

Projectification and the impact on societies

The trend of the omnipresence of projects in all areas of professional and private life is ubiquitous and still going on. Projects have become a postmodern organisations' symbol of adaptability and contingency, considered to be a superior way of reacting to unanticipated and irregular situations (Lundin and Söderholm, 1995; Clegg and Courpasson, 2004; Sjöblom and Godenhjelm, 2009) and of creating major infrastructures for the future. With the creation of the term "projectification" in the mid-1990s, Midler defined a phenomenon that he observed at the car manufacturer Renault. Projectification, an amalgam of "project" and "organisational transformation", describes the diffusion of projects as a form of business organisation (Midler, 1995). Projectification is not only taking place in typical project-oriented or project-based industries like construction, aeronautics or software industry, but also in the public sector, in policy implementation, in performing arts or scientific research. Jensen observes an expansion of the concept of projectification to all parts of private and societal life (Jensen *et al.*, 2016). Consequently, Lundin *et al.* (2015) speak about the "Project Society", which they perceive as the fourth industrial revolution or the next Kondratieff cycle (Händler, 2011).

A projectified society consists of the majority of organisational members being project workers and project managers (Hodgson and Cicmil, 2006), which has an effect both on the identity of the individual, and also for the community. Projectification has an impact on all members of the society, leading from long-term stable and unlimited working contracts to temporary employment in temporary organisations, from a formerly retrospective control-based orientation towards a prospective perspective not only of the management but also of all people in the society (Gemünden, 2013; Maylor *et al.*, 2006). Because of the fundamental changes on all parts of the society, the already apparent projectification of societies can be called a paradigm shift (Jensen *et al.*, 2016).

Still we find ourselves in the early research stage of this broad phenomenon. A worldwide analysis of projects and societies has already been covered in a first Special Section by Jacobsson and Lundin (2019). The publication of two Special Sections within one year underlines the importance, and also the urgency of a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of projectification to all members of the society.

Special section focus

In the Call for Paper for this Special Section, which ended in September 2018 we defined the aim to analyse the implications of projectification to the various stakeholders in the societies. We asked for the consequences of this global trend not only for individuals, but also for organisations: "What is the impact of projectification on public administration or politics, areas that have not been a focal point of project management research so far? What is the status of the various national economies concerning their project maturity?"

We received 12 submissions from all parts of the world. At the end of an intense review process, we can present five stimulating articles in this Special Section.

Contents of the publications and their contributions

We assign the five articles of this Special Section to the concept of the levels of projectification presented by Beata Jalocho (2019) in her article in this Special Section. In here she presents a typology of five projectification research levels: micro (dealing with the individual),



meso (organisations), macro (industries and sectors), mega (societies, countries, supranational organisations) and finally meta (relations and trends transforming global social structures).

The first paper “The project managers’ challenges in a projectification environment” by Luis Ballesteros-Sánchez, Isabel Ortiz-Marcos and Rocío Rodríguez-Rivero covers the micro layer as it is treating the individual and will interest those who want to better understand the impacts of projectification for the individual in the project society. It is based on interviews with Spanish project managers and their project teams. The authors state that as organisations are getting more and more projectified, this leads to changes in the work environment, changed requirements and new challenges facing project personnel. The findings confirm earlier findings regarding the importance for technical managers to develop their communication skills – and regarding the difficulties of project managers to disconnect from their work. The authors point out that more support is needed for project managers to cope with stress and to manage their time better. It seems that they have discovered an important “dark side” of the projectification trend that more and more people are not able to make a separation between their work and their private life. A consequence of this is the rapid increase of burnout rates which is particularly high within the professional group of project managers. So far, the burnout phenomenon was diagnosed and treated on the individual level, but the qualitative study from Ballesteros-Sánchez *et al.* shows that new, effective measures are needed not only for the whole professional group but also for the entire projectified society.

On the meso level, we present two articles: the first is written by the creator of the buzzword projectification, Christophe Midler, who provides his reflections about “Projectification: the forgotten variable in the internationalisation of firms’ innovation processes?” In this paper, Midler brings together the two large transformative streams in large organisations within the last decades, project management and the internationalisation of the innovation processes. These two distinct organisational developments have co-existed largely in parallel without enquiring how can the projectification of the firm impacts the dynamics of its global innovation process pattern. In this article – which we recommend to read if you are interested in global innovation management – Midler builds a bridge between international innovation processes and project management. The results underline the importance of the organisation’s projectification capability for the success of global innovation processes. Midler states that global innovation process networks are no longer central, home-based models but subsidiary-relationship models, making multinational corporations ambidextrous organisations that need to be able to deal with the dual dynamic learning processes both in the mature and emerging markets. His case shows how the projectification of the organisation impacts its overall global innovation process pattern. He appeals for building bridges between the project management research and other management streams like international innovation strategy and linking the ambidexterity field with project management.

The third article is by Harvey Maylor and Virpi Turkulainen and is titled “The concept of organisational projectification: past, present and beyond?” The authors discuss the contexts in which projectification has taken place. The paper is focusing on the conceptualisation of the term projectification rather than an all-encompassing study of projectification. They reflect on the past 25 years of research on projectification and synthesise the discourse on organisational projectification in terms of content (or “what” can be “projectified?”) and process (or “how” this can happen?). The “what” can refer to the individual, project, functions, institutions, economy and society, while the “how” can refer to the structure, governance, capabilities, competences or language. They observe that many organisations have reached a point where the increased use of project structures and processes comes to their natural limits; in such organisations, increasing the project form has either become undesirable or resource limits have been reached. In their remarks, the authors point out that even though research indicates that projectification is on the rise, it cannot be assumed that it is spread deeply and evenly into management practices. Their reflections indicate

that the adoption of project management practices is more selective than generic and has not proven that the professionalisation of project management as a discipline leads to more competent project managers nor improved project management practices. Based on the discussion, the paper presents a synthesised view of organisational projectification as well as directions for future research to advance the understanding of projectification. The study has implications for policymakers in the design of the process of ongoing projectification and provides illustrations and also a warning concerning the assumptions that are made of different kinds of benefits as an organisation advances in its projectification.

The fourth article by Beata Jalocha represents the mega level analysing the social structures in a society. Her article is titled “The European Union’s multi-level impact on member state projectification in light of neoinstitutional theory” and analyses the role of the European Union in the projectification process of Poland. It is of interest for all those who deal with Public Management and supranational politics. The EU became within the last decades “the main catalyst of projectification through the use of projects in the implementation of the public policies [...] and a strong driver of the expansion of a certain logic of project management in contemporary public affair”. However, little is known how this projectification process affects the individual member states. Poland represents the largest net recipient of EU funding since its entrance in the EU in 2004; therefore, the Polish projectification process can be seen as very dynamic. The author analyses three levels of projectification on the mega (state), macro (sector) and meso (organisation level), and the challenges and consequences “cascading” between the levels by using the neoinstitutional theory and the concept of Europeanisation. She separates between strategic changes, changes in organisational structures and changes in the work processes. On the strategic side, projects are perceived as a tool for implementing strategies. At all organisational levels, new special units were created to apply for, manage and coordinate the European funds. To realise the programs, a large group of highly specialized clerks were trained as project managers. At the beginning, there was a misfit between the projectified EU structures and the low project maturity level in the Polish public sector. Striving to achieve the competences needed they started imitating the actors. This transformation leads to a change in the organisational structures from functional to project oriented in Poland, and a fundamental shift to strategies based on projects. Today, project work is seen as the major method of activity implementation in the public institutions in Poland. Jalocha concludes that the European Union can be seen as a projectification agent, transferring its project practices in the member states by a top-down Europeanisation and organisational isomorphism. In the case of the Polish public sector, this transformation was universal, complete and fast and has enormous impacts on the social structures. She concludes that “the consequences of the changes that occurred in Poland under the influence of EU projects are not yet fully known and require further research”. However, there is also a dark side of these new project bodies, creating new bureaucratic rules, delaying the delivery of projects and costing money which should be analysed.

Finally, the fifth article “Projectification in Iceland measured – a comparison of two methods” by Helgi Thor Ingason, Thordur Fridgeirsson and Haukur Jonasson which presents the mega level, the national and supranational systems. This paper is about two methodologies for assessing projectification in a country. It is of interest for those who want to measure the size of projectification in a sector or in a whole regional or national economy. The authors tried to develop an easier, cheaper method to evaluate the size of projectification in an economy. In comparison to their previous gross value added study, a simpler “omnibus method” was developed, consisting of a questionnaire sent to organisations. Only two questions were asked: how common is the use of project management in your company? And: do you think the importance of project management will grow, decrease or remain unchanged in the next 12 months? The results show that the use of project management in organisations

increases with turnover and employees and that companies plan to use more project management in the future. The two methods yield a revealing picture of projectification of the Icelandic economy. The two methods complement each other and can be applied in a systematic way to give a longitudinal view of the evolution of projectification in a society.

Conclusion

The calling out of the various phenomena of projectification on all five levels and their implications for all stakeholder groups in the societies allows new conversations to be developed on the basis of this Special Section. The five articles show that in order to comprehensively understand the deeper effects of the ongoing projectification in the societies, a more holistic, systemic view on projectification covering all five levels is needed.

Projectification is a reality, taking place in all economies worldwide. However, there are new shadows emerging on the horizon of projectification. As researchers we should carefully analyse these shadows not only to understand their causes and effects, but also to find ways to deal with them. Referring to the Rethinking Project Management initiative of Svetlana Cicmil, Terry Williams, Janice Thomas and Damian Hodgson in 2006, we suggest that we should start an international Rethinking Projectification Network to analyse and reflect the current developments in the project societies worldwide.

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