term impact and sustainable change). There were however a pronounced tension between the longstanding practices of the authorities and the evolving expectations set by Sida, underscoring the challenges of integrating new policy directives into existing operational frameworks. Moreover, the study illustrated the continuous process of negotiation and the intricate dance of hybridisation where global aspirations meet and sometimes clash with local implementation practices in policy translation and implementation.

In the case context, the exploration of the dominant institutional logics revealed a complex interplay of practices, expectations, and values. Delving into the narratives of various stakeholders, three primary logics emerged as central to the authorities' development cooperation practices: managerialist, collaborative, and developmental. These logics, while distinct, often intersected and influenced one another, shaping the landscape of development cooperation.

The managerialist logic, which underscores the importance of efficiency, results, and performance metrics, in the case context, was rooted in the principal's need for tangible outcomes, streamlined processes, and measurable impacts. For instance, the emphasis in authority informants' narratives on "efficiency, results, and performance metrics" epitomised this logic, highlighting the value placed on operational excellence and accountability. However, while there did not appear to be a direct contradiction in Sida or authorities' views regarding this logic, this enactment of this managerialist logic could come at the expense of broader stakeholder engagement and long-term developmental goals manifested in other institutional logics. The quote below from a Sida bureaucrat in Stockholm recognised the tension between the logics in the authorities' development cooperation practice:

"If we [Swedish development cooperation] are going to enter into new kinds of constellations or partnerships, Sida and embassies need to reorganise the authorities or allocate more resources to them. Sida's [service or grant] agreement templates, and regulatory requirements do not really go hand-in-hand with this kind of development. Therefore, this is a constant struggle for the authorities". (Interviewee 25).

The above quote touches upon bureaucratic processes, resource allocation, and the challenges facing the authorities within the existing ambivalent hybrid governance structures which may not be entirely compatible with the new "whole-of-society" policy agenda.

In this regard, the collaborative logic emerged as a counterpoint to the managerialist logic. The collaborative logic, emphasising the value of partnerships, joint decision-making, shared responsibilities and shared accountability, was evident in all the interviewees' narratives on the ideal practices. While the narratives from both Sida and authorities informants seem to value collaboration, the results emphasis of Sida might be more oriented towards a broader, strategic level of collaboration while the authorities narratives focus more on operational collaboration. There is potential for tension if the expectations around collaboration (who to collaborate with, how, and to what extent) differ between the two, especially when juxtaposed against the demands of the managerialist logic, as presented earlier.

On the other hand, the developmental logic, with focus on long-term impact, sustainable change, and the broader objectives of development cooperation, was not always explicitly or coherently mentioned in the case context. This logic underpinned many diverse narratives, reflecting, for example, a commitment to bottom-up accountability and public-value creation of lasting positive change in partner organisations and countries, on the one hand, and an internal accountability for efficient resource use within the authorities.

The quote below from one authority's project manager exemplifies the need for adaptability and forward-thinking in this context:

“There are so many unknowns with us moving into different types of international collaborations. We need to see how the landscape has evolved and that is why we need a more frequent updating on shared visions on what we perceive our development cooperation project is about and how it should be carried out now and in the future.” (Interviewee 33).

Conversely, this quote from another authority's programme manager underscores some internal tensions within the authorities:

“Development cooperation is not really our agency's core business. So it is always going to be a side thing and not prioritised within the organisation. We always have to justify why we are doing it, why it is good for the organisation, and what we gain from this kind of work, financially of course. So, we try to market ourselves internally but it is a battle always” (Interviewee 7).

This quote illustrates the struggle of the authorities to internally legitimate their involvement in development cooperation, which is often seen as secondary to their agency's national priorities. This can have serious implications for resource mobilisation and adaptability.

The study illuminated the distinct characteristics of the three logics within the case context. The interplay between these logics in the “whole-of-society” context posed challenges due to the authorities' resource dependencies on Sida and the continuous negotiations for internal resource mobilisation. The results highlight the complexities of integrating new policy directives into existing frameworks and the necessity for hybridisation to balance multiple institutional logics.

Two typologies of hybridisation

The study identified two distinct typologies of hybridisation: specialisation-centric and integration-centric. These typologies elucidate how authorities navigate the complexities of multiple institutional logics within the “whole-of-society” context, influenced by the evolving principal-agent dynamics between Sida and the authorities (discussed further in 4.3.).

Specialisation-centric hybridisation

The specialisation-centric hybridisation is characterised by the emphasis on leveraging specialised knowledge and skills to address specific development challenges. In the context of the “whole-of-society” approach, this hybridisation becomes particularly relevant as Swedish development cooperation expands to encompass a broader range of objectives and stakeholders.

In the case context, the authorities increasingly had to deepen and widen their specialised expertise to grasp local contextual understanding to inform their projects' institutional design. For example, in cooperation contexts with no prior experiences, the authorities would need other specialised expertise to navigate complex terrains with ambivalent governance institutions, as noted by a Sida informant in the quote below:

“How to handle the dynamics whereby civil society has taken over a huge chunk of the work and responsibilities of the state? How to work in that context when you have [self-declared] states within the states. And then you have a subtle civil society working alongside the clans and then, of course, the national government. So, the authorities working in that context would require really to balance all these sectors” (Interviewee 25).

In this regard, the narratives of many authority informants emphasised a clear understanding of their specialised expertise and the boundaries of their capabilities to favour specialisation-centric hybridisation. Many favoured, for example, focussed bilateral projects to allow for deeper partnerships to be forged in attaining specific development outcomes. The lack of limited experience working with broader global and regional thematic strategies (e.g., gender, human rights, poverty reduction, etc) in Swedish development cooperation was highlighted. However, the willingness to collaborate with other authorities to effect more significant change in partner countries was strongly expressed in the narratives.

Central to the complexities of specialised hybridisation was the question of how to specialise in their areas of expertise while also being adaptable to the evolving needs of the development cooperation landscape. And how much resources the authorities could use to assess the context or conduct political economy analysis before starting a project remained ambivalent, highlighting the intricacies of specialisation-centric hybridisation, and the challenges and opportunities that come with it.

In conclusion, specialisation-centric hybridisation is about harnessing specific expertise to address nuanced challenges in the development cooperation landscape. As the “whole-of-society” approach continues to evolve, the need for specialised knowledge and skills becomes even more paramount, and the authorities continuously seek to refine their expertise and adapt to the changing dynamics of development cooperation on the ground. Their resource-dependency, however, may mean operating within well-defined boundaries to ensure their specialised skills are optimally utilised to address more short-term and specific development challenges.

Integration-centric hybridisation

Distinct from the specialisation-centric approach, integration-centric hybridisation adopts a broader lens. This approach emphasises the amalgamation of multiple

institutional logics, promotes collaboration, and prioritises the overarching objectives of development cooperation.

In the case context, authorities frequently found themselves weaving together a myriad of development cooperation practices, spanning from overarching policy directives to granular on-the-ground implementation strategies. This necessitated a comprehensive grasp of the expansive development landscape and the intricate specifics of individual projects. The goal wasn't merely the fusion of diverse practices, but their coherent, effective, and purposeful integration in line with the broader objectives of Swedish development cooperation. As one interviewee noted below the inherent complexity:

“It’s complex enough to have bilateral government-to-government projects. The more organisations and change agents you involve, the more intricate it becomes, especially as we diversify our project approaches” (Interviewee 5).

This integration-centric approach’s multifaceted nature brings its own challenges, especially when considering the authorities' limited resources and boundaries of expertise. There was often a pronounced sense of cautiousness in practice, as elaborated by another interviewee:

“We don't want to promise things that we cannot deliver on. While we may be expert in producing specific public services, our advocacy for these services or our role as users might not be as strong. However, partnering with other authorities, CSO and others, can offer us a pathway to achieve more change in our partner countries” (Interviewee 11).

This sentiment underscores the authorities' keen awareness of their specialised strengths and willingness to collaborate for broader developmental outcomes. Such a stance resonates with the essence of integration-centric hybridisation, which emphasises a broader, strategic level of collaboration. The empirical insights shed light on the authorities' adaptability and pursuit to amalgamate diverse perspectives and expertise for sustainable development goals.

To conclude, the dual typologies of hybridisation processes provide a nuanced and layered understanding of how Swedish authorities navigate the multifaceted landscape of coexisting institutional logics in development cooperation. While the specialisation-centric approach provides clarity and focus, the integration-centric approach offers flexibility and inclusivity. Both typologies highlight the dynamic nature of hybridisation in the authorities’ practices in the “whole-of-society” context.

The role of principal-agent dynamics in the authorities' hybridisation

The “whole-of-society” approach in Swedish development cooperation introduces a broader spectrum of stakeholders and integrated objectives, reshaping the traditional dynamics between principals (e.g., Sida) and agents (e.g., the authorities). This section presents the empirical insights into the evolution of these dynamics in the context of the two typologies of hybridisation above described.

Evolving principals' expectations and expertise (link to specialisation-centric hybridisation)

In the realm of specialisation-centric hybridisation, the authorities are now expected by Sida to demonstrate a blend of technical expertise, cultural understanding, and pedagogical skills. This expectation was increasingly recognised in operational documents, as noted below in one progress report of a large EU-funded multi-authorities project coordinated by Sida in a post-conflict country:

“It is not sufficient for the Swedish experts to have the relevant technical expertise but they also need to have the pedagogical skills...as well as the cultural understanding to know how to navigate within the [partner] institution they work with.” (Archival document, p. 28).

This shift signifies the diverse expertise now expected of the authorities, emphasising the intricate nature of their role in the “whole-of-society” framework. This evolution in expectations underscores the move towards a more specialised model where authorities are not just executors of government directives but also adult educators and cultural intermediaries.

Balancing authorities' strengths and downstream agents' strategic interest (link to integration-centric hybridisation)

In the context of integration-centric hybridisation, it is evident that authorities grapple with aligning their interests with those of downstream agents in Sweden's development cooperation partner countries. As the quote below from an authority project manager illustrates the increasing challenge in multi-tier principal-agent relationships downstream in the development cooperation system:

“We have this overarching capacity and responsibility to structure cooperation in specific [public sector] fields [in partner countries]. Understanding what it takes to find the right, sort of, cooperation mechanisms with the corresponding institutions is very demanding, resource-intensive, and that's, sort of, a mismatch sometimes.” (Interviewee 33)

The broader objectives of the “whole-of-society” approach necessitate a connective rethinking of traditional accountability metrics and bureaucratic processes. This

quote from a senior Sida informant illustrates an evolving principal-agent dynamic in the governing arrangements of Swedish development cooperation:

“Strategic evaluations are done by external consultants and then they have lots of recommendations and Sida has to respond. But there is no responsible unit [within Sida] to implement them. All the other evaluations are decentralised [to individual development cooperation agents]. Our collaboration with the authorities used to be more confrontational, very much ‘us and them’. Now we are more collaborative”. (Interviewee 26).

This shift towards a more collaborative approach indicates a potential move towards integration-centric hybridisation in the authorities’ everyday practices where values, norms, and objectives are co-created and shared between Sida and the authorities.

Hybridisation opportunities in the new paradigm (link to both typologies)

The “whole-of-society” approach presents opportunities for authorities to redefine their roles and leverage their unique position, bridging both specialisation-centric and integration-centric hybridisation in the authorities’ development cooperation practices. However, these opportunities appear to be contingent on how Sida bureaucrats construct their organisational identity in the principal-agent relationship with the authorities. This quote from an authority informant illustrates the role of Sida’s identity work:

“Sida sometimes sees us as any other executor [agent] of a development project. We could be a private entity, an NGO. It doesn't really matter. We are treated in the same way. But we can work more closely together. We are sister organisations, public servants after all. So we should have sort of the same approach” (Interviewee 10).

This sentiment underscores the authorities’ desire for Sida to recognise their uniquely different identity, expertise and relationship, different from other hybrid organisations (e.g., UN or NGOs) in the Swedish system. This recognition in the principal-agent relationship can potentially lead to a more integrated model where, through leveraging collective expertise, shared learnings and adaptive capacities, the authorities can specialise while also aligning with shared integration goals in the “whole-of-society” context.

In conclusion, the principal-agent dynamics between Sida and the authorities can influence positively and negatively the opportunities presented by the new “whole-of-society” paradigm for specialisation-centric and or integration-centric hybridisation in the authorities’ practices. As both principals and agents navigate this new landscape, there is a widely recognised need for continuous and collective adaptation, learning, and growth.

Discussion and Conclusion

Building on the current understanding of hybridisation in public service organisations, this research delves into the evolving landscape of development cooperation, particularly the rising “whole-of-society” approach increasingly adopted in donor countries’ development policy and practice for realising global policy frameworks. In this context, the study sought to elucidate the inter-organisational dynamics between the actors involved and discern how these dynamics influence the manifestation of hybridisation in everyday practices of public service organisations in development cooperation, by focussing on the hybridisation experience of Swedish authorities and their principal-agent relationship with Sida. Specifically, the research sought to address the following research questions: What are multiple institutional logics in the authorities’ development cooperation practices? How do the principal-agent dynamics manifest in their hybridisation of these logics?

Analysis of data collected from interviews, archival documents and FGD revealed the authorities’ unique identity and expertise that differentiate their practices and inter-organisational dynamics from other traditional development agents with Sida. Empirical observations, as presented in the previous section, have illuminated their field-specific characteristics of the three dominant institutional logics and how the principal-agent dynamics influence the authorities’ hybridisation.

Two distinct typologies of hybridisation emerged: specialisation-centric and integration-centric, each with its unique characteristics and challenges. The former emphasises leveraging specialised knowledge and skills, while the latter focuses on the amalgamation of multiple institutional logics, promoting collaboration, and prioritising overarching objectives. Furthermore, the evolving principal-agent dynamics between Sida and the authorities were explored, revealing the complexities of their relationship in the context of the “whole-of-society” approach. The authorities’ resource dependencies on Sida, shifting stakeholder accountability dynamics, and the continuous negotiations for internal financial and human resource mobilisation were highlighted. The study also shed light on the challenges and opportunities inherent in translating policy intentions into practice in development cooperation.

The following section discusses the study’s main theoretical contributions, followed by practical implications, limitations of the study and further research avenues.

Theoretical implications

The study's findings contribute to the public administration and development literature in two main ways.

First, this research responds to the call by Denis et al. (2015) for a pluralistic theoretical lens to deepen our understanding of hybridisation in public service organisations, focusing on agency and inter-organisational social processes. By introducing new case material from previously underexplored public service entities, namely the authorities, this study enriches the burgeoning literature on hybridisation in development cooperation, as seen in works like Heeks et al. (2020) and Kumi and Saharan (2021). A unique aspect of this research is its focus on the dynamics between Sida and the authorities. This focus has revealed rich insights into the authorities' agency and social interaction processes in hybrid development cooperation structures. These insights affirmed the pivotal role of inter-organisational dynamics in the hybridisation of public service organisations. The study identified two typologies of hybridisation—specialisation-centric and integration-centric—employed by the authorities in the evolving “whole-of-society” context, as moderated by these social interactions. This nuanced exploration adds depth to the broader discourse on the coexistence of multiple logics in public administration and illuminates their field-specific manifestations in development studies. The complexities inherent in both specialisation-centric and integration-centric hybridisation resonate also with what Mosse (2014) suggests as knowledge's relational nature in development studies. Reminiscent of Mosse's observations, in specialisation-centric hybridisation, distinct knowledge systems coexist, leading to unpredictable development outcomes, whereas, in integration-centric hybridisation, the embeddedness of knowledge allows different knowledge systems to intertwine and synergise within specific contexts.

Second, this study offers a preliminary institutional framework to further reconceptualise principal-agent dynamics in the rapidly evolving “whole-of-society” paradigm in development cooperation. As nuanced by Ocasio (2023), the historical, pattern-based, and guiding nature of institutional logics and their applicability across different levels of analysis has been valuable to redefine principal-agent dynamics in the “whole-of-society” development cooperation context. The study challenges the traditional principal-agent relationships in the literature that predominantly involve a linear delegation of authority from a single principal to an agent. Instead, it suggests a more complex landscape where multiple principals and agents operate within different institutional logics, influenced by their unique identities, expertise, and value creation. As Chaturvedi et al. (2021) suggest, the contemporary development cooperation context is complex and introduces multifaceted principal-agent problems related to accountability (Ebrahim, Battilana, & Mair, 2014), ownership, and coordination issues (McCourt & Gulrajani, 2010). This study posited Swedish authorities as hybrid organisations, and engaged in

hybrid practices seeking to blend expert and non-expert knowledge to maintain legitimacy and accountability towards upstream principals, downstream agents and horizontal partners in the changing context. The empirical findings shed light on the inherent tensions and contradictions arising from the coexistence of multiple logics and identities in development cooperation. These insights underscore the challenges authorities face in reconciling longstanding practices with evolving expectations set by principals like Sida, especially when these expectations may not fully recognise or align with the authorities' internally or externally perceived and accepted identities, expertise or organising forms.

Practical implications

The insights derived from this research on the hybridisation processes within Swedish authorities' development cooperation practices offer several practical implications for both policymakers and practitioners.

Firstly, authorities and stakeholders involved in development cooperation should be aware of the two distinct typologies of hybridisation: specialisation-centric and integration-centric. Understanding these typologies can guide authorities in choosing the most appropriate approach based on the specific challenges and objectives of their development initiatives.

Secondly, as the "whole-of-society" approach continues to evolve, authorities should strike a balance between leveraging their specialised expertise and integrating multiple institutional logics. This requires a continuous assessment of their practices to ensure they align with the broader objectives of Swedish development cooperation.

Thirdly, the evolving landscape of development cooperation, marked by the "whole-of-society" approach, introduces complexities in navigating multiple institutional logics and principal-agent dynamics. Authorities should adopt a mindset that embraces this complexity, seeking to understand the interdependencies and potential areas of collaboration or conflict among various actors. Moreover, given the dynamic nature of development cooperation, authorities should establish regular feedback mechanisms, such as periodic consultations or digital feedback platforms. This will allow for continuous assessment and adaptation of their hybridisation processes with upstream, downstream or horizontal agents, ensuring alignment with intended objectives, and addressing emerging challenges.

Finally, the study highlights the authorities' unique identity and expertise in the evolving "whole-of-society" context. There is a need for authorities to continuously reassess what are being traded away and what competencies are required to navigate this landscape. This might include enhancing cultural understanding, strengthening pedagogical skills, or building expertise in specific areas of development cooperation to navigate the influence of internal and external organisational

dynamics (historical imprints, policy shifts, local implementation contexts), where the authorities' unique hybridisation advantages can be optimised.

Limitations of the study and future research recommendations

The findings of this study are anchored in the specific context of Swedish national authorities. This contextual focus may constrain the direct applicability of the findings to other institutional and geographical settings. Furthermore, while the study seeks to enrich the theoretical discourse on hybridisation within public service organisations engaged in development cooperation using a multi-site case research design, the potential of its case-to-case transferability or theoretical generalisability (Baxter & Jack, 2008) may be limited to the distinct organisational field and sampling strategies employed.

The study's lens is primarily through the European perspective of the "whole-of-society" paradigm and the conceptualisation of hybridisation. This perspective, while offering valuable insights, may not encompass the nuances and dynamics present in other global contexts. Future research could benefit from exploring alternative theoretical perspectives and comparing their results with the present study.

The temporal scope of this study captures the structural and relational facets of hybridisation during a specific period, marked by the introduction of the "whole-of-society" directive and its ambivalent operationalisation. This timeframe might not fully encapsulate the broader influences, such as historical learning trajectories, organisational path dependencies, and other external factors within the development cooperation system that shape hybridisation. These influences, especially those that unfold over more extended periods, play a crucial role in the effective realisation of global policy commitments. A longitudinal research approach would offer deeper insights into hybridisation's evolution, capturing the nuanced interplay of principal-agent dynamics between upstream and downstream actors over time.

Lastly, the intricate relationship between hybrid structures, practices, and their subsequent impact on development effectiveness outcomes remains an area ripe for further exploration. Future research endeavours could delve into the mechanisms through which hybrid structures and practices influence the implementation and outcomes of development cooperation. Such studies would also be instrumental in identifying factors that harness the flexibility and adaptability inherent in hybrid organisations, ensuring they align with and effectively realise global policy aspirations.

In conclusion, this research sheds light on the transformative evolution of development cooperation practices within Swedish national authorities. It

underscores the intricate interplay of multiple institutional logics, identities, and inter-organisational dynamics within the new “whole-of-society” policy framework. The emergence of two distinct typologies of hybridisation—specialisation-centric and integration-centric—offers a novel perspective on these dynamics, spotlighting the inherent challenges and opportunities in translating policy intentions into tangible actions. Furthermore, the study emphasises the need for a genuinely collaborative approach in the complex landscape of development cooperation. Such an approach transcends simple top-down or bottom-up dynamics, acknowledging the intricacies of hybridisation. It necessitates a deep understanding of the nuances across various logics and champions an institutional environment that fosters mutual respect, collaboration, and collective decision-making both upstream and downstream the development cooperation system.

The identified typologies of hybridisation elucidate the strategies and mechanisms through which authorities navigate these multifaceted challenges. Fundamentally, this research adds new empirical material to advance the academic discourse on hybridisation in both public administration and development cooperation literature. It also offers practical insights for policymakers and practitioners navigating this terrain.

The complexities and potentials of hybridisation will undeniably play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of development cooperation, influencing its relevance and effectiveness in delivering global public goods. As the “whole-of-society” approach continues to evolve in the field, the imperative for development actors remains: to perpetually adapt, learn, and evolve.

While this research offers novel contributions, it acknowledges limitations and might not capture the latest nuances. As such, future studies are welcome to delve deeper into these areas and expand upon the theoretical framework and the vantage points suggested in this study.

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Appendix A

Table 1. Summary profile of the three focal authorities

Authority	2018 Sida disbursement (SEK)	Main project profile 2018-2019	Development cooperation history	Staff involved in international development in 2018
ALPHA	53,2 million	9 programmes: global, regional and 14 countries mainly in Eastern Europe and Africa	Since 1980s	115
BETA	54,5 million	11 programmes: global, regional (Balkans) and 8 geographically spread countries	Since 1980s	212
GAMMA	37 million	15 programmes: global, regional and 11 countries mainly in Eastern Europe	Since early 1990s	78

Appendix B

Table 2. Interviewees

Interview e	Interview date	Interview mode	Role categories	Gender	Research site	Responsibility
1	25/03/2019	Onsite	Short term expert	Female	Authority ALPHA	Organisational focus
2	25/03/2019	Onsite	Short term expert	Female	Authority ALPHA	Technical focus
3	25/03/2019	Onsite	Short term expert	Female	Authority ALPHA	Technical focus
4	25/03/2019	Onsite	Project manager	Male	Authority ALPHA	Albania, Cambodia, Kosovo
5	25/03/2019	Onsite	Project manager	Male	Authority ALPHA	Balkans, Somalia
6	25/03/2019	Onsite	Short term expert	Male	Authority ALPHA	Technical focus
7	25/03/2019	Onsite	Project manager	Female	Authority ALPHA	Balkans, Cambodia, Mali
8	25/03/2019	Onsite	Senior manager	Male	Authority ALPHA	Overarching
9	28/03/2019	Online	Project manager	Male	Authority ALPHA	Albania, Kenya
10	28/03/2019	Online	Long term advisor	Male	Authority ALPHA	Kenya
11	01/04/2019	Online	Project manager/Short-term expert	Male	Authority BETA	Eastern Africa
12	01/04/2019	Online	Short term expert	Male	Authority BETA	Technical focus
13	08/04/2019	Online	Senior manager	Male	Authority BETA	Overarching
14	09/04/2019	Online	Project manager/Long-term expert	Male	Authority BETA	Rwanda
15	16/04/2019	Online	Short term expert	Male	Authority BETA	Technical focus
16	26/04/2019	Online	Project manager	Female	Authority BETA	Belarus, Macedonia, Serbia
17	24/04/2019	Online	Short term expert	Male	Authority BETA	Technical focus
18	24/04/2019	Online	Short term expert	Male	Authority BETA	Policy focus
19	09/04/2019	Online	Sida focal point	Female	Sida headquarters	Authority BETA
20	26/04/2019	Online	Sida focal point	Male	Sida headquarters	Other authorities
21	04/02/2019	Onsite	Sida focal point	Male	Sida headquarters	Authorities' network
22	25/04/2019	Online	Sida focal point	Female	Sida headquarters	Other authorities, EU
23	26/04/2019	Onsite	Embassy focal point	Male	Swedish embassy	Authority ALPHA, other authorities, international organisations
24	29/04/2019	Online	Embassy focal point	Female	Swedish embassy	Authority ALPHA, other authorities
25	30/04/2019	Onsite	Sida focal point	Male	Sida headquarters	Authorities ALPHA, BETA, other authorities
26	01/05/2019	Onsite	Sida senior manager	Female	Sida headquarters	Overarching

27	04/05/2019	Online	Embassy focal point	Female	Swedish Embassy	Authority ALPHA
28	09/04/2019	Online	Sida focal point	Male	Sida headquarters	Other authorities
29	15/05/2019	Onsite	Sida Focal point	Female	Sida headquarters	Authorities BETA & GAMMA
30	10/06/2019	Onsite	Project manager	Female	Authority GAMMA	Global
31	10/06/2019	Online	Long term advisor	Female	Authority GAMMA	Global
32	10/06/2019	Onsite	Short term expert	Female	Authority GAMMA	Technical focus
33	10/06/2019	Onsite	Project manager	Male	Authority GAMMA	Global
34	17/05/2019	Online	Sida focal point	Female	Sida headquarters	Process development

Appendix C

Table 3. Archival documents (30) included in the study

Type	Source (Quantity)
General/strategic documents about the authorities' work in general	
The new government capacity development strategies	Sida (1)
Facts and figures about the authorities involved in the 2018-2019 funding period and basic information about their ongoing projects (e.g. themes, timeline, budget, and countries of operation).	Sida (1)
Capacity development manual and guidelines (for all grantees)	Sida (2)
Sida annual report 2018	Sida (1)
Inputs from the network of authorities to Sida annual report	Bravo (1)
Meta authorities-related evaluation reports/studies	Sida (2)
Project documents from sampled projects implemented by the three focal authorities (Alpha, Beta, Gamma)	
Project proposals	Authorities (6)/embassy (1)
Partnership agreements	Authorities (4)/embassy (1)
Fact-finding missions reports	Authorities (2)
Concept notes	Authorities (1)
Monitoring and evaluation reports	Authorities (5)/embassy (2)

Paper II



Doing 'Us-Them' differently: the identity work of frontline aid bureaucrats in translating aid effectiveness policy rhetoric into practice

Jenny Iao-Jørgensen^a

^aDivision of Risk Management and Societal Safety, Department of Building and Environmental Technology, Faculty of Engineering, Lund University, Lund, Sweden

ABSTRACT

Bilateral aid agencies often face implementation challenges in internal efforts to address long-standing aid fragmentation and effectiveness issues. This article introduces the organizational identity concept to understand better these challenges by examining how Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) frontline staff understand their role and organizational goals in light of shifting demands to coordinate and align Swedish government agencies' (SGA) aid engagements. SGAs implement 10-15% of Swedish bilateral aid annually. A recent government strategy prioritizes strengthening partner countries' public institutions and partnerships in line with the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development. Analysis of interviews and focus group data reveals a general shift among bureaucrats beyond the traditional *us-them* funder identity, to embrace a range of other identity orientations in the Sida-SGA relationship. The various orientations reflected Sida frontline bureaucrats' diverse interpretations of their individual authority and socialized sense-making of ambivalent organizational changes, as they grapple with questions of 'Who we should be?' and 'What we should do?' on the frontline. The study provides a fine-grained view of the essential attitudes, skills and behavior on the frontline that influence aid relationships and the implementation of aid effectiveness principles, adding nuance to the existing aid effectiveness literature.

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Introduction

Although the volume of aid continues to increase to support global poverty reduction and sustainable development efforts, aid fragmentation and effectiveness remain significant concerns for many bilateral aid agencies. Following the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and subsequent commitments (OECD 2022), aid agencies have made internal changes to improve the quality of aid and its development impact. These changes include, among others, letting frontline staff make their judgment to work contingently and flexibly, and explicitly linking these changes to more significant aid impact on partner countries (Honig and Gulrajani 2018). However, there is growing recognition that the implementation of aid effectiveness's coordination, alignment, and harmonization principles is insufficient to overcome the negative side effects of uncoordinated and fragmented aid (Leiderer 2015; Lundsgaarde and Engberg-Pedersen 2019). Translating rhetoric into practice requires changing the roles, power relations, attitudes and behavior

of individual professionals and agencies involved (Groves and Hinton 2004; Eyben 2014).

Research suggests that bilateral aid agencies face more internal challenges than expected in their efforts to deliver on their aid effectiveness commitments. Bilateral aid agencies, typically federal ministries, government offices, departments, and agencies, provide direct development assistance to a low-income partner countries through grants, loans, in-kind services or expertise, to other governments, civil society, and multilaterals (viz., United Nations and international organizations). While bilateral aid offers donor countries advantages such as more control over aid funds, promoting their strategic interests, and developing long-term relationships with specific partner countries, these advantages also make bilateral aid more susceptible to the political influence of the donor nation, more politicized (e.g. tied to specific conditions), and even less cost-efficient than multilateral aid (Gulrajani 2015, 2017). It is, therefore, of no surprise that the aid effectiveness literature presents opposing views of

CONTACT Jenny Iao-Jørgensen  jenny.iao-jorgensen@risk.lth.se

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bilateral aid agencies' performance. Recent studies suggest that most bilateral aid agencies still need to fulfill their pledged standards of good practices and have performed poorly on several aid effectiveness metrics (Palagashvili and Williamson 2020, 2021). This has led some to suggest that there is growing aid effectiveness 'fatigue' (Leiderer 2015), or 'lost momentum' of aid effectiveness commitments (Lundsgaarde and Engberg-Pedersen 2019). These arguments highlight the complexity of implementing aid effectiveness and the importance of attending to the diverse relational settings in which aid effectiveness principles are implemented (Lundsgaarde and Engberg-Pedersen 2019). Given that bilateral aid constitutes 70% of today's total official development assistance (179 billion USD) for the majority of OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donor countries, understanding bilateral aid agencies' inner workings behind the gaps between policy commitments and practical realities of implementing aid effectiveness principles, and how they balance prevailing tensions, is critically needed.

The aid effectiveness literature has primarily focussed on policy design and structural factors that influence aid agencies' implementation of aid effectiveness principles. However, previous research has emphasized the discretionary power of frontline aid bureaucrats in shaping aid relationship and aid effectiveness (e.g. Brinkerhoff 2002; Eyben 2006). In this article, frontline aid bureaucrats are public employees who are the primary implementers and interpreters of bilateral aid policies at the frontline and have day-to-day contact with development brokers or aid agents (i.e. organizational actors associated with implementing bilateral aid) and people affected by their decision (Falanga 2019). However, research has yet to provide a fine-grained understanding of how frontline aid bureaucrats translate aid effectiveness policy commitments into new roles and new aid relationship while balancing prevailing tensions or organizational conflicts.

To address this knowledge gap, this article responds to repeated calls (e.g. Hupe and Hill 2007; Honig 2014; Gulrajani 2015) to incorporate organizational theory by utilizing the concept of organizational identity (OI). OI has rarely been used in the aid relationship or aid effectiveness literature. OI offers a valuable perspective for examining how organizational members collectively comprehend their roles and interpret organization goals and objectives (Fiol 1991; Ellis and Ybema 2010). By analysing how aid bureaucrats construct their identity when implementing policy commitments in a given aid relationship, we can gain a better understanding of the organizational tensions that arise, how aid agencies and their members balance these tensions, and the values that are important in the aid relationship and aid effectiveness principles.

To answer the research question, the study conducted a single case study that examines the identity work of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) frontline staff. The study aims to understand how they position themselves to meet new aid effectiveness policy demands to more effectively coordinate and align the aid engagements of Swedish government agencies (SGA). Sida works with embassies, non-profits, and government agencies to execute Sweden's bilateral aid strategies. Despite its highly decentralized aid management model granting high-level program and financial authority to its frontline staff in headquarters and embassies, Sida still had areas needing improvement, such as engagement in fragile states, alignment between Swedish development actors, and Sida staff's capacity in adaptive programming, collaborative performance/results, and knowledge-management (OECD 2019). The new organizational demands were a result of a recent government strategy to strengthen partner countries' public institutions and partnerships, as implied in the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development. A pool of 20–25 SGAs (out of 340; Statskontoret 2023) act as development intermediaries or aid agents, implementing about 10–15% (around 600 million SEK or 57 million USD) of Sweden's total aid each year. The new strategy explicitly specified Sida's formal responsibility for implementing the strategy and creating conditions for more effective aid engagement and effectiveness of SGAs. SGAs' aid engagements could be traced back to three decades ago yet, along with the Sida-SGA aid relationship, has been underexplored in academic research.

This study analysed the OI narratives collected from key informant interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) using reflexive interpretation techniques guided by *Why, What if, So What* questions (Gabriel 2018). The analytical approach enabled a better understanding of the link between OI, aid relationship, and aid effectiveness by attending to the significant details of the identity narratives in the situated organizational environments. The study contributes to the knowledge on aid effectiveness by demonstrating the diversity of interpretation and construction of identity among frontline aid bureaucrats in translating ambivalent organizational demands to implement aid effectiveness principles. The next section outlines the theoretical approach, followed by the study's materials and methods, results, and finally, the article's contributions and implications are discussed.

Theoretical background

Albert and Whetten (1985) defined organizational identity (OI) as the central, distinctive and enduring features that organization members collectively share. Since

then, the concept has evolved in many directions across the fields of organization, public administration and international organizations, but has yet to bridge with aid relationship or effectiveness literature. OI research has suggested that identity work will intensify when there are conflicts or misunderstandings around roles, and identity narratives are neither static nor completed as multiple versions are constantly being reconstructed, negotiated, and re-imagined by different actors (Caza, Vough, and Puranik 2018, 898). This article adopts a pragmatist philosophical perspective for a richer and more realistic view of such multi-faceted human behavior across multiple levels of analysis. It emphasizes a more comprehensive account of the structural, historical and relational contexts in which contemporary public organizations operate (Farjoun, Ansell, and Boin 2015).

This pragmatist perspective assumes that public organizations have to balance continuity and adaptability, acknowledging that stability and change of OI coexist (Albert and Whetten 1985; Gioia, Schultz, and Corley 2000; Golant et al. 2015). Therefore, a dynamic view of OI with an adaptive potential is used in the study to entail 'who we should be as an organisation' (Gioia, Schultz, and Corley 2000) and 'what members perceive, feel and think about their organisation' (Hatch and Schultz 1997, 357). In short, OI is the outcome of ongoing collective sense-making (Fiol 1991) by which members share, discuss and negotiate their perceptions of what their organization is or should be. In the study context, this means that the identity work of aid bureaucrats is highly dependent on what has been socialized into them internally and externally. This also presents frontline bureaucrats as social constructors, and OIs as products of such social constructions, produced in interactions (Czarniawska-Joerges 1994, 196) within and outside the organization.

The literature has indicated that sense-making is often 'grounded on constant struggles to construct identities' (Gabriel 2018, 263). In this sense, OI (re)construction can be understood as triggered by events that disrupt members' or stakeholders' expectations (Weick 2001), such as changes in the internal and external environment (Ravasi and Schultz 2006), external shocks or critiques (Breit 2014). This phenomenon is similar to what Ramalingam (2013) has described as 'aid on the edge of chaos', referring to the current aid context of rising complexities needing urgent reorganization, and resilient partnerships with local actors to adapt to changing needs. In such challenging times, members of aid organizations may reconstruct OI to address prevailing ambiguity, dilemmas and conflicting demands. Scholars have suggested that members may generate multiple OI accounts, drawing on different

resources (e.g. knowledge, skills, expertise and influence) as conscious reciprocal interactions from within or outside the organization (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld 2005; Cornelissen 2012). In decentralized contexts with high organizational autonomy and front-line authority, the nature of resource mobilization would look quite different. Therefore, according to Scott and Lane (2000, 43), it is crucial to recognize OI as negotiated cognitive references or by-products emerging from complex, dynamic, and reciprocal social relations that are embedded within different sense-making (sub)systems.

Research suggests that resources are likely to be internally influenced by references to the organization's history and values to connect past, present and future (Ravasi and Schultz 2006). For instance, OI may be reconstructed from evoking memories of the past (Schultz and Hernes 2013), or enforced through leaders' messaging with historical referencing (Golant et al. 2015). However, unmanaged, fragmented sense-making (Maitlis 2005) and competing OIs (Pratt and Foreman 2000) could result in organizations being pulled apart (Kreiner et al. 2015). As mitigating fragmentation is one pressing concern in aid effectiveness reform agenda, understanding the intra-organizational sense-making dynamics and the interactions embedded in different (sub)systems of the organizational membership is vital.

In partnership-based inter-organizational contexts, resource mobilization is likely influenced by members' use of different cognitive references (mental frameworks to understand and organize information, to justify their sense-making of self and identity) (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012, 3). For example, Rondeaux (2006) has suggested that bureaucrats combine a public service reference and a public managerialism reference to describe the identity of their partnership-based organization. Others have further suggested that cognitive references support members' OI generation and negotiation with stakeholders in expanding available resources within socially acceptable boundaries (Kraatz and Block 2008; Kraatz et al. 2016; Reissner 2019). Reissner (2019) even highlights that there may be tensions and ambiguity in which references are considered essential or socially accepted. Therefore, understanding how these tensions and ambiguity affect the way aid bureaucrats construct their OI in frontline interactions with aid agents could provide a strong foundation to explore the key elements of OI that support or undermine the implementation of aid effectiveness policy commitments.

In inter-organizational literature, the *us-them* divide is central to the conceptualization of OI as negotiated

cognitive images or by-products of asymmetric power relations. Ellis and Ybema (2010) argue that this aspect creates uncharted territory for scholarly investigation of what the organization and its members do and value, not just in policy design but also in frontline reality. This aspect is highly relevant to the study of frontline bureaucrats' identity work in implementing aid effectiveness commitments within a specific aid relationship. For instance, Ybema, Vroemisse, and van Marrewijk (2012) present a nuanced *us-them* OI account of an aid-funded Dutch human rights organization. They show that staff members deconstructed differences between themselves and their partners for egalitarian partnership-building purposes by actively seeking to 'smooth out, trivialise or upend differences' through presenting themselves as 'strange' and others as 'normal'. The intention was to level out power differentials typical in aid relationships and constructing an inclusive 'we' in relationship-building (Ybema, Vroemisse, and van Marrewijk 2012, 48). This example resonates with Elias and Scotson's (1994) notion that social interactions involve inclusion and exclusion dynamics. It is crucial to understand who is 'in' and 'out', who 'we' are and who 'they' are in the *us-them* divide. This aspect also highlights the importance of sensitizing research to the fundamental heterogeneity and situatedness of OI in the interplay of power, bureaucratic procedures, and relationships. In the intra- and inter-organizational context of the case study, unveiling this *us-them* aspect requires multi-level analysis of how individuals- and organizationally shared OI shape aid relationships as part of ongoing organizational changes.

Materials and methods

A single case study was conducted between December 2018 and December 2019 to answer the research question and to reveal distinct, previously inaccessible theoretical and empirical insights (Yin 2009). Sweden was selected for its theoretical usefulness as a bilateral donor country that has persistently affirmed its aid effectiveness commitments and entrusted high-level authority to frontline aid bureaucrats of its executing agency, Sida. About five months prior to this study, the Swedish government launched a new 2018–2022 aid strategy, 'Strategy for capacity development, partnership and methods that support the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development' (hereafter referred to as the 'Strategy') (GOS 2018), which explicitly specified Sida's formal responsibility to implement the Strategy and to better support other Swedish government agencies' (SGA) aid engagements and effectiveness. Approximately 10%–15% of Sweden's official development

assistance budget is disbursed annually to a network of 20–25 SGAs to strengthen public institutions in partner countries for achieving poverty reduction and sustainable development. At the time of the study, Sweden had bilateral development cooperation with some 35 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe.

Access to the case was gained through a grant funded by the Strategy in a research project aimed at exploring how SGAs experience the changing bilateral aid contexts. To address potential bias resulting from the research funding source and the author's prior professional aid experience, a pilot study workshop was conducted in Stockholm on 5 December 2018 with a core group consisting of SGAs' aid project managers and Sida representatives. The group members regularly met to discuss common issues in the bilateral aid contexts. Twelve representatives from the group attended the workshop, which presented the research purpose and its independent nature. The workshop also provided a contextualization of the current Sida-SGA collaborative relationship and challenges, and identified three SGAs for an in-depth examination of Sida's frontline identity work in relation to them.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary means of data collection to elicit in-depth qualitative OI accounts from Sida frontline bureaucrats. During the study, there were 29 focal points in Sida headquarters who each managed one or more SGA relationships. To answer the research question, the researcher purposively selected 12 samples based on their frontline interactions with three focal SGAs on strategic or operational levels. The three focal SGAs (given pseudo names of Alpha, Beta, Gamma in randomized order) represented the public administration of environment, land, and statistics. Sida's frontline interactions with them were selected because the three SGAs had the most extensive bilateral aid history, programmatic and geographical spread, offering a situated perspective over time and change contexts. In 2018, the disbursement from Sida to these three SGAs together constituted 24% of the total disbursed to all aid-involved SGAs. The 12 informants were interviewed between February and May 2019, nine from three Sida departments at the headquarters and three from embassies based in three different continents with the most intensive SGA interactions (see Appendix A for informant details). Pseudonyms were used to protect their identity, and only in the article where they would not be identifiable. This qualitative case research aims to provide an in-depth and contextualized understanding of the phenomenon (i.e. organizational identity) (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011). Information saturation was considered reached

following the 12 interviews, as no new relevant themes emerged to answer the research question (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006; Small 2009). All informants provided written informed consent to participate in the study, and all interviews were recorded. A similar set of broadly framed questions guided the interviews, covering the topics such as the informant's background, their role and SGA interactions, tensions experienced in organizational changes, and opportunities and concerns to promote SGAs' aid engagements and effectiveness.

In addition to the interviews, observations from two FGDs in Stockholm provided complementary data. The first FGD on 30 September 2019 with 17 participants representing six SGAs, including Sida, validated the preliminary findings around challenges and concerns in the changing context. The FGD also identified priority areas of improvement, coordination and foreseeable challenges moving forward. The second FGD on 16 December 2019 with also 17 participants representing seven SGAs, including Sida, mapped out in more detail the policy, procedures, and practices in Sida's and SGAs' coordination mechanisms that influence their interactions and aid effectiveness. The FGDs generated further insights into the *us-them* divide and how collective identity in the ongoing organizational changes was referenced, negotiated and reconciled in a relatively power-neutral setting.

This study conducted multi-level analyses of the collected data in three main reflexive steps. This reflexive approach to the data analysis went beyond pattern recognition to gain a deeper understanding grounded in the data and account for the social, cultural, and historical particularities, complexities and contradictions of the case (Alvesson 2011; Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014). First, 'in vivo' coding approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998) was used to stay as close as possible to informants' own words (e.g. 'not just a funder') and to identify interesting details of their cognitive references of OI. Second, a reflexive gaze, guided by questions of *Why*, *What if*, *So What?* (Gabriel 2018, 152) directed the interpretation coding techniques. This step complemented the theoretical perspective to attend to the significant details of the identity narratives dynamically interrelated to the organizational environments in which the informants were embedded. For instance, asking *Why* led to the code of organizational situatedness (e.g. 'operationalisation vagueness'), *What if* led to code of cognitive referencing (e.g. 'top-down control' and 'negotiated bottom-up feedback' mechanism), and *So What* led to the code of socially accepted sense-making choices and the *us-them* positioning in the change (e.g. 'aid effectiveness value-creation aspirations' and 'concerns' of change). This approach enabled theoretical imaginations of the studied

phenomena and made the plausible link between identity work at the frontline, the intended relationship and desired outcome of organizational demands. Finally, the interpretations from Step 2 were reconciled with extant literature on frontline bureaucracy and aid effectiveness, and aggregate themes on OI narratives were drawn up.

Results

The study revealed the complexity of managing evolving organizational demands with limited Sida frontline resources in both the headquarters and field offices in the embassies, where the needs of a large number of smaller projects across various implementing SGAs and other organizations had to be met. In the case context, the study identified a general shift from a historically dominant *funder* identity, which prioritized non-profits, to a multi-dimensional identity, which prioritized SGAs as aid agents. Although the technical details that set the two contexts apart were beyond the scope of this study, the interviews indicated that a series of internal and external events triggered the new organizational demands into the second context. These events included the United Nations' adoption of the Agenda 2030 in 2015 for sustainable development with an explicit dedication of goals to strengthen public institutions (SDG#16) and revitalize global partnerships (SDG#17), the Sida Director-General's emphasis on prioritizing SGAs as key aid agents, and the launch of the Strategy in July 2018, which called for collaborative partnership approaches, engagements in fragile states, and sustainable and synergistic aid effectiveness.

Pre-SGA prioritization context: who we are and what we do

The most prevalent theme in this context was Sida's traditional *funder* identity which typically featured Sida as a 'financier ... We finance other development actors'. Despite SGAs and Sida both being highly autonomous from the 'ministerial rule' (Ahlbäck Öberg and Wockelberg 2021) in the domestic context, regardless of SGAs' aid engagement forms (*viz.*, government mandate, strategic framework or service agreement), the frontline interactions would always 'put Sida or the embassy as the funder'. This meant that the same logic of frontline interactions with non-profits, consulting firms and multilaterals also applied to SGAs, creating bureaucratic competition.

Informants with fund-management responsibilities notably demonstrated this identity. Typical frontline bureaucracy in line with this *funder* identity would entail 'quality and financial accountability control

exercises every year', 'appraising every project that Sida supports, following up on project finances, identified and new risks, practical challenges, reviewing the annual report they submitted, and following up with further discussions with them'. This identity signaled top-down control and a strong *us-them* divide in frontline interactions, and position Sida above SGAs in the aid's value chain network. As one informant seasoned in various Sida positions justified the importance of keeping the *us-them* divide,

Seven-eight years ago, when there was much focus on internal control within Sida, the approach was that we should be at arm's length from SGAs to control their implementation ... This is basically still the model we get. We assess their application to see if they have the capacity to do this and manage funds. (Kristina)

Some informants argued the prevalence of this *funder* identity as permeating some frontline attitude and behavior to-date, reflecting different *us-them* cognitive referencing sub-systems within Sida. As one headquarters informant with a multilateral background and broad collaborative program portfolios (involving SGAs, universities, non-profits and consulting firms) articulated,

The dialogue and attitude here at Sida, not always but often, is rude and arrogant. There is an elite culture here that we Sida in certain ways are better. I've been in meetings where Sida staff are being condescending to staff from other SGAs. It's completely unacceptable ... People work in silos and can't think outside the box when the political dynamics are changing. (Erik)

The dominance of the *funder* identity had created some contentious moments in the past, especially where Sida's bureaucratic routines entangled in between local (Sweden) and global (aid) relational contexts were not be well understood or accepted by SGAs. One embassy informant recalled a dramatic event in the past and how it was resolved,

We wanted to do an audit review ... The general director of involved SGA went berserk, saying 'Sida cannot come and do an audit on us! We are the same state agency bodies'. The people at their international department got upset as well. We managed to convince them to do it and it was quite useful because it helped them their project management procedures in place because that's not always something a state agency has. (Anna)

We should note that there had already been customized rather than standardized frontline practice within Sida in the pre-SGA prioritization context. However, one other prevalent feature associated with the *funder* identity in this context was a shared cognitive image within Sida that working with public-sector (and SGAs, by association) was 'not glamorous

work ... with people fighting over it', or 'sexy subject like civil-society cooperation', and ended up as 'an add-on' for bureaucrats who might or might not have relevant public administration background or motivation to engage SGAs meaningfully. While informants generally recognized that some SGAs were doing a 'fantastic work' that Sida 'could never do', others acknowledged the 'political pressures to engage SGAs' even though SGAs might not be 'the most cost-effective' aid agents compared to multilaterals or consulting firms, or 'have the capacities', 'linguistic skills', or 'context-relevant expertise' to scale up to Sweden's 35 partner countries, fragile states with weak public institutions in particular.

These features before the SGA prioritization context constituted the basis of potential tensions and *us-them* orientations with varying control-trust interactional dynamics in the SGA prioritization context.

SGA prioritization context: who we should be and what we should do

Sida had introduced numerous internal organizational changes into the SGA prioritization context. We should note that some of these changes were universal changes in Sida's frontline interactions with all aid agents, not necessarily specific to SGAs' aid engagements. One notable change was a strengthened focal-point structure comprising one overall coordinator and 29 SGA-specific focal points across Sida's departments. Focal points served to 'answer any questions from any SGAs who wanted to engage with Sida', as 'entry points to Sida' and find 'a good fit' from the myriad of 49 thematic, global, regional and country Swedish aid strategies. Frontline interactions were also strengthened on the senior management level (through the annual SGAs' forum *myndighetsforum*) and, initiated on the director-general level, to draw on Sida's global experience to support SGA's national implementation of the SDGs. Although not exclusively for the SGAs, cross-departmental reference groups were also strengthened to appraise and review all bilateral aid projects to break Sida's organizational 'silos'. Additionally, Sida's training and meeting center in Härnösand, some 427 km north of Stockholm, had started adapting their training support to the changing needs of SGAs.

These initiatives were widely recognized by informants as essential to SGAs' aid engagements and effectiveness. While an explicit call for a strategic identity change was not evident in this study, there was a clear general shift beyond the mere *funder* identity in terms of what informants felt about who Sida should be and what Sida should do in the prioritization context.

The most prevalent theme was the *dialogue-partner* identity. One informant articulated what this meant for the frontline, 'when SGAs come to us sometimes to ask for help, to get a point across, if we agree or not. If we do, we help them push that point on every level we have access to' (Jan). For others, this would be like a critical friend giving feedback or shedding light on some blind spots, for example, on a new project idea in a partner country with some known high risks or difficulties, by asking 'why, who would be the contact points [in partner country], what would be the purpose' (Maria). As some informants described, this was to add a sense of realism as SGAs were generally not 'development cooperation experts' or that they might be 'too invested in their baby and may need to know when to pull the plug'. It was clear that within Sida there was 'no set principle or model for how that dialogue works, because you can't box development or a reality into a simple format'. This reference seemingly signaled the importance of a reciprocal, flexible or even bottom-up feedback mechanism, and suggested that bureaucrats had a high-level authority to reflect their cognitive images of frontline interactions.

In line with the *dialogue-partner* identity, several identity features were prevalent, but not dismissing the *funder* identity. These included *problem-fixer*, *knowledge-broker*, *true-partner* and *team-player* orientations. *Problem-fixer* tended to feature frontline interactions relatively proximate to the cognitive image of the *funder* identity, aimed at, for example, as one embassy informant described, 'trying to solve problems for existing projects, keep them running smoothly and accomplish what's intended, and that the [tax] money is being well used, free from corruption scandals' (Johan). *Knowledge-broker*, *true-partner* and *team-player* orientations, on the other hand, would feature interactions relatively distant from the cognitive image of a *funder*. As one embassy informant seasoned in various Sida positions in the headquarters and multiple embassies articulated,

We have hired SGAs to do that job and need to think of them as true partners and we are players in the same team. By playing our different roles, we are more likely to reach the results we all want. Development cooperation is not SGAs core competency. But we can pool our knowledge and sharing our development cooperation competence. When we adopt an 'us and you' position or hold up information and knowledge from them, we are in trouble. (Birgitta)

These varied *us-them* identity orientations reflected bureaucrats' heterogeneous interpretations and enactment of their frontline authority. There would always be 'a fine line to cross' given the 'administrative and

legal barriers' embedded in the *funder* identity in the existing aid administration system, which were not always 'compatible' (Lena) with these new organizational demands and SGAs' expectations in frontline interactions.

Although the notion, as articulated in this quote from a headquarters informant, 'in bureaucracies, we are all individuals' (Anna) showed up repeatedly in all the interviews and the group discussions, the study's reflexive interpretative analysis suggested that there were more dimensions than to attributing the bureaucrats' interpretation and enactment of a specific identity orientation to frontline authority alone. The most prevalent theme was the aspirations and values being prized in the internal and external environments in which the bureaucrats made and exchanged senses about their role and SGAs' aid engagements in the organizational change contexts.

Tracing the source of the *us-them* divide revealed two sense-exchanging categories underpinning the negotiated, collective and reciprocal nature of the sense-making process in the case's organizational cultural context. The first category primarily sought to exchange cognitive references to improve coordination and complementarity of SGAs' aid engagements with other aid actors in Sweden and partner countries. As this embassy informant explained why one should reject the notion of Sida just being a *funder*,

The agencies are very good, specifically with the EU integration projects. But they have varying degrees of capacity to implement poverty reduction and organisational change projects... Pushing them to fragile states is insane. It can't just be solely up to them to implement whatever they see fit. We have, therefore, different roles and different responsibilities. (Kristina)

The second category primarily sought to exchange cognitive references to balance the sometimes conflicting demands and trust-control dynamics between the *funder* and *dialogue-partner* identities in frontline practice. As this headquarters informant with decades of private and public-sector experience and global aid portfolios described how the identity dynamics should be managed and guided by aspirations for SGAs' aid engagements and effectiveness potentials for SDGs,

In practice, we need to build a bulk of trust with them to look at new ways of doing things, and to take advantage of Sida field offices to build partnership of mutual benefit... This is a balance, of course, since we have a rigid kind of control and follow-up of taxpayers' money. It demands getting to know the agency you work with, their project details and progress... contribute with the flexibility more as a team member... share context-specific knowledge to help them stand on their own and build local partnerships in the long run

independent of aid to build real sustainability. We have so much to gain as a public sector in the North from contexts different from ours. It's ideological but I think this is a very good way to go. (Anders)

In the same vein, trust-building emerged as a crucial feature in the *dialogue-partner* identity for making and exchanging senses of cognitive references within Sida and at the frontline with SGAs. As airing dirty laundry implied in this quote from a seasoned embassy informant, 'everybody is reluctant to talk about intimate problems off the bat, or, admit something less than successful in print. You have to win the confidence' (Johan).

Moreover, coordination of sense-making and exchanges also emerged as another essential feature in the *dialogue-partner* identity. Despite the focal-point coordination structure, many informants would still use 'ambiguous', 'tricky', and 'ad hoc' to describe the lack of 'institutionalized' information exchange or coordination within Sida to strengthen synergies between different thematic areas of SGAs' aid engagements. Several informants referenced recent examples where non-coordination of a dialogue event by the headquarters ended up undermining a similar effort by an embassy. Specifically, the lack of institutionalized coordination within tended to undermine the opportunity for junior bureaucrats to mobilize authority or trust to deviate too much from the *funder* identity and associated bureaucratic features.

Discussion and conclusion

This article has responded to the calls to attend to the discretionary power of frontline bureaucrats and engage with organizational theory to better understand the implementation challenges of aid effectiveness within bilateral aid agencies. Drawing on the OI theoretical perspective, this study explored how bilateral aid agencies' frontline bureaucrats construct identity in response to shifting yet ambiguous organizational demands to implement aid effectiveness principles. The central revelation of the empirical case study was the multi-identity narratives and the complexity of implementing aid effectiveness principles on the frontline. Bureaucrats made heterogeneous interpretations of their frontline authority to express who they should be and what they should do when faced with organizational conflicts. On the one hand, the organizational conflicts were derived from bureaucratic competition (Kilby 2011) for a greater share of frontline resources to help coordinate and align a large number of small-scale aid projects, or initiate new ones in uncharted contexts. On the other hand, the conflicts were a result

of tensions between demands for flexible relationships and rigid bureaucratic procedures. In light of the organizational conflicts and tensions, frontline bureaucrats might draw cognitive references through social exchanges with internal and external organizational stakeholders to make sense of the value-creation aspirations and concerns of the shifting organizational demands. These findings align with the public administration literature that suggests frontline bureaucrats in contemporary democratic governance systems are not mere executors of public policies, but they can navigate back-office and frontline functions by creating an extended social network of references for decision-making (Falanga 2019). This study provides a situated understanding of how frontline bureaucrats balance control-trust dynamics in their identity work to engage in stakeholder relations, draw cognitive references to legitimate their interpretations of their authority, roles, and forms of frontline interactions. This study demonstrates that a trust-control balancing act on the frontline can create opportunities for exploring how shifting between multi-identity narratives may enable flexibility, ownership and collaboration with aid agents. In contrast, solely on controlling risks associated with new organizational demands, given high agency fragmentation, may enforce historically dominant identity, perpetuating asymmetric power relations and bureaucratic competition.

Theoretical contribution

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and subsequent agenda emphasize inclusive partnership, ownership and collaboration as organizational principles to avert power inequality and hegemony in aid relationships. By focusing on the identity work of bilateral aid agencies' frontline bureaucrats and their relationship with development intermediaries, the study contributes to the literature in several main ways.

First, it enriches our understanding of the link between organizational identity, aid relationship, and aid effectiveness by providing fine-grained insights into the complexity of implementing aid effectiveness principles in a decentralized yet non-coordinating context within a bilateral aid agency. The study revealed that multi-identity narratives co-exist in the social and cognitive sub-systems of a given aid relationship. The socialization of individual frontline bureaucrats amplifies the legitimacy of specific aid effectiveness values and aspirations to make sense of the shifting organizational demands (i.e. prioritization the support to SGAs as bilateral aid agents). This influenced how they reinterpreted shifting their role, discretionary power, organizational routines, and aid relationship.

Frontline bureaucrats could reference a mere policy-implementer but interpreters or even policy-entrepreneur (someone who uses their influence, knowledge, and skills to advance the policy) (Mintrom and Norman 2009), based on their sense-exchanges. Frontline bureaucrats' bottom-up referencing opens up opportunities to gather local knowledge (e.g. from aid agents and their local partners) and customize routines or procedures to lessen the effect of bureaucratic impediments (Bovens and Zouridis 2002), enhance reciprocity and aid effectiveness policy implementation success.

Second, the study extends the literature on frontline bureaucracy by providing rich insights into the discretionary power of frontline bureaucrats in a bilateral aid agency when faced with organizational conflicts and bureaucratic competition. The study showed that bureaucrats' situated and perceived authority could influence cognitive references and the enactment of specific sense-exchanging references in the identity work. In the case context, for example, embassy bureaucrats had distinctively different authority from those at the headquarters, whereas bureaucrats with specific sectoral or professional proximity to the aid agents would gravitate toward a specify type of identity work in their sense-exchanging process.

Third, the study enriches knowledge of organizational identity in development studies literature by showing how frontline aid bureaucrats combine different identity orientations while preserving their *funder* identity to navigate conflicting organizational demands between stability and change. The study identified an emerging and co-existing *dialogue-partner* identity, featuring *problem-fixer*, *knowledge-broker*, *true-partner* and *team-player* characteristics in frontline interactions. The study also found that each identity orientation could allow *us-them* dynamic to play out differently in relation to the aid agents (de)prioritized, in/excluded in the shifting organizational demands. The study highlights the usefulness of the OI theoretical perspective in examining the actual power distribution implicated in closing the aid effectiveness policy rhetoric and practice gaps.

Finally, one essential element in the current development cooperation context is Agenda 2030 for sustainable development which necessitates development actors orient their roles and actions. This study provides early lessons about the potential contradictions between the different dimensions of the Agenda to carry forward.

Practical implications

This OI study suggests that implementing aid effectiveness principles require aid agencies to focus on the

development of essential social skills among frontline bureaucrats. These skills include the ability to shift or combine different mind-sets, the capacity to mobilize relevant information and knowledge, and exert influence to guide decision-making, and the ability to balance trust-control dynamics in various relationship-building and dialogue forms with aid agents (and local stakeholders) affected by the changes. Furthermore, such skills would require not just extensive knowledge of the inner workings of the aid organizing systems, procedures and routines, but more importantly, the willingness to go outside the box and across organizational and professional boundaries to adjust roles and aid relationships to the changing institutional demands, stakeholder expectations, and needs. To improve frontline bureaucrats' social skills, aid agencies must institutionalize internal and external knowledge-exchange as a fundamental frontline function and skill. This institutionalization of OI work would support the acquisition of the essential skills necessary to make good, rather than make do with politically driven aid effectiveness policy commitments in various aid relationship contexts.

Future research directions

Future research can expand on the study's findings and address the limitations of a single case. Quantitative research with larger samples in other OECD donor countries, comparing the aid agencies' OI narratives in relation to other types of development intermediaries (e.g. non-profits, universities, consulting firms) would help to better understand the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, future research could explore the trust and control dynamics and trade-offs, and the resulting aid effectiveness outcomes implied in different identity orientations or combinations. As Lotta et al. (2022) point out, the nature of frontline bureaucracy may differ in the developing world. Therefore, future research could investigate how aid agents construct their identity in increasingly collaborative relationships at various levels of the aid value chain, including upstream, downstream, in the new context of the Agenda 2030.

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Data availability statement

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Ethical approval

Ethics approval for the study was not required by the local ethics committees. Informed consent to participate in the research was sought in verbal and written forms.

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Appendix A**Table A1.** Interviewees.

	Pseudonym	Interview date	Interview Mode	Duration	Gender	Age	Work location	Responsible SGA aid relationship
1	Maria	09/04/2019	Virtual	1h05min	F	>55	Headquarters	BRAVO
2	Anders	26/04/2019	Virtual	1h24min	M	46-50	Headquarters	Other SGAs than ALPHA, BRAVO, GAMMA
3	Lars	06/02/2019	Sida office	50 min	M	45-50	Headquarters	Overarching
4	Anna	25/04/2019	Virtual	55min	F	>55	Headquarters	Other SGAs, EU
5	Jan	09/04/2019	Virtual	1h13min	M	40-45	Headquarters	Other SGAs
6	Eva	15/05/2019	Virtual	55min	F	46-50	Headquarters	BRAVO & GAMMA, another SGA, EU
7	Erik	30/04/2019	Sida office	1h43min	M	46-50	Headquarters	ALPHA, BRAVO, other SGAs
8	Lena	01/05/2019	Sida office	1h26min	F	50-55	Headquarters	Overarching
9	Kristina	04/05/2019	Virtual	1h14min	F	40-45	Embassy in an Asian country	ALPHA
10	Johan	26/04/2019	Author's office	1h44min	M	>55	Embassy in an African country	ALPHA, other SGAs, multilaterals
11	Brigitta	29/04/2019	Virtual	52min	F	46-50	Embassy in a Balkan region	ALPHA and other SGAs
12	Inger	17/05/2019	Virtual	40min	F	46-50	Headquarters	Overarching

Paper III





Antecedents to bounce forward: A case study tracing the resilience of inter-organisational projects in the face of disruptions

Jenny Iao-Jørgensen

Division of Risk Management and Societal Safety, Faculty of Engineering, Lund University, P.O. Box 118, Lund 22100, Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Inter-organisational projects depend on stakeholder interactions and joint decision-making to perform and continually adjust to variations. This paper examines the emergence of transformative resilience (i.e., dynamic project capabilities to pursue fundamentally new strategies and practices) when facing external disruptions. A process-orientated case study was conducted within a culturally diverse project network of disaster risk management actors from Sweden and four Asian countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found three crucial interactional considerations in the premise of project resilience during challenging times. These considerations concern *contextual* (through proactivity for a common picture and centralisation of linkages), *behavioural* (through stakeholders' willingness to engage, commit and distribute agency), and *cognitive embeddedness* (through appreciation of diversity and reflexivity of actions). The findings enrich our understanding of resilience with new insights into the sequential and antecedent role of social embeddedness in projects' organisational transformation and the complexity of inter-organisational relationships in uncertain times.

1. Introduction

The concept of resilience has become popular in project studies. This popularity is driven by the growing recognition that unexpected external disruptions (e.g., pandemics, socio-economic, political turbulence, and natural hazards) augment organisational complexities, challenge project performance, and limit traditional project risk management practices (Kutsch et al., 2015). Organisation science, like other disciplines and domains, has broadly defined the resilience concept as the capability of a system to adapt to adversity or to perform under variations (Holling, 1973; Folke, 2006; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2011; Naderpajouh et al., 2020a). Increasingly, there have been attempts to apply the resilience concept in organisation and project studies to help better understand how resilience plays out in uncertain and challenging environments.

This paper responds to the call for a paradigm shift in the concept of resilience in project studies (Naderpajouh et al., 2020b) by building on the multi-equilibria and transformative perspectives inherent in social-ecological and organisational resilience discussions. This perspective assumes that a system may exist in multiple possible equilibria and, therefore, needs continual adjustments to changing circumstances (Gunderson, 2000; Clément & Rivera, 2017). Moreover, this

notion recognises resilience as a multi-dimensional capability and measures beyond just bouncing backward but potentially forward to generate multiple adaptive trajectories (Folke et al., 2010). The literature has highlighted that a multi-dimensional theorisation of the social is essential to understand better the intertwined nature of how human actions shape and are shaped by the environments (Gunderson & Holling, 2002). This focus is consistent with the increasing calls (e.g., Söderlund & Sydow, 2019) for systems thinking in project studies to attend to the role of cognitive systems and social structures, agency, and power relations in understanding projects' adaptive behaviour and relations amongst organisational actors involved.

Likewise, research has sought to link this multi-equilibria or multi-dimensional aspect to the notion of *transformability*, understood broadly as the capability of a system to pursue fundamentally new strategies and practices that challenge the conventional frame of reference, assumptions, and power imbalances (Walker et al., 2002; Wheeler et al., 2004). This transformative resilience perspective is inherent in the resilience concept with the notion of "renewal of the system and emergence of new trajectories" after the disruptions (Folke, 2006, p.259). However, the literature has mainly focussed on adaptation (as changes of basic organising strategy or structure) (Levinthal, 1994) rather than how the system can be transformed (Côte & Nightingale, 2012; Côte,

E-mail address: jenny.iao-jorgensen@risk.lth.se.

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2019). While project management literature has discussed the multi-equilibria and transformative resilience views and called for multi-level analyses to advance the understanding (e.g., Naderpajouh et al., 2020a), a fine-grained qualitative understanding of the social mechanisms at work remains limited.

Such understanding is essential to improve the management of resilience of inter-organisational projects (IOP) as one dominant organising form in the age of ‘projectification of everything’ (Jensen et al., 2016) that we live in. IOPs are projects in which two or more organisations collaborate over a limited period to solve otherwise unsolvable problems (Gray & Purdy, 2018). Such temporary organisations are often described as loosely coupled social or organisational systems with many project components, interactions and high task complexity at different levels across the boundaries of multiple organisations (Matinheikki et al., 2016; Geraldi et al., 2011; Naderpajouh et al., 2020a). In temporally- and socially-embedded contexts, what renders IOPs’ transformative resilience through various adaptation forms and degrees in facing disruptions has not been comprehensively understood. Specifically, a relational dynamic framing (Bhamra et al., 2011) is needed to reflect the dyadic and multi-faceted social interactions amongst organisational actors in projects’ decision-making (Sydow & Braun, 2018). This is because IOPs’ performance, success, and goal attainment indispensably depend on multiple stakeholder organisations’ joint efforts (Lehtinen & Aaltonen, 2020). However, we know little about how people and power dynamics influence project resilience in general and transformative resilience in particular. As nested or systems thinking becomes increasingly applied in project studies to understand the project complexity and the spillover effects of change beyond the projects themselves (Naderpajouh et al., 2020a), theoretical insights from a transformative resilience perspective could generate a more balanced, pluralistic view of how resilience plays out in strategic projects (Martinsuo et al., 2022) intended to address societal or grand challenges (Gray & Purdy, 2018).

This paper, therefore, seeks to contribute to a better understanding and management of IOPs’ resilience by asking the following research question:

How does transformative resilience emerge in inter-organisational projects in the face of disruptions?

To this end, an exploratory case study was conducted between February and December 2020 to examine the social interactions within an international development project hosted by a Swedish government agency during the COVID-19 pandemic. Development projects offer a rich empirical context as they often operate in distinctively high social-political complexities with intangible values, multiple stakeholders, power asymmetries, conflicting values, norms and expectations (Ika & Saint-Macary, 2012; Pilbeam, 2013). The focal project was knowledge-intensive, involving a culturally diverse and interdependent network of disaster risk management (DRM) actors from Sweden and four Asian countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, and the Philippines). The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 outlines the different resilience research streams relevant to the study context and presents the focal transformative resilience theoretical perspective. Section 3 describes the case-study method, data collection, and analysis. Section 4 explains the key empirical results. Section 5 discusses the implications and limitations of the study and recommends future work.

2. Resilience, transformative resilience and projects

Since the conceptual foundation of Holling (1973), multiple perspectives to advance the resilience concept have emerged across multiple academic disciplines (Folke, 2006; Hollnagel, 2014; Baggio, 2015). The separate research streams have arguably confused the early interdisciplinary use of the term (Brand & Jax, 2007) while presenting many opportunities for interdisciplinary project studies to bridge across fields (Naderpajouh et al., 2020a, p.2). This section first briefly outlines the different resilience research streams before presenting the study’s focal

transformative resilience perspective.

2.1. Resilience research

In engineering, on which project management has had a firm grounding (Geraldi & Söderlund, 2018), resilience has been widely used, notably in disaster or risk management, with a strong focus on the efficiency with which a system can recover and return to a stable state after disruptions, and controlling the optimal resource flow (Folke, 2006). The earlier focus was on returns to its original equilibrium state and short-term stability, i.e., stable combinations of the key attributes, including components, functions, structures, and processes (Gunderson, 2000). In ecology, the notion of resilience has evolved to recognise that disturbed systems did not necessarily return to the previous steady state as there could be many equilibria. In contrast to bouncing-back resilience, multi-equilibria resilience focusses on the system’s to remain in a particular state and withstand change before reaching a critical threshold and shifting to a new regime (Folke, 2006). Social-ecology resilience has broadened this resilience notion to consider the dynamic interaction between social and ecological change to theorise the social better in the discussions (e.g., Armitage et al., 2012; Pelling & Manuel-Navarrete, 2011). This resilience notion sees human and biophysical systems are linked and co-evolving through long-term adaptive cycle dynamics. The focus is on the nature of interactions and a state of continual adjustment and evolution rather than equilibrium. In this regard, social-ecological systems can also self-organise and transform in facing internal and external disruptions. In other words, transformability (i.e., the capability of a system to pursue fundamentally new strategies and practices that challenge conventional frames of reference, assumptions, and power imbalances) (Walker et al., 2002, 2004) becomes the primary concern when the current situation is deemed untenable and unsustainable. The notion of systemic change to avoid getting stuck in unfit structures sets transformability apart from adaptability (i.e., the capability of a system to adjust to external and internal change through self-organisation and collective learning) (Folke et al., 2010; Holling, 2001).

In management and organisational scholarship, the body of knowledge on resilience is extensive (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003; Linnenlueke, 2017; Stephenson, 2010). The concept has been studied at different levels (e.g., individuals, organisations, sectors, supply chains, communities, state) (see, e.g., Bhamra et al., 2011; Gilly et al., 2014; Kama-lahmadi & Mellat, 2016; Van Der Vegt et al., 2015). Different definitions have been used. Both adaptability and transformability notions of social-ecological resilience have been theoretically and empirically explored in organisation and project studies. Research suggests that organisations build resilience through adaptive capacities to prepare for and respond to changes and discontinuities (Burnard & Bhamra, 2019). Others (e.g., Clément & Rivera, 2017) underline the notion of transformability, suggesting that organisations may reach an adaptation limit within their resource environment and may, therefore, seek new adaptation trajectories and critical resources to complement already established adaptation or risk-mitigating actions. Duchek (2020) further suggests that transformability can be enhanced through new and diverse knowledge and translating this knowledge into new products or solutions to respond to new circumstances. Clément and Rivera (2017) also highlight that resilience is determined by the form and degree of adaptation the system is undergoing in a given phase of the adaptive cycle, along which a system progresses through multiple equilibria. A fine-grained and multi-dimensional empirical understanding of the mechanism that shapes transformative rather than adaptive resilience is limited.

Similarly, in project studies, resilience emerges to challenge the limitations of traditional risk management practices, which emphasise known disruptive events (Turner & Kutsch, 2015). In contemporary resilience thinking, managers can instead prepare for the unexpected by improving resilience in the project organisational systems (Nachbagauer

& Schirl-Boeck, 2019). A project is a temporary organisation where diverse resources work together in a team on specific tasks for a discrete period to achieve unique objectives (Sydow et al., 2004). Being vehicles of organising change (Turner & Müller, 2003) and an open adaptive system where multi-stakeholders partnerships with values and logical tensions are expected to co-define project goals and success (Dentoni et al., 2016, 2021), projects are expected to face many internal and external disruptions, both known and unknown. Therefore, improving the resilience in contemporary project organisations concerns not only VUCA (vulnerable-uncertain-complex-ambiguous) environmental complexities, but also social complexities derived from adopting this open systems framing. Such framing assumes that external political environments may seep into the internal political dynamics of organisations in various ways. Similarly, those internal politics may, in turn, mediate organisation-level outcomes about external pressures (Weber & Waeger, 2017). In innovation IOPs, for instance, task conflicts and difficulty in assimilating knowledge amongst project team members and stakeholder organisations are said to result in project failure (Wu et al., 2017a).

All previously mentioned resilience notions have been acknowledged in the literature as offering project management different options to deal with the desired change (viz., recovery, adaptation or transformation). This paper takes a sharper focus on human capabilities and relational dynamics to understand better the transformative premise of the IOPs resilience process in coping with unexpected variations. This transformative resilience perspective is explained next.

2.2. Transformative resilience perspective

Two aspects are central to the transformative resilience perspective. The first one underpins the multi-dimensional interactional dynamics in resilience. This aspect emphasises resilience as “the process by which a party (i.e., individual, organisation, or community) builds and uses capability endowments to interact with the environment in a way that positively adjusts and maintains functioning prior to, during, following adversity” (Williams et al., 2017, p. 742). The resilience process highly depends on the concerned individuals, groups, and subsystems to face environmental changes with a proactive attitude and develop response strategies (Kamalahmadi & Mellat, 2016, p.121). Hence, this view requires attention to both stability, and development of those capabilities at different points in the project life cycle, intra- and inter-organisational spaces.

This view gives organisations the potential to come out of disruptions and associated organisational challenges more robust than before (Duchek, 2020). Hamel and Välikangas (2003) highlight that resilient organisations demonstrate abilities to address four specific challenges: (1) a cognitive challenge (to be realistic and aware of how changes will affect the organisation), (2) a strategic challenge (to design new strategic options), (3) a political challenge (to reallocate resources for support promising actions), and (4) an ideological challenge (to instil a proactive attitude focussed on the steady search for new opportunities). Similarly, Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) highlight that addressing these challenges involves cognitive, behavioural and contextual interactions.

Previous efforts applying this aspect identified key characteristics of the capabilities as sensing (horizon scanning/ understanding), seizing (actions following identification), and transforming (organisational re-figuring) (Teece et al., 1997). This resonates with other established notions that the resilience phases are intertwined with one another: for instance, of readiness (anticipation), response (coping) and recovery (adaptation) in organisational resilience literature (Burnard & Bhamra, 2019; Clément & Rivera, 2017; Sharma & Sharma, 2016; Duchek, 2020). These phases emphasise intersubjective interaction, proactive thinking, engagement, and adaptability, and require a process-based view (Yang et al., 2021). IOPs research has highlighted that project performance indispensably depends on the joint efforts of multiple stakeholder organisations (Lehtinen & Aaltonen, 2020). Jones and Lichtenstein (2008)

have also used the term ‘social embeddedness’ to underline the temporal interaction dynamics between organisational actors in shaping project behaviour, the co-evolution of social ties, coordination and collaborative activities to manage uncertainty. We know little about how these temporal and social embeddedness dynamics manifest in different resilience phases. The literature is predominantly theoretical and empirically limited to single organisations. Although case-based IOP research has been called for (e.g., Bhamra et al., 2011; Gilly et al., 2014; Kamalahmadi & Mellat, 2016; Williams et al., 2017; Sydow & Braun, 2018), only a few exists (for a recent exception, see, e.g., Yang et al., 2021). This study, hence, seeks to address these research challenges.

The second aspect addresses the dominant assumptions of nonhierarchical power relations in IOPs. Folke (2006) states that “resilience is not simply about being persistent or robust to disturbance. It is also about the opportunities that disturbance opens up in terms of recombination of evolved structures and processes, renewal of the system and emergence of new trajectories.” (p.259). This aspect of power relations has been discussed in organisation resilience literature (see, e.g., Burnard & Bhamra, 2019; Duchek, 2020) and is consistent with the argument that complex adaptive systems are constantly learning and, hence, by default, never return to the pre-existing trajectory (Fath et al., 2015). Social resilience scholars have highlighted that this aspect entails “the need to pursue policies that relate to power imbalances” (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004, p.9) in social systems. Transformative resilience typically implies radical or systemic changes to institutional arrangements, priorities and norms (O’Brien, 2011), instead of simply reinforcing the status quo (Boyden & Cooper, 2006; Evans & Reid, 2014).

In this sense, in complex, adaptive social systems such as IOPs, transformative resilience can be determined by the dynamic relationships between various associated components. Changing one element can affect positively or negatively other elements or even the entire system. Therefore, trade-offs and tensions between actions, interests, and associated tensions need to be critically recognised, mediated and resolved (Pelling et al., 2015). Pelling (2010) calls this transformation lens ‘conscientisation’ or critical awareness. This awareness assumes that people frame resilience to materialise their particular interests, needs, or the persistence of their institutions (Turner, 2008). In social innovations, Fougère and Meriläinen (2021) describe this awareness as attending to the dark sides of resilience. The dynamics of top-down, experts discourse versus bottom-up initiatives, resilience framings and practice can be easily hijacked by influential stakeholders in the guise of empowering self-organised adaptation of marginalised communities in neoliberalist discourse (see also Grove, 2014; Meriläinen, 2020). Addressing the trade-offs and the power dynamics would require conscious awareness of long-term impacts and self-critical reflection on currently held assumptions, worldviews, values and norms, and deep learning (Gunderson & Holling, 2002; Walker et al., 2002; Folke et al., 2010; O’Brien, 2012). Earlier applications to translate the resilience concept from natural science to social science have arguably failed to incorporate these considerations (see, e.g., Turner, 2008; Olson et al., 2014).

This transformative resilience aspect highlights the importance of distinguishing adaptive resilience from transformative resilience in terms of social interaction approaches and change strategies pursued in projects’ cognitive measures and behaviours to cope with variations. The former would imply steady adaptation to organisational values, priorities, processes, and mechanisms, whereas the latter would deliberately promote fundamentally novel solutions.

Considering these ongoing resilience notions from the transformative resilience perspective, this paper approaches *project resilience* as an overarching theoretical concept to mean the dynamic project capability(ies) to adapt to expected and unexpected variations in the broader project environment. The resilience process in this notion would feature social interactions that attend to the inter-dependence between individuals, groups, and subsystems in project environments and the interplay between cognitive, behavioural, and contextual elements.

Adaptive project resilience refers to the dynamic project capability to make continual and steady adjustments to internal and external variations through existing self-organisation and collective learning mechanisms. Social interactions would focus on the stability of existing systems while flexibly changing project arrangements, priorities and norms throughout different stages of disruptions. *Transformative project resilience* refers to the dynamic project capability to pursue fundamentally new strategies and practices to respond to internal and external variations by enhancing critical awareness in project decision-making. Social interactions in this notion deliberately focus on systemic changes to existing project arrangements, priorities and norms, conscious awareness of power imbalances and technical and cognitive bias. Table 1 summarises these three concepts, their definitions and their key features.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Research design, case selection and context

This study used a process approach and qualitative procedures to conduct an exploratory study. IOPs have distinct stakeholder relations, and the resilience process can be expected to evolve differently during critical events. Single-case studies are suited to reveal unique, previously inaccessible theoretically (of transformative resilience and the role of social), insights into how certain circumstances emerge over time and lead to specific consequent changes (Yin, 2017). The longitudinal design aimed at better capturing over time (Langley, 1999) the dynamic, non-linear nature of resilience in all its richness. Moreover, the study used event-based strategies inspired by Halinen et al., (2013) to trace and analyse the temporal and socially-interactive nature of resilience in the context of a ‘fluid and dynamic’ (p.224) multi-layered inter-organisational relationship context. These strategies guided the study’s multi-method data collection and multi-level analyses.

The study aimed to select a revelatory case that could be theoretically useful (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2009), that is, to extend the theory (of transformation resilience) by filling a conceptual category (the role of the social). The selection was built on insights from other IOPs and project network studies (Bizzi & Langley, 2012) relevant to the selected context. Besides more explicit transformative intent and intangibility of outcomes, development projects tend to experience higher levels of socio-political and network complexity than other

international projects (ibid). Social embeddedness in development projects is often used to broaden the resource base, and coordinate project tasks (Pilbeam, 2013) in multiple project sites within the same or different countries. It is also used between organisational actors in the Global North (typically referred to as the funding countries in the advanced economies) and the Global South (typically referred to as the recipient countries in the developing economies) (Dados & Connell, 2012). Power asymmetries are inherent in development projects’ architecture and management of change processes, results, unexpected events, and various forms of stakeholder engagements. Moreover, process thinking, complexity, flexibility, participatory approaches, multi-stakeholder partnerships, adaptive learning and adaption have never been more critically called for to enhance projects’ performance (Honig, 2018; Ika, 2012; Ika et al., 2020). Theoretical and empirical insights into the ‘black box’ of how resilience plays out in this broader context could be valuable to inform other project domains sharing similar complexities.

The selected case was set in a new development project hosted by a Swedish government agency (SGA) during the first year of the COVID-19 outbreak. The project network is consistent with the socially embedded features, emerging management practices and concerns in the overall development domain. It followed a specific networking architecture prescribed by a considerable programmatic funding and implementation system called the international training program (ITP). The approach was developed in the 1980s by the project sponsor, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) (Sida, 2017). This architecture focuses on creating and facilitating cross-country networks amongst actors working in similar public-reform areas (e.g., environment management, land administration, health) to develop working and actionable knowledge for driving organisational or development change in participating countries.

The focal project (hereafter ITP-DRM) aimed at strengthening the capacity of disaster risk management organisations in four Asian countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, and the Philippines) by equipping their change agents with common DRM taxonomy, understanding, and tools; and customised technical support to their change initiatives (CIs). It has a budget of around 6 million USD (64 million Swedish crowns). The initial project timeframe of 2018–2022 has, since the COVID-19 disruptions, been extended to mid-2024. Like other ITP projects, ITP-DRM has 5–7 training rounds, each formally lasting 1–1.5 years, involving 22–25 openly-recruited professionals from multiple sectors (public, civil society, private, and academic organisations). Unlike subjects in dominant IOP studies, these professionals may not have prior social ties. Although not made explicit, each round’s sequencing of learning activities follows conventional network development stages as social ties, trust, and expectations are consolidated amongst project stakeholders. The three main learning stages, after the selection of participants, in each round are: (1) *preparatory* (e.g., a regional physical workshop with all participants in one of the partner countries to contextualise learning content based on participants’ needs) lasting 2 months, (2) *implementation* (e.g., implementation of series of learning events, e.g., an advanced 2-week workshop in Sweden with all participants, mentorship support, experts follow-up visits in partner countries, CI implementation in participating organisations) lasting 7–9 months, and (3) *phasing-out* (e.g., final participants report and a final physical workshop with all graduating and former participants to share experiences driving CIs, and identify further networking initiatives). A pool of SGA’s and externally contracted experts, predominantly based in Sweden, was expected to provide varied support to the participants at different stages to support and follow up on the participants and their CI progress.

Given the novelty of the networking architecture, and the multitude of inter-dependant parts, to ensure project performance, the implementing SGA has explicitly devised an action-learning mechanism to support its adaptive management and participatory approaches. A list of typically expected internal and external risks in the domain (e.g., natural

Table 1
Key concepts and definitions used in the study.

Concepts	Definitions	Key features
Project resilience	Dynamic project capability to adapt to expected and unexpected variations in the broader project environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-dependence between individuals, groups, and subsystems in project environments • Interplaying cognitive, behavioural, and contextual elements
Adaptive project resilience	Dynamic project capability to adapt to internal and external variations, through existing self-organisation and collective learning mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistence or stability of existing systems • Phased approaches to flexibly adjusting existing organisational arrangements, priorities and norms
Transformative project resilience	Dynamic project capability to pursue fundamentally new strategies and practices to adapt to internal and external variations by enhancing critical awareness in decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberate systemic changes to existing organisational arrangements, priorities and norms • Conscious about power imbalances and bias in knowledge base

hazards, socio-political unrests, participants' appropriateness and willingness to interact, availability of their organisational and support to implement CIs, and relevance of Swedish technical experts), and corresponding mitigation measures have been identified during the project's inception. The occurrence of a global pandemic was unexpected and was the first significant disruption the project had experienced in its external environment. At the time, the project had just completed the first round while initiating the second. The pre-defined tasks and deliverables in the 2nd (*implementation*) and 3rd (*phasing-out*) stages of Round 2 were severely disrupted. Consequently, the intent to strengthen social ties between project stakeholders was not realised, although financial resources planned for workshop travelling were largely unused.

The study focussed on observing the evolution of the resilience practice in the second round, between February and December 2020. The social embeddedness of the selected case is reflected in the connectedness amongst the multiple stakeholder groups in their dynamic relationships and individual and shared experiences (Pilbeam, 2013) with the resilience activities against unexpected disruption. Fig. 1 provides an overview of the project stakeholders' roles and relationships in one typical networking round. Those marked in blue participated in the study. While the constellation, selection of participants and implementation of each round are structurally similar with many inter-dependant parts, there could be many different possible learning and collaboration arrangements between project participants.

3.2. Data collection

Permission was granted to investigate the resilience practice in the focal project as part of the "engaged scholarship" (Van de Ven, 2007) of the associated university to support the project's action learning since its conceptualisation in 2018. This access gave the researchers a contextualised understanding of the context prior to the study, and a trusted, front-row seat to the 'backstage' (Goffman, 1963) of evolving resilience and social process during a critical event. A combination of data collection methods was used for the retrospective (prior to the critical disruptive event throughout the previous project years) and the real-time research processes. Fig. 2 presents an overview of the study timeline and methods used. In order to guarantee confidentiality, some details of the informants were deliberately omitted.

The purpose of the multi-methods was to generate a comprehensive, robust and rich description of the evolution of the resilience practice and the role of the multi-dimensional social in fostering transformative trajectories. We collected real-time and retrospective data to account for clear temporal breakpoints (where there were significant endogenous and exogenous processes/events), referring to temporal bracketing strategy, to obtain distinctive units of analysis (Langley, 1999) of the resilience process patterns. The retrospective process involved a review of internal and external documentation. The researchers had unlimited access (via the project's online file-sharing platform) to many archival documents (AD) throughout the years. In total, 18 documents relevant to the study were selected, including the project work plan, risk matrix – original and updated, annual report, team-meeting minutes, email communication with the project sponsor and other project stakeholders,

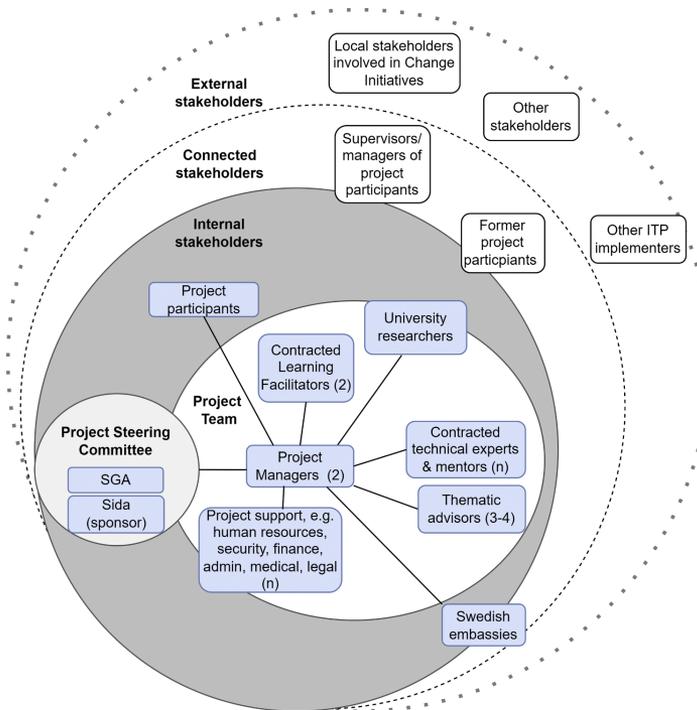


Fig. 1. The network context of the selected case (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure, the reader is referred to the web version of this article).

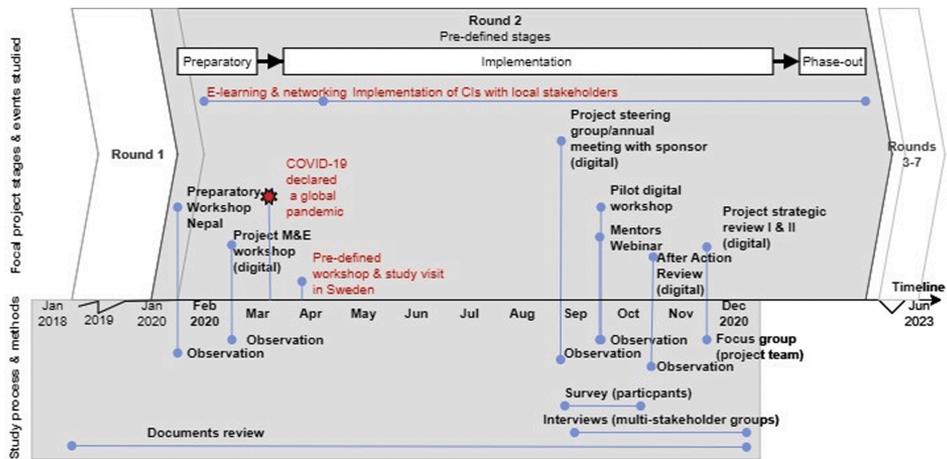


Fig. 2. Overview of the study timeline and methods used.

and after-action review reports. The documentation helped the researchers make a consistent and contextualised understanding (Martinsuo & Huemann, 2021b) of the network’s coordination structure in making sense of, preparing for, responding to and recovering from disruptions.

The real-time process was undertaken shortly before and after the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern between February and December 2020. This process aimed to collect first-hand, rich and triangulated data in real-life settings, using multiple techniques and sources to trace the real-time impact of COVID-19 disruptions, resilience practice, and the social process patterns as they unfolded in the project network context. In total, the researchers observed as outsiders seven pre-defined or adapted events (in total 60.5 h) in their real-life settings (including, e.g., the preparatory workshop in Nepal, the project team’s action learning workshops and the adapted virtual Swedish workshop). Clear observation criteria and termination protocols (if participants did not appear to act normally) were established and carried out by three researchers. Field notes were discussed amongst the three research members in real-time using WhatsApp and immediately after the events to identify the process patterns of resilience practice in the case, and

update the research design/process where relevant. See Appendix 1 for an overview of the document reviewed and events observed.

This early documents’ review and events observation provided a limited, if not superficial, understanding of what was going on (Martinsuo & Huemann, 2021a) and what to expect within the broader project network. Further data were, therefore, collected for cross-function and cross-cultural insights, following a significant adaptation decision in August-September 2020 to hold the initially planned advanced workshop online in October 2020 instead.

First, 18 anonymised survey responses (out of all 25 Round-2 project participants from 21 different organisations) amounting to a 72% response rate were collected online in September. Participants answered close-ended questions about their views of (1) the project resilience practice so far, (2) the disruptions experienced, and (3) the implications of the project decision to move online pre-defined project events.

Subsequently, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives of various project stakeholder groups. The survey and the interviews aimed to enhance the breadth and depth of the data and trace previously less prevalent influencing factors, social processes, and subsequent changes in response to the COVID-19. In total, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted (September-December 2022)

Table 2 Interviewees.

Identifier	Project role	Project Site	Project network experience prior to interview
PT-LF1	Project team – learning facilitator 1	Sweden	10 months
PT-LF2	Project team – learning facilitator 2	Sweden	22 months
PT-MG1	Project team – manager 1, female	Sweden	22 months
PT-MG2	Project team – manager 2, female	Sweden	22 months
PR-MT1	Project resource – mentor 1, male	Sweden	22 months
PR-MT2	Project resource – mentor 2, female	Sweden	13 months
PT-TA/PR-MT3	Project team - thematic advisor / project resource - mentor 3	Sweden	13 months
PS1	Project sponsor representative to the case project, male	Sweden	22 months
PS2	Project sponsor representative to two similar projects, female	Sweden	N/A
PP1-PC1	Project participant 1 – Round-2, female, civil society	Partner country 1	8 months
PP2-PC1	Project participant 2 – Round-2, male, academia	Partner country 1	8 months
PP3-PC2	Project participant 3 – Round-2, male, civil society	Partner country 2	8 months
PP4-PC3	Project participant 4 – Round-2, female, civil society	Partner country 3	8 months
PP5-PC4	Project participant 5 – Round-2, male, civil society	Partner country 4	10 months
PP6-PC2	Project participant 6 – Round-2, male, academia	Partner country 2	9 months

with project managers, learning facilitators, technical experts, sponsors and participants (see Table 2. Interviewees).

The informants were selected based on: (1) their resilience function in the project, in Sweden or in partner countries, as articulated in the risk matrix, (2) the high intensities of stakeholder interactions during the COVID-19, and (3) availability. Interview access to participants from the governmental sector was, however, limited. The study excluded the project support staff.

Specifically, the selection of project participant informants strived to ensure equal representation of genders, sectors, countries, and views (as expressed on the network's social media) to allow richer cross-cultural insights. One other ITP sponsor representative was interviewed, using the snowballing technique, to mitigate research bias and to allow comparable and transferrable insights from a broader project systems perspective about adaptability and transformability.

The same set of questions guided all the interviews, covering: (1) the informant's role and responsibility in project resilience, (2) COVID disruptions and opportunities of change, (3) the experience of project resilience, (4) stakeholder interactions (5) expectations and lessons. The interviews, each lasting between 40 min and 1.5 h, were conducted in English, using either Zoom, Teams, WhatsApp, or telephone as accessible to the informants.

The material reviewed some tensions in using specific knowledge and social resources, the divergence of perceptions, and expectations of project adaptability and transformability between stakeholder groups. Therefore, one focus group workshop was held virtually in two half-day sessions (totalling six hours) in December 2020. The researchers designed and facilitated the discussion with another researcher. In total, seven project team members (two project managers, one project administrator, two project trainers and two project thematic advisors) participated in the discussion. This joint sense-making workshop allowed a deeper understanding of the sources of tensions and divergence of stakeholders' perspectives, as well as the consequent adaptation trajectory of the project.

As the project team decided to put Round-2 on hold for an unknown period, no further break points or new process patterns were expected. In other words, theoretical saturation was sufficiently reached in this exploratory case study; hence, no further data was needed.

3.3. Data analysis

Several strategies were used to ensure validity and reliability based on the methodology work of several authors (e.g., Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Langley, 1999). Triangulation was primarily sought within the choice of data (e.g., technical details of events sequencing corroborated by examining project documents), methods (multiple methods and sources), investigators (three researchers collaborated), and theory (resilience, and the role of the social in adaptation's temporal processes) used. Specifically, all interviews were transcribed verbatim, and field notes from observing project events were taken. Although the analysis considered all the data collected, the result narratives mainly referred to fewer sources, notably interviews, to illustrate the process patterns that were interpreted as representing the complex temporal and cross-cultural processes. The Gioia methodology inspired the data analytical process (Gioia et al., 2013).

As the first step in the data analysis, the project documents and interview transcripts were coded to generate a case history using temporal bracketing (Langley, 1999) with the chronological order of external and internal events and consequent adaptations made.

In the second step, themes and sub-themes were identified based on words, sentences, and dispositions in the interview transcript that conveyed stakeholder interactions, dynamics, motives and tensions of interactions. A narrative account of the temporal organisation of project resilience was created to make sense of the event sequence. Subsequently, interview segments were used to compare the pattern process between stakeholders for cross-function and cultural perspectives and

between data sources (e.g., documents and interviews) iteratively. Three researchers, two of whom originally came from Asia and had experienced with conducting interpretive research in intercultural settings, were involved in the first rounds of open coding. These were shared with the focal project team to establish the reliability of the observations. Based on their feedback, minor modifications were made. The author recoded these first-order concepts in abductive mode, i.e., reconciling the empirical findings with the previous theoretical concepts/their relationships (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009) and performed the second-order interpretive analyses. The open-coded first-order themes were converted into second-order themes with meaningful categories of resilience process patterns and consequent changes, that the literature has described in relation to resilience, inter-organisational collaboration, stakeholder management, and project-based learning. For example, the first-order codes about *ambiguous relation to the resilience tasks* were grouped under the theoretical theme of *willingness to engage and commit critical resources*. Within this theme, the first-order codes revealed the distributed agency amongst the informants to undertake the resilience task beyond the formal, mandated responsibilities. Similarly, Sydow and Braun's (2018) work on different IOP types allowed some first-order codes related to the heterogeneity of perspectives and tensions actors experienced to be converted into *appreciation of the diverse perspectives*.

Finally, the analytical step sought plausible explanations for the dynamics of the social relations influencing the temporal resilience process patterns. Here, the second-order themes were converted to represent aggregated dimensions of embedding deliberations to answer how transformative resilience emerges, if any, in IOPs. Additional literature on social embeddedness in IOPs was consulted to ensure theoretical validity and identify distinct organisational features unique to the empirical contexts. The work of Jones and Lichtenstein (2008) and Pilbeam (2013) on social embeddedness, Tate et al. (2013) on behavioural embeddedness, Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) and Rost (2011) on cognitive embeddedness, and Berggren, Sydow and Tell (2016) on boundary-spanning was helpful to aggregate the second-order themes into useful dimensions to aid future theory development on transformative resilience of IOPs. The second-order themes were refined and reworded iteratively to reflect the developed theoretical observations (Gioia et al., 2013). The emerging ideas were constantly contrasted with the theoretical underpinnings of the paper to explain the resilience process pattern over time. Fig. 3 outlines the data structure.

4. Results

This section first describes the different phases in the resilience process in the case context, followed by the key elements underpinning the antecedent role of the social in shaping the transformative premise of the resilience process (as featured in Fig. 3 data structure). A preliminary conceptual model is then presented.

4.1. Resilience phases

Three specific coping phases were prevalent to describe how resilience evolved in the case context in response to the unexpected COVID-19 disruption. To distinguish them from the three resilience phases (anticipating, coping, and adaptation) described in extant risk management literature with a different timescale in mind (see Section 2), these labels, borrowing from a similar study by Mokline and Ben Abdallah (2021), were instead used: (1) awareness and absorption phase, (2) adaptation and renewal phase, and (3) learning and feedback phase.

During the first (awareness and absorption) phase, covering February-March 2020, the resilience process focused on enhancing situation awareness. For instance, the project managers immediately used pre-defined risk-mitigating measures and consulted broadly with project stakeholders. Information about the situation was gathered from both internal and external sources, including participants' view about what is

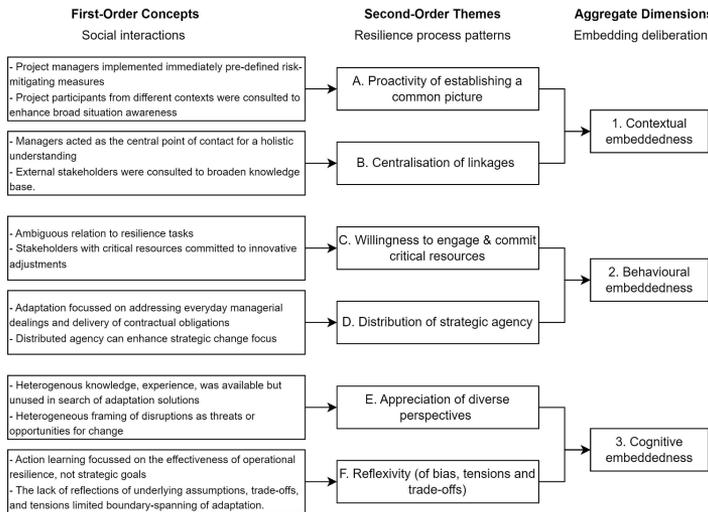


Fig. 3. Data structure.

possible and not with their engagements, public health authorities' recommendations and participants' potential risk exposure if the Swedish workshop was to take place as planned in April 2020. They also looked at the different scenarios and insurance coverage. They sought technical advice from the project's medical coordinator about adjustments needed for social interactions should the workshop go ahead (e.g., social distancing, public transport, and hotel accommodation).

The second (adaptation and renewal) phase covered an extended period between April and October 2020, following the WHO's (2020) declaration of the COVID-19 as a pandemic on 11 March 2020. The focus was to accept the situation and consider short-term and even longer-term actions in response to emerging challenges. Several adaptation and renewal actions/events were undertaken. For instance, the project decided to postpone the Swedish workshop to September. Engagement with the project participants and their assigned mentors was initiated to refine their CIs (i.e., their expected learning and outcome from participating in the ITP-DRM). These actions aimed at getting "the wheels in motion" and "not to lose momentum" (PT-LF2) of stakeholder engagements built up from the project's preparatory stage, also allowing the project team to continue monitoring the changing context and work out corresponding actions.

Moreover, the project risk matrix was updated in April 2020 (AD4). Opportunities were also sought within the project team to accelerate long-term adaptations (e.g., revision of the project's learning objectives, monitoring framework, and templates) identified from Round 1, which would otherwise only get implemented slowly in the project life cycle (AD 6–9).

Additionally, the pre-planned Round 3 recruitment process was postponed until further notice. Following the decision about virtualising the Swedish workshop in October, efforts shifted to developing the capability to coordinate this new task, i.e., working with digital learning and technologies (e.g., one project facilitator attended a digital learning course), ensuring internet connectivity amongst participants (AD11–12), and so on. The digital event concluded in October with the participation of the participants, supported by Swedish experts.

The third (learning and feedback) project resilience phase covered November–December 2020. It included two significant actions/events, (1) a routine, after-action review within the core project team following

the conclusion of the digital workshop (AD15), and (2) a strategic project review with the core project team facilitated by two researchers. The latter constituted the focus group discussion of this study to understand better the sources of divergent stakeholder perspectives about transformative project resilience.

The three project resilience phases in the case context revealed that the resilience capability evolved in a processual manner. The different natures of social interactions enacted highly influence the resilience phases. The sections below elaborate on these findings.

4.2. The role of the social in project resilience

4.2.1. Contextual embeddedness

Two themes emerged from analysing the managerial function of the social interactions in the case context: *proactivity of establishing a common picture* and *centralisation of temporal linkages*. Together the two elements constitute the contextual embeddedness that underpins the dependence of the resilience process on the contextual links of varying contexts in the network structure.

The *proactivity of establishing a common picture* was particularly prevalent in the early resilience phases. In the time leading up to the WHO's (2020) declaration of the COVID-19 as a pandemic, it was prevalent that project resilience was enacted. Adaptation actions corresponded to the pre-defined risk-mitigating measures in the project risk matrix (AD1). This matrix was developed during the project initiation, based on fact-finding missions and broad stakeholder consultations in the partner countries, to outline the contextual risk factors affecting the project's performance and success. It was no surprise that, given the selection of partner countries based on their highly disaster-prone nature, "natural disasters [in partner countries]" were explicitly identified as the one "extreme" risk with a "high" likelihood and "major" impact on project continuity and success (AD1, p.1). Even though the pandemic was not a known risk, and the project risk matrix "were not routinely looked at before the pandemic" (PT-MG1), the project managers were able to implement the pre-defined mitigating measures immediately, consulted a broad range of stakeholders, and did so throughout all the remaining phases. This proactivity helped establish a communication structure to enhance a shared awareness of the situation earlier.

The *centralisation of temporal linkages* facilitated the contextual embeddedness by the project managers (and the learning facilitators) to respond to the temporal dynamics of the disruptions. This element was particularly prevalent in the second resilience phase. Notably, according to the project managers, some certainty about the situation was established following internal discussions within the project team, and consultation with external experts from the SGA's special COVID response unit that was established to monitor the pandemic's development in all countries with ongoing programs and projects (PT-MG1). The accumulated contextual insights prompted a significant decision to postpone the Swedish workshop to October 2020, as it became clear that the pandemic would continue to impact all predefined project events. However, other stakeholders in the project team held a non-linear view of the decision-making process, as this quote described, "We individually did not feel comfortable travelling with all the things that happened. I do not think that we were all super deliberate or intentional about it yet. The decision just happened almost like the night before. Like, OK, it doesn't seem like a good idea." (PT-LF1). Regardless, the centralisation of temporal linkages, at least within the interactions of the core project team, had helped the project navigate the fluidity of the situation derived from an unknown and relatively novel risk. This centralisation also injected a sense of relief and consciousness in exploring different adaptation options to embark on a now clearly set direction as ambiguity in the external contexts lingered, as exemplified in this quote from a project manager:

"I think there was initially much anxiety, going back and forth about what to and what not to do, and what the consequences are. But after making the decision, we can now explore: what are our options? What kind of opportunity can we use the time for as COVID slows our project implementation?" (PT-PM2).

The two embedding elements, *proactivity of establishing a common picture and centralisation of temporal linkages*, enabled the project to transition from adaptive to potentially transformative resilience as it gained focus on seeking renewal opportunities rather than merely on mitigating adverse consequences. The project annual report described the moderating effect of the two elements on the renewal opportunity in the case context, "The [COVID-19] situation has encouraged rethinking old and generating new ideas, both for the project team and participants" (AD3, p.5).

4.2.2. Behavioural embeddedness

Analyses of individual stakeholders' perspectives in the case context underlined two essential elements, *willingness to engage and commit critical resources and distribution of strategic agency*, in influencing positively the network's relationships to mobilise social rather than formal resources to allow continual adjustments of the project organisation to the changing circumstances.

First, project risk management followed a centralised structure with the resilience responsibilities primarily and formally on the two project managers. Other project team members generally did not see a clear relation to the resilience tasks, as exemplified in this quote by one of the learning facilitators, "I do not have a formal role, maybe informally" (PT-LF2). This ambiguous relation to the resilience tasks did not necessarily limit stakeholders' engagement in the social process. Several other factors shaped their level of engagement in the resilience tasks, especially in the second resilience phase. In the case DRM context, project stakeholders generally were accustomed to managing known and unknown risks. Many stakeholders, even in culturally different contexts, could easily relate to the situation, offered solidarity, and were willing to span the boundary of their assigned role to help address the challenges at the hand of the project managers. For example, most project participants in the survey manifested their solidarity, highly or moderately appreciating the adequacy (78%) and timeliness (67%) of the resilience performance. Within the project team, stakeholders with professional proximity to the resilience tasks tended to be more willing than others to engage proactively with formal resilience managers. As

this quote from a project team member illustrated, "I have worked on pandemic preparedness before. I felt that we were going into a global lockdown for quite some time. So I came back several times to the management team that we have to think about adjusting everything, even though I was not involved in actually making those decisions" (PT-LF2). This stood in contrast with another project member with the same function but limited in professional proximity who saw "a very small role and maybe when it is time I say something" (PT-LF1) in the resilience tasks.

Moreover, the stakeholders' *willingness to engage and commit critical resources* had a strong bearing on conventional or innovative adjustments. For instance, this element was particularly prevalent at the beginning of the second resilience phase when Sida's Director-General sent out a general letter on 26 March 2020 (AD17) to all implementing partners. The letter acknowledged the challenges everyone was facing and assured that: "[Sida] will remain flexible, if necessary make justified adjustments to plans and budgets, and discuss the best way forward. This is a time for innovation, for finding new and better ways to tackle our global challenges." (AD17). This message affirmed a commitment to international development's strategic goals while legitimating self-organisation and collective learning to drive resilience evolution in all ITP projects. This willingness and commitment of stakeholders with critical resources, in this case, project sponsors, to engage in the resilience tasks was illustrated in Sida officers' adoption of multiple roles as "sister state agency" to SGAs, "advisors" and "sounding boards" (PS1, PS2) to "work out [adaptation] options" (PS2) with implementers. This was, however, not unconditioned in the contractual governance relationships. One Sida officer highlighted the importance of some explicit safeguards in this quote, "not all implementing agencies have the absorptive and adaptive capacities; some chose to stop their operation altogether despite Sida's flexibility and support." (PS2). Maintaining this power position was seen as essential to ensure the everyday managerial dealings with the pandemic disruptions would maintain projects' strategic goals of achieving societal impacts in partner countries.

Empirically, adopting digital technologies in the ITP methodology commonly appeared in the project team's narratives as a cost-efficiency opportunity to reach out to more participating organisations. However, one Sida officer pointed out that uncritical adoption might divert attention from addressing systemic challenges previously identified in the ITP methodology. The pandemic might exacerbate, for example, "the fragmentation of CIs" between participating individuals/organisations, and the difficulty of engaging "influential actors in the partner organisations" (PS1) to drive change.

In this regard, the *distribution of strategic agency* in the project network emerged as an essential element in the resilience process. The project risk matrix (AD1) acknowledged the specific dependence of resilience on project participants' agency to engage, exchange, and implement the CIs in their organisational contexts. Despite some recognised shortfalls in the selection process, participants were agents of change in the network, generally holding "a [mid-management] position in their home organisations with a mandate to manage significant change processes" (AD18). The pandemic escalated this dependence on their agency, negatively impacting all surveyed participants' CI implementation. Their project-related interactions with other internal and external stakeholders were minimised. Nonetheless, a substantive proportion expressed willingness to commit (78% highly or moderately) to continuing participation in the network and implementing their CIs. While 67% considered that the resilience process had substantively considered their inputs, 61% were not at all or slightly satisfied with the decision to take the Swedish workshop online. Those holding a negative view considered online learning to be "ineffective" (PP4-PC3) and "difficult to ensure active participation of all attendees" (PP2-PC1). Conversely, those with a positive view suggested that "even if we can only start to move forward, it will be a positive step." (PP1-PC1).

The heterogeneity of cognitive perspectives within and between

stakeholder groups in the case context was apparent in the socialisation processes, as elaborated in the following sub-section.

4.2.3. Cognitive embeddedness

Two critical elements in the cognitive aspect of the resilience process emerged from the analysis of the heterogeneity of stakeholders' perspectives: *appreciation of diverse perspectives and reflexivity of bias, tensions, and trade-offs*. Together, they characterise the cognitive embeddedness dimension, which refers to the socialisation process articulating the similarities in the systems of meaning-making, norms and values (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) amongst different organisational actors in a network (Rost, 2011).

In the case context, it was evident that *appreciation of diverse perspectives* enabled the smooth transition and delivery of the virtualisation of the Swedish workshop within a short period. As this informant suggested, "The complementarity is obvious. I am a subject matter practitioner and have shortcomings. Another team member brings the project one step further. I think the product is much better than prior to the pandemic." (PT-LF2). However, the heterogeneity of the social resources (e.g., social capital, knowledge, and experiences) available in the entire network was not fully considered for transformative resilience to emerge. This insensitivity limited the opportunity to explore innovative or context-dependant renewal options, despite flexibility from project sponsors and other internal stakeholders. A predominantly centralised process, based on the knowledge base much closer to the project managers in the network, tended to be more appreciated. Context-dependant knowledge and experiences from the participants and their participating organisations (the majority being response or social organisations in their respective countries) were not well explored or integrated into the project decision-making. 81% of surveyed participants reported varying COVID-induced opportunities for their CIs. The resilience process mainly collected participants' feedback to anticipate and manage risks on technical challenges (e.g., internet connectivity and level of participation with others) when planning for the digital workshop. One project team member explained how the technical bias and threats-framing might have come about in the absence of deliberately integrating broader knowledge sources in the project decision-making:

"I had anticipated that more participants would be keen to adapt the design of their CIs to more COVID focus. But the project was more like we will make little adjustments, not big ones. I was surprised that there was so little of that. Then the idea got faded away and we came back to the original CIs. There is not a kind of scenario thinking...but much fog and we are more short-sighted for now." (PT-LF1)

The heterogeneity was also prevalent in how tensions and trade-offs were framed within and between the stakeholder groups. For example, in terms of the digitalisation of the Swedish workshop, some project participants viewed the loss of precious opportunities to mobilise their social resources, such as "to visit professional organisations and establish a direct contact for financial support from Swedish development partners to finance the implementation of their CIs" (PP3-PC2), and "to explore first-hand how Swedish DRM system is functioning in practice through observation and interactions" (PP1-PC1) to acquire actionable knowledge. Project sponsors saw a lost opportunity for the network "to connect with Sweden and the experience of getting to where we are today to help them create hope and inspiration." (PS2). Conversely, however, project team members saw minimal trade-offs through taking the Swedish workshop online, but rather an emerging opportunity, as this quote illustrated "A trip to Sweden is a lovely experience but mainly of great entertainment value" (PT-LF1), so much so "that some participants made up CIs to apply to the project. So going digital means we can get more substantial and quality commitments from participants" (PT-LF2). Mentor informants generally saw the loss of an opportunity to build a trustful mentor-mentee relationship if interactions were to rely on digital means. One quoted, "The learning facilitators and we have different perspectives and approaches. The tension is obvious. We spent less time helping participants deal with the practical challenges facing

their CIs." (PR-MT1). In addition, there was a common notion that mentors' perspectives were generally excluded in critically assessing renewal options, potential bias and trade-offs. They were, for instance, brought into the tripartite digital talks (between learning facilitators, mentors and mentees) as a response to prolonged uncertainty from the pandemic without a clear understanding of their role or the adaptation strategies undertaken.

In this vein, *reflexivity of bias, tensions, and trade-offs* was revealed to be another critical element of the cognitive dimension in influencing the adaptive trajectory of the resilience process in the case context. The built-in action-learning structure and participatory approaches in the network's organising structure (as seen in the after-action reviews, incorporating iterative adaptations between network rounds even in times of the pandemic) facilitated a reflective practice in the first and second resilience phases to attune adaptation strategies and practices to the changing contexts and the particularities of the participants' circumstances. However, the action-learning mechanism tended to fall short of deeper and collective learning to examine tensions, bias, and trade-offs in the resilience process. It was not until the researchers-facilitated Strategic Review Meeting in December 2020 that some tensions and misperceptions about the adaptation boundaries were uncovered (field note from 11 December 2020). For instance, one project manager with other ITP experience assumed that an assumed minimum number of participants was contractually obligated for each round. Another project member with prior project sponsor insights contested this assumption. This realisation, amongst others, subsequently shifted the spanning of adaptation boundaries to a more qualitative focus, prioritising fewer recruits for better support to participants, their CIs, and their organisational change contexts (*ibid*). This also led to the recognition of the importance of more transparent and inclusive communication and decision-making processes within the network (field note from 16 December 2020). A reflexive, rather than just reflective, practice was shown to offer the better potential to promote critical awareness inherent in transformative resilience.

4.3. A conceptual model

Fig. 4 is a preliminary conceptual model developed based on empirical findings to illustrate the role of social interactions in the emergence of IOPs' transformative resilience in facing disruptions. The model first acknowledges resilience as continuous interactions between the IOP and the environment, and responses to environmental changes before, during and after disruptions. It suggests that a critically disruptive event can trigger the enactment of three sequential types of social interactions within the IOPs, upon which corresponding response measures are determined and enacted.

The first interaction type is contextual embeddedness which deliberately strengthens the contextual links of varying circumstances amongst IOP stakeholders. Contextual embeddedness allows project management to leverage proactive and centralised organisational structures and approaches to gather stakeholders' perspectives for a holistic and continuous awareness of environmental variations and the network's absorptive capacity to withstand disruptions. Interactions build on the prior knowledge base before the disruption to draw on established resources (e.g., knowledge, skills, commitment, engagement) in the projects' organisational routines to identify and enact awareness and absorptive measures.

The second interaction type is behavioural embeddedness which enables projects to leverage stakeholders' willingness to engage, commit critical resources, and take on a fair share of their individual and collective resilience tasks. Behavioural embeddedness allows projects to transition effectively from centralised organisational structures to more distributed or networked ones. Here new resources from outside the routines are prioritised to identify and enact adaptation and renewal measures.

The third interaction type is cognitive embeddedness which allows

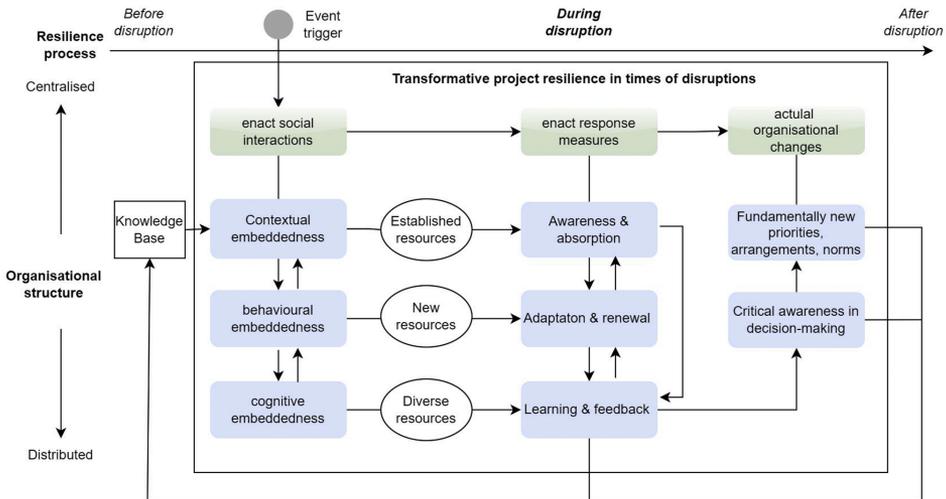


Fig. 4. Conceptual model illustrating the role of social embeddedness in the emergence of transformative project resilience.

projects to account for diverse perspectives in meaning-making, norms, and values of framing the disruption (e.g., as threats or opportunities), boundaries and options of adaptation strategies and measures. Mobilising diverse resources proactively from within and outside the project network structures is prioritised to enact learning and feedback measures. While social interactions up to this point feature elements of adaptive project resilience in terms of dynamic self-organising and collective learning capabilities, the model suggests that when learning and feedback measures are integrated into projects' knowledge base and decision-making mechanisms from the start rather than at the end of the resilience process, they can foster a dynamic interplay between contextual, behavioural and cognitive embeddedness. This interplay enhances projects' capability to be critically aware of the response measures enacted at different resilience phases (i.e., awareness and absorption, adaptation and renewal, and learning and feedback) for any blind spots, power imbalances, biases, and trade-offs. The interplay also strengthens projects' capability to proactively seek multi-equilibria opportunities with longer-term impacts rather than just mitigating threats of negative consequences from disruptions in making actual organisational changes.

In summary, the conceptual model emphasises the importance of considering the role of social embeddedness in fostering transformative project resilience when facing disruptions. It suggests that a dynamic interplay between contextual, behavioural, and cognitive embeddedness plays an antecedent role in projects' capability to bounce forward and create fundamentally new organisational priorities, arrangements, norms, and practices.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Resilience thinking and the systems perspective it adopts views IOPs as temporary and complex organisational systems of multiple interdependent and interacting subsystems and components spanning across two or more organisations. By focusing on the transformative resilience theoretical perspective to explore the case of ITP-DRM in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study shows that the transformative premise of IOPs' resilience rests on the dynamic capacity of the project organisational system to leverage three interacting social mechanisms

deliberately. The study further reviews that these mechanisms manifest different power structures (centralised or distributed) at different decision points in the post-disruption resilience process. These findings align with prior IOP research suggesting that temporal and social embeddedness provide specific mechanisms for managing uncertainty and facilitate collaboration amongst project actors (Jones and Lichtenstein, 2008; Pilbeam, 2013).

In the case context, the contextual embeddedness positively shapes the awareness of the situation and the actors' absorptive capacities across different geographical locations in the early response phase. The embeddedness is realised through centralised stakeholder engagements similar to what Wang et al. (2022) describe in their resilience study of IOPs. The behavioural embeddedness underlines the interdependence of actors' agency in terms of willingness and commitment to operational or strategic interests. This is similar to the behavioural embeddedness described by Tate et al. (2013) that facilitates inter-organisational learning and knowledge integration (Geyskens et al., 1996). This dimension offers a premise, especially in the adaptation and renewal phase, for innovation to emerge faster in a networked setting (Borgatti & Foster, 2003) depending on actors' boundary-spanning interests similar to the three agency options that Berggren et al. (2016) propose: boundary reproduction (path-dependence), boundary crossing (path extension), and new boundary configuration (path creation). The cognitive embeddedness underlines the interdependence of actors' sense-making, norms, and values (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Rost, 2011) in assessing adaptive options and performance. This aligns with the cognitive embeddedness proposed by Bakker et al. (2011) that projects, as complex entities, cannot be understood from one single vantage point for successfully managing project knowledge. The cognitive dimension is also similar to the meta-competencies of reflective practitioners (Crawford & Hoffman, 2011) and the role of reflective agency in knowledge integration (Bergen et al., 2016) in the literature to support critical reflection, learning from experience, and boundary-spanning in a complex world.

Although previous studies have suggested the critical role centralised social and cognitive structures play in the early resilience process for efficiency and optimal control, the study identifies that distributed structures can complement systems integration from earlier on to

enhance the inter-project coordination and implementation of resilience management (Kutsch et al., 2015; Nachbagauer and Schirl-Boeck, 2019). In the case context, despite having a robust action-learning mechanism, the core project team was too preoccupied with administrative tasks to address strategic challenges that the unexpected disruption continued to post (Kutsch et al., 2015). As a result, the network's vast knowledge and skills were not used or mobilised to harness the boundary-spanning opportunities rendered by the project sponsors. Therefore, technical biases, norms, and assumptions had gone unchallenged until much later in the resilience process when more conscious learning and feedback strategies came about.

The study identifies a process model based on the dynamic interplay between contextual, behavioural and cognitive embeddedness. The model offers a preliminary explanation of how the three interactional deliberations can be leveraged post-disruptions to use and mobilise critical resources in the network to steer the identification and implementation of adaptation measures towards a bouncing-forward resilience path.

These findings suggest novel insights into how resilience as a dynamic project capability to adapt to environmental variations plays out in heterogeneous, and power-imbalanced IOP environments. They have potentially interesting implications for our deeper understanding of the role of the social in the transformative potentials of IOPs resilience management.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

This study primarily adds to the resilience and project management literature in two main ways. First, this interdisciplinary study extends the multi-equilibria and transformative resilience notions inherent in other resilience research streams (Gunderson, 2000; Clément & Rivera, 2017) to IOP research. Prior research on project resilience concentrated mainly on adaptive resilience and projects in individual organisations (Naderpajouh et al., 2020a, 2020b). Research has also recognised that projects are expected to make continual adjustments to respond to internal and external variations and that not all adaptation can lead to transformation. This study concentrates on the emergence of the transformative capability. It attends explicitly to the temporal and intertwined nature of internal and external variations in the resilience process in response to disruptions; and the role of human capabilities and power relations between organisational actors in the IOP's resilience management. This study conceptualises transformative resilience as (1) awareness and absorption, (2) adaptation and renewal, and (3) learning and feedback phases. While these phases are similar to those identified in more recent resilience studies (see, e.g., Rahi, 2019; Mokline & Abdallah, 2021), this study enriches knowledge of the multi-stage concept of resilience in the literature with novel insights into the sequential socialisation mechanisms (i.e., contextual, behavioural and cognitive) at work in each of the three resilience phases.

Second, the study contributes to project network literature by illuminating the social embeddedness inherent in IOP but is largely missing from the existing literature. Networks characterise today's organisational landscapes. However, how networks evolve and the processes occurring in and around networks to respond to internal and external variations still need to be better understood (Bizzi & Langley, 2012), especially in challenging times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This study's use of the process study design (Langley, 1999) and event-based methodological techniques (Halinen et al., 2013) adds to emerging ways of researching the fluidity and dynamism in nested network relationships and network processes. Extant literature does not take into account of cross-level analyses of the temporariness of actors' collaboration across projects and operational coordination over time (Wang et al., 2022). The study shows that unexpected disruptions add complexity to the coordination performance of IOPs. Centralised structures may be efficient at first but would become unfit for transformative resilience in subsequent resilience phases, which must be complemented with

distributed management structures to enhance self-organisation and collective learning. This study sheds light on the necessary organising structures and analytical tools to understand and manage resource base, bias, power imbalances and trade-offs to deal with the relational and resilience task complexities dynamics in the project networks. This insight enriches the knowledge of projects as being embedded in dyadic or complex networks of inter-organisational relationships (Sydow & Braun, 2018) and of projects as contested sites where stakeholder engagements may manifest in favour of certain knowledge bases, stakeholder interests, or power positions over others (Scholz, Bocking, Platania-Phung, Banfield, & Happell, 2018; Madsen & O'Mullan, 2018).

5.2. Practical implications

As far as IOPs with robust action-learning mechanisms are concerned, transformative resilience does not emerge organically in the face of disruptions but by deliberately and continually adjusted design of structures to coordinate social interactions between stakeholders involved. The interplay between contextual, behavioural, and cognitive interactions underpins the overarching social mechanism behind IOPs' capability to foster transformative resilience. The empirical case demonstrates that a centralised structure to coordinate and engage network stakeholders may work well in the early awareness absorption phase. However, as the coordination complexity of social interactions increases towards the adaptation and renewal phase, a dedicated resilience team would be needed to facilitate the transition into a more distributed structure of stakeholder engagements to broaden the resource and knowledge base for continuous adjustments to varying circumstances. In order to manage the coordination complexity and enhance self-organisation and collective learning under uncertain circumstances, projects need a broader range of capacities to sustain stakeholders' continuous engagements and commitment. Critically reflexive practices are also needed to sensitise existing decision-making, learning, and feedback mechanisms to be consciously aware of technical or knowledge bias, marginalised voices, blind spots and trade-offs between short-term gains and long-term systemic in the pursued adaptation strategies and measures. These broader capacities would enable iterative improvement of the adaptation strategies and measures to proactively respond to disruptions and enhance the transformative potentials of project resilience.

5.3. Limitations and future research

Although this exploratory study generates rich contributions and novel insights into how transformative resilience emerges in IOPs, several limitations must be recognised and addressed in future research. First, as data depth was chosen over breadth, the study examined a single case in the international development context with distinctly different power relations and stakeholder expectations. Therefore, future research can use the theoretical perspective to examine other IOP contexts. Second, the social mechanisms, their relational elements and interacting dynamics for transformative resilience in centralised organising structures may look quite different from distributed organising structures elsewhere. Future research can examine how the different structures may enable or deter transformative resilience. Third, this study investigates a knowledge-intensive IOP and, hence, focusses on the social-cognitive structures of interaction. Further project resilience research in other fields is thus recommended to compare results. Fourth, the study follows a process-orientated design but is time-constrained to pursue a more open-ended process study to observe the longer-term dynamics of the resilience process. Future research can explore a longitudinal study of the disruption prolongs like the COVID-19. Finally, the process model should be seen only as an early attempt to expand the transformative resilience theory in project studies and naturally invites theoretical and empirical scrutiny in future research.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Documents reviewed and project events observed

Table 2. Documents reviewed and project events observed.

Archival documents Identifier	Description	Duration
AD1	Project risk matrix (prior to COVID), dated 2018	
AD2	Round 2 Preparatory Workshop report, dated February 2020	
AD3	Annual report 2020, dated January 2021	
AD4	Project risk matrix (revised), dated April 2020	
AD5	Summary notes from digital calls with 4 countries' participants, dated April 2020	
AD6	Email exchanges on project M&E workshop, dated April 2020	
AD7	New mentor reporting template, dated May 2020	
AD8	New monitoring framework, dated May 2020	
AD9	Updated project round learning pathways and project outcomes, dated May 2020	
AD11	Project message to round 2 participants about virtual workshop, dated 11 August 2020	
AD12	Project message to round 2 participants surveying internet connectivity, dated 7 Aug 2020	
AD13	post Digital phase participants satisfaction survey report, dated Nov 2020	
AD14	Project email exchanges with Sida officer, dated 2020	
AD15	Round 2 Digital Workshop project learning facilitators report, dated Oct 2020	
AD16	Agenda of Strategic Team Review / Focus Group Discussion, dated Nov 2020	
AD17	Letter from Sida's director-general, dated 26 March 2020	
AD18	Round 2 project brochure, no date	
Date	Event description	Duration
Project events observed (all digital except for the first event)		
3-6/2/2020	Project round 2 Preparatory Workshop (Nepal)	4 days
27/03/2020	Project outcome mapping and M&E workshop	2 h
08/09/2020	Project annual meeting with project sponsor, Sida	2 h
14-21/10/2020	Project's pilot digital workshop	6 days
19/10/2020	Mentors orientation webinar during the Round 2 digital workshop	1 h
18/11/2020	After Action Review meeting to review Round 2 digital workshop	1,5 h
11/12/2020	Project Strategic Team Review I (facilitated by the researchers of the study)	3 h
16/12/2020	Project Strategic Team Review II (facilitated by the researchers of the study)	3 h

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Paper IV



Networking in Action: Taking Collaborative Capacity Development Seriously for Disaster Risk Management

Jenny Iao-Jørgensen

Division of Risk Management and Societal Safety, Department of Building and Environmental Technology, Faculty of Engineering, Lund University, P.O. Box 118, 22100 Lund, Sweden.

Email: jenny.iao-jorgensen@risk.lth.se

Abstract: This study investigates the role of multi-stakeholder networks in disaster risk management (DRM) capacity development, aligning with the principles of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. While the Framework emphasises collaboration, coordination, and partnerships among diverse stakeholders, there remains a gap in understanding how these networks foster collaborative capacity and contribute to sustainable DRM efforts. Employing a mixed methods case study approach, this research explores capacity development outcomes and early signs of sustainability in three informal networks in Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Philippines, one year after the cessation of formal external support from Sweden. By applying the integrated complex adaptive systems and network governance lens, this study offers a nuanced understanding of the dynamic interplay between various stakeholders and systemic factors influencing network effectiveness and sustainability. The findings enhance our knowledge about the functioning of multi-stakeholder networks in DRM and provide practical insights for optimising institutional designs in collaborative DRM capacity development projects. The research underscores the importance of scalability, adaptability, and holistic approaches in fostering effective and sustainable collaborative capacity development. Implications for implementing the Sendai Framework are discussed.

Keywords: Multi-Stakeholder Networks, Collaborative Capacity, Sendai Framework, Institutional Factors, Sustainability, Capacity Development

Introduction

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) recognises that multi-stakeholder platforms can take various forms, such as formal or informal communities of practice or thematic working groups. These spaces bring together stakeholders to share information, coordinate actions, and collectively address DRR challenges. The Framework also acknowledges that such platforms can enhance the capacity of stakeholders to implement effective DRR measures and promote resilience at all levels (UNISDR, 2015). Moreover, the SFDRR emphasises integrating DRR into development policies and planning processes. It calls for establishing mechanisms that promote coherence and coordination among different sectors and stakeholders involved in DRR. This includes fostering partnerships and networks across sectors, such as health, education, infrastructure, and environment, to ensure a comprehensive and integrated approach to disaster risk management (DRM) capacity development (ibid; UNDRR, 2018).

Despite this clear recognition of the importance of multi-stakeholder networks in capacity development efforts, academic literature on capacity development is limited in general (Few et al., 2016; Kacou et al., 2022) and has not sufficiently addressed the role of multi-stakeholder networks in DRM capacity development, and the specific mechanisms through which these networks contribute to institutional capacities and systems change. This research aims to contribute to a better theoretical and empirical understanding of the functioning of multi-stakeholder networks in DRM capacity development. Specifically, it seeks to answer these main research questions: how multi-stakeholder networks operate and contribute to DRM capacity development at different levels?; and what factors influence the effectiveness and sustainability of DRM capacity gains?

By doing so, this research aims to bridge this gap by contributing to a better theoretical and empirical understanding of multi-stakeholder networks in DRM capacity development, specifically in alignment with the strategic approaches and action areas outlined in the Strategic Approach to Capacity Development for Implementation of the SFDRR: a vision of risk-informed sustainable development by 2030 (UNDRR, 2018).

Building on the common scholarly concerns in the emerging DRM capacity development research and governance research in neighbouring disciplines of public administration, climate change adaptation and sustainable development fields, this research proposes a theoretical framework as a first bridging attempt between capacity development as complex adaptive systems and network governance. Here albeit implicitly in some instances, capacity development has been central to the common concerns and discourses of addressing complex global challenges of climate change and sustainable development (UNISDR, 2015; United Nations, 2015; Baser & Morgan, 2008; Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010; Kong et al.,

2020). Different scholars have defined capacity development differently. This article adopts the UNDRR's broad definition that shares their common notion of capacity development as "the process by which people, organisations and society systematically stimulate and develop their capacities over time to achieve social and economic goals" (UNDRR, 2015, p. 18). In lower-income countries, achieving these development goals is often challenged by limited resources, fragmented institutional frameworks, and weak capacities to translate policies, plans, and existing knowledge into action or work across public policy fields (Andrews et al., 2017; Gaillard, 2010; Mercer et al., 2012).

Capacity development (including its previous iterations, such as capacity building and institutional development) has been at the forefront of public policy and international development practice since the 1950s, and scholars have advocated for enhancing the theoretical rigor and real-world relevance to advance capacity development theory and practice (Kacou et al., 2022). To this end, this research engages with the emerging body of network governance literature to generate insights into the complex, adaptive, multi-dimensional process of collaborative capacity development, and to better understand the role of multi-stakeholder networks and the institutional conditions influencing the networks' effectiveness and sustainability (i.e., changes across society and governance layers and scales) for DRM capacity development.

Network governance scholars have suggested, "The governance challenges of the 21st century require the formation of collaborative networks, which transcend traditional boundaries of sector, discipline, and geography to develop new ways of addressing complex public problems" (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2004). Similar to capacity development, knowledge about capacity development that multi-stakeholder networks can potentially generate beyond individual and organisational level is limited and fragmented (Armstrong, 2013; Blythe et al., 2022). A broad theoretical perspective for an integrated understanding can address this knowledge gap. This article adapts van Poering-Verkert et al.'s (2022, p.1770) definition of collaborative capacity as the potential of multi-stakeholder networks (comprising of actors from government, civil society, and the private sector across different policy areas) working together, coordinating their actions and deploying resources develop and implement change initiatives in the pursuit of collective issues.

Collaborative capacity and multi-stakeholder networks

Evolution and critiques of capacity development in DRM

In this research context, the prevailing conceptualisation of capacity development in DRM literature and neighbouring public administration and development

research fields have been generally applied at three interconnected levels—individuals, organisations, and societies (or social and organisational systems)—to enhance their ability to perform functions effectively, efficiently, and sustainably (Scott & Few, 2016; Kong et al., 2020; Brinkerhoff & Morgon, 2010; Kacou et al., 2022). This multilevel approach aligns with the SFDRR's (UNISDR, 2015) Priority 2: Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk, which emphasises the need for transparent, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels, and the importance of a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach in DRM decision-making processes. This notion of collaborative and institutional problem-solving capacity is also echoed in the SFDRR's strategic guide, which emphasises the integration of these levels to foster comprehensive DRM strategies (UNDRR, 2018).

Although collaborative capacity introduced earlier is not directly addressed in this Strategic Guide (UNDRR, 2018), the literature has commonly described the capacity development process as typically involving a wide range of activities, including strengthening knowledge, skills, competencies, institutions (formal and informal rules, norms, values), fostering collaborative relationships among stakeholders, and establishing enabling environments (Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010; Ramalingam et al., 2014).

The capacity development approach has been pivotal in international development discourse and practice since the 1960s, with a focus evolving from individuals to organisations and, now, entire societies' institutions (Kacou, Ika & Munro, 2022). Each evolution addresses the previous conceptualisation's shortcomings, but the process has yet to be without criticism. This evolution is reflected in SFDRR's Priority 3: Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience (UNISDR, 2015), which advocates for public and private investment in diverse measures to enhance resilience at various societal levels.

Common criticisms include top-down, donor-driven approaches (Kacou et al., 2022) and overemphasising formal institutions at the expense of informal networks and social capital (Bodin & Crona, 2009; Blythe et al., 2022). McEvoy, Brady and Munck (2016) went further to suggest that traditional rational-analytic model of managing capacity development projects in international development context has several negative consequences, including its linear and predictable approach, lack of adaptability, focus on short-term results, and limited stakeholder participation. Other scholars have similarly suggested that the management process of such capacity development efforts often lacks robust mechanisms for tracking capacity development progress, especially at collaborative levels, learning from success and failure, and adapting to local institutional contexts and long-term development objectives (Bodin & Crona, 2009; Blythe et al., 2022; Armstrong, 2013; Ika & Donnelly, 2017, 2019; Becker & van Niekerk, 2015).

These critiques and recognition of the obstacles, challenges, and consequences of capacity development resonate with the principles outlined in the UNDRR's (2018) Strategic Guide, particularly in the areas of Institutionalising DRR Capacity and Strengthening External Support Mechanisms, emphasising the need for integrating DRR considerations in various sectors and leveraging international support mechanisms for effective capacity development.

In response, recent capacity development discussions and efforts stress context-sensitive, adaptive, integrated, and sustainable strategies, emphasising local ownership and broader systemic challenges such as gender, governance, and environmental issues (Hagelsteen & Becker, 2013; Kelman et al., 2018; Ramalingam, Laric & Primrose, 2014). These efforts mirror the UNDRR (2018) Strategic Guide's emphasis on Developing and Strengthening DRR Fundamentals, Sharing and Using Risk Information Before and After Disasters, and Advancing and Expanding DRR Capabilities, to name a few, highlighting the importance of actionable, risk-informed, context-adaptive, integrated (combining different capacity elements cohesively) and sustainable (to last over the long term) approaches. These approaches are expected to engage local stakeholders, promote local ownership, account for diverse contextual factors, link broader systemic development challenges (e.g., gender, governance, human rights, environment) (UNDRR, 2018). More specifically, the Strategic Guide underlines the importance of an 'All-of-Society' approach and cross-sectoral understanding of DRR, to address the need for inclusive and participatory DRM methods, as advocated in the SFDRR's Priority Areas. This inclusive approach is essential in capacity development projects for developing comprehensive strategies to consider the multiple facets of disaster risk governance, economic, social, and environmental aspects (ibid).

While the broader capacity development discourses in the literature provides a clear theoretical framework for implementing SFDRR's strategic capacity development areas and principles, research on their practical application remains less explored both conceptually and empirically. This research presents two interconnected conceptual lens, as we see next, to address these research challenges and seek new insights into the practical implementation of capacity development strategies in DRM to advance the SFDRR agenda.

Capacity development projects as complex adaptive systems

Prior research has tried to conceptualise capacity development projects as open systems to illuminate the intricacies and complexities of capacity development endeavours in international development context. For example, according to McEvoy et al. (2016), capacity development in this context should be viewed through a complex adaptive systems (CAS) lens. This approach emphasises the importance of context, adaptability, and learning, countering the limitations inherent

in the traditional rational-analytic models of managing international development projects. Such a perspective is particularly relevant when considering the multifaceted nature of DRR and the diverse yet interconnected strategic areas identified in the SFDRR's Strategic Approach to Capacity Development (UNDRR, 2018).

Specifically, the CAS view aligns well with SFDRR's (UNISDR, 2015) emphasis on the need for accurate, actionable data and a comprehensive understanding of societal risks to inform evidence-based policies and practices. In capacity development projects as CAS, this risk can be understood as the project risks requiring evidence-based approach to enhance collaborative problem-solving capacity at an inter-organisational level. This risk-informed perspective resonates also with the Strategic Areas 2 and 3 (UNDRR, 2018), which focus on adaptive and integrated methods necessary for understanding the interconnections between DRR and sustainable development. Furthermore, the emphasis on sustainability correlates with Strategic Area 6, advocating for educational and innovative approaches in DRR.

The 'All-of-Society' approach, underscored in Strategic Areas 3 and 4 (UNDRR,2018) necessitates understanding the economics of DRR and building resilience in a manner that is inclusive and sustainable. It highlights the need for capacity development strategies that are not only context-specific but also adaptive to changing circumstances and diverse stakeholder needs, knowledge and resource base.

This research applies this CAS lens to examine how various components, such as stakeholder relationships, training modules, and local change initiatives, dynamically interacted within the focal project context. This analysis aims to understand how international capacity development projects embody the principles of holistic, inclusive, and resilient DRR strategies as advocated by the SFDRR in project management practice and social interactions involved.

However, the CAS lens, as outlined by McEvoy et al. (2016), primarily focusses on the systemic interactions and adaptability at various project levels. It falls short in comprehensively addressing the specificities of multi-stakeholder collaborative capacity, especially in terms of long-term sustainability and effective governance in implementing 'all-of-society' approaches in DRM. This research complements the CAS lens with a network governance perspective, as we see next, to provide deeper insights into the governance structures, stakeholder dynamics, and sustainability factors critical for effective DRM capacity development. These insights are essential to inform how multi-stakeholder networks operate and contribute to sustainable DRM capacity development in international development's 'all-of-society' endeavours.

The role and integration of multi-stakeholder networks in DRM capacity development

Multi-stakeholder networks, as emphasised in the UNDRR's (2018) Strategic Guide, are pivotal in realising 'all-of-society' approaches and fostering collaborative action for DRR at national and local levels. Networks have also been recognised in contemporary capacity development literature in similar contexts. Comprising actors from government agencies, civil society organisations (CSO), academia, and the private sector, these networks offer 'all-of-society' platform for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and learning, thereby enhancing capacity at different levels (Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010; Kong et al., 2020). Their role aligns closely with the SFDRR's emphasis on inclusive and participatory approaches, underpinning the necessity for diverse stakeholder engagement in DRM initiatives.

Drawing on network governance literature, the logic of change can be understood as such that participation in these networks fosters human, organisational, and institutional development, enhancing social learning, knowledge coproduction, and the overall capacity of the development system to achieve sustainable goals (Berkes, 2009; Bodin & Crona, 2009; Bodin, 2017; Bodin et al., 2009; Folke et al., 2005; Prell, Hubacek & Reed, 2009; Rijke et al., 2013; Newig et al., 2018; Blythe et al., 2017; Provan & Lemaire, 2012; Edelenbos et al., 2013).

The SFDRR (UNISDR, 2015) implicitly recognises the role of multi-sector networks in enhancing institutional DRR capacity and sharing and using risk information for improved collaboration, coordination, and partnerships among diverse stakeholders in a specific DRM system. This recognition aligns with the focus of this research, which seeks to explore the dynamics, effectiveness, and sustainability of these networks in DRM capacity development, particularly at the collaborative capacity level. The SFDRR's inclusive and participatory principles to capacity development calls for the establishment of dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaboration platforms to facilitate the exchange of experiences, lessons learned, and best practices in DRR (UNISDR, 2015). It also recognises that these platforms can take various forms, such as formal or informal communities of practice or thematic working groups, providing spaces for stakeholders to collectively address DRR challenges.

Despite their potential, the specific mechanisms and conditions under which multi-stakeholder networks contribute to collaborative DRM capacity development need further elucidation. This research seems to apply network governance theories to conceptualise these mechanisms and conditions and add empirical material to assess the impact and effectiveness of these networks in contributing to collaborative DRM capacity.

Kong et al. (2020) used Wenger's (1998) social learning systems perspective to frame capacity development as a self-sustaining learning system to examine the

effectiveness of multi-stakeholder networks for DRM capacity development in a local South African municipality. While useful in providing a structure for designing and implementing capacity development at the individual and organisational levels, this perspective falls short in addressing the drivers, processes and outcomes at a systems capacity level. This research seeks to build on these insights by integrating CAS lens and engaging with the network governance literature to understand the dynamics, effectiveness, and sustainability of multi-stakeholder networks, specifically on the collaborative DRM capacity level.

Scalability is a key aspect of multi-stakeholder networks, where the focus is not only on reaching more risk-exposed and marginalised communities but also on creating sustainable, systemic changes for resilient and effective DRM across society and governance layers (Folke et al., 2005; Berkes, 2009; Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013) and at different scales (Pahl-Wostl et al., 2012). This involves integrating these networks into formal capacity development efforts and institutionalising them to achieve broader, transformative, and long-term impact is an area that requires further exploration (Blythe et al., 2022). This research aims to address these aspects, focusing on how to sustain multi-sector networks and explore scalability challenges and opportunities.

Prior network research suggests examining internal and external factors in the broader context in which these networks are embedded. Factors such as the network structure and composition, the quality of relationships among actors, and alignment of goals and incentives influence networks' performance and sustainability (Bodin & Crona, 2009; Hahn et al., 2006). Trust and reciprocity among network actors are critical for building collaborative relationships and fostering collective action (Pretty & Ward, 2001; Armitage et al., 2009). Additionally, political, social, and environmental changes can influence network success and sustainability (Grack Nelson et al., 2019; Newig et al., 2018). Supportive policies, robust institutional frameworks, and sufficient resources provide favourable conditions for these networks (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013; Pahl-Wostl et al., 2007), while political instability, resource scarcity, and weak institutional arrangements may hinder their performance (Blythe et al., 2022). In this research context, scalability is understood as not merely about reaching more risk-exposed and marginalised people and communities but also about creating sustainable and systemic changes that lead to a resilient and effective DRM across different layers of society and governance. How to sustain multi-sector networks and what the scalability challenges and opportunities facing these networks are widely acknowledged concerns in the DRM literature (see, e.g., Djalante, 2012) but have remained under explored in DRM capacity development research.

In summary, while multi-stakeholder networks are seen as a promising solution for more sustainable and adaptive capacity development strategies in public policy and international development, understanding their role in and contribution to DRM capacity development a significant research challenge. This research employs the

the integrated lens of CAS and network governance to generate comprehensive and holistic view of the complex relational dynamics within these networks. By doing so, it aims to offer nuanced conceptual and empirical insights into their operational mechanisms and contributions to sustainable DRM capacity development, aligning with the SFDRR's objectives of fostering inclusive, participatory and 'all-of-society' approaches in DRM.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a multi-context case study approach with mixed methods for data collection to explore the role of multi-stakeholder networks in the effectiveness and sustainability of DRM capacity development, particularly at the collaborative capacity level. The research design, inspired by a process approach prevalent in management and organisation research (Langley, 1999; Pettigrew, 1990), allows for an in-depth examination of the dynamics, effectiveness, and sustainability of capacity development outcomes in multi-stakeholder networks within a specific context (Yin, 2014). This approach can capture the fluid, dynamic, and non-linear nature of informal networks and adaptive capacity development support where the relationships between cause and effects are not entirely clear (Langley, 1999; Van de Ven & Poole, 2005).

The multi-context case was premised on three informal multi-stakeholder networks in Bangladesh, Nepal and the Philippines supported by the International Training Programme for Disaster Risk Management (ITP-DRM). The case was selected based on its relevance to the research questions and the presence of active international development support. The ITP-DRM was funded through Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency's (Sida) International Training Programme framework, which has been one of their instrumental capacity development approaches since the 1980s¹. The core principle of the ITP framework is to establish multi-stakeholder learning platforms and cultivate a critical mass of trained individuals. These individuals were expected to exchange practical and actionable knowledge to instigate long-term organisational and systemic changes, and to continue networking with both existing and new members beyond the formal support period of the ITP. While training and coaching by Sweden-based experts remain integral to the ITP framework, there has been a recent shift towards addressing the shortcomings of an overemphasis on individual capacity (Ternström et al., 2017).

¹ Sida's database for 2008 – 2017 showed that over 10,600 persons from 117 countries participated in an ITP (Ternström et al., 2017)

Table 1. Details of the three networks' configuration.

Country	Member#	Age Group	Sector	Professional categories
Bangladesh	1	25-34	Academia	Programme staff
	2	34-44	NGO	Programme staff
	3	34-44	UN/INGO	Programme staff
	4	45-54	Government	Director
	5	45-54	Government	Director assistant
	6	25-34	NGO	Thematic advisor
	7*	34-44	Government	National coordinator
Nepal	8*	25-34	Government	Section Officer
	9	25-34	Government	Section Officer
	10	25-34	NGO	Programme Coordinator
	11	25-34	NGO	Communication staff
	12	25-34	Academia	Researcher
	13*	25-34	NGO	Programme manager
	14	25-34	Government	Training manager
	15	over 55	Academia	Department manager/ teaching staff
	16	34-44	Academia	Teaching staff
Philippines	17	45-54	NGO	Deputy director
	18	25-34	NGO	Programme manager
	19	over 55	Sub-national government	Division manager
	20*	45-54	Sub-national government	Operations staff
	21	45-54	Government	Programme manager
	22	25-34	Government	Programme staff
	23*	over 55	Government	Director
	24	34-44	Government	Programme staff
	25	34-44	Government	Section manager
	26*	25-34	NGO	Information management staff
Total network members in the case study: 26 (Female=12; Male=14) Total organisations represented in the case study: 21 (INGO/UN=1; NGO=7; Academia=3; Government=9; Sub-national government=1)				

* Participated in in-country multi-context interviews along with their manager, colleague and/or local partners.

The three focal networks were the first, and due to the disruptions caused by COVID-19, the only cycle of networks supported by the ITP-DRM at the time of the study. This unique circumstance provided a rich context for understanding the role of these networks in DRM capacity development. It also offered insights into

the early indications of sustainability of capacity gains, as well as the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing multi-stakeholder networks for collaborative capacity development.

The researcher gained access to the ITP-DRM through a novel developmental evaluation research agreement between the author's university and the ITP-DRM implementing agency, Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), to support the project's real-time learning and improvement. The ITP-DRM explicitly aimed to strengthen individual and organisational DRM capacities for achieving the 1st (no poverty), the 11th (sustainable cities and communities), and the 17th (partnerships for the goals) Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), and SFDRR's three priority areas (understanding disaster risk, strengthening disaster risk governance, and enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and "Build Back Better" in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction).

The total population size in the three focal networks was relatively small, comprising 26 members. They represented mainly technical experts or mid-level managers from 18 different organisations across different sectors. The ITP-DRM openly recruited network members with the support of the Swedish embassies based on a set of criteria (e.g., English proficiency, relevance of their organisation and professional background, initial idea for a local change initiative to apply new knowledge, gender and sectoral diversity). Except for few members from the same organisations, the majority did not have prior social ties. Table 1 presents the three sampled networks' configurations in the case study. This table provides foundational insights into the diversity of network members' backgrounds, which is critical for understanding their collaborative capacity development dynamics and scalability potential in their respective countries.

The ITP-DRM extended two primary forms of assistance to the networks, categorised as formal and informal support. The formal support from ITP-DRM encompassed a variety of social learning and networking activities that overlapped in several phases. These included expert-led lectures, discussions, coaching activities, and knowledge exchanges that took place in the respective countries, regionally, and in Sweden. Informal support, on the other hand, included participation in ITP-DRM regional network events, as well as financial assistance for participation in external, DRM-related regional networking events. A group of Swedish experts, hailing from corresponding sectors and/or professional fields, offered facilitated learning and coaching support to individual (or clusters of) network members at various stages. This support was aimed at following up on the application and integration of knowledge within their local change initiatives and organisations.

Additionally, understanding the varying configurations of network members, as detailed in Table 1, is essential for analysing the interplay of factors such as organisational sectors, and professional categories, which are vital for evaluating

the networks' collaborative capacity and scalability potential. These local change initiatives varied widely, from the promotion of women's disaster management committees in rural areas to the improvement of sex- and age-aggregated risk and damage data methods and national risk databases. Other initiatives included the development of a DRR-informed training curriculum and raising awareness about fire hazards in schools. Table 2 provides a detailed outline of the main networking activities that the ITP-DRM formally and informally supported.

Data collection primarily relied on semi-structured interviews, supplemented by survey responses, archival project documents, and both participant and non-participant observations of network events in both natural and facilitated settings (Provan & Kenis, 2008). This approach facilitated a comprehensive and contextual understanding of network dynamics, including aspects of collaboration, communication, influence, and temporal changes. The survey questionnaire was strategically designed to include a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The open-ended questions employed the most-significant-change technique (Serrat & Serrat, 2017), a method predominantly used in evaluation research of capacity development projects. This technique in the research context facilitated the collection and participatory interpretation of detailed narratives of change (ibid). These narratives are instrumental in capturing and substantiating later on through interviews with key informants the diverse experiences and perspectives of network participants and their local stakeholders, especially in understanding the depth and scope of capacity development and its sustainability within a specific local context (ibid). Retrospective data were gathered between April and August 2021, approximately a year after the formal support from ITP-DRM to the sampled networks had concluded. This period coincided with the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which some authors have characterised as an unprecedented threat, yet also a catalyst for solidarity and collaborative opportunities (Naidoo & Fisher, 2020; Leal Filho et al., 2020). These conditions provided a unique opportunity to observe any signs of collaborative capacity in action.

Table 2. Overview of ITP-DRM capacity development support to the networks

Phases	Approximate duration	Main networking activities
Formal ITP-DRM support		
Preparatory	2 months	A regional physical workshop with all network members in one of the partner countries to contextualise learning content based on their needs
Implementation	7-9 months	A series of learning events, e.g., an advanced 2-week workshop in Sweden with all participants, coaching support, experts' follow-up visits to each program country, refinement and implementation of local change initiatives.
Phasing-out	3-6 months	Individual network members and their mentors' final reports to capture their experience, capacity changes and lessons, a final physical workshop in one of the program countries with all old and new network members to share experiences, and identify self-organised continuous learning and networking opportunities in respective countries.
Informal ITP-DRM support		
Formal exit	During ITP-DRM project period	Participation in ITP-DRM regional network events, limited ad hoc financial support to participate in other regional networking events. Swedish embassies in the country hosts some networking events.

The study also incorporated longitudinal data collected since the initiation of the ITP-DRM in early 2019. This data provided a contextual understanding of the evolution of the ITP-DRM's formal and informal support strategies, as well as the network interactions and dynamics over time in both naturally occurring and facilitated settings (Prova & Milward, 2001).

Between June and August 2021, substantiating the most significant changes in the survey responses, the research conducted in-country multi-context case study, employing purposive sampling technique, as detailed in Table 3. Working with ITP-DRM organisers, our research team compiled a list of seven change initiatives (at least two per country), encompassing both 'successful' and 'less successful' examples, encompassing varied representation in terms of implementation status (e.g., successfully completed, being implemented, unimplemented), organisational type, change initiative nature, and likelihood of sustainability based on survey responses. The diversity allowed a balanced view of the ITP-DRM's impact and to gain insights into the effectiveness and sustainability of the capacity gains, as well as the roles of ITP-DRM and networks in these processes. This process included reviewing final reports and conducting semi-structured interviews with network members, their supervisors/colleagues, and local partners suggested in survey responses. These steps helped identify patterns of ITP-DRM experiences and capacity gains, informing the selection of cases for deeper analysis. The empirical

material and data collection methods and techniques used are summarised in Table 3.

The research design, data collection and analysis was led by the author, with the support of an experienced researcher and a research assistant who contributed in different ways to the data collection and preliminary analysis in relation to the ITP-DRM's networking strategies. Additionally, three consultants based in Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Philippines contributed to the data collection and preliminary analysis in the in-country multi-context case study. All interviews were conducted in English, with the exception of those carried out in local languages for the in-country multi-context case study. Informed consent was obtained from all research participants in either oral or written form.

The Gioia methodology (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013), originating from and widely used in organisational studies, was employed to analyse the empirical materials collected. This approach systematically organises raw data to conceptual insights aligned with the central research questions of the study: how do multi-stakeholder networks operate and contribute to DRM capacity development at different levels, and what factors influence their effectiveness and sustainability? This approach allows for a rigorous yet flexible interpretation of qualitative data, transiting between inductive to abductive reasoning, and ensuring that findings are firmly grounded in the participants' perspectives while being closely linked to theoretical constructs (*ibid*). The study primarily drew on qualitative data, complemented by other data collected through mixed methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

The initial step applying the Gioia methodology involved immersing in the data, which entailed reviewing survey responses, interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documents, followed by initial coding. This step was crucial in beginning to unravel the complex dynamics within these networks and their impact on DRM capacity development at various levels. This step unveiled patterns and themes (first-order concepts reflecting informants' terms) in the data that corresponded to the research questions and theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in relation to the 'most significant', 'why significant', 'role of ITP-DRM network', and 'likely sustained' network effects on capacity gains at different levels, influential factors on the effectiveness and sustainability capacity gains, and the role of networks and ITP-DRM support.

Table 3. Overview of the empirical material and data collection methods used.

Date	Methods	Materials (n)	Purpose/areas of inquiry
Primary retrospective data			
April 2021	Documents review	All available final reports by network members (16)	Identify patterns of self-reported ITP-DRM experiences, capacity gains, prevalence of network's role and sustainability thinking; identify cases for in-country multi-context case study.
April 2021	Online semi-structured informants interviews (each lasting 30-60 min)	Transcripts of interviews with ITP-DRM project organisers purposively sampled (3), experts/mentors sampled through both purposive and snowballing techniques (7)	Elicit insights into the logics of ITP-DRM's support, prevalence of network's role and sustainability thinking, perceived role, opportunities and challenges.
Jun-Jul 2021	Online survey (a mix of multiple-choice and open ended questions)	Survey responses (20; 77% response rate of the total population)	Quantify/validate the most significant capacity gains and their sustainability prospect, influential factors, network dynamics and interactions; identify 1-3 referrals to substantiate self-reported claims.
Jun-Aug 2021	In-country multi-context case study (2-3 per country) by three local research collaborator in the programme countries (using semi-structured interviews, each lasting 30-90 min; and purposively sampled documents review)	Field notes from semi-structured interviews with network members (9) (<i>marked with * in Table 1</i>), their supervisor/colleagues (4) and local partners (6); associated documents relating to the sampled cases (survey response, final reports, and mentors reports). <i>Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting cases in consultation with ITP-DRM organisers and the research team to ensure diversity of gender, sectors, scales, types of capacity gains, sustainability.</i>	Substantiate self-reported most significant capacity gains in specific organisational and institutional contexts; elicit in-depth understanding of the factors influencing the effectiveness and sustainability of the capacity gains, the role of ITP-DRM and networks in the process of these gains.
Supplementary data			
2019-2021	Documents review	Purposively sampled project documents: ITP-DRM project proposal (1), annual reports (2), regional event activity reports (3), baseline study report (1) based on 48 interviews with DRR and development organisations in programme countries.	Gain insights into the capacity development logics of ITP-DRM design, objectives, expectations, activities, scope of formal and informal support to networks, members and member organisations, and the broader institutional context in which the ITP-DRM target groups operate.
June 2019 Feb 2020	Participant and non-participant observations	Field notes from the first regional event (Manila, 3 days in June) and the last event with new network members from the 2 nd cycle (Kathmandu, 3 days, in Feb 2020).	Direct observation of network interactions and dynamics over time in natural and ITP-facilitated settings.
Feb 2020	Focus group discussions with each country-specific network	Field notes from focus group discussions with each country network facilitated by the research team (Kathmandu, 2h each).	Gain insights into common collaborative capacity concerns; ITP-DRM potentials and limits to advance collaborative capacity within the networks.

In the second step, the codes were organised into four (out of nine) broader themes around multi-dimensional learning and adaptation (CAS elements), stakeholder engagements, resource mobilisation, and institutional integration (network governance aspects), directly address the two research questions. The four second-order themes encapsulate the various dimensions through which multi-stakeholder networks operate and contribute to capacity development. Furthermore, they shed light on the myriad factors – both internal and external to the networks – that influence the effectiveness and longevity of capacity gains in the DRM context.

The final step applying the Gioia methodology involved weaving together the developed themes with theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, and relevant collaborative capacity development and network governance literature. This comprehensive integration, supported by reflexive interpretation and contextualisation (Gabriel, 2018), involved critically examining how network dynamics observed in Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Philippines resonated with or diverged from existing theories of network governance and complex adaptive systems. For example, instances where network members navigated resource constraints or policy changes were contextualised within broader discussions of adaptability and resilience in network governance. Similarly, the processes of learning and adaptation observed within these networks were interpreted in light of the CAS framework, shedding light on how emergent behaviours and interconnectedness contributed to DRM capacity development. This approach not only provided plausible explanations to answer the core research questions but also ensured that the study's findings were firmly grounded in both empirical evidence and theoretical constructs. The use of the Gioia methodology thus served as a bridge between the empirical realities of multi-stakeholder network in DRM and the theoretical underpinnings of their functioning and impact on DRM capacity development.

Noteworthy is that in this final step, this research initially explored using a process-tracing approach (Bennett & Checkel, 2014) to delve into the mechanisms and interrelationships that drive capacity development in DRM in the focal project for a more nuanced understanding of how different elements (CAS) within the multi-stakeholder networks interact, influence each other, and collectively contribute to building DRM capacities. As a result of this initial process-tracing approach, the research developed a comprehensive Theory of Change (ToC) (Funnel & Rogers, 2011), mapping out how change happened within ITP-DRM project, and discussed the ToC with the ITP-DRM project management team as a co-learning tool. The ToC, outlining the emerging understanding of the ITP-DRM's impact pathways, serves as a foundational tool for future evaluation research in multi-stakeholder networks for DRM capacity development. However, due to the institutional diversity among the ITP-DRM participants, the sectors and the countries they represented, establishing conclusively clear causality from the available evidence base of one single cycle proved challenging and beyond the study's scope. As a

result, the final analytical step shifted focus on generating context-sensitive, plausible explanations for the observed changes, self-reported by the network members and substantiated by their local informants. This methodological shift reflects my iterative and reflexive approach to doing capacity development research in multi-cultural international contexts.

Relatedly, to ensure the trustworthiness, several strategies including member checking and the use of multiple data sources were employed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), involving critical reflection and feedback on the preliminary findings with other research team members and ITP-DRM organisers. The triangulation of findings, using surveys, interviews, documents, and observations from two time scales (before and one year after the cessation of formal ITP-DRM support) enhanced the study's credibility and validity.

Results

The results of this study are organised around four key thematic areas, directly addressing the primary research questions: how do multi-stakeholder networks operate and contribute to DRM capacity development at different levels, and what factors influence their effectiveness and sustainability? These thematic areas, emergent from the analysis of the empirical data from the ITP-DRM case study using the Gioia methodology, are crucial in comprehending the complexities of collaborative DRM capacity development within the multi-stakeholder networks. These four themes are: (1) multi-stakeholder network outcomes, (2) integrative multi-tier stakeholder engagements, (3) strategic resource mobilisation for scalability, and (4) institutional embeddedness and network governance. While the study concentrates on these four areas due to their prominence in the UNDRR's (2018) Strategic Guide and collaborative capacity in the empirical data, it acknowledges the existence of other factors that may also influence DRM capacity development. These additional factors, while not the primary focus of this research, are recognised as part of the broader system that affects scalability and sustainability.

These thematic areas were identified as significant during the data analysis and collectively provide an in-depth response to the core research questions. They illuminate the multifaceted nature of collaborative capacity development in DRM, emphasising the practical implications of network operations, stakeholder engagement, resource management, and institutional integration. The themes collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the transformative potentials and complex dynamics of multi-stakeholder networks in fostering collaborative capacity development for DRM. They are explained in details next.

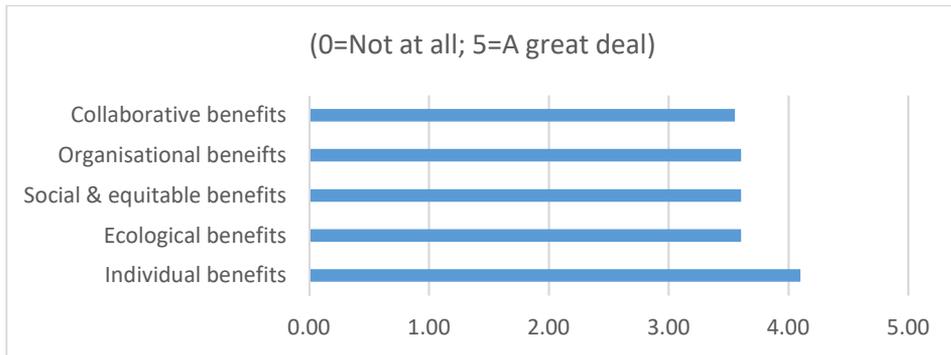


Figure 1. Survey results on the extent of capacity gains from ITP-DRM.

Multi-stakeholder networks and collaborative benefits

This theme directly addresses how these networks contribute to DRM capacity gains at different levels. It reveals the outcomes of network collaborations and their sustainability over time of the ITP-DRM’s multi-stakeholder networking approaches.

The survey findings from the Likert scale responses (where 0=Don't know, 1=Not at all, 2=A little, 3=A moderate amount, 4=A lot, and 5=A great deal) unequivocally demonstrate the significant capacity gains at different capacity levels as Figure 1 illustrates, even one year after the formal ITP-DRM support has ended.

At the individual level, network members reported substantial improvements in their capacity, with an average Likert scale score of 3.85. Examples of improvements included increased self-efficacy, broadened and deepened DRM knowledge, and exposure to international DRM norms and standards. Similarly, at the organisational level, with an average Likert scale score of 3.61 (3.85 regarding internal organisational benefits; and 3.59 regarding external organisational benefits), capacity gains were reported. These gains encompass improvements in internal procedures, leading to more efficient information sharing among team members; and an enhanced ability to engage with a broader range of stakeholders on DRM issues. This extension of the organisation’s influence and authority in the field was a significant outcome. To contextualise this organisational benefit, one member from a governmental organisation shared their perspective:

“I can now easily motivate my director general about any important disaster-related initiatives because I have a broad understanding [of DRM] now and can easily set up coordination meeting with our international and national partners.” (Survey respondent 5)

This quote illustrates how individual capacity enhancement, as mentioned earlier, directly contributes to broader organisational benefits. By having a deeper understanding of DRM and improved coordination abilities, network members can play a pivotal role in advancing their organisation's DRM initiatives and collaborations with external partners.

At the systems level, as illustrated in Figure 1, network members reported substantial improvements in social and equitable, and ecological benefits, with both having an average Likert scale score of 3.61. The application of knowledge in the implementation of the local change initiatives were reported as contributing to these capacity gains. Archival documents (including mentors reports and network members individual final reports) together with interviews from the in-country multi-context study with key informants with knowledge of the change initiatives or ITP-DRM network participation substantiated some of these self-reported capacity gains, such as the increased recognition of specific needs of marginalised populations in internal organisational routines, improved quality of sex-and-age-disaggregated data, and the incorporation of environmental impacts of disasters in recurring DRM professional training curricula. This was also consistent with the most significant changes reported by network members in their open-ended survey responses. For example, one most significant change identified in Bangladesh relates to changing attitudes towards strengthening women to work for themselves on DRM issues. This significance was deemed significant in the given rural community context of the change initiative as it empowers women, aligning with the broader goal of social equity and inclusive development. In-country case study in Bangladesh also substantiated this social and equitable benefits through the implication of a change initiative focussing on strengthening gender-sensitive data in post-disaster needs assessment and response planning. As a key informant noted, "After implementing the change initiative... We have got gender segregated data with less than 5% error. Those data help us in decision making, identify areas of need, and allocate funds from donors in a more female and child friendly manner" (a needs assessment working group representative, Bangladesh).

In Nepal, one most significant change was related to local government starting to make plans on DRR issues. This change was seen as significant because it fosters better cooperation and collaboration at the local level, contributing to enhanced disaster resilience. In the Philippines, one reported most significant change (out of the implementation of the local change initiative) was the increased engagement of local partners in supporting inclusive data management. This change emerged as a response to the recognised need for accurate data regarding the number of persons with disabilities and their specific needs. Local partners acknowledged the importance of having such data to effectively address the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities in DRM.

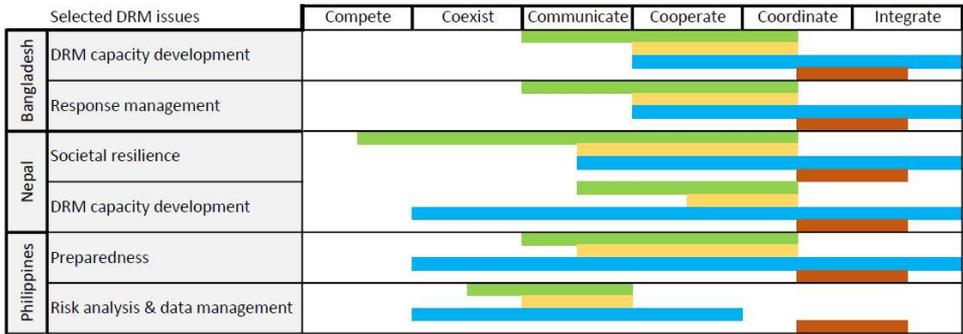
At the collaborative capacity level, network members reported substantial improvements in their capacity, with an average Likert scale score of 3.56 as Figure

1 shows. A significant collaborative benefit was mainly observed in the form of sustained interactions between network members. A majority (80%) of survey respondents reported maintaining close contact with other participants for personal and professional purposes, even after the formal end of the ITP-DRM support, primarily for advice, information exchange, and resource pooling. Some also stayed in touch with ITP-DRM personnel. Comparing the survey results on collaborative gains with previous observations from focus group discussions on two DRM issues participants identified showed a generally perceived positive trend over time (pre-, immediately post-, and one year post-ITP-DRM) of collaborative potentials between ITP-DRM member organisations (see Figure 2). However, it is important to note the large variability between network members' perception (illustrated by the wide spread of the legends) which warrants further exploration.

The ITP-DRM's structured social learning, balanced approach between theory and practice, focus on holistic and systemic DRM issues, and context-specific support to members' learning needs and local change initiatives were perceived by network members as particularly effective in contributing to the capacity gains. Most significantly, nearly half of the survey respondents stated with certainty that without the ITP-DRM, these individual and collaborative gains would not have been possible (see Figure 3). This highlights the unique role of the ITP-DRM in providing comprehensive DRM capacity development opportunities.

However, the study revealed concerns about the long-term sustainability of these capacity gains. Only 41% of respondents reported continuity or no indication of discontinuity of observed capacity gains one year after the formal ITP-DRM support ended. Furthermore, challenges in maintaining active participation of all members due to limited resources, competing priorities, and personnel turnover were evident.

In conclusion, the ITP-DRM's institutional design and support strategies have effectively promoted capacity development at different levels, demonstrating the value of a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach to DRM. However, the sustainability of these capacity gains remains a concern, warranting further exploration and networking support to ensure the consolidation of emerging DRM capacity gains in the respective countries. The next sections will delve more into these sustainability concerns.



■ Pre-ITP perception — views on collaboration before ITP-DRM
■ Post-ITP perception - views on collaboration immediately after the formal ITP-DRM support ended.
■ Post-ITP (one-year) perception — views on collaboration one year after the formal ITP-DRM support ended.
■ Ideal state of collaboration — the desired level of collaboration as envisioned by network members.

Figure 2. Visual representation of synthesised perceptions of the collaborative status and potentials among network members over time on two pertinent DRM issues of their choice.

NOTE: The distribution of colours across the chart illustrates the variability and evolution of these perceptions over time. This variability, indicated by the 'spread' of each colour, underscores the diverse experiences and perceptions among network members.

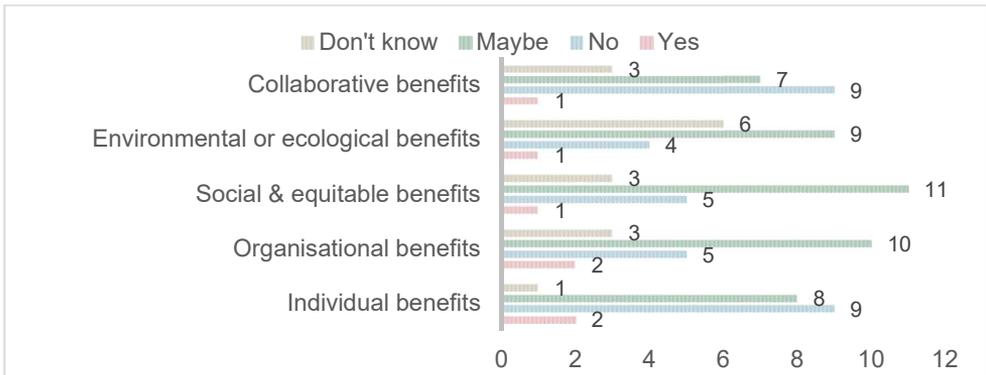


Figure 3. Survey results on perceived certainty among network members about capacity gains without ITP-DRM

Integrative multi-tier stakeholder engagement

The previous theme looks at the immediate and tangible collaborative capacity gains from the ITP-DRM multi-stakeholder network strategies one year after the formal support. This theme explores the operational aspect of networks, focusing on how

engagement at various tiers (local, national, and international levels) contributes to overall DRM capacity development. The empirical findings highlight the importance of multi-tier stakeholder engagement beyond the network members and their organisations in the capacity development process.

ITP-DRM network members reported that the ITP-DRM's support strategies facilitated better engagement with internal and external stakeholders, ultimately improving trust, social ties, collaboration, and coordination within and between organisations represented in the network and reached through local change initiatives. This engagement was crucial for leveraging collaborative resources, knowledge, and expertise from a broader pool of actors and knowledge base to enhance the effectiveness of DRM capacity development. Quantitative data support these findings, with 65% of survey respondents indicating that their organisation's ability to engage with a broader range of stakeholders had improved as an indirect collaborative result of their ITP-DRM capacity development support. The ITP-DRM helped institute community awareness, diversity thinking, and rights-based, gender and social inclusion considerations more seriously and effectively in their local change initiatives, prompting the necessity to identify and engage with a broader range of stakeholders.

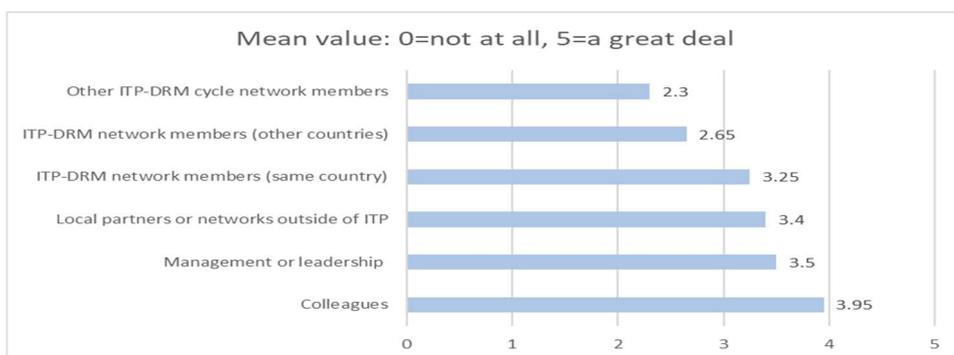


Figure 4. Survey results on the extent of sharing ITP-DRM knowledge, experiences and practices in the last 12 months.

These indirect collaborative benefits, as quantified by the survey data, were felt within the participating organisations and extended to their external networks through various formal and informal learning channels. Network members shared new information, practices, and experiences primarily with their colleagues (mean value of 3.95), management or leadership (3.5) in the organisation, and to a lesser extent, with their local partners or external networks (3.4) (see overview in Figure 4). These high mean values on the 0-5 Likert scale are indicative of the significant positive impact on network members' relationships, confirming the effectiveness of the ITP-DRM in fostering robust collaborative connections essential for DRM. The

data clearly demonstrates that these stakeholder engagements were a major driver in changing DRM organisational practices and systems.

However, the prospect of sustaining collaborative capacity gains outside the networks varied across the sampled cases. For example, while some participants reported that their organisation successfully integrated this collaborative thinking and practices learned through the ITP-DRM into existing policies, others expressed concerns about the potential risk of not sustaining these new practices if they were not transferred to their colleagues and integrated into organisational priorities and routines. For instance, a key informant representing an international NGO from the in-country case study in Bangladesh while recognising the impact of the change initiative implemented, also expressed that “there was very lack of sharing about ITP-DRM knowledge and the project could be more serious on sharing and sustaining impact”.

Notably, the network members might not always have the pre-existing capacity or organisational culture to institute new collaborative practices into the (inter)organisational system for collective growth and development as a whole. Survey results indicated a lack of clear sustainability steps during the formal support (see Figure 5). This shows that the planned exit strategies had not adequately been translated into clear sustainability steps for networks and members to sustain capacity gains in the long term.

Despite these sustainability concerns, the ITP-DRM had a significant positive impact on network members' relationships with other internal and external stakeholders beyond the networks. This is particularly true in instances where the local change initiatives explicitly aimed to facilitate collaborative knowledge sharing, resource mobilisation and joint efforts with other internal units and external local stakeholders. This evidence of improved stakeholder relationships, previously detailed in this section, attests to the strategic benefits realised through the ITP-DRM's support. However, the findings also suggest that while these broader collaborative benefits were of great strategic interest to ITP-DRM, as implied in its objectives, the strategic engagement of multi-tier stakeholders beyond the provision of mentor support or senior management workshops requires further attention to ensure the sustainability and consolidation of DRM capacity gains in the respective countries.

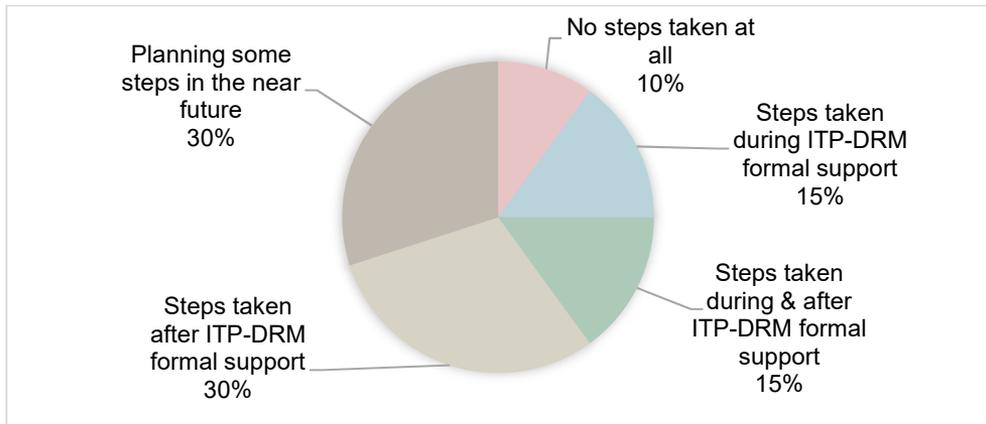


Figure 5. Survey results on steps taken to sustain capacity gains

Strategic resource mobilisation for scalability

This theme reveals the internal and external factors that influence the effectiveness and sustainability of collaborative DRM capacity development, and highlights the critical role of strategic resource mobilisation. This theme also underscores the importance of local resource mobilisation for scalability in ITP-DRM’s networking strategies. In this context, scalability refers to the capacity of network members, their networks, and the organisations they represent to expand and adapt their knowledge and individual or collective change initiatives to a larger or broader scope.

Survey results and interview data highlight the need for network members to develop and implement strategies for securing adequate resources. This is particularly relevant given that only 35% of the members’ local change initiatives were at the design, resource mobilisation, or implementation phase at the time of the study – one year after the cessation of formal ITP-DRM support. Furthermore, only 20% of completed change initiatives managed to replicate or integrate their initiatives on a broader scale.

The institutional design of the ITP-DRM requires members’ organisations to allocate significant work time and resources for participation and change initiative development, reflecting a commitment to local ownership and sustainability as core principles. While diversifying funding sources and exploring alternative resource mobilisation strategies were not focal project activities, mentorship from the ITP-DRM has proven beneficial for some members, as one noted, “Building our capacity [mentors] in resource mobilisation and management has been a game-changer for our network, allowing us to secure more funding and resources and, ultimately, achieve greater impact.” (Member 23). This experience points to the potential for

ITP-DRM's expert and knowledge base to indirectly support members' resource mobilisation efforts, with a broader definition encompassing financial, knowledge, partnerships, and networks.

Furthermore, feedback from several network members, substantiated by in-country key informant interviews, indicates a strong desire for more "support to explore funding opportunities for scaling up change initiative", more thematic and field-based learning experiences in other partner countries not just Sweden, and "advanced training" field-based learning experiences. This suggests a disconnect between the theoretical knowledge provided by the ITP-DRM and the practical application required for executing change initiatives, especially as smaller NGOs highlight resource and partnership mobilisation as their essential challenge. Such strategic resource mobilisation is crucial not only for individual projects but for bolstering the collective strength of networks and organisations, thus enhancing DRM initiatives' scalability and sustainability.

However, the study did not find clear evidence that the ITP-DRM systematically provided support to enhance the networks or members' resource mobilisation capacity beyond individual coaching or mentoring support. The political economy of the programme countries suggests the need for resource mobilisation strategies that can navigate DRM governance challenges, leverage the strengths of civil society, adapt to a multitude of disaster and climate risks, and take advantage of opportunities arising from economic and political transition (ITP-DRM Final Report Baseline Study, November 2019, p.2-4). These insights suggest the importance of networks, network members and their organisations to mobilise diverse resources and foster new relationships with international and emerging local funders and development actors in the countries.

In addition, the findings also suggest that enhancing the scalability of capacity gains to achieve a broader impact would require adapting networking support strategies in the face of external pressures or changes in their operating environment. In the event of the COVID-19 pandemic, network members' organisations had to reprioritise, affecting local change initiatives still at different stages of implementation. Although the support was delayed and ad hoc, the ITP-DRM adapted the networking support to facilitate knowledge exchange on good practices between old and new network members recruited to the second cycle (Field note from the ITP-DRM regional event in Kathmandu, February 2020).

In short, the study acknowledges that while resources for scalability were reported as limited, strategic resource mobilisation was identified as one of several crucial factors to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of DRM capacity development in the respective countries. The limited availability of resources highlights the need for improved resource mobilisation strategies; however, it is also recognised that scalability depends on a confluence of factors. These can include, as interviews from in-country case studies and mentors and network members' own

final reports suggest, as we see some next, institutional support, policy environments, stakeholder engagement, and the adaptability of initiatives to changing circumstances. Therefore, while securing resources is indeed important, the study suggests a multifaceted approach to scalability, where strategic resource mobilisation is a critical component, but not the sole determinant of successful expansion and adaptation of DRM efforts. This comprehensive approach is essential to overcome the myriad of challenges that may hinder scalability and to ensure long-term sustainability of capacity development initiatives.

Institutional embeddedness and network governance

This section examines the integration of networks within existing institutional frameworks and governance mechanisms, offering a nuanced understanding of the factors that influence the sustainability and effectiveness of collaborative DRM capacity development. Institutional embeddedness characterises how networks and their activities are woven into broader organisational and institutional contexts, leveraging existing resources, relationships, and support systems. Conversely, network governance involves the structures, processes, and mechanisms through which networks make decisions, set priorities, and manage collective activities.

As collaborative potentials from the survey responses showed in Figure 2, network members' perceptions of collaborative potentials through the ITP-DRM over time indicates a positive trend in the ability of ITP-DRM member self-organisations to engage effectively in DRM activities post-ITP-DRM's formal support. While this trend reflects a general improvement, the variability in perceptions among network members—ranging from competition to integration—is considerable and suggests that experiences and outcomes are far from uniform.

Within individual partner countries, for instance, in Bangladesh, a change initiative to reduce gender-based violence risks in disasters saw two network members from distinct organisations successfully integrate the initiative into their strategic operations and the wider DRM community. This integration was possible due to pre-existing collaborative ties and a government-led DRM program, which provided a shared motivation and resource base, thereby enhancing direct and indirect collaborative capacity development. Conversely, another discontinued gender-sensitive DRM change initiative encountered unexpected tensions when aligning the initiative's nuanced DRM focus within a larger partnership framework involving two donor agencies. The individual who led the initiative, and who was equipped with skills and knowledge from the ITP-DRM, departed from their position shortly after the training. This departure underscored the fragility of continuing collaborative capacity and the vital role of individual actors within broader institutional structures. The challenge then became one of sustaining momentum, legitimating and retaining the initiative's focus within the organisation, despite the change in personnel. The case illustrates how personal development through

externally supported capacity-development project can clash with institutional cultures and operational realities, potentially leading to underutilisation of newly acquired competencies or the abandonment of initiatives that lack organisational commitment or a clear succession plan.

Similarly, in the Philippines, the departure of a key network member post-training brought to light the difficulties in preserving the continuity of DRM efforts. This was encapsulated by an informant who highlighted the struggle to maintain initiative momentum in the absence of its originator, stating, “It was hard to continue the initiative with the main proponent gone. It was turned over to me. Why will we still go ahead with it if the one who started it is no longer here. The hardest part is everyone’s acceptance for that.” This reflection captures the essence of the challenges faced when attempting to integrate individual learning into enduring organisational practice, particularly in the face of staff turnover.

Furthermore, the study suggests that self-organised networks may falter without proper cultivation tailored to the collaborative culture of the institutions involved. Discrepancies in “post-training engagement” and “progress in post-training networking activities” signify challenges in achieving effective network governance once formal ITP-DRM support concludes. This evidence calls for a strategic approach to nurturing network governance, considering the specific institutional contexts, to foster coherent and purpose-driven collaborative structures.

In short, the evidence from these case studies suggests that while individual capacity development is a cornerstone of network growth, the resilience of these networks is equally dependent on institutional mechanisms that support the translation of individual learning into sustained organisational and inter-organisational action. This underscores the need for network governance strategies that extend beyond individual capacity building to include the creation of robust transition processes, active cultivation of organisational and collaborative culture to embrace DRM initiatives, and the establishment of enduring institutional commitments to DRM priorities, and fostering and sustaining collaborative capacity development. The data, illustrated by the spread of perceptions across three different timeframes—pre-ITP, post-ITP, and one year post-ITP—highlight the dynamic evolution of collaborative relationships within these networks. These observations underscore the necessity for the ITP-DRM to mobilise strategic resources, as described in Section 4.3., to ensure continuous, context-sensitive support for network governance to leverage specific institutional DRM characteristics for sustained impact.

Discussion and Conclusion

The section aims to contextualise the empirical findings from the multi-stakeholder networks in DRM capacity development within the broader literature and theoretical frameworks. By critically examining these findings against the SFDRR and other relevant literature, this section seeks to elucidate the novel contributions of this study, address its limitations, and propose pathways for future research.

The ITP-DRM project, with its diverse international participants and multifaceted capacity-development activities, served as a real-world example of exploring how multi-stakeholder networks operate and contribute to DRM capacity development at different levels; and what factors influence the effectiveness and sustainability of DRM capacity gains. Employing an integrated CAS and network governance lens in the case context, four thematic areas emerged as pivotal in understanding these networks' operations and their contributions to DRM capacity development at different levels, as well as the factors influencing their effectiveness and sustainability. These four themes resonate with various Action Areas outlined in UNDRR (2018) Strategic Guide. First, the study identified significant multi-stakeholder network outcomes, representing capacity gains at individual, organisational, and systems levels contributed by the network strategies of the ITP-DRM. This resonates with UNDRR (2018)'s critical area to emphasise South-South and peer-to-peer mechanisms. Survey data revealed notable improvements in DRM knowledge, and internal and external organisational procedures, underscoring the networks' effectiveness in fostering capacity development even beyond the formal ITP-DRM support period. Second, the research highlighted the crucial role of integrative multi-tier stakeholder engagement in enhancing DRM capacity, resonating with UNDRR (2018)'s critical area to establish collaborative action at various levels. This engagement facilitated the development of trust, collaboration, and coordination, which proved essential for leveraging resources and knowledge across a diverse array of actors. Third, the research underscored the importance of strategic resource mobilisation in ensuring the scalability of DRM initiatives, resonating with UNDRR (2018)'s critical area to advance and expand DRR capabilities. While some network members successfully secured additional resources to expand their initiatives, the study pointed to the need for more systematic support in this area to enhance the scalability and sustainability of capacity gains. Fourth, the institutional embeddedness and network governance, resonating with UNDRR's (2018) critical area of institutionalising DRR capacity sharing, were found to be a key factor influencing the sustainability and effectiveness of DRM capacity development. Cases from different countries illustrated how networks' successes and challenges are intimately tied to their institutional embeddedness and the governance structures that support or hinder their initiatives.

These key findings not only provide a nuanced understanding of the role and functioning of multi-stakeholder networks in DRM but also highlight the complexities and challenges facing externally supported capacity development projects in sustaining the capacity gains achieved or fostering collaborative potentials in the process. The subsequent sections will delve into the implications for DRM practice and SFDRR implementation.

Theoretical and practical implications

The findings of this research provide distinct insights into the dynamics and sustainability of multi-stakeholder networks in DRM capacity development, thus contributing novel perspectives to the field. This research particularly stands out in its focus on the long-term sustainability of capacity gains post-formal support, a dimension not extensively covered in existing studies. Prior research predominantly emphasises immediate outcomes (Scott et al., 2016). Evaluating DRM capacity development initiatives is generally an underdeveloped area, with limited framework and attention to outcomes, impact, and few independent evaluations (ibid). This study employed an integrated CAS and network governance lens and used mixed methods of data collection to shed light on the enduring impact of multi-stakeholder networks beyond the formal external support. This approach has revealed crucial insights into the ongoing challenges and strategies necessary for maintaining collaborative momentum and effectiveness in DRM initiatives, aligning with the literature about the challenges but also possibilities to track outcomes even before the end of the project lifecycle. This focus on sustainability not only enriches the discourse around DRM capacity development in the context of external support mechanism highlighted in UNDRR (2018) Strategic Approach but also provides a practical roadmap for future collaborative DRM capacity development interventions aimed at long-term impact.

Another area where this study diverges from existing literature is in its detailed exploration of non-financial resource mobilisation. While the importance of stakeholder engagement and resource mobilisation is well-documented in the literature, this study delves deeper into the specific strategies and challenges involved in sustaining network momentum and collaborative potentials for scalability through non-financial means in DRM context. This emphasis adds practical insights to the theoretical discussions surrounding sustainability and effectiveness of collaborative DRM capacity development efforts, offering tangible approaches for DRM practitioners.

Further, this research highlights the critical role of fostering stronger linkages between network members, their organisations, and formal and informal governance structures, particularly in networks at an early formation stage with limited prior social ties. This insight responds to a gap in the literature, which often focuses on formal and internal network dynamics without sufficiently addressing external

connections and institutional embeddedness essential for network effectiveness and sustainability (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Huxham & Vangen, 2005).

Furthermore, the operationalisation of institutional embeddedness in network governance in capacity development, as demonstrated in this study, differentiates it from existing DRM research. This study shows how embedding networks within organisational and institutional contexts can be achieved and managed, thereby enhancing the understanding of network governance and strategic resource mobilisation for DRM beyond the often-discussed internal dynamics.

These novel contributions not only differentiate this research from existing studies but also extend the understanding of multi-stakeholder networks in DRM capacity development. By emphasising sustainability, resource mobilisation, and institutional embeddedness, this research offers new theoretical insights and practical strategies, thereby advancing the discourse in DRM capacity development as interventions in open rather than closed systems.

The research findings reveal both the challenges and opportunities implementing the SFDRR through all-of-society efforts. The SFDRR does not explicitly address strategies for maintaining and enhancing capacity gains post-project completion of external support. The study's focus on the enduring impact and challenges of sustaining collaborative efforts contributes a significant perspective, urging a re-evaluation of the SFDRR's approach to long-term impact and sustainability.

Moreover, align with the SFDRR's (UNISDR, 2015) advocacy for an all-of-society approach in DRM, the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder networks, as evidenced in the study, underscores the SFDRR's emphasis on broad-based stakeholder participation. However, the study goes further by providing empirical evidence on the complexities and practical challenges of engaging diverse actors, particularly highlighting the nuances of multi-tier stakeholder engagement and resource mobilisation. Specifically, the findings point out a significant gap in the SFDRR's approach to resource mobilisation. While the Framework acknowledges the importance of resources, the study reveals a lack of comprehensive strategies for non-financial resource mobilisation in sustaining DRM initiatives. While the UNDRR (2018) Strategic Guide promotes South-South cooperation, as manifested in the case context, it is clear that the implementation of SFDRR could benefit from incorporating more explicit guidelines and strategies for resource diversification and mobilisation to enhance the scalability and sustainability of DRM efforts.

The research contributes to the network governance discourse in the implementation of SFDRR by emphasising the importance of institutional embeddedness (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Huxham & Vangen, 2005). It critiques the often-overlooked aspect of informal institutional collaborative environments supported by the international donor community in DRM literature. The study demonstrates how successful network governance in DRM not only relies on internal dynamics but

also on the effective integration of networks within broader organisational and societal structures.

The insights gained from this research offer valuable implications for the implementation of the SFDRR. Specifically, they suggest that for the SFDRR to be effectively implemented, there needs to be a greater focus on the sustainability of capacity gains, strategic resource mobilisation, and the integration of DRM networks within existing institutional frameworks. The study's findings advocate for a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to DRM capacity development, one that goes beyond immediate outcomes and considers the long-term efficacy and adaptability of collaborative DRM capacity development strategies.

In conclusion, this research provides a nuanced critique of the SFDRR and advocates for closer engagement with network governance theories, offering new insights into their implementation and effectiveness. By highlighting the significance of long-term sustainability, multi-tier stakeholder engagement, and institutional embeddedness, the study contributes to a more holistic understanding of the institutional design and social learning mechanisms that offer potentials to advance collaborative DRM capacity development and the SFDRR's implementation strategy. This research adds empirical insights to the knowledge about how DRM networks operate in social learning environments (Kong et al., 2020) and why they may or may not be effective in developing and sustaining collaborative capacity. Using a multi-stakeholder network perspective, grounded in network governance theory, has provided a robust framework for understanding the complex dynamics of DRM capacity development. It has allowed for a nuanced exploration of the interplay between individual, organisational, and systems capacities and the role of multi-stakeholder networks in enhancing and sustaining capacities at various levels. The framework allowed the present study to move beyond the traditional, prescriptive understanding of capacity development and delve into the complexities and dynamics of networked capacity development efforts, which are increasingly recognised in various global policy frameworks besides the SFDRR.

Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of multi-stakeholder networks in DRM capacity development, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. Firstly, the research primarily focused on a specific international development project, the ITP-DRM, with a specific collaborative DRM capacity development approach. Consequently, as in other case study research, the findings may not be entirely transferrable to other institutional contexts or capacity development projects. Future research should delve deeper into the institutional realities of specific contexts. For instance, exploring how different types of institutions, such as governmental bodies, NGOs, or academic institutions, private

sector, interact within the multi-stakeholder networks and how these interactions influence collaborative DRM capacity development could provide valuable insights.

Secondly, the study concentrated on informal networks, predominantly without prior social ties, within Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Philippines. While these regions provided valuable insights, it is important to recognise that these regions represent only a subset of potential network variations. Future research should aim to capture the diversity of multi-stakeholder networks within these countries and beyond. Investigating how formal networks, or those with established social ties, differ in their collaborative DRM capacity development dynamics would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the field. Similarly, it is crucial to recognise that the dynamics and challenges of collaborative DRM capacity development may vary in different forms of networks and their historical and collaborative contexts. Although the study touched upon network governance and complexity theories in its analysis, the depth of engagement with these theoretical frameworks could have been more extensive. Further exploration of these theories may provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing all-of-society efforts in DRM capacity development.

Furthermore, while the research highlighted the importance of multi-tier stakeholder engagement, resource mobilisation, institutional embeddedness, and governance structures, it may benefit from a more explicit exploration of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches. This would address the broader goal of integrating diverse stakeholder perspectives and overcoming challenges related to different disciplinary backgrounds, especially considering SFDRR's advocating for the integration of DRR in all sectors. For instance, research could explore how diverse stakeholder perspectives from different disciplines (e.g., engineering, social sciences, environmental sciences) can be integrated to enhance the effectiveness of collaborative capacity development efforts.

In addition, this study touched upon network governance and complexity theories in its analysis. However, to address the complexity of collaborative DRM capacity development effectively, future research should delve deeper into the practical operationalisation of these theoretical frameworks. Researchers could consider case studies or practical applications that demonstrate how network governance and complexity theories can be applied to real-world DRM capacity development projects. Finally, although this research shed light on the initial stages and outcomes of collaborative DRM capacity development, it faced challenges when attempting to apply a process-tracing approach to establish causality. As a result, it did not provide a comprehensive exploration of how the pathways of change could be practically realised. In future research, there is an opportunity to delve deeper into generating theoretical insights that can inform practical strategies for effectively implementing and sustaining collaborative DRM capacity development efforts.

In conclusion, this study has laid the foundation for understanding collaborative DRM capacity development within informal multi-stakeholder networks that are externally supported by a donor agency. Addressing the limitations presented will enhance our understanding of how collaborative efforts can effectively contribute to achieving the SFDRR objectives.

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Overall, opening up our horizons for development means thinking in systems: coming to terms with the non-linear complexity of social change, smashing siloes to work at the intersections, and trusting more in emergence than in the illusion of control

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Jenny Iao-Jørgensen has a career spanning diverse international humanitarian and development challenges, from disaster-struck communities to post-conflict and institutionally unstable environments. Her research is featured in public administration, project management, development studies, and climate research journals. She teaches within two master's programmes, LUMID and DRM/CCA, at Lund University.



This thesis, the capstone of her doctoral journey in systems safety, explores the application of complex adaptive systems thinking within Swedish bilateral development cooperation projects implemented by a network of Swedish authorities. The thesis reveals influential internal and external organisational political dynamics in their efforts. It proposes some pathways to navigate these organisational dynamics, enhancing the transformative potential and effectiveness of complex adaptive system thinking in practice.



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