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**Translation and Transcription  
in Development Projects**

From Vague Problems to Clear-Cut Solutions  
Through Project Organizing

**by**

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**TRANSLATION AND TRANSCRIPTION IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS  
- FROM VAGUE PROBLEMS TO CLEAR-CUT SOLUTIONS THROUGH  
PROJECT ORGANIZING**

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### **Descriptors**

Development projects, translation, transcription, links between projects, organizing processes

### **Biography**

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## **Abstract**

Occasionally, problems in society arise that do not fit into traditional structures of public organizations. Such problems become especially problematic if there is no adequate capacity to deal with them. At such situations, development projects may enable exploration of new ways of organizing activities. We use illustrations of development projects in public management in Sweden to discuss a fundamental organizing problem of projects: how project delimitation and formation takes place. This paper shows that the specific slice from organizational reality embodied in the interfaces between projects is of particular theoretical interest when observing this type of project organizing. Also, it shows how new issues are dealt with through the organizing of temporary activities. We offer a theoretical discussion of translation and transcription in development projects, not only since they are important to the formulation of the project goals, above all, since they are crucial links in a chain of sequential projects that are organized as responses to the new situation.

## Introduction

Organizations, as well as states and society in general, are organized along a functionally based division of labour. In society this means that public administration and government structure reflect a functional partitioning (Ahrne, 1998). There are departments and authorities dealing with communication, industrial policies, agriculture, and so on, and over time borders between them have been widely accepted. The different departments and authorities become organizational environments to each other.

Studies of adaptation and diffusion processes have shown how organizations tend to adapt to attributions of their organizational environments with which they interact and depend upon (DiMaggio, 1983; Tolbert and Zucker, 1983). Over time, stability and standard operating procedures have become the norm and the balance between the exploration of new possibilities and the exploitation of old certainties (March, 1991; March, 1994a:237ff) has been disturbed. The balance is permanently threatened by tendencies for both exploration and exploitation to be self-reinforcing, once proven to be successful (March, 1999:39).

However, from time to time problems arise that do not fit into a traditional structure of society or of organizations. Such problems become even more problematic if there is a lack of capacity to deal with them. An improper balance between exploration and exploitation in favor of exploiting routinized administrative systems call for a re-awakening of explorative undertakings. Newly defined problems demand different solutions and lead to a wave of organizing in which newly created functions must be

organized (Meyer, 1994). Focus on organizing becomes apparent and, in times of exploration, such attempts tend to be temporary.

Just as hard it is to deny administrative systems and bureaucracies as existing organizational forms, just as easy is it to acknowledge that new organizational forms have emerged. 'Clusters', 'networks', 'virtual' organizations and 'temporary' projects are just a few labels of emerging organizational forms which mirror how the interest is turning from internal issues concerning size or technology to "the newly found fluidity in the external appearance of organizations" (Clegg and Hardy, 1996:9). This turn of interest raises the question of how cross-organizational undertakings are organized today.

We will argue that a situation of vague and underdefined problems creates a need for projects. Projects become a natural way of dealing with those issues that current structural arrangements fail to attend to. Obviously, these projects are not of a traditional Project Management text book character. Instead these projects represent a way of dealing with problems that are vaguely formulated and where there are no clear-cut solutions initially. Some authors would argue that this lack of clarity is a characteristic not only for the startup phase of projects, but for the entire project process (Sahlin-Andersson, 1986; Sahlin-Andersson, 1989). A crucial project task in endeavours of change is therefore to create clarity and sensemaking of the problem.

Thereby, translation is a key concept for understanding organizational change (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996:7). One proponent of the translation sociology is Bruno Latour. He 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 and diffuse throughout society, but are the effects of heterogeneous interests, emotions and consensus, as well as carelessness, conflict and clashing intentions. So the nature of a project changes whenever a new actor becomes 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 the project is the effect of ongoing negotiations where a project never is real, but is gaining or losing 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 interfaces between projects is a slice of organizing reality well worth studying.

This paper investigates how projects run from degrees of vagueness to degrees of clarification. Empirical illustrations from public management will be used to support our discussion, i.e. an environmental improvement project organized as an inter-organizational collaboration and a renewal project in different health care organizations. We argue that the interfaces between different projects are of particular interest when observing this type of project organizing since the ontology and direction of projects is decided at these links. 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 describes how project delimitation and formation takes place.

## **Projects as response to vague problems**

In this section the rise of cross-functional problems in two different settings will be described. The first one illustrates how environmental problems have been dealt with over the years until it became accepted as a cross-functional problem and, thus, made an issue for project organizing activities. This is to say that the way public organizations work with environmental control has changed, or better, broadened, during the last decades. Coming from the 1960's with a focus on control and legislation towards a number of different cooperative attempts being decentralized and problem oriented. Good examples for this are a number of environmental projects taking place in Sweden lately.

Our second case is a major renewal project in a health care organization. Health care in Sweden that is publicly funded and operated has been under economic pressure during the 1990's and most health care organizations has launched renewal projects in order to make operations more effective and efficient. The EPQ project reported here is such an example.

We argue, that it is of particular interest when observing this type of project organizing to focus on the links between different projects, between the principal and the project members, and between the project members and different clients of their projects. The direction and force of project work is decided at these links, and how the projects are delimited and formed through different phases of translation and transcription processes. It is partly the translation of political and strategic ideas at the beginning of a project; it is partly the transcriptions of processed and translated ideas that have changed status into reports, suggestions and new ideas at the end of a project.



Together, translation and transcription describes how project delimitation and formation takes place.

### **Case 1. The Environmental Project Sundsvall/Timrå**

The Minister of Environmental Affairs suggested that a delegation be appointed, which should initiate and coordinate actions to improve the environment considerably in the Sundsvall/Timrå region within a ten-year period. The directive was the last of four at the end of the 1980's that the government appointed in February 1989. For a detailed description of all environmental projects, see Dobers (1997). Sundsvall and Timrå municipality belong to an old and highly exploited industrial region. Production in this region, especially in the field of paper and aluminium, has led to the accumulation of a considerable amount of land and water pollution. Waste, particularly from industry, is complicated to take care of. Sundsvall/Timrå is a melting pot in this part of Sweden, long distance traffic passes through the city for further transportation and the area is also a destination for traffic.

The environmental project covered an area of 4,000 square kilometers, which corresponds to about one per cent of Sweden's total area. It is just little more than the area of Gotland and four per cent of the area is used for agriculture whereas seventy-five per cent is covered by forest. Taken together, Sundsvall and Timrå municipalities had 112,000 inhabitants in 1988, which then was about 1.3 per cent of Sweden's population. Of all those being employed, one fifth work in the manufacturing industry, which is a little less than the average in Sweden.

The forest industry and the large process industries dominate the Sundsvall and Timrå region. In 1989, the paper mills of Ortviken and Wifsta produced 550,000 tons of

paper for newspapers and 100,000 tons of high quality paper, and industry in Östrand produced 370 000 tons of paper pulp. The only aluminium producing industry in Sweden, GA Metall, produced 97,000 tons of aluminium. Nobel Industries in Stockvik has several products, among others, 60,000 tons of calcium carbide, 50,000 tons of sodium chlorate and 25,000 tons of semi-manufactured articles to other industries (1989).

Despite these operations with seemingly large quantities of pollution, the environmental project in Sundsvall and Timrå took a different stand and focused on problems connected with the content of products, the consumption of products, and their final displacement.

I believe that each time has its specific way of working. Problems are perceived in specific ways. During the 1970's, large single source emissions at chimneys and into the water were the major environmental problems. Thus, it seemed natural that we controlled large single source emissions. (...) Fall-out of sulphur has been minimised, these large single source emissions are very much improved. District heating has led to no emissions in the city due to single boilers. It is all concentrated to Korsta where filters and cleaning systems have been installed. The problems of today and of tomorrow are slightly different. Nowadays, you have to pay more attention to the products that come out of the factory. Previously, you have focused on the raw material entering the production process and on emissions. You did not pay attention to the contents of the products (Åke Dahlberg, member of the EPST delegation, 941208:9-10, our translation).

As the previous quotation shows, the perception of environmental problems had changed. The politicians chose not to engage the centralized competence of the EPA, but turned directly to the people active in a particular area. It was not merely in a political sense that the discretion to take decisions was decentralised to the municipalities and to

the people in the area. The delegation ensured an active participation on the side of the municipal executive board as well.

While the delegation was active we ensured sound support of the municipality in all discussions and saw to it that the municipal executive board became responsible for the work in different committees and boards, and they still are (Ivar Nordlander, chairperson of the EPST delegation, 941208:7, our translation).

To reach the aim of the assignment, the environmental projects concluded that major efforts were needed in fields such as traffic, industries and municipal plants, nature in general, and environmental protection. The successful implementation of these suggestions rested on the participation of people in all sections of the municipalities. To assure such participation, the final report established an Environmental Plan for Sundsvall and Timrå. The plan contained a detailed inventory of environmental problems, suggestions of improvement, who was being in charge of the improvement actions, and what time-table was set for such actions. Eighty-three suggestions for the Sundsvall municipality were formulated in the EPST (SOU 1990/91:90, 1991) and politically decided upon in March 1990. The Environmental Plan for Sundsvall municipality was followed up twice, once in January 1993 for the year of 1992 and once in March 1995, the latter covering all three years, which the Environmental Plan was set out to cover.

## **Case 2. The EPQ-project in a health care organization**

Health care in Sweden is mainly financed through public funds and most hospitals and other health care providers are owned and operated by regionally public health care organizations (on a county level). Thus each health care organization operates a number

of hospitals and a large number of family health care centers in their region. Some hospitals have special competencies in certain areas and serve people also from other, neighboring, regions. Many of the health care organizations have experienced economic difficulties during the 1990's, following general economic recession and reduction of tax revenues. Consequently a large number of renewal projects have been launched in the different health care organizations aiming at the creation of more efficient organizational structures and routines to cut spending while still providing high quality health care.

This case is about one of these organizations that in the early 1990's launched a major renewal project labelled EPQ. The acronym meant Effectiveness, Productivity and Quality. EPQ was a top management initiated project and the newly appointed CEO and his staff was made responsible for the implementation. At approximately the same time, the political organization of the health care was changed (a provider – purchaser model was introduced; see Saltman and von Otter, 1992). These changes will not be described in this paper (see Lundin and Söderholm, 1997 for a full case description).

At the outset it was not obvious what to do under the general heading of EPQ even though there were some general aims formulated, such as reducing the cost of the health care provided and renew the management accounting systems used. A number of measurements were thought of and a number of different approaches were discussed. During 1992 a number of documents and policies were created where different issues were dealt with. Those documents introduced concepts like pay-per-performance instead of annual funding, Diagnostic Related Groups (DRG) system for measuring 'production', income-related budgeting and new principles for clinic's annual planning

cycles. Through these documents the general acronym EPQ were given a general content although it still was unclear what this meant in the long run.

Some of the various issues that had been subject for policy-making procedures were subsequently implemented. Also, some new issues not previously planned were also implemented. DRG-registration procedures were introduced for all hospital care while pay-per-performance routines were introduced for patients transferred between different hospitals and for all health care at one specific hospital. Since the organization was divided into three districts with its own district managers the implementation was dependent on their support. The pay-per-performance routine was initially only accepted and implemented by one of the districts.

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

EPQ had different impact at different hospitals and at different hospital clinics. Some clinics used EPQ as a reason for implementing new organizational routines or new organizational structures that weren't initially indicated by the EPQ-project. One clinic re-organized their working organization and thereby was able to reduce the number of employees. Another clinic used EPQ as an argument for the introduction of a completely new set of medical routines. Yet another clinic made substantial changes to their division of responsibilities among the doctors, and so on. EPQ was thereby re-

designed as it reached local clinics and new sets of activities were organized. These activities were connected to the general idea of EPQ and made use of instruments and documents produced within EPQ but were nevertheless not initially planned as a part of EPQ.

To sum up, EPQ was initially a vague idea around a set of long term goals that were made clearer over time and through the introduction of a number of more specific administrative routines and management accounting principles. Some of the clinics could also use EPQ as a local 'excuse' for the change of clinical organization or routines. The project was not terminated at a specific point in time. Rather, top management gradually abandoned it as some of the ideas had been implemented, some were abandoned and some were made the object for future projects. An example of the latter case is quality issues that were a part of the general EPQ discussion initially but never were attended to. Instead quality development was the subject of a new renewal project launched as separate project later on.

## **The fundamental organizing problems of projects**

The projects mentioned earlier could be viewed as answers to the limitations of administrative systems when dealing with diffuse problems that are hard to identify and where no clear-cut responsibility is assigned. Thereby, they became strategic projects (Lundin and Söderholm, 1997:145ff). The projects were used as a general method to combat a complex web of problems within an area where established agencies and existing legislation were unsatisfactory and incomplete.

The most fundamental organizing problem of temporary organizations and projects is how they are delimited and formed. We will dwell deeper into this problem area in the following. Thereby, we argue that translation and transcription, as a certain slice from an organizational reality, are examples of how delimitation and formation of projects take place. We focus on translation and transcription not only since they are important to the formulation of the project goals, above all, since they are crucial links in a chain of sequential projects.

### **Delimitation and formation of projects**

The most apparent difference between development projects and the traditional functional work is that development projects are delimited in distinct ways; 1) projects have an own specified task, 2) projects have a certain time horizon, 3) projects have certain resources assigned and, 4) projects are implemented in certain ways. It is the existence of these delimitations that makes it possible for us to label any action as a project (Lundin and Söderholm, 1995).

However, projects can be more or less delimited in relation to the various dimensions. Projects concerning clearly defined relations with clients are tightly controlled by time and therefore, the other dimensions have to adjust to the time-wise delimitation. Development projects, where most often no clear client exists and thus, projects that lack clearly defined relations with clients, are instead delimited by the task and the rest of the dimensions are adjusted to the task-wise dimension. Environmental projects and the EPQ-project are clearly characterized being development projects; they came into existence since the established systems of environmental abatement or the existing organizational structure could not deal with the topical problems. Also, the

tasks were unclear, and it was not settled to what extent and which companies and agencies should be enrolled in the longer run. Regarding the environmental projects, the task was spatially defined, but it was not clear what “coordinate actions”, “considerably cleaner” and “environment” would mean. The environmental projects were thus concentrated to develop knowledge and suggestions for action, and to initiate and coordinate those actions – typical development tasks. EPQ was at the outset a set of general principles and long term goals but had no specific and delimited implementation issues defined.

Projects are not only defined by the tasks at hand, but also by the resources that are given to them in terms of people and money etc. For development projects, this is often a critical delimitation. If a project lack “advocates”, the work can become worthless over time. In those cases projects are organized around a clear and relatively easy solved issue, the principal might not follow the project in detail. The role of “advocates” is not only important out of a management perspective, but also in relation to the contacts that are organized between principal, project and the clients. The environmental projects were formed in a political sphere and it is natural that the political interest changes over time. The environmental projects lasted for only 18 months, but were geared to improvements in the environmental state of art over a ten years period. Thereby, the project members came to put demands for resources on the principal, the state, under a relatively long period of time. EPQ also aimed at long lasting changes in the organization and major benefits of the projects could therefore not be expected to be obvious during the projects time horizons. Any new routines that came



out of EPQ were therefore creating demands for future attention from the various health care representatives.

The environmental projects had also a local and regional dimension. Political and business advocates of the region were enrolled in the project and it can be assumed that once enrolled, they took also some responsibility for the project outcome. The local and regional dimension can be exemplified by the Gothenburg project, where consultants were enrolled that also were trusted by the local business community in other settings (Dobers, 1997:53f). This way was rational since the ambition of the project was to be action oriented. In Sundsvall/Timrå, key representatives of the municipality took part in the project, which later on increased the possibilities of implementing the suggestions of the environmental projects in the bureaucracies of the municipality. The local anchoring of the environmental projects was taken care of by enrolling different societal interests.

Eventually, the projects are delimited also by the work method chosen. In the short and clear directives for the environmental project it was an implicit assumption that the projects should lead way to developing knowledge and environmental competence (Dobers and Wolff, 1995). The short time frame gives also reason to believe that not much concrete change work could take place. The projects had its main focus on “initiating” rather than on “implementing”, which is true to Sundsvall/Timrå. EPQ also had certain delimitation through the choice of method. After the first stage of investigation into different alternatives the project was mainly organized within the line organization and by successive learning during development and implementation.

Traditional teaching in project management stress that a project develops from initiation or conceptualization, via implementation to closing and feedback (see Engwall

1995 for a critical discussion on traditional project definitions). At least the environmental project has to some extent been treated this way, but we argue that the perception of initiating, conceptualization, implementation and closing is not particularly interesting for development projects. Projects with such clear boundary-overlapping character and with genuine development tasks cannot be judged with concepts stemming from the methods of construction project management. In contrary, we argue that there are two other concepts that better can explain the special organizing problems evoked by our cases. Hereby, it is fruitful to focus on a particular slice from a certain organizational reality (Alvesson and Köping, 1993). The slice that is best suited for closer inquiry is the transition between different projects, which will be discussed in the terms of translation and transcription.

### **Translation and transcription**

These terms, especially the term “translation”, has its theoretical basis in the translation sociology that was once formulated by French sociologists (Callon and Latour, 1981; Callon, 1986; Latour, 1996/93:118ff; Latour, 1998). Two models are presented that are of help when studying innovations and their spreading; the diffusion model and the translation model. In the former, a brilliant idea is formulated that has a strong and autonomous position and that is not contestable. The idea is spread very quickly and although some actors might discredit the idea, it will always survive. In the latter model, the translation model, the basis for the spreading of the idea is different. The original idea is rather weak, not clearly formulated and is hardly structured at all. Since it lacks an own force, the idea is dependent on others and is spreading only through others becoming interested in it and formulate alliances with it. Each time someone has interest

in the idea, it changes in character. Such ideas can only spread if they are changed and if interested parties may “translate” the ideas to own language frames and interpret them in accordance with their own dictionaries existing in particular organizational fields. The idea eventually results in a fantastic project and ends where the diffusion model wants us to start out; with a stable idea that can be implemented (Latour, 1996/93:119).

Translation sociology has been used in a Scandinavian anthology (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996), where several authors have facilitated studies of organizational change using translation sociology. One chapter is of particular interest to us since it evolves on the translation sociology and thus complements traditional analyses of organizational change; namely the narrative of ideas that materialize through a chain of translations and through inscriptions into materiality (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996; Joerges and Czarniawska, 1998). Through selective perception, adjusted to the social environment and coping with “what’s in or out” (Abrahamson, 1996; Røvik, 1996), certain ideas are chosen among many existing ones to be part of a translation process. The idea takes form when it becomes known in pictures or words; so it gets into a material form and can start its journey from one organizational field to another when it is translated to its new temporary habitat. The materialized idea might lead to different changes, in itself yet another translation, and eventually becomes institutionalized by taking on a concrete form—just look around you to see the computer, chair, desk... The argument can be summarized; an idea is translated into an object (text, book, prototype of any kind), which in itself is translated into actions that are repeated over and over again, that eventually is institutionalized by even more new translations (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996:26).

The Scandinavian adjusted, or, if you prefer, translated translation sociology takes an overall perspective where all changes are interpreted as translation of any kind. However, in this paper, we take a project-internal perspective where we, if you prefer, start from one single translation link in the chain described above. When talking about the concept of “translation” we refer to the start of a project; it is when project members make sense in their task by translating ideas given to them by the principal (or “transcribed” materialized items given as a report or directive for instance). When talking about the concept of “transcription” we refer to the end of a project; it is when project members have worked with a project and is coming to an end and “pass on” their materialized ideas transcribed into reports, actions or action nets. See also a study that has focussed on other organizational passages. The move from day shift to night shift at a west Swedish newspaper is called to ”pass on”, where the concept shows the process, the transformation from one condition to another (Kärreman, 1996).

### **Translation in development projects**

As mentioned earlier, development projects such as the environmental projects are organized as seen from unclear starting conditions and perspectives. The project is defined over time and becomes clearer and clearer and thus, gets structured forms with organized activities. Thus, the perceived insecurity is reduced over the lifetime of a project, which is rather natural. This quality of development projects identifies the first critical process of a project as dealing with translation and simply involves formulating a meaning and making sense of the task description (Weick, 1995). A non-concrete process is given concrete content and forms that is the basis for further actions. This is an uncertainty reduction phase of the projects.

Translation is resulting in a projects' meaning and form in terms of the concepts presented in previous section; i.e. direction, content and time horizon. The translation process step by step reduces the latitude for competing ideas of how resources could be used, of alternative subprojects or the direction of the overall work. Having this in mind, translation is about linking and coupling the project to relevant descriptions of problems and solutions in the region, organization, or society in large and also to hopeful descriptions of the future and positive results of having the project actually taking place. Translation is consequently more often associated with the "outside" of projects rather than with the "inside" since it is on the 'outside' a development projects' result having to be noticeable. This means, it might be more important to show that the project is coupled and linked with general discourses in society and/or the organization rather than to be able to show the solutions of practical implementation problems.

Tasks of development projects are often unclearly formulated; you don't know in advance how to work and there is not much experience to rely upon; and the working definition used are thus formed through translation processes within the project. A routinized operationalization of the task is not possible, and the work process of the project organization as well as the definition of any task underlies processes of formulating and reformulating; of translating and retranslating. Given these conditions, development projects are often unique in character (Sahlin-Andersson, 1986:196-199; Sahlin-Andersson, 1989:29-33), and therefore it is normal that the character and complexity of the task is ruling the time horizon of the project. Also, generally speaking, for this kind of projects it is often more important that the problems are attended to than that any time limits are kept.

Instead of focussing certain major companies in the region and targeting them in their environmental endeavor, the environmental project in Sundsvall / Timrå defined certain focus areas of interest, like traffic and nature, to work with. You could say that the initial translation processes brought about a series of activities, where the focus areas were platforms to meet upon, which triggered studies and suggested solutions. All four environmental projects had similar directives (only one is described in this paper) but due to different translation processes ended up with different activities. Whereas Sundsvall/Timrå focused on studies, did Gothenburg environmental project focus on implementation. The notion here is that both projects had similar conditions to work with, but resulting in different translation processes and different activities.

Once the project is up and running along a certain translation trajectory, alternative development paths are dropped. EPQ was made clearer as some key areas were focussed (e.g. pay-per-performance, annual planning, and DRG-registration) while other were dropped (e.g. quality or major organizational structure changes within hospitals). The project is thus entering a phase of chosen isolation to work along the translation trajectory. Thereby, the project work is given necessary stability and direction, when attention is given defined areas of importance and these can be exploited; however, at the same time, signals from outside of potential exploration are avoided as well. For a deeper discussion on the concepts of exploration and exploitation in organizational learning, please see (March, 1991; March, 1994b). Examples of such work is if gatekeepers of the project permanently declare that “work is going on”, “that a report is coming up” or “that an evaluation is planned” when the project is confronted with questions of what is really happening in the project. Isolation and decoupling of

activities (Weick, 1979) give a safety zone in which the main actors of a project can work peacefully and in accordance with the translation process given.

On one hand, changes in the environment are thus harder to also affect the project work (Kreiner, 1995). On the other hand, it is necessary to create a situation with clarity and reduced insecurity for project members to work in. This also leads forward to the next critical aspect of organizing projects; namely the phase when projects must open up to the environment and pass on any transcribed results of their work.

### **Transcription in development projects**

The environmental projects were dependent on that their work within the projects gave results outside of the projects, and we do not only refer to written reports on work done. Instead, each project resulted in certain knowledge areas and initiated actions that were passed on. These should, of course, also make a difference in different, upcoming projects. However, the formal time horizon of each project that no dramatic changes could take place during the lifetime of each project. The environmental projects in particular, but any organizational development project in general, were relying on that something was being passed on, that knowledge and ideas were made available for subsequent projects. This makes the passing on of a project's work, the transcription phase of any project, to a critical aspect.

In principle, the transcription of the projects can take place due to many different reasons. One reason is of course that the project has run out of time or money. Another reason can be drastic changes in the project context which makes it impossible to follow along a pre-chosen translation trajectory. The project then has to be re-translated and re-defined in order to continue. Transcribing a project prior to its natural end means also

that the project opens up and becomes the element for negotiating of new delimitations and new formations until a trajectory is found again. If the transcription takes place when a project ends, it can be part of an evaluation or be a starting point for new activities.

Having the environmental projects in mind, the transcription was planned from the beginning since they had to work for suggestions for the environment to become considerable cleaner within the next 10 years. Within the projects as well as from outside the projects it was known that they would present some form of suggested path of working, or a package of different activities in which their work could be transcribed into, in order for the work to continue on certain “pre-translated” paths. In EPQ there was not distinct end point for the project. It was said to be the focus for renewal activities for the coming years. Instead of having a certain time period when results were transcribed to new projects EPQ was characterized (after initial translation) of a continuous transcription of different issues.

Transcription phases are critical in the sense that they make sure that also the general ideas are passed on, that the momentum of “initiating and coordinating” could be further worked upon even if the projects themselves do not exist any longer. Consequently, it is a transcription and passing on of political and visionary ideas, directives, money, and working paths for environmental and organizational improvement. Simultaneously, these passed on ideas and things are taken on by new project teams and by other organizations, where translation processes start and new translation trajectories are negotiated upon.



Environmental problems are of such a character that it can hardly be said that a certain “environmental problem is solved” once certain organizational or other actions have been implemented. Environmental projects can thus not be ended in traditional ways by noticing that “now the project time is over and the task is taken care of”. Instead, when transcribing the project for subsequent efforts, it means anchoring (Czarniawska 1999) the suggestions and the project work in such a way, as to reach as many alliances with important things and texts among companies, governmental agencies or other organizations, to secure resources for future work. Transcribing thus means that projects of this kind is not terminated in a distinct way. Rather they fade away as pieces of their work leaves the project.

Also, transcribing and anchoring means to try to codify and stabilize pre-translated paths of how new projects, new legislation, new cooperation forms or new tasks could be established to secure the present project work. Having the Sundsvall/Timrå case in mind, their project members partly represented municipality interests, which meant that the work proceeding the project end could be stabilized and to vary translation processes avoided that could jeopardize the pre-translated path. Thus, anchoring in the municipality was a rather secure act. Also, the municipality of Sundsvall decided to take over the plan of the project, as it was, and make it the environmental plan for the municipality for the subsequent 3-4 years. Either the project was right on time, or the project members could stabilize their own translation in such a way, that the transcription from the project to the municipality was an easy and smooth task avoiding new translation processes in the municipality.

As always, it is of course hard to estimate the value of anything being passed on or transcribed in the ways described above. Development projects are per definition fuzzy projects with little past experience to relate to. Since the translation processes taking place in environmental projects in Sweden were so different, it is also hard to compare them to each other. In addition, it is hard to compare results since the time horizon in which the results should show, ten years, was so long. During a ten-year period so many different things have occurred that could not be anticipated during the project. The same observation holds true for EPQ with one major difference. EPQ relied upon concepts and instruments that were used in many public health care organizations at the time. Thereby they received some initial legitimization for measurements taken. Still, it is not easy to link future developments within the organization to certain activities within EPQ. Conditions had changed and the fade away character of the project further complicated the judgement of what had been done.

So you could always argue that conditions popping up subsequently altered the translation trajectories worked upon during the projects lifetime. But you could also state, if suggestions are still topical for use several years after project close down, that the project could “read the future” or was part of “formulating the future”. The value of any single project thus erodes over time so that any kind of evaluation 5 – 10 years after a project end is either rather arbitrary or uninteresting.

Instead, such projects are judged by how many activities are taking place due to their work. It can be established that the environmental projects made people in these regions re-interested in environmental issues, that they paved the way for a more proactive stand of many companies and organizations and even led to that certain

concrete activities could take place also without the initial state funding. Several of the effects associated with the environmental projects would have been hard, if at all, to realize with the traditional function of permanent state organizations. The projects and what they had transcribed and passed on were locally prepared and anchored which would not have been possible to do with centrally organized agency attention solely. EPQ made a number of activities possible that might not have been performed otherwise. That is most obvious for the various clinics that used EPQ arguments for local changes.

## **Translation and transcription as crucial links between projects**

The arguments put forward above about translation and transcription (passing on) can also be illustrated graphically in the following exhibit (Figure 1). From a project internal perspective, two central phases can be identified. Partly the translation phase where the rather vague and abstract directives and ideas of a project are translated to more concrete activities and partly the transcription phase when the effects or results of these activities are passed on from the project to actors in other organizations.

The figure shows that translation at a certain point or stage of a project is replaced by transcription. Rather, the figure shows that translation activities go on during the entire project time, although in a reduced amount towards the end. Transcription takes place simultaneously during the project duration but with less intensity and with less clarity in the early phases. Also, what is being passed on and transcribed from one project is a possible ingredient for translation processes in another project or another organization. Our point is that what is being transcribed is not an unambiguous plan for

action but the base material which has to be interpreted, understood and translated to new conditions in the projects and organization where it is received.

Insert Figure 1 here.

## **Vague problems need projects!**

This paper has focused on development project work regarding environmental and organizational renewal projects. We have analyzed how such projects are organized and linked context. In this last section, we are summing up our main arguments on the organizing of development projects. There are three final arguments that we would like to emphasize:

*First*, we argue that development work needs temporary organizations (Ekstedt *et al*, 1999) or projects, to be run successfully and with good chances of reaching impact. It is necessary to have an organization that runs from great uncertainty through translation and onward to activities and transcription of results. That can hardly be achieved by a traditional functionally organization. Also, development problems, and their solutions, cannot be divided into a functional structure since they are overlapping and demands attention by a multitude of perspectives during translation. There are not many administratively structured permanent organizations that unfold the flexibility and the possibilities of project organizing in this respect.

Important to notice is that a project only attends to a certain amount of ‘problems’. Instead of dealing with ‘everything’ some areas are selected for attention

and translation. Projects thus provide means to initially drop some types of problems that are not a part of the overall project definition. Since a project is not an everlasting entity it is also possible to direct attention to a certain time period while later time periods can be devoted to other problem areas.

*Second*, development projects cannot be run as traditional projects. This means that the task, and to some extent also the problem formulation (translation process) must be part of the project work itself. Normally project theory prescribes that project design is done outside single projects. The insecurity it means to include problem formulation and project design as a part of the project must be balanced with the potential benefit it can carry in terms of better designed activities. One way of dealing with this issue is to let projects run through different processes of translation and transcriptions. Each time a project is opened up for such processes, substantial changes can be made.

Organizing in projects also imply a possibility to merge different organizations, organizational units and actors. Of course, each actor participating will have their own motives, so any project will be inhabited with members having different aims, so the task here is to unify people around the resources and around some minimal consent, instead of attempting to unify the goals themselves. So the initial translation processes seems to be a very important phase for participating actors to negotiate around what to do.

*Third*, we argue it is theoretically interesting to highlight the notion of viewing certain slices of the organizational reality in projects. We have chosen a project internal perspective and focus at the beginning and at the end of projects. In theoretical terms we

have chosen to call these phases “translation” and “transcription”. In the beginning, members of the project have to make sense of any task by translating some initial ideas or directives to a knowledgeable content. Ideas, directives, reports and the like can only spread if they are changed and thus translated locally by people within the project, to make it concrete. But the ideas are also translated globally in other, related projects, when the transcriptions of one project are entering the translation process of other projects. This aspect of organizing projects is neglected in theory and we argue that to study development projects, you have to focus on the linkings of a projects to other projects in its web of actions by focusing on translation and transcriptions processes.

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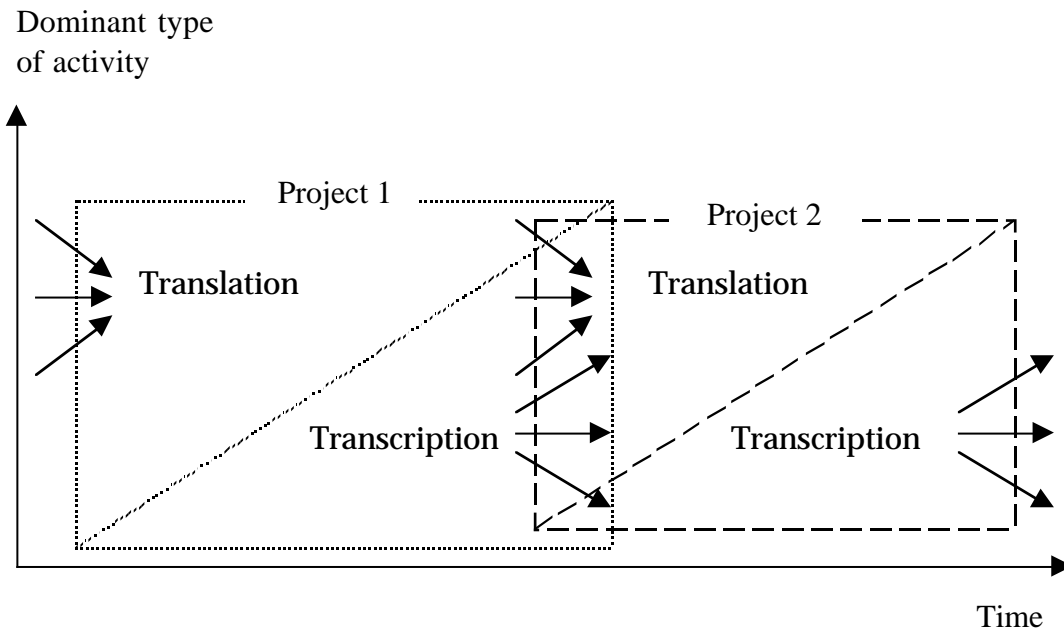


Fig. 1 The dominant type of activity at different times during a project life time.