Projectification of public health

Social investment funds in Swedish municipalities

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Abstract

In local governments long-term thinking and planning are replaced by short-term modes. This becomes evident through the explosion of temporary organizations, such as projects over the last couple of years in public administration, a development sometimes referred to as projectification. This paper aims to contribute to our understandings of the increasing short-termism in public sector. That is done through an ethnographically inspired illustrative case study of a projectification process in a Swedish municipality. The case studied is an initiation and implementation of a project funding system called social investment funds – a new and growing phenomenon in Swedish municipalities. The municipalities are described to live their lives in a project friendly surrounding. The projectification process, it is argued, is both an adaptation of the environment – the municipal organizations are mobilized through specific funds or budgets, courses, project models and consultants to handle project activities – and a transformation of activities – the public health related work is reorganized and reformulated into temporary activities. In addition to this some projects are described as temporary bubbles: materializing, almost from out of nowhere, and after termination, disappear almost without a trace. The social investment funds are put forward by its advocators as a mean to innovatively battle fragmented organizations and change the municipal organization’s public health work at a strategic level. However, the result of the funds is short term projects that have little or no effect on public health beyond the termination of the projects. The funds are, though, additional means to facilitate project activities and short-term modes in municipal organizations.

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Introduction

…many former tasks of state and local governments go to temporary institutions; long-term thinking and planning are replaced by short-term modes (Csurgó et al. 2012:175).

Over the last couple of decades an increasing use of temporary organizations, has been observed in public administration (cf. Sjöblom et al. forthcoming; Andersson, 2009; Andrew Pettigrew et al. 2003). Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm (2002) argue that tasks in public sector not only, to an increasing extent, are organized in temporary forms but also that “many processes are presented and understood as projects” (p.15, cf. Sjöblom & Godenhjelm 2009; Abrahamsson & Agevall, 2009). The rapidly increasing use of projects is sometimes linked to the characteristics of the ‘late modern’ age, with features such as contingency, unpredictability and rapid change (Andersson, 2009:189). To handle these challenges public organizations address them by new and flexible means, such as short-term projects. The assumption is that projects will increase innovativeness and deliver sustainable contributions to strategic goals (cf. Godenhjelm, 2013; Svensson et al, 2013). The basic reason for this increase and diffusion of the project form seems to be that projects (viewed as a task-specific and time-limited form of working) are “perceived as a controllable way of avoiding all the classic problems of bureaucracy” (Packendorff & Lindgren, 2014: 7). The proliferation of projects can to some extent seem paradoxical in an age when long-term policy objectives are emphasized more than ever (cf. Skerratt, 2012). Sjöblom (2009:165) goes even further and argue that the:

gradual development towards increasingly non-permanent and informal structures is, in fact, one of the most important—although still very much neglected—administrative changes of the past decades

Little consideration has been given to projects and other short-term policy devises as distinctive ways of getting things done (Andersson, 2009). Research on the consequences of these “short-term modes” and increasing use of projects in the public sector has been limited (cf. Sjöblom et al. in review; Söderlund, 2011; Andersson, 2009; Janowicz-Panjaitan et al, 2009; Jensen et al, 2007). The lack of interest in project proliferation, or projectification, within the social sciences has partly to do with the fact that project management has been confined to engineering and business management (ibid.): “Project management has trickled
down from these sectors to public administration gradually and rather silently” (Sjöblom, 2009:166). There is a need for systematic knowledge about the consequences of administrative short-termism and projectification in public organizations (Sjöblom et al, in review, Packendorff & Lindgren, 2014; Janowicz-Panjaitan et al, 2009).

This paper aims to contribute to our understandings of the increasing short-termism in public administration. My ambition is to illustrate how projectification in public organizations unfolds and what consequences these ‘short-term modes’ and organizational solutions have. To undertake these questions, an illustrative case study of an initiation and implementation of a project funding system in a Swedish municipality was carried out. In this paper I argue that the research on projectification needs to broaden its perspective to grasp the implications and consequences of the phenomena. Research on project activities has traditionally been defined through its focus on single projects as unit of analysis (cf. Packendorff & Lindgren, 2014). I argue for a perspective that also involves the environments in which the project activities are embedded. To apprehend the more subtle processes of projectification, I also argue for an ethnographically inspired approach with a sensemaking perspective, in which language and communication have a central role. The paper is structured into five parts. The first part (following this introduction), introduces the concept of projects, its temporary characteristics and the specific features of projects in the public sector. The second part reviews the research on projectification and is both an argument for a broader perspective on projectification and at the same time an argument for methodological closeness to the studied organizations. The third part presents the actual methods and empirical material used in the study. The fourth part is an empirical part where the case of the study is depicted in some detail. We start of in a general discussion on social investments and end up in a close analytical description of an implementation of a project funding system called social investment fund in one municipality called municipality X. Following that, the fifth and final part, is a summarizing discussion where the findings from the case study gets into dialogue with the research on projects and projectification from a sensemaking perspective.

**Projects in public organizations**

Projects could be argued to be an old phenomenon, but the contemporary understanding of it evolved in the middle of the twentieth century in the USA and its military and space programs
(cf. Blomquist & Söderholm, 2002). The overwhelming scale of these projects in terms of resources and ambitious timing created formidable problems of co-ordination and control which led to the professionalization of the project manager (Grabher, 2002; Engwall, 1995). From the 1960s onwards the concept has evolved and “diffused widely into the business world, and increasingly, beyond” (s.207). Public administration has been described as a place where the use of projects, over the last decades, has virtually exploded in many countries (cf. Sjöblom, 2009; Abrahamsson & Agevall, 2009). In this paper I try to contribute to our understanding of what impact this “explosion” has on the public organizations. In this section I discuss definitions of projects and the temporary characteristics of these. I also explore the specific features of projects in public organizations. To understand the projectification processes in Swedish municipalities we need to focus both at the project activities per se as well as the surrounding environment (cf. Kenis et al, 2009; Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002).

**Definitions of project**

The definition of a project organization differs but the common denominator is temporariness. The American Project Management Institute (PMI) – the world’s largest membership association for the project management profession – defines projects as “a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product or service” (PMBOK 2008:5). This an instrumental or even normative definition (Sjöblom, 2006) and many writings on project management have “echoed practical management, and have taken the form of recipes and handbooks on how to manage better” (Sahlin & Söderholm, 2002:12). According to the EU (who is a huge financier of project activities), a project is “a single, non-divisible intervention with a fixed time schedule and dedicated budget” (European Commission, 1997:4). The funding principles of the European Union have fostered a definition in which almost all reform activities are viewed as projects. Through the different EU funds, that definition is also diffused into, or absorbed at, a sub national level in European countries. Bakker (2010) argue for a definition of projects drawn from a literature review of research on projects between 1964 and 2008. She found the field to go by many names such as; ephemeral organizations, temporary teams, transitory organizations, short-term projects or disposable organizations. In combining this research into one cohesive definition, temporary organizations, she argues, are “a set of organizational actors working together on a complex task over a limited period of time” (Bakker, 2010:468).
**Temporariness in projects**

Time, or temporariness, is a key element in project organizations. Janowicz-Panjaitan and her colleagues (2009) identified temporariness as the crucial unique characteristic of temporary organizations. For any organization, time is generally regarded as a scarce resource. However, “for a temporary organization the handling of time is more complicated, since their time is literally limited: it ends” (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). In a permanent organization the future is perceived as (more or less) eternal. For a temporary project, on the other hand, time is always running out since it is finite from the start. Ibert (2004) claimed that the main difference between a temporary project and a permanent organization is their conceptions of time. For the permanent organization a cyclical (or spiral) time conception is applied—in that phenomena are repeated, recurring time and time again (cf. Burrell, 1992)—whereas the project follows a linear time conception—to lead the way from a starting-point to termination (Ibert, 2004:1530, cf. Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). Lundin and Söderholm (1995, cf. Janowicz-Panjaitan et al, 2009) argues that a temporary organization can be viewed as being both “right-bracketed” by virtue of their ex ante specified ending point, and “left-bracketed” because the project and the members of the project team often lack a common history (cf. Goodman & Goodman, 1976). This leaves the project in a ‘temporary bubble’ or zone where “members are freed from the expectancy of a common future as well as from the weight of a common past” (Janowicz-Panjaitan et al, 2009:130, cf. Miles, 1964). With this conceptualization of time in projects, Janowicz-Panjaitan and her colleagues (2009:127f) argue that employees can be expected to focus on the present, be result oriented, and be creative in problem solving but at the same time having trouble extending the knowledge learned in projects beyond the termination point.

**The context | Projects in public organizations**

However, projects in public sector are not necessarily unique in any sense (cf. Forssell et al, 2013), as several of the definitions of projects incline. Perhaps the definitions of projects “suffer somewhat from the imprints of its original ‘birth’ in engineering sciences” (Sydow, 2009:xii). In public sector projects are more or less embedded in surrounding organizational, and political, structures and the contextual relationships may vary. Projects do not emerge in a vacuum (cf. Engwall, 2003). They emerge:
…in interaction with one or several permanent organizations or with other temporary organizations and they are expected to provide these organizations with some kind of surplus compared to traditional forms of organizing (Sjöblom, 2006:12).

Projects in public sector are assumed to increase innovativeness, increase public participation by including various actors, increase economic growth by fiscal multipliers, and deliver a sustained contribution to strategic goals (cf. Godenhjelm, 2013; Svensson et al, 2013; Sbarcea & Martins, 2003). Anell and Wilson (2002) argue that both project organizations and the more permanent organizations can be understood as flows of activities that are more closely linked than what present theory indicates. Different organizational characteristics influence each other. This can amount to projects with less innovative and flexible features (cf. Anell & Wilson, 2002) and permanent organizations with focus on flexibility and change rather than stability and the maintenance of previous routines (cf. Fred, forthcoming; Sjöblom & Godenhjelm, 2009; Sydow et al. 2004).

In sum, projects or project activities in public organizations are temporary endeavors that are (at least in a rhetorical sense) expected to create surplus of some sort in the permanent structures. As well as influencing the surrounding organizations, the project activities might also be influenced by its surrounding. To study such phenomena we need a perspective that entails more than just the projects. To grasp the more subtle characteristics of the processes of projectification we also need a close relation to the organizations we study in order understand how employees and civil servants make sense of their work.

**Making sense of projectification**

The increasing use of projects has in research been understood as a fashion - something that signals innovation, entrepreneurship, action and determination (cf. Brady & Hobday, 2011) and as something that can simplify or reduce complexity in organizations (Sjöblom, 2006). Or as programs where several projects are bundled into a group of activities aiming to implement or develop a strategic effort (cf. Bergman et, al. 2013). However, the notion of increasing project activities in the public sector does not necessarily tell us much about what is going on in more permanent organizations and how projectification processes in these organizations unfold.
When first introduced by Christopher Midler in 1995, projectification was described as a process in which a company transforms parts of its activities to be handled by autonomous project teams, within a restricted time frame and budget. Midler refers to projectification as the process which took place in a series of changes in the structure for organizing new product development at Renault, as they moved from a classical functional organization to “autonomous and powerful project teams” (Midler, 1995: 363; cf. Maylor et al. 2006). Midler identifies several organizational challenges due to projectification. Perhaps the most significant was the adaptation of the rest of the organization and its supply networks to the new structures:

The development of a new car involves more than a thousand professionals and hundreds of different firms. These complex cooperative processes cannot be changed in an instant by the creation of a new project structure (Midler, 1995: 367).

Projectification is, following Midler’s argument, both a transformation of activities into projects and an adaptation process of the environment. The two-folded character of Midler’s definition of projectification creates a sort of tension between the projects and the non-project part of the organization (the “permanent organization”). However, these kinds of adaptations and transformations in organizations and their environments have not been studied to any larger extent, not even in traditionally project-based organizations such as construction or the IT industry (cf. Sjöblom et al. in review). Traditionally project management research has been defined through its focus on single projects as the unit of analysis. Packendorff and Lindgren (2013) argue that by limiting research on projectification to organizational restructurings only, and by that excluding adaptation or transformation in the environment, “many questions concerning the reasons, implications and consequences of projectification are left unanswered and suppressed” (p.10).

So how can we understand the practicalities of projectification in the organization and its surroundings? Packendorff and Lindgren (2014) suggest a broader view of projectification and argue for a view of “projects and project-based organizing as cultural and discursive phenomena” (p.17). To tackle this, methodological challenge, one could view communication and interaction between civil servants, working in projectification processes, as acts of sensemaking. Sensemaking is then an instrument to understand how individuals and groups of
individuals in municipalities understand and make sense of their own organizations. It is based on the assumption that “when people talk differently, what they see is different, what they think and do are different, and the consequences are different” (Weick, 2009: 29). To understand the processes of adaptation and transformation – how organizations become “project-like” - we need to understand how the people adopting or advocating a specific view, perspective or language about their work make sense of what they are doing.

Sensemaking can be understood as an “ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing” (Weick et al. 2005: 490) and involves the construction or continuous negotiation of meaning (Wenger, 1998). To adapt a sensemaking perspective is to view organizations:

not as fixed objective entities, clearly delimited by organizational charts and management hierarchies, but as variable and multiple representations of reality that are ‘constructed during human sensemaking activities’ (Ivory et al. 2006: p.319).

From this viewpoint, both organizations and the environments these are embedded in are socially constructed. Through sensemaking, meanings are created, deconstructed, negotiated and elaborated (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992). Communication and speech have a central role in sensemaking. It is a process that always is situated in a social context and involves interaction with others.

Through a sensemaking perspective on projectification we are able to move beyond the notion of projectification as “a lot of projects”. Projectification could then also be viewed as something that changes the more permanent organizations, a way to communicate or something that creates structure and meaning in day-to-day work. Weick (1993) argues that people, in their pursuit of meaning, constantly construct and find meaning in what is happening to them. To focus on sensemaking is to: “portray organizing as the experience of being thrown into an ongoing, unknowable, unpredictable streaming of experience in search of answers to the question, ‘what’s the story?’”(Weick et al. 2005: 132).

Processes of projectification in public organizations provide an ideal context in which to consider sensemaking because these processes are settings with numerous perspectives and
understandings, which arise from multiple stakeholders and different communities of practices involved (cf. Ivory et al. 2006). The diversity of involved actors and various perspectives, it may be suggested, will lead to different discourse or ‘narratives’ reflecting different interpretations of what the organizations represent (ibid.).

Using a broad perspective on projectification and a sencemaking approach - how can we study the phenomena, with what methods and empirical material?

**Methodological considerations**

The methodology used for this paper is an illustrative case study with an ethnographically inspired approach (cf. Ybema et al. 2009). The case, referred to as municipality X, is both a typical and an “extreme” case (cf. Seawright & Gerring, 2008). It is typical in the sense that it, by Swedish measures, is a municipality of average size (both geographically and by population), they initiate and own EU funded projects (as do more than 55 % of Swedish municipalities) and they have, as approximately 80 out of 290 municipalities, started a social investment fund within the last three or four years. However, Municipality X is also, I believe, a case that is extreme or unusual in the sense that the organization has a specific policy, and some influential actors driving the issue, on projectification of the organization. Flyvbjerg (2006:14) argues that typical or extreme cases “often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied”. He continues to argue for the case study approach by claiming that

> it is often more important to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur (ibid).

In this paper I try to clarify, or deepen, our understanding of the processes of projectification and its consequences through an illustration of a project funding system.

One important feature of the case study is that it often focuses on processes - events over time. Another characteristic of the case study is the use of different empirical material (Yin, 2008). To capture the time aspects of a process in a case study design a retrospective perspective is often used where a process is traced back in time (cf. Bennett & George, 2001).
This approach often leads to a case where processes are subsumed in chronological phases reinforcing the notion of decisions as a rational process (cf. Johansson, 2011). As a response to that critique, one can follow processes as they unfold or occur in real-time. Johansson (2011) argue that real-time studies are required to study interaction and interaction patterns between actors, something which is of great importance for our understanding of complex processes. One way to study ongoing processes is to interview people continuously and parallel to the process (ibid, cf. Sahlin-Andersson, 1989). However, Silverman (2013) argue that people tend to rationalize their behavior and events, hence the need for methodological strategies that are less dependent upon the different actors’ memory or retrospective interpretations. In this study I have interviews 19 people over a period of approximately six month. 12 of these were civil servants in the municipality working, at a strategic or operational level, with the social investment fund. The others were people outside, but in relation to, the municipality: People working with social investment funds in other municipalities and a consultant that the municipality has been working with for several years. During this period I also observed meetings and a conference (cf. Ybema et al. 2009) arranged by a social investment fund network (in which municipality X is a part) consisting of representatives from four municipalities and two regional governmental agencies. In addition to this I studied what Silverman (2013) calls naturally occurring data; audit reports, web pages, power point slides, meeting minutes and policy documents. With this multitude of empirical material I get both the employees’ own interpretations of their work, my observations of their practice in relations to other organizations and official statements from the organization.

The initiation and implementation of a social investment fund in a Swedish municipality is a good case for the study of processes of projectification. It is an initiative inspired by the EU funds – an international institution advocating, and enabling, project activities at sub-national levels. However, unlike the EU funds the social investment funds are owned and organized by the municipality within a specific policy area – public health. The investment funds consists of fairly small projects (in terms of money and people involved) where people work part time in the projects and part time at a department somewhere in the organization. This leaves good room for project knowledge and experiences to travel beyond the boundaries of the projects, and it is also a projectification process that the municipality more directly can influence one might assume.
Social investment funds in Swedish municipalities

Before going deep into the social investment fund in municipality X, we need to take a step back and examine the context in which this occurs – the Swedish municipalities. We also need to investigate social investments as a general concept and social investment as a phenomenon in Swedish municipalities.

Swedish municipalities

Sweden is divided into 290 municipalities. The Swedish municipalities handle matters and activities of public interest, which the Swedish government is not responsible for, such as: pre-schools and nine year compulsory schools, care of elderly, libraries, planning and building, waste and sewage systems. The municipality’s responsibilities and activities are comprehensive and approximately one third out of every employed person in Sweden is employed at a municipality, preferably in the area of welfare (Bäck & Johansson, 2010). Compared to most other countries local self-government is strong in Sweden — there is great freedom for each municipality to decide about its own activities and organization (cf. Montin & Granberg, 2013; Larsson & Bäck, 2011).

The local authorities in Sweden have also been particularly susceptible to the organizational fashion known as New Public Management (ibid.). Even though the label, NPM, suggest commonality and uniformity the application and underlying ideas of the reforms seem to fluctuate (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Due to NPM reforms, re-organizations have been evident in public administration and organizing through temporary projects seems to have increased by that development (cf. Fred, forthcoming; Fogh Jensen, 2013; Jensen et, al. 2013; Packendorff & Lindgren, 2014). Koen Verhoest and colleagues argues that, at least the western European, countries has moved in a similar trajectory when it comes to reforms in public organizations starting out in the 1980s and 1990s and resulting in “disaggregation and a suboptimal fragmentation of government” (Verhoest et al,2007:325). When initiating a social investment fund in Sweden, a fragmented public sector is used as an argument – we need to collaborate more – and to receive funds the projects have to involve two or more department.
Social investments

Social investments are a new and growing phenomenon in Swedish municipalities, and because of this also relatively unexplored scientifically. The concept of social investments is one out of several related concepts that have become common during recent years: social innovation, social entrepreneurship, social sustainability or corporate social responsibility, to mention a few. A lot of these concepts are activated through the use of projects. These and similar concepts are sometimes gathered under the social investment perspective (cf. Stigendal & Östergren 2013, Jenson 2012, White, 2012). This perspective, it is argued by Stigendal & Östergren (2013, cf. White, 2012), have a background in a critique against neoliberal economic theories and is focusing on creating a balanced relationship between increased growth and increased welfare. Thus, a social effort could be regarded as an investment, comparable with other kinds of investments such as infrastructure for example.

Social investment funds in Sweden

The first Swedish municipal social investment fund was initiated in 2009. Today about 80 (out of 290) municipalities have one or more social investment funds, ranging from two to 200 million Swedish kronor. According to Camilla Backström (interview, May, 2014), Senior Advisor at Forum for Social Innovation¹ (a collaboration between academia, industry, government and non-profit organizations who promote the idea of social innovation and social entrepreneurship) Sweden is unique when it comes to initiating social investment funds at a sub-national level. No other country has that amount of social investment activity at a municipality level.

The capital used in the social investment funds are made available through budgetary surplus in the municipalities, and by administrating these as funds it is possible to invest in activities ranging across several years (at least that is the idea), in contrast to what ordinary municipal budgets allows. The idea is to invest in preventive initiatives that eventually will lead to reduced municipal costs. The reduced cost in the municipality is then seen as a repayment of the investment.

The Swedish association of local authorities and regions (SALAR), an organization that represents and advocates for local government, is a big promoter of social investment funds

¹ http://www.socialinnovation.se/en/?lang=en
and arranges seminars and network activities for interested municipalities. They argue that societal efforts in general, and towards children and young adults in particular, should be viewed as an investment and not be regarded as a cost (cf. Nilsson 2014). The investment perspective, they mean, demands coordination between different actors because the costs and benefits are supposed to be distributed equally among and within these parties. For instance, the investment in one policy area can produce benefits in another (cf. Stigendal & Östergren 2013, Nilsson 2014). The social investment funds differ between municipalities among other things in terms of their organization, but they share the investment perspective, the idea of early interventions, the advocacy of collaboration between two or more actors in the initiatives, and that the activities are organized in temporary project form.

**Municipality X | Social investment budget and a project model**

Municipality X is located in the southern parts of Sweden with approximately 32 000 inhabitants, and has an organization with about 2400 full time, and permanent, employees. The municipality has a political organization made up of a City Council, a municipal executive board and committees. The municipality also consists of an administrative organization with civil servants planning and implementing the political decisions and the municipality is organized in seven administrative departments, each responsible for a particular area, such as health care or school.

Municipality X has, since June 2012, a policy, or program, for social sustainable development. The policy takes its departure in a parliamentary bill on eleven national public health objectives (Prop. 2002/03:35). The bill has, in municipality X, been transformed into three overarching objectives: 1) participation, openness and influence; 2) Social and economic conditions; 3) Children and young adults’ living conditions. To implement these objectives a social investment budget has been initiated. The idea with the budget is to cover initial costs for organizational development, increase intersectoral collaboration and make use of good ideas in the organization (Welfare policy 2013). To receive funding from the social investment budget the initiative has to be a collaborative endeavor between at least two departments, it has to be innovative, engage in one of the three prioritized objectives and lead to long-term effects. The investment budget was initiated in the beginning of 2013 and has two million Swedish kronor for each year designated for project activities. Anyone employed at the municipality, after approval from the closest executive, may apply for funding from the
investment budget. A committee, consisting of administrative managers, reviews and prepares the applications for a final decision taken by the municipal executive board.

The work with the investment budget started with a public health specialist mapping the public health. Municipality X was measured in comparison with other municipalities from various variables: how is the availability for people with disabilities in municipality X compared to other municipalities, and is it better or worse since last year? Was the voter turnout in municipality X better or worse compared to other municipalities the last election? Youth unemployment – better or worse compared to other municipalities? Some of this data came from The Public Health Agency of Sweden, who has a national responsibility for public health issues, or from Statistics Sweden, an administrative agency responsible for different form of national statistics. Other data was collected by the municipality itself through different kind of surveys. How municipality X is placed in these various ranking systems is put forward, in the policy document, as an important indicator on where focus should be in order to become a social sustainable municipality.

The mapping of public health also included identifying and defining measurable targets for the fund, a work inspired by socio-economic calculations. Municipality X refers to seminars held by Ingvar Nilsson, a Swedish professor in political economy and a consultant, as a source of inspiration for the initiation of the investment budget. Ingvar Nilsson has, over the last couple of years, trained over 50 municipalities (not municipality X) in social investments and socio-economic calculations and has been traveling, more or less the entire country, to hold lectures and seminars (Ingvar Nilsson presentation at a conference about social investment funds. June 2014). In socio-economic calculations an individual's (within a specific target group) future is stipulated in economic terms and the calculation is based on how much that person will cost society if an intervention is not made (cf. Nilsson 2014).

A lot of emphasis has been placed upon economic issues and technicalities when it comes to setting up the social investment budget, and this seems to be the case even in other municipalities. There even is a national network of municipal finance managers and economists meeting on a regular basis to discuss social investment funds. The economists also appear to have huge impact on the organizing style of the funds. In municipality X, the finance manager argued that a municipality could not hold a fund due to accounting regulations. For this reason the “fund”, in municipality X called social investment budget, is a
regular post in the ordinary budget, financed as other activities through tax revenues and general government grants. This means that the funds designated for public health is more or less the same as before but are now organized in form of a “fund”.

There appears to be two different strategies in setting up a social investment fund. One (the most common one) is the ‘municipality X way’ – letting the activities be part of the ordinary budget procedures. The other strategy is to have an actual fund, transcending the ordinary budget and budget cycle and try to find return on those investments. Exactly how this return should work out seem a bit fuzzy. An investment in one policy area can produce surplus in another and how that should be accounted for is not clear. One of Sweden’s largest municipalities has two social investment funds of 50 million Swedish kronor were the ambition is to invest outside the ordinary budget, and to find return on those investments inside the municipality. However, in the spring of 2014 the city council had the funds put on hold due to municipal budgetary setbacks – in practice no projects were allowed to start unless they were fully financed within the ordinary budget. So it appears that the funds after all have a strong connection to the regular budget and the one-year budget cycle, or as one of the civil servants phrased it: “a social investment fund dressed in the usual local government suit” (interview, 3 Feb 2014). To have this closeness to the regular budget, as municipality X has as well, also means a risk of not being prioritized the next year. One of the civil servants working with the social investment budget explains this conundrum and its effects:

If there is no immediate result we might get canceled. It is hard to work long-term within the ordinary budget and almost even harder to do that in the form of a project, when it is even more related to specific funds in a one-time initiative (interview, 3 Feb 2014).

In some cases the municipal committee, who prioritize among project application, has chosen to invest in projects beyond one year, perhaps to simulate the feeling of a fund. However, this means that the two million per year is not in reality two million per year, since parts of the budget of coming year is already used up.

During its first year the social investment budget committee received 14 and approved eight applications. These were all projects initiated by civil servants at a management level. One of them described how their projects (he was involved in two projects that received funds) came from ideas that had been “floating around” in the organization for quite some time, but never
had been tested out. One of those projects was described as a collaboration project between the municipality and civil society. The aim was to endorse, or educate, people involved in different civil society organizations on how to apply for, and administer EU projects. The project idea came from another project that the municipality was responsible for several years ago, long before the idea of a social investment fund came about. Back then a group of four people tried to formulate and initiate the project in the municipality but without success. Different funding agencies were discussed as possible funders for the project (including EU funds), but were abandoned because they were perceived as complicated or too slow. When the social investment budget came about in the municipality the idea was revived and an application was written, sent in and approved. Another example of a social investment project that received funding was a project aiming to increase the participation and engagement of the citizens and increase access to municipal services. One more example was a project called the breakfast club aiming to get people in high school to eat breakfast.

In the beginning of the work with the investment budget, there was a concern from the investment budget committee of not getting any applications from the employees. To tackle this possible problem the criteria for the investment budget was written in vague terms so that it would fill several purposes. The result of that, one of the civil servants said, have been projects that aren’t 100% social investments. During spring 2014 the committee has been working to develop or re-formulate the investment budget and its criteria, emphasizing the connection to the three prioritized areas and that the projects must be evaluated and activities measured.

A recurrent theme in my interviews and the meetings I attended was the assessment of the projects - How do we know if a project really is an investment? Ingvar Nilsson, one of the sources of inspiration for the initiation of the investment budget in municipality X argues for the use of socio economic measurements. However, one of the civil servants responsible for two of the projects claim that none of the eight projects in municipality X are possible to evaluate in that fashion (interview 13 March 2014): how do you measure the socio-economic benefits of young people eating more breakfast or getting a better access to public services, was the argument. Municipality X is still not sure on how to evaluate their social investment projects but it is an ongoing debate, and discussions about whether or not they should undertake courses in socioeconomic calculations are recurrent. For now the projects are responsible for evaluation and each project tackles this their own way. The breakfast club for
instance made a questionnaire, consisting of five questions, which they handed out to the students the last breakfast meeting.

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) has produced a guide for impact evaluation of social investment projects (and is an important actor in Sweden advocating social investment funds). SALAR is an organization that represents and promotes local government in Sweden. All of Sweden's municipalities, county councils and regions are members of SALAR and SALAR represents and acts on their initiative. In their guide for impact evaluation, SALAR encourage the use of randomized control trials (RCT), although in a not so rigid fashion as a scientific RCT (Report: Salar 2014). The advocacy of RCT’s was also evident at the conference for municipalities working with social investment funds, which I attended. The use of RCT’s comes from the medical sciences where one group of individuals gets a specific treatment and another group does not. The two groups are then compared before and after the intervention to measure the effects.

The alternative to a social investment budget is described by the civil servant responsible for the investment budget as working with “plans of action”. That is what they did before and is described as a top-down strategy to implement public health policy whilst the investment budget is viewed as a bottom-up strategy. The civil servant means that the top-down strategies often are difficult to find support for: “it is hard to get real access to the different administrations within the municipality and encourage them to do something specific when the idea is not theirs” (interview, 7 March, 2014). She continues to argue that the idea, with the investment budget, is to let employees out in the organization apply for funding. She has also been “traveling” the organization promoting the possibilities that the investment budget provides. The city manager (interview, 4 April, 2014) said that the public health issues now are in focus, much more than before, due to the fact that the municipality has an investment budget.

Public health through a project model

The application process for the investment budget is described as structured with clear guidelines and was created through a project model, developed by the municipality in collaboration with a consultancy firm. The same model is also strongly encouraged as a management tool in the projects that receives funds and was also used in the development of the investment budget. The model is now in its last stages of becoming an official policy for
the entire municipality – a final (political) decision is to be taken this fall. This is a policy that in its essence advocates projectification of the municipality. The development of a project model came about after a trainee program, aiming to find leaders of the future in the organization, and several courses in project management and project methodology. Almost 100 civil servants (a big number for a small municipality), at different level in the organization, have undergone some sort of project management training. There is, and has been a focus on project activities the last two years, said the City manager: “suddenly it exploded and everybody started to talk about projects, even about things that were not projects” (interview, 4 April, 2014). In the trainee program the participants were given cases from a group of executive managers. The cases consisted of tasks or issues that the management wanted to develop further – how should the organization handle a certain issue or problem for instance? In working with such tasks, one of the trainees said, it became evident that there were no structures or routines on how to work with questions like that. There were also, at this time, several working groups in the municipality driven by energetic civil servants trying to deal with similar, often intersectorial questions. But these groups often had an unclear assignment and their mandates were often blurred. This had the employees inquire for some sort of tool or guidelines for that kind of work. In the project management course the individuals brought assignments from their daily work. The idea was that no matter what they had in front of them it could be handled by a project methodology. The trainee programs and the project management courses have left the municipality with a lot of staff with project management skills – a lot more than there is projects in the municipality, and there is still a demand of more project management courses according to the civil servant responsible for the courses and the project model. This demand of more courses and the experiences from the civil servants taking the courses and trainee programs had the management, together with the consultant, develop the project model.

The model consists of guidelines and document templates (project idea, project plan, status report, final report) and in the first couple of pages of the guidelines it is stated that even though the project model is associated with clearly defined projects, such as social investment projects, it is an organizational model that always is useful (Guidelines 2013). Support, the maintenance of existing solutions, small improvements of work or training programs are not projects but the project model could (and should) still be used (ibid.).
Several of the civil servants I have talked to mean that the model has been received well in the organization due to the many individuals attending the project management courses and the trainee programs. If you receive money from the social investment budget it is mandatory to use the project model, so the public health work is in itself a driving force in the projectification and as argued in the guidelines for the model it goes beyond ordinary project activities. One civil servant describe how regular activities now are organized as if they were projects with a clearly defined project plan, a project leader, a project owner or client and clearly defined goals. One of the civil servants, who also undergone the trainee program and is responsible for two social investment projects, argue that one of the most important features of the model is the idea of a well-defined owner and a clearly defined assignment, something that he believe has become more evident in the entire organization due to the model. He compares with projects that have external funding and states that the results from those projects almost never gets taken care of and that this is due to the lack of ownership.

In municipality X clarity, a common language, and accountability are the driving forces for the civil servants advocating the model. In the documents and the interviews a desire for clarity is expressed and the examples given are also examples where the language has been perceived to be common and where it has been evident who is accountable for what. In the social investment projects it is required that the projects are organized between different departments or administrations and the civil servants describe how the project model have helped in the communication to cross these organizational boarders: “The benefit of our project model is that you have to think before you act, everyone is onboard and everyone speaks the same language” (interview, 4 April, 2014). One of the civil servants talked about an earlier initiative targeting unemployed young adults and how the project model makes the social investment budget different. At that time you could also apply for funding but:

…it was not as organized as the social investment budget. If you look at the applications from that time they appear very basic, it was no rocket science. At the same time the projects were as good as the social investment projects. So, I’m not sure if it adds to the quality. However, it feels as if it is more thought through” (interview, 14 February, 2014).

The project model seems to be applicable to several different activities and serve more than one purpose: a planning device, a guiding model for organizing, a tool for governing, and a source for a common language.
Discussion

Swedish municipalities are living their lives in a project friendly surrounding. Sjöblom, Godenhjelm and Lundin (in review) argue that the implementation of EU policy in European countries has created an environment that supports project activities at a local level. Following that, the implementation of social investment funds as a provider of project activities in Swedish municipalities has been fairly unproblematic, at least when it comes to organizing style (cf. Nilsson, 2014). In some sense it seems paradoxical to let short term initiatives be the provider of public health - issues usually associated with long-term approaches. In another sense it seems unavoidable – the organizational form, and life-span, is predetermined. To receive funds from a social investment fund (or from any EU fund for that matter) it is mandatory to work in a temporary, collaborative organization that not engages in ordinary activities – no projects, no money! This logic has been applied on an entire policy field in municipality X. Before there was an investment budget in the municipality there were “plans of action” for public health issues. These plans were a budget line in the regular budget, activated through the different departments and their ordinary activities. Similarly, the social investment budget is a budget line within the regular budget, but activated through temporary projects. Public health has been re-formulated, or adapted (cf. Midler, 1995) to a specific “fund” where the temporary characteristics of the activities are unavoidable.

When a broader perspective on projectification is applied, one that entails more than just the projects, the projectification processes becomes more subtle. In municipality X the investment budget is setup through the use of a project model. The same model is also a mandatory tool for the projects that receive funding. The civil servants involved in the social investment budget talk about a common language thanks to the model and how they make sense of even their ordinary work in terms of projects. The model is perceived as a de-contextualized model, developed in collaboration with a consultant, aiming to function regardless of what task is at hand. The project model also functions as a vehicle for the dissemination of project terminology in the organization. The consultants involved acts as drivers of that vehicle proclaiming the language of the project. When civil servants, in diverse parts of the organization, are trying to make sense of their organization, project terminology is available and promoted by management, through the project model and consultants. It becomes important how you make sense of your activities. Public health is a projectifyed policy area in
municipality x, in which you need to formulate and communicate (make sense of) your work in terms of project management, collaboration, investments, and implicitly; temporality.

If the project model is a model that facilitates the projectification process in more general terms the social investment fund has its own specific characteristics that influence the organizations. The social investment funds were setup by financial managers and economists, having the organizing activities revolve around budget procedures and economic technicalities. Monitoring, documentation, quantification and measurements were emphasized. The projects in municipality X were all part of the ordinary budget, set up by the financial manager, with the same (more or less) regulations and demands as the ordinary activities. The projects were very close related to, and resembled, the permanent organizations. They were forced to fit the existing structures and procedures. Andersson (2009) describes a similar situation in the case of EU funded projects and calls it an innovation paradox. The projects, financed by a social investment fund or one of the EU funds, are supposed to be innovative but they end up looking like, or function as their parent organizations:

…this has sometimes led to more or less tragicomic situations in which people in the regions desperately have tried to find something ‘new’ to base a project application on, while still standing in the local and regional setting with its rather restrictive realities (Andersson, 2009:192).

On the one hand the projects are situated in a rather restrictive environment. On the other hand they are encouraged to be (within those restrictions) creative and innovative. In the striving ambitions to be innovative lies a risk of becoming too distant from the practice in the permanent organizations (cf. Bakker, 2010; Jensen,2004). The projects may be perceived as too ‘different’ or ‘unfamiliar’ and the result from the projects left unwanted, unused or abandoned. They are left in a temporary bubble (cf. Miles, 1964).

However, some researchers (cf. Kadefors, 1995; Anell & Wilson, 2002; Bakker, 2010; Wieck, 2009) argue that temporary and non-temporary organizations can inherit characteristics from each other, despite the ‘bubble’. This could mean that projects become less innovative and flexible than their management sometimes wishes (cf. Anell & Wilson, 2002) and/or that the more permanent organizations focus more on flexibility and change rather than stability and
the maintenance of previous routines (cf. Sydow et al. 2004; Sjöblom & Godenhjelm, 2009). In municipality X, a specific policy on projects has been created and projects initiated are strongly encouraged to work according to a regulated project model, perhaps limiting the innovative and flexible character of the projects. At the same time, public health, as a policy field, has been reformulated to imitate a project funding system, boosting the idea of temporality and continuous change.

**The cause of, and solution to, fragmentation**

One of the core problems that the investment funds set out to solve is the perceived fragmentation of the organization, in research often said to be caused by NPM reforms (cf. Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Verhoest et al, 2007). In interviews and documents, municipality X is framed as fragmented. They describe their organization as consisting of several ‘silos’ with little or no connection between them, and there is hope that the social investment projects might solve this, at least partly. However, learning from the EU funds the result might very well be the opposite:

…it is evident that project-based policy-making […] carries an inherent risk of causing fragmentation and considerable variations in procedures and outcomes at regional and local levels (Sjöblom, 2009:167).

One of the civil servants talks about municipality X as an organization in need of reorganization due to the fragmentation. S/he argue that the reason they do not reorganize, but instead put their faith in temporary project solutions is that it costs money to reorganize and is time consuming and energy draining. Another civil servant refer to the financial manager who allegedly said that the social investment budget is a result of a municipal organization that do not function, because the social investment projects is something that they should be doing anyway. Ingvar Nilsson, a Swedish political economist and social investment consultant argue that:

The strategic aim of social investment funds should be to affect the entire municipal organization as a whole regarding organization, governance, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation (Nilsson, 2014:216).
The argument is that in order to battle fragmented public organizations and their short-termism (one-year budget cycles for instance), radical changes are needed at a strategic and political level of the organizations, and these changes can come through the initiation of a social investment fund (cf. ibid.). However, in practice – as is evident in municipality X – the projects that come out of the investment budget have come to deal with specific problems for a specific target group within a specific time frame. The permanent organizations, or the system in which they operate, have not changed in accordance with the ideas of the social investment perspective. The projects might be a success at an operational level – in municipality X meaning more students ate breakfast during the project period for example, or more organizations from civil society applied for and receive funds from EU, or that the citizens engaged more in municipal activities. However, there do not appear to have been any strategic changes or re-thinking of the organization; how it is organized and governed, how recourses are allocated or evaluated (for similar conclusions but in the context of EU projects and collaboration projects see: Svensson et al, 2013; Jakobsson et al, 2012; Löfström 2010; Johansson, Löfström & Ohlsson, 2007). What has changed over the last couple of years in municipality x is a mobilization of the ability to handle projects and project activities through trainee programs, project management courses, s project model, and a specific policy on projects.

**Concluding remarks**

The aims of this paper was to contribute to our understandings of the increasing short-termism in public administration and my ambition was to illustrate how projectification in Swedish municipalities unfolds and what consequences these ‘short-term modes’ and organizational solutions have. The projectification process in Swedish municipalities in general, and in municipality X in particular, is (through the wordings of Midler, 1995) both an adaptation of the environment – the organizations are mobilized through specific funds or budgets, courses, project models and consultants to handle project activities – and a transformation of activities – the public health related work is reorganized and reformulated into temporary activities. To these projectification processes I would like to add (inspired by Janowicz-Panjaitan et al, 2009 and Miles, 1964) a third dimension – the temporary bubble. In addition to the transformation of activities into projects and the adaptation of the environment to handle project activities, some projects seem to materialize, almost from out of nowhere, and after termination, disappear without a trace. Svensson (et al, 2013) argue in a similar fashion how
some projects never becomes implemented in the permanent organization but instead provides a temporary, parallel organization to the ordinary activities.

When the municipality reformulating their activities into the language of projects, several features of what a project in public administration is perceived to be, seem lost. Projects in public sector are assumed to increase innovativeness and deliver a sustained contribution to strategic goals (cf. cf. Godenhjelm, 2013; Svensson et al, 2013; Sbarcea & Martins, 2003). However, the project models encourage efficiency, transparency, documentation and control and seem to leave little room for innovation. The social investment projects also appear to have little or no long term effects on public health. They appear to be temporary bubbles but the fact that the social investment budget is organized as a project provider it function as an instrument to further the short-termism in the organization.

References


**Official documents**

Prop. 2002/03:35 Regeringens proposition *Mål för folkhälsan [Objectives for public health]*.