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A Projectified Public Administration

How Projects in Swedish Local Governments Become Instruments for Political and Managerial Concerns

Mats Fred & Patrik Hall

Abstract

Over the last couple of decades an increasing use of temporary organizations has been observed in public administration, a development sometimes referred to as projectification. This article explores the political-administrative rationality of projectification by studying the initiation and implementation of a project funding system regarding social investments in a Swedish municipality. In the article it is argued that projectification is driven by the administrative leadership with the aid of devoted civil servants. Projects are also attractive to politicians because of the temporal, forward-looking character of politics itself, i.e. that the time conception of project management and politics is basically similar. The article shows that the critique against projectification in terms of increasing short-termism is somewhat beside the point, since politicians and top managers rather seem interested to introduce more short-termism in public administration. Projectification, however, does not represent a profound organizational change but rather introduces a new mind-set with potential long-term effects.

Introduction

Over the last couple of decades an increasing use of temporary organizations has been observed in public administration (cf. Andersson 2009; Godenhjelm et al. 2015; Pettigrew et al. 2003). Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm (2002: 15) argue that tasks are increasingly organized in temporary forms, but also that “many processes are presented and understood as projects”. The increasing use of projects is sometimes linked to the characteristics of the “late modern” age, with features such as contingency, unpredictability and rapid change (Andersson 2009: 189). In order to handle these challenges public organizations address them by new and flexible means, such as short-term projects. The argument from project advocating organizations and project funding systems is that projects will increase innovativeness and deliver sustainable contributions

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to strategic goals (cf. Godenhjelm 2016; Svensson et al. 2013). Projects are also “perceived as a controllable way of avoiding all the classic problems of bureaucracy” (Packendorff & Lindgren 2014: 7) since they are able to deliver both controllability and adventure (Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm 2002). However, the proliferation of short-term projects may also seem paradoxical in an age when long-term policy objectives are emphasized more than ever (cf. Skerratt, 2012).

This article will develop the argument that this seeming paradox of “short-termism” within policy areas in need of sustainable solutions is dependent upon a bureaucratic adaptation to a political and managerial logic. Through the projectification of activities, public administration, rather than being occupied by routinized behavior, makes itself an instrument for strategic purposes and signals clearer than before that it actively performs a political agenda. This shapes a new form of accountability within public administration, where individual public administrators become “responsibilized” (Rose 1999: 214–215) as project managers for a distinct, temporally delimited activity – the project. Through such a form of accountability, long-term objectives are translated into a managerial rationality: the intentions of leadership (political and managerial) are to be promptly taken care of in a clear, orderly and transparent manner. Since the permanent bureaucracy persists, traditional forms of accountability to elected politicians, the citizens and the laws do not vanish but are rather supplemented by a form where the individual public administrator as project leader is held to account to the managerial level, a form of “light” version of the principal-agent model (Broadbent et al. 1996). This theory of projectification within public administration will be explored empirically through an investigation of the implementation of a social investment fund in one municipality within the strongly decentralized political system of Sweden.

Social investment funds are project funding systems initiated within local government as a response to an “investment” perspective on social policy. The very concept of “social investment” seems to derive from a report which the famous welfare system researcher Gøsta Esping-Andersen prepared for the EU Lisbon summit in 2000 (Hansen & Triantafillou 2011: 201). A social investment perspective implies that social policy should be seen as an investment. By making early investments in people’s lives, public organizations avoid future costs (Nilsson 2014). Social investment has been described as an emerging paradigm for social policy and has spread across the western world the last couple of years (Morel et al. 2012). The European Union is advocating a social investment perspective and endorses it through different initiatives and project funding systems. In Sweden, the social investment approach has generated networks and processes on the national, regional and local levels. In the Swedish setting, these actors and networks have one thing in common: the practical outlet of their work is project related activities. Social investment funds represent a projectification of a wide range of social issues such as homelessness, youth

unemployment and neuropsychiatric rehabilitation. The political interest in this issue is high, and differs considerably – at least in outlook – from the strongly institutionalized way of dealing with social issues in the welfare state of Sweden. It follows that the research aim of this article is explorative: to use a contemporary development in political-administrative relations in local government and the fashion for “projects” in order to advance our understanding of projectification as a phenomenon. The research question is: which are the driving factors behind the increasing projectification in one municipality in Sweden?

The article is organized as follows. First, contemporary research on projectification is briefly presented, followed by the development of a perspective on projectification in politically governed organizations. Second, our case study methodology is described. Third, the generalized project model of the chosen municipality is extensively described, based on the fact that social investment funds are translated as project activities. Fourth, the introduction of social investment funds is described. In the last section follows a concluding discussion where the results of the study are related to the perspective of projectification presented in the next section.

Projectification

Political science research on the consequences of projectification in the public sector has been surprisingly limited (cf. Andersson 2009; Janowicz-Panjaitan. et al 2009; Jensen et al. 2013; Sjöblom & Godenhjelm 2009; Söderlund 2011). Partly, this is due to the fact that project management has been confined to engineering and business management: “Project management has trickled down from these sectors to public administration gradually and rather silently” (Sjöblom 2009: 166). Research on project activities has traditionally been defined through its focus on single projects as units of analysis, often with an evaluative aim, whereas the general consequences of projectification within the public sector have been neglected (cf. Packendorff & Lindgren 2014).

Projectification – the increasing use and proliferation of project organizations – has been understood as a fashion, something which signals innovation, entrepreneurship, action and determination (cf. Brady & Hodbay 2011), or as something that can simplify or reduce complexity in organizations (Sjöblom 2006), and has been described in terms of programs or project portfolios where projects are bundled into groups of activities aiming to implement or develop a strategic effort (cf. Bergman et al. 2013; Maylor et al. 2006). When first introduced by Christopher Midler in 1995, the concept of projectification was described as a process in which a company transforms parts of its activities to be handled by autonomous project teams, within a restricted time frame and budget. Midler refers to projectification as the process which took place in a series of changes in the structure for organizing new product development

at Renault, as they moved from a classical functional organization to “autonomous and powerful project teams” (Midler 1995: 363). Midler identifies several organizational challenges due to projectification. Perhaps the most significant was the adaptation of the rest of the organization and its supply networks to the new structures. Projectification is, following Midler’s argument, both a transformation of activities into projects and an adaptation process of the environment. The two-folded character of Midler’s definition of projectification creates a potential tension between the projects and the permanent organization.

According to Ibert (2004), the main difference between projects and permanent organizations is temporal. The time conception of the permanent organization is cyclical – phenomena are repeated, recurring time and time again (Burrell 1992) – whereas the project follows a linear time conception leading from a starting-point to termination (Ibert 2004: 1530). These different conceptions have an impact on the organizations in several aspects. The future is framed in terms of strategies and goals in which the present is viewed as a passing phase from the past to the future, while ordinary activities are characterized by repetition and routine where more or less the same activities are repeated every day. Ellström (2009) describes this in terms of different logics where the ordinary activities are colored by a logic pursuing production (efficiency, stability and fast results) while strategies, rhetoric formulations and plans for the future are in line with a logic enforcing ideas of development (reflection, risk-taking and innovation). In a linear time conception organizational outcomes and impacts are projected, already in the planning phase of a project, into the future. This future-oriented perspective, which characterizes contemporary western social life as well as reform politics, has fostered concepts and activities that anticipate conditions that have not yet occurred, but still are able to control the activities of people and legitimize political acts (Koselleck 2004: 160). Thus, in a projectified organization, individual public administrators as project leaders become directly subordinate to the linear, strategic purposes of their (political and/or managerial) peers.

Such a view of projects as instruments to instantly realize the goals of management has been developed by Courpasson (2006). His analysis of project management within the French banking sector and in the field of Human Relations Management shows that projects build new forms of vertical loyalty between managers, project managers and project teams which bypass traditional power structures in the organization (such as formal units) as well as forms of horizontal solidarity. Transformed to the political sector, the leadership which wants fast and short-term action to be implemented in the permanent organization is the political and bureaucratic leadership, while individual public administrators may make an important career step by showing willingness to lead projects which realize political intentions (Courpasson & Clegg 2006). Temporary organizations within the public administration may have the same consequences in terms of power as the ones analyzed by Courpasson

– at least they create a new type of relation between politics and administration where the latter becomes instrumental to short-term political purposes even in sectors where other work practices have prevailed, such as the routinized procedures where individual cases are matched with professional norms and legislation by way of professional discretion within the social sector, what March & Olsen (1989) famously call “norms of appropriateness”. If this is the case, projects are not only task- and goal-oriented, but also (perhaps even primarily) politically and strategically oriented. Hence the bureaucracy becomes instrumental for political and managerial purposes.

By instrumentalization for political and managerial purposes, we mean, first, a form of rationality where public administration does not work according to organizational routines or institutional norms within specific sectors such as social work or health care, but rather enacts and becomes accountable to the contemporary policies developed by politicians and top managers. Of course, political direction has always guided public administration, but what is new is the linear and short-term activation of the bureaucracy in strategic and delimited projects. Second, instrumentalization in the form of projects also means a new kind of visibility, where different work tasks are defined, connected to specific people (project managers and teams) with delimited tasks, mandates and time frames, and made transparent. Third, this implies a business-like, top-down intervention in ordinary work where potential project managers and project teams prioritize work for their peers over professional discretion. Fourth, and connected, the very concept of “instruments” relates to a managerial rationality where the organization is not a historical or even “eternal” entity (the “permanent” organization) but is destabilized and made into a temporal tool for the goals of management (Courpasson & Clegg 2006). In a political setting, projectification means an adaptation to the political time frame. If such an interpretation of projectification is correct, the critique against increasing “short-termism” and problems with implementation in the “permanent” organization is somewhat beside the point, since the goal of project management actually *is* short-termism. This political interpretation of projectification will here be tested against the case of projectification in a Swedish municipality.

Methodology

The methodology used for this article is an illustrative case study with an ethnographically inspired approach (Ybema et al. 2009). The initiation and implementation of social investment funds in a Swedish municipality is a good case for the study of processes of projectification. It is an initiative inspired by the EU social fund system which advocates and enables project activities on sub-national levels. However, unlike the EU funds, the social investment funds are owned and organized by the municipality.

Our case is Eslöv, a medium-sized municipality located in the southern part of Sweden with approximately 32 000 inhabitants and an organization with about 2400 full time employees. It is an average Swedish municipality when it comes to size, population, age, median income, unemployment rates and proportion of entrepreneurs (ekonomifakta.se 14 dec. 2015). Eslöv is one of the front runners of social investments in Sweden. In 2014 they were appointed “Public Health Municipality of the year” by the Swedish Association for Public Health Work (Eslov.se dec. 2015) which was due to their work with social investments in the area of public health. Furthermore, its public administration works with a general project model (more below). The investment funds consists of fairly small projects (in terms of money and people involved) where people work part time on the projects and part time at a department somewhere in the organization. This leaves good room for project knowledge and experiences to travel beyond the boundaries of the projects, and it is also a projectification process that the political and administrative leadership may influence more directly.

One important feature of the case study is that it often focuses on processes – events over time. Another characteristic of the case study is the use of different empirical material (Yin 2008). To capture the time aspects of a process in a case study design, a retrospective perspective is often used where a process is traced back in time (Bennett & George 2001). This approach often leads to a case where processes are subsumed in chronological phases reinforcing the notion of decisions as a rational process (Johansson 2011). As a response to that critique, one can follow processes as they unfold or occur in real-time. Johansson (2011) argues that real-time studies are required to study interaction and interaction patterns between actors, something which is of great importance for our understanding of complex processes. One way to study ongoing processes is to interview people continuously and parallel to the process (ibid., cf. Sahlin-Andersson, 1989). In this study we have interviewed 33 respondents starting with the first interview in late 2012 and ending in early 2016.

Table 1.

Empirical material	Quantity
<i>Interviews</i>	
Politician (chairwoman of Eslöv City Council)	1
Civil servants in Eslöv	17
Civil servants in other municipalities	6
Civil servants at regional or national level	8
Consultant	1
<i>Field notes from:</i>	
observations of meetings	
fieldtrip to Norrköping	
two conferences (one national, one regional)	

Some of the interviewees¹ have been interviewed several times during this period and we have met the civil servants in Eslöv continuously; in meetings, seminars and conferences. Each interview lasted 30–120 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards to be analyzed. The purpose of the interviews was to understand how people at different levels narrate about and make sense of their work (Czarniawska 1998) with projects and social investments. In addition to interviews we conducted a series of observations of meetings and conferences, and also studied what Silverman (2013) calls “naturally occurring data”; audit reports, web pages, power point slides, meeting minutes and policy documents concerning social investment and project organization. With this multitude of empirical material we have analyzed both the employees’ own interpretations of their work, our observations of their practices in relations to other organizations and official statements from the organizations. These documents and the transcribed interviews and filed notes have been read thoroughly with the purpose of identifying possible driving factors of projectification from how the actors themselves create a sense of order and social structure (Gubrium & Holstein 1997:44–45) of the project organization and the introduction of social investments. This means that the analysis is built on the actors’ own narrations of why they work with projects and social investments.

Swedish public health work and social investment funds

The strategic aim of social investment funds should be to affect the entire municipal organization as a whole regarding organization, governance, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation (Nilsson 2014: 216).

Social investment is a new and growing phenomenon in Swedish local government and because of this also relatively unexplored scientifically. Sweden, as all Nordic countries do, has a welfare state that is universal and tax-financed. It aims to provide a high level of quality service and benefits for all citizens, independent of their status in the labor market (Esping-Andersen et al. 2002). With social investment, Morel, Palier and Palme (2012) argue that we now are witnessing an “emerging paradigm” possibly replacing, or at least adding to, earlier paradigms – Keynesian and neoliberal social policies. Sweden is described as a country that spends more money than most European countries, outnumbered only

1 The person responsible for the social investment work, the person responsible for the project model, a project manager responsible for several projects and the senior advisor at Forum for Social Innovation has been interviewed at more than one occasion.

by Denmark, on “investment oriented social expenditure” such as childcare, education and rehabilitation (Ferrera 2013) and actors and agencies are developing and advocating social investment on national, regional and local levels.

The quotation above comes from Ingvar Nilsson, Swedish professor in political economy and consultant, who over the last couple of years has trained over 50 municipalities in social investments and socio-economic calculations and has been traveling more or less the entire country to hold lectures and seminars. He is accordingly to be seen as a dominant policy entrepreneur for the Swedish contextualization of the concept. In brief, a social investment perspective implies that social policy should be seen as an investment and public organizations ought to make early investments in people’s lives to avoid future costs (Nilsson 2014). The first Swedish municipal social investment fund, inspired by Ingvar Nilsson, was initiated in 2007 in the city of Nynäshamn. In 2015 about 100 (out of 290) municipalities have (and about 60 is considering starting) one or more social investment funds, ranging from SEK 2 million to SEK 400 million (Balkfors 2015). Whether the municipality is governed by a right-wing or a left-wing majority appears to make no difference when it comes to if they have an investment fund or not (Hultkrantz 2015). According to the senior advisor at Forum for Social Innovation,² Sweden is unique when it comes to initiating social investment funds on the sub-national level (interview). No other country has that amount of social investment activity within local government.

However, the social investment work in Swedish local government is embedded in a multi-level context. If we zoom out from our particular case (Eslöv), in the immediately surrounding area we find a “thematic group” consisting of representatives from six municipalities, the Skåne Association of Local Authorities and Region Skåne, which organizes conferences and goes on field trips. Region Skåne has a social investment fund for project activities and is responsible for a project aiming to develop a municipal model for social investment. This project consists of four municipalities in Skåne and is run by Ingvar Nilsson. On the national level, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) is also developing and advocating the concept of social investment through projects, publications, networks and conferences – conferences at which representatives from Eslöv attend and present. From 2008 until 2015 three agreements regarding social investment have been met between SALAR and the Government (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs) resulting in three projects following each other and growing each time in terms of scope and resources. And finally, on the European level, the EU is advocating a social investment perspective through several initiatives such as a social investment package and a project funding system (Morel et al. 2012).

2 A collaboration between academia, industry, government and non-profit organizations who promote the idea of social innovation and social entrepreneurship.

From this short overview, it may be concluded that social investment funds are initiated within local government organizations as a response to a social investment perspective on social policy which is developed by a multitude of governing actors on different levels. Eslöv is but a small part of this structure of implementing an idea whose time seems to have come (Kingdon 2003). The social investment perspective promotes a more active, strategic orientation from leadership – on the municipal level both politicians and top managers. The cyclical time of professional discretion within the limits of the law is to be supplemented with a linear perspective of making strategic and delimited investments which are to be implemented by the professions within public administration. In the following, we describe and analyze this process in Eslöv from the introduction of a generalized “project model” to the arrival of the social investment perspective.

A project model in Eslöv

Project activities have expanded rapidly over the last couple of years in Eslöv:

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

Eslöv has been working with projects for a longer time in the more technical departments of the organization, i.e. those concerned with infrastructure, buildings, traffic and IT (Ibid.). But even “softer” policy areas such as health, social care, work and livelihood have increasingly been subject to temporary organizational forms, not least due to EU funding where temporary organization is mandatory. But according to the city manager, the head of development as well as the development strategist, the strong focus upon projects in later years has also been boosted by the development of a project model. This project model is said to be a response to a vague organization with ambiguous decision making procedures:

Before there was a committed civil servant carrying on by himself, or a group of civil servants driven by certain questions. We had one group engaged in youth policy and one about gender equality, for instance, and these groups often had no mandate and vague, if any, official assignments. They initiated a lot of work but when presenting the results of their work to the executive managers the response was like: “this is not what we want, we never asked for this” and so on, and all this created a lot of frustration and negativity in the organization (interview with development strategist).

The head of development gives a similar account of the history behind what later on became the project model, but adds that the “decision-making procedures in the organization were ambiguous” and that this was particularly evident when it came to projects. Some sort of guidelines or routines for how to deal with those issues were requested, she argues (interview). The development strategist talks about the project model as a solution to a fragmented organization in need of a significant re-organization, but an organization without the energy and resources to implement it:

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

The conditions for introducing the project model as an organizational tool was rife since large parts of the employees have attended courses in project management in recent years. In these courses, civil servants brought assignments from their daily work to develop. The consultant responsible for the course illustrates how ordinary activities are re-labeled as project activities:

People in these [public] organizations are doing lots of work in the project form but they don't always label it as projects for some reason, but they are projects, and they [the organizations] benefit immensely from the project form. So we bring that with us [into the project management courses], we take their day-to-day work and tweak it a little bit to fit the project format, and that also gives them some tools to help them understand how everything holds together (interview with consultant).

The project management courses have left the municipality with a highly skilled staff when it comes to project management. All courses and programs have resulted in an organization where “there are even more project managers than there are projects” (Ibid.):

We received such good response from the employees that they started to put pressure upward in the organization, on the

executive managers asking them questions like how much resources do I have for this project? When exactly do you need it to be finished? Why? etc. and these are all good questions that the project format help you to ask (Ibid.).

The development strategist and the head of development arranged a course for executive managers “concerning the ordering of a project and the role of project owners” (interview), and even the politicians have received an introduction in project management and the project model. Thus, all organizational levels have been in some contact with project management ideas. As shown here, a more linear model of top-down implementation is not only demanded by managers but also by the employees. However, the “permanent” organization is not changed; rather, an alternative model of implementation is introduced in the already existing organization, but the new model is said to bring the managerial level and the ordinary work tasks in closer contact to each other.

THE PROJECT MODEL BECOMES AN ORGANIZATIONAL POLICY

The project model was developed together with the consultant. The model has the status of a policy for the entire organization – and is also a model that all social investment projects are to use. People receiving funds from the investment fund also have to undertake a project management course in which the model is introduced. The project model is described in a 23-page long document called *Guidelines for projects*. At the first page it is stated that the project model is not exclusively a tool for projects – “It is always useful” (Guidelines 2014: 5):

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

The model consists of four phases: idea, preparation, realization and evaluation. Each phase in the model has document templates attached, prescribing what to take into consideration and what to achieve at each step – project proposal, project plan, status reports, final report etc. There is also a gatekeeper at each step who is supposed to be a person with authority to make decisions whether or not to continue with the project. The preparation phase, in which a project plan is produced, is given most attention in the *Guidelines*: “the preparation phase is the most important phase since all planning for the project is done here” (*Guidelines* 2014: 6). The reliance on planning as a means to reach organizational goals, or as a tool for correcting organizational errors, is a recurrent theme in our interviews. The city manager describes how implementation failures can be solved through better and more planning (interview). The development strategist argues that “there is a need to invest more time in

planning, to sit down from the beginning, and create a plan, what would we like to achieve?" (interview). There is also pressure from departments within the municipality to work more according to plan and through the specific project model:

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

The "harder" policy areas (infrastructure, buildings, traffic and IT) have a long tradition when it comes to organizing work in project form, and people responsible for the project model, including the city manager, have a background in these departments. Eslöv's leading politician confirms that the technical-oriented departments of the organization have a long tradition of project work, but acknowledge the diffusion of the project format to other parts of the organization and embraces the clarity it brings:

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

A common language, between different departments and professionals or between civil servants and politicians, is referred to as one major benefit coming from the project model:

...it has become easier to agree upon what to do and also easier to understand each other across borders. The benefit of our project model is that you have to think before you act, everyone is on board and everyone speaks the same language (civil servant).

The development strategist responsible for the project model argues that the perhaps most significant feature of the model is this common language and exemplifies with two specific concepts in the model: "impact objectives" and "deliverables", concepts which he and the head of development have introduced

to the politicians through a project management course, and he argues that politicians and civil servants ought to use the same language regarding what should be done and when (interview).

Besides the four phases, the *Guidelines* also consists of information on how to handle budgets, subprojects, how to conduct a stakeholder analysis, instructions for what it means to be a project manager, a project owner or part of a project team. There is also a specific section on communication:

...a project that nobody knows exist is in some sense a failed project [... and] there is a great value, from a professional development perspective, to disseminate the project. We also have a responsibility towards the citizens to show how taxes are being used (*Guidelines* 2014:15).

It is important, it is argued, to communicate projects, to make them visible, both within the organization, to other civil servants and politicians, and also to the citizens.

The project model appears to be well known, at least in the central parts of the organization: among politicians, and civil servants at management level, as well as among civil servants working with cross-sectorial questions and/or organizational development. One civil servant describes how regular activities around the organization now are organized as if they were projects with a clearly defined project plan, project leaders, project owners and tasks with clearly defined goals (interview). Yet another example of the dissemination of the model and the use of a specific language is given by the city manager (interview) who describes the department working with exploitation of land and how they started to view their work in a project perspective – with the help of the project model – which had them re-formulate their function as a department and by that also changing their practices and presentations of their work.

Furthermore, the project model and its *Guidelines* function as an unofficial policy in the municipality. It is the head of development and the development strategist who pushed for a political decision regarding the model. The idea has been to “ratify the project model as Eslöv’s model and to ensure that no one starts a project without it” (interview with Head of development). The city manager did not initially see the project model as a concern for the political leadership – “how we organize ourselves around this [implementing political goals] is not a political issue to me” (interview). The head of development, however, argues that “the model could function as a tool of governance in relations to other departments. If we can refer to the model as an official policy it also becomes a great tool of power” (interview). Even if there is no formal, political decision, the interviewees claim that this is hardly necessary due to the wide use of the model. One of the managers claims that “there is an unspoken agreement to use the model” (interview).

There are two interesting traits in Eslöv's work with project management. First, the generalized project model is conceived as bringing order, clarity (not least linguistic), rationality and a more structured hierarchy into an organization which is portrayed as partly lacking these features earlier. The more innovative and flexible traits often related to projects is not to be found in the stated motivations for organizing Eslöv in the project form. To the contrary, it is a hierarchical order which is envisaged. The daily work becomes "strategized" as an activity which fulfils temporal goals set on the political or managerial level, although strongly demanded, as it seems, by the civil servants further down in the organization. Second, Eslöv's project organization is driven by the higher levels of the public administration, but political approval is still seen as important. When politics is involved, the project model becomes something more than implementation and the structured handling of administrative affairs. The relation between politics and public administration will now be described in the case of social investment funds.

The project model in action – Social investments

Since June 2012, Eslöv has a program for social sustainable development under which its budget for social investments resides. The idea with the budget is to cover initial costs for organizational development, to increase cross-sectorial collaboration and to make use of good ideas in the organization (Eslöv welfare policy 2013). In order to receive funds from the social investment budget the initiative has to be a collaborative endeavor between at least two departments, it has to be innovative, engage in one of the three prioritized objectives stated in the welfare policy and it has to lead to long-term effects and be built upon scientific- or practice-based reliable evidence (Ibid.). The investment budget was initiated in the beginning of 2013 and has SEK two million for each year designated for project activities. Anyone employed in the municipality, after approval from the closest executive, may apply for funding from the investment budget. A committee, consisting of administrative managers, reviews and prepares the applications for a final decision taken by the City Council.

When asked why Eslöv introduced a social investment budget in the first place, each interviewee referred to Ingvar Nilsson (see above):

We were well over 200 people from the organization listening to him and it was almost like a revival meeting. He is so sensible, so extremely wise, so when walking out of there, we were many who said, we really need to get this going here (interview with chairwoman of the City Council).

About the same time as Ingvar Nilsson visited Eslöv (2012), the managers from all departments in the organization visited a hearing where the financial

manager from the City of Norrköping talked about the initiation of their social investment fund. During this period Eslöv also hired a new public health strategist. The assemblage of Ingvar Nilsson, inspiration from Norrköping, and the new public health strategist appears all to have been important aspects of the initiation of the social investment budget.

We all had experiences of working with overarching “plans of action” prescribed from above and did not want that kind of top-down perspective. The public health specialists are out in the organization at different departments. There is where we find the primary knowledge. So we were all in agreement about a bottom-up perspective. Then it all fell into place and seemed natural – our bottom-up perspective, the seminar by Ingvar Nilsson and the inspiration from Norrköping. The idea with a social investment fund seemed so obvious, when the idea came from so many different sources at the same time. So we gave the politics a proposal to connect a social investment fund to the program for social sustainability (interview with public health strategist).

A decision was taken by the City Council in November 2012 to initiate a social investment budget (KS.2013.0245).

PROJECTIFICATION OF SOCIAL INVESTMENT FUNDS

A lot of emphasis has been placed upon economic issues and administrative technicalities when it comes to setting up the social investment budget. The financial manager argued that a municipality cannot hold a fund due to municipal accounting regulations (interview). For this reason the fund, in Eslöv called social investment budget, is a regular post in the ordinary budget, financed as other activities through tax revenues and general government grants (Ibid.). The difference however, is that the funding is designated to project activities. All social investments in Eslöv are materialized as temporary project activities. The projects are quite different in character but have at least some form of connection to public health. Several of the projects originate from older projects, from ideas which have been “floating around” in the organization for a while, or are inspired by projects in other municipalities.

The direct connection to the regular budget and the temporary approach may contain risks of not being prioritized the next year. Hence it becomes important to show results. One of the civil servants explains this conundrum and its effects:

If there is no immediate result we might get canceled. It is hard to work long-term within the ordinary budget and even harder to do that in the form of a project, when it is even more related to specific funds in a one-time initiative (interview).

These discussions on “immediate results” have pushed ideas of evaluation to the front in Eslöv. Ingvar Nilsson is arguing for socio-economic calculation and evaluation as the way of showing good results but: “how do you measure the socio-economic benefits of young people eating more breakfast or getting a better access to public services” (civil servant), as two of Eslöv’s social investment projects are aiming to do? SALAR tries to enforce ideas of Randomized Control Trials (RCT) to deliver evidence of good practice, but municipalities in general and Eslöv in particular seem to lack resources as well as the knowhow to enact RCTs (Balkfors 2014). The discussions around evaluation in our interviews, as well as at conferences, appear to deal mostly with matters of how to show result in order to avoid cancellation rather than how to learn from or change practices.

I feel some kind of pressure to measure effects because everyone is talking so much about it, and I’m wondering for how long we can talk about “learning” and “the development of our organization” to the politicians. Perhaps they won’t prioritize our social investment budget, and perhaps they think it doesn’t lead to anything and that they then could use the money for something else instead (interview with public health strategist).

The importance of showing results is also put forward by the city manager who describes it in terms of visibility. However, she argues that Eslöv’s work on public health has been more visible in relation to both politicians and the citizens since the social investment budget was implemented in the municipality. Thus, due to the investment budget, she claims that public health issues are more prioritized now than before (interview).

The work with the social investment fund in Eslöv is strongly connected to the overall project model since the fund is organized as projects. It is even reasonable to claim that the fund is co-opted into a strategic, linear and temporal mode of dealing with social problems. Hence the fund is also expected to install order and calculability into the “softer” areas of the public administration, in particular the area of public health. This makes “social investments” subject to the same kind of evaluative discussion as other project activities (such as EU-funded ones), but this time in a stronger version since it is supposed – according to Ingvar Nilsson’s model – that results in terms of costs and benefits are possible to calculate. However, as seen in the quotation from the city manager, the problem with calculating measurable results seems subordinated to the success in making public health issues more visible to politicians as well as citizens in the municipality. This being said, the social investment fund has hardly been revolutionary – the project activities are linked to other types of project activities which Eslöv was already carrying out.

Concluding discussion

It seems that projectification in Eslöv, to a large degree, is driven by the administrative leadership with the aid of devoted civil servants within the organization. The goals of projectification relates strongly to the linear time conception discussed earlier in the article. Rather than doing the same thing over and over again, it is important for the leadership to rationalize why an activity is done, what goal it has and when it should end. The project model emerges almost as a form of organizational ideology which unites the organization in spite of the fact that no formal re-organizations have been made (Fred 2015). By doing this, the managerial level comes closer to the performing level, providing a picture of an organization which is not based on repetitive routines and administrative rules of thumb, but rather on the fulfillment of delimited managerial and political strategies; a kind of “strategization” of the municipal organization. However, as stated, this development is not only directed top-down; enthusiastic – perhaps aspiring? – civil servants act as entrepreneurs for the project model on “the floor”. Organizational reforms are often related to resistance of various kinds, but in this case we find an opposite trait, where many civil servants serve as translators of a model according to which they may be governed more strategically and tied more directly to political priorities (Lundholm et al. 2012).

In theory, the project model means a reinforcement of hierarchical order in a sector with a strong tradition of decentralization, for instance in the form of professional discretion. This order is effectuated by the model itself where three phenomena are worthy of notice: accountability, transparency and the relatedness of the time conception within project management and politics. First, projectification implies that new relations of accountability are introduced between managers, project managers and project teams. Due to the limited duration of projects, the personnel become more dependent upon the management level (and, ultimately, the political will to decide on new investments). On the other hand, the personnel demands to be “responsibilized” in this manner and seems to be eagerly striving for a more thorough implementation of the project model. Second, activities become transparent in new ways, which is particularly clear in the case of the funds. As witnessed in a quotation from the chairwoman of the City Council, politicians appreciate the communicative aspects of narrating bureaucratic activities in the coherent and transparent fashion of the project model. Interestingly, she seems to hope that the “softer” parts of the administration will learn from the orderly habits of the “hard” parts. An element of transparency is also the demand for a “common language” which may unite the organizations.

Third, political commitment for projectification generally, and social investment funds specifically, may be important in the long-term. The municipality partly breaks with a model of implementation where the politicians set the goals and the public administration may choose the means of implementation

themselves. Even if the administrative leadership is to be seen as the driving force behind projectification, political support seems important for the organizational restructuring which projectification implies. Social investment funds are a special case where political interest is high, not only in Eslöv (Balkfors 2015; Hultkrantz 2015). The funds imply a new kind of cross-sectorial thinking which seems to be more attractive to the political level than the “old” organization. Furthermore, as Kingdon (2003: 79) notes, projects are attractive to politicians because of the temporal, forward-looking character of politics itself, i.e. that the time conception of project management and politics itself is basically similar. Launching a new, fresh project is always more interesting than evaluating old ones, since politics (like project management) is future-oriented. However, in practice, the concrete changes should not be exaggerated. The social investment fund probably still has a limited effect and project budgets are small compared to the ordinary ones. Projectification does not represent a profound change but rather introduces a new mindset with potential long-term effects which are too early to judge.

This article has shown that the critique against projectification in terms of increasing short-termism is somewhat beside the point, since politicians and top managers rather seem interested in introducing more short-termism in public administration. A reason for this, which was developed in the theory section, is the political as well as managerial interest in using (parts of) the public administration as an instrument to instantly realize strategic orientations. In a limited way it is possible to speak of a politicization of public administration, not in the form of ideology, but rather in making bureaucrats and their activities visible as fulfillers of political projects. This may be a reason behind the popularity of projectification among both politicians and top managers, despite the wide-spread criticism against the phenomenon. Even if the importance of individual projects – such as social investments – definitely should not be exaggerated, this new way of conceiving the public administration may have important effects for “permanent organizations” in the long run.

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