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Projects and Institutions: Towards Understanding their Mutual Constitution and Dynamics

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Abstract

Institutions are long-term and stabilizing mechanisms of social interaction that provide much of the groundwork for projects as temporary systems. Due to amassed change ambitions in contemporary projects, not least reflected in their increasing complexity, such systems to a greater extent revolve around processes of institutional change. This development sparks scholarly inquiries emphasizing the need for better understanding the linkages between projects and institutions, and how projects cope with and trigger institutional change. This introductory paper seeks to provide a background and backdrop to the study of the interlinkages between projects and institutions – to demonstrate how they are mutually constituting each other. However, this paper also points to various problems associated with them and the process in practice, and what problems require particular scholarly attention. Further, we discuss how the papers of this special issue inform a revised research agenda for the study of projects and institutions, and how they help us better understand some of the identified challenges.

1. Introduction

Projects – like other forms of temporary organizations – are characterized by intentionally finite time frames that enable firms and other individuals or collectives to organize in a flexible and ad-hoc manner (Sydow et al., 2004; Jones and Lichtenstein, 2008; Kenis et al., 2009). The scholarly interest in project studies is clearly on the rise (Geraldi and Söderlund, 2018), especially among strategy and organizational theorists (Bakker, 2010; Söderlund, 2011), which is perhaps most evident in journal publications and academic events, such as the annual colloquia of the European Group of Organization Studies (EGOS). Indeed, within the EGOS community, projects have received considerable interest as indicated by the number of citations to many of the papers on projects published in *Organization Studies* over the last ten years or so (see for instance Sydow et al., 2004; Grabher, 2004; and recently Bakker et al., 2016). The interest within the EGOS community is also reflected in the number of submissions to the EGOS sub-themes on projects and project-based organizing, which have been one of the most popular subthemes (see for instance Söderlund et al., 2014; Bakker et al., 2016), including the 2017 sub-theme from which this special issue originates. In that respect, management and organization studies has evidently shown much more interest in projects as organizational forms recently, and likewise, projects have been to a greater extent viewed as a particular kind of organizational form requiring explicit framing within the confines of management and organization studies. These are unquestionably steps in the right direction.

Moreover, the empirical focus in project studies has evidently also evolved from studying traditional project settings, such as construction (Eccles, 1981) and movie production (Faulkner and Anderson, 1987), to investigating a much wider variety of temporary organizational processes in as well as among firms and many other kinds of organizations (March, 1995; Whitley, 2006; Lundin et al., 2015). Thus, gradually scholarly interest has come to mirror the practical awareness of projects as vehicles for innovation, change and development in and across sectors; many sectors increasingly rely on projects for their ongoing operations and deliveries, but projects also play a critical role for orchestrating innovation and change-oriented activities (Boltanski and Chiappello, 2006; Jensen et al., 2016). In addition, recent scholarly activity has also paid much attention to the changing nature of projects as such, specifically the increasing complexity of contemporary projects, including so-called ‘megaprojects’ (Flyvbjerg, 2017; Shenhar and Holzmann, 2017), which in itself constitutes a specific research area within the broader field of project studies, and which by some has been referred to as a specific kind of “industry” in its own right (Orr et al., 2011).

However, despite this broadening research interest and the growing societal importance and complexity of projects, our advancements toward understanding the embeddedness of projects

into organizational, inter-organizational or even wider institutional contexts is still quite limited. Projects are all too often viewed as separated islands with little interaction with their environment, and if context is addressed, then projects are oftentimes treated as “black boxes” with little concerns for the interior processes and how they interact with the wider institutional issues.

This continues, without a doubt, to be a major weakness of current theorizing and constitutes an issue which also makes the scholarly literature somewhat disconnected from the actual practice of project managing (Cicmil et al., 2006). Most project managers would testify to the importance of understanding the context of the project to effectively ensure the progress of the project, as well as the interior processes and unfoldings. Scholarly work particularly fails to consider the role of the institutional environment for understanding the actuality and dynamics of contemporary projects. When “opening the black box”, a project usually appears as a fleeting constellation of multiple, interrelated subprojects and multiple stakeholders collaborating and conflicting in constantly shifting alliances (Van Marrewijk et al., 2008). In the context of large-scale global construction projects, for instance, Orr and Scott (2008) suggest that project actors resolve differences through phases of ignorance, sensemaking and responses. Others have pointed out the importance of establishing an “alliance culture” to ensure that actors with very different backgrounds and perhaps institutional affiliations come to share the same view of what should be done and how these things should be done, and various activities centering on getting a better understanding of each other (Clegg et al., 2002). Other studies have demonstrated the value of intermediaries and third-party actors, such as consultants and freelancers, to ensure that institutional differences are overcome (Mahalingham et al., 2011).

Continuing along these lines, the aim of this introductory paper and the special issue as a whole is to provide a better understanding of the mutual constitution and dynamics of projects and institutions, to demonstrate how institutional analysis may contribute to our understanding of projects and their environment, and the role that projects play in shaping the institutional environment. More so, we are also interested in establishing a better understanding of what goes on in projects. Among other things, we are interested in the institutional pressures that are put on projects, the requirements that are enforced upon them, and the responses projects develop to cope with these requirements. Of importance to developing such understandings is a more nuanced examination of the relationship between institutions and projects, of their mutual constitution and ongoing dynamics. In that respect, we hope that this paper and the other papers in the special issue will offer reflective ideas on what research should focus on and how to do research in the borderland between projects and institutions.

Figure 1 highlights two central institutional processes depicting the relationship between institutions and projects. On the one hand, there is how institutions shape and influence the institutional embeddedness and social texture of the project (as indicated by the upper arrow in Fig. 1). Indeed, projects are usually organized and run by formal organizations. No matter whether these are project-supporting or project-based (Hobday, 2000; Lundin et al., 2015), the project is not only embedded in the respective permanent organizations and/or inter-organizational networks but also in wider institutional fields. In some cases, such fields are highly dependent on projects, making it increasingly relevant to portray these contexts as “project ecologies” (Grabher, 2004). But which institutions in such fields or ecologies do influence the shaping and life of projects – and how? What role does the permanent organization or the inter-organizational network play in which a focal project is embedded? Does this particular context reinforce or mitigate the institutional impact on the project?

On the other hand, projects may impact the institutions (see bottom arrow in Fig. 1). An example is the “institutional project” (Holm, 1995) which is set up to address either the stabilization or change of the institutional environment. Such projects can be considered as vehicles for institutional entrepreneurship or arenas for institutional work (DiMaggio, 1988; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Another example is the “inter-institutional project” (Dille and Söderlund, 2011) fighting institutional forces from multiple fields and developing response strategies (Kraatz and Block, 2008) to cope with various conflicting institutional pressures and complexities (Greenwood et al., 2011). How exactly are various kinds of projects used in these processes of institutionalization, de-institutionalization or re-institutionalization – and what determines their success? What is the role of the (project-supporting or project-based) organization or the inter-organizational (project) network in creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions as an outcome of institutional work practices? The figure captures several of the important issues that are addressed in recent theorizing on institutions in a project context (see for instance Biesenthal et al., 2017; Scott, 2012); it also illustrates some of the important issues emerging when looking at projects from an institutional perspective.

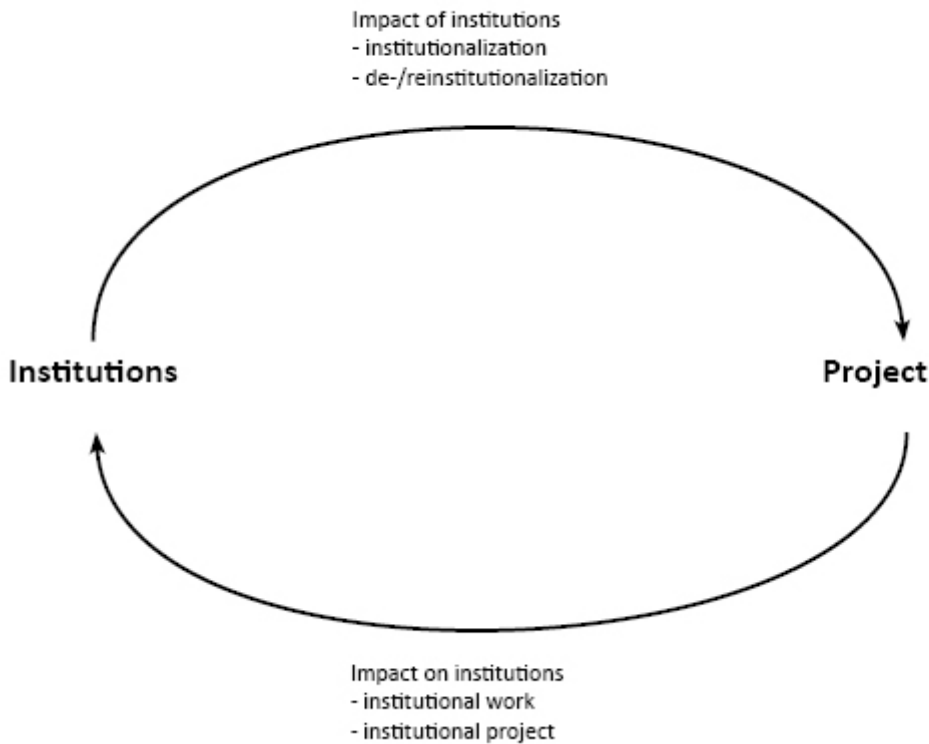


Fig. 1. Institutions impacting projects impacting institutions

2. Institutions, institutional change and institutional projects

Institutional theory is clearly one of the most successful scholarly developments within management and organization studies in the last three decades (cf. Greenwood et al., 2017; Scott, 2008; Alvesson and Spicer, 2019). Historically, institutional analysis has addressed the mechanisms and processes by which social systems and structures, norms and behavioral patterns are established, how they are maintained and how they change over time. In that respect, as Scott puts it, it addresses the “fundamental issues of social order and social change when and the construction of shared meaning systems” (Scott, 2012: 29).

Following Scott (2008), institutional analysis tends to focus on three central pillars: the regulative, the normative and the cultural-cognitive. These pillars are analytically distinct and operate in different ways relying on a variety of mechanisms. When they are “misaligned” (Scott, 2012: 30), they offer opportunities for social change. As highlighted by Scott (1995), institutional theory is especially concerned with questions relating to what specific types of institutions are associated

with the rise of organizations and how one should regard behavior in organizational settings. More specifically, research has addressed the role of laws, how rules and other types of regulative and normative systems arise and what implications they have on organizational behavior, and how cultural beliefs and shared values shape the nature and dynamics of organizations. One might thus argue that a central and general concern in institutional analysis is that of how, and indeed why, organizations respond to institutional pressures (Kraatz and Block, 2008). More recent work has emphasized that organizations are far from passive recipients of such pressures but are also influencing them (e.g. Garud et al., 2007; Lawrence et al., 2011). Sometimes the entire purpose of an organization might be oriented towards achieving change in institutional pressures and alterations of the 'rules of the game' within an industry, sector or even across sectors (North, 1990).

Indeed, classic works on institutions analyzing the establishment of institutions have considered their importance for societies to develop and prosper (Selznick, 1957). Institutions have been pointed out to have a paramount role also in establishing the right kind of projects and collaborative efforts (Merrow, 2011; Miller and Lessard, 2000), ensuring the property rights are distributed adequately and that investments in infrastructure have been made possible (Scott, 2008). This has also been a critical explanation for the difference among countries as regards to why certain nations develop positively and why other countries stagnate (North, 1990). In that respect, there is a close bond between projects and institutions – that they mutually rely on each other, and it is equally true that societies without the ability to generate the value-creating projects and societies that lack the ability to govern and manage large-scale projects will find it difficult to maintain infrastructures that are critical for long-term and sustainable economic development (Flyvbjerg, 2017). However, that being said, there is also somewhat of a paradox associated with the relationship between projects and institutions – institutions are to a great extent associated with the permanence of social interaction, with stabilization of social exchanges and with ongoing patterns of behavior – in norms, regulations and values – whereas projects are principally about change, of bringing novelty to society, of exploring and exploiting innovation, and establishing new infrastructure and ways of interacting (see, for instance, Lenfle and Loch, 2010). In that respect, there is an inherent tension involved between projects and institutions (Grabher, 2002).

Institutions will influence what projects will come about and how these projects are to be governed and managed (Miterev et al., 2017; Brunet, 2019). This is a fundamental question for societal and economic development, and obviously a central concern for project studies (Geraldini and Söderlund, 2018). In that respect, we follow others before us in arguing that the linkages between projects and institutions is perhaps one of the most important ones in project studies (cf. Engwall, 2003; Grabher, 2002; Lundin and Söderholm, 1995; Sahlin-Andersson and

Söderholm, 2002; Scott, 2011), yet, also a concern that might be of interest to theorists outside the narrow confines of this field. As several recent studies have indicated, also the broader theoretical literature may have something to learn from better understanding projects (Tukiainen and Granqvist, 2016) – of sorting out how projects imply particular kinds of activities involving greater focus on temporality and various kinds of temporal institutional work (Granqvist and Gustafsson, 2016), and of understanding how projects operate to “adjusting the clocks” among organizational and institutional boundaries (Dille et al., 2018; Stjerne et al., 2019).

Patterns of stability and established rules of the game are typically observed in various organizational and institutional fields and sectors where actors repeatedly interact and respond to a mutual set of regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive orders (Scott and Meyer, 1991). These fields may differ in kind with regards to the conflict among institutional logics and prescribed behaviors, although generally actors within the same field tend to share a set of beliefs regarding social order and conduct, for instance as in the healthcare sector, in the university sector, or in particular industries (Zietsma et al., 2017). A central issue in this strand of research is also how institutions are established within specific sectors, thus paying attention to the very process of institutionalization, defined by Fligstein (2001: 108) as the “process by which rules move from abstractions to being constitutive of repeated patterns of interaction in fields.” Of particular interest for project studies is to explore how project-intensive sectors or project ecologies differ from other kinds of fields and whether there are significant challenges and dynamics involved. More so, as Scott (2012) observed, there is the emergence of certain fields that are fundamentally project-based, such as the Olympic Games (Grabher and Thiel, 2014), the global construction industry (Scott et al., 2011), and the megaproject sectors (Flyvbjerg, 2018; Söderlund et al., 2017), which all are constituting quite unique fields in their own right with a set of defined actors that share strong common beliefs of what and how things should be done. It might be interesting to explore how these “project-based fields” differ from other kinds of fields, what mechanisms of institutionalization seem particularly important, and the role of different kinds of projects in the shaping of these stabilizing action patterns.

The awareness of the existence of organizational or institutional fields has also paved the way for much interest in projects located in two kinds of surroundings: one as principally located *within* a particular field – where pressures are put on projects to behave according to the rules and norms in that particular field (Engwall, 2003). Such interests also demonstrate the need to understand what projects have to do to defend their rights to exist, and how they may implement particular courses of action. This naturally also resonates well with the idea that projects may serve the purpose of changing institutions and institutional fields – and of providing the groundworks for particular institutional fields; however, their chances might indeed be limited. Related to this interest in within-field occurrences are also issues pertaining to activities that *cross* institutional

field boundaries – and that projects offer a rather unique organizational mechanism to arrange for such exchanges and collaborations (Sydow et al., 2004). This latter type of project, the so-called “inter-institutional project” (Dille and Söderlund, 2011), seems especially relevant in times of increasing scope of projects; projects cut boundaries of various sorts of fields (e.g. public-private partnerships), and projects are today assuming greater responsibilities to ensure that multiple societal interests are acknowledged (e.g. regarding infrastructure projects). Society expects that resource utilization is done in such a manner that scarce resources are used efficiently across domains, and that knowledge is integrated across sectors to allow for both the development of specialized knowledge and the integration of that knowledge across application domains (Berggren et al., 2011).

From a project, or “temporary organizing” (Bakker et al., 2016), perspective, one of the most important roles that institutions have is to set the stage for projects or any other type of temporary system – to reduce the uncertainty for the actors involved, to provide a stabilizing structure (Bechky, 2006) for the interplay between individuals and organizations involved in transactions that may be difficult to *a priori* plan and decompose requiring cooperation and coordination among actors with diverse goals and incentive structures. Indeed, as is well-known among project scholars, a fundamental problem in project transactions is the lack of relationship continuity (Ligthart et al., 2016) – that many project partners have a limited history of working together and limited prospects of working together again in the future (Meyerson et al., 1996; Jones and Lichtenstein, 2008). In such cases, institutions play perhaps an even more important role for providing the context needed to ensure that project actors are cooperatively oriented (Swärd, 2016), to curb opportunistic behavior, and to make sure that there are rules of the game in place for getting the project off ground and completed (Whitley, 2006). Institutions are thus essential to maintain high standards and, ensuring what Sugden (1986) referred to as a kind of “cooperative morale” among actors involved in complex collaborative projects. A key question here is that of “organizational justice” (Untenhitzenberger and Bryde, 2018) in project-based sectors – and how and why these behaviors may differ among and within project-based sectors. Will sectors where project-based production have a central role display different kinds of cooperative morale than other industries, and will project-based industries of different sorts bolster different kinds of cooperative morale and logics of fairness. If so, why?

Scott (1995: 5) emphasizes that “the battle between the particular and the general, between the temporal and the timeless, is one that contemporary institutional theories continue to confront.” And, we believe, this is a battle that project studies may help institutional theorists fight. As Scott (2012: 34) put it: “We are only in the early stages of needed research efforts to better understand how companies negotiate these conflicting demands—identifying company attributes, strategies and tactics that are more and less effective in bringing a project to a successful conclusion.”

3. Institutional challenges facing contemporary projects

The field of project studies has developed significantly the past few decades. It has developed both to capture multiple levels of analysis (see, for instance, Geraldi and Söderlund, 2018; Sydow et al., 2004), and in terms of theoretical ambitions and critical perspectives (Cicmil et al., 2006; Hodgson and Cicmil, 2006; Floricel et al., 2014). More interest has been paid to understanding projects as a specific organizational form (Manning, 2018) in combination with a more sophisticated discussion about the various ways temporary organizations should be theorized (Bakker et al., 2016) as well as highlighting the significance of “meta-theories” to encourage cross-fertilization with other fields of research (Davies et al., 2018). Our awareness of the uniqueness of projects as organizational forms has increased along with the diffusion of projects as a mechanism to facilitate cross-sector collaboration, innovation and change. Moreover, ambitions for theoretical advancements have also risen to a level where scholars turn to projects as temporary contexts to try out existing theories and to explore novel theories. Institutional theory is clearly one example of how such efforts have occurred and an example of a meta-theory from which scholars might benefit to generate ideas for cross-fertilization (Davies et al., 2018).

It should be pointed out that the interest in projects and their surroundings is not all new, although it has historically, given the long-time preoccupation of project management literature with the proclamation of tools and techniques (Morris, 1994; Söderlund, 2004), not had a dominant role (see for instance Kreiner, 1995). This development has been referred to as the “third wave of project management research” (Morris et al., 2011), which basically centers on the ways that projects are produced and reproduced and on which they (re-)produce its contexts (Geraldi and Morris, 2011). In this respect, Windeler and Sydow (2001) showed how changes at the organizational field level of television production influenced social practices of coordinating projects and project networks in this particular industry, how taken-for-granted assumptions and norms at the institutional level were brought into the project – and, perhaps more interestingly for project scholars, how these project organizing practices, in turn, shaped and changed the field. Van Marrewijk et al. (2016) added to this observation that conflicts are an integral part of many project contexts, and that harmonizing activities seem to co-exist with contestation. The project must balance these contrasting forces which are critical to bring the project to fruition, and which, in turn, may influence the legacy of the project (van Marrewijk, 2017). This highlights the need to understand the nested nature of projects and institutions – that some changes at the field level might indeed be problematic for the development at the project level, and likewise, that occurrences at the project level may destabilize institutional frameworks.

Besides not only offering a better view of the actuality of projects and the fundamental challenges of project management practice, this development also opens up for a host of connections to other streams of literature and cross-fertilization. Indeed, it is clearly a development of project studies when they are rooted in sociology and organization theory (Geraldi and Söderlund, 2018). Capturing this elegantly, Engwall (2003), as mentioned earlier, reminds us that “no project is an island” and that more interests need to be directed towards a number of institutional factors, such as how projects are affected by various processes of pre-project politics, expectations about the future, and nested processes of parallel developments and events.

This special issue is a continuation along these lines. In particular, the message here is that projects are to some extent a victim of its context, defined by its contexts and project managing needs to rest upon a thorough understanding of how the project, its content, its processes and emergence hinge upon contextual and institutional factors (see again Fig. 1). Equally important though, and perhaps this is where project studies can bring some novelty to the table of management and organization theories, is that projects may also work entrepreneurially and creatively to define or co-define its context, to maneuver among contexts, and seek and explore alternative contexts. In that respect, projects are not just passive receivers of institutional pressures; they are also “institutional projects” (Holm, 1995) that through the right practices and procedures may (re-)shape institutions and institutional pressures (Dille and Söderlund, 2011; Granqvist and Gustafsson, 2016). In many ways, these are some of the most important reasons why projects are initiated in the first place, and these are indeed one of the most important reasons why projects fail. Changing institutional requirements and maneuvering in complex institutional landscapes are indeed far from easy.

In particular, such maneuvering requires an understanding of not only the regulative, normative and cognitive dimensions of institutions (Scott, 1987) – the rules and conceptions of the game – but also the allocative and authoritative resources individual and collective agents can draw on in their institutional work (Giddens, 1984; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). In addition, we need to understand how institutions change and evolve along these lines – that the regulatory conditions might influence the cognitive ones, the resource-enabled power the regulations, and so forth. In that respect, it involves issues more than merely understanding the regulatory frameworks and power-enabling resources critical for the projects. Rather, it seems essential to understand how these dimensions relate to each other and how changes of one might influence the alterations of the other ones. More so, it is equally central to the evolution and ultimate completion of the project – how the project interacts with these institutional dimensions, how the project seeks to influence its institutional conditions and pressures, and how that in turn might influence the requirements and expectations put on the focal project.

An interesting thought is that projects might differ considerably from other kinds of organizations with regards to their institutional framing. Not only are they to a greater extent initiated to challenge the institutional rules of the game or to decouple from institutional complexity (cf. McPherson and Sauder, 2013) – that is incompatible prescriptions from multiple institutional logics (Greenwood et al., 2012), they are also implemented as under-the-radar mechanisms to escape some of the institutional pressures that would be put on other organizational arrangements – their temporariness offers a less of a threat than comparable permanent solutions. However, as projects become larger, their institutional challenges become more severe. In that respect, one might posit that projects differ quite considerably from other organizational types, including the corporation which might exercise greater power as its size increases. Projects may not. Projects may in fact run a greater risk of failure if they grow in size as this increases their risk of being looked upon as either being unable to handle the institutional complexities or even as institutional threats that need to be put down.

In sum, there are many reasons why institutional framings might be particularly relevant for the study of projects. First, because as indicated above, more projects struggle with challenges associated with the dual challenge to balance organizational autonomy and institutional pressures; that many projects fail because of failures to respond to the institutional requirements put on them. Second, projects have increasing institutional-spanning ambitions – megaprojects (Flyvbjerg, 2017), large-scale engineering projects (Miller and Lessard, 2000), and so on, are all examples of projects that explicitly as part of their *raison d'être* (Söderlund, 2004) has the fulfillment of broader change, institutional change being an increasingly important factor involved. Third, our understanding of projects needs to be firmly rooted in social realities facing any large-scale project, and projects studies as an increasingly important domain within management and organization research needs to build, relate and interact with broader theoretical fields – especially to move beyond the technocratic toolbox tradition that dominated the field for so long. Fourth, because the study of projects should aim at contributing also to the literature outside the conventional confines of 'project management' and to contribute to the literature on institutional theory more generally. In that respect, the context of projects (Bakker et al., 2016) might prove to be an important one also for the advancement of institutional theory – in linking the practice of managing with the change and dynamics of its context (Biesenthal et al., 2017).

4. Emerging institutional issues in project studies

Our brief overview demonstrates both the promises and challenges of institutional analysis and project studies. It clarifies the fundamental linkages between projects and institutions – how

institutions shape the conditions for projects, and how projects may influence institutions and institutionalization processes. A few issues seem particularly important for contemporary research in this borderland of inquiries.

First, it seems essential to highlight projects in highly institutionalized environments, how they cope with institutionalized pressures and how they dynamically unfold due to institutionalized pressures, and accordingly, how their responses may influence the institutionalized pressures put on these projects. It seems equally important to address how different kinds of institutionalized environments may produce different trajectories with regard to these processes.

Second, it seems central to capture and analyze projects as institutional entrepreneurs, as mechanisms and ventures for institutional entrepreneurship or work, what different kinds of entrepreneurship or work that projects may enact, and how they may contribute to lasting institutional change. On that same matter, one would also need to uncover the various institutional conflicts involved in such work (Orr et al., 2011) and how those conflicts differ dependent on institutional context and project type.

Third, research has increasingly come to highlight projects as sites for inter-institutional collaboration – the bridging of resources and organizations representing different institutional fields and sectors – which in turn may create a series of institutional conflicts and high degrees of institutional complexity (Greenwood et al., 2011). This was clearly documented in the substantial research on global projects by Scott and colleagues (Scott et al., 2011). However, how projects respond to the different pressures from different institutional fields, how those requirements change over time, are still questions that extant research has only studied to a limited degree (see for instance Dille et al., 2018).

Fourth, it is critical to highlight new kinds of project collaborative practices and new forms of project contexts. In that respect, it seems particularly important to analyze how new collaborative practices, such as project alliances or networks become established. How do project networks then influence and shape such processes of institutionalization? It also seems important to grapple how entire domains of project collaborations emerge. For instance, how do project ecologies become institutionalized? What particular institutions seem central in such processes? How will the rising platform economy affect collaborative project practices? Will they become even more competitive?

5. Advancing institutional theorizing of projects

The papers that are part of the present special issue are all set out to advance the study of projects by paying more attention to institutional factors and relying on institutional theory. The papers share this overall concern, but they also differ on several important counts. In many ways, they contribute and add nuance to the four issues highlighted above. We summarize the main points in the papers in the following paragraphs.

The construction industry represents an interesting example of a relatively conservative and strongly project-based industry. An overall issue concerns the difficulty of change in project-based industries and whether those difficulties have anything to do with the fact that we are dealing with a strongly project-based industry? Lieftink, Smits and Lauche (2019) emphasize the importance of addressing what the authors refer to as relational institutional work – the institutional work that is concerned with the interaction among the partners within a particular industrial field. They focus on the implementation of a new delivery model. They also point out the fact that these delivery models are highly inter-organizational and change of delivery models is only made possible if the interactions and collaboration among the key stakeholders are done in novel ways. To understand this particular issue, the authors point out that there is a need to broaden the emerging literature on projects and institutions by investigating the mobilization of stakeholders and they explore how new practices are developed and institutionalized. Therefore, this paper examines how actors rely on relational institutional work in inter-organizational projects to mobilize key stakeholders from two loosely coupled subfields with the aim to institutionalize a new project delivery model with new underlying practices. The paper identifies three types of relational institutional work based on a study of the Dutch construction industry: awareness creation, selective networking, and coalition building. The authors find that institutional work is relatively effective in the co-supplier subfield but less effective in the architectural subfield. Explaining these differences, the authors point out the importance of three central dimensions: (1) the nature of activities, (2) the social positions, and (3) the coopetition. The paper adds nuance to the role that the nature of activities play in changing the collaborative mode among key players in a project-based industry. In sum, this paper not only offers interesting views on issues relevant to the field of project studies, it clearly also has some important points in relation to institutional theory – in the elaboration of the notion of the institutional project and the unfolding of institutional entrepreneurship in project-based industries. The notion of relational institutional work might also be an interesting addition to institutional theory, which seems particularly relevant in this kind of industries where inter-organizational collaboration is central for business and delivery models.

Brunet (2019) zooms in on the idea of governance-as-practice. She starts off in the literature on processual and, in particular, practice-based studies epitomized by two complementary streams of literature: the strategy-as-practice literature on the one hand, and the project-as-practice literature on the other hand. The author points out that although much research has addressed many aspects of project governance, surprisingly little attention has been paid to what is actually done by different actors and how these different actors at various levels interact to shape and reshape project governance. She emphasizes the importance of the three different levels involved: the project, the organizational and the institutional levels, along with the dynamics of project governance. For these reasons, she introduces the idea of project governing and, based on four in-depth case studies of four major public projects in Canada, the paper shows how the performative practices in the projects were enacted against the ostensive practices, uncovering a process of multi-level project governing. The paper clearly addresses the embeddedness of the studied projects and connects the projects to their wider organizational and institutional contexts, as well as the interfaces between the projects and the involved organizations, as well as between projects and institutions. Brunet's paper is a call to consider not only the multiple levels, and in that respect stress the value of a combined macro analysis and micro analysis of project governing, but also to highlight the tensions involved across the different levels involved.

As highlighted by Matinheikki, Aaltonen and Walker (2019), public infrastructure projects must comply with divergent and sometimes highly conflicting demands of institutional requirements causing high degrees of institutional complexity. The notion of institutional complexity might be particularly interesting and relevant to the context of project-based industries and public projects as these tend to span institutional divides activating a number of institutional logics that may be conflicting. Based on an in-depth single case study of a large-scale infrastructure project, the paper offers empirical insights into the challenges associated with organizing projects in such instances and identifies responses to the management of institutional complexity in such projects. The paper demonstrates how public buyers of an infrastructure project established a hybrid organization of a multi-party project alliance to respond to institutional complexity. The authors delineate a process of what they refer to as "temporary hybridization" to grasp how the various competing logics of the bureaucratic state, the corporate market, and the multiple professions were combined within the focal temporary project alliance. The paper points out that such processes of hybridization not only focus on selective coupling with external demands but also on mitigating internal tensions. The paper develops a process model showing that institutional complexity can be responded to by adopting a hybrid form of organizing in a temporary organization. Theoretically, the paper not only contributes to our understanding of inter-organizational projects in the public realm and how such projects respond to institutional complexity, which in itself is an important managerial insight; it also adds to the broader management and organization literature with the notion of temporary hybridization adding

insights related to the dynamics of institutional complexity and how it is dealt with at the more operational levels of the temporary organization.

Tonga Uriarte, DeFillippi, Riccaboni and Catoni (2019) investigate the relations between festivals and their institutional settings, which is again an in-depth case study of a temporary organization. The authors analyze institutional logics and work practices in a complex, and particularly interesting case: the Lucca Comics & Games festival, which is the largest festival dedicated to fantasy culture in Italy and among the largest ones in the entire world. The findings reveal the recursive interplay between institutional logics and work practices for institutional maintenance. The authors emphasize that the study of festivals seems particularly important and relevant to address some of the key aspects of contemporary project-based organizing. The authors specifically highlight that the maintaining of institutions must be distinguished from stability or the absence of change. Their highly historical and contextual analysis shows that multiple tensions that occur due to competing institutional logics can open up new ways of thinking about projects and institutions. The authors demonstrate that future research should use institutional work practices for understanding maintenance in recurring temporary organizations. This study is particularly interesting because of its focus on the relationship between the temporary and the permanent – that the project as such is recurring, causing specific problems both with regard to renewal, as well as stability. Adding to the broader field of institutional theory, the authors point out that institutional logics evolve and sediment over time and maintaining institutions involves nested processes of change in the organization and/or its environment. In that respect, to maintain institutions organizations and project actors must cope with the entrance of new actors into the organization or the field and the evolution of the field in both new and expected directions.

With the intriguing headline “Teargas, taboo and transformation: A neo-institutional study of community resistance and the struggle to legitimize subway projects in Amsterdam 1960-2018”, van den Ende and van Marrewijk (2009) add a historical perspective to our understanding of institutional work. Based on an in-depth case study of two subway projects in Amsterdam: the East line (1960-1960) and the North-South Line (1995-2018), the authors investigate the underlying reasons and coping strategies of community resistance. As shown in their paper, both projects, despite their importance to urban development, encountered severe community resistance from actors who wanted to protect the historic city and its monumental buildings. This resistance called for elaborate institutional work by the involved project actors to be able to socially reconstruct the projects to ensure legitimacy among key stakeholders. In particular, the resistance prompted various responses, practices and strategies of institutional work among the project actors in their ongoing attempt to gain legitimacy of their projects among key stakeholders, and ensure this over time. The paper offers two key contributions, which are

relevant to both the field of project studies and to institutional theory more broadly. First, it demonstrates the dynamic interplay between projects and their environment, processes of institutional transformation, and practices of institutional work, and how these various elements interact over time to shape preconditions for institutional legitimacy. Second, the paper documents longitudinally the contextual dialectic of resistance projects and their environment, processes of institutional transformation and accommodation with a focus on shifting approaches of institutionalization, the constant struggle to acquire legitimacy and the local embeddedness of projects.

Stjerne, Söderlund and Minbaeva (2019) introduce the notion of temporal boundary-spanning and center on the role of project managing in resolving key temporal tensions among the core project partners participating in inter-organizational projects. The authors emphasize the importance of introducing a temporal lens to the study of inter-organizational projects with partners grounded in diverse institutional settings. The study is based on data from 93 inter-organizational projects undertaken within a major change program – targeting the improvement of collaboration among the firms involved. The paper inductively derives a practice-based theory that identifies three key temporal tensions that call for managerial attention and solution to ensure project progression. Highlighting how these solutions were solved, the authors underline the importance of three main practices: framing, synchronizing and hyping. In particular, the paper taps into ongoing debates about institutional requirements and taken-for-granted beliefs about when and how fast things should be done – how various institutionally defined practices relate to time and timing and what problems that create when organizations collaborate in projects set to redefine such contrasting beliefs. A key issue in project-based industries concerns the change of collaborative modes and business models. This is particularly interesting as institutional norms have made change particularly difficult in those settings.

6. Conclusions

This introductory paper gave an overview of some of the foundational issues, challenges, and opportunities for research in the borderland between projects and institutions. At this stage, it is clear that project studies could benefit immensely from making better use of past and present theorizations within institutional theory. Each singular paper accepted for publication in this special issue thus contributes to a better understanding of the recursive interplay between projects and institutions and, thereby adds not only to the literature on project studies and the management of projects, but also to management and organization theory more broadly, in particular neo-institutional theory that alone or together with practice-based approaches are becoming increasingly popular in the study of temporary organizations – and this for very good

reasons. We hope that more papers will come in this important area – and that the field of projects and institutions will open up new kinds of collaborations across these and other scholarly fields of inquiry.

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