

# Organizing Sustainable Development. From Diffusion to Translation <sup>∞</sup>

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## **Abstract**

Policy changes towards global sustainable development have important consequences for how these policies are organized. New and alternative models of organizing tend to emphasize indirect control rather than direct control and supervision. However, our understanding of their effects and consequences is not very elaborated. The purpose of this paper is to develop an understanding of specific characteristics and effects of organizing alternative environmental policies towards sustainable development. The paper is based on a field study of the latest attempt in Sweden to work towards sustainable development. In 1998, the Swedish government formulated a program for local investments aiming at positive environmental effects and increased employment rates.

In this article, we have posed more general questions on how to understand and to theorize upon the organizing of sustainable development. We suggest to view the implementation of environmental policies towards sustainable development as a chain of translations. These translations highlight unintended consequences of the policies, e.g. the creation of a temporary linguistic community allowing local and global “time spaces” to merge.

*Keywords:* organizing, environment, management, local government, projects, translation, linguistic community

# Introduction

Environmental issues in Sweden are a fairly new sector responsibility with the first environmental department established in 1989.<sup>1</sup> As part of the general wave of decentralization in the Swedish public sector during the 1980s, responsibility for combating environmental problems were increasingly passed on to municipalities. The current repertoire of Swedish environmental policy dates back to the 1960s, from when two phases of environmental control can be identified (Lundgren, 1991:158-162; Strandberg, 1995:30-36). These phases differ in terms of how environmental problems are defined and how environmental policies are organized (Dobers, 1997:21-27; Dobers *et al*, 1998:35-40).

In the beginning of the *first phase* (1960s – early 1980s) environmental problems were perceived as their own area of politics. In July 1967, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was established to create a critical mass of administrative know-how to solve environmental problems. It was “a central authority responsible for policy interpretation, supervision, and control” (Lundqvist, 1980:66) and it created the scientific foundation to formulate standards and emission limits for different substances (i.e. the Environmental Protection Act in 1969). Point source emission was the environmental problem that was primarily attacked during the 1970s and early 1980s. Since these emission sources were easy to locate and the emissions easy to measure, centralized control could be exercised by means of detailed legislation, specialization, and end-of-pipe technology. The centralized and hierarchical environmental protection system in Sweden was set up to handle routine events of controlling point source emission (Lundgren, 1991:158f).

The *second phase* (mid 1980s – present) describes a change in the perception of environmental problems and how to handle them. From 1970 to 1985, dramatic reductions in emissions can be noted (Bergman, 1994:275; Ryding, 1995:10). The industrial emissions of sulphur were reduced by 65 per cent and the emissions of mercury and cadmium were reduced by 90 per cent. Whereas point source emissions to water and the air were reduced considerably in the first phase, diffuse emissions came into focus in the second phase (Lundgren, 1991:160). Such new problems challenge the inherent logic of centralized control and how to organize environmental policies. It seems reasonable that different environmental problems need different ways of

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<sup>1</sup> In 1987 there was an energy and environmental department and before that environmental issues were dealt with in the department for agriculture.

organizing. From the mid 1980s and onwards, initiatives for environmental policies and action came increasingly from governmental agencies. A shift occurred and ecological issues appeared on the agendas of the Swedish political parties (Bennulf, 1994:61), and the initiative shifted from expert-driven planning in the administrative bodies to political leadership formulating strategies for sustainable development.

## **Exploiting plans or exploring the unknown?**

The practice of formulating environmental policies in phase one was based on plans assuming one clear line of control and accountability, unambiguous directives and unequivocal objects of control. No change or re-interpretation of the original thoughts occurred and the ideas were exploited and diffused in their pure and virgin form. Environmental problems, as well as their attempted solutions, diffused through action-oriented links in a nested network from the global to the local and back to the global (Carley *et al*, 1992:186-199). This practice found its equivalence in theory with corporate and municipal environmental management. Implementation took place according to plans without interruption and disturbance. Environmental management systems were typical examples of how planning for change were considered to become an important and crucial part of corporate environmental management (Roome, 1992; Welford, 1992; Welford *et al*, 1993). Studies of implementation of proactive environmental strategies (Rothenberg *et al*, 1992) or of clean technologies (Irwin *et al*, 1992) have been crucial in understanding environmental improvement work, but they fail to address how social and technological change takes place.

Writings important to the field of corporate environmental management, such as four articles of the very first issue of *Business Strategy and the Environment* (Roome, 1992; Schot, 1992; Smith, 1992; Welford, 1992), have shown to have a considerable impact on the academic field (Dobers *et al*, 2000). All these writings have been important for understanding environmental problems and how practitioners formulate environmental policies, but they treat plans for environmental improvement uncritically and do not focus on how these small changes in practice take place when professionals in the field work for sustainable development. Since external conditions and internal assumptions have changed during the second phase, initial plans lose their controlling function.

Practice has changed in phase two, but theory not accordingly. In more recent writings you can find critical voices to the very concept of environmental *management*, since the imposition of human plans on nature turns it into an artifact of human (male!)

domination (Haraway, 1991; Katz, 1997; Meriläinen *et al*, 1999), or that environmentalism has been hijacked by capitalism and traditional management (Welford, 1997; Welford, 1999). In this paper we do not push the critique this far, but would like to point out problems with viewing environmental plans as a matter of diffusion of a fixed and stable idea. Instead, we have found that participants in fact are very active in the transformation of society in translating ideas and thus changing original plans. Others have pointed out that environmental improvement work demands change and change management (Schot, 1992:43; Shrivastava, 1992), but they give no explanation or description of how change is taking place. Moreover, some studies even show that change and translation is a pre-requisite for inertia and stability of ideas and plans (Brunsson, 1989; Brunsson *et al*, 1993; Östlund, 1994:31f)!

Thus, when it became clear in practice that new conditions had developed in the second phase, a search for new organizational solutions and new environmental policies could take place. In the end of the 1980s specific environmental reform projects were introduced in Sweden to change the broad rules of the game. One feature in common for the environmental projects was that their directives were formulated openly and that each environmental project had extensive freedom to take steps towards environmental improvements (Dobers, 1997). The latest attempt in Sweden to work towards sustainable development and to combat diffuse environmental problems and unemployment is the so-called Local Investment Program. In 1997, the Swedish parliament decided to sponsor certain municipalities with 5.4 billion SEK for investing in environmentally sustainable technologies from the years of 1998 to 2000 in order to work towards a sustainable society (Ministry of the Environment, 1997:6). Entering a competition, municipalities could submit a proposal of interest in the Local Investment Program and eventually submit an application for grants to their own Local Investment Program. 42 municipalities were given grants and gained responsibility to undertake investments in environmentally sustainable technology.

## **Theoretical challenges**

The recent development of governmental policies in Sweden towards sustainable development pose new theoretical challenges. So far in the paper we have described how the practice of formulating environmental policies in Sweden has changed during the 1980s. We have shown that academic articles have been able to theorize upon the way practitioners formulated environmental policies and strategies. Then practice has changed gradually and we see that a few early articles disregard this change in

formulating policies and treat it with the same theoretical framework as before. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to present a new way of understanding the practice of how sustainable development is formulated and changed on its way through society. We do so by assuming that plans for sustainable development are always changed when they are handed over from one organization to another, from government to municipality, from municipality to local business, thus changing the way sustainable development is organized. Our aim in this paper is to show that governmental plans for sustainable development are not diffused throughout society, but translated, changed and localized through many intermediaries in different “time-spaces” (Joerges *et al*, 1998). The paper ends with a discussion of these links between globalized time-spaces and localized time-spaces and how organizing sustainable development by projects might add to the Swedish repertoire of environmental control strategies.

From time to time problems arise that do not fit into a traditional structure of society or if there is a lack of capacity to deal with them. Ecological problems present a vast area in which society in many ways has not found adequate organizational routines, where specific environmental protection activities are complemented with broad efforts towards sustainable development. Hence, how environmental protection in general and sustainable development in particular is organized is thus an underlying dimension of any environmental action on behalf of the state. We suggest that projects become a natural way of dealing with issues that current structural arrangements fail to attend to. They represent an explorative way of dealing with problems that are vaguely formulated and where there are no clear-cut and institutionalized solutions available. A crucial project task is thus the attempt to create sensemaking and an unequivocally understanding of the problem (Weick, 1995).

Bruno Latour (1996/93) would argue that projects exist only as long as spokespersons can perform relevant translations by which networks of socio-technical actants are assembled as a whole. In this view, projects are seen as emerging networks in which coalitions of humans and non-humans, individuals and groups, come together in an ongoing chain of translations. Thus, projects are not linear models of how ideas are implemented through plans, but are the effects of heterogeneous interests, emotions or consensus, as well as carelessness, conflict and clashing intentions. So the nature of a project changes whenever a new actor becomes member of the project or whenever an old member leaves the project. It changes for every agreement or disagreement. To be precise, the ontology of a project is the effect of ongoing negotiations where a project never is real, but is gaining or loosing in degrees of reality. For Latour, links between

actors, however fragile and subtle, determine projects, just as links between projects determine socio-technical networks of another magnitude (Latour, 1996/93).

We take from this that links between projects is a slice of the organizing reality well worth studying. In a different writing we have shown how projects are delimited and formed through different phases of translation and transcription processes (Dobers *et al*, 1998). It is partly the translation of political and strategic ideas at the beginning of a project; it is partly the transcriptions of ideas into reports, actions and new ideas at the end of a project. Together, translation and transcription describe how project delimitation and formation takes place. However, in this paper we disregard the transcription process and focus on the translation process in contrast to the diffusion model. The next section presents one process of translation. We hope to contribute to a better understanding of how ideas, such as sustainable development, are translated from one time/space to another time/space (Czarniawska *et al*, 1996).

## **Local Investment Programs in Sweden**

The empirical part of this paper starts by describing how the Swedish government decided to work towards sustainable development. One way of doing so is by introducing the local investment programs (LIP), in which municipalities in Sweden could apply for grants helping them to invest in environmentally adjusted technologies. The process of one application by the Trollhättan municipality is described. We learn about how the government decides and how Trollhättan turned out to be one of the happy few, receiving grants.

The study is based on the analysis of transcribed interviews with representatives from the government and Trollhättan municipality. In the latter, we have conducted several interviews with those responsible for formulating the LIP application and with those later employed to work with the LIP of Trollhättan. Of course, many documents, protocols, and transcripts from web pages have also enriched the field description.

## **Sustainable development – a global language**

In the term of office from 1994 to 1998 the Social Democrats in Sweden integrated environmental issues into politics. Thus, it was natural to the party leader and later prime minister Göran Persson to highlight a vision of the sustainable society and make it part

of the political platform in the assumption of office in September 1996. In January 1997, the government presented a writing to the parliament “On our way to a sustainable society”. It described different strategies of how a sustainable society could be reached in different sectors. Upon this writing, the government decided to assign a governmental working group called “Delegation for sustainable society” (Delegation) headed by Anna Lindh, the minister of environmental affairs at the time (from 1998 the minister of foreign affairs).

The Delegation became an important factor to the government in its attempt to work out overall strategies for environmental policies. In March of 1997, the Delegation had formulated its first suggestion to the government that would be the platform for the government’s suggestion on “Sustainable Sweden” in the economical government bill. Part of this suggestion was a state grant for local investment programs (LIP), which the parliament decided in favor of. In June of 1997, the Delegation gave a revised and further elaborated suggestion to the government on how the local investment programs could be realized. Given this report, the Delegation formulated guidelines for LIP and passed it on to the parliament in September 1997 to decide upon. When submitting the budget for 1998, the parliament decided to give state grant to LIP for sustainable society. Aim of the LIP is to speed up the change in society to sustainability, and to increase employment.

A society that works towards sustainable development is according to the World Commission on Environment and Development characterized by social, economical, ecological and cultural dimensions of our lives (WCED, 1987). Members of the Delegation developed these thoughts and arrived at the notion that investments should be in focus. But what kind of environmental issues are related to the concept of sustainable society and what does the Swedish government in 1997 mean by using these terms? The general goals for a sustainable society is according to the Swedish government:

- *To protect the environment:* Emissions should not hurt the health of humans or exceed the ability of nature to take care of pollution. Naturally occurring substances should be used in such a way to protect the natural cycle. Human-made and dangerous substances should not exist in nature. The biodiversity should be kept and cultural environments should be protected.
- *Efficient use:* The use of energy and other natural resources should be much more effective than today. Thus, energy and material flows should be delimited so that they are in accordance with sustainability. Urban planning, technological development and investments should thus be focused on resource efficient products and processes.
- *Sustainable resource supply:* The long-term production capacity of the ecological system must be secured. As long as possible, the supply should be based on the sustainable use of renewable resources. That means that the use in the long run cannot exceed the pace by which nature creates new resources and that material should be reused in cycles. We should be economical with not renewable resources and continually strive for renewable substitutions.



In order to evaluate which LIP projects should be given state grants, the Delegation had formulated a set of criterias which are linked to environmental performance goals. They form a point of passage, which all LIP projects ought to pass and take into consideration when formulating and submitting their LIPs. Each LIP should address the following environmental issues and show how their projects:

- Reduce the negative impact on the environment
- Improve the efficiency in energy use
- Improve the efficiency in using other natural resources
- Enhance the use of renewable resources
- Increase the re-use and recycling of resources
- Contribute to the preservation of the biodiversity
- Contribute to increase the circulation of plant nutritive

Eventually, municipalities with the best suggestions get state grants. The municipality has the a key role to make sure the grants are transferred to the individual projects in the LIP, whereby the government continuously follows up how the projects proceed. An additional idea of LIP is to ensure local anchoring<sup>2</sup>. This should make it possible to maintain the successful work of Agenda 21, which has a record of involving local organizations and its members in environmental work. The government also hopes that these locally adopted conditions lead to a fast employment of new working methods that enhance the sustainability of the invested capital.

The overall grant permitted by the Swedish parliament is 5.4 billion SEK in the years of 1998-2000. The LIP is said to be a first step in a chain of reforming steps to turn Sweden into a sustainable society and into a leading figure internationally. In the first round, municipalities could formulate and submit proposals by October 1997 to enter a phase of dialogue between the municipality and the governmental *Division for sustainable development*. In this dialogue phase, the proposal should be amended and translated into a final application, that should be submitted by February 1998. The Division for sustainable development has two aims with this procedure: First, to help the municipalities in their development work. Second, to have control over the process while meeting representatives from the municipalities, even if it is up to the municipality to enter with any kind of application.

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<sup>2</sup> For a brief understanding of the concept of anchoring, please see (Czarniawska, 2000).

## **LIP in Trollhättan**

The work on the initial proposal at the Municipality of Trollhättan started immediately once the government had announced the local investment program (LIP). At that time, the Municipality of Trollhättan had long experience of working with environmental issues through the Agenda 21. For this work they had previously received the environmental prize of the Swedish King. Applying for grants from the LIP was regarded as one way to continue the extensive environmental work that took place and to get fresh resources to further develop the environmentally friendly profile of the municipality.

The assignment to formulate the initial proposal of interest was given to Tore Carlsson and Gunnar Gidenstam since they had been engaged in the environmental work of the municipality for a long time. Furthermore, they had a broad network within the community, both through their activities in the Agenda 21-work and the experience of working within the municipal administration. The municipal council set aside resources to enable them to work full time with the completion of the application. This was regarded as an investment for the municipality, knowing that, if they played their cards right and according to the conditions presented by the government, it could result in governmental grants.

The work started in the end of August 1997 with a call to all citizens of the municipality, companies and local authorities to participate in the process of improving the environment in Trollhättan. They wanted to have a broad local commitment in the program, as was previously successful with the Agenda 21-process. But it was also the personal interests and preferences of the project managers that governed the choice of how to organize the project:

*"It is my interest to be at the frontier when it comes to development, new ideas and to experiment. I like that. I think it is very exciting. I've never liked doing anything administrative, always the same thing, and that's a personal thing." (Interview with Gunnar Gidenstam on October 13, 1998)*

The project managers were able to present 150 different project proposals in different directions, scope and levels of completion. Despite the intensive work and the elegant design, the proposal did not fall on good ground at the Division for sustainable development. Trollhättan was never invited to a further dialogue with the government. The reason why the Division for sustainable development disapproved of the proposal was, however, unclear. The project managers imagined that they had misinterpreted the

instructions and the meaning of the directions of the central authority; that the final shape of the program would be completed through a dialogue.

"We overinterpreted the word proposal and dialogue. We thought that we could have a *smörgåsbord* with good ideas that we, at a later stage, would form together in a dialogue. We thought we should get much more time after their response. We thought they would say: 'This looks good. We think you should work on that!' and 'Yes, then we go home and do that!' but it didn't work that way, rather we should have been more clear from the beginning ..." (Interview with Gunnar Gidenstam on October 13, 1998)

The application was regarded as a catalogue of ideas. That was not what the central authorities had expected. The energy and commitment characterizing the work group was turned into despair. The Division for sustainable development did not pay attention to the Agenda 21-like working methods and to the qualities that the program had generated for the local representatives. Thus, the use of the Agenda 21-principles for the creation of the proposal was regarded as one reason why Trollhättan was not offered to go further in the dialogue with the central government.

Notwithstanding the disappointment of the negative answer, they did not give up. The work managers still thought that their proposal was something they could stand up for. They were proud of it. It was all in line with the way of organizing environmental issues in the municipal administration since it was awarded in 1996 by the environmental prize of the Swedish King. However, through unconventional measures never stated clearly to us, they could convince the Division for sustainable development to bring Trollhättan back into the race for grants. The contacts gave results. The central authority changed their mind. The working team in Trollhättan got a second chance to come up to Stockholm and present their program, together with nearly 70 other selected municipalities in Sweden. The result of the meeting in Stockholm was that Trollhättan was allowed to go on with their proposal.

Completing the application was an arduous task. It was important to, in a limited time, make exhaustive plans for the work in the projects, pick out the projects that seemed to fit with the hints of the central authority and, at the same time, consider if they were possible to pursue or not. The team chose 50 projects that were divided into the five fields of housing (3), energy (11) circulation (14) environmental management (10) and transportation (11). This implied that the application was cut with two thirds. The final application was handed in with the expectations that it would provide further support to the environmental work of the municipality.

## **The decision of the Swedish government**

The government decided to give grants to the municipality of Trollhättan with a total of 37,861,000 SEK over three years. The decision clearly defined what projects of the Trollhättan LIP would get grants. Each project that was given grants had a detailed description under what conditions the money will be paid (for instance the ratio of 30% state grants, 70% municipality funding), deadlines for certain milestones, and which effects should be reached by each project.

The final report of the municipalities had to be handed in by April 2001. Grants not used in accordance with the government decision could be reimbursed to the Department of Environmental Affairs. The government also had the right to disburse grants when entire projects or parts thereof deviated considerably from the conditions of the government decision. The grants were paid to 80 per cent during the years of 1998-2000, leaving the remaining 20 per cent for payment when the final report of each project had been handed in to the municipality, and to the Division for sustainable development respectively.

The positive decision was regarded as a reward for the hard work they had gone through. It was important; not only for project managers, but also for the politicians who had given them their support.

"It was intense and we really had put a lot of energy into it, me and Gunnar, and the colleagues had put prestige into it as well and it was important for the municipal commissioners." And "The local authorities get a 'spider role', not only for the municipal administration, but also for the whole geographical area of the municipality and there has not been such clear assignments before." (Interview with Tore Carlsson on October 13, 1998)

It was also regarded as a positive thing that the program contributed to a review of and higher priority of the local environmental policy. It was regarded as important to get support for heavy environmental investments. It gives environmental issues greater status. The support for heavy investments is regarded as a way to get in to a new phase in environmental work and in that sense this program is regarded as a complement rather than a substitute to other ways of organizing environment, i.e. Agenda 21. Taken together, the local investment program is understood as a new move from central government that has both good and bad sides.

## Discussion

The local authority of Trollhättan was given grants for several projects of sustainable development and also the possibility to influence the evaluation of the application. In that sense they have good chances to pursue their environmental goals in the local arena. However, it is the central Division for sustainable development in Stockholm that has control of the process and finally decides what projects to grant. Even if the local authorities are not prepared for, have political support or have the capacity to pursue the projects, the central Division for sustainable development makes them formulate, plan and calculate the work that has to be done and the resources needed to carry on a local environmental policy. This is done in three ways.

*First*, the government demands that the local projects should fulfill certain criteria in line with the “global” environmental policy. The point of departure is that the local environment work can be described in terms of an ecologically sustainable society. However, there is also room for the local authorities to get support for local solutions, personal pet projects and particular interests. At the same time the central Division for sustainable development has the authority to define the meaning of environmental problems.

*Second*, a great part of the government instructions is about the way local authorities organize sustainable development. There are demands on “descriptions of current and future ways of organizing sustainable development in the municipality”: “the projects should be put in a context”; “provide opportunities for equality”; “cooperation with local trade and industry”; and demands on “forms to encourage and facilitate the commitment to a sustainable development among the citizens”. To some extent it is the commitment, interest and competence in organizing sustainable development that is the basis for evaluation, rather than the “actual” environmental problems in the local community. In the LIP application of Trollhättan the description of the “environment” is restricted to those aspects covered by the proposed projects, rather than a complete description of the environmental problems in the community.

*Third*, the instructions of the Division for sustainable development are posed with a request for specific information, details considering costs, time schedules and effects: e.g. “the number of jobs created”. With these conditions it is in the interest of the local authorities to describe the projects in a way that shows they are profitable, possible to accomplish, and that the additional costs associated with making the investment environmental friendly is made explicit.

The application procedure is also introduced as a kind of dialogue between central and local authorities. The dialogue is said to be both a support and a way to learn. Thus, the dialogue serves several functions.

- (1) To indicate what is the right type of projects and actions, and to give a hint to how projects should be formulated.
- (2) To evaluate and support the definition of projects a priori, in order to make sure that it is based on appropriate local conditions.
- (3) To correct and discourage incorrect use of the directives to make sure that it is the governmental definition of the sustainable development that works as a basis for the local work towards sustainable development.

The result of the application procedure is that the subsidized local projects are made “global”. (It does not mean that the same thing is done all over the country, neither that any project is granted resources.) The dialogue between the central and local authorities contributes to create what Czarniawska and Joerges call: a link between localized time/spaces and globalized time/spaces (Czarniawska *et al*, 1996). The practice of the centrally located Division for sustainable development makes sure that the chosen projects are locally connected in time and space. “Think globally—act locally”, as one of the representatives of the Division for sustainable development expressed it. The central environmental policy is made local. Thus, the application procedure is an occasion where the construction of local environmental work by the Division for sustainable development gains in degrees of reality (Latour, 1987).

The local investment program is a way for the central government to distribute resources for environmental work to local authorities. LIP has advantages in this respect in relation to other ways of organizing environmental solutions, since there is an opportunity to influence, not only which environmental projects to support, but also on how these resources should be used. In order to achieve this, the Division for sustainable development introduce the application procedure as a “dialogue” where local authorities should participate, have influence on the final shape of the program and contribute with their knowledge and experience from local environmental work (e.g. Agenda 21). During the application procedure the local authorities take part of a mass of directives, that are negotiable and a basis for learning for both parties. They are also recommended to describe the ongoing and the coming organization for sustainable development. The applications of the municipalities are evaluated by the central government, commented upon and assessed in order to make sure that the centrally formulated environmental policy is locally connected. In short, this procedure could be regarded as what Latour (1996/93:118) refers to as *translation*—the linkage of actions in

time and space. In fact, translation in the LIP program could be described as a chain of several translations, as illustrated in figure 1.

Please insert figure 1 about here.

Translation in the LIP program is, however, made in a particular way and under certain conditions.

*First*, since the local authorities are a part of the public administration there is already a kind of linguistic community. In each municipality there is long experience of applying for funding from the central authorities and, even if there are variations, the procedures are similar. If the applicant had been less experienced, e.g. a private company without the same natural connection to public administration, or had a different frame of reference and interests concerning environmental issues, the translation process may have been less transparent. However, the program is directed to municipalities as a way to support environmental programs in the local authorities as an extension of the centrally formulated environmental policy. The central authorities take advantage of the linguistic community, in terms of acquaintance with the rules of translation already existing in the municipality, also guaranteeing good results and timely treatment, which is a condition for political action. From an interpreter's point of view, however, the common language is something that is less important, a necessary evil or something that distracts working with the important issues.

*Second*, LIP is a relatively temporary phenomenon and would accordingly not be of vital importance for the use of neither organizational nor environmental language in the long run. One would think that a more far-reaching change of the usage of language would require a more extensive and widespread process, where the local authorities gradually reformulate their environmental policy and where large parts of the population are included. On the other hand, LIP could be regarded as a part of a longer and more extensive process of change: the municipality's transformation to a sustainable society, not starting with the application of grants to a number of investments, rather a pronounced priority to the environment as a political and economic concern in the long run. In this instance the LIP program provides, what Latour (1996/93) calls, a "meta-language", with which the local speakers can talk about their own actions as a part of a global movement, producing opportunities for speakers to gain, what Bourdieu refers to as, "symbolic capital"—i.e. accumulated prestige or honour (Bourdieu, 1992). In this way the LIP program contributes to distribute resources, not only in monetary terms but also in a linguistic and symbolic sense. Thus,

*translation is dependent on the skillful performance of the local authorities in speaking the public administrative language—not because the central authorities would not accept their dialect, but because the local representatives would not be able to talk about their own work as a part of the “ecological sustainable society”.*

The most important evidence of translation in the LIP-program is the transformation of the program itself: the representatives of the municipality described how their understanding of environmental work changed as a consequence of the application. At the same time the central authority’s view of the project changed. This is one of the differences Latour poses between the translation model and the diffusion model:

“(E)very time a new group becomes interested in the project, it transforms the project—a little, a lot, excessively, or not at all. In the translation model, there is no transportation without transformation—except in those miraculous cases where everybody is in total agreement about a project.” (Latour, 1996/93:118)

This is valid to a different extent for the different projects. Some projects have been adjusted and redefined in accordance with the governmental instructions, whereas others have been preserved in about the same form as was intended from the beginning. Even if most of the projects were accepted and no considerable changes of the direction of the projects were made, project managers assert that their way of organizing environmental solutions has been changed. *The LIP has grown into a complement to other environmental activities instead of a replacement of them and by giving priority to environmental issue, the importance of the whole environmental area has grown in the municipality, both in terms of resources and status. Such a result may support the interest of environmental clerks and the citizens of the municipality, it may also be in line with the governmental interest: that environmental issues should be taken care of in the local community, where the competence and commitment is present.*

## **Conclusion: Organizing Sustainability**

Irrespective of the origin of certain projects’ compliance with the conditions of the central authorities, they have a considerable effect for those who are engaged in environmental issues in the municipality. For their own part, even if they do it on governmental pressure, this implies that local environmental workers get support for their work, that their effort is given attention to and that they can visualize their



contribution to the municipality. Furthermore, when more resources are at the disposal for organizing sustainability there is a possibility to employ more people as spokes-persons for the environmental interest within the municipal administration. That means that the LIP program may lead to reinforcement of a network of municipal administrators engaged in environmental issues, which may have effects in the long run. These groups may function as local pressure groups, putting forward environmental issues in the municipal administration, whether they lead to any direct effects on the environment or not. This is valid for most of the projects of the municipality, whether they imply full time employment of administrators or not. It is maybe most important for those projects about employing administrators dealing with particular issues such as: "bicycle informant"; "natural gas informant" or "project coordinator". Thus, the LIP program gives priority to environmental issues in the municipality, and could be said to oppose previous decades of efforts of modernization (Latour, 1998).

However, from the governmental point of view, there are difficulties associated with making the representatives of the municipality fully comply with the environmental policy and the way to organize the local investment programs. There is an opportunity for the municipality to apply for grants, more as a way to "add water to the wine", i.e. to create resources to cover up for budget deficits in the municipal administration, rather than an expression of a genuine long term commitment for sustainable development. A further possibility may be that the municipality applies for grants without being able to carry out the projects applied for (e.g. because of unsatisfactory planning, weak support from local politicians or too high ambitions). It is this type of rash applications the government wants to guard against by demanding detailed information and to set up a dialogue with the applying municipalities. They want to make sure that the local authorities have reflected upon their projects and the possibility to carry them through. This assurance is created by successively demanding new information and by making the local applicants specify important aspects of their environmental policy. The central authority, by making a comprehensive assessment of the application, completes the chain of translations. Furthermore, which may be even more important, the design of the application process contains a built-in possibility for local administrators to make more detailed preparations, to create local support from politicians and to reformulate their projects in the time period between the initial proposal of interest and the final application. During this period local administrators had the opportunity to think through which projects to apply for. Thus, the LIP-

program is arranged in a way that supports local commitment and responsibility for environmental management.

The application procedure of the LIP-program appears as a supervised, limited and systematic translation of governmental environmental policy to local authorities. At the same time local representatives experience that their 'language' has not been drastically changed, rather that their environmental 'vocabulary' and 'grammar' has been improved. The central authority has shown a relatively open attitude towards the application procedure, criterias to use and not least the possibility to influence the interpretation and application of the criterias. Such openness could be regarded as different from the standard grant system, where the government authorities offer grants for particular actions and only grant those applications that fully comply with the formal criteria, thus applying a diffusion model of government policy. In this case the possibility to adjust the program to local conditions is a prerequisite for the government to achieve the aim of LIP: to support local work for sustainable development. Similarly, the flexibility and adaptability of the central Division for sustainable development give the local representatives further confirmation of the importance of the local commitment for sustainable development.

In sum: the local investment program in Sweden is a way of organizing sustainable development where the national government initiates, supports and controls the municipalities' applications for grants. It is thus a process of translating the central environment policy to local authorities rather than a diffusion of one pre-empted model. However, this translation is ambiguous. It presupposes that the municipality has the skills required to understand and translate the governmental directives, that they have the interest and commitment for sustainable development and have the ability to coordinate and (re-)formulate the application to the central authorities. These conditions are difficult to combine with the second function of the LIP-program: to distribute resources and evaluate which projects provide the most positive environmental effects.

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**Figure 1: The Local Investment Program as a chain of translations.**

Unfortunately, the text of the boxes do sometimes not show up on print-outs. Therefore, we provide you with the text of each box, starting with the top box going clockwise.

Local Investment Programs (LIP)

LIP application of Trollhättan municipality

The decision of the government

Trollhättan: one of the lucky few

Government: “sustainable society”

