

# **TRANSLATION AND TRANSCRIBING IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS – FROM VAGUE PROBLEMS TO CLEAR-CUT SOLUTIONS THROUGH PROJECT ORGANISING**

Peter Dobers, Gothenburg Research Institute, School of Economics and Commercial Law, Göteborg University.  
Box 600, SE-405 30 Göteborg, Sweden. E-mail: [peter.dobers@gri.gu.se](mailto:peter.dobers@gri.gu.se)

Anders Söderholm, Royal Institute of Technology, Industriell ekonomi, SE-100 44 Stockholm, Sweden.  
E-mail: [anders.soderholm@lector.kth.se](mailto:anders.soderholm@lector.kth.se)

## **ABSTRACT**

Organisations, as well as society in general, are organised along functional perspectives. Each function that serves members of a society has traditionally been taken care of by one state agency in each functional field. In the past, state agencies have improved sectors such as the social, educational and environmental fields of the industrialised society. Due to their initial success, these organisations have grown larger and have become permanent actors to serve society. However, over time new problems arise that cannot be dealt with by means of permanent organisations. Instead, projects and project-like organisations are created to deal with issues where permanent organisations tend to be less appropriate.

On a societal level, the creating of environmental projects to deal with diffuse pollution problems is one example. On a company level, the organising of organisational development projects to deal with problems in the current organisational structure is another example. Our reasoning is that such problems and previously unorganised solutions need temporary projects to ensure successful implementation and real change. It is simply not possible to cover all present and future problems by means of permanent and administrative organisations.

This paper takes the discussion further by examining the crucial organisational problems that projects of this type have to deal with. They are created with little or no support from traditional organisations, they have ambiguous goals, and are vulnerable. The implications of this paper are the following: from a practical perspective, we show how environmental and organisational renewal projects can be successfully organised as development projects instead of traditional projects. From a theoretical perspective, we argue it is fruitful to concentrate on certain aspects of project organising. By doing so, and by referring to the Scandinavian adapted institutionalism and translation sociology, this paper discusses the delimitation and formation of project organising by introducing the concepts of translation and transcription as vital components in the process of shaping and re-shaping this type of projects.

## **ORGANISING PROJECTS**

Organisations, as well as society in general, are organised along a functionally based division of labour. In society this means that public administration and government structures reflect a functional partitioning. 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 same is true for single organisations. Functionally organised organisations are still common and most “new” organisations (such as matrix-organisations) have their specific functional units still intact.

However, from time to time problems arise that do not fit into a traditional structure of society or organisations. Such problems become even more problematic since there is a lack of capacity to deal with them. We will argue that this situation 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 textbook character. Instead these projects represent a way of dealing with problems that are vaguely formulated and where there are no clear-cut solutions initially. A crucial project task is therefore to create clarity and an unequivocal understanding of the problem.

This paper investigates how projects of this type run from vagueness to clarification. More specifically, mechanisms inherent in project work of this type are analysed. Empirical instances from two different sectors will be used to support our discussion. First, an environmental improvement project organised as an inter-organisational collaboration and, second, one corporate renewals project within a large private company.

## **PROJECTS AS A 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 they became accepted as cross-functional problems and, thus, made an issue for project organising activities. This is to say that the way public organisations work with environmental controls has changed, or better, has broadened, during the last decades. Starting from the 1960s there has been a focus on control and legislation leading to a number of different cooperative attempts being decentralised and problem-oriented. Good examples of this are a number of environmental projects taking place in Sweden of late.

Our second case is a major renewal project in a health care organisation. Health care in Sweden that is publicly funded and operated has been under economic pressure during the 1990s and most health care organisations have 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 organising 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 by 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, who should initiate and coordinate actions to considerably improve the environment in the Sundsvall/Timrå region within a ten-year period. The directive was the last of four that the government issued 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 to further destinations.

The environmental project covered an area of 4,000 square kilometres, which corresponds to about one per cent of Sweden's total area. It is just a little larger than the area of Gotland. 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 was then about 1.3 per cent of Sweden's population. Of all those employed, one fifth worked in the manufacturing industry, which was 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 newsprint 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 produced several products, including, 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 generation has its specific way of working. Problems are perceived in specific ways. During the 1970s, large single source emissions from chimneys and into waterways were the major environmental problems. Thus, it seemed natural to control 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 zero emissions in the

city due to individual boilers. It is all concentrated in 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 focused on the raw materials 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 centralised 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 goal 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 ensure such participation, the final report established an Environmental Plan for Sundsvall and Timrå. The plan contained a detailed inventory of environmental problems, suggestions for improvement, who was to be in charge of the improvement actions, and the timetable for such actions. Eighty-three suggestions for the Sundsvall municipality were formulated in the EPST (SOU 1990/91:90, 1991) and politically decided 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 covered.

## **CASE 2. THE EPQ-PROJECT IN A HEALTH CARE ORGANISATION**

Health care in Sweden is financed mainly through public funds and most hospitals and other health care providers are owned and operated by regional public health care organisations (on a county level). Thus each health care organisation operates a number of hospitals and a large number of family health care centres in its region. Some hospitals have special competencies in certain areas and also serve people from other, neighbouring, regions. Many of the health care organisations experienced economic difficulties during the 1990s, following general economic recession and the reduction of tax revenues. Consequently, a large number of renewal projects were launched in the different health care organisations aiming to create more efficient organisational structures and routines to cut spending while still providing high quality health care.

This case study is about one of these organisations that in the early 1990s 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 were made responsible for the implementation. At approximately the same time, the political organisation of 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 should be done under the general heading of EPQ even though some general aims were formulated, such as reducing the cost of the health care provided and renewing the management accounting systems in use. A number of measures 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 the clinic's annual planning cycles. Through these documents the acronym EPQ was given a general content although it still was unclear what this meant in the long run.

Some of the various issues that had been a 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 was introduced for patients transferred between different hospitals and for all health care at one specific hospital. Since the organisation was

divided into three districts with their own district managers, the implementation was dependent on their support. Initially, pay-per-performance was accepted and implemented by only one of the districts.

Some supporting services (like real estate and purchasing) were made separate organisational units and market-like relations were established between them and the health care providers (hospitals, etc.). Establishing these relationships and re-organising the service organisations 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 impacts at different hospitals and at different hospital clinics. Some clinics used EPQ as a reason for implementing new organisational routines or new organisational structures that were not initially indicated by the EPQ-project. One clinic re-organised its working organisation 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 its division of responsibilities among the doctors. EPQ was thereby re-designed as it reached local clinics and new sets of activities were organised. 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 became 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 organisation 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 subject for future projects. An example of the latter case is quality issues that were a part of the general EPQ discussion initially but were never attended to. Instead quality development was the subject of a new renewal project launched as separate project later on.

## **THE FUNDAMENTAL ORGANISING 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 of combating a complex web of problems within an area where established agencies and existing legislation were unsatisfactory and incomplete.

The most fundamental organising problem of temporary organisations and projects is how they are delimited and formed. We will dwell deeper on this problem area in the following sections. There, we argue that translation and transcription, are a segment from an organisational reality, are examples of how delimitation and formation of projects take place. We focus on translation and transcription not only because they are important to the formulation of the project goals, but also because 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 a 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 such as 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 characterised as being development projects; they came into existence since the established systems of environmental abatement or the existing organisational structure could not deal with the topical problems. Also, the tasks were unclear, and the companies and agencies which should be enrolled and to what extent in the longer run was not settled. 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 on developing knowledge and suggestions for action, and initiating and

coordinating those actions – typical development tasks. EPQ was at the outset a set of general principles and long-term goals, but no specific and delimited implementation issues were 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 lacks “advocates”, the work can become worthless over time. In those cases projects are organised around a clear and relatively easily solved issue, the principal might not follow the project in detail. The role of “advocates” is not only important from a management perspective, but also in relation to the contacts that are organised between principal, project and the clients. The environmental projects were formed in the 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-the-art over a ten year period. Thereby, the project members started to demand resources from the principal, the state, over a relatively long period of time. EPQ also aimed at long lasting changes in the organisation and major benefits of the projects could therefore not be expected to be obvious during the project’s 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 also had 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 also took some responsibility for the project outcome. The local and regional dimension can be exemplified by the Gothenburg project, where consultants were enrolled who 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 were also delimited 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 the way to developing knowledge and environmental competency (Dobers and Wolff, 1995). The short time frame also gave reason to believe that not many concrete changes in work could take place. The projects had their main focus on “initiating” rather than on “implementing”, which is true for 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 organised within the line organisation and by successive learning during development and implementation.

Traditional teaching in project management stresses that a project develops from initiation or conceptualisation, 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, conceptualisation, 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 using concepts stemming from the methods of construction project management. On the contrary, we argue that there are two other concepts that can better explain the special organising problems evoked by our cases. Hereby, it is fruitful to focus on a particular segment from a certain organisational reality (Alvesson and Köping, 1993). The segment 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”, have their theoretical basis in the translation sociology that was once formulated by French sociologists (Callon and Latour, 1981; Callon, 1986; Latour, 1996:118ff; Latour, 1998). Two models are presented that are of help when studying innovations and their spread: 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 spreading the idea is different. The original idea is rather weak, not clearly formulated and is hardly structured. Since it lacks its own force, the idea is dependent on others and is spread only through others becoming interested in it and formulating alliances with it. Every time someone is interested in the idea, it changes in character. Such ideas can spread only if they are changed and if interested parties can “translate” the ideas to own vocabularies and interpret them in accordance with their own lexicons existing in particular organisational fields. The idea eventually results in a fantastic project and ends where the diffusion model wants us to start; with a stable idea that can be implemented (Latour, 1996:119).

Translation sociology has been used in a Scandinavian anthology (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996), where several authors have facilitated studies of organisational change using translation sociology. One chapter is of particular interest to us since it evolves from the translation sociology and thus complements traditional analyses of organisational change; namely the narrative of ideas that materialises through a chain of translations (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). 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 the 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 organisational field to another when it is translated to its new temporary habitat. The materialised idea might lead to different changes, in itself yet another translation, and eventually becomes institutionalised by taking on a concrete form—just look around you to see the computer, chair, desk... The argument can be summarised: 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 become institutionalised 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 translations of some kind. However, in this paper, we take a project-internal perspective where we 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; that is when project members make sense of their task by translating ideas given to them by the principal (or “transcribed” materialised items given as a report or directive). 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 it is coming to an end and “pass on” their materialised ideas transcribed into reports, actions or action nets. See also a study that has focussed on other organisational 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 organised from unclear starting conditions and perspectives. The project is defined over time and becomes clearer and clearer and thus, gets structured forms with organised 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 are the basis for further actions. This is an uncertainty reduction phase of the projects.

Translation results in a project’s 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, organisation, 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” that a development project’s result is 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 organisation 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 definitions used are thus formed through translation processes within the project. A routine operationalisation of the task is not possible, and the work process of the project organisation 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 rules the time horizon of the project. Also, generally speaking, for these kinds of projects it is often more important that the problems are attended to than that any time limits are kept.

Instead of focussing on certain major companies in the region and targeting them in their environmental endeavours, the environmental project in Sundsvall / Timrå identified 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 on, 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, the Gothenburg environmental project focused on implementation. The notion here is that both projects had similar conditions to work with, but resulted 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 became clearer as some key areas were focussed (e.g. pay-per-performance, annual planning, and DRG-registration) while others were dropped (e.g. quality or major organisational 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, at which time attention is given to 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 organisational learning, see (March, 1991; March, 1994). Examples of such work are 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, it is thus harder for changes in the environment 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 towards the next critical aspect of organising 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 depended on the work within the projects giving results outside the projects, and not just in reference 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 various, upcoming projects. However, the formal time horizon of each project was such that no dramatic changes could take place during the lifetime of each project. The environmental projects in particular, but any organisational development project in general, were relying on something 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, a critical aspect.

In principle, the transcription of the projects can take place for 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 also means that the project opens up and becomes the element for negotiating 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 considerably 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 within which their work could be transcribed., in order for the work to continue on certain “pre-translated” paths. In EPQ there was not a 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 characterised (after initial translation) by a continuous transcription of different issues.

Transcription phases are critical in the sense that they also make sure that the general ideas are passed on, that the momentum of “initiating and coordinating” could be further worked upon even if the projects themselves no longer existed. Consequently, it is a transcription and passing on of political and visionary ideas, directives, money, and working paths for environmental and organisational improvement. Simultaneously, these passed on ideas and things are taken on by new project teams and by other organisations, where translation processes start and new translation trajectories are negotiated.

Environmental problems are of such a character that it can hardly be said that a certain “environmental problem is solved” once certain organisational 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 form many alliances with important things and texts among companies, governmental agencies or other organisations, to secure resources for future work. Transcribing thus means that projects of this kind are not terminated in a distinct way. Rather they fade away as pieces of their work leave the project.

Also, transcribing and anchoring means to try to codify and stabilise 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 municipal interests, which meant that the work proceeding the project end could be stabilised and variations to the translation processes avoided that could jeopardise 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 stabilise 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 by 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 organisations at the time. Thereby they received some initial legitimisation for measurements taken. Still, it is not easy to link future developments within the organisation 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.

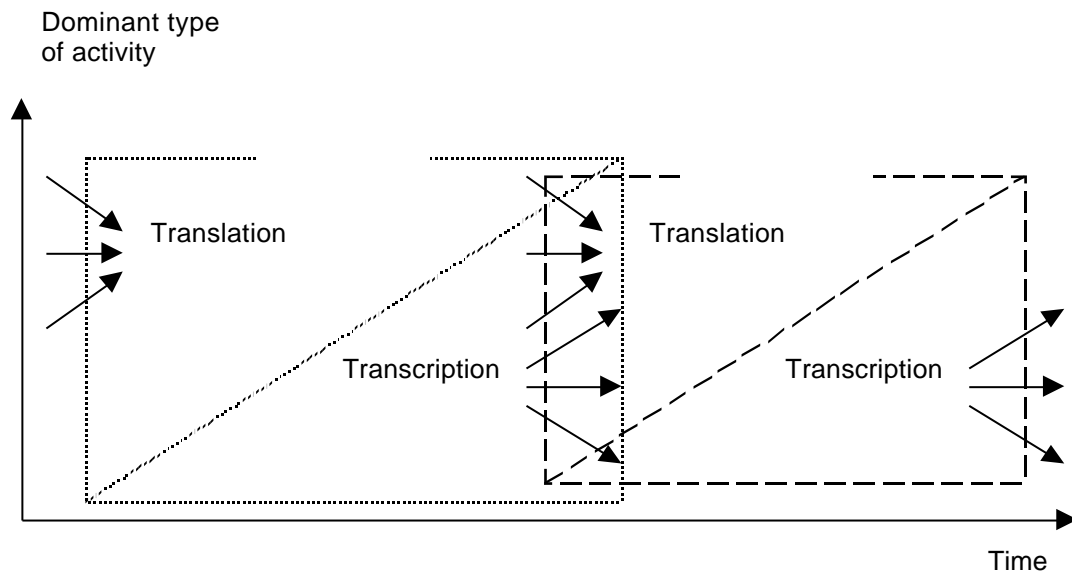
So you could always argue that conditions subsequently popping up altered the translation trajectories worked upon during the project's lifetime. But you could also state, if suggestions are still topical for use several years after project close down, that the project could "read the future" or was 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 the project end is either rather arbitrary or uninteresting.

Instead, such projects are judged by how many activities take 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 organisations and even led to certain concrete activities taking place also without the initial state funding. Several of the effects associated with the environmental projects would have been hard, if at all, to realise within the traditional function of permanent state organisations. The projects and what they had transcribed and passed on were locally prepared and anchored which would not have been possible solely with centrally organised agency attention. EPQ made a number of activities possible that might not have been performed otherwise. This 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 (Exhibit 1).





**Exhibit 1 - The dominant type of activity at different times during a project life time.**

From a project's 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 organisations.

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 organisation. 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 organisation where it is received.

### **VAGUE PROBLEMS NEED PROJECTS!**

This paper has focused on development project work regarding environmental and organisational renewal projects. We have analysed how such projects are organised and linked in context. In this last section, we sum up our main arguments on the organising of development projects. There are three final arguments that we would like to emphasise:

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

It is important to note that a project only addresses a certain number of 'problems'. Instead of dealing with 'everything' some areas are selected for attention and translation. Projects thus initially provide means to 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. Insecurity from including 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.

Organising in projects also implies a possibility to merge different organisations, organisational units and actors. Of course, each actor participating will have his own motives, so any project will include 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 seem 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 segments of the organisational 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 enter the translation process of other projects. This aspect of organising projects is neglected in theory and we argue that to study development projects, you have to focus on the linkages of a project to other projects in its web of actions by focusing on translation and transcriptions processes.

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