Guest editorial

World views on projects and society

Introduction to the Special Section

This Special Section of *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business* contains a collection of six articles focusing on various aspects related to the topic of *World Views on Projects and Society*. Based in the far-reaching projectification of society (Jacobsson and Jałocha, 2018), and the observation that projects of today both shapes and are shaped by society (Packendorff and Lindgren, 2014), the contributing authors of this Special Section were encouraged to address areas of social concern and the framework(s) of ideas and beliefs which form the way in which people interpret the world and interacts within it. The general themes of this Special Section were inspired by ideas presented in the book *Managing and working in project society* (Lundin *et al.*, 2015; Lundin, 2016). In the call for the Special Section, three interrelated themes were proposed – "World Views on Projects in Society," "the World of Projects in Society" and "the Role of Projects in the World" – which together opened up for a broad understanding of the projectification trend which is spreading throughout most parts of society and the world today.

The contributing authors of this Special Section also come from various parts of the world at the same time as their research interests represent a wide variety of traditions. However, in line with the call for articles, they all stress macro perspectives rather than traditional topics related to projects and project management which is preoccupied with individual or isolated projects (Geraldi and Söderlund, 2016). Our hope is that this combination of macro-related studies will inspire others to widen their views on project studies and connect to sociologically oriented work as well as other academic disciplines, and by that break out of the traditional boundaries of the project management domain (Jacobsson and Söderholm, 2011).

The articles and their contribution

The first article in this collection is written by Derek Walker and Beverley Lloyd-Walker. The article, titled "The future of the management of projects in the 2030s," provides us with what can be describe as an explorative reflective review. The authors take their starting point in five foresight reports in order to explore the trends and scenarios of the project workplace of the future. As reflected in the article title, their more precise target is to discuss project workers prospects in the 2030s.

As a background and through their review, the authors outline a plethora of contemporary trends such as increased digitalization, the development of the digital economy, IOT, Big Data and its impact on decision making, AI, robotics and its automation consequence, VR, as well as demographic shifts. All trends and developments which in different ways will have a huge impact on the project workplace of the future. Given that, and we quote the authors, "the future is impossible to accurately predict," they still supply us with convincing arguments regarding the positive and negative news for the project worker of the future. In the article – which we recommend you to read if you have an interest in what knowledge, skills, attributes and experience is needed by the project worker of the future, the authors conclude that "the good news is that for those working in non-routine roles their work will be more interesting and rewarding than is the case for today. The bad

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news is that for workers in routine work roles, they will be replaced by advanced digital technology." If their predictions will become reality, only time will tell.

The second article in this Special Section is written by Eskil Ekstedt who provides us with an economic history perspective on projects and society. Through his reflective essay called "Project work, a challenge to traditional work life institutions," he aims at illustrate and problematize how projectification, and by that the expansion of project and temporary work, challenges the traditional industrial work organization and its institutions. The question which drives the reasoning is not only descriptive but constructive in that it pushes for what representatives of work life institutions can do to be better cope with the transformation which is currently ongoing in society. Similar to the article by Derek Walker and Beverley Lloyd-Walker, also Ekstedt reflects on the contemporary trends that influence project work. His take on transformation is however somewhat different in that it focuses on the consequences of the present (rather than the future) and connects the organizational forms to different employment regimes, an approach common to economic history methods. By that, he explains why project work is expanding and discusses the consequences and tensions thereof. The article ends with a call for institutions to better support a project dense work life. Ekstedt also gives numerous suggestions on how to bring these important issues forward – providing a minor gold mine for researchers looking for suggestions for future research in regards to projects and society.

Article three, "A pragmatic sociological examination of projectification," is a result of a collaboration between Régis Barondeau and Brian Hobbs. The article brings in a sociologically oriented discussion about projectification by referring to an "Economics of Worth" framework. It also alludes to two special streams in project research, critical theory applied in this field (mostly along the lines of the series of "Making Projects Critical" conferences) and projects as self-organizing networks. The authors argue a case for conceptual developments as well as a need for empirical investigations.

One reason why this paper is very interesting is that it connects to French sociology tradition when connecting project management reasoning which mainly is of an Anglo-Saxon heritage. The argument is that there is a need for several perspectives in studying and developing project society. Resting on texts about critical sociology, the authors argue for wider perspectives on what happens in the development of projects society. Yet another reason why the article is worth reading is that it has a definite basis in how the field has developed over a long period of time where ideologies have changed. The article also takes up stakeholder disputes and how they shape what is happening.

The fourth article in the collection is divine in a metaphorical sense. The article by Beata Jałocha, Anna Góral and Ewa Bogacz-Wojtanowska, titled "Projectification of a global organization: Case study of the Roman Catholic Church," takes us to a journey over time (from 1985 through 2016) and across the world (covering several continents on the globe) with various prospects for projectification. Since the Roman Catholic Church is the center of the activities, the Pope himself is a crucial center personality. The main empirical work covers World Youth Days (WYD) which are organized by the Roman Catholic Church. The initiative was taken in 1984 by the pope John Paul II and the first event was labeled "Festival of Hope" and organized as a prototype for what was to become World Youth Days.

Projectification of the Vatican and the Church activities are in focus and the authors compare how the five WYDs studied and described are run with reference to how the mission of the Church is realized and how the contents change over the time. One focus is that these days eventually became what should now be called megaprojects and such projects are possibly more difficult to organize than others. As an example, the WYD in Manila had 5 m general participants. And financing these events was not a simple matter so the church had to negotiate with the local authorities as part of the entrepreneurial preparation. In that respect it is not too different from other major events like Olympic

Games (with another vision/mission). In the article the authors compare how management and learning develop over time.

The church as a stakeholder in these events is interesting. However, the church as a stakeholder changes over time and does not act as a stakeholder in a traditional sense in an isolated project. In fact, the contents in the article opens up for an Actor Network Theory inspired reasoning.

In the fifth article, we are again dealing with the contemporary transformation of the world of projects, this time related to digitalization. The article, titled "The birth of an ICT project alliance," is written by Teemu Lappi, Kirsi Aaltonen and Jaako Kujala and brings attention to the increasing role of digitalization in the world of projects and how ICT projects, which are inherently complex, are handled. Due to complexities in terms of organizational context, technology and other uncertainties, a project alliance can be useful as a means to handle those difficulties. The focus of this paper is on the initial stages of the formation of an ICT-oriented project alliance related to the construction sector. The case concerns the Finnish public sector but the results can be generalized to a wider project society context. How can the cross-field transfer processes be handled? The authors refer to the conspicuous role of "institutional entrepreneurs" who perform important roles when it comes to cross-field transfers in ICT-related alliances as compared to other, general project alliances. Also, the participating partners in the alliance need to prepare their respective organizations which is also a task related to the entrepreneurs. On another level, extrapolating from the current case, the article by Lappi and coauthors demonstrates how the world is developing and how organizations and actors change their behaviors to fit ongoing changes and adaptations in the world.

Finally, what would a Special Section on World Views on Projects and Society be without an article related to one of the most pressing issues in society today, the very complex challenges relating to sustainable development. The sixth and final article of this collection is written by Anette Cerne and Johan Jansson and puts the spotlight on the intersection of projects and sustainable development with the aim to demonstrate how to better understand the interface between these two partly competing and partly complementing phenomena. In the article titled "Projectification of sustainable development: Implications from a critical review," the authors go about outlining the global and the local dimensions of sustainable development as a business objective, and discuss this against a backdrop of projectification, and projects/project management constituting both a means and an end in sustainable development practice. In other words, sustainable development through projects vs sustainability in projects. The article provides not only a thorough outline of the complexity and interrelatedness of the two phenomena, going back to the Brundtland report "Our Common Future" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), but also an extensive list of important and to some extent uncomfortable questions. A must read for everyone interested in the role of projects in the quest for a sustainable future.

A final note

As mentioned above, we as editors believe that this very interesting collection of articles should provide important impetus for future research efforts broadening the notion and scope of project studies. It would be a disadvantage to the entire field of project research if the group of researchers develop into a tribe with a sole introspective view of the field. Past efforts should not be repeated but in line with this Special Section be used as a springboard to future efforts!

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Further reading

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