Mälardalen University

This is an accepted version of a paper published in *Journal of Organizational Change Management*. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

Citation for the published paper:

Dobers, P., Söderholm, A. (2009)

"Translation and inscription in development projects: Understanding environmental and health care-related organizational change"

Journal of Organizational Change Management, 22(5): 480-493

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09534810910983451>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:mdh:diva-9647>

<http://mdh.diva-portal.org>

Translation and inscription in development projects. Understanding environmental and health care- related organizational change

Research paper published in *Journal of Organizational Change Management*
Volume 22, issue 5, pp. 480-493

Autobiographical note

Peter Dobers (professor)
peter.dobers@mdh.se
School of Sustainable Development of Society and Technology
Mälardalen University
Box 883, 721 23 Västerås, Sweden

Anders Söderholm (professor)
anders.soderholm@miun.se
Mid Sweden University
851 70 Sundsvall, Sweden

Abstract

Recent challenges in society, such as environmental degradation and a declining health care sector, expose capacity problems of existing public organizations. In such situations of when organizational and institutional change is called for, development projects have been utilized to enable exploration of new ways of organizing social activities. We use illustrations of development projects in public management in Sweden to discuss a fundamental organizing problem of projects: how project delimitation and formation takes place. This paper argues that the interface between projects is of a particular interest when organizing development projects. We offer a theoretical discussion of translation and inscription phases, not only because they are important to the understanding of mobilizing action in development projects, but also because they are crucial in a chain of sequential projects that are organized as responses to new situations.

Purpose of this paper

[What are the reason(s) for writing the paper or the aims of the research?]

This paper argues that the interface between projects is of a particular interest when organizing development projects. We offer a theoretical discussion of translation and inscription phases, not only because they are important to the understanding of mobilizing action in development projects, but also because they are crucial in a chain of sequential projects that are organized as responses to new situations.

Keywords

Development projects, translation, inscription, interfaces between projects, organizing processes

Translation and Inscription in Development Projects

Introduction

It appears that organizations, as well as states and society in general, are traditionally organized along a functionally based division of labour. In society this means that public administration and government structure reflect a functional partitioning (Ahrne, 1998). There are departments and authorities dealing with communication, industrial policies and agriculture, and over time borders between them have been widely accepted. Different departments and authorities become organizational environments to each other in what has become a rather stable structure of the public sector. Once proven to be successful, the tendency for exploiting these routine administrative structures seems to be self-reinforcing (March, 1999:39).

From time to time, however, problems arise that public organizations seemingly cannot deal with. Since stability and standard operating procedures have become the norm, the balance between the exploration of new possibilities and the exploitation of old certainties has been disturbed (March, 1991, March, 1994a:237ff). Such problems become even more problematic if there is a lack of organizational capacity to deal with newly defined problems. In light of this, a focus on organizational change, development and new organizational forms becomes necessary (Meyer, 1994).

“Clusters”, “networks”, “virtual” organizations and “temporary” organizations/projects are just a few labels of organizational forms which mirror how interest is turning from internal issues concerning size, technology or functional partitioning to “the newly found fluidity in the external appearance of organizations” (Clegg and Hardy, 1996). This turn of interest raises the question of how under-defined problems are dealt with and how cross-organizational undertakings are organized today, especially in times of changes in organizational forms in early 21st century.

Scholars in organizational change argue that a situation of vague and under-defined problems calls for change and creates a need for exploring alternative organizational forms (March, 1994a). The organizational form of projects become one way of dealing with those issues to which current structural arrangements fail to attend and when change and exploration are called for (Ekstedt et al., 1999). Some would argue that this lack of clarity is characteristic of not only the startup phases of projects but also for the entire project process, at least when the project has to do with organizational change and development (Sahlin-Andersson, 1986, Sahlin-Andersson, 1989). Traditional teaching in project management stresses that the project process develops from initiation or conceptualization, via implementation to closing and feedback (for a critical discussion on traditional project definitions, see (Engwall, 1995). However, we argue that the perception of initiation, conceptualization, implementation and closure is not particularly interesting for organizational change and development projects, when new ways of working are explored. Projects with clear boundary-overlapping character cannot be judged with concepts stemming from the methods of construction project management. In contrary, we argue that there are two other concepts that can explain better the special organizing problems invoked by the cases of this paper: translation and inscription.

A crucial project task in endeavors of change is to create a shared linguistic platform for action, and translation and inscription becomes essential concepts for understanding how organizational change is initiated and implemented (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996, Joerges and Czarniawska, 1998, Latour, 1990, Holmström and Robey, 2005). According to the translation sociology, links between actors, however fragile and subtle, determine projects, just as links between projects determine socio-technical networks of another magnitude (Latour, 1996). We take from this that the links between projects are a slice of organizing reality well worth examining. To be more precise, the slice of organizational reality of this paper is delimited to the very beginning and the very end of a project, to the formation and the finalization stage. Two empirical illustrations of development projects in public management will be used to

support our discussion. First, we examine an environmental improvement project organized as an inter-organizational collaboration and second, we look at a renewal project in different health care organizations. The aim of this paper is to show that interfaces between projects are of particular interest when observing organizing of development projects since the ontology and direction of each project are decided at these links. We theorize about the interfaces between projects using two theoretical concepts: the *translation* of political and strategic ideas at the beginning of a project, when the work is open for influences, and the *inscription* of ideas into reports, actions and new ideas at the end of a project, as the work is focusing on stabilizing its ventures and bracketing it from influences. Together, translation and inscription describe how project delimitation and formation takes place, and how they underlie processes of creating tasks, mobilizing action and continuous networking (Söderholm and Steinthorsson, 2002).

The Concepts of Translation and Inscription

“Translation” and “inscription”, especially the term translation, have their theoretical basis in the translation sociology that was once formulated by French sociologists (Callon and Latour, 1981, Callon, 1986, Latour, 1996, Latour, 1998). Two models are presented that help us examine innovations and change efforts and the way in which they are spread: the diffusion model and the translation model. In the former, a brilliant idea is formulated that has a strong and autonomous position. Moreover, the idea is not contestable. The idea spreads very quickly and although some actors might discredit the idea, it survives. In the latter model, the translation model, the basis for the spread of the idea is different. The original idea is rather weak, not clearly formulated and is hardly structured at all. Since it lacks its own force, the idea is dependent on others and is spreading only because others are interested in it and formulate alliances with it. Each time someone has an interest in the idea, it changes in character. Such ideas can only spread if they are changed and individuals can translate the ideas into a language that frames and interprets them in accordance with their own dictionaries which exist in

particular organizational fields. The idea eventually results in a fantastic project and ends where the diffusion model begins; with a stable idea that can be implemented (Latour, 1996:119).

Projects exist only as long as spokespersons can perform relevant translations by which networks of socio-technical actants are assembled as a whole. In this view, projects are seen as emerging networks in which coalitions of humans and non-humans, individuals and groups, come together in an ongoing chain of translations and inscriptions. Thus, projects are not linear models of how ideas are implemented through plans and diffuse throughout society, but are the effects of heterogeneous interests, emotions and consensus, as well as carelessness, conflict and clashing intentions. So the nature of a project changes whenever a new actor becomes a member of the project or whenever an old member leaves the project. The idea or the project changes for every agreement or disagreement. To be precise, a project is the effect of ongoing negotiations where a project is never real, but is gaining or losing in degrees of reality.

Translation sociology has also been used in a Scandinavian anthology (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996), where several authors present studies of organizational change using the predictions of translation sociology. One chapter, and another related publication, is of particular interest to us since the authors explain the narrative of ideas that materialize through a chain of translations and inscriptions (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996, Joerges and Czarniawska, 1998). Through selective perception, which adjusts to the social environment and copes with what is in fashion and what is out of fashion (Abrahamson, 1996, Røvik, 1996), certain ideas are chosen among many existing ones to be part of translation. The idea takes form when it becomes known in pictures or words. Thus, the idea gets into a material form and begins its journey from one organizational field to another as it has been translated and inscribed to its new temporary habitat. The materialized idea might lead to different changes, in itself through yet another translation, and it eventually becomes institutionalized as it takes on a concrete form. Just look around and you will see the computer, the chair, the desk. The argument can be summarized in our term of inscription; an idea is *inscribed* into an

object (text, book, prototype of any kind), which in itself is translated into actions that are repeated over and over again, that eventually are institutionalized by even more chains of translations and inscriptions (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996:26, Joerges and Czarniawska, 1998).

The Scandinavian version of translation sociology takes an overall perspective where all changes are interpreted as translation of something. However, in this paper, we focus on overlapping boundaries in organizational change and development projects, where we begin with one single translation link in the chain described above, looking more closely into how it is developed into inscriptions. When talking about the concept of translation we refer to the beginning of a project. When a project begins, project members translate previously inscribed materialized items into plans of action. When talking about the concept of “inscription” we refer to the end of a project. When a project ends, materialized ideas are inscribed into reports, actions or action nets and passed on as temporarily stabilized entities.

Environmental and Health Care Related Change Projects

Each of our Swedish cases describes organizational incapacity to deal with certain problems. We have deliberately chosen two cases of seemingly efficiency in two different sectors to illuminate common elements of alternative organizational efforts. The cases represent a political will to change existing organizational structures by exploring new ways of working and new areas of fulfilling tasks of society. Both cases illustrate an urge to go beyond the boundaries set by current organizing practices and can, in some respects, be considered as unusual cases. On the other hand, the cases are typical for efforts of this kind. When dealing with issues not normally attended to and that are not currently included as primary tasks in any of the established organizations, projects tend to be normal modes of organizing (see discussion in e.g. (Ekstedt et al., 1999)). Taken together, we believe that the two cases demonstrate well how the

handling of vague problems can be understood by focusing on translation and inscription phases of change projects. Since these two cases depict how alternative working orders and non-traditional organizational forms can be used to address newly defined problems, they can be considered “successful”. However, determining the extent to which the cases were “successful” in terms of the efficiency of the new orders and organizational forms is beyond the scope of this paper.

Both cases have been constructed on the background of an extensive number of interviews and document studies. Since the study has an explorative character, case selection was not a random process, but was based on theoretical sampling (Eisenhardt, 1989). The main criteria for selecting our cases has been to illustrate public attempts at organizing projects in new ways. It has thereby been our ambition to comment on traditional project management topics, but analyzing them from a theoretical outlook of translation sociology and its Scandinavian version. Thus, interviews and documents have been used to form a narrative for illustrating new theoretical insights (Czarniawska, 1998, Czarniawska, 1999).

The first case illustrates how the way public organizations work with environmental control has changed and broadened during the last decades. Environmental problems were dealt with through control and legislation in the 1960s while a number of different cooperative and decentralized attempts are used in the 1990s. Our second case is a major renewal project in a health care organization. Publicly funded and operated health care in Sweden has been under economic pressure during the 1990s. Consequently, most health care organizations have changed and have launched renewal projects in order to make operations more effective and efficient. The Efficiency, Productivity and Quality (EPQ) project reported here is an example of such a renewal project that focuses on measurements to increase effectiveness and productivity while keeping a certain quality.

Case 1. The Environmental Project Sundsvall/Timrå (EPST)

In September 1987, the social democrats in Sweden held their 13th party congress. The first Minister of Environmental Affairs in the newly founded governmental department of Environmental Affairs, Birgitta Dahl, held an opening speech for the debate about environmental issues. The political rhetoric built up a spirit of a new beginning:

And, comrades, it is rebellious we have to be, if we shall succeed in fighting the threats to our survival just as our grandparents overcame the threats that faced them. And there are alternatives. There exists a new insight... (Birgitta Dahl, Minister of Environmental Affairs. Social Democratic Party Congress in 1987, Protokoll D, p. 6, our translation)

Competence and education were perceived as important for achieving this. Among other instruments the minister challenged the party people to take practical steps to achieve environmental improvements in their own communities.

We wanted to change and renew the whole culture in this field. To actually speed up the development, just as we have talked about. The way actors worked was stuck in a tradition. We realized that environmental agencies also felt pushed around by politicians who all of a sudden placed new demands on them. These agencies possibly became used to politicians putting the brake on and then they all of a sudden making new demands. And they thought, many of them, that it was wrong. It was not only the industry that had activities that could be environmentally harmful, which were taken by surprise, but it was the environmental agencies themselves, the authorities. Then the idea was born that we should undertake such environmental projects. We undertook four environmental projects, Gothenburg, Dalälven, Sundsvall/Timrå, and Western Skåne and the aim was to gather all actors in an effort and to act together in different kinds of environmental work. (...) the thought was that an untraditional way of working would spark actors to develop new and possibly good solutions. Both organizational and technical. (Birgitta Dahl, Minister of Environmental Affairs, personal interview, our translation)

When Birgitta Dahl in February 1989 asked Peter Gavelin in Sundsvall to take responsibility for one of these projects, he accepted the challenge right away. The only prerequisite Gavelin had was a two-page governmental directive with the key sentence:

I suggest that a delegation must be appointed to initiate and coordinate actions to improve the environment considerably in the Sundsvall/Timrå region within a ten-year period. (Birgitta Dahl in Dir1989:9, 1989, our translation)

This gave Gavelin a free hand to address the environmental problems he and his team wanted, despite the seemingly large quantities of pollution of the large-scale forest industry and large process industries. They focused on problems connected with the content, the consumption and the final displacement of products. A team member remembers:

I believe that each time has its specific way of working. Problems are perceived in specific ways. During the 1970s, large single source emissions at chimneys and into the water were the major environmental problems. Thus, it seemed natural that we controlled large single source emissions. (...) Fall-out of sulphur has been minimised, these large single source emissions are very much improved. District heating has led to no emissions in the city due to single boilers. It is all concentrated to Korsta where filters and cleaning systems have been installed. The problems of today and of tomorrow are slightly different. Nowadays, you have to pay more attention to the products that come out of the factory. Previously, you have focused on the raw material entering the production process and on emissions. You did not pay attention to the contents of the products (Åke Dahlberg, member of the EPST delegation, personal interview, our translation).

Gavelin and his team wrote a large report, had many meetings with concerned politicians, administrators from the public sector, and managers from industry, and concluded that major efforts were needed in fields such as traffic, industries and municipal plants. The successful implementation of these suggestions, it seemed, rested on the participation of people in all sections of the municipalities. To assure such participation, the final report established an Environmental Plan for Sundsvall and Timrå. The written plan contained a detailed inventory of environmental problems, suggestions of improvement, which was being in charge of the improvement actions, and what timetable was set for such actions. Eighty-three suggestions for the Sundsvall municipality were formulated in the EPST (SOU1990/91:90, 1991) and politically decided upon in March 1990. The Environmental Plan for Sundsvall municipality was

followed up twice, once in January 1993 for the year of 1992 and once in March 1995, the latter covering all three years, which the Environmental Plan was set out to cover.

Case 2. The EPQ Project in a Health Care Organization

This case is about a public health care organization that launched a major renewal project in the first half of the 1990s. The renewal was triggered by arguments on decreasing tax-generated income, too low productivity and effectiveness in the health care provided. The renewal project was named EPQ (Effectiveness, Productivity and Quality). EPQ was a top management initiated project and the newly appointed CEO and his staff were made responsible for its implementation.

EPQ was attached to a general aim (reducing the cost of the care provided and renewing the management accounting system) but specific goals of the project were not clear at the outset. The first year was spent on the preparation of documents and policies. Those documents introduced concepts like pay-per-performance instead of annual funding, Diagnostic Related Groups (DRG) system for measuring production, income-related budgeting and new principles for the clinic's annual planning cycles. Through these documents the acronym EPQ was given a more precise content. Below, two issues are more closely described.

Pay-per-performance

Pay-per-performance is related to the DRG-routines. Basically it means that each medical department gets paid for what has been done during the previous period. This procedure should stimulate productivity control since payment is dependent on performance. In this particular hospital only major departments had the authority to assess DRG-codes to a patient. For example, the surgical department did this but not the X-ray-department or the clinical tests department. The surgical department received an annual budget based on the cost per point (see above on DRG) and the money was allocated with 1/12 each month. If productivity fell below 1/12 per month, the sum could be either reduced or increased although increases above budget was paid less.

Departments that were not authorized to assess DRG codes were paid for deliveries of services to the main departments that did the assessment. Consequently, only a limited number of departments got paid from the hospital while other departments were paid-per-performance by the main departments according to standardized costs for each service delivered. Department heads and administrative staff at main departments and service departments were involved in annual negotiations on how to define standard costs. Each patient admitted into the hospital and who required attention from other departments than the main one doing the DRG assessment led to the creation of internal invoices sent between different departments. For example, a non-complicated kidney surgery led to seven different invoices.

Diagnostic Related Groups (DRG)

The DRG was originally developed in the United States. It is a patient classification scheme, which provides means of relating treatment to the costs incurred. DRG consists of a number of codes, each one referring to a specific diagnosis. Each diagnosis is attached to a specific number of “points” and by adding the diagnosis made at a department, its productivity can be measured. It is also possible to compare productivity between different, medically unrelated, departments by comparing DRG points produced. This system was introduced within the health care organization. Each doctor had to fill out a form after having made a diagnosis on a patient. This form was sent for registration along with other medical information. Hospital department heads received statistics on a regular basis showing the productivity for the individual period compared to previous periods and to budget. The registration procedures created was made in different ways in different departments. For departments that was heavily specialized the doctors normally knew what code to assign to a diagnosis but in other departments where a large number of primary and secondary diagnosis were made secretaries made the coding according to the classification scheme.

DRG data was used in two ways. First, it showed productivity and was reported as a measurement of how well a department performed. Second, the total number of DRG points produced by a hospital during a year was used to determine the “cost per DRG point”. Once the cost per point was determined, this information was used to determine next year’s budget for individual departments by comparing their productivity to the hospital’s cost per point. Low performing departments (i.e. having a higher cost per point than the hospital average) was required to reduce costs to meet the budget while high performing departments (i.e. having a lower cost per point than the hospital average) could afford extra expenses. DRG can be used in other ways (e.g. as a pay-for-performance tool or as a tool to distribute costs inter-regionally between hospitals or for statistical purposes only) and the case shows that the way the general DRG system was translated to two major routines in the particular case. These routines affected the work of individual doctors all over the hospital and were made a major tool for the annual budgeting process.

Since the health care organization was divided into three districts with its own district managers, the implementation was dependent on support from the district managers. The pay-per-performance routine was initially only accepted and implemented by one of the districts. A second district introduced the routine a few years later.

Some supporting services (like real estate and purchasing) were made separate organizational units and market-like relations were established between these new units and the health care providers (hospitals etc.). Establishing these relations and re-organizing the service organizations accordingly was made a project of its own. Quality of the care provided was not attended to as a part of EPQ during the first years. Almost all efforts were directed towards accounting and production measurements.

EPQ had different impacts on different hospitals and on different hospital clinics. Some clinics used EPQ as a reason for implementing new organizational routines or new organizational structures that were not initially indicated by the EPQ project. One clinic re-organized their working organization and thereby was able to reduce the

number of employees. Another clinic used EPQ as an argument for the introduction of a completely new set of medical routines. Yet another clinic made substantial changes to their division of responsibilities among the doctors, and so on. EPQ was thereby re-designed as it reached local clinics and new sets of activities were organized. These activities were connected to the general idea of EPQ and made use of instruments and documents produced within EPQ but were nevertheless not initially planned as a part of EPQ.

In sum, EPQ was initially a vague idea around a set of long-term goals that were made clearer over time and through the introduction of a number of more specific administrative routines and management accounting principles. Some of the clinics could also use EPQ as a local “excuse” for the change of clinical organization or routines. See example below:

Transformation of the orthopedic department

The head of the orthopedic department had been planning a major change in the way the patient care unit was organized. Instead of having patient admitted into different units depending on the diagnosis made by the doctors his aim was to have patient distributed among the different care units depending on whether they were supposed to stay over the weekend or not. This would mean that only one instead of three units had to remain open 7 days a week. The drawback was that individual doctors could have their patients at any of the three units instead of having all patients at the same one. When EPQ was launched, the department head immediately made EPQ into a requirement to reduce cost at the department. It was at that time possible for him to implement the closure of two care units over the weekends since the cost reduction was so obvious and immediate. No permanent staff had to go but the number of nurses hired on an hourly basis was almost cut to zero.

The project was not terminated at a specific point in time. Instead, top management gradually paid less and less attention to EPQ as some of the ideas were implemented, some were discarded and some were made the object for subsequent projects. Quality of care provided is, for example, one issue that was a part of EPQ initially but never was emphasized during the implementation but later on was made a project of its own.

Discussion

The projects could be viewed as answers to the limitations of administrative systems when dealing with diffuse and new problems that were difficult to identify and where no clear-cut responsibility could be assigned. Thereby, the projects became development projects with a strategic importance for the founding organizations (Lundin and Söderholm, 1995:145ff). The projects were used as a general method to combat a complex web of problems within an area where established agencies and existing legislation were unsatisfactory and incomplete. The most fundamental organizing problem of projects in general and development projects in particular concerns how they are delimited and formed (Lundin, 1995, Kreiner, 1995). We will illustrate that translation and inscription, as a certain slice from an organizational reality, are examples of how delimitation and formation of projects take place. We focus on translation at the beginning of a development project and on inscription towards the end of a development project, not only because they are important to the formulation of the project goals, but also (and perhaps more importantly) because they are crucial links in a chain of sequential projects.

Translation in Development Projects

Development projects such as the environmental projects were organized from unclear starting conditions and perspectives. The project was translated into more known ideological and linguistic spheres and therefore attained a more structured form. Consequently, the perceived insecurity was reduced over the lifetime of a project. This quality of development projects identifies the first critical translation phase of a project which involves identifying and formulating the situation at hand. Step by step, the translation phase reduced the latitude for competing ideas regarding the use of resources, alternative subprojects, or the direction of the overall work.

Having this in mind, translation is about linking and coupling the project to relevant descriptions of problems and solutions in the region, organization, or society.

Although the existing environmental problems of that time, as inscribed by the industrial activities of the forest industry and the process industry in the Sundsvall region, Gavelin and his team members translated this situation, and the governmental directives, into a new definition of environmental problems. Not end-of-pipe and the production of goods and services, but the use of products was translated and framed as a serious new challenge. Additional translation activities links the project to promising descriptions of the future and positive results that can be expected once the project is completed. Development projects must show that they are coupled with and linked to general discourses in society and/or the organization. Development projects, though, are less concerned about verifying the ways in which the practical implementation problems are solved.

Tasks of development projects are often not clearly formulated; you do not know in advance how to work and there is little experience upon which you can rely. Thus, definitions used are formed through translation phases within the project. A routine operationalization of the task is not possible, and the work of the project organization as well as the definition of any task underlies processes of formulating and reformulating: of translating and retranslating. Given these conditions, development projects are often unique in character (Sahlin-Andersson, 1986:196-199, Sahlin-Andersson, 1989:29-33).

Once a project is up and running along a certain translation trajectory, alternative development paths are discarded. EPQ was made clearer as some key areas were focussed (e.g. pay-per-performance, annual planning, and DRG-registration) while other areas were dropped (e.g. quality or major organizational structure changes within hospitals). The project then entered a phase of chosen isolation to work along the translation trajectory. Here, the project team received necessary stability and direction, as attention was given to defined areas of importance and these areas were exploited. The general DRG system was translated into two major routines. At the same time, signals from outside of potential exploration could be avoided (March, 1991, March, 1994b). Avoiding involvement from the outside would be as if gatekeepers of the project declared that “work is going on”, that “a report will be coming up” or that “an

evaluation is planned” when the project is confronted with questions of what is really happening. Isolation and decoupling of activities give a safety zone in which the main actors of a project can work peacefully and in accordance with the translation phase, to which they have subscribed to.

On the one hand, changes in the environment can only with difficulty affect the project work (Kreiner, 1995). On the other hand, it is necessary to create a situation with clarity and reduced insecurity in which project members can work. Our discussion so far leads to the next critical aspect of organizing projects: the phase when projects must open up to the environment and pass on any stabilized and inscribed results of their work.

Inscription in Development Projects

The environmental projects were expected to result in a number of activities within other organizations or projects. The project resulted in certain knowledge areas and initiated actions that were passed on. Knowledge gained and actions initiated were thus supposed to be starting points for other projects. Some member of the project team in Sundsvall were on leave from their regular duties in the Sundsvall municipality. When they finalized the reports with many practical steps to the government, it was also addressed to the municipality. Inscribed into reports and plans, they became stable enough to travel into the board rooms of Sundsvall municipality and beyond that become translated into future plans of the environmental work of Sundsvall / Timrå. The environmental projects, as well as the EPQ project, relied on that knowledge and ideas were made available for subsequent projects and activities. This requirement for connection with future activities makes the stabilization of a project's work, the inscription phase of any project, to a critical aspect.

In principle, the inscription of the projects takes place because of many reasons. One reason is that drastic changes in the project context make it impossible to follow along a pre-chosen translation trajectory. In these cases, the project then has to be re-translated and re-defined in order to continue. Inscribing a project before its planned

termination can also indicate that the project opens up and allows for the negotiation of new ideas and new content. If the inscription takes place when a project ends, it can be part of an evaluation or be a starting point for new activities.

Having the environmental projects in mind, the inscription was planned from the beginning since the project goal was to make suggestions for actions that would make the environment considerable cleaner within the next 10 years. Within the project, as well as from outside, it was known that the project would end with suggestion for future activities, or a package of different activities in which their work could be inscribed into. In EPQ there was no distinct end point for the project. Top management said that the project was the focus for renewal activities for the coming years. Instead of having a certain time period when results were inscribed to new projects EPQ was characterized (after initial translation) by a continuous inscription of different issues.

Inscription phases are critical in so far that they make sure that general ideas are passed on in a materialized way and that the momentum of initiating and coordinating could be further worked upon according to written plans even if the projects themselves do not exist any longer. Consequently, inscription includes passing on of political and visionary ideas in plans, directives in reports, money set free by the project, and working paths for environmental and organizational improvement. Simultaneously, these inscriptions are taken on by new project teams and by other organizations, where the translation phase starts and new translation trajectories are negotiated.

Environmental problems are of such a character that it can hardly be said that a certain “environmental problem is solved” once actions have been implemented. Environmental projects can thus not be ended in traditional ways by noticing that “now the project time is over and the task is taken care of”. Instead, when inscribing the project for subsequent efforts, it means to reach alliances, e.g. governmental agencies or other organizations, to secure resources for future work. Inscribing means that projects of this kind are stabilized and not terminated in a distinct way. Rather the projects fade away as materialized pieces of their work leaves the present project to enter subsequent projects of other times and other spaces.

Also, inscribing is an attempt to codify and stabilize pre-translated paths of how new projects, new legislation, new cooperation forms or new tasks are established to secure the present project work. In the EPST some of the project team members represented some of the organizations (e.g. the local municipality) to which some of the suggestions were passed on. This meant that, in some cases, the same individuals were involved both in the EPST and in subsequent projects. Thus, inscription in the municipality was rather evident, since project members and their idea moved along also in a material sense. Thus, the municipality of Sundsvall decided to take over the plan of the project and make it the environmental plan for the municipality for the next 3-4 years. The project members could stabilize their own translation in such a way, that the inscription from the project to the municipality was an easy and smooth task avoiding time consuming translation phases in the municipality once EPST had ended.

Translation and Inscription as Crucial Links Between Projects

The arguments put forth above regarding translation and inscription can be illustrated graphically (See figure 1). From a project perspective, two central phases can be identified. One is the translation phase that occurs when the rather vague and abstract directives and ideas of a previous project are translated to activities that are more concrete. The other is the inscription phase that occurs when the effects or results of these activities are passed on from the present project into a materialized form to actors in subsequent projects.

Insert Figure 1 here.

The figure shows that translation at a certain point or stage of a project is replaced by inscription. Further, the figure shows that translation activities go on during the entire project time, although less frequently towards the end of the project. Inscription takes place throughout the project's duration but with less intensity and with less clarity in the

early phases. Also, what is being passed on and inscribed from one project is a possible ingredient for translation phases in subsequent projects or other organizations. Our point is that what is being inscribed is not an unambiguous plan for action but the base material which has to be interpreted, understood and translated to new conditions in subsequent projects and organization.

Conclusions

This paper has focused on organizational change and development projects regarding environmental and health care organization renewal projects. We have analyzed how such projects are organized and linked to context. Development problems and their solutions cannot be divided into a functional structure since they overlap and demand attention by a multitude of perspectives during translation. Projects are different compared to permanent organizations due to the existence of beginning and endings. On the one hand, permanent organizations are normally “going concern” where the start is back in history and the end is clouded in a distant future. On the other hand, in a project, translation and inscriptions phases are unavoidable as they are triggered by the specific conditions underlying beginnings and endings.

Furthermore, a project only attends to a certain amount of problems. Instead of dealing with “everything”, some areas are selected for attention and others are omitted. Projects thus provide means to initially drop some types of problems that are not a part of the overall project definition. That also is a part of the translation phase. Since a project is not an everlasting entity, it is also possible to direct attention to a certain time period while later time periods can be devoted to other problem areas. Each time a project runs through translation and inscription phases, the organizational change agenda can be altered.

Organizing in projects implies the possibility of merging different organizations, organizational units and actors. Of course, each actor participating will have his or her own motives, so any project will be inhabited with members having different aims. The

task here is to unify people around the resources and around some minimal consent, make people and things translators of the same lexicon, instead of attempting to unify the goals themselves. Thus, organizational change processes are most open for influences in the beginning, when it is negotiated what to translate into the projects, and towards the end, when inscriptions to pass on are settled.

In this paper we have argued that it is theoretically interesting to highlight the notion of viewing certain slices of the organizational reality in projects. We have chosen a project perspective and focus at the beginning and at the end of projects. In theoretical terms we have chosen to call these phases *translation* and *inscription*. In the beginning, members of the project have to translate some initial ideas, artifacts or directives from previous undertakings to a knowledgeable content. Ideas, directives, reports and the like can only spread if they are inscribed into many different shapes and become stable enough to travel and be passed on. The ideas are also translated globally in other, related projects, when the *inscriptions* of one project are entering the translation phase of subsequent undertakings. As crucial parts of projects, translating and inscribing are neglected phases in theory and we argue that to study development projects, researchers ought to focus on the linkages between projects by examining translation and inscription phases.

References

- ABRAHAMSON, E. (1996) Technical and aesthetic fashion. IN CZARNIAWSKA, B. & SEVÓN, G. (Eds.) *Translating organizational change*. Berlin, de Gruyter.
- AHRNE, G. (Ed.) (1998) *Stater som organisationer*, Stockholm, Nerenius & Santérus.
- CALLON, M. (1986) Some elements of a sociology of translation. Domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay. IN LAW, J. (Ed.) *Power, action and belief*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- CALLON, M. & LATOUR, B. (1981) Unscrewing the big Leviathan. How actors macro-structure reality and how sociologists help them to do so. IN KNORR-CETINA, K. & CICOUREL, A. V. (Eds.) *Advances in social theory and methodology*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- CLEGG, S. R. & HARDY, C. (1996) Organizations, organization and organizing. IN CLEGG, S. R., HARDY, C. & NORD, W. R. (Eds.) *Handbook of organization studies*. London, Sage.
- CZARNIAWSKA, B. (1998) *A narrative approach to organization studies*, Thousands Oaks, Sage.
- CZARNIAWSKA, B. (1999) *Writing management. Organization theory as a literary genre*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- CZARNIAWSKA, B. & JOERGES, B. (1996) Travels of ideas. IN CZARNIAWSKA, B. & SEVÓN, G. (Eds.) *Translating organizational change*. Berlin, de Gruyter.

- CZARNIAWSKA, B. & SEVÓN, G. (Eds.) (1996) *Translating organizational change*, Berlin, de Gruyter.
- EISENHARDT, K. M. (1989) Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14, 532-550.
- EKSTEDT, E., LUNDIN, R. A., SÖDERHOLM, A. & WIRDENIUS, A. (1999) *Neo-industrial organising*, London, Routledge.
- ENGWALL, M. (1995) *Jakten på det effektiva projektet*, Stockholm, Nerenius & Santérus.
- HOLMSTRÖM, J. & ROBEY, D. (2005) Inscribing organizational change with information technology. IN CZARNIAWSKA, B. & HERNES, T. (Eds.) *Actor-network theory and organizing*. Malmö, Liber & Copenhagen Business School Press.
- JOERGES, B. & CZARNIAWSKA, B. (1998) The question of technology, or How organizations inscribe the world. *Organization Studies*, 19, 363-385.
- KREINER, K. (1995) In search of relevance: project management in drifting environments. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 11, 335-346.
- LATOUR, B. (1990) Drawing things together. IN LYNCH, M. & WOLGAR, S. (Eds.) *Representation in scientific practice*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.
- LATOUR, B. (1996) *Aramis or the love of technology*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- LATOUR, B. (1998) *Artefaktens återkomst. Ett möte mellan organisationsteori och tingens sociologi*, Stockholm, Nerenius & Santérus.
- LUNDIN, R. A. (1995) Editorial. Temporary organizations and project management. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 11, 315-318.
- LUNDIN, R. A. & SÖDERHOLM, A. (1995) A theory of the temporary organization. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 11, 437-455.
- MARCH, J. G. (1991) Exploration and exploitation in organizational learning. *Organization Science*, 2, 71-87.
- MARCH, J. G. (1994a) *A primer on decision making. How decisions happen*, New York, The Free Press.
- MARCH, J. G. (1994b) Three lectures on efficiency and adaptiveness in organizations. Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration, Helsinki.
- MARCH, J. G. (1999) *The pursuit of organizational intelligence*, Malden, MA, Blackwell.
- MEYER, J. W. (1994) Rationalized environments. IN SCOTT, W. R. & MEYER, J. W. (Eds.) *Institutional environments and organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.
- RØVIK, K.-A. (1996) Deinstitutionalization and the logic of fashion. IN CZARNIAWSKA, B. & SEVÓN, G. (Eds.) *Translating organizational change*. Berlin, de Gruyter.
- SAHLIN-ANDERSSON, K. (1986) *Beslutsprocessens komplexitet. Att genomföra och hindra stora projekt*, Lund, Doxa Ekonomi.
- SAHLIN-ANDERSSON, K. (1989) *Oklarhetens strategi. Organisering av projektsamarbete*, Lund, Studentlitteratur.
- SOU1990/91:90 (1991) En god livsmiljö. Miljödepartementet.
- SÖDERHOLM, A. & STEINTHORSSON, R. S. (2002) Strategic management as multi-contextual sensemaking in intermediate organizations. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 18, 233-248.

Fig. 1 The dominant type of activity at different times during a project life time.

!!! Please note! The two arrows at the top in the below figure can be omitted, but I cannot do it in the powerpoint of Microsoft office. !!!