





# An ecology of ideas permeating science, higher education, and society

Essays for Kerstin Sahlin

Edited by  
Stefan Arora-Jonsson, Maria Blomgren,  
Josef Pallas & Linda Wedlin



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## ABSTRACT

This book is a dedication to Kerstin Sahlin, delving into the intricate realm of ideas and tracing their profound journey through the realms of science, higher education, and society. A collective effort of Kerstin's colleagues and friends, the book explores the multifaceted aspects of dominant ideas, unraveling their global trends and profound influences on universities and beyond.

Structured into four comprehensive themes, the volume commences by dissecting the prevalent global trends shaping universities and academic institutions. This section critically examines widespread and fundamental trends such as bureaucratization, the emergence of English as the lingua franca of science, as well as the dynamics of competition and identity construction.

The second theme meticulously explores the intricate relationships between the sciences and society. Addressing issues like academic freedom, the role of think-tanks in knowledge production, the 'open movement' in science, and the construction of ignorance, chapters in this section align with Kerstin's ecosystem view on the academic field.

The book's third theme directly ties into Kerstin's work on collegiality, presenting it as both an ideal-typical mode of governance and a response to daily challenges. Beyond formal decision-making bodies, collegiality is portrayed as a lived practice shaping interactions among faculty. The challenges faced by collegial practices at the university's upper echelons during corporatization processes are highlighted, emphasizing the crucial role of collegial governance in project organizing and scientific practices.

The final theme explores the impact of ideas in the public sector, examining alternate paths, shifts in governance paradigms, and the translation of ideas like the Nordic model across diverse settings. Discussions on trust underscore the contextual nature of idea adoption and implementation. The book also provides an exposé of Kerstin's extensive work, focusing on her studies of imitation and offering detailed case studies and theoretical frameworks.

Through these insightful examinations, the volume echoes Kerstin's pioneering research on the translation, editing, and dissemination of management concepts. It also showcases her recent work on the ecology of ideas in science and higher education. This book stands as a testament to Kerstin's enduring legacy, acknowledging her profound influence in understanding the ecology of ideas that permeate diverse spheres of society and academia.

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# Contents

Exploring multiple ideas in the academic field and beyond.  
*Linda Wedlin, Maria Blomgren, Josef Pallas, and Stefan Arora-Jonsson* ..... 7

## GLOBAL FLOWS AND TRENDS

Higher education in Europe after the diffusion of management ideas. Changes, impact, and challenges. *Carmelo Mazza and Jesper Strandgaard* ..... 25

Englishization through imitation, hybridization, translation. *Behlül Üsdiken* ..... 37

The construction of actors in the ecology of competitions permeating science and higher education. *Georg Krücken* ..... 51

Expansive identity and community in hyper-organizational society. *John W. Meyer and Patricia Bromley* ..... 71

## SCIENCE AND SOCIETY

Academic freedom and freedom of speech. Translating travelling ideas. *Tom Christensen and Per Lægveid* ..... 91

Think tanks and the ecology of ideas. Editing futures. *Christina Garsten* ..... 109

On Open and Openness in academia. *Bengt Gerdin* ..... 121

Organizing against knowledge – the role of carriers and mediators. *Stefan Arora-Jonsson, Maria Blomgren, Josef Pallas, and Linda Wedlin* .... 139

## COLLEGIALITY AND GOVERNANCE

An island of collegiality. Notes from the university “shop floor” of teaching. *Anders Forssell, Lars Fälting, and Emilia Kvarnström* ..... 155

A Vice-Chancellor in action. *Lars Engwall* ..... 169

Travelling with an idea. *Ulla Eriksson-Zetterquist* ..... 185

Project collegiality. Boundary work and boundary integration in governing science. *Fredrik Tell* ..... 195

## PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT

The road not taken. Notes on administrative reform. <i>Bengt Jacobsson</i> .....	213
Renewing powerful ideas. The Nordic model as an 'ecology of circulation'. <i>Haldor Byrkjeflot and Silviya Svejenova</i> .....	225
Trust: not just another idea that travels? Translation and adaptation of trust in local eldercare. <i>Elisabeth Sundin and Magdalena Elmersjö</i> .....	243
How big projects become imitated. <i>Barbara Czarniawska and Guje Sevón</i> .....	255

# Exploring multiple ideas in the academic field and beyond

*Linda Wedlin, Maria Blomgren, Josef Pallas,  
and Stefan Arora-Jonsson, Uppsala University*

## Travel of ideas

The interest in ideas is widespread in the social sciences. Ideas shape our lives, our conversations about how to live, and our dreams, hopes and strategies for action and change. In the field of organizations, there has been a long interest in ideas that shape and reform management thinking and organizational practices, most significantly on ideas that “travel” between contexts and settings and how they influence and shape organizational practices in these settings as they spread and become used. A particular focus has been on ideas that travel and spread rapidly and become widely accepted in such a way that they can be considered to be management fashions. These include models and templates for good governance, quality production, or efficient management, with a prominent example being lean management practices. As a concept, “lean management”, originating in the production section in Japan, has travelled not only across the world but also from the private to the public sector and is now used widely in healthcare organizations in Sweden and elsewhere. The mechanisms of such travels, as well as their implications for organizations and management practices, are the focus of theoretical work on the translation of management ideas.

Theoretical contributions to this field have developed within the frames of organizational institutionalism, with significant contributions made over the past decades from Scandinavian organizational scholars – one of them being Kerstin Sahlin, to which this volume is dedicated. Kerstin’s contributions to our understanding of the travel and translation of management ideas are widely recognized, and she has published extensively in various outlets on the mechanisms and effects of translation, travel and influence of ideas in various contexts and fields. In her impressive publication list, comprising more than

150 titles, we find many influential contributions in the form of articles and books, as well as book chapters in prominent edited volumes and handbooks. She has, for many, been most clearly connected to ideas of translation and editing of ideas and for the development of a Scandinavian research tradition on this topic, but she has been equally influential in the shaping of central international research traditions within organizational institutional theory (see for instance Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin & Suddaby, 2008; Meyer, Sahlin, Ventresca & Walgenbach, 2009).

Her studies in this tradition have included empirical analyses of circulating ideas regarding public sector reforms, health care management, MBA programs and business education. A central reference of this work is the anthology co-edited together with the Uppsala colleague Lars Engwall, where they explored the expansion of management knowledge in contemporary society. In the volume, they put forward a much-used model to describe and analyse this process, consisting of carriers, flows and sources of management knowledge (Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002). Clearly positioning the travel of ideas as an active process, the model particularly points to the role of business schools, the business media, and management consultants acting as carriers of ideas between different contexts and thus influencing and shaping the flow of ideas. These actors have been particularly important in shaping where, when and how ideas flow and what conditions the circulation and expansion of management knowledge. Through empirical studies of the spread of the MBA model for business education in Europe after the Second World War (WWII), Kerstin and colleagues showed us, for instance, how the American model for professional management training became translated into European higher education (Mazza, Sahlin-Andersson & Strandgaard Pedersen 1998; 2005). In that process, the program was adapted to fit the local circumstances, resulting in a “European” MBA model that was both similar and different from the original.

Explaining in more detail the flow of ideas, or more distinctly the mechanisms whereby ideas travel, Kerstin’s work has pointed us to the role of imitation: that actors imitate other actors that they find to be more successful or prominent (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996; see also Czarniawska & Sevón 1996). Imitation is here: “the motor of translation and fashion sits at the wheel”, as put vividly by Barbara Czarniawska and Guje Sevón in their book on *Global Ideas* (2005, p. 7). In an analysis of the global expansion of management education and the role of different types of carriers, Kerstin and co-authors theorized different modes of imitation that helped shape the expansion: broadcast mode, chain mode, and a mediated mode (Hedmo, Sahlin-Andersson & Wedlin, 2005). While the imitation in Europe of the most prominent American

MBA programs is an example of the broadcast mode (Mazza et al., 2005), they showed how the MBA model was further translated when more actors started to imitate the imitated and translated/adapted models. They particularly point to the third mode, the mediated mode of translation, showing how imitations of models for management education were mediated by other organizations and actors, most prominently by media organizations (through rankings) and accreditation agencies, that provided guidelines and templates that guided imitations. In this way, the translation process and the actors involved have a significant influence on how, when and where ideas circulate and become translated (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008).

The concept of translation is used to denote the combined processes of simultaneous movement and change of the ideas that travel (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996): individual ideas, experiences, or models are actively transferred from one setting to another, and such movement invariably involve more or less change, intentional or unintentional, as the ideas are adapted in new contexts and settings. As a way to theorize such change, Kerstin used the term “editing” to suggest that changes were not automatic or given; they were actively constructed in the process of translation. She noted, however, that such changes are guided by what she termed “editing rules” provided by the institutional context (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). While not prescriptive, such editing rules should be understood as implicit ‘rules which have been followed’ (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996, p. 85), which further guide and shape translation processes.

## Governance, change and public sector reforms

Kerstin’s contributions to our thinking and modelling in management and organization are diverse and multifaceted, and it would be unfair to reduce it to the travel of management ideas only. With her critical eye and ability to pick up on contemporary societal phenomena, her writings have not only helped to bring clarity to the everyday life of practitioners but have also provided the research community with novel theoretical understandings in several areas. Among her most profound contributions is the theoretical understanding of the public sector reforms of the 1980s and 1990s. In the well-cited article, co-authored with colleague Nils Brunsson, on *Constructing Organizations*, she convincingly showed how the many reforms of this era could be understood as attempts to transform agencies, hospitals, universities and other public entities into complete organizations (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000). The lines of thought in this paper did not only make sense of the many reforms of this period but also put organization theory more generally into the spotlight

by showing how it offers valid and powerful analytical lenses for understanding a multitude of societal developments with relevance beyond the management field.

Similarly, another example of changes and trends in the public sector, which Kerstin has been early to recognize and analyse, is the proliferation and increasing importance of transnational governance and regulations, with corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the quest for transparency being two versions of this. The way in which rules and regulations expand beyond national borders to become transnational and how such systems are formed and changed was successfully analysed in an anthology co-edited together with Marie-Laure Djelic (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006). This volume convincingly showed how transnational regulations have proliferated and why, and it also pointed to the importance and role of many different actors in this process. In a follow-up chapter, Marie-Laure and Kerstin (Salles-Djelic & Sahlin, 2012) further explore the implications as well as the challenges of transnational governance and regulations and how this constitutes a reordering of the world.

How the proliferating CSR practices can be seen as a form of soft governance with new types of control mechanisms such as “naming and shaming” was another topical theme picked up and developed by Kerstin at an early stage, as was the formation and enforcement of the transparency trend in healthcare and other public sectors (Sahlin-Andersson, 2006). The transparency trend was explained by a cycle of regulations, scrutiny and accountancy in which audits and evaluations, priority lists, guidelines and financial quality journals were important elements (Blomgren & Sahlin, 2007). Empirical studies of higher education and the forming of regulatory mechanisms in this field also showed the interrelation and dependence of different types of regulatory mechanisms (Hedmo, Sahlin-Andersson & Wedlin, 2001), and this was further theorized in studies of changing corporate governance practices more broadly (Wedlin, Buhr & Sahlin, 2018).

## Professional organizations and the academic field

Kerstin's scholarship is also diverse in the empirical fields where she has identified important societal phenomena. While the backdrop is her long-time interest in, and studies of, public sector reforms, empirical studies have spanned healthcare organizations, schools, municipalities, big projects, debt collecting agencies, and many other organizations and actors in the public sphere as well as those in the intersection between the public and the private sectors. Among her most well-known studies are those of the construction of Globen, the multi-million-dollar project in the 1980's in Stockholm aiming to build

the (then) largest spherical building in the world. Analysing the decision-making process of the collaboration between public and private entities, Kerstin showed how ambiguity can be used as a strategy for managing big projects and how vague ideas, and even visions, are used to guide decision-making in these complex settings (Sahlin-Andersson, 1989; 1992).

Apart from an empirical context for Kerstin's interest in public sector decisions and management practices, these studies of large-scale projects positioned Kerstin as a central scholar in research on project management and project organization, where she helped to develop a Scandinavian approach to the analysis of projects. A central reference for this ambition is an edited volume with Anders Söderholm (Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm 2002), where the traditional perspective on project management is widened to include the organizational and societal context in which project management practices are to be understood. Along with a distinct theoretical approach based on organization theory and organizational behaviour perspectives, the Scandinavian approach to project management analysis is characterized by its focus on projects as a temporary organization and recognizes the "projectification" that takes place as this form of organization is used in both the public and the private sector to drive organizational reform and change (Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm 2002; Jacobsson, Lundin & Söderholm 2016).

Healthcare is another empirical area where Kerstin has published widely. She has shown us the complexities of managing and organizing in professional contexts and how this complexity increased drastically as healthcare was reformed according to new market and management ideas – previously foreign to this sector (Sahlin-Andersson, 1999). Acknowledging that this is a sector where many different professional groups meet and interact, Kerstin has analysed how the leadership of medical doctors was affected by professional, administrative and political ideals (Sahlin-Andersson & Östergren, 1996, 1998), how nurses have ascribed a female identity in their interaction with others and among themselves (Sahlin-Andersson, 1994), and what different forms of knowledge meant for healthcare politicians' possibilities of managing at a distance (Blomgren & Sahlin-Andersson, 2003).

One of her more persistent empirical interests, as is visible also above, has been in the field of higher education, specifically business education, and more recently, on the conditions for science and knowledge production more generally. As illustrated above, Kerstin has used empirical studies of business education and universities to ponder a variety of theoretical questions, including governance and reform of the public sector, the development of scrutiny and regulations and their implications for governance, and the proliferation of MBA programs as a feature of management knowledge creation.

The deep and longstanding interest in the academic field is also a reflection, of course, of the fact that Kerstin has held a wide variety of positions in the academic field throughout her long and successful career, including those of researcher, teacher, manager, deputy vice-chancellor and policy-practitioner. In her various positions, she has directly impacted the local research community and the wider academic field with her deep knowledge, extensive experience, and humbling enthusiasm. Her impact is further extended through the many PhD candidates that she has guided into academic life, many of whom today contribute to academic life on their own as well as through their PhD students.

More recently, Kerstin's attention has turned to a distinct interest in collegiality as a governance form in academia and to the role of leadership and professional decision-making inside universities. This interest brings together several of her theoretical and empirical interests to explore how university governance can be understood as an interplay between different ideas, rationales, and practices that represent both the academic profession and those associated with management and bureaucracy. Together with both Swedish and international colleagues, Kerstin seeks to re-address the role of collegial processes at our universities and point to the necessity of strengthening the involvement of collegial leadership and collegial collaboration in the governance of contemporary institutions for higher education and research (Eriksson-Zetterquist & Sahlin 2023; Cloette et al. 2023). By distinguishing between vertical and horizontal collegiality, Kerstin and Ulla Eriksson Zetterquist (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist 2023) argue for two dimensions along which universities and the scholars populating them can foster academic freedom and high-quality academic work. Whereas vertical collegiality includes the proliferation and safeguarding of collegial decision-making structures and hiring/promotion practices within universities, horizontal collegiality focuses on field-level processes in which communities of scholarly peers jointly define, promote, and uphold academic values, preferences, and practices. It is also in relation to these two dimensions, they argue, that we can discuss how the organizing and governing principles of bureaucracy and managerialism challenge (but at times also support) the conditions for scholarly work in and between universities.

## Ecology of ideas

How, then, are we to make sense of this rich, multifaceted, and encompassing scholarship and the many ideas that it holds? We find no better way than to turn back to Kerstin's scholarship and theoretical interest – that of the travel and impact of ideas. More specifically, we will use the notion of an “ecology of ideas” as a way to understand the diverse and varied set of ideas that influence and shape understandings and practices. Inspiration for this is taken from one of Kerstin's more recent theoretical conceptualizations, namely the idea of an ecology of translations, a notion first presented in a book chapter (Wedlin and Sahlin 2017) but more recently also picked up by other organizational translation scholars (Nielsen, Mathiassen and Newell, 2022; Westney & Piekkari, 2020; Westney et al., 2022). In the book chapter, the authors write:

As a key insight here, we note that not only are ideas subject to translation as they are being circulated, but these ideas also impact other ideas and on those organizations involved in the diffusion and adoption of ideas. Hence, the translation of ideas and their embeddedness in organizational practices and actions should be understood as sets of dynamic and mutually influencing processes. Another way to phrase this is that several processes of translation interplay in what we here term ecologies of translation. We suggest that such a conceptualization can further help to explain the many complex interactions and relations, actions and actors involved in continuous translation processes both within and outside the organizational context. When using the notion of ecologies of translation we also want to emphasize that these developments evolve in dynamic processes including a multitude of activities, actors and interests, but as a whole, they are not controlled or planned. (Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017, p.103)

There are several key contributions of Kerstin's previous work that lie within this perspective, including the prominent focus on the multitude of actors involved in translations and the interest in the translation processes and how these may interact and be related. However, the one contribution most significant for our argument in this book is the notion that translations are not to be seen as isolated from each other; rather, these take place in the context of other translations and with a multitude of ideas (as well as actors and activities) influencing. This recognition can be traced to two of the other theoretical insights provided through Kerstin's previous work. One is from Brunsson and Sahlin (2000), who note that reforms (and implicitly ideas that form the basis of reforms) come in packages or “strings”; one reform often follows another reform, where one idea or model is substituted for another. Also, in tracing the flow of management ideas, Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall (2002) noted that ideas that flow are often constituted by several other ideas, or what they called

“creolized” knowledge. The idea of an ecology of translations thus builds on the recognition that ideas do not exist, nor travel and translate, in a vacuum but rather in relation and conjunction with other ideas. With a multitude of actors, translators, and mediators involved, various translation processes also interact and develop in relation to each other, significantly impacting the way that specific ideas travel and take shape in both global and local space.

Picking up on this first part – the recognition that ideas exist and travel in the context of other ideas – we can speak of this as an ecology of ideas. Our ambition with this volume is thus to assemble a collection of essays – reflecting an “ecology of ideas” relating to the field of science and higher education organizations and wider society – to acknowledge Kerstin’s scholarship and contributions to the academic field. Focusing mainly on ideas and concepts that can be used to investigate challenges and conditions for universities, higher education, and science organizations in Sweden and beyond in recent years, we want the volume to present an illustration of what the concept of ecology can give. The contributions to this volume either bring some of the theoretical ideas from Kerstin’s work into use in this distinct field, analysing an issue in the field of science, higher education, and universities, or use these concepts to reflect in relation to an empirical concept or an idea that is currently discussed in relation to higher education and universities and in wider society. Both contribute to the overall aim to show, in a very broad sense, how Kerstin’s work has provided an “eco-system of ideas” in its sense, shaping the way we understand contemporary challenges to higher education and universities.

## Outline of the book

The volume is structured around four broad themes. The first theme connects most directly to Kerstin’s theoretical work on the flow and translation of global ideas into organizational settings. The chapters here focus on global trends and flows in the university field, detailing a few of the current developments characterizing academic organizations and the university: bureaucratization, internationalization, and the notion of competition. These are underpinned by the shaping of identities as an element in an increasingly organized and rationalized society.

Building on this, the second theme helps to create an ecological view on the academic field by focusing on the relations between science and society as wider issues to which these trends are related. This touches not only on the characteristics of the academic system but also on how academic actors and processes are interrelated with broader societal actors and issues, most promi-

nently here issues of the freedom of speech, fake news, openness to society, and the desire to envision new futures.

The third theme in this book relates to contemporary discussions of collegiality as a governance form, and how we can direct and manage academic organizations. This picks up on Kerstin's empirical interest in collegiality but also on theoretical issues on governance forms, leadership, and professional knowledge in organizations. This moves our attention from broader translation issues into local contexts. In our fourth and last theme, these governance issues are informed by taking an ecological view. Here, we use the ecology perspective to argue – in line with Kerstin's ambitions – that trends and developments in and around the academy need to be considered in relation to ideas permeating other parts of society; here, we pay particular attention to changes in the public sector and to the management and governing of public sector organizations.

### *Global flows and trends*

In the first chapter of this section, *Carmelo Mazza* and *Jesper Strandgaard* develops the argument about universities being exposed to a variety of management ideas. They use European MBA programs to illustrate how Kerstin's work on travel and editing of management ideas can be used to understand how and why universities transform into bureaucratic organizations that are mainly dedicated to administering different evaluation and assessment pressures. That is, pressures that arise from the necessity to deal with the nothingness produced by academic managers who emerged in universities as part of the management ideas and models that were implemented. In the subsequent chapter, *Behlül Üsdiken* explores another trend in higher education: the construction of English as the lingua franca of science and higher education. In this chapter he analyses the expansion of the English language as medium for instruction in Turkish higher education. Tracing this trend to the development of two universities explicitly using English to model leading US universities, he shows how English today is used in a variety of ways in a large share of Turkish higher education institutions. By means of imitation and local translations, at least three hybrid models of English language use have developed, aided by both legislative initiatives and privatization of the university sector.

In his chapter, *Georg Krücken* explores the various forms of competition that have come to characterize science and higher education in the past decades. By elaborating on the “ecology of competitions” in this field, he analyses the development of actors at three levels – individual, organizational, and state levels – and argues that these are increasingly constructed as competitors. These actors increasingly see themselves as competing for resources, for

attention, and for positions in a global field of higher education. Picking up on the widespread construction of actorhood not only in higher education but in society at large, Patricia Bromley and John Meyer explore the expansive identity of individuals and organization. They write: “Contemporary people, now constructed as social actors, are to engage in rationalized social action, but are also seen as infusing it with individual and collective identities” (this volume, p.65). This increasing focus on the construction of identity and meaning hold significant implications for current organizing and forms a source as well as a driver for both imitation and translation of ideas into organizational practice.

### *Science and society*

In this theme, some chapters contribute to the idea of an ecosystem view on the academic field in accordance with Kerstin's ideas. These contributions concern the relations between different actors in the science system, but also the intricate relationship between the sciences and the rest of society. Thinking about the connections in the ecosystem, the chapters trace influences from society on science, but also from science to society – and the chapters pay attention to the boundary spanners, those who mediate the science-society relationship.

Dealing with the question of how society influences academia, Tom Christensen and Per Lægveid discuss the recent debate on academic freedom in Norway. Drawing on the editing and translation framework of Sahlin and others, they argue that the debate on academic freedom can be understood as imported from the U.S. and that a translation framework is essential to nuance and better understand who the actors are and its effects on Norwegian academia. Christina Garsten turns the gaze slightly and focuses on the role of think-tanks as producers of knowledge. Situated between science and society, Garsten argues that ‘...think tanks are instrumental in producing a ‘global ecology of ideas’ and that a part of their activities involves the crafting and ‘editing’... it is not simply innocent thought experiments or utopian exercises we are dealing with, but a form of reflexive thinking that has the potential to become performative, in other words: ideas and knowledge with implications. Core to the translation perspective is close attention to meaning and the fact that meanings are deeply contextual. Bengt Gerdin illustrates the importance of nuance and specificity in academic discussion by tracing the origin and shifting meanings of the term openness in society, from early debates about secrecy and sharing to the current ideal propagated by the ‘open movement’ in science.

In contrast to these contributions that cast academia as a producer of various forms of knowledge that permeates into society, Stefan Arora-Jonsson,

Maria Blomgren, Josef Pallas, and Linda Wedlin ask when and how academia is a party to producing ignorance in society. Infusing the central ideas from the field of agnotology (the social construction of ignorance) with insights from the model of management practice development, legitimization and spread proposed by Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall (2002), this chapter outlines the core role of – in particular, management scholars – in the production of ignorance in society.

Together, these chapters begin to explore the rich and multifaceted aspects of society-academia relationships that emerge when applying an ecosystem lens to academia and society.

### *Collegiality and governance*

This theme holds chapters that are directly related to Kerstin's work on collegiality. In her writing, Kerstin approaches collegiality not only as academic practices and values that are inscribed in university governing structures and processes but also as a distinct governing mode that, alongside global management trends and models, shapes and transforms the governance of contemporary universities around the world.

*Anders Forssell, Lars Fälting and Emilia Kvarnström* elaborate on the notion of collegiality in the context of teaching. By describing their work with one of the major courses in business administration at Uppsala University, they provide us with a detailed illustration of how collegial values and practices can be passed on and developed in the interaction between junior and senior faculty. Furthermore, they remind us that collegiality is not limited to the existence of collegial decision-making bodies and their mandates at different levels in the university organization but that it is, first and foremost, a lived practice that requires a commitment to academic values and principles as well as engagement by the members of the collegium in different aspects of academic life.

The collegial practices also regard the top level in the university. *Lars Engwall* introduces us to the world of the former vice-chancellor of Uppsala University, Professor Stig Strömholm, and the work of a university manager. Based on the Vice-Chancellor's diary notes, Lars concludes, in line with results from other national and international studies, that the role of a Vice-Chancellor as a collegially elected *primus inter pares* has shifted towards protecting and safeguarding the interest of the university in relation to external parties rather than being involved in strategic governance issues. In that, the collegial focus on the Vice-Chancellor is being challenged by the corporatization of the university. Showing another side of the relation between collegiality and other governance modes, *Ulla Eriksson-Zetterquist* shares her experience from working with Kerstin on developing the notion of collegiality both as an

ideal-typical mode of governance and in relation to daily challenges and developments driven in universities by bureaucratic and managerial values and practices. While presenting their thoughts and insights on collegiality in different contexts of the Swedish field of higher education and research, as well as internationally, they discuss the nature of collegiality as an idea that travels and translates into different settings.

Comparing features of scientific practices to those of project organizing, *Fredrik Tell* argues for a project-inspired view on collegial governance in academia. Drawing on Kerstin's work on projects as temporary organization, we learn how collegial forms of governance can aid processes of boundary-work and boundary integration, issues that are central to project organizing as well as to scientific practice. Tell suggests the notion of "project collegiality" to better understand how collegial systems can be understood both inside and outside the boundaries of academia: "Project collegiality possibly translate across university boundaries in multilateral directions, allowing for academia and scientific practices to be compared, contrasted and integrated with other project-based activities in society" (this volume, p. 192).

### *Public sector management*

In the final section, *Bengt Jacobsson* is inspired by Kerstin's early work on reforms in the public sector and discusses how "the road not taken" could be the way forward in public sector governance. This road, suggests Jacobsson, is to put trust in the expertise of governmental agencies at the expense of excessive managerial control and steering measures that have dominated administrative reforms for a long time. Rather than trying to increase the governance capacity through control and steering, the better alternative is to reduce the need to steer in a detailed manner to begin with. This road has not yet been tried. On the theme of public sector reform, *Haldor Byrkjeflot* and *Silviya Svejenova* draw inspiration from the Scandinavian institutionalist perspective and develop the concept of "ecology of circulation" to describe the spread and use of what they term the Nordic model of public sector governance. This model, they argue, has travelled and translated in a variety of settings and through complex processes and has remained a powerful idea but with a renewed meaning over time. The ecology perspective gives us a tool to understand this persistent interest and its entanglements into other circulation and translation processes.

Following the call for the return of trust in public sector governance, the concept of trust is explored by *Elisabeth Sundin* and *Magdalena Elmersjö* in their chapter on the organizing of Swedish elderly care. They also argue, based on the recognition of management ideas that travel, that the concept of trust

can be put to use in a variety of ways in organizations, clearly illustrating the contextual character of translations. Even though an overarching “model” of trust-based governance was not implemented in the studied municipality, the concept is still important for shaping organizational practices and points to the need for flexibility and reflexivity, in the adoption of ideas in practice. As an excellent way to summarize Kerstin's contributions to the understanding of translations, imitations, big projects and many other important organizational processes and phenomena, *Barbara Czarniawska* and *Guje Sevón* provide us with an exposé of the work over the years. They suggest that the complexity of imitation processes constitutes a particularly important contribution that characterizes much of her work and that this is also a well-suited analytical framework for understanding management fashions.

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# GLOBAL FLOWS AND TRENDS



# Higher education in Europe after the diffusion of management ideas

## Changes, impact, and challenges

*Carmelo Mazza*, INSEAD Business School

*Jesper Strandgaard*, Copenhagen Business School

### Introduction

Two decades ago, the Academy of Management's new journal focusing on Learning and Education in its very first issue hosted a contribution of highly distinguished scholars claiming the end of business schools (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Just two years after that claim, management guru Henry Mintzberg (2004) followed by affirming the need of managers rather than MBAs to increase organizational performance. A few years earlier, Parker and Jary (1995) and Slaughter and Leslie (1999) had spoken respectively of *McUniversity* and *Entrepreneurial University* as signs of an incoming transformation of the nature of university.

A few years later, a forceful stream of literature emerged questioning, among other issues, the role of universities (Collini, 2012; Sperlinger et al, 2018) and the reform of universities (Mazza et al, 2008; Parker, 2020). This stream reached both consulting firms suggesting "higher education is dead. Long live to the knowledge services sector" (EY, 2021, p. 18) and more popular media such as New York Times and several TED talks that announced, "The end of university as we know it" (Taylor, 2009). At the same time, MBA and business schools received a similar kind of attention when scholars questioned the effects of their capability for social transformation on business (Ghoshal, 2005; Khurana, 2007), eventually hypothesizing the death of MBAs (Blass and Weight, 2005), and critically analyzing the foundation of their legitimacy (Alajoutsjarvi et al, 2014; Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016). More recently, Martin Parker's (2008; 2018) corrosive arguments ended up with the suggestion to shut down business schools as the only way to open room for a new management education for the future.

The theoretical premises of this impressive array of research and opinions resonate with some of the most influential arguments developed by Kerstin Sahlin in her organizational research and work on Higher Education. In this chapter, we aim at illustrating some of these arguments, and in particular those arguments referring to imitation and editing of ideas (Sahlin Andersson, 1996) and the ecology of translation (Wedlin & Sahlin, 2008). We take a point of departure in the research collaboration established in late nineties to outline the original contributions that fruitfully allowed for discussions addressing the theme of the transformation of universities and of management education. Based on Kerstin Sahlin's reflections, ideas, and theoretical contributions, we derive insights to also address the role and future of university and management education. In this way, we aim at creating an academic dialogue between Kerstin Sahlin's theoretical conceptualizations and the current skepticism of the role of university and management education.

## Travel of ideas: a research journey with Kerstin Sahlin

Our research encounter with Kerstin Sahlin dates back to 1998, discussing the framework of an EU Research project on the Creation of European Management Practice (CEMP). CEMP formally began in February 1998 and involved several universities and business schools in the three following years:

to judge to what extent education, research and consulting are contributing to a homogenization in European business practice, to determine whether this homogenization is more developed in some parts of Europe than in others, to contribute to an improvement of the European dimension in the diffusion and consumption of management knowledge (CEMP, 1998).

Our starting point was on a sunny roof terrace of a hotel in central Rome with a heartbreaking view of the Foro Romano. There, the three of us, working together for the first time and under the sun of a warm Roman spring, began to debate to what extent homogenization of management was taking place or at least underway. Despite widespread and the apparently successful diffusion of MBA programs in European management education, we, however, also shared a skepticism towards the stream of institutional research arguing that standardization was the key outcome of globalization and organizations were doomed to become more and more similar over time (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). We were not convinced by the arguments about a simple and forceful Americanization of education apparently underway in EU, made of similar products, similar forms and a unique rhetoric singing out the timeless success of the Ivy League US universities and management as a new religion.

Therefore, we began to think if and how diffusion of management ideas could generate variety rather than isomorphism within management education.

The CEMP project was our point of departure, and it was not by chance. The idea of the Creation of a European Management Practice reflected two waves of optimism in the nineties in the wake of the Fall of the Berlin Wall and dissolution of the Soviet Union. One wave of optimism was in management itself as the way to a timeless increase of performance and richness, and the other wave of optimism was in the economy-driven process of unification of Europe. Management was seen to represent the toolbox helping society to reach efficiency and performance achievements. Management principles aimed at being everywhere, and prophets, managers, consultants, business press and management education institutions spread the managerial word in any domain. Optimism builds on the assumption that management ideas were well-defined packages, travelling across industries and countries needless of translation and achieving the same performance increase everywhere. Despite these waves of optimism on the "*magnifiche sorti e progressive*" of European Union and on managerialization, we felt that the diffusion of management practices was a much more complex matter than most of institutional studies described and that we observed even more variety after the implementation of institutionalized practices than before.

CEMP gave us the opportunity to dig further into our doubts building on Czarniawska and Sevón's (1996) studies on the translation of ideas and, in particular, in Kerstin Sahlin's contribution (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996) in that influential volume. Ideas are seen as being translated when they travel; consequently, they are transformed when they are moved from one context, like a country or an organization, to another. For example, management ideas, sometimes adopted "by decree" (Marcon & Panozzo, 1998; Sicca & Zan, 2005) like in Italian Public Administration, got twisted and turned into different ones when observed and applied in different contexts. Nevertheless, our analysis within CEMP about business education institutions as carriers of management knowledge made us aware of an even more interesting dynamic, which seems to permeate future studies of educational institutions in Europe. Management ideas are not only translated and transformed as they are applied in different contexts; management ideas are not stable constructs so what travels is translated and not simply imitated by the receivers. We explored this in our studies on the diffusion of MBAs across highly qualified business schools in Europe (Mazza, Sahlin-Andersson & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2005) comparing four MBA programs in four European countries. This study represented the very point of departure for several investigations on management education and on management in educational institutions, like the case of university

reform process in Europe (Mazza et al, 2008), and theorized in Strandgaard Pedersen and Dobbin (2006).

Our study and arguments open for several reflections and insights. MBA was supposed to be an American model, one among several business concepts reaching Europe via the diffusion of management education and publications. Looking carefully into MBA programs, it became clear to us how MBA was not *tout-a-fait* a model. Rather MBA appears like a label encompassing a plurality of local interpretations borrowing legitimacy from the concept of MBA but adapting to the local regulatory and organizational context of each country of the educational institution in question. Inasmuch as MBA was not a model, it was not even “American”. MBA programs were outcomes of translations, characterized by components adopted in the Ivy League of US and international business schools and universities much more than to US educational system as a whole package. Finally, you can argue that American universities are built on ideals and principles from European universities.

MBA programs were “ideas”, shaped in highly specific contexts, which spread throughout a globalized world and transformed into new ideas. A core set of elements may recall the original idea; other elements may differ to meet local needs and requirements. However, even the original idea itself lays “in the eye of the beholder”. An American MBA model does not exist, rather, a label exists whose legitimacy and form reflects the institutions adopting it. From this perspective, research should focus on both similarities and differences of what ideas and how ideas are applied across contexts. Moreover, it is important to investigate how applied ideas differ or are similar to the original ideas, and to scrutinize how original ideas are transformed or, as discussed by Sahlin & Wedlin (2008), “edited”.

The arguments developed in our paper on the diffusion of MBA programs allowed for putting the stream of literature on the development of management education (see Amdam, 1996, for a wide array of historical perspectives) in quite a different perspective. First, it can be questioned whether the entire process of homogenization promoted by EU with the Bologna and Lisbon agreements is leading to standardization of the educational fields in Europe following an American model. It can be argued that local translations are still in place and that the Americanization of education is more rhetorical than substantial (Mazza et al., 2008), following what Sahlin and Wedlin (2008) described as *editing*, that is an adaptation of ideas to the needs of the context of application.

Second, what seems to be an inspiring model, coming from US and from New Public Management principles, is increasingly under scrutiny and object of strong criticism inside and outside the universities. The rise of resistance

apparently disconfirms the pressure towards isomorphism that homogenization was supposed to generate by the diffusion of common practices and common educational products. On the contrary, as management practices spread in university, criticisms on the “neoliberal, managerialized university” seem to raise daily (Fleming, 2022). Moreover, the case of MBA programs, generating a whole portfolio of products very different from each other, reveals how and what is spreading is not necessarily uniform and is open to local adaptation. Furthermore, the spread of ideas and practices appear to generate new ideas and practices, leading to more variety rather than homogeneity.

Third, as the diffusion is not as uniform as the early new institutional theory have suggested, it can be argued that they are not single, isolated ideas to be imitated and translated. As Wedlin and Sahlin (2017) describe, multiple processes of translation occur at the same time in an organization. These processes influence each other and constitutes an *ecology of translation* where different ideas collide and transform. In this sense, the reforms of university and the change of management education can be conceptualized as the outcome of translation eco-systems where different ideas find their application and turn simultaneously into other ideas. Within a translation ecology, homogeneity is a rather unlikely outcome. Instead, the result is an ongoing process of translation, which, in the case of educational institutions, may largely depart from the outcome projected by EU policy makers. The three directions departing from the original studies of European adoption of MBA programs corresponds to the three stages of evolution of Kerstin Sahlin’s thought about diffusion of ideas, moving from the seminal study of Czarniawska and Sevón (1996), from imitation of ideas to editing and, finally, to translations ecology.

## Where is the idea of University and Management education going?

What we learnt from Kerstin Sahlin’s approach is that diffusion and the outcome of diffusion are very different constructs. What *is diffused* and what *is applied* may differ along several dimensions, sometimes leading to completely different outcomes. Moreover, what is diffused is never a single idea or practice but a set of different constructs that collide with other diffused practices and ideas in the same contexts. The resulting translation ecology needs to be analyzed and described before attempting any inference between what is supposed to be diffused and what we observe as applied.

When we use these lenses to look at the changes of University and Management education, we clearly notice a very intricate fabric of intertwining translation processes. Firstly, we see the very idea, which we are assuming

throughout this chapter, of a relation, a nexus, between university and management education. As Parker (2020) outlines, management education is not only a teaching/research program within the broader university setting. Management and management education are forms of a new social order (Shatil, 2020) university is asked to be protagonist of. What at the beginning was a tool to increase funds, has now become the university's other side of the coin.

Secondly, when reviewing the trends in University development over the last couple of decades we found an ecology of translations dealing with an ecology of ideas, for example, external evaluation, University boards, advisory boards for research projects, digitization, relevance and lately “impact” to name but a few. These ideas have competed for attention and resources by University management as well as by scholars, consistently with the general shift in the attention from movement, idealized during Renaissance and Classicism, to speed, the very symbol of early modernity, as well as from destination to acceleration (Rosa, 2013). This contributed to “speeding up the mess”, to quote a dear friend and colleague, the now late Jim March. Interestingly, the word “acceleration” also returns in several consulting reports that are influencing the university sector in the last years (Fleming, 2022). What is diffusing is neither a specific idea nor the imitation of a well-defined and designed model. What is diffused is not an edible label; it rather looks like a set of justifications in Boltanski and Thevenot's terms (2006), or even a *no-thing* (Bento da Silva et al., 2022). Something that is quickly consumable - just to play with words *edible* – able to be eaten, rather than *editable* – able to be edited. Consequently, creation and diffusion of practices end up with more variety and more variety calls for more procedures leading to more evaluation processes and more assessment offices. In a world of unsought consequences, the diffusion of uniqueness drives more differences in as much as more management drives for more bureaucracy in the educational institutions.

Academic life has recently embodied higher and higher degrees of bureaucracy, mostly behind the veil of accountability. Scholars often spends more time on describing done research than carrying out the research. The academic job is changing: the original mission of teaching and researching it is now complemented by, e. g. writing more and more elaborate applications, going through more and more elaborate procedures in the pre-application process, post-application process, during the research project with more and more extensive demands on annual reporting, and finally on the final reporting of the project. Furthermore, universities are competing for the attention of media and politics. This implies increased demands on dissemination of research results beyond the “classic” channels like books, academic journals, and conferences. Media interviews, TV and Radio presence, social media channels such

like websites, Facebook, Linked-in, Podcasts, YouTube channels, blogs among others, are more and more required for university professors to display their appeal to a broader audience. In an effort to display their *being*, universities engage in diffusing no-things up to winking to *nothingness*.

From this perspective, the rise of the academic manager profession within the managerialized university and the consequent identity schism (Winter, 2009) can assume a different meaning. Academic managers are the prophets of the managerial administration of university (Fleming, 2022), thus engaging in *the administration of nothingness*. The administration of nothingness is almost the opposite of what the original idea of managerial administration was made up of apparently, that is well-defined and designed practices in the university domain. Paradoxically, nowadays nothingness in university goes hand in hand with greater world challenges. Universities are expected to be actors, and key ones, following Frank and Meyer (2020), in helping supranational institutions address the current global challenges as EU Horizon impact goals show (EU website, 2022). Research funding has significantly shifted towards grand challenges recognizing the central role of university and the need of management to monitor efficiently the research activity. Unfortunately, nowadays this trend does not consider at all the criticisms we mentioned above about what universities are becoming under the pressure of the new rationalized myth of EU Horizon goals and other bureaucratic attempts for control.

## Conclusions: whose side are we on?

“The past century has seen tremendous expansion of higher education around the world” (Schofer & Meyer, 2005, p. 898). This was the *incipit* of the influential *American Sociological Review* paper summarizing John Meyer’s long-term research on the diffusion of higher education institutions. The picture that emerged was optimistic viewing open access to education as a key to unlimited progress. The diffusion of management ideas in the university context was seen under the same perspective: management and university together will lead towards the new liberal and managerialized social progress. So, what happened to generate the current disappointment and skepticism towards university and management education in as much to imagine “the end of the university as we know it” and “to shut down the business schools”?

Kerstin Sahlin’s research helped us understand how the diffusion of ideas is a tremendous complex process even in the educational field. Her arguments on how ideas are modified in translation and on the existence of competing translations and ideas within fields taking place at the same time provide strong evidence that the performativity path linking diffusion and progress is neither

simple nor predictable. In the case of university and management education, this evidence explains why the *magnifiche sorti e progressive* are far from being accomplished. Furthermore, we believe that the trust on a social progress yet to come could be questionable. As the diffusion of management ideas in university represented a way to include university within the glorious path towards modernity and progress, significant doubts rise whether modernity and progress are leading towards a better world (Rosa, 2013). University and higher education institutions are increasingly under scrutiny as potentially unhealthy (in metaphorical terms) places (Zawadzki, 2018; Mazza & Quattrone, 2018) and increasingly victims of negative discourses (Jones, 2022). Although it lays at the *avant-garde* of modernity, management education today seems unable to provide responses to current world challenges (Starkey, 2015), which reveal their more and more social and political nature. Rather, managerialization of university is increasing bureaucracy. So, from an organized anarchy, to use James March's thought-provoking categories, the university is turning into an irresistible academic bureaucracy (Tahir, 2010), where new academics-to-be are actively engaged in the administration of nothingness.

Now, in the face of these waves of skepticism, we might be tempted to theorize the end of university and the final triumph of managerialism and its educational tools. We could abide to the description below of the role of university in the new social order as the way things are:

Universities render services that aid in the perpetuation of this order, from the developing of intellectual property to the training of "human capital." Universities are also being internally reorganized to conform to a neoliberal model, which is "driven principally by vocational and economic questions," and in which "every procedure has been managerialized." The increasing tendency to direct research funding to those whose work has clear possibilities for commercial exploitation or will aid in state domination is also indicative of a turn away from critical thought and basic research, which were once considered to be primary tasks of "higher" education institutions. As what Lyotard has called "performativity" becomes the highest value, an environment is fostered that is hardly conducive to critical reflection. (Coté et al., 2007, p. 319)

However, we believe Kerstin Sahlin's conceptualizations might come to our rescue. Even though ideas are to a certain extent imposed to universities by policy makers at national and supranational level (as often not "burdened by knowledge" about the field they are regulating) in the higher education field, several translations of ideas are simultaneously in place. Managerial practices are translated within universities as well as principles taught by management education are translated within corporations and organizations. Perhaps the antidote to what the most pessimist scholars are predicting can be already en-

visaged in newly translated ideas. Moreover, perhaps, those no-things populating universities and management education courses are being translated into new concepts, more familiar with challenges and tensions of our world rather than with the current representation of world modernity (Rosa, 2013).

We believe to value Kerstin Sahlin's scholarship by staying on the side of research, rejecting the temptation of giving in to skepticism or only missing the good old times. If no-things are around us, new things happen every day, waiting for us to find them out. Ecologies of translations are everywhere and we, as researchers, should be ready to trace and interpret the way they are changing the world around us.

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# Englishization through imitation, hybridization, translation

*Behlül Üsdiken, Sabanci University and Özyeğin University*

The turn of the Ottoman Empire towards Westernization in late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in view of its impending decline, involved, amongst various initiatives, the establishment of public educational institutions patterned after European exemplars. Of these, the early ones were for the military, followed by the founding of civilian schools which developed over time into higher education institutions. Although Turkish was dominant, some of the courses in these schools were sporadically taught in French. Indeed, there was the case of the school of military medicine where all teaching was in French for almost three decades (Berkes, 1964). A public secondary school was also founded in the 1860s under French influence where instruction was also in French (Berkes, 1964). Moreover, during the nineteenth century many foreign schools predominantly at the primary level were also established in various parts of the Empire, mostly by missionaries (Davison, 1961).

Almost all of this was to end abruptly when the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923 following the demise of the Ottoman Empire. As a part of the nation building project, the language of instruction in the single university and the tertiary stand-alone schools that constituted the binary structure inherited from the Empire was now to be entirely in Turkish. Of the foreign schools, those at the primary level had to be closed. Altogether around 15 American, Austrian, English, French, German and Italian secondary schools did continue to operate as private institutions though they were brought under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and were required to teach all social subjects in Turkish (Doğançay-Aktuna, 1998). The public secondary school established during the Ottoman period where teaching was in French also came under the same regime.

The subsequent three decades or so was therefore a period when teaching in a language other than Turkish was essentially unthinkable, the foreign secondary schools and the only public one considered as exceptions confined to that level. Higher education expanded in the same period, as by mid-1950s

the number of universities in the country was increased to three and various additions were made to the non-university sector within the continuing binary structure.

The era of Turkish as the sole language of instruction in higher education was to come to an end however when two institutions emerged in the latter part of the 1950s where entire teaching was to be in English. From these beginnings, English as medium of instruction has expanded so that currently around one in five of all the departments in Turkish universities claim offering first degrees (i.e., bachelor's) taught in English. How this process of Englishization has unfolded over these six decades constitutes the focus of this chapter.

## Origins and the first two decades

The two initiatives which led to the introduction of English as the medium of instruction into Turkish higher education developed separately and in different ways, while both enjoyed the strong support of the government at the time. The late 1940s and the 1950s was a period when Turkey was trying to secure a place in the Western alliance in the aftermath of World War II. Concurrently, Turkey was strengthening its military, political and economic ties to the United States (US) to benefit not least from various forms of aid.

The first of these initiatives involved the founding in 1959 of a public university entirely different from all the universities that existed in the country at the time. The creation of this university originated from the visit of Charles Abrams (1901–1970), an American housing expert, sent to Turkey by the United Nations (UN) to advise on city planning. His proposals were taken up by some public sector officials and governing party parliamentarians who secured the support of the government to obtain further UN funding and to turn the project into one of establishing a new public university (see Reed, 1975). It was to have “schools” (or “faculties” in Turkish nomenclature) in architecture, arts and sciences, administration, and engineering. The university was also to be modelled after American state universities and its aim would be to educate not only young people in Turkey but from the entire Middle East – hence the name Middle East Technical University (METU). The formulation of the aim of the university in this manner served as the main justification for instruction in English. In fact, that teaching would be in English was written into the law by which the university was established. And English became the medium of instruction in all the faculties of the university and at all degree levels that were offered. That this was considered doable in a country where English was not the native language and had not been colonized in the past had to do with the premise that the academic staff would be made up

largely of Turkish nationals predominantly with US doctorates as well as some foreign instructors. As especially public secondary schools in Turkey are not particularly effective in teaching a foreign language, an obligatory preparatory year was introduced for students who did not have an adequate command of English which they had to attend and pass before they could commence their studies.

The second initiative developed from an entirely different origin. It came from an American college established in Istanbul in 1863 during the Ottoman era (Freely, 2009). The language of instruction was English from the very beginning. Named as Robert College after its benefactor Christopher R. Robert (1802–1878), the college was incorporated in the State of New York and started offering Bachelor of Arts (BA) degrees, as any other American liberal arts college. A Bachelor of Science (BS) degree was added when the college established an Engineering School in 1912, also within the framework of the US institutional sphere with no equivalents within the Ottoman Empire. As mentioned above, after the Turkish Republic was founded, Robert College became one of the foreign schools officially recognized as at the secondary level teaching subjects such as science and mathematics in English and subjects like history and geography in Turkish. Soon after the administrators of Robert College began to air their interest in mid-1950s to extend the operations of the college to the tertiary level, they were able to secure a governmental decree to that effect. Yet this decree did not grant university status, but rather a permit to establish an upper division that would have the right to confer first degrees (the *lisans* in Turkish terminology) after four years of education like the other schools in the non-university sector. Nevertheless, for the first time in Republican history a foreign private institution had entered the higher education field. Robert College began admitting its first upper division students in 1959. It had the same schools as METU except architecture. As it was an American college it was deemed “natural” that instruction would be in English. The upper division was also exempt from the constraints imposed on foreign secondary schools, which meant that teaching could be in English in the entire college and at all degree levels. Recruitment of academic staff in Robert College was also based on the same premise as in METU. Likewise, there was also a preparatory year for admitted students to learn English.

Notably, this was a period when Turkish universities were almost entirely nationally oriented, hosting very small numbers of foreign students, typically from neighbouring Middle Eastern countries. Purportedly, this was expected to be expanded by METU, which as mentioned above served as a major justification for making instruction entirely in English. This did happen in the first few years, speedily declining however as internationally funded bursaries

were drained (Üsdiken, 2011). Soon it had become a university catering almost entirely to Turkish students.

In any case, it was with these two initiatives that it all started. It went on in the same manner throughout the 1960s with METU and Robert College remaining as the sole higher education institutions where teaching was in English. The 1960s also saw a rapid increase in the demand for higher education. This increase prompted the creation of indigenous for-profit private schools at the tertiary level in various disciplines, their total number reaching around 40 by the end of the decade. However, these private schools were ruled unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court in 1971 and had to be closed. They were then turned into public schools and attached to existing similar ones in the non-university sector and to one of the universities, the only one willing to accept them. The Constitutional Court ruling also made it impossible for the upper division of Robert College to continue. The College was also facing financial difficulties as the US Agency for International Development (USAID) had started withdrawing its funding support. Negotiations resulted in the Board of Trustees of Robert College turning over the grounds and the facilities of the College to the Turkish Government and a new public university (Boğaziçi) was established in its stead (Reed, 1975). Boğaziçi University continued with the teaching staff, academic structure and the practices of Robert College including teaching in English although this time it was not written into the law but was left to the discretion of the new university. Boğaziçi did opt for English as well as continuing with the recruitment practices of Robert College.

So now, there were two public universities which carried out their teaching entirely in English. To meet the rising demand for higher education, the number of universities in the country were increased to 19 during the 1970s, together with numerous additions to the non-university sector. None of the old or the new universities, nor the tertiary schools attempted to turn to teaching in English in this decade, despite the better job prospects that METU and Boğaziçi were offering to their graduates and the advances that they were making in student selectivity. Yet, this virtuous circle was not to go unnoticed for long, especially as they bolstered the standing and reputation of these two institutions even more so after a major shift in the economic environment of the country towards greater liberalization and internationalization following the military coup in 1980 (Ahmad, 1993). Attributed, as it has likely been, to English-medium instruction as the most visible feature of these two universities, followers soon began to appear.

## Legislative overhaul and the advent of the private university

Radical changes were also made in the legislation governing higher education in Turkey in the aftermath of the military coup. The new legislative framework abolished firstly the binary structure that dated back to the Ottoman times. Some of the tertiary schools were converted into universities and others either attached to them or to the existing universities. As a result, the number of universities in the country went up overnight to 27. Secondly, for the first time ever, private universities were allowed, though they could only be not-for-profit and established by philanthropic foundations. Finally, universities were brought under centralized control through the creation of a highly powerful public body, the Council of Higher Education (CHE) (see further Barblan, Ergüder & Gürüz, 2008).

Instruction in English was already budding when the new legislative framework came into force, and it began to spread soon after. The two all English public universities (METU and Boğaziçi) served as sources of legitimacy as well as of competitive influence. Already in this early stage, Englishization progressed both through outright imitation and various forms of hybridization with teaching in Turkish. The first two private universities (Bilkent and Koç) founded in 1986 and 1992 respectively were exact replicas of METU and Boğaziçi with instruction entirely in English at all degree levels. They also consisted of very similar faculties. As one author remarked for Bilkent “its model was the American campus and everything, including the cafeteria menu, was written in English” (Ahmad, 1993, p. 210). The founders of these private universities must have thought that to match the elite status that METU and Boğaziçi enjoyed, teaching had to be in English, given also that private universities were in a disadvantaged position due to being tuition-based as opposed to public universities which charged only nominal fees. These two private universities were even more ardent in employing predominantly those with US degrees, as they could offer much better pay, not constrained by the salary scheme that applied to academic staff in public universities who had civil servant status.

A couple of public universities took the hybridization route even ahead of the private universities mentioned above. Hybridization took different forms. The first public university to do so (Hacettepe) introduced in 1982 what could be referred to as a *lateral* hybrid, meaning that the same program (in this instance in medicine) was taught separately in English and Turkish within the same faculty. This was a step that this university probably believed that it could take as it did have Turkish staff in its Faculty of Medicine who

had been educated or had taught or practiced in the US (Reed, 1975). A new university (Marmara) converted from a school in the non-university sector that had therefore historically been a more marginal player, ventured a year later into founding a Faculty of Medicine where teaching would be only in English, thus creating the first example of what has been dubbed as turning a university into a *compartmentalized* hybrid, meaning that one or more parts of a university operated fully in English whereas in other parts instruction continued to be in Turkish (Topaler & Üsdiken, 2021). The same university added to its compartmentalized form lateral hybrid programs in the departments of economics and business. Istanbul University, the oldest in the country, followed suit by turning its programs in medicine, economics and business into lateral hybrids. A few other public universities developed yet another hybrid form, a *minimalist* version, whereby together with an obligatory preparatory year a third of the courses in a program would be taught in English and the rest in Turkish (Topaler & Üsdiken, 2021). This hybrid version was introduced in these universities variably in economics, business, medicine and/or engineering departments.

All these hybrid cases, apart perhaps from the original lateral hybrid at Hacettepe University, involved a reinterpretation of teaching in English, a “translation” as it were, different from how this practice was constituted in METU and Boğaziçi, the pioneering public universities and continued more vehemently by the first couple of private universities mentioned above (Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017). As mentioned above, English-medium instruction in these old public as well as the new private universities was underpinned by the premise that the academic staff engaged in this practice would have been educated and socialized into teaching in English in an environment like the US where the native language was English. There are no indications that in the hybrid instances mentioned above this premise was upheld. It appears that the academic staff already teaching in Turkish had to turn to doing their teaching in English.

The CHE took a rather liberal attitude towards English-medium instruction throughout the 1980s leaving it to the discretion of universities, though it did retain its powers to ratify applications to that effect. Probably due to its relatively fast spread, the CHE did intervene though in 1994 by issuing a new regulation which limited instruction in English at the first-degree level to the two public universities (METU and Boğaziçi) that had spearheaded this practice and the initial private universities that were established as their replicas (Bilkent and Koç). However, this new regulation could only survive for about 18 months, possibly due to pressure from the prospective founders of at least some of the upcoming private universities. It was replaced by a new regula-

tion issued in 1996, which essentially involved a return to the pre-1994 rules and thus allowed any university that could obtain CHE ratification to teach in English (or in any other foreign language).

The CHE did not turn out to be eager in encouraging the founding of new universities during the 1980s. There were only two additions, one being the first private university mentioned above and the other a public one, which split from an existing university. Things were to change however in early 1990s as governments gained superiority over the CHE and in a couple of years 24 new public universities were founded. Another public university (Galatasaray) was established based on an agreement between French and Turkish governments, where in this case all teaching was to be in French. Private universities gained pace after then as well, 18 new ones founded before the end of the decade. So, by the year 2000 the total number of universities in the country went up to 73, of which 53 were public and 20 were private.

Table 1 shows the extent to which Englishization had spread and the forms that it had taken by the year 2000 in first-degree programs. As seen in the last column, altogether in approximately 15% of the universities teaching was entirely in English. And another 25% or so had at least one program where English was the language of instruction. Although the number of universities teaching purely in English went up from two at the time of the legislative overhaul in early 1980s to 10 in 2000, even more universities had moved to English-medium instruction through one or more forms of hybridization. Table 1 also shows that teaching in English found greater reception in private universities. During the 1980s and the 1990s, while there was only one addition (Izmir YTE) to public universities imitating fully the two pioneering ones (METU and Boğaziçi), the number of private universities doing so had gone up to seven. Although relatively more public universities turned to lateral or compartmentalized hybridization than to full English teaching, the proportion of private universities following the same route was even higher than the public ones. Moreover, when private universities took to hybridization, on average the share of programs in English in each university was much higher than in public universities. So, as Table 1 shows (the penultimate bottom row), at the program level around 70% of all programs in private universities were taught in English as opposed to about 7% in public ones (including those in universities where teaching was entirely in English). That the drive towards Englishization was much stronger in private universities is also indicated by the very small number of universities of this type relative to public ones where instruction was only in Turkish.

One would suspect that together with this expansion of Englishization, considerable translation in the practice of instruction in English, characterized

Table 1. *Englishization in Turkish higher education at the first-degree level, 2000<sup>a</sup>*

Universities	Public <sup>b</sup> (n=51)	Private <sup>c</sup> (n=18)	Total (n=69)
Entirely in English	3 (5.9%)	7 (38.9%)	10 (14.5%)
Lateral and/or compartmentalized hybrids	11 (21.7%)	8 (44.4%)	19 (27.5%)
Minimalist hybrids (1/3 English) <sup>d</sup>	4 (7.8%)	1 (5.6%)	5 (7.3%)
Only in Turkish	33 (64.7%)	2 (11.1%)	35 (50.7%)
Programs fully in English <sup>e</sup>	121 (7.4%)	133 (69.3%)	254 (13.8%)
Programs 1/3 in English <sup>f</sup>	69 (4.2%)	13 (6.8%)	82 (4.5%)

<sup>a</sup> Source: 2000 Manual for Higher Education Programs and Quotas. Programs in languages, literature and translation studies where teaching in a foreign language would be expected are not included in the figures and proportions reported in the Table.

<sup>b</sup> Does not include the public university where teaching is in French and the one that had not yet started admitting first degree students.

<sup>c</sup> Does not include two private universities that had not yet started admitting students.

<sup>d</sup> Universities that only had minimalist hybrids and no programs where teaching was fully in English.

<sup>e</sup> Total number of programs in 2000 – public universities: 1647; private universities: 192 (grand total: 1839). Proportions in this and the row below are based on these totals.

<sup>f</sup> All programs that were 1/3 English including those in universities that also had lateral or compartmentalized hybrids.

by a more relaxed approach to who does the teaching had been taking place. Although systematic data are not available, this is indicated not least by the 1996 CHE regulation mentioned above, which stipulated that as an alternative to being educated abroad, Turkish nationals could qualify to teach in programs in English (or in any other foreign language) either by a bachelor's or a graduate degree in a Turkish university where instruction was in that language or by high scores in recognized national or international language tests.

## Another two decades: the post-2000 period

The two decades after the turn of the century saw a frenzy of establishing new universities in Turkey. This unprecedented drive had to do mainly with the political project of the governing party in power since 2002, symbolized initially by the slogan “a university in every city”, which was then extended to various other cities where there were already universities, though in both instances some of these universities were created in part by splitting up exist-

ing ones. The founding of private universities also continued unabated during this period. Both sets of these initiatives were justified and indeed encouraged by the persistent high demand for higher education. On the way, a public Turkish-German University was also established based on an agreement between German and Turkish governments much like the one mentioned above with France. In this case, teaching was to be almost entirely in German. So, by the year 2020 the number of universities in the country had gone up from 73 in 2000 (53 public and 20 private) to 200, 127 of which were public and 73 were private universities.

Internationalization had also begun to garner greater attention, though initially in seeking rapprochement with the European Union, as Turkey became a part of the Bologna process in 2001 and of the Erasmus project in 2004. It was towards the end of the first decade of the 2000s that internationalization began to enter public discourse, promoted as it was by the CHE as well as other public agencies. This was a somewhat late-coming response to discourses and practices gaining currency at the transnational level in the 1990s, as the international flow of students grew and attracting foreign students became an increasingly competitive “export” activity in various countries, with concomitant expansion of programs and courses taught in English where the latter was not the native language (Engwall and Wedlin, 2023). In any case, a considerable increase has been recorded in Turkey too after the mid-2010s with students coming mainly from the Middle East, Turkic Republics and Africa (CHE, 2021, pp. 23–24).

Englishization at the first-degree level continued to expand in this context of extremely fast growth in the number of universities and the emergent accent on internationalization. That it has is shown in Table 2. The expansion is indicated first by the fall in the share of universities where teaching was only in Turkish from around a half to about a third (cf. Table 1). Table 2 also shows however that the proportion of Turkish only universities varied across type and age. In 2020, none of the relatively older private universities (established prior to 2000) were carrying out their teaching only in Turkish. There was a marked drop among the older public universities too (established before 2000) in adhering solely to Turkish as the medium of instruction. Whereas about two-thirds of these universities were Turkish only in 2000 (Table 1), instruction was purely in Turkish in only about a quarter of the same universities in the year 2020 (Table 2). The share of Turkish only instruction among the newer (post-2000) private universities was roughly at par with the older public universities, a proportion (23.2%) twice as high as it had been among the first round of private universities (11.1%) in 2000 (Table 1 and 2). It was among the public universities that were an outgrowth of the post-2000 new

university creation drive that had the highest share of only Turkish instruction (60.3%; Table 2), though still marginally lower than the proportion for public universities by the year 2000 (64.7%; Table 1).

Further expansion towards Englishization is also indicated by the penetration of English at program levels. Again, there is variation across different categories of universities. Private universities both old and new are squarely at the forefront also in 2020. In particular, the pre-2000 private universities scored by far the highest at the program level with around 70% of all their first-degree programs taught in English (Table 2), maintaining the extent that they had attained in 2000 (Table 1). The newer private universities follow, though only with about a half of this rate. This may have been due to the newer ones having more modest aspirations or possibly aiming to attract students who may prefer instruction in Turkish. Still, as Table 2 shows, the share of programs taught in English even in the new private universities is far higher than those observed for older (11.3%) and newer (7.0%) public universities.

Table 2 also indicates that the route towards further Englishization in the two post-2000 decades has been even more so through lateral and compartmentalized hybridization rather than imitation of all-English universities. In fact, the total number of universities doing the latter fell from 10 to seven in 2020. Specifically, while the two pioneering public universities (METU and Boğaziçi) and the pre-2000 addition (İzmir YTE) retained their all-English character, only one such new public university was established after 2000. Of the seven private universities founded as all-English before 2000 only one remained in the same form. And there were only two additions to all-English private universities after 2000 which increased their total number to three, making the total even less than the public ones. In fact, the two private universities (Bilkent and Koç) which, as mentioned above, started out as exact imitations of METU and Boğaziçi had to diverge from this “pure” form, albeit marginally, because they diversified, like some of the others, into law where they had to abide by the minimalist hybrid rule imposed on them now re-defined and standardized as “minimum 30% in English” (Table 2).

In all then, relative to only two all-English universities in 1980 (among 19 universities and 38 non-university tertiary institutions), by the year 2020, 127 universities had ventured into teaching in English in full or partially in varying degrees, which constituted around two-thirds of all the universities in the country. Consequently, about one in five of all first-degree programs on offer were now claimed to be taught in English (Table 2). With such expansion, the kind of translation in the implementation of this practice pointed out above is likely to have become even more widespread, as indicated again by the regulations issued by the CHE. These have oscillated between a highly “liberal” for-

Table 2. *Englishization in Turkish higher education at the first-degree level, 2020<sup>a</sup>*

Universities	Pre-2000 public <sup>b</sup> (n=51)	Post-2000 public <sup>c</sup> (n=73)	Pre-2000 private <sup>d</sup> (n=17)	Post-2000 private (n=56)	Total (n=197)
Entirely in English	3 (5.9%)	1 (1.4%)	1 (5.9%)	2 (3.6%)	7 (3.6%)
Lateral and/or compartmentalized hybrids	33 (64.7%)	19 (26.0%)	16 (94.1%)	38 (67.9%)	106 (53.8%)
Minimalist hybrid (min. 30% English)	2 (3.9%)	9 (12.3%)	-	3 (5.4%)	14 (7.1%)
Only in Turkish	13 (25.5%)	44 (60.3%)	-	13 (23.2%)	70 (35.5%)
Programs fully in English <sup>e</sup>	285 (11.3%)	125 (7.0%)	335 (70.4%)	361 (36.4%)	1106 (19.1%)
Programs in min. 30% English <sup>f</sup>	151 (6.0%)	46 (2.6%)	18 (3.8%)	58 (5.8%)	273 (4.7%)

<sup>a</sup> Source: 2020 Manual for Higher Education Programs and Quotas. Programs in languages, literature and translation studies where teaching in a foreign language would be expected are not included in the figures and proportions reported in the Table.

<sup>b</sup> Does not include the public university where teaching is in French and the one that had not yet started admitting first degree students in 2000.

<sup>c</sup> Does not include the public university where teaching is in German.

<sup>d</sup> Does not include two private universities that had not yet started admitting students in 2000 and the one which was closed by governmental decree after 2000.

<sup>e</sup> Total number of programs – pre-2000 public universities: 2515; post-2000 public universities: 1796; pre-2000 private universities: 476; post-2000 private universities: 993 (grand total: 5780). Proportions in this and the row below are based on these totals.

<sup>f</sup> All programs that were 1/3 English including those in universities that also had lateral or compartmentalized hybrids.

mulation phrased as “teaching staff should have a command of the language” (in 2008) and the stipulation of requirements such as foreign education or high marks in recognized national or international language tests (in 2016).

## Concluding remarks

The preceding review has shown how the process of Englishization at the first-degree level has unfolded in Turkey over a period of six decades. The original sources were two higher education institutions (a public university and an American college) that were established in the late 1950s within a historical context when US military, political and economic influence on the country was rampant. Although teaching in English was foreseen as to be carried out largely by Turkish nationals, a central premise was that those would

be individuals who were trained and socialized into academic life predominantly in the US. Both these institutions enjoyed sociopolitical legitimacy at the time in that there was limited questioning of teaching in English although it would have been probably unthinkable even a few years before. Nevertheless, they did not spur a diffusion of instruction in English in the two decades that followed, other than the American college being turned into a Turkish university again under unique circumstances.

Englishization did receive an impetus however in the politico-economic context of the 1980s coupled with a legislative overhaul, which amongst other marked changes introduced the private university into Turkish higher education. Although not emulated in the two decades after their founding (i.e., the 1960s and the 1970s), the two original all-English public universities had become centers of attention with the stature that they had been gaining during that period. Imitative behavior was soon to follow as two of the nascent private universities were created as exact replicas of the two all-English public universities. As an instance of counterfactual history, one may be tempted to ask if these two private universities would so readily take this all-English form if the two public universities with origins in the 1950s had not already been there. In any case, contemporaneously with the emergent private universities in the 1980s and early 1990s, some other public universities, which apparently found it difficult to turn themselves into such replicas, “discovered” hybridization as the way forward in Englishization. Indeed, although some more imitations of the original all-English university did emerge during the last four decades or so, it was essentially hybridization, mainly in lateral and compartmentalized forms that drove the spread of instruction in English. Running programs as minimalist hybrids, meaning partly in English and partly in Turkish was also employed though to a lesser degree, while this version also appears to have served as a first step towards turning programs fully into English. And it was the private universities that served as the main carriers of Englishization, though the public ones followed too albeit at a lesser scale. Again, counterfactually one is tempted to ask whether instruction in English would have expanded as much if the legislative overhaul in early 1980s had not enabled the creation of private universities. Indeed, this review does demonstrate how hybridization and privatization may serve as significant mechanisms in the diffusion of instruction in English in higher education.

Assessing what this process of Englishization has done to higher education in Turkey is beyond the scope of this chapter. Lack of systematic historical data also precluded extending the review to graduate level programs. The all-English universities and those that carry out a large part of their instruction in English tend to do all their graduate education in English as well, while

what those that have adopted hybrid practices do in this respect is likely to be variable. There is also no systematic research on what transpires in classes that are purportedly taught in English. As pointed out above in various occasions, there are enough indications to expect that the expansion of teaching in English has involved considerable translation of what was believed to be brought into Turkey with the two original institutions of the 1950s. Together with expansion, staff doing the teaching in English have had to be increasingly drawn from those that have not been trained in native language environments. One could therefore conjecture that as students are not native speakers either and most of them are likely to have learned English through the preparatory year at not a particularly young age, a lot of decoupling is also likely to occur. It may well be that what is claimed to be instruction in English turns into a mixed language teaching with Turkish also being used, though admittedly the presence of foreign students in class may perhaps serve to alleviate this state of affairs.

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# The construction of actors in the ecology of competitions permeating science and higher education

*Georg Krücken*, University of Kassel

If one deals with competition in sociology and organization research, one inevitably comes across ecological approaches. They are particularly suitable for the analysis of competition because competition is a social relationship that is based on the embeddedness and interplay of different actors in an overarching environment in which the competition is about scarce goods. Prominent examples of the fruitfulness of such a perspective are the Chicago School in sociology and the Organizational Population Ecology approach in organization research. In their Introduction to the Science of Sociology, Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess view competition as a “universal phenomenon” (1921, p. 249) as well as an “elementary fundamental and universal form” (1921, p. 250) of interaction that comprises a network of interdependencies. In the framework of the human ecology approach in sociology, complex socio-ecological phenomena such as a city like Chicago can be analyzed as interdependent relationships between humans and their social and natural environment. Similarly, in their groundbreaking article in organization research, Michael T. Hannan and John Freeman (1977) established an entire research program that observes populations of organizations in their environments and places the interplay of organizations’ environmental adaptation and the selection pressures exerted on organizations by the environment at the center of the analysis. The sense-making of the actors involved in the competition remains excluded in such ecological approaches, as does the enactment of the environmental conditions that confront the actors as an objective fact.<sup>1</sup> Ecological approaches to competition have led, on the one hand, to a coherent research program (or-

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<sup>1</sup> Here I, of course, refer to earlier versions of the organizational population ecology approach. Among the many extensions are also attempts that put the sense-making of actors into the foreground and, by focusing on the interpretation of the environmental conditions of actors involved in competition, build a bridge to neo-institutionalism. On this, see especially the works by Joel A.C. Baum and his co-authors (Baum & Oliver, 1992; Baum & Lant, 2003).

ganizational population ecology) and, on the other hand, a once again popular relational sociology that is also able to capture interactions of human actors endowed with subjective meaning and non-human actors in an environment shared by both of them (human ecology).

In contrast, other ecological concepts such as the “ecology of ideas” focus directly on the cultural and meaningful dimensions of environmental embeddedness. Thus, Wedlin and Sahlin (2017, p. 113) write: “The concept of ecology points to the importance of bringing into the analysis the dynamic interaction among circulating ideas and the interaction of those ideas with their environments.” Especially when it is about the circulation of ideas that are subject to various processes of translating and editing, one will also have to take questions of sense-making in different environments into account. Why, for example, do individual and collective actors in science and higher education increasingly perceive themselves as competitive actors? Which processes of translating and editing take place here? Competition requires actors. These, however, are not simply given, but are constructed through cultural processes that can be reconstructed both historically and sociologically.

The social construction of competitive actors first of all means that one does not understand competition as a quasi-anthropological natural state. Rather, specific conditions are necessary that encompass the embeddedness in global environmental settings, cognitive processes, scarce goods for which to compete, political-legal frameworks and competition-oriented organizational structures.<sup>2</sup>

Following Goffman’s (1974) framework analysis, it can be assumed that a specific frame is required for actors to engage in a cognitive process of self-perception according to which they perceive themselves as being in competition (see also Arora-Jonsson et al., 2021). The historic-sociological analysis by Leifer (1988) describes such a process of framing, the result of which led to basketball teams in the US as competitive actors. Historically, basketball teams were not competitive actors. Similar to the Harlem Globetrotters today they travelled across the country in order to perform show matches, and much like wrestling matches in the US today, these matches were based on defined roles and a script, so basketball teams were more like acting troupes. This situation changed only after leagues had been created, points were awarded and championships were carried out. Leifer (1988) describes similar developments for other team sports in the US. The result is that the US sports leagues

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<sup>2</sup> With regard to the social conditions of competition, there is a certain parallel with Finnemore’s (1996) analysis of modern warfare, which, according to her, should not be understood as an unregulated Hobbesian natural state, but as a “highly regulated social institution” (Finnemore, 1996: 69).

appear to us today as an almost pure form of competition without any reflection on their historically contingent origins. Although one should not overemphasize the analogy between what Leifer (1988) describes and more recent developments in science and higher education, the creation of leagues that provide the framework for regular comparison and competition with others is an essential step in the social construction of competitive actors.

In the following, I will first outline the actor model of neo-institutionalism and then transfer it to the construction of competitive actors. In the sense of translating and editing of globally circulating ideas on the actorhood of states, organizations and individuals in science and higher education, one national system is used to show how such ideas are taken up and contextually adapted in a specific national context, which is shaped by its own traditions, framing conditions, and patterns of interpretation. In this contribution, Germany represents the national system of reference, a system that, on the one hand, is characterized by powerful national traditions and related structures, and, on the other, has been subject to various changes in the past 20–30 years, which can only be captured in a global frame of reference (Hüther & Krücken, 2018). Finally, perspectives for future research are proposed.

When focusing on the construction of competitive actors in science and higher education, I draw strongly on the work of the neo-institutional sociologist and globalization theorist John Meyer and his collaborators, in particular Ronald Jepperson (Krücken & Drori, 2009; Meyer & Jepperson, 2000; Jepperson & Meyer, 2021). Research on actorhood tries to expand neo-institutional theorizing by reconstructing modern actors as “a goal oriented, bounded, integrated, technically effective entity” (Meyer, 2009, p. 38) that is nevertheless not simply an autonomous decision-maker. Instead, despite their strong sense of agency and identity, modern actors can only be understood by reconstructing “their practical embeddedness in taken-for-granted culture and relationships” (Meyer, 2009, p. 39). Conceptually, the seminal essay by Meyer and Jepperson (2000) captures the main characteristics of the neo-institutional theorizing on actorhood. In it, they distinguish between three types of actors in modern society: states, organizations, and individuals. The significance of the three types of actors for modern society and their particularly high legitimacy can be seen in the fact that political independence movements usually strive to establish a state in order to be recognized by the international community of states; social movements and loose networks tend to become organizations, for instance, in the form of political parties or NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations). Finally, the autonomous individual is not to be presupposed ontologically, but only emerges through the attribution of rights and duties, for example, in the context of citizenship; its understanding

as an individual member of society who is not merely understood as part of overarching collectives (families, ethnic groups, national communities) presupposes far-reaching social construction processes. In this context, the assumed autonomous capacity to act does not mean independence from societal specifications; on the contrary: Modern state, organizational, and individual actors paradoxically express their deep embeddedness in society and their basic cultural assumptions by considering themselves as autonomous actors. Meyer and Jepperson's (2000) paper established an entire research program within neo-institutional studies by theoretical and empirical investigations into the global construction and proliferation of actorhood (see, for example, the contributions in Hwang et al., 2019).<sup>3</sup> Together with other key articles of the period 1988 to 2009 as well as newer considerations and comments of the two authors, it has recently been published in an anthology that provides an overview of the main ideas on the construction of actors within contemporary social structure (cf. Jepperson & Meyer, 2021). Of particular interest is the final chapter, in which the authors delineate the coming of a post-liberal age that comes along with counter-reactions such as nationalism or anti-intellectualism that challenge modern, globally embedded actorhood.

This approach has already proven its fruitfulness for the study of science and higher education, in particular by analyses of how universities are constructed as organizational actors (Krücken & Meier, 2006; Ramirez, 2010; Christensen et al., 2017) and the book by Frank and Meyer on the interplay of the expansion of higher education and individual actorhood (Frank & Meyer, 2020). Further insights are provided, for example, by the book by Bromley and Meyer on "The Hyperactive Organization" (Bromley & Meyer, 2015), which reads like a generalized description of modern-day universities. Interestingly, the state as the third type of modern actorhood has drawn considerably less attention in neo-institutional research and theorizing over the last years. The central theoretical piece is still Meyer et al. (1997), and major investigations into its role in science and higher education are to be found in a volume from 2006 (Drori et al., 2006). In extension of the above-mentioned studies, I will focus on all three types of actors and their construction as competitive actors. Furthermore, with the help of an ecological approach as exemplified by Kerstin Sahlin and her co-authors (Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017) with its emphasis on processes of translating and editing globally circulating ideas, in this essay I will try to focus on the globally circulating idea that states, universities and

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<sup>3</sup> With that line of research, neo-institutionalism displays some interesting parallels to other strands of macrosociological theorizing as, for example, the work by Norbert Elias, Georg Simmel and Max Weber or more recent work on "The Society of Singularities" (Reckwitz, 2020), or to Michel Foucault's work and the wide field of cultural studies.

individual academics are increasingly seen as competitive actors whose actorhood is deeply embedded in a specific national setting – in our case: Germany – hence requiring translating and editing processes of globally available scripts.

In the area of higher education and science policy, the state increasingly constitutes itself as a competitive actor whose actorhood is the result of the previously mentioned dialectic of the ability to act and make decisions and of its embeddedness in global relations, which do not leave the traditional understanding of statehood untouched and lead to worldwide processes of adaptation that are edited within the individual national contexts. Following Werron (2014, pp. 67–71), it can be assumed that specific forms of competition are of importance in this area. In contrast to the military-based form of interstate competition for territorial influence (see Hironaka, 2017), these can be described as a “soft’ form of competition” (Werron, 2014, p. 67). While the focus on spatiality and the associated goal of directly ousting competitors is more reminiscent of the early Chicago School’s understanding of competition, the “soft’ form of competition” is related to so-called third parties in the sense of Simmel’s “Sociology of Competition” (2008/1903), which since the late 19th century have been constituted primarily by international governmental and non-governmental organizations and rankings. According to Werron, one can observe since then an increasing trend of interstate competition for modernity, cultural prestige as well as attention and legitimacy. It is obvious that the higher education and science system is of high importance with respect to this trend. The studies in Drori et al. (2006), for example, show that higher education and science are regarded worldwide as hallmarks of modern statehood, regardless of their actual importance for the socio-economic development of the respective country. Especially global rankings, which represent a highly standardized form of measuring and metrization, with which different information is condensed into one ranking position, exacerbate the dynamics of interstate competition. Rankings such as the Shanghai Ranking or the Times Higher Education Ranking act as third parties, as one could say following Simmel (2008/1903), which put different universities in relation to each other as competitors for ranking positions. Hence, a global competition for national prestige takes place as a result - similar to worldwide standardized school performance surveys, such as the PISA studies in particular - in which states are addressed as actors, not only the universities that were actually measured. Similar to the “PISA shock” in Germany in 2001 - when the first PISA study of the OECD revealed average results at best, whereas national systems like Finland, Singapore or South Korea had much higher scores - the disappointment was huge when the first Shanghai Ranking in 2003 ranked the first German university at position 48 and only three other universities could

be found in the top 100. The positioning in the global competition for ranking positions thus replaces the celebration of national ideals and institutions such as the “German Gymnasium” or the “German university.”

In more general terms, the state as an actor in the school- as well as in the higher education and science system is subject to the fact that the idiosyncratic orientation towards its own traditions is superimposed, if not replaced - at least on the discursive level - by the systematic, indicator- and competition-oriented comparison with other states. The globally embedded competitive state passes the pressure that is generated by interstate competition on to different actors at the national level. In this way, competition as a structural principle is multiplied by the “competitive federalism” between the German states. Just as the state increasingly competes with other states on the global stage, federal states and the ministries responsible for higher education and science constitute themselves as competitive actors that stand in competition with each other.

In Germany, state governance through competition covers not only research, such as the Excellence Initiative in particular, which is also being closely observed by other countries and has led to imitations in Europe and Asia, but also teaching, as in the large-scale Quality Pact for Teaching. In addition to these two core missions of universities, state-funded competitions on other topics like the “third mission”, i.e., direct contributions to society, science communication, equality, family friendliness and internationalization are carried out as well. Furthermore, the competition over the scarce good “professorship” is no longer one between the applying scientists only, but, due to the federal Tenure-Track program, now also takes place on the level of the German states and the level of the higher education institutions. Here, one can observe a multiplication of state-induced competitions and the simultaneous constitution of federal and state ministries as competitive actors.

The state, under pressure to legitimize itself, can demonstrate its orientation to modern criteria for action and decision-making, such as efficiency, performance, accountability, and transparency, by initiating competitions; in contrast, traditional mechanisms of higher education governance, such as hierarchy and negotiation, are losing legitimacy. At the same time, even under conditions of increasing formal autonomy of universities, the competitive state demonstrates its ability to act and strategize, and thus reaffirms its actorhood, because the design of new competitions opens up considerable room for maneuver. Apart from the federal structure and the proliferation of competitions due to different levels of politics, for Germany two additional aspects have to be taken into account. First, not all globally existing concepts diffuse into the German system, but national peculiarities must be taken into account;

second, a simple top-down policy is by no means to be assumed, rather the competitive state is exposed to numerous bottom-up influences. First, I will turn to the national peculiarities.

In Germany, clear balancing tendencies were visible early on, which allow a concentration on the promotion of very few universities as 'world-class universities' in global competition at best in discourse, not in concrete higher education and science policy. Thus, the Excellence Initiative with its three funding lines – Future Concepts of the entire 'excellence' university, Research Clusters and Graduate Schools - and the total of xxx funded universities already represents a weakened and less selective funding logic compared to the early discourse about a very few "elite" universities (cf. Mayer, 2019, especially chapters 6 and 7). In the first round of the Excellence Initiative in 2006, three universities were funded as excellence universities with their future concepts as well as 17 clusters and 18 graduate schools. In the second round in 2007, the numbers were six universities, 20 clusters and 21 graduate schools; in the third round in 2012, 11 universities, 42 clusters and 45 graduate schools. For all three rounds the total funding was at 4.6 billion Euros. In 2019, the Excellence Initiative was transferred to the Excellence Strategy. Here, ten universities of excellence and an excellence alliance of Berlin universities as well as 57 clusters - graduate schools are no longer part of the excellence strategy - are funded with 533 million Euros annually since November 2019. In the long term, the Excellence Strategy, in contrast to the temporary funding under the Excellence Initiative, is intended to provide permanent funding for universities and clusters following successful evaluation. The attempt associated with the Excellence Initiative to contribute to a stratification of the German higher education system by awarding prizes to particularly high-performing universities and to break up the previously valid "Gleichheitsfiktion" – a term commonly used in German higher education discourse; in English "fiction of equality" – was controversial from the beginning. Academic and political observers feared that the competition would lead to a strong stratification of the university landscape along with intensifying the differences between universities and universities of applied sciences as well as richer and poorer federal states (Münch, 2007; 2014; Münch & Baier, 2012; for a systemic review of the debate see Götze et al., 2022). Against this background, the Quality Pact for Teaching was adopted in 2010. It is a competitively organized program by the federal government and the states, which, similar to the Excellence Initiative, supports both the entire university organization as well as individual parts via collaborative projects. The aim is to improve the quality of teaching at German universities. From 2011 to 2020, 186 universities, universities of applied sciences as well as colleges of art and music received a total of two billion

Table 1. *Englishization in Turkish higher education at the first-degree level, 2000<sup>a</sup>*

Universities	Public <sup>b</sup> (n=51)	Private <sup>c</sup> (n=18)	Total (n=69)
Entirely in English	3 (5.9%)	7 (38.9%)	10 (14.5%)
Lateral and/or compartmentalized hybrids	11 (21.7%)	8 (44.4%)	19 (27.5%)
Minimalist hybrids (1/3 English) <sup>d</sup>	4 (7.8%)	1 (5.6%)	5 (7.3%)
Only in Turkish	33 (64.7%)	2 (11.1%)	35 (50.7%)
Programs fully in English <sup>e</sup>	121 (7.4%)	133 (69.3%)	254 (13.8%)
Programs 1/3 in English <sup>f</sup>	69 (4.2%)	13 (6.8%)	82 (4.5%)

<sup>a</sup> Source: 2000 Manual for Higher Education Programs and Quotas. Programs in languages, literature and translation studies where teaching in a foreign language would be expected are not included in the figures and proportions reported in the Table.

<sup>b</sup> Does not include the public university where teaching is in French and the one that had not yet started admitting first degree students.

<sup>c</sup> Does not include two private universities that had not yet started admitting students.

<sup>d</sup> Universities that only had minimalist hybrids and no programs where teaching was fully in English.

<sup>e</sup> Total number of programs in 2000 – public universities: 1647; private universities: 192 (grand total: 1839). Proportions in this and the row below are based on these totals.

<sup>f</sup> All programs that were 1/3 English including those in universities that also had lateral or compartmentalized hybrids.

Euros in funding. Since 2021, the program is continued under the name “Innovation in der Hochschullehre” (Innovation in Higher Education Teaching). What is particularly interesting under aspects of competition is that this program is much less selective than the Excellence Initiative and funds not only universities but also other types of public higher education institutions. The inception of the Quality Pact implies that, although selective competitions such as the Excellence Initiative are accompanied by a high reputational gain for the successfully competing universities, there are balancing and countervailing tendencies in the German higher education and science system due to its history and constitution as well as the surrounding political-institutional structure (“federalism”). These tendencies counteract an overly selective competition that is deliberately not aimed at all universities and produces a high number of losers among the participants. Furthermore, it needs to be taken into account that overall 44 universities received funding in the framework of the Excellence Initiative. Given that currently 87 public universities exist in

Germany, this also represents a departure from early ideas of concentrating funding on very few institutions as “world-class universities.”

Furthermore, it should be emphasized that the development of the state as a competitive actor in the German higher education system is by no means accompanied by an increase in market control and privatization. This clearly reflects both national and sectoral peculiarities. Elements of market governance, as apparent in Germany in the attempts to introduce tuition fees in seven federal states between 2006 and 2007, were short-lived in the German higher education system (Hüther & Krücken, 2014). This is in stark contrast with national systems such as the American, Australian or British one, which strongly rely on tuition fees even for public universities. Likewise, the withdrawal of the state and the accompanying privatization of the higher education system, which can be observed in other countries (for the UK, cf. Scott, 2021, chapter 4), failed to materialize in the German context. In Germany, privatizations of public institutions did play a role in areas such as telecommunication, postal service and energy supply but not with respect to higher education institutions. Governance of higher education through competition strengthens the state’s power as an actor, while market privatization in the long term deprives the state of its ability to act.

In addition to these national peculiarities, one has to emphasize that the competitive state is exposed to numerous bottom-up influences that stand in contrast to assumption that the state can simply exercise a top-down policy vis-à-vis ‘its’ universities. Mayer’s (2019) reconstruction of competitive constellations of universities since the 1980s shows that German universities were by no means merely a “dependent variable” of federal policy and had to passively accept the changes outlined above. On the contrary: the state’s increasing governance by competition has been actively promoted by individual universities that saw themselves as high performers. Competition-oriented criteria for the allocation of financial resources by the responsible state ministries instead of basic funding, as well as the initiation of new competitions by the federal and state governments, are also the result of the universities themselves breaking up the above mentioned “fiction of equality” and attempting to realize individual competitive advantages over other universities. While this self-positioning as an individual competitive actor was initially limited to a few, particularly strong research universities, gradually all universities followed suit and attempted to influence federal competitive funding in the sense of their “competitive advantage” (Porter, 1985). The state as a competitive actor is thus not only “outwardly” subject to various influences from the transnational sphere, but also “inwardly,” ironically especially towards those

who, in classical state governance theory (Mayntz, 1997), represent the object of state governance, while the state in this theory is understood as the subject of governance, capable of implementing its policies in a straightforward way.

The German case shows that the translating and editing of the globally widespread notion that the role of the state must also change in the context of New Public Management in Germany means, interestingly, strengthening the state as a competitive actor. In the field of higher education, international comparative studies have shown that although New Public Management and the emphasis on competition is a global trend and can even be regarded as a global cultural script, different national enactments result. In their book comparing the impact of New Public Management on university governance in different Western European countries, Bleiklie et al. (2017) provide ample evidence on how university reforms are simultaneously shaped by broader national political administrative regimes and sectoral policy regimes in the field of higher education, hence leading to very different outcomes. Similarly, Pineda (2015) depicts similarities and differences between Chile and Columbia concerning the way in which the global model of the entrepreneurial research university, which has been promoted as an overall model with the diffusion of New Public Management, is both adapted and modified in both countries. While governance via markets also entails far-reaching privatization, which weakens the ability of state actors to act and strategize, governance via competition secures, strengthens, and generates competencies of state actors, especially in view of a formal increase of university autonomy. As a result, one finds a multiplication of competitions at different policy levels that are mutually reinforcing and create an ecology of competition for individuals and organizations in the higher education and science system. The roughly sketched out considerations on the construction of states as competitive actors in science and higher education need to be developed further, both empirically and theoretically. In this context, there are far-reaching perspectives to be explored.

While the construction of the state as a competitive actor in the field of science and higher education is still an under-researched area, the shift concerning the university as an organization, which is transforming itself from a loosely coupled expert organisation into a strategically-oriented competitive actor, has been widely analyzed (see, for example, Christensen et al., 2017; Musselin, 2018; 2021; Popp Berman & Paradeise, 2016; Hasse & Krücken, 2013; Brunsson & Wedlin, 2021)). In Germany, France and Great Britain, for example, turning universities into organisational actors occurred in the context of New Public Management reforms, while this process took place much earlier in the United States (Krücken & Meier, 2006). Detailed studies at the level of individual university organisations have shown that the strategic and

Table 2. *Englishization in Turkish higher education at the first-degree level, 2020<sup>a</sup>*

Universities	Pre-2000 public <sup>b</sup> (n=51)	Post-2000 public <sup>c</sup> (n=73)	Pre-2000 private <sup>d</sup> (n=17)	Post-2000 private (n=56)	Total (n=197)
Entirely in English	3 (5.9%)	1 (1.4%)	1 (5.9%)	2 (3.6%)	7 (3.6%)
Lateral and/or compartmentalized hybrids	33 (64.7%)	19 (26.0%)	16 (94.1%)	38 (67.9%)	106 (53.8%)
Minimalist hybrid (min. 30% English)	2 (3.9%)	9 (12.3%)	-	3 (5.4%)	14 (7.1%)
Only in Turkish	13 (25.5%)	44 (60.3%)	-	13 (23.2%)	70 (35.5%)
Programs fully in English <sup>e</sup>	285 (11.3%)	125 (7.0%)	335 (70.4%)	361 (36.4%)	1106 (19.1%)
Programs in min. 30% English <sup>f</sup>	151 (6.0%)	46 (2.6%)	18 (3.8%)	58 (5.8%)	273 (4.7%)

<sup>a</sup> Source: 2020 Manual for Higher Education Programs and Quotas. Programs in languages, literature and translation studies where teaching in a foreign language would be expected are not included in the figures and proportions reported in the Table.

<sup>b</sup> Does not include the public university where teaching is in French and the one that had not yet started admitting first degree students in 2000.

<sup>c</sup> Does not include the public university where teaching is in German.

<sup>d</sup> Does not include two private universities that had not yet started admitting students in 2000 and the one which was closed by governmental decree after 2000.

<sup>e</sup> Total number of programs – pre-2000 public universities: 2515; post-2000 public universities: 1796; pre-2000 private universities: 476; post-2000 private universities: 993 (grand total: 5780). Proportions in this and the row below are based on these totals.

<sup>f</sup> All programs that were 1/3 English including those in universities that also had lateral or compartmentalized hybrids.

competitive capacities of universities differ remarkably (Thoenig & Paradeise, 2016). Nonetheless, very different universities in very different national systems submit to the standardized measurement of performance, the increasing comparison with others that are seen as competitors, and the permanent observation of relevant environments, in particular related to funding. They are sharpening their individual organisational identity and profile, build up managerial capacities, and, in this, increasingly rely on specialized staff and management consultants.

The following three examples from the German context will illustrate that the construction of organizational actorhood is not only subject to specific conditions of national contexts. It is also by no means a linear transformation process that gives rise to conflicts. The examples are the expansion and restructuring of the administrative higher education management, gender

equality in the Excellence Initiative as well as management consulting in universities.

Expansion and restructuring of the administrative management is a significant and often critically discussed aspect of the transformation of universities into competitive actors. In this context, the critical question is posed whether the development of management capacities does not occur at the expense of academic staff and leads to an accompanying shift in the balance of power between academics and administration in universities. Empirical studies for Germany do not provide a clear picture here (Krücken et al., 2013). On the one hand, a significant expansion takes place in those areas that are of particular importance with regard to the competitive observation of one's own university and the corresponding competitive environment. For example, numerous new positions and departments have been created in recent years, particularly in the presidents' administration, quality management, research evaluation and public relations. On the other hand, the powers of decision-making and action vis-à-vis the professoriate are very limited, and influence is only possible through the support of the university leadership and the use of various types of 'soft power.' In addition, the growth of academic staff is also considerable, since the rapid increase of externally funded research has led to a considerable rise in typically non-tenured positions, for example, among postdoctoral researchers.

In this context, data on the development of personnel at universities that were awarded in the framework of the Excellence Initiative for their future concepts are interesting. Universities that were successful in the first round do not have a disproportionately high share of staff in administrative university management compared to others, but rather disproportionately high shares of scientists. In the second round, it is different, however. Here, there was a disproportionate number of recruitments in the area of administrative university management prior to the successful grant. Organizational actorhood in the area of funding competitions thus represents a learning process in the course of which the administrative personnel, which is specially trained for such competitions, also came into focus.

A second example for illustrating the increasing role of competitive actorhood among German universities can be seen in the reformulation of gender issues that came with the Excellence Initiative as analyzed by Engels et al. (2015).<sup>4</sup> For instance, a documented concept to promote gender equality is

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<sup>4</sup> In Germany, diversity was for a long time defined by gender. This is also reflected in the relevant funding environment, as the "Research-Oriented Standards on Gender Equality" of the DFG that existed since 2008 were replaced by the "Research-Oriented Equity and Diversity Standards" in 2022.

a necessary requirement for any application to the Excellence Strategy. In its wake, gender equality is no longer framed in terms of equality of opportunity, justice, or fairness but rather in terms of competition, namely, the competitive advantage for the individual university and the overall university system if all talents can be mobilized. Previously, responsibility for gender issues in universities lay in the hands of equal opportunity or women's commissioners, who were by and large rather detached from university leadership. With the Excellence Initiative, equal opportunities have become a strategic and competitive issue for the entire university, including its leadership and management, and have hence become part of broader human resources and organizational development (for a similar argument on the trajectory of equal opportunity in American corporations, see Dobbin, 2009). Of particular interest is that a variety of measures, such as flexible time arrangements, provision of childcare, and dual-career options, were developed at the organizational level in order to take the private lives of (future) members into account. This indicates a huge cultural shift as German universities are historically shaped by the ethos of 'science as a vocation' (Max Weber), which is at odds with extra-academic orientations of its members. Following Engels et al. (2015), the changes, including those in the number of women among the professoriate, are visible and certainly more than mere window dressing for the funding environment. Though the entire issue requires further critical monitoring, it seems obvious that the construction of the university as a competitive actor is not necessarily linked to 'neo-liberal goals' as critics typically assume. Instead, competitive actorhood is open to a huge variety of goals, including the pursuit of justice and equality.

A third example of changes at the organizational level in German universities is the increasing role played by management consultancies (Serrano-Velarde & Krücken, 2012; Seidenschnur & Krücken, 2019). The expansion of management knowledge in very different national and institutional contexts has been analyzed since more than two decades (Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002). In addition, in neo-institutional theorizing the openness towards external advice is seen as a central pillar of actorhood (Meyer & Jepperson, 2000; Hasse, 2019). Management consultancies illustrate markedly the attempt to understand universities as organizational actors, since similar to business firms, universities' willingness to seek external advice from management consultants is becoming a standardized routine. In Germany, in particular with the advent of the Excellence Initiative, university leaderships see their organization in competition with other universities and try to perform better and use external consultants for this purpose. When analyzing consultancy processes, however, it becomes obvious that traditional elements of the academic expert

organization, its institutional identity and related course of action have been retained. In our analyses, we could regularly observe conflicts between the discursive logic of the academic profession and the efficiency- and enforcement-oriented logic of management consultancy. These conflicts crystallized when it came to organizational decision-making processes. For the universities we analyzed, a deliberate decision-making culture was of central importance. As we could detect this pattern in very different universities, we assume that herein lies the strong institutional identity of the university, independent of more recent changes towards competitive organizational actorhood. Obviously, one must further differentiate between decision-making areas and topics in management consultancy. There is, for example, a considerable difference between strategy consulting as, for example, in the case of the Excellence Initiative, where we could detect the above-mentioned patterns and conflicts, and IT consulting, where all relevant actors can much more easily agree on common definitions and procedures. Nevertheless, this example shows that the transformation of the university into a competitive organizational actor is an open and contested process that does not unfold in a straightforward and unequivocal way.

All three examples discussed here indicate the particular circumstances in the construction of actorhood in a specific national and organizational setting. This allows for manifold comparative perspectives, both on a cross-national and cross-sectoral level.

As compared to states and universities, whose transformation into competitive actors can be studied at present, there is a long tradition of analyzing individual researchers as competitive actors who compete for discoveries and related recognition in the science system (Merton, 1957; 1973; Bourdieu, 1975). The most prominent historical example is the priority dispute between Newton and Leibniz on the invention of the calculus in the early 18th century (Merton, 1957, p. 636). Nevertheless, we can witness an ongoing construction process, which in particular affects junior researchers striving for tenure. A broad range of academic activities (publications, third party funding, teaching, stays abroad, public engagement, etc.) can be assessed and compared in a competitive way, both by the individual academics themselves, and by external forces such as universities, funding agencies, and search committees for professors. Not surprisingly, the positioning of academics along different dimensions of competition is particularly important for junior scientists trying to gain tenure, while other dimensions of academic work become less attractive and lose importance (Fochler et al., 2016; Waajer et al., 2018; Müller, 2014). The self-description as being part of an academic community – be it a discipline or a particular school of thought – is increasingly substituted by one,

in which the individual actorhood is highlighted along relevant dimensions of competition. For Germany, in particular third-party funding is of paramount importance. Therefore, junior researchers in all disciplines aspire for highly prestigious grants. ERC grants, for example, are mainly means for getting tenure, not necessarily for conducting high-profile research. At the same time, the university engages in all kinds of support activities for the ever-increasing number of doctoral and post doc researchers. Organized career consulting, individual mentors, coaching, and further education programs support junior researchers in becoming competitive actors – though this hardly compensates for the very limited number of tenured positions at German universities. What Roland Bloch (2021) labelled “the actorhood imperative” when analyzing the positioning of German universities in a large national funding contest is certainly true when it comes to individual actors in the system, in particular junior scientists. Studies on the construction of individual competitive actorhood in the German system as well as elsewhere are of high empirical and theoretical interest. Though neo-institutional research on actorhood does not include this obvious ‘construction site’ so far, there are a numerous relevant and related studies on the transformation of junior researchers’ behaviour and self-conceptions as being triggered by the ubiquity and multiplicity of competition in present-day academia (see, for example, the studies on junior scientists cited above).

The construction of actors in the ecology of competitions requires more detailed analyses. The seminal study by Leifer (1988) on the construction of competitive sport teams in the United States is still paradigmatic in this regard. Following the perspective outlined in this paper, one might explore more deeply the multiple interrelations between the three different types of actors in science and higher education, particularly as neither one is fixed, and we can witness the ongoing construction of actorhood at the level of states, organizations and individuals in the ecology of competitions permeating science and higher education. In this process, we will see reinforcing dynamics, but also contradictions and tensions between the three types of actors. Combining an ecological approach with its emphasis on the embeddedness of actors in multiple environments and their interrelations with constructivist insights from neo-institutional theorizing on actorhood seems to be a promising way for such analyses.

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# Expansive identity and community in hyper-organizational society

*John W. Meyer and Patricia Bromley, Stanford University*

Expanding rationalization is one of the defining characteristics of the modern era. It is often seen as dehumanizing, as in Weber's classic imagery of an iron cage ([1905]2001). Arational and charismatic qualities are tamed or trapped by the rules of organization and the force of the market. Educational and scientific activities, along with all other institutional spheres, are structured in organizations and populated by people constrained by their rules (Meyer & Bromley 2013; Bromley & Meyer 2015). But reverse effects also occur and are the focus of this essay: Expanding social rationalization supports myths and expressions of individual identity and organizational community, carrying out roles with purpose and vision. Contemporary people, now constructed as social actors, are to engage in rationalized social action, but are also seen as infusing it with individual and collective identities. This is intensified in contemporary liberal contexts, in which actorhood and action are valued as the core sources of social order and especially of social progress. The choices and preferences of individuals and organizations seen as actors are envisioned as driving society and social change. This culturally supports not only the expansive displays of the arational plumage of individual identity and collective community characteristic of liberal modernity, but in neo-liberalism makes them driving forces for the progress to be achieved by empowered individual and organizational actorhood.

In realist accounts, expanded rationalized action (e.g., organization) and expanded identities (e.g., bases for choice in markets of all sorts) are seen as in conflict – as alternative sources of order and progress. On the one hand, large-scale organization is thought to promote efficiency and standardization, enabling the creation of great global supply chains with interlocking parts and

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ATM and credit cards that work across multiple institutions worldwide. On the other hand, rules and regulations are seen to suppress creativity, innovation, and competition. These tradeoffs may make some sense in a stable social order with fixed participant-roles and fixed necessary actions. But contemporary societies are far from fixed. Notions of progress and order are evolving and deeply dependent on the actions of empowered individual and organizational actors bringing their own identities, meanings, and purposes to goals and activities. Under conditions of cultural rationalization at the macro level, individual and organizational actors' action rests ultimately on their arational identities.

Our argument can be summarized as threefold. First, the expanding cultural rationalization of social action in the modern order reflects and creates both the constraints of the iron cage and the correlated expanding displays of individual and collective identity. Second, under conditions of expanding cultural rationalization, the two dimensions of expanded rationalized action and expanded actorhood identity positively reinforce each other. If social action is purposive choice, the entities making it must be seen as capable of choice. Third, the positive relations between the two dimensions are strongest in social arenas with little immediate technical clarity; without functional integration, rationalized choices and actions most directly reflect arational identities.

In this essay, we elaborate on these ideas.

## Individualism and the society of organizations

Contemporary society is notoriously organized: the "society of organizations" (Perrow 1991; Coleman 1982; Davis 2009). Organizational expansion is everywhere, cutting across social sectors from the economy to religion and education. It is worldwide and is extreme in the liberal and neoliberal periods since the second world war, bringing social order to great new globalized spaces such as education, religion, health, and recreation: Bromley and Meyer (2015) call it hyper-organization. It characterizes every sort of national society but is especially striking in the supra-national arena, with exploding numbers of intergovernmental, international nongovernmental, and private organizations. Thus, multi-national organizations, rare in 1950, arise by the tens of thousands in the period since then (Boli & Thomas 1999).

The society of organizations is often depicted as repressive of individuality and cultural community, as with Charlie Chaplin in *Hard Times*. At the same time, modern society is commonly seen, with much evidence, as a world of (perhaps excessive and narcissistic) individualism, with the attribution of entitlement, capacity, and empowerment to persons and the organizations they

construct. In the modern world, actors have purpose and integrated entity and bring these to individual and collective decision and action, providing a basis of social structure and social change. The social theory and ideology behind this view is called action theory (Parsons 1975), which posits that individual *choices* underpin social structures, and produce social order and social progress. Commonly criticized sociologically, the perspective is built into practically all contemporary thought. An action theory view has become culturally dominant in many parts of the world; beyond its role as theory. It is a taken-for-granted social fact that grounds the market economy, democratic polity, individually-chosen religion, individualist family, and voluntary associational life. It is central in the structure and content of contemporary mass and higher education. Individual choice now applies even to the particulars of gender, sexuality, and family life. These changing norms are celebrated in common national patterns, but also at the global level with enormously expanded principles of empowering individual rights (Elliott 2007, 2014). And as ideology, they function as the central modern theory of social progress, transcending older ideologies denying progress, or treating it as resulting from collective religious and political orders.

These two themes underlie modern society and its social theories. On the one side there are the structures and analyses of the organized society – Marx and Weber, often stressing the rationalities of action. On the other side are the analysts of the irrationality of the individual and the social organization seen as empowered actors – Durkheim and Freud.

Much modern theory (and actual social organization) reflects a realist opposition between these two themes. The artisan is thought suppressed by large-scale organization, or creativity is undercut by a blizzard of rules, and man becomes unidimensional and standardized. Conversely, local idiosyncrasy blocks the formation of efficient relationship, creating an array of social railroads whose tracks do not match. At micro- and meso-sociological levels, such conflicts are apparent, and create much structuration and boundary-work, as in dramatic oppositions between capitalism and democracy. Individuals who are equal in principle as primordial actors, function in rationalized markets and organizations far from equality: the suppressed worker can step into the citizen role and vote equally with others: much law and normative theory structures the inconsistencies involved (Giddens 1984).

A negative relationship between individuality and organization makes sense if we see both terms in a zero-sum realist perspective. If these are alternative ways to get some standard functional business done, then they are alternatives, and simply trade-off. This is the orientation built into the argumentation of transaction-cost economics (Coase [1937]1993; Williamson

1979): one can do the same work either through organization or through markets with participants functioning as choosing actors. The participants are real functioning entities, fixed in character with real needs and desires and tasks to complete.

However, decision-making entities are not primordial beings, but rather constructed as social actors (Meyer 2010).<sup>1</sup> If actors, including individuals and organizations, are culturally-empowered and variable makers of widely varying legitimate decisions then we see a different story. Legitimately expanded individuals as “actors” make animated decisions, and these infuse organizations with expanded meaning and value (Selznick [1949]1980). Legitimately expanded hyper-organizations make enlarged decisions, as “actors” rather than passive bureaucracies instrumenting external sovereigns (Bromley & Meyer 2015).

In a larger and macro-sociological or cultural sense, charismatic actorhood and rationalized hyper-organization reciprocally reinforce each other (for public organizations, see Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson 2000; Bromley & Meyer 2015; for universities Kruecken & Meier 2006; see also Chen 2009). At a general cultural level, post-Enlightenment theory and practice creates the secularized individual or collective actor, and also the creates rationalized physical and social environments legitimating more dimensions of life to be brought under control (Bromley & Meyer 2015). Expanded hyper-organization creates more opportunities for positive action and more recognized internal and external grievances to be corrected, but also more and more grounds for individuality. The synthesis here derives directly from Simmel’s analysis of modernity (1968) – role differentiation and complexity may involve anomie at micro levels, but expanded individualism at macro ones.

The core conception of the empowered individual in a rationalized world is central to contemporary society. It does not simply operate as a legitimator of individual freedoms, but is a collective account of social order and even more of social progress. The empowered individual with human rights is at the same time the responsible legitimated source of the collective good.

The individuals and organizations of contemporary society are seen as real actors and the source of social action. This model of order and progress, ex-

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<sup>1</sup> The actorhood of people and groups arises out of a cultural ontology with roots in the Enlightenment that attributes increasing capabilities and autonomy to individuals (Meyer & Jepperson 2000). Secularized, the older notion of the receptive soul evolves into the entitled citizen and the increasingly proactive “individual” with personality, and now the free abstract “actor.” And the older notion of the sacralized church evolves into the modern state and the post-modern organizational society infused with its own meaning and purpose. Into the center of the nominally secularized world stride individual and organizational entities entitled and obligated to make decisions that make up society and its future.

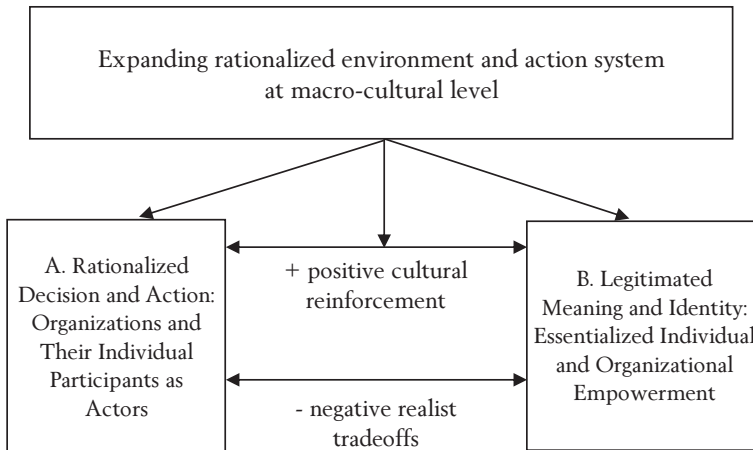


Figure 1. *Actor and Action as Cultural Myth and Local Instantiation.*

panding over time, has created an environment that is densely populated by an array of actors envisioned as rational decision-makers possessing diverse identities, values, and interests. Especially in the post-World War II period, more and more are recognized as having legitimate identities and purposes of their own (Frank & Meyer 2002). There is thus a culturally supported expansion of (a) rationalized action and (b) legitimate purposes, identities and values of individuals and organizations seen as actors.

Our arguments are spelled out in Figure 1. As the backdrop, expanding rationalization of the environment and action system at the macro or cultural level promotes both rationalized decision and action (Box A) and legitimated identity and meaning (Box B). Our focus is on the reciprocal positive cultural reinforcement between Box A and Box B that occurs under the macro conditions of expanding cultural rationalization. Our focus contrasts with standard lines of thought emphasizing the negative realist tradeoffs.

Efforts at decision-making and action are reciprocally related to efforts to construct actors to have well-developed available legitimated identities that give purposes and meaning. For instance, the invention and expansion of management consulting rests on actors seeking rationalized approaches to achieve goals; as management consulting becomes institutionalized it further formalizes actors' identities and goal setting (Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall 2002). More concretely, a practice such as the invention of "reputation risk" as a calculable and routine part of organizational life, supports the elaboration of a broadly reputable identity that includes communal goodwill not just profit-making (Power et al 2009). The assumption of identity lies, as an ontological base, beneath the modern order of organizations and their participants.

## The centrality of actorhood

The long-term rise of the individual, expanding from religious to civil, political and economic, and then broadly to broad regions of legitimate personality, is in part a matter of entitlement. People are to be protected by religious, economic, and political authorities. They are to be free to make an expanding array of choices without interference. They may be actors, but on the private stage: so modern people (even, sometimes, children), partly freed from familial controls, can decide for themselves when to have lunch. But much choice is legitimated in a broader sense: in aggressive post-war liberalism, and even more in post-Communist neoliberalism, people are empowered and responsible for all social order and social progress (Ruggie 1982, 1993, 1998). They, as individuals and as organizational participants, are actors on the great societal and global stage. Modern order and progress depend on their rationalized activity: and their activity is understood to depend on their identity and purpose.

The more rationalized the roles of individuals and the more elaborate the organization of them, the greater the requirements for decision and action. As societal rationalization increases, it becomes clearer that the structures far outpace any actual capacities (Bromley & Meyer 2015). The requirements for rationalized decision and action are well beyond what people and organizations can reasonably attain. As a result, many short-cut recipes are constructed (e.g., see Simon 1947, 1956 for a discussion of “satisficing”), decoupling between policies and practices and means and ends is routine (Meyer & Rowan 1977; Bromley & Powell 2012), and cultural scripts or models are translated and edited to reconcile abstract recipes with the concrete realities of local settings (Sahlin & Wedlin 2008). But the most crucial recipe involves the construction of animating identities, providing the needed impetus for the future. Routine social structure may require only limited empowered input from individual and organizational members: Liberal and especially neoliberal models require much more.

Thus, the outsized fantasies of modernity generate a causal process: It becomes more urgent to see arational capacities, purposes, and values behind rationalized decisions and structures. In part, we observe special tendencies in the modern order for people to display distinct identities – personalities – over and above their roles because straightforward functional links are unrealistic. As a result, individuals, groups, and organizations announce distinct values, cultures, and other identity claims as the foundation of decision and action. Individual persons and organizations – especially those in roles less visibly linked to functional goals like making money or managing technical processes – are more likely to report diffuse values and identities. So sustain-

ability officers, diversity officers, or talent managers might on average display more identity as part of their workplace roles than managerial accountants, investors, or plumbers. In other words, certain social roles are largely built on identity (e.g. as an advocate for the marginalized or the environment).

Modern individuals and organizations are constructed as empowered and competent actors legitimately capable and entitled to infuse their roles with coherence, and autonomous purpose, choice, and decision. The central question then becomes one of identity: what essence outside the immediate roles or organizational situation drives, supports, and legitimates the choices and purposes involved?

Here we find the arational ontological supports for rationalized individual and organizational “action.” Whereas the classic bureaucrat or bureaucracy can be a faceless entity in the office (but a personality at home or an organizational member of a community), the decision-making organization or organizational member can and should display an identity. If roles and organizations are constrained by technical or instrumental rationalities, they may require participants to display little personality or identity – it may suffice to assume they are motivated by their pay and entitled by virtue of their technical training. But as organizational roles expand at supra-technical levels – with everyone professionalized – it becomes appropriate for participants to display personal values, special educational preparation, or special experience.

It is relevant to note that modern educational expansion – extreme around the world in the entire post-war period – focuses less on technical training for functional role performance, and more on “personal development.” So vocational education declines relatively (Benavot 1983), and expansive general education grows, all the way through university and even post-university education (Schofer & Meyer 2005; Jakobi 2009). The post-modern person isn’t to be able to do things, but is to be the kind of person who can do things. As a result, education can be both a marker of identity and of technical competence.

In the post-war period of “embedded liberalism” (Ruggie 1982), with markets and organizations balanced against individual entitlements through the management of the democratic nation-state, a rough equilibrium was maintained. The individual had personhood, and much choice of organizational and market roles, and these roles could be structured around the collective purposes of sovereign states and market organizations (Frank & Meyer 2002). Neoliberalism (Ruggie 1993, 1998) weakened the authority of the state, and empowered individuals and their organizations to carry the burdens of progress, order, and the whole collective good. The older society of tamed political and economic bureaucracies and special-purpose structures – and private life choices – gave way to ideologies of heroic market choices and dynamic

decision-making hyper-organizations and celebrations of extraordinary entrepreneurship and hyper-managerialism (Bromley & Meyer 2015, 2021; Bromley, Meyer & Ruo 2022). Post-modern personhood became central in rationalized society itself.

## Individual and collective meaning and identity

Our arguments help explain why, in many contemporary settings, individuals and organizations develop elaborate rationales espousing a larger vision of what role their work plays in the world. They invoke claims beyond routine technical integration or instrumental achievement and assert values over and above the immediately instrumental accomplishment of routine individual or organizational ends. Something special, distinctive, external, and valuable is involved (Selznick [1949]1980).

The individual “self”: The long modern history involves the differentiation of roles, so that people have much space for private lives apart from organizational or work roles. The classic professional may spend time and energy fishing or may display unusual facial hair. Similarly, organizational entities may structure non-organizational parallel Christmas parties and bowling leagues, and so on. But in hyper-organizational society, such phenomena become part of the account of the public or organizational matter itself, explaining productivity and value. At the individual level, participants in hyper-organizational life are likely to be envisioned as having a core “self” that has many dimensions of meaning and identity that explain purpose and effectiveness. Education and professional certification can enter in here, and may suffice in tamed organizational roles, but often even more is called for. In the current era, workplace displays that reflect self-identity are thought to aid the enterprise. The displays are thought to provide a sense of community or cohesion or belonging beyond simple conformity and task accomplishment. So, for instance, the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University sets aside two hours a week every week for “Community Time.” One recent event, in honor of Native American Heritage Month, was led by a staff member discussing how she harvests Navajo tea, and the importance of tea in her culture. Team building events and off-site retreats are now a common feature of the workplace, including specialized companies and roles to facilitate these activities. Work groups can, and should, participate in things like office trivia, puzzle rooms (where the team needs to find clues to unlock a room), or joint community service (see Barman 2006, for an in-depth discussion on the rise of workplace charity). More than simple sociability, these phenomena provide accounts of purpose: the driving forces behind rationalized action.

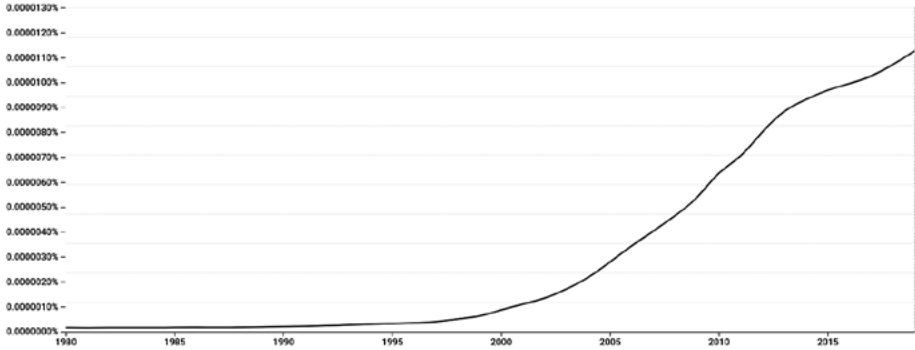


Figure 2. *Relative frequency of phrase “authentic leadership” in Google Ngram book corpus, 1980–2019.*

Thus, displays of self are now thought to give meaning to work. For example, it falls short of expectations for a person, especially a professionalized one, to say, “I just work here” or “it’s just a job.” Job seekers should not answer, “I need the money” when interviewers ask why they want a position. Instead, candidates should display their passion for a position and the company, as well as fit with their life history. One popular column advises potential customer service representatives to emphasize their love of interaction and helping people, and their admiration for what the company is accomplishing in the world (Muse Website 2022). And contemporary leaders ought to develop their own distinctive style that reflects personal values (Center for Creative Leadership Website 2022): Discussions of “authentic leadership” have exploded in recent decades (See Figure 2), and today everyone can and should be a leader (Bromley & Meyer 2021).

The “self” that should appear, however, is highly circumscribed. Identity beyond role performance should in principle be positive in quality and implications for action, with negative elements downplayed: after all, the effort is to account for forward movement and progress beyond role performance. And of course, it should not be exclusionary in its claims. As one leadership website advises, “being authentic and practicing honesty isn’t a license to behave without filters, political savvy, or good judgment” (Center for Creative Leadership Website, 2022). Criticism should be constructive and sandwiched by positive claims. More broadly, criticism and evaluation are reframed as growth opportunities that everyone should take advantage of rather than a penalty for sub-par employees.

In the extreme, an individual may be seen as endowed with motivating personhood by qualities, activities, and background rather divorced from the

core organizational role. So, an organizational member who was an expert at singing or skiing may add diffuse value to the work role. In this sense role distance may be a central aspect of balancing identity against organizational conformity (Goffman, 1975): one establishes the claims necessary to personhood through what amounts to deviant behavior. The institutionalized cynical languages of the back stages of high professional roles reflect such a process: one is more than an instrumental actor. Even the cynical private languages of doctors, lawyers, professors, priests, and engineers may assert expanded backstage selves that give more meaning and perspective to professional performance than mechanical and instrumental conformity.

The organizational “self”: In parallel to the construction of individual selves, a modern hyper-organized entity should have an identity more than just another instance of its role as a hardware store or church or university whose larger meanings are carried by institutional content. A specific church would not have to present itself as special: it can be a simple role enacting a great institution. But modernized as an organized actor it should have more identity of its own. If it is to be a real decision-making actor, a church or school must have a mission that does something larger in the world. In the same way that contemporary individuals (and liberal theories of progress) depict people as constituted by core identities that provide meaning beyond roles, entities becoming real organizations are seen (and see themselves) as distinct, with values that motivate action. A business turned into a hyper-organization is about more than making money. Governmental agencies, now organizations, contribute creatively to social integration and progress (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson 2000). An organized church or college produces vitality in its people.

Within organizations as wholes, particular components – smaller organizations on their own – can take on some of the same qualities, with distinctive values and symbols of solidarity and special purposiveness and achievements. In universities the whole school has an identity, but so do departments and programs, and even student clubs, faculty labs, and staff units. This, in an older system indicative of lack of integration, becomes now an assertion of shared dynamic purpose. In practice, of course, the integration itself becomes unclear and requires special attention to developing connections across the disparate elements, such as university positions for “Associate Deans for Integrative Initiatives” (Adams 2022). Such roles arise in organizational structures expanded beyond immediate technical-functional activity.

Hyper-organization rests on more than simple rationalization. The organization’s participants and structures are more than conforming role-players and technical devices. There is a claimed essence to the enterprise and its parts

beyond routine coordination, with integrating events, messages, and displays. And this essence, beyond conformity and routine, is claimed to add to progress rather than simply fulfilling some of its components. Further, showing integrated qualities of self and identity requires stressing acausal or nonpurposeful orientations in the absence of coherence around a core function.

So, an individual is more of an actor with a purposefully developed sense of meaning and identity. And an organization making values claims must be speaking for the organization as an integrated collective or community rather than a differentiated structure – it must claim its organization rests on a non-organization, so to speak.

## Loci of displays of expanded identity and community

Overall, as this discussion implies, the relationship between rationalization and identity expression should vary. We can speculate about when the reciprocal relationship between arational identity expressions and rationalized decision is likely to be positive. Broadly, liberal and neoliberal society emphasizes the special standing of individuals and the organizations they create as driving action and progress. Empirical patterns can reflect the abstract processes we discuss here:

1. Times and places when accounts of social order rest on a broad set of actors rather than overall collectives or a limited set of sovereigns, should be more filled with such displays. Globally, the post-World War II liberal world order, and even more the post-1990 neoliberal order, are characterized by an ethos of expanding actorhood. As older institutions – schools, universities, churches, charities, recreational groups, ethnic communities – refocus as organizations, displays of personhood and moral community increase. The cultural context is fundamental: It is easy to imagine alternatives where expansive organization suppresses identity, and at times this occurs. Individual tastes and choices may get little emphasis in armies.
2. Structures and roles more deeply linked to alternative centralized authority systems, such as authoritarian control, religious orders, or older kinship systems, likely display lower levels of individual and organizational identity. Disembedded structures, such as supra-national or private sector or secular organizations, may display more individual and organizational personhood. Empowered beyond the normal political order or religious structures, and thus distinctively autonomous, they take on claims to special cultural and personal accountings.

3. More professionalized role-players (and service sector organizational entities) that lack integration around immediate and visible technical considerations likely display more identity and community commitments. This could appear within organizations (e.g. human resources versus janitorial staff) and between them (e.g. a financial services company versus a manufacturing operation). The global expansion of professionalism (Wilensky 1964) and imagined integration around abstract relationships produces more such displays.

Empirically, we should find evidence of expanded displays of individual meaning and identity in individual documents such as resumes and web pages. Displays may also occur in organizational accounts depicting individual persons, such as staff biographies and introductions of new staff. Similar effects should appear in interviews, surveys, and letters of reference. One common account of individual identity refers to education. This has a rationalized dimension as it links, in theory, to role performance. But it has a broader connotation reflecting the individual's personal qualities above and beyond technical training. Thus, in personnel records and personal accounts we expect to find increases in reporting of general education. Similarly, there is expanded use of credentialing as a broad identity market: certification partly shows technical skills, but also displays something broader: a resume boasting a long list of courses that teach programming skills may also be used to indicate that "I am a programmer."

All these effects should especially be true in professional and service sectors -- hyper-organizational settings, with activities less tied together by immediate technical interdependencies, and integrated under general myths of professionalism.

In the same way, the dimensions of work and experience reported by persons and personnel records may change. The accounts of background broaden, including dimensions less and less tied to technical capacities to perform roles, and more and more reflective of expanded personhood. Thus the recent custom of allowing "personal days" indicates the recognition of the importance for an organization of identity rather than role matters. Or an organizational member may have served in the Peace Corps or play a leading role in the local symphony: a long career in a single department or program may even indicate narrowness of spirit.

Evidence on the matter can come from organizational announcements and displays. We expect these to go beyond instrumental assertions of accomplishment (profit and the like), and to attribute outcomes to the unusual spirit and enterprise infusing participants and structures. The magical qualities of

organizational identity become explanatory accounts of the pre-organizational sources of organizational effectiveness. There is a special culture, or special values, or distinctively selected participants: these bring energy, and infuse organizations with special actorhood.

Beyond the mission statements now common in organizational life, which depict means-ends relations, we now find value and vision statements describing identities more than anything instrumental – assertions of organizational commitment to human rights, the environment, justice and transparency, and so on. These portray an identity base (in values, history or cosmology), parallel to individual personhood, thought to infuse organizational life with special meaning: that becomes especially important as organizations seen as actors are central to social functioning and progress.

One indicator of expanded organizational identity bases can be found in the rise of organizational pronouncements on questions far removed from immediate organizational life. Such pronouncements, often put forward as general assertions of the organization as community (not differentiated structure), assert values more than instrumental policy. For instance, an organization might be internally committed to respecting diversity in hiring and promotion as part of a rational plan. But it might also, increasingly, take a general stand on equality and diversity as general public goods. In an analysis of statements put out by the Business Roundtable, a lobbying association for some of the world's largest corporations, Pope and Bromley (2022) find a sharp increase in pronouncements related to the environment and society, alongside traditional concerns such as labor relations. The organization thus becomes a sort of citizen of national and global society rather than a technical instrument.

## Conclusion

The great liberal global society of recent decades has rested on inflated pictures of the integrated and purposive competence of individual and organizational actors. This helped and helps the world celebrated by action theories to make sense and provides an account of order and progress. As cultural discourse, however, the account is quite unrealistic, with a mythic quality decoupled from actual local practice (Bromley & Powell 2012). The imagined capacities of individuals, organizations, and states is vastly greater than the actual and mundane qualities involved (Brunsson 1986, 2002). Social research is clear on the point (for states see Hironaka 2017; for individuals see Jepperson 1992; for organizations and decision-makers see March 1978).

These issues are intensified in the contemporary state-less globalized world, with increasing visions of a global order created and legitimated by the

participating individual, organizational and national actors rather than by authoritative global institutions. Grand claims to equality, progress, and justice are sustained by myths of the member-actors, whose assertions are far from realistic.

In the long development of liberal and neoliberal models, worldwide, few pressures arise to weaken the exaggerated claims involved. Almost all efforts are directed toward making the claims come true: fixing the world rather than acceding to its obvious limitations. This wider cultural context has created positive feedback loops, between expanding individualism and organizational expansion. So as global interdependence increases, more and more national states are seen as “failed states.” More and more efforts at organizational reform are made (Bromley et al. 2021; Brunsson 2009; Brunsson & Olson 2018). And more and more efforts to school individuals to be better members of a global society are put in place (Boli et al 1985). People as they are fall short and need purposeful development to “discover themselves.”

In recent decades, however, cultural faith in a great liberal world order has weakened. A world of authoritarian leaders, and less individual and organizational actorhood comes into view. There is something of a return to older notions of the authority of family, community, history, religion, culture and race, replacing the liberal world of empowered actorhood. On the macro-social side, the gods may come back too (though not in the individualistic form now considered “religion”). If the hyper-organization of the world declines, we may imagine that the exaggerated myths of individual personality and organizational community will decline too. The “quiet quitting” phenomenon of the early 2020s partly captures a new ethos: Some employees are purposefully choosing to treat work as a routine place to get a paycheck with minimal or routine effort, as an active rejection of a culture that treats work as a source of identity and meaning (e.g. Kudhail, 2022). “The Great Resignation” wave in the US, which began before the covid-19 pandemic, may partly reflect a similar disenchantment (Fuller and Kerr, 2022). There is even some reactionary commentary daring readers to “defy the latest catchphrase of human resources [about bringing your whole self to work] and leave a good portion of you back home” (Paul 2022).

We have mainly depicted a positive feedback loop whereby the expanding rationalization of decision and action positively promotes displays of identity and community, and vice versa. But our arguments about the reciprocal causal relationship is embedded in a specific (liberal) cultural context. If these cultural underpinnings weaken at the macro level, then we expect the system we have spelled out to change or weaken: Early signs of this shift already appear.

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# SCIENCE AND SOCIETY



# Academic freedom and freedom of speech

## Translating travelling ideas

*Tom Christensen*, University of Oslo,  
*Per Lægreid*, University of Bergen

### Introduction

This essay will address a contemporary debate in Norway about whether academic freedom of speech is coming under pressure (NOU 2022:2; Thue et al. 2021, 2022). The case will be described and analyzed based on some ideas from institutional theory to which Kerstin Sahlin has been a major contributor. We will refer specifically to how ideas travel from one context to another. While this might lead to translation and editing of the ideas, they may also be circulated and adapted with reference to other ideas about public management (Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017). The essay will discuss which actors, interests and activities facilitate the translation of ideas.

First, we will outline the theoretical perspective with a special focus on the contribution of Kerstin Sahlin. Second, we will describe the case of academic freedom in Norway. Third, we will analyze the case in relation to the theoretical approach. Finally, we will draw some conclusions.

### Theoretical approach

Concepts such as academic freedom and freedom of speech are closely linked to the concept of autonomy. This is an ambiguous and multi-dimensional concept, which embraces formal or legal autonomy; living, actual or de facto autonomy; and perceived, subjective or felt autonomy (Lægreid & Verhoest, 2010). The empirical data on the different dimensions of institutional autonomy – subjective autonomy, for instance – are rather few and unexplored (Maggetti & Verhoest, 2014). Moreover, in the debate on academic freedom of

speech it is often not entirely clear which dimensions of autonomy are being discussed, producing tensions and ambiguity.

Academic freedom concerns the freedom of scholars to pursue truth in their teaching and research without fear of sanctions (Berdahl, 1990); how this works in practice varies according to national context. One can distinguish between three types of national context (Olsen, 2007; Gornitzka et al., 2017; Maasen, forthcoming): first, universities as service enterprises embedded in competitive markets, as exemplified by the United States; second, universities as instruments for national political agendas, as exemplified by China and other East Asian countries; and third, universities as social institutions in an open society in which their research and teaching is aimed at furthering democratic societies, as exemplified by the Nordic countries and Continental Europe. We argue that any debate about academic freedom will be informed by the national context; therefore, when different ideas about academic freedom of speech travel from one type of national context to another, the debate will become more complicated and ambiguous.

To analyze how ideas of academic freedom of speech have spread across countries and how they have become embedded in organizational structures, we apply a myth perspective as part of an institutional approach. This entails the idea of an institutionalized environment and focuses on the importance of the values and norms prevailing in an organization's wider environment (Christensen, Lægveid & Røvik, 2020). Myths in this sense can be defined as institutionalized and widely disseminated norms, recipes, and fashions about appropriate and legitimate ways to organize. They are often assumed to be the most rational, timely and modern ways of organizing, and adopting them therefore potentially lends an organization and its central actors increased legitimacy and support (Brunsson, 1989).

One aspect of this institutional theory is how ideas travel, and it encompasses two opposing positions regarding what happens when they do. The first holds that the circulation of ideas leads to institutional isomorphism, convergence, and homogenization of organizations across countries and policy fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Institutions seem, at least superficially, to use the same institutional standards (Røvik, 2002). The second position asserts that when ideas travel from one context to another, divergence will follow because ideas are filtered, edited, translated and shaped according to pragmatic considerations (Olsen, 1992; Røvik, 2016; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). This will lead to variety, not similarity.

This essay leans towards the second position. Rather than simple imitation and diffusion of ideas and prototypes, there are templates which allow for modification and adjustments (Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017). Obviously, ideas do

not travel on their own but are facilitated by actors, so there are also instrumental features in institutional processes, and it is important to ask who the carriers of such ideas are (Sahlin-Andersson, 2001; Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002). In our case the question is which types and aspects of academic freedom of speech travel, and how are such ideas transformed when they are transferred to academic institutions in different countries? To find out why and how organizations adopt ideas that have arrived from elsewhere, we need to focus on the content and form of travelling ideas and how they are formalized into the normative and regulative arrangements that guide organizations, in our case universities. The travelling ideas approach was originally developed to analyze what happens to ideas about public management when they spread (Schedler, 2022). But it can also be applied to other types of ideas, such as those shaping governance frames and university practice (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006; Ramirez, 2006).

Both the supply side and the demand side of such myths need to be addressed, but a main aspect of translation theory is to explore how the receiving organization handles them (Christensen, Læg Reid & Røvik, 2020). Popular organizational recipes are often ideas of a general nature that need to be interpreted, made explicit and operationalized if they are to be used in specific organizations. This may take the form of partial imitation or certain recipes from one set of ideas combined with elements from others, or else they are altered through more comprehensive reshaping.

One can also link the travelling ideas approach to the popular topic of reputation management in public sector organizations. This derives from the notion that modern organizations should be concerned about their reputation and should therefore try to influence the image that various actors and groups in the institutional environment have of the organization (Carpenter & Krause, 2012; Christensen, Læg Reid & Røvik, 2020; Wæraas & Maor, 2015). Risk management and reputational risk have also become cornerstones of good governance. Universities as organizations have likewise generally become more concerned with reputational risk and have tended to adopt more defensive and legalistically framed forms of asset management, (Power, Scheytt, Soïn & Sahlin, 2009).

Core topics in a wider frame are the content and form of different ideas or recipes. Are they solid and stable or elastic and flexible (Christensen, Læg Reid & Røvik, 2020)? How will the nature of the ideas change as they develop, circulate, and are translated into institutional settings that are also in a state of flux? What is the role of different actors, interests, and activities in the translation process (Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017)? This essay addresses the actors, problems and solutions involved in the Norwegian debate on academic freedom of

speech. Where do the ideas come from and what problems and solutions are important for the different actors?

## Academic freedom of speech: the case of Norway

This section starts by describing some of the historical background of the academic freedom debate in Norway, including how it was enshrined in law in 2005. This is followed by an outline of how it has changed in recent years, following the report by Thue et al. (2021) commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Research. The report addressed the issue of academic freedom and freedom of expression in a time of upheaval and asked whether the climate of free expression was under pressure. The same group issued a second report titled “Integration and integrity” in 2022. This mainly addressed the issue of trust in research in the context of a knowledge society. The second phase of the debate was initiated by a report from the Public Commission on Academic Freedom of Expression commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Research in July 2021 and published in March 2022. The third phase encompassed the public debate and the consultation process following the commission’s report.

### *The background of the academic freedom debate in Norway*

In recent decades there have been a number of research agendas for higher education informed by a strong belief in the relationship between increased institutional autonomy and academic performance as well as socio-economic relevance (Gornitzka et al., 2007; Maasen & Stensaaker, 2011), but with little attention paid to the impact on academic freedom (Maasen, forthcoming). What are some of the realities of academic freedom in Norway? Karran (2015) compared Norway with the EU member-states and concluded that perceptions of protection of academic freedom were higher at Norwegian universities than they were on average in the EU. He refuted the notion that individual academic freedom in teaching and research was declining. While agreeing that tenure was essential to maintain academic freedom, he did not see a decline in employment protection at universities. Teichler et al. (2013) produced a slightly more differentiated picture in their wider study of nineteen different countries and concluded that European countries on average scored lower than the United States on perceptions of influence on academic decisions and practices and on support from internal management, including academic freedom. Among the European countries Norway scored slightly lower than average on these factors.

Even though these results are somewhat inconclusive, many university actors believe that the traditional guarantees of academic freedom in Norway have come under pressure, reflecting a global decline in collegial self-governance whereby a university is regarded as a republic of scholars. At the same time, they see an emergence of management-oriented governance principles and of stakeholder universities that regard themselves as business enterprises (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007; Bleiklie & Michelsen, 2008). These trends have reformulated academic freedom in terms of the extent of the strategic room for maneuver of an economically oriented university management (Christensen, Gornitzka & Ramirez, 2019). The strengthening of professional management and the weakening of faculty leadership might imply that administrative staff are becoming involved to an increasing degree in matters in which they lack sufficient competence (Aberbach & Christensen, 2018). A strong emphasis on professional management may also increase the importance of loyalty to the management.

This may, in turn, lead to a hybridization of administrative and academic roles, whereby management-oriented governance regimes with less room for collegial governance might challenge academic freedom (Sahlin, 2012). This development has raised concerns about academic freedom, and in 2006 a public commission in Norway asserted that the principle of academic freedom needed to be enshrined in law (NOU 2006:19); this was approved by the parliament. However, fifteen years later the Ministry of Education and Research was still concerned about academic freedom and how much freedom of expression researchers enjoyed in practice in view of a polarized climate for meaning-making, the influence of social media, democratic challenges in many countries, and new forms of activism connected with identity politics and cancel culture appearing on campus and threatening academic freedom of expression from within (Thue et al., 2021).

*The OsloMet reports: 'A climate of expression under pressure?' and 'Integration and integrity'*

In response to a request from the Ministry of Education and Research, an expert group at OsloMet University headed by Professor Fredrik Thue submitted a report addressing the issue of academic freedom and freedom of expression in an era of discontent and asking whether the climate of expression in Norway was under pressure (Thue et al., 2021). The report addressed developments over the last twenty years and assessed academic freedom and freedom of expression along three dimensions of the infrastructure underpinning academic freedom: *room for action, integrity, and ability*.

Regarding the researchers' room for expression, the report concluded that it to a relatively small extent has been directly constrained by an aggressive and polarized public speech climate. Research on topics which are particularly controversial and unpopular in part of the public opinion such as climate research, gender studies and research on immigration, integration, and multiculturalism, is a partial exception. Overall, it saw the Norwegian model of academic autonomy as having a solid economic, legal, and organizational basis for protecting academic freedom. However, it concluded that more subtle types of pressure to conform were being exerted by the public authorities, research council and university management, which control strategic resources. This was seen as a bigger potential problem for freedom of expression for academic staff than activism related to identity politics and cancel culture. Management-inspired governance principles, a large administrative apparatus, and the emergence of service-oriented, student-centered universities together with external standards and quality assessments in higher education may challenge collegial governance and freedom of expression (Christensen, Gornitzka & Ramirez, 2019).

When it comes to integrity and trust there has not been any development in Norway that directly parallels the American culture wars or the Danish cultural battle in which the academic community has become the target of a conservative campaign against purported left-wing intellectual ideological and cultural hegemony (Thue et al., 2022). Science in Norway enjoys a high degree of public trust, but that trust decreases in areas where there is doubt about the scientific integrity of contractors, funders and political authorities fueled by perceptions of politicized and ideologized research communities in which research findings challenge interests and values.

According to the report on integration, integrity and trust, the short answer is 'no' to the question of whether public trust in research-based knowledge and expertise is in the process of eroding in Norway and whether science is experiencing a trust crisis (Thue et al. 2022). However, there are some concerns internationally, especially in the United States, that trust in major institutions is decreasing. More specifically there is a perception that trust in research varies with educational level and political attitudes and that it decreases significantly in strongly politicized and controversial fields such as climate change and gender issues where there are close links between researchers, public authorities, and stakeholders with vested interests in the results of the research. A main assumption in the report is that trust in research depends on the integrity of the research vis-à-vis public authorities and stakeholders.

The ability of freedom of expression to prevail is connected with internal constraints related to culture and socialization within academic institutions

that are subject to the tension between an autonomy culture and a conformity culture. In Norway there are some examples of a tendency to constrain the freedom of expression of academic staff with reference to the value base of the discipline or the institution, but there are few proven cases in which academic staff have incurred negative consequences for making use of their freedom of expression. Thue et al. (2021) argued that the struggle for professionalism must be informed by an academic liberal-democratic perspective.

A main conclusion of the report is that academic freedom of expression in Norway is more threatened by subtle forms of pressure to conform than by activism related to identity politics and cancel culture. Overall, the Norwegian debate about academic freedom is more consensus-based than those in Denmark and Sweden. In Denmark, there have been irreconcilable divisions in some areas, such as immigration. The Danish debate has been labeled a cultural war and a value struggle. The Swedish debate has generally been characterized by self-censorship and passive leadership, but there has been a polemic about gender research. In Norway the debate has been less controversial. However, researchers concerned with gender and immigration are more restricted in the dissemination of their research. There are also some examples of imported debates taken up by the Norwegian media related to sexism, racism, and de-colonialization. Even if identity politics, no-platforming, trigger warnings, safe-spaces and de-colonialization do play something of a role in Norway, the conflicts between academic staff and students are lower than in Sweden and Denmark.

### *The public commission's report: academic freedom of expression*

The Ministry of Education and Research appointed a public commission in July 2021, which submitted its report in March 2022. The commission was chaired by an associate professor in law and had six members of whom five came from universities and other higher education institutions and included one student representative. Their mandate was to describe possible threats to academic freedom of expression and to propose measures to clarify the academic staff's right to freedom of expression and the institutions' responsibility to promote it. The commission focused on academic freedom of expression related to *dissemination* of evidence-based knowledge and truth-seeking communication and underscored that academic freedom of expression also implied academic responsibility for expression.

The report was partly based on Thue et al. (2021) and it argued that academic freedom of expression faced several dilemmas and challenges from both above and below and internally as well as externally. Internationally, academic freedom and freedom of expression face a variety of threats that exist in Nor-

way to differing degrees. The commission argued that classic censorship in a legal sense constituted only a minor threat in Norway and that the problem was more about self-censorship linked to limits on freedom of expression arising out of the tension between an autonomy culture and a conformity culture. Overall, the commission asserted that universities seemed to have proved resilient to the polarizing dynamics of identity politics. Despite some controversial cases it evaluated the threat to academic freedom of speech as low. Nevertheless, phenomena like conformity culture, cancel culture, populism, disinformation, and politicization were putting pressure on freedom of expression (see also Norris, 2021).

The commission argued that it was primarily the actual, not the legal situation which was the problem: while freedom of expression had good legal protection, it nonetheless came under pressure in practice. It underlined the academic staff's responsibility for upholding academic freedom of expression and warned against self-censorship. At the same time, the commission argued that academic freedom of expression needed to be strengthened through hard measures such as new legislation and changes to the funding structure and the management system. The commission recommended that the mission of academics to disseminate knowledge and academic freedom of expression should be enshrined in law and that dissemination indicators should become part both of the funding system and of future development agreements between the government and the universities. It also proposed soft measures such as a "Declaration of Freedom of Expression" and "Speech Etiquette Rules" as guidelines to enhance a good culture of expression based on the slogan "A good culture of expression must be built from the bottom up on a daily basis". The proposed package of measures also entailed training managers and the media in the principles of freedom of expression. Furthermore, the report also devoted a lot of space to language and suggested that dissemination of knowledge to the population as a main rule should be in the common language in Norway.

The report in many ways breaks with the traditional ideal of a university as a collegial community where internal communication is a core principle and where research and teaching have a more inward-looking perspective (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000; Ramirez & Christensen, 2013). Instead, a university tends to be seen like any other standardized organization where effectiveness, efficiency, service provision and externally visible results are important (Christensen, Gornitzka & Ramirez, 2019). This also touches on the issue of reputation management, i.e., the dissemination of knowledge is also about creating a positive image of a university (Wæraas & Maor, 2015).

### *The consultation process and the public debate*

The Ministry of Education and Research sent the report for formal consultation and had received sixty responses by the end of June 2022, of which twenty came from universities and colleges. There was also a lively and critical debate in the media about the report. There was very little support either for the proposal to introduce dissemination indicators or to include dissemination in the development agreements. The proposal to legally enshrine training in academic freedom of expression was also largely rejected, especially by the universities. The three largest universities were against the dissemination indicators, and many, including the University of Oslo and University of Bergen, were skeptical about the focus on academic freedom of expression, which is a narrower concept than academic freedom per se.

The report was also criticized for focusing too much on dissemination and the individual academic's role in the public domain and too little on academic freedom of expression related to research and teaching. Several cases were cited in which the university management had come under pressure (Bleiklie, 2022). Furthermore, the report was accused of neglecting the role of the unions in creating a good climate for academic freedom of expression. It was also criticized for paying too much attention to internal social mechanisms in the research community and too little to structural and organizational constraints linked to political governance of the sector, research funding and internal management. That said, there was also some positive feedback. Several actors thought that the report had supplied a lot of valuable input such as the guidelines for academic freedom of expression and for freedom of speech.

## Discussion

### *Translation of travelling ideas*

The major debate over the report on academic freedom of expression reflects both internal pressure and pressure from the institutional environment, illustrating the translation and travelling of ideas literature (Czarniawska & Jorges, 1996). The report comes in the wake of several controversial national cases which have affected academic freedom of expression concerning issues such as decolonialization and identity politics. On a more general level, it can be viewed in relation to the international debate on cancel culture, political correctness and woke culture, echoing the US debate about the university sector as a place for a new and intolerant left-leaning community. It can also be seen as activating a latent worry about the room for academic freedom in a period characterized by new management principles and funding arrangements as well as reduced job security (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016).

It has been revealed that the relationship between those being imitated and those imitating has been mediated by other organizations and actors (Westlin & Sahlin, 2017). Many individuals and organizations act as carriers or mediators – they include expert committees but also stakeholders and in this case the media (Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002). They report on action and cases occurring elsewhere but also pursue their own interests in how this can be translated to the Norwegian national context (cf. Sahlin, 2014). As editors they also formulate and reformulate and thus frame and reshape ideas, models and practice and define what are relevant problems and appropriate solutions (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). Overall, the circulation and adoption of ideas linked to academic freedom of expression in the Norwegian case seems to be more supply-driven than demand-driven, as indeed are management ideas (Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002).

#### *Actors, carriers, mediators, and translators*

Policy development has been appropriate and in line with the Norwegian tradition of involving affected stakeholders via expert reports and public commissions, followed by broad formal consultation with various relevant actors and a transparent public debate in the media. The process has been broad and open, involving many different actors, including academic experts as well as the management of major universities. Core mediators and carriers have come from *within* academia (managers, academic staff, unions, and students), from the government ministries and agencies that are the main funders of higher education, and from the general public where academia is viewed as part of an open and transparent society and media landscape.

The debate on the report reveals a tension between two major traditions of academic freedom, the German and the American one (Aberbach & Christensen, 2017). The Humboldt-oriented ideal is based on *Freiheit der Wissenschaft* and *Lehrfreiheit*, meaning freedom in teaching and research; and *Lernfreiheit*, meaning the freedom of students to choose what type of teaching to follow. The American tradition is more externally and grassroots oriented, since it is derived from American universities' foundations in lay rule and local communities and authorities (Ramirez & Christensen, 2013). Academic freedom in this type of environment is about guaranteeing the freedom of professors from interference in their work and in the expression of their views by lay boards, administrations, external authorities, and the general public (Ben-David, 1971; Searle, 1994).

The discussions surrounding the most recent Norwegian reports, for example those about dissemination, seem to be inspired more by the American ideal than the German one. The ideas derived from the market model see the

universities as competitive service enterprises, as in the United States, but when they travel to Norway they are edited and translated to fit the Norwegian model so that in reality universities are characterized more as social institutions in an open society contributing to various goals and to furthering a democratic society (Olsen 2007, Maasen, forthcoming).

### *Translation of ideas and problems*

Externally, the ideas in the Norwegian debate – especially those informed by the debate in the United States about cancel culture and identity politics – have been disseminated from a global landscape of which Norwegian academia is a part (cf. Christensen, 2012). The United States not only represents the main gold standard of excellence in the global academic community, but also influences other countries with its debates, even though the preconditions for academic freedom are very different in countries like Norway. A main carrier of global ideas in Norway has been the Ministry of Education and Research, which commissioned the report from the expert group at OsloMet and which also appointed the public commission. Its main mandate from the ministry was to describe possible threats to academic freedom of expression in Norway based on international trends.

Both the expert group and the public commission were dominated by experts from within academia. The expert group underlined the robustness of the Norwegian higher education system with respect to freedom of expression and argued that subtle pressure to conform exerted by the public authorities, the research council and university management, which controls strategic resources, was a bigger potential problem for academic freedom of expression than activism driven by identity politics and cancel culture. The public commission's focus on dissemination was narrower and underlined the academic staff's own responsibility for academic freedom of expression and warned against self-censorship triggered by internal social mechanisms in academia. In the public debate that followed, the concept of academic freedom of expression was criticized for being too vague and ambiguous and overlapping with other concepts so that it did not really clarify the challenges that the university community faced. This criticism reflects the notion of modern universities as rational and formalized organizations (Christensen, Gornitzka & Ramirez, 2019).

The international ideas of politicization, cultural struggle, cancel culture, identity politics, no-platforming, trigger warning, safe-spaces and de-colonialization have been translated and edited into the more peaceful, trust-based, and collaborative Norwegian setting. While this translation is related to the cultural context, it is also biased in many ways (cf. Westney, 1987). It is also a

question of branding and reputation management (Carpenter, 2010), with the notion of 'editing universities' echoing the term 'editing corporations' coined by Engwall and Sahlin (2007), and problem of reputation risk being treated as a logical part of organizing (cf. Power et al., 2009).

### *Translation of solutions and measures*

The public commission was also asked to suggest measures to strengthen academic freedom of expression and came up with no less than twenty-three different recommendations. The commission's suggested measures were a combination of soft regulation, emphasizing culture, advice, guidelines, recommendations, and internal bottom-up processes; and hard regulation, encompassing performance measurement, agreements and legal measures addressing structural elements and what Sahlin and Brunsson (2000) label constructing organizations. Together this adds up to a rather hybrid and somewhat confusing package of measures.

Most of the public debate and the consultation process revolved around the different solutions suggested by the public commission. The commission's report received a lot of criticism from the universities as well as from individual professors, which may be seen as a push-back reaction based on Humboldt-inspired ideas. The suggested solutions and measures were translated into the institutional university context and practice. In particular the suggestion to introduce a dissemination indicator into the performance management system and into development plans as well as to put academic freedom of expression on a legal footing was rejected by the universities. Formalization and more management by indicators and rules, reflecting global trends (Christensen, Gornitzka & Ramirez, 2019), were seen as unnecessary and unwelcome.

The main reactions from individuals and organizations in the higher education system to the suggested measures were informed by a logic of appropriateness and traditional identities, expectations, and rules for action within the academic community, rather than by a tendency to adopt the latest fashions (March and Olsen, 1989). Rather than simply allowing ideas and solutions coming from abroad to be disseminated in a bid to reduce uncertainty in the field of higher education, the debate was informed by identification and attention from central actors who tended to protect and defend the status quo (Weldin & Sahlin, 2017).

## Conclusion

First, this case has revealed that a variety of partly competing and co-existing ideas have been circulating in the current Norwegian debate about academic freedom of speech and have been adapted to the Norwegian context. These ideas are elastic and flexible rather than solid and stable, so that both the problems and solutions presented were characterized by different understandings of academic freedom of speech. This increased the ambiguity of the meaning-making process (cf. Christensen, Gornitzka & Ramirez, 2019). Different actors have different opinions and there are rather loose links between the problems expressed and the solutions proposed. It is rather difficult to grasp what the problem is regarding academic freedom and freedom of speech in Norwegian universities, and whether dissemination is the solution or whether it actually creates more challenges. The nature of the ideas changes as they circulate and become adapted to a Norwegian approach as well as within different institutional settings. Different actors, interests and activities introduce different problems and solutions into the process, so the main picture is rather hybrid (cf. Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017; Christensen, Læg Reid & Røvik, 2020).

Second, it has been illustrated that translating the idea of academic freedom of expression depends on national and local action and practice and that the translation process is characterized by variation and divergence rather than imitation, standardization, and convergence. The national cultural tradition and context matter (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2013). Contextual factors represent the setting in which ideas are developed, problems formulated, and solutions suggested. Contextualization seems to be more important than generic de-contextualization (Christensen, 2012; Røvik, 2011), meaning that the problems formulated and solutions suggested are time- and place-sensitive as well as subject to the logic of appropriateness and the importance of trust, integrity and identity (March and Olsen, 1989). Global ideas are interpreted and responded to differently depending on national institutional arrangements and historical traditions, local action, existing practice, and the organizational identity of universities (Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017).

Third, we have revealed that ideas related to science and higher education institutions do not exist in a vacuum, but travel and translate in relation to and in conjunction with other ideas – a process that has been labeled ‘ecology of ideas’ or ‘ecologies of translation’ by Wedlin and Sahlin (2017). With a multitude of actors and translators involved, translation processes also develop and interact in relation to each other, affecting the way that specific ideas travel and take shape in a local and domestic space. Overall, the circulation of ideas seems to be mainly process-driven and characterized by ambiguity

regarding the concept of academic freedom of expression and how to treat it, but also ambiguity regarding how it is intertwined with other partly overlapping concepts and ideas, and how it is institutionally framed and translated (March & Olsen, 1976; Sahlin, 2014).

The circulation of the idea of academic freedom of expression seems to be informed more by templates than by prototypes and the suggested measures are a combination of soft regulation by culturally informed guidelines and recommendations, and harder legal regulations. The consultation process has revealed a rather negative reaction from core stakeholders towards regulatory activism and legalism, not to mention dissemination measures. What the final result will be when organizations try to adopt and implement rationalized recipes and apply them to local conditions remains to be seen.

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# Think tanks and the ecology of ideas

## Editing futures

*Christina Garsten*, Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study

### Introduction: ideas for the future

In times of high uncertainty, chaos, and complexity, a growing number of think tanks offer tools to organize overwhelming events and confusing signals into paths to the future—and to convert those paths to strategic action. Adding scenario-thinking to our toolbox for foresight, design, strategic planning, or innovation leadership, we are told, will help us in the process of crafting visionary scenarios for the future. Being ‘future-ready’ or even ‘future literate’ promises to give us the upper hand in being prepared for challenging times to come. And more so, it may empower us to create and design the future we desire. To illustrate, on the website of the Institute for Global Futures (<https://www.globalfuturist.com/>, accessed April 10, 2023), we read:

Increasing complexity in the future will continue to challenge organizations to better anticipate change and adapt faster. Better preparing organizations to meet the challenges of the future is central to our DNA. At IGF we refer to this capability as Future-Readiness.

In my current research, I am interested in organized attempts to create knowledge about and influence people’s perception of the future. More specifically, I am curious about how different types of organizations, especially think tanks, produce ‘knowledge’ about possible futures and how these scenarios are used to influence the design of futures. My starting point is that this type of activity is important for which issues come up for political discussion, which issues that are placed on the policy-making agenda, and that they can, in the long run, play a role in the decisions that are made, both locally and globally.

Think tanks base their projections and foresight activities on a number of different methods. They may be statistical calculations, qualified applications of ‘big data’, and more recently artificial intelligence systems. But more often than not, their activities involve creative and interactive scenario planning

methods, which often imply looking for 'signals', i.e., events that stand out in some way, thinking about their causes and how they possibly interact, and then extrapolating these signals to future scenarios. These visions can be five years ahead, fifty years, or 100 years into the future. The end product is often imaginative stories and images about future societies, new political systems, new communication patterns and new ways of living (Flyverbom & Garsten 2021).

In recent years, we have seen a marked increase in activities related to future forecasting and scenario making among think tanks. Future foresight expresses not only an anxiety and emotional state of our times, but has become an organizing concept for associations, governments, state agencies and international bodies. But how is it that foresight has such great explosive power today? That world leaders would want to participate in future foresight training courses and workshops? In this essay, inspired by the scholarly works of Kerstin Sahlin, I posit that think tanks are instrumental in producing a 'global ecology of ideas' and that a part of their activities involves the crafting and 'editing' (Sahlin-Andersson 1996; Sahlin & Wedlin; Wedlin & Sahlin 2008; 2017) of ideas about plausible and desirable futures. Moreover, it is not simply innocent thought experiments or utopian exercises we are dealing with, but a form of reflexive thinking that has the potential to become performative, in other words: ideas and knowledge with implications. This anticipatory form of knowledge (Gusterson 2008) is knowledge oriented towards the future. Oftentimes, it is knowledge intended to be actionable and thus suited for organizational intervention. Such anticipatory knowledge provides the basis for 'anticipatory governance' (Flyverbom & Garsten 2021), emerging in step with an acceding globalization and increased challenges for the nation-state and its governing power.

## A global ecology of ideas

Think tanks, or policy research institutes, have over the past decades grown and spread to constitute a global 'ecology of ideas' (Wedlin & Sahlin 2017). In nation-state political debates as well as in transnational political discourse, on topics such as the global financial crisis, climate risk scenarios, and security threats, think tanks are gaining increasing traction for their expertise and perspectives. The concept of an ecology of ideas, in the spirit of Bateson (2000; Steier 2005), here underlines the importance of looking at the growth of this particular organizational form in a broader context or field of organizational dynamics, reflecting changing modes of governance, new ideologies of reform, and novel ways of exerting power and influence. The notion of ecology also

emphasizes the fact that ideas, knowledge, or whatever emanates from the unit of observation extends beyond that of its originator and may also survive beyond that. 'The ideas, under further transformation, may go out in the world in books or works of art', as Bateson has it (<http://entersection.com/posts/929-gregory-bateson-on-an-ecology-of-ideas>, accessed April 11, 2023).<sup>1</sup>

In line with the above reasoning, Barley (2010) maintains that organization scholars have much to gain from focusing more attention on how organizations attempt to influence and mold their environment. Based on his own research, he shows how during the 1970s and 1980s American corporations built, partially intentionally and partially unintentionally, an institutional field for shaping public policy. 'Institutional field' here refers to a set of organizational populations and the relations that embed members of these populations into a social system or network with a purpose (note the resonance with 'ecology'). These populations, Barley contends (2010, p.280) represent an example of what Zald and Lounsbury (2010) refer to as 'command posts': 'centres of societal power ... that regulate, oversee and aim to maintain social order in society and economy'. To these verbs, Barley adds 'change' (op. cit.). Think tanks, often funded by corporate money and geared to promote a certain ideological perspective, are organizational forms that funnel resources amongst corporations and public agencies. The political power exercised, albeit indirectly, through the advocacy of think tanks is, I suggest, an indicator of broad ideological change, a window onto a changing governance structure, one in which the future has become a focal element of governance.

The principal task of most think tanks is to generate policy-relevant knowledge and to provide information to political and business elites as well as the public at large – knowledge that can then influence political decisions. Think tanks are places where information is being gathered and packaged, and knowledge is produced and distributed. They are motors in the diffusion of normatively charged ideas about how the current state of affairs should be understood, dealt with, and improved. This is most visible in the United States, where think tanks have a long tradition of 'helping government think,' traceable all the way back to the Progressive Era Reform and the rise of Scientific Management in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Their legal position as 501c(3) organizations in US corporate law denies them influence by way of lobbying, but provides scope for indirect influence by education and infor-

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<sup>1</sup> We may note here that Bateson himself was indebted to Sir Geoffrey Vickers' essay 'The Ecology of Ideas' in *Value Systems and Social Process*, Basic Books, 1968, for the phrase 'ecology ideas', (<http://entersection.com/posts/929-gregory-bateson-on-an-ecology-of-ideas>, accessed April 11, 2023).

mation. Their ambition to educate, inform, and to advocate render them key 'sites for normativity' with respect to the global order (cf. Sassen 1998).

The growth of think tanks over the last few decades has been explosive, both in terms of numbers and scope of activity. According to McGann (2012, p.15), 90,5 per cent of all US think tanks were established after 1950, with numbers more than doubling since 1980. A similar, but not as dramatic, trajectory can be seen worldwide. Despite a marked decrease in the rate of establishment of new think tanks in recent years, think tanks continue to increase their role and influence in countries around the world, offering expert knowledge for governmental decision-making and arenas for discussions to take place.<sup>2</sup> Part of their sway derives from a sophisticated combination of opacity and transparency (Garsten, 2013). The relative opacity of think tanks has attracted outside criticism, as has the diffuse funding base, and the informal interactions between think tank experts and political and business leaders. However, think tanks are recognized for bringing social problems to the attention of decision-makers, for providing platforms for open public debate, and as providing alternative pathways for public influence on the political scene.

The advancement of think tanks on the global political scene and the attractiveness of the scenarios are also expressions of an accelerating governance problem in an increasingly globalized world, a kind of regulatory loophole. The post-war international architecture, with the dominant multilateral organizations, such as the UN, the World Bank and the IMF, and also the EU, faces significant difficulties in dealing with global challenges such as the environment, migration and financial crises, in a fast and flexible way. These organizations, like the nation-states, are increasingly being challenged by other types of organizations with global governance ambitions.

The policy experts who work for think tanks are often well-educated professionals who have found a niche for themselves outside of established academia. Oftentimes, they are alumni of respected universities and colleges. The revolving door practice of moving between public agencies, private business, and civil society organizations make them particularly well-placed to engage in advocacy across organizational fields. Experienced in different types of organizational operations, with a vast network of social contacts, they are able to broker between different types of organizations and positions and thus influence policy. Such 'policy professionals' (Garsten, Rothstein & Svallfors 2015) are part of growing cadre of knowledge workers, engaged in the as-

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<sup>2</sup> For more about the general development of think tanks, see for example, McGann 2007; Medvetz 2012; Rich 2004; Smith 1991; Stone 1996; Weidenbaum 2011.

sembling, editing, and diffusing of complex sets of data about the state of the world. And, we may add, to the extent that their work entails crafting future scenarios or teaching others in the art of future forecasting, they are involved in producing global scenarios of cultural flows and borders that enter 'the public geocultural imagination' (Hannerz 2009).

## Future as a space for intervention

Adam and Groves (2007) describe how, in our late modern times, the future has been stripped of content and meaning. We no longer put our trust in fate. Once the future is emptied, it can be filled with anything: with interests, desires, values, beliefs, ethical stances, corporate visions, and political ambitions. Because of its emptiness, the future becomes fundamentally uncertain and open to the colonization of projections and imaginary projects. This perceived lack of meaning has also been discussed by Augé (1995, p.29), who suggests that what is truly new today, as compared to 100 years ago, is not the fact that 'the world lacks meaning, or has little meaning, or less than it used to have; it is that we feel an explicit and intense daily need to give it meaning'. Future-oriented think tanks are capitalizing on this perceived future anxiety and emptiness, offering methods and tools for building collective imagination that will allow organizational leaders to take action and make decisions to create the future they desire.

The Institute for the Future (IFTF), a Palo Alto-based think tank, claims to be one of the oldest future-forecasting organizations, founded in 1968, and to have pioneered many the methods that are standard practices for professional futurists today (McGonigal, p.xxiii). The institute was founded in 1968 as an independent, public-interest nonprofit and a spinoff from RAND Corporation with original support from the Ford Foundation. On their website, we read: 'Today, as an independent, registered 501(c)(3), nonprofit research institute with a global reach and impact, we continue to build new tools to help organizations, communities, and nations navigate complexity, uncertainty, and change so they can become future-ready' <https://www.iftf.org/about-iftf/>, accessed April 11, 2023). Jane McGonigal works as the director of game research and development. She has a PhD degree in performance studies and was a Young Global Leader at the World Economic Forum. Over the past fifteen years she has been associated with the IFTF, McGonigal has developed future forecasts, trainings, and simulations for experts and leaders at clients such as Google, IBM, Cisco, Intel, Disney, GSK, the Rockefeller Foundation, the US Department of Defense, the National Academy of Sciences, and the World Economic Forum. In her recent book, *Imaginable – How to see the future*

coming and feel ready for anything—even things that seem impossible today (2022), she shows how to train our minds to ‘think the unthinkable and imagine the unimaginable’. She invites us to play with future simulations to build our collective imagination and take action that will help change the future we want.

The IFTF offers a wide repertoire of leadership training courses, and advisory services, both live and online. Most of these require participants to pay a registration fee, which varies depending on the type of event. I participated myself at a three-day long training course at the institute and met with clients from across the world and from many different types of organizations. Apart from singular events, the institute also invites individuals and organizations to join their future-facing network, the IFTF Vantage Partnership. The partnership, which comes with a fee, offers a number of exclusive membership advantages. Among them are, for example, access to the Foresight Councils, i.e., exclusive peer groups focused on ‘deep strategic conversations’ among future-facing professionals. These are depicted as ‘networks for collective sense-making’ that address organizational challenges ‘illuminated by urgent futures’ (<https://www.iftf.org/vantage-partnership/iftf-vantage-foresight-councils/>, accessed April 11, 2023). In this way, the organizing process extends beyond that of temporary and short-term engagements with clients to form a more stable network of partners that provide financial support for the institute, whilst also sharing amongst themselves perspectives, priorities, methods, and tools. These relationships thus also extend the ecology of ideas beyond that of the think tank itself.<sup>3</sup>

Future foresight is not only of interest to think tanks but is placed on the agenda of governments across the world. Leveraging strategic foresight is increasingly seen as a way to improve policymaking. As described by a report issued by the think tank New America (Scoblic 2021, <https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/strategic-foresight-in-us-agencies/the-future-of-us-foresight/>, accessed April 11, 2023), scholars and practitioners have over the past decade called for the U.S. government to institutionalize strategic foresight at the highest levels. Proposals have been put forward suggesting restructuring the U.S. government to link foresight with policymaking. According to the report, the National Academy of Public Administration in 2016 called for the incoming White House team to integrate foresight with policymaking government-wide. This would involve establishing ‘new offices and positions throughout the government dedicated to con-

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<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, this model of involving organizations in partnerships that provide financial support and extends the reach of the organization is also used by other think tanks, not least the World Economic Forum (Garsten & Sörbom 2018).

ducting long-range analysis, and creating a position or unit based in the White House with responsibility for promoting the development and coordination of government-wide foresight activities.' (Scoblic 2021, p.43). Also in 2016, in a report on fragile states, the establishment of a strategic foresight cell within the National Security Council was called for. And in 2019, futurist Amy Webb called for the president to create 'a centralized office championing strategic foresight,' focused on scientific and technological developments' (op.cit.). Other countries, such as Canada, Finland, and Singapore, have also proposed a plethora of institutional models for incorporating foresight into policymaking. The European Commission (EC), issued its first strategic foresight report in 2020, emphasizing the role that foresight could play in improving resilience to disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic. The EC's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation issued a report in August 2021, providing not only a set of scenarios, but also a guide to 'future-proofing' policies (op.cit.).

Given the expanded global significance, the transnational diffusion and attraction of anticipatory practices, we might even venture to say that the future foresight agenda has expanded to become a cornerstone of good governance and responsible actorhood, in a manner similar to risk management (cf. Power et al 2009). While it is difficult to say whether contemporary complex organizations are more future-oriented than their predecessors, it clear that there exists an expanded organizational concern with future foresight, and a willingness to invest in learning the practices and tools of future foresight. Hence, we may posit that anticipatory activities are becoming routine practices as organizations, private as well as public, process external demands for the rational management of future risk scenarios, and expectations of good governance (cf. Power 2007).

Yet another reason for the attractiveness of scenario-making comes to mind: a need to complement the cool reporting of facts with good narratives. Learning how to look for 'signals', to use the tools of future scenario-making, offers a means to produce organizational narrative for the future. Scenarios condense and articulate central events into comprehensible and manageable chains of events and visions of alternative futures. Future scenarios may thus be seen as a form of 'prospective sensemaking' (Weick 1995) that provides meaning to what appears as (and essentially is) uncertain and unknowable. As Weick (1995) puts it: A good story holds together seemingly disparate elements in a way that gives power and energy to action and that gives the action a direction, that makes us feel like we understand what is happening. Qualitative scenarios offer a counterbalance and fill the numbers with human substance.

The power of attraction of future foresight and scenario-making activities derives partly from their potential to open up space for thought and reflexivity and provide incentives for action. (cf. Bergquist 2001, p.44). They invite us to stop and reflect on choices and decisions and their implications. Not least, they open up for interventions, policies, program explanations and strategies. They thus provide space for gathering resources, political visions, financial investments, and not least media space around proposed interventions, in response to conceivable scenarios. Gaining the skills and tools that enable one to engage in designing the future one want would be appealing to many, and a reputational signal of prospective good governance practice, for global leaders.

## Editing futures

As Andersson (2018) writes, the future became ‘a social problem’ above all in the time after the Second World War, in step with the growth of an international institutional infrastructure, new technological achievements, development of new forms of statistical calculation models. The future became the subject of rationalized social engineering. The geo-cultural imagination that is at the heart of scenario activities are an expression of an awareness of the fact that we now live in an interconnected, globalized world, where we can imagine or anticipate the implications of policy decisions and different scales (cf. Hannerz 2016).

This preparedness for the future implies that there are ways to understand and shape the future – and that both individuals and organizations can learn to do this. The orientation to the future, detecting risks and opportunities, and articulating ways to deal with them, are skills that can be learned. George Friedman, author of the book *The Next 100 Years, A Forecast for the 21st Century* (2009, p.11), believes that forecasting is both necessary and possible. In his view, there is a degree of predictability in the way that leaders of the nations of the world govern and therefore it is also possible, with good knowledge of the international system and the forces that shape it, to foresee and design the future international system.

There is an agentic overtone in the writings of Friedman, as in much of the futurist writings and narratives. The focus on future literacy, future readiness, playing with future scenarios, and mastering the tools of foresight suggest a strong sense of empowerment and agency on the part of those who are trained in foresight skills. These anticipatory practices articulate a desire to ‘design’ the future, and also denote the agentic individual as the focal source of this design process (Garsten & Sörbom, 2021). Herein lies a central paradox: Whilst the future is at once seen as designable and editable, and thus subject

to the agency and intentionality of the rational actor, it is also seen unknowable and as something to which the actor only has to adapt, respond, and prepare for. This paradox serves to fuel the sense of future anxiety and to evoke a perceived need for the services of the future industry (op.cit.).

Forecasting models and tools are presented and represented in various ways as they are circulated, most commonly in the form of written or oral presentations, in leadership training courses and at conferences. As receivers and participants of these models and tools bring them home, as it were, to their own organizations, the 'imitating' organizations may not, and most likely do not, have direct experience with the models they imitate, refer to, and put to use. As Latour has pointed out (2005), all knowledge acquired at a distance involves elements of translation. Such translated accounts and practices are subject to 'editing' (Sahlin-Andersson 1996, Sahlin & Wedlin 2008), as the stories, models, and tools, are narrated and re-narrated as they circulate. As pointed out by Sahlin-Andersson and Sévon (2003), tracing the path of a circulated model, allows us to see that such editing is circumscribed and guided by conventions that form 'editing rules'. Editing rules are by implication context-bound, reflecting the setting in which the editing occurs, thus restrict the process of representing and retelling. 'Through the process of editing, an idea may be formulated more clearly and more explicitly, but such reformulation may, in turn, change not only the form of the text, but also its focus, content, and meaning' (Sahlin-Andersson & Sévon 2003, p.262) Ideas about the future about plausible, potential, or desirable futures are thus transformed as they are transferred from place to place. This implies that the location for the crafting, editing, and diffusion of the models and tools for future imagination and anticipation is of central significance for our understanding of contemporary governance and power. In other words, who the actors engage in future forecasting and scenario making are, where they are operating from, and what resources are brought to bear in their dealings, are of utmost importance.

## Concluding notes

Our contemporary organizational world is replete with projections, statistical extrapolations, foresight exercises and scenarios. Examining the anticipatory activities undertaken by think tanks, corporations, and state agencies, we find a wide repertoire of anticipatory actions, a plurality of knowledge claims, and an ambitious set of governance aspirations (Flyverbom & Garsten 2021, p.5). Future forecasting has become a way for organizations to process external demands for the rational management of future risk scenarios, and expectations of good governance. The focus on capacities geared towards the future

– future literacy, future readiness – and on mastering the tools of foresight suggest a strong sense of empowerment and agency that further enhances organizational governance aspirations. We are dealing with thought experiments and exercises, a form of reflexive thinking, that has the potential to become performative, in other words: ideas and knowledge with implications. The organizing process involves a diffusion and editing of ideas, tools, and skills that extends the ecology of ideas beyond that of the think tank itself.

Future foresight revolves around the production of knowledge and ideas. Claims to knowledge, the forms of knowledge that are created and the way these are represented in anticipatory practices have implications for the kind of governance at play (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021). Different forms of knowledge production perform particular functions in organizations, such as developing strategies, setting priorities and orienting to time. Organizational anticipatory practices may thus have an impact on how futures are imagined, and thus influence decision-making, strategy, policy, and long-term planning.

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# On Open and Openness in academia

*Bengt Gerdin, Uppsala University*

-When I use a word, Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.

-The question is, said Alice, whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

-The question is, said Humpty Dumpty, which is to be master—that’s all.

Lewis Carroll; *Through the Looking-Glass, 1872*

## Introduction

*Openness*<sup>1</sup> has more or less been a watchword in the 21st-century academic dialogue, often without a distinct definition and demarcation of its meaning.

On the one hand, it has been seen restrictively only to cover a perspective that, e.g., published knowledge and similar, shall be accessible to everyone without having to pay an “admission fee”. On the other hand, it has been given a broad meaning, implying a norm, or behaviour, of university scholars, saying that as much intellectual work as possible, from ideas and reflections and onwards, is part of a shared intellectual domain.

It has also been given an imperative meaning with imposed adherence to protocols, adaption to routines and practices, or rules one must follow. It has also been seen to reflect a deeply founded perspective of a natural and generous attitude to disseminating perspectives, knowledge, findings, and interpretations. It is evident that the concept, depending on the context, is given either a dichotomous and categorical meaning or a more dimensional and relative meaning. *Openness* can therefore be seen as a fluid concept presented and contextualized in myriad fashions, e.g., (Ncube, 2021; Peters & Roberts, 2011; Pomerantz & Peek, 2016). The only thing in common between these is the word *Openness* and its underlying linguistic meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> After some hesitation, *Openness* is capitalized and italicized in the entire text. There are arguments against this, e.g., the term has different meanings in different contexts where capitalization is motivated in some but not in others. Nevertheless, simplicity reasons decided the matter.

In this short essay, I will give some perspectives on the term “Open”, and on the concept of “Openness”, as they are used in academia. The essay is catalyzed by the fact that *the Open movement* has, step by step, penetrated most research fields over the last twenty years.

Nevertheless, it is a self-betrayal to perceive a concept of *Openness* as new within academia. *Openness* was part of the Greek ideal of science. In medieval times, the Church distrusted and opposed claims to secret knowledge and stated in its universities the public and rational character of all genuine “science,” including theology (McMullin, 1985). After fading out in the late medieval time and early renaissance, with a growth of secrecy to protect early scientific discoveries, it re-emerged during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as an integral part of the Scientific Revolution. It meant a shift from a dominant ethos of secrecy to a new set of values that reinforced researchers’ commitments to rapidly disclosing new knowledge (David, 2008; Eamon, 1985; McMullin, 1985). The formal presentation of original scientific information openly in a scientific journal format with the aim to disseminate and give the public access to results begins with the founding of the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* in 1665, with Henry Oldenburg as its first editor. He was also the first to send submitted manuscripts to other experts to assess their quality before publication. This is seen as the birth of modern scientific publication, with the practice of peer review (Henry, 1988). Other aspects of *Openness*, e.g., that related to academic freedom, came later (Whittington, 2022).

## A key and prosperous choice of path

Before discussing *Openness* in current academia, it is imperative to approach some critical decisions that allowed independent academia controlled by peers, not by political power, to flourish after WWII.

Universities have seen enormous global expansion during the twentieth century, and above all after WWII (Frank & Meyer, 2006; Schofer & Meyer, 2005). This is reflected by a vast increase in the number and global distribution of universities, in a rapid rise in student admission, and in a widening and diversification of the areas available for study and research. The expansion occurred in the shade of the cold war, with heavy industrial initiatives as driving forces, and was particularly profound within natural sciences and technology. In the US, the leading research nation after WWII, there were enormous investments in military science already during the war, much in the form of application of basic research within natural sciences, and with political – and military – control over the universities. As part of planning post-war academia

in the US, President Roosevelt gave a task to Vannevar Bush, an engineering professor and science administrator, who headed the US Office of Scientific Research and Development during the war. In early 1945 Vannevar Bush published the report “Science – the endless frontier” with analysis and suggestions on how to build, design, and create requisites for a broad expansion of a post-war system for higher education and research in the US (Bush, 1945).

The Vannevar Bush report highlighted that societal development and common welfare required investment in science and motivated a considerable expansion of government research funding. It also argued that universities should have a high level of autonomy, that peers and peer review should prioritize the available resources, and that basic research was best done in universities (Martin, 2012). Based on this view, the National Science Foundation, only led by peers, was instituted in 1950 to finance research conducted exclusively within existing university and college settings. The Vannevar Bush vision of independent research did not go unchallenged and was heavily antagonized by the strong development of the military-industrial complex and the intense investment in secret military research. Nevertheless, the substantial expansion of self-governed and independent research financed publicly in the Western world owe thanks to the strong impetus of Vannevar Bush. His perspectives have influenced science policy globally to this day. They have shaped the foundation for the contemporary relationship between peer-led science and society, which has had a global impact since then. The stepwise transition into increasingly structural Openness, which we have seen over the last decades, would have been much more difficult without the choice of path set by him which facilitated academic autonomy during a critical period in post-war development.

The Vannevar Bush idea of an independent scientific community was not new but rather a natural extension of the concepts of Max Weber (Weber, 1989) and Robert Merton (Merton, 1938, 1973), with science as a vocation of its own and with its own normative system. In the shade of the pre-WWII totalitarian environment with enforced restrictions against intellectual freedom, Merton explored the tension between the ethics of science and political will in a non-democratic environment. He visualized how external societal changes could “curtail, modify or possibly prevent the pursuit of science” and also advocated the autonomy of science: “Science must not suffer itself to become the handmaiden of theology or economy or state” (Merton, 1938). Merton considered the norms of “Communism”, Universalism, Disinterestedness, and Organized skepticism as deeply embodied in scientists. However, he soon realized that these norms were in an ambivalent equilibrium with counter-norms. In the context of this essay, the norm “Communism” – the term is

within brackets of apparent reasons – requires a comment. Merton used this term in the non-technical and extended sense of shared ownership of goods to describe knowledge as a public and open asset accessible to all scientists and a prerequisite for intellectual independence. He wrote: “Secrecy is the antithesis of this norm; full and open communication its enactment” (Merton, 1973). He also explicitly stated that researchers should share their “important discoveries”, something he considered imperative for the conception of science as part of the public domain. This makes his “Communism” a Siamese twin to the concept of Openness.

Merton’s position on Openness as part of a “Communism” norm does not preclude his perception of the substantial importance of upholding the individual’s motivation and right to protect the originality of his/her work (Hosseini et al., 2022). This view is reflected in an analysis by Sissela Bok (Bok, 1982), and in his own review of James Watson’s book “Making It Scientifically” in the New York Times on Feb 25, 1968 (Merton, 1968).

The institution of science emphasizes significant originality and ultimate value and demonstrated originality generally means coming upon the idea or finding first. Recognition and fame thus appear to be more than merely personal ambitions. They are institutionalized symbols for having done one’s job as a scientist superlatively well.

Nevertheless, he regarded *Openness* as a prerequisite for an optimal distribution of thoughts and a vital discussion climate. Thus, he saw *Openness* as beneficial from an overall intellectual point of view for the scientific community. He could well have used the quote of Louis Pasteur: “*La science n’a pas de patrie*”, i.e., science does not have a homeland, meaning that knowledge shall have no borders or limitations.

In this context, it must be emphasized that Merton was not an intellectual island during WWII. Actually, during the early war, a period of extreme secrecy and state control of research, the journal *Nature* published a Declaration of Scientific Principles, based on work from the British Association, claiming independence, complete intellectual freedom, and unrestricted international exchange, all in line with the ideas of Merton, and later also of Vannevar Bush (“The Commonwealth of Science,” 1941).

The Mertonian norms, which were not based on experiments but instead appeared intuitive to Merton himself, have later been challenged as knowledge production has changed during the last fifty years (Hosseini et al., 2022). The most widely cited study is that of the organizational theorist Ian Mitroff (Mitroff, 1974), who went to study the norm system of a group of top American scientists in the, at the time, largest post-war American scientific project,

the Apollo project. The most eminent scientists in related research fields in the US were recruited to participate in this – one way or the other. Mitroff studied a sample of these scientists extensively for their perspectives on science and the norms they embodied. The sample chosen from that elite can best be described as an “elite of elites”. Two of the forty-two had a Nobel Prize, six were National Academy of Scientists members, and thirteen were major editors of key scientific journals. These scientists were not unbiased analytic observers but mentally and heavily involved both in their own and others’ ideas of their core scientific problems, e.g., on how the moon would be like, what their studies would reveal on the age of the moon, or of its origin – some with almost religious intensity. Moreover, there was an intense competition between individual scientists. The study visualized how these scientists functioned in a balanced “norm – counter-norm system”. The Openness-related norm “Communism” was counter-balanced by a norm of “Particularism”, which was described as: “Property rights are expanded to include protective control over the disposition of one’s discoveries; secrecy thus becomes a moral act.”

As academic science began deviating from the long-established model during the Cold War era, there were more arguments that the Mertonian model was idealized and no longer held; see, e.g. (Hosseini et al., 2022). John Ziman, a New Zealand physicist, and humanist introduced the term “post-academic science” to describe the increased marketing of university findings (Ziman, 2000). He argued that the prevailing norm system could be described in terms of “Proprietary”, meaning exclusive ownership of knowledge, “Local” that knowledge is primarily created to solve practical problems, “Authoritarian” that research is hierarchically managed, “Commissioned”, that research is based on external commissions aiming at a practical utility, and finally, “Expert”, symbolizing that a researcher is merely a paid problem solver (Rodriguez, 2007). In analogy to Mitroff (Mitroff, 1974), this description of contemporary norms visualizes a step away from Openness and the Mertonian norm of “Communism”.

### *Openness vs. secrecy*

As stated above, there are many overlapping definitions and uses of the attribute “*Open*” and the noun “*Openness*”, and the literature on *Openness* has produced multiple understandings and conceptual ambiguities as to what is meant, e.g. (Dahlander & Gann, 2010; Roberts, 2015). In its broadest sense, a concept of *Openness* reflects a free and unhindered expression of one’s true feelings and opinions, thereby being an antonym of “secretiveness”.

Traditional historiography of science has constructed *Openness* in opposition to secrecy (Resnik, 2006; Vermeir, 2012). Both have followed each other in the course of history of science, from the Greek ideal of science espoused by Plato and Aristotle, where the public and open character of the knowledge process itself was central, to oriental secret and esoteric mysticism. From the *Openness* during early Christianity to the secrecy required to protect originality which was essential for obtaining patronage during the renaissance or avoiding criticism from the church, a strategy used by, e.g., Leonardo da Vinci, Galileo, and Copernicus (McMullin, 1985).

An appropriate description of the *Openness* vs. secrecy conflict is given by the philosopher Pamela Long who makes this conflict relative by describing *Openness* as “the relative degree of freedom given to the dissemination of information or knowledge which involves assumptions concerning the nature and extent of the audience”; quoted by (Vermeir, 2012). It implies accessibility or lack of restrictiveness concerning communication. “For both *Openness* and secrecy, it is important to specify “by whom” and “for whom”, else the terms are meaningless.” Vermeir gives Isaac Newton’s communication of his ideas as an example. Newton consistently distributed his texts to friends. Still, he could feel betrayed if some of his ideas were distributed without his knowledge. While Newton now and again tried to avoid making his work public, the secret or public status of Newton’s manuscripts and oral presentations was not always clear. He used different strategies to publish his work, from formal publication of his main works to distribution of manuscripts, lectures, letters to his colleagues, and oral communication (Vermeir, 2012). This gave those interested in his work several types of access to his research. As pointed out, this dynamic does not reflect a strict dichotomy of what is open and what is secret. Instead, it points to *Openness* and secrecy as gradational categories. Nevertheless, this perspective, taken from seventeenth-century Britain, reflects Newton’s personality and the dissemination of his intellectual ideas. More than that, it reflects core generic features applicable in today’s academia on how research results are communicated.

Actually, denunciation of secrecy is a modern issue. Sissela Bok has expanded on the perspective:

Denunciation of secrecy is ritualistic in modern science. Precisely because the conflicts that secrecy raises for scientists are so strong, their declarations against it are, in part, efforts at conjuring away its power. Unlike other professionals such as lawyers or government officials, modern scientists have never staked out a rationale justifying even limited practices of secrecy. They have held free and open communication to be the most essential requirement for their work. Secret practices, although common, have been furtive and viewed with intense suspicion.

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Modern scientists have directed their disavowals of secrecy, first of all, against the ancient and powerful doctrine of esotericism in science: the view that only the elect can penetrate the mysteries of science and that to open up the scientific process would destroy it, along with the hopes of its practitioners. (Bok, 1982)

Thus, the present discourse lifts forward *Openness* as a desirable property in a research organization and society. A historical argument is that an attitude of “*Openness*” was crucial for the public dissemination of pioneering discoveries leading to immense scientific progress, exemplified by the discovery of penicillin by Alexander Fleming, the steps leading to the transistor, the light bulb, and the description of the double helix by Crick and Watson (Krishna, 2020). Nevertheless, when the term’s true meaning is questioned in different contexts, it becomes clear that it has different meanings in different research structures and phases and also in different research fields. There is, e.g., a need for better agreement on the meaning of key terms and more consensus on some of the goals to support an increased *Openness* (Grubb & Easterbrook, 2011). Also, there is wide variability in how researchers define the term. In a study based on a web-based survey, there was strong support for “*Communism*” as an academic norm defined from an *Openness* perspective with sharing of results and teaching materials as opposed to protecting intellectual copyright and withholding access (Macfarlane & Cheng, 2008). In another study, biomedical researchers defined, understood, and enacted the idea of *Openness* from different angles, ranging from everyday technical issues to broader institutional and policy issues (Levin et al., 2016).

At least five more perspectives need to be addressed. The first has been touched already. Studies based on viewpoints from very proliferative research groups, and from projects resulting in ground-breaking new knowledge have regularly pointed out that these represent environments with fierce competition between individual scientists and research groups. In these environments, the inner motivation to obtain results before colleagues and competitors has been a motivator, all in line with the prime importance of originality. The individual’s motivation to protect academic originality during an ongoing, not yet published project is in line with both Merton’s perspective (Merton, 1968) and is also supported by others (Hosseini et al., 2022).

The other perspective is related to the current change in knowledge production, where more research is conducted in multidisciplinary teams brought together ad hoc for limited periods to manage defined research problems. The fruitful success of such collaboration presumes that involved parties have

similar norm systems, which is a challenge in projects where researchers from both industry and academia collaborate and in collaborations across other types of cultural barriers.

The third aspect is related to the beneficial effect of Openness at a system level. An example is that the more internationally open and engaged a nation is in co-authorships and mobility of researchers, the higher the impact of its scientific work (Wagner et al., 2018).

The fourth aspect is that although Openness is a desirable norm in academic research, there are many relevant reasons to maintain secrecy, from a motivation to protect priority, credit, and intellectual property, to the need to avoid national or international security threats (Resnik, 2006). Secrecy is often the default in industrial research, where scientific knowledge is seen as a trade secret. In some industrial fields, companies only disclose data and results when required by legal authorities or to achieve financial goals. An example is a requirement to disclose research results to obtain approval for its product from a regulatory agency or to market its product (Resnik, 2006). This is very characteristic of, e.g., the pharmaceutical industry.

Finally, viewing Openness as a social norm would provide a way out of problems caused by the confusion and indistinctness caused by the present multiple uses of the term (Smith & Seward, 2017) but also an understanding of the many ways to interpret Openness in different contexts.

## The Open movement and the Open Science concept

A discussion on *Openness* in contemporary academia is incomplete without lifting forward the structural initiatives in *The Open Movement*. *The Open Movement* can be defined as an underground process that, step by step, enforces the awareness that open and free access to research materials of different characters is beneficial for an optimal distribution of knowledge to benefit society and humanity. This movement aims to make genuine *Openness* accurate, available, and usable in research. It thus links a scientific norm of *Openness* to usable practice.

The rapid expansion and meaningful growth of the *Open movement* concepts are deeply linked to the equally rapid development of digital resources for the availability of mass-stored data and the technical ease of accessing such data (Pomerantz & Peek, 2016; Schlagwein et al., 2017).

There is a broad recognition that *The Open Movement* relies on some critical elements such as *Open source* – mentioned first of historical reasons – *Open data*, *Open material*, *Open Access*, *Open peer review*, and *Open Education* (Krishna, 2020). The last defined by The European Commission as:

a way of carrying out education, often using digital technologies. Its aim is to widen access and participation to everyone by removing barriers and making learning accessible, abundant, and customizable for all.

Pioneers in the *Open Movement* process were the programmers and developers, mainly employed by universities, who, in the early days of computing, shared software, thereby obtaining reciprocal benefits and providing the ability to fix bugs or add new functions (Maracke, 2019). The Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET), which, from the late 60ies and onwards, later developed into the internet, cheered an open feedback process and peer review.

*Open source*, meaning “Free and open-source software (FOSS)”, the term was coined in 1998, has led to many globally used software products, such as Linux, Firefox, Wikipedia, Drupal, and Android (Woelfle et al., 2011). Since then, open initiatives have developed in a wide range of areas, primarily facilitated by the rapid development of digital resources with ease in communication and facilities for storage of data, e.g., GitHub; for review, see, e.g. (Corrall & Pinfield, 2014; Schlagwein et al., 2017).

Various initiatives from universities, groups, and authorities have supported and catalyzed *The Open Movement*, e.g., *OpenForum Europe (OFE)*, *Open Science Framework (OSF)*, *Center for Open Science (COS)*, *Open Science Platforms*, and *Open Science Resources (OSR)*. UNESCO has also supported several initiatives (UNESCO, 2022). One such initiative is *The Open Scholarship Initiative*, which in partnership with UNESCO since early 2015, has structured a taxonomy for the overriding concept of “*Open Science*” (Hampson et al., 2020). A framework for research training, “*Framework for Open and Reproducible Research Training (FORRT)*”, has also been developed (Parsons et al., 2022). A component of *The Open Movement* is *Open Access*. *The Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities* of Oct 22, 2003 (“*Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities*,” 2008), is one of the milestones of the *Open Access* movement, which has had an immense impact on the publication structure of scientific literature. This is heavily supported by academic libraries (Corrall, 2016), with The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) as a powerful driver (Lowry, 2012).

There is now a vast literature on *The Open Movement* and *Open Science*. One can find elements of *The Open Movement* defined differently but with considerable similarities. An example is necessary to grasp the overriding concept. The International Science Council framed an inclusive definition of *Open science* as:

Science that is open to scrutiny and challenge, and to the knowledge needs and interests of wider publics. *Open science* makes the record of science, its evolving stock of knowledge, ideas, and possibilities accessible and free to all, irrespective of geography, gender, ethnicity, or financial circumstance. It makes the data and evidence of science accessible and re-usable by all, subject to constraints of safety, security, and privacy. It is open to engagement with other societal actors in the common pursuit of new knowledge and to support humanity in achieving sustainable and equitable life on planet Earth. (The International Science Council (ISC), 2020).

Finally, the *Open science* concept is in no way related to the proliferation of predatory journals or platforms allowing *Open Access* (Krishna, 2020). Instead, the explosion of predatory journals can be seen as unwanted companion (Krawczyk & Kulczycki, 2021).

## A useful framework

Recently an onion model was taken as a helpful metaphor for conceptualizing norms of *Open science* (Bowman & Keene, 2018). This metaphor re-forms the discussion of *Open science* to the depth of information on a given study which is made available (disclosed) by authors to others. Five such layers are proposed, with increasing *Openness* for each layer.

The outermost layer, and the least open, is the concept of “by author request”, which requires that the reader initiates contact with the author, who may or may not honour a request or not respond. The next layer represents sharing study material, e.g., authors supplying all data for review and replication, e.g., in third-party open online repositories. A third layer represents sharing of syntax and output used to produce the published data, allowing the reader to assess what analyses were conducted and how. A fourth layer represents sharing all data that have been analysed, allowing an assessment of whether variables or measures are excluded and the reasons for that so that readers can follow the logical steps from raw data to the data analysis file. Finally, at the centre of the onion is “preregistration”, a process by which authors publicly document their core study logic, hypotheses, research design, and an *a priori* plan for their data, e.g., in the process of hypothesis registration. Here, authors can “timestamp” their hypotheses and analysis plans or publish peer-reviewed preregistered reports, in which authors engage both in hypothesis registration and downstream, also applying each of the previous practices, such as shared materials and shared data. The Open Science Foundation, OSF (<https://cos.io/rr/>) (Bowman & Keene, 2018) outlines this as the most rigorously peer-reviewed scientific method. Several publishing houses now support such routines with a two-stage review, with the first review based on

the design of the planned study, publication of the registered report, and after provisional acceptance, a second review based on the completed study.

Preregistration, and publication of the registered report, have evolved rapidly and with a speed well covered in terms of “The preregistration revolution” (Nosek et al., 2018). The process secures transparency around the decisions on data analysis before gathering data collection (Reich, 2021). A recent survey among researchers with experience of a preregistration process in their research show that the experiences and expectations were mostly positive with a perception that the process improved the quality of their work, although to the prize of an increase in both work-related stress and total project duration (Sarafoglou et al., 2022).

The presented framework shows that *Open science* involves multiple practices and tensions. As shown by (Hosseini et al., 2022), these do not a priori reflect similar Mertonian ideals. Instead, there is an intersection where an *Open science* ideal and Merton’s “*Communism*” collide and contrast. To take a few examples. Merton had a relatively restricted perspective of what should be shared. He mentioned “discoveries and findings” (Merton, 1938, 1973). Also, he did not define the timing of sharing, although his restriction suggests sharing only when there are meaningful results to share. His “*Communism*” thus reflects sharing of significant results, while the *Open science* concept is about sharing the entire research process.

## The open scientist

The individual researchers and their characteristics are at the center of the *Openness* concept. The will of the individual scientist to share thoughts, ideas, and results is, of course, influenced by the culture among scientists, the “republic of science” (Polanyi, 1962) if you will, but also by the individual’s personality. There is a concept of *Openness* in the description of human personalities, reflecting the most comprehensive characteristic of an individual being. *Openness*, or rather *Openness to Experience*, is one of the five dimensions used to describe variations in the human personality in the personality model “Big Five” (McCrae & John, 1992).

*Openness to experience* represents the extent to which an individual is imaginative, curious, and broad-minded. This dimension mirrors a person willing to embrace new things, fresh ideas, and novel experiences. It also mirrors a person who has an appetite for new impressions and approaches those with curiosity, who is no stranger to novelty, and who is gladly approaching new adventures, experiences, and creative endeavors. This concept of *Openness* is also linked to laterality, i.e., an ability to “think outside the box” and to make

connections between different concepts and ideas. *Openness* was central to the Greek ideal of the knowledge process advocated by Plato and Aristotle (McMullin, 1985).

A person with a personality characterized by *Openness* has more creativity than anyone devoid of this. An essential factor is that *Openness to experience* interacts positively with interpersonal trust and creativity, thereby obviously being a desirable element for fruitful research (Chen et al., 2021).

## Openness and its enemies

Various “enemies” or adversaries challenge the paradigm of *Open science* and its social contract. Threats against *Openness* operate both at an institutional and an individual level. Agreements between large companies and individual universities may involve pacts that obstruct free communication and the free publication of data. Academic publishing companies carry through activities against *Open Science*. Both these are examples of institutional-level processes. Examples of individual processes are researchers’ own activities to secure originality, including patents, making it difficult for other researchers to repeat experiments. Sissela Bok phrases threats in the following words:

No matter how often denounced, the pressure for exclusivity and the incentives for profiteering, monopoly, and fraud nevertheless continue in modern science in new guises. In addition, scientists are beset with new pressures for secrecy even as scrutiny of their activities is intensified. The impact of government, business, and military policies of secrecy today reaches into most scientific undertakings and pits demands for secrecy against adherence to the fundamental norms held to govern science. (Bok, 1982)

One threat to the *Openness* that has been won as part of *The Open Movement* comes from the current global challenges in the contract between science and society. Another threat is the contemporary emergence of a market-based privatized commercial science where the private sector forms a large part of the research ecosystem (Krishna, 2020). Restrictions to publish and communicate research findings based on confidentiality agreements with external commercial clients or financiers are *legio*. Such restrictions operate in opposition to the freedom to publish. This freedom is currently secured in diverse ways, from internal policy documents in, e.g., US universities to legal regulations in, e.g., Sweden, where the Higher Education Act explicitly expresses that “research issues may be freely selected, research methodologies may be freely developed, and research results may be freely published.”

An emerging issue is how the ongoing transition to an even more market-controlled university will affect its norms and attitudes and, from the current view, *Openness*. Can university norms of independence and unbiasedness withstand more vital economic forces? As pointed out (Perkmann et al., 2013), it has been suggested that academic researchers involved in commercialization are less open and practice more secrecy than colleagues not involved in commercialization. This may reflect a goal conflict where academic entrepreneurship could impede the distribution of knowledge to the public domain (Walsh and Huang, 2014), a risk which has largely been overshadowed by the alleged benefits of allowing universities to be more entrepreneurial with increased university-industrial collaborations (Etzkowitz, 2016; Feola et al., 2021; Morisson & Pattinson, 2020).

A major threat lies in the emergence of Industry 4.0, which conceptualizes the ongoing rapid technology change with the introduction of, e.g., artificial intelligence, gene editing, or advanced robotics, and which will lead to profound industrial and societal changes (Krishna, 2020; Philbeck & Davis, 2018; Schwab, 2017). Industry 4.0 links physical, digital, and biological worlds, influences all disciplines, economies, and industries, and challenges ideas about what it means to be human (Nath & Manna, 2023). Industry 4.0 challenges, with all its promises and possibilities, but also dangers, where the new technologies develop faster than the ability of organizations to adapt and governments to control and use. This will lead to a transfer of power with significant security risks and threats to civil society and an emerging powerlessness of institutions (Schwab, 2017), and a situation where “technology drives society, while law and ethics hinder progress; innovation is seen as inherently good and virtuous while potential adverse consequences are dismissed” (Jasanoff, 2020).

Another threat lies in a “new iron curtain” created by global political powers, or tech titans, with the ability to limit the free flow of scientific data and information (Krishna, 2020).

Finally, on an entirely different level and valid at any point of time, *Openness* is severely impeded in an environment of mistrust. Mistrust is growing in a polarized society. To serve its true purpose of bringing the benefits of knowledge to society, universities must be broadly trusted (Whittington, 2022). Mistrust is a breeding ground for secrecy and individualism and, thus, an effective destroyer of the academic climate.

## Conclusion

*Openness* is an indispensable part of the collegial academic discourse. It is the basis for disseminating factual knowledge and a live academic climate. This essay has superficially touched on various aspects of *Openness* based on perspectives already flagged by others. A few general conclusions can be drawn.

First, *Openness* is not dichotomous but highly contextual. While secrecy during an intellectual process may be part of protecting academic originality, unrestricted *Openness* is expected in disseminating the obtained results as well as the basis for those results.

Second, *Openness* in its broadest sense is impossible in environments where real freedom is obstructed or non-existing. From a historical perspective, a critical factor of *Openness* in academia has been the imposed restrictions that are part of totalitarian regimes (Merton, 1938; Sigerist, 1938). Such external limitations affect, above all, social sciences, while natural sciences are more autonomous, i.e., less subject to political control, but still used for the totalitarian state (Hirsch, 1961). This perspective on the threat to science in environments with extensive political meddling has been increasingly important in the last decades, during which science as well as the free flow of information have become severely threatened (Krishna, 2020).

Third, *Openness*, with a free flow of ideas, thoughts, and results of researchers' endeavours, faces its greatest challenge in the present age of uncertainty as the science-society contract undergoes major changes. The digital revolution enabled the current *Openness* within academia. A real threat is that the increasing amalgamation of academic research with market-driven profit-oriented global industry 4.0 technologies and biomedical techno-sciences will have the opposite effect (Krishna, 2020).

Finally, the current initiatives linked to The Open Movement represent a supportive structure to change practices into more *Openness*. However, they do not replace the collegial dialogue based on a foundation – or virtue if you will – of *Openness* as a norm.

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# Organizing against knowledge – the role of carriers and mediators

*Stefan Arora-Jonsson, Maria Blomgren, Josef Pallas,  
and Linda Wedlin, Uppsala University<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

The organization of knowledge has received much attention and constitutes a mainstay in current theories of sociology, management and organization. Much of its focus has been on the positive sides of the organization of knowledge – its production, legitimization and utilization. A general presumption has been that organizations and society in general are interested in more and new knowledge; expectations of progress and expansion of our knowledge universe have been the underlying theme of this work. The problems investigated have been of the nature of how to organize the generation (innovation studies), dissemination (management and diffusion studies) and leverage of knowledge (strategic management).

Significantly less attention has been paid to how the *undermining of new knowledge* is organized. By this, we mean purposeful and systematic efforts to undermine the development and legitimacy, as well as the spreading, of knowledge that is threatening a status-quo in specific fields or areas (Carrier, 2020). Although there may be a legitimate argument to undermine and limit new knowledge – for instance, in the context of the development of products, technologies or policies that might have the potential to threaten the well-being of humanity, other species, or the planet as such (Galison, 2008), the undermining of the production and spread of knowledge can also be motivated by far less altruistic reasons. Protection of political, economic, or cultural privileges, market shares, or safeguarding of existing power structures are examples of areas where counteracting new knowledge can be seen as problematic (Proctor, 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> Authors in alphabetic order.

The state-sponsored censorship of knowledge is interesting and relevant to study, not least from a democratic and public governance perspective (Galison, 2008), but we leave this quest to our colleagues from political sciences, sociology, and other related disciplines. Instead, we focus on a more prosaic reason of maintaining existing knowledge in the context of organizations and actors operating outside the public sphere. More precisely, we turn our attention to contexts in which organizations of various types have strong interests in undermining business knowledge that challenges the fundamentals of the industries or fields in which they operate (Edman & Arora-Jonsson, 2022). Iconic examples of such instances include the tobacco and fossil fuel industries or the financial sector, where business corporations have been actively preventing and disrupting the emergence of knowledge that would expose the consequences of the business models applied by these corporations (Dunlap & McCright, 2015; Oreskes & Conway, 2011; Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008).

In this chapter, we seek to develop conceptual reasoning about how new knowledge that has the potential to threaten the existing state of affairs in a specific field is undermined and opposed as a part of a broader system of producing, validating, legitimizing, and popularizing management ideas and models. We do this by combining insights from two fields – agnotology, with its focus on systematic construction and production of ignorance for strategic purposes (Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008), and the work on the production of management knowledge as emerging from the work of and relations between, specialized actors such as consultancies, academia and media (Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002). Joining insights from the production of management knowledge, we seek to broaden our understanding of how agnosis (ignorance) can be socially constructed, focusing on the particularities of managerial knowledge – a field of knowledge/ignorance production this far not well-explored.

## Agnotology – the study of ignorance as a social construction

Organizing to systematically undermine new knowledge is far from only an act of a rouge business manager with odd ideas. From internal memos from tobacco and fossil fuel firms that have been made public through litigation (Hirschhorn, 2000; Oreskes & Conway, 2011), it is clear that the strategic importance of maintaining the legitimacy of the market for a product category by far outweighs the importance of almost any other strategic considerations that these firms could consider. Decisions on product placement, pricing, or positioning fade in the face of the risk of having the product banned, out-

lawed, or in other ways made illegitimate to consume. In such cases, undermining new knowledge – and thereby keeping the public and policymakers ignorant of the dangers of consuming/using a particular product – is the most pressing issue for firms or entire industries. As a consequence, serious attention, resources, and thoughts have been invested in this.

Studies within the field of organization theory have identified and analyzed attempts to limit the spread of knowledge that may undermine the legitimacy of an industry by efforts at agenda framing and media control (Hoffman, 1999; Maguire & Hardy, 2009; McCombs & Shaw, 1993). These studies, we argue, can be greatly enhanced by drawing on the field of sociology of knowledge, specifically, a sub-field of the sociology of ignorance (Kourany & Carrier, 2020) called *agnotology* (Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008) that focuses on the systematic undermining of knowledge.

Agnotology is the study of how *agnosis*, or ignorance, is socially constructed – often by the use of science. It is a sub-field of the sociology of knowledge, and the idea is to expand the study beyond what is known to also include what is not known (Proctor, 2008). The main point is to question the naturalness of ignorance, to see ignorance not only as a native state but also as a result of social processes in which certain types or kinds of knowledge are proliferated, whereas others do not. Important questions concern not only understanding which kind of knowledge is not more widely spread or accepted but also why. But also to track the systems of power that subjugate some forms of knowing.

Proctor (2008) distinguishes between different kinds of ignorance. Ignorance as a ‘passive construct’ (i.e., as the unintended byproduct of choices made in the research process), as a ‘virtuous’ state (when not knowing in research is accepted as a consequence of adopting certain values – for instance, the limitations of a particular research ethics code), and as an ‘active construct’ (when it is a strategic ploy). It is this third state of ignorance, as an active construct, that we are interested in: the maintenance of ignorance as a strategic organizational choice and how such strategically desired ignorance is organized.

There are a number of earlier studies that speak to this question. Perhaps most widely known is the book by Oreskes and Conway (2011) – *Merchants of Doubt*. They show the role of a handful of scientists who – at the end of the Cold War – migrated from research for the military-industrial complex to take up roles as organizers of research for the tobacco industry (Oreskes & Conway, 2008). As expressed in an internal memo – their idea was to “manufacture doubt” about research into the health effects of tobacco. This was done by several key activities and processes, briefly summarized in Kourany and Carrier (2020, p. 7):

The industry devised what Proctor calls the “tobacco strategies” to do this – strategies that included funding decoy research to distract from critical questions, thereby “jamming the scientific airwaves”; organizing “friendly research” for publication in popular magazines; establishing scientific front organizations; producing divergent interpretations of evidence regarding the health effects of smoking, and even misinterpretations and suppression of such evidence; forever calling for more research and more evidence, and setting standards for proof so high that nothing could ever satisfy them; and exploiting or actually producing divergent expert opinion (see also Michaels 2008).

Another known way to create ignorance is to demand equal treatment in media. Even if the findings that threw doubt on the hazards of smoking were much fewer and less established in the research community, it was still argued that media should provide equal coverage of both sides of the debate. After the tobacco industry litigated against and settled, the fossil fuel industry associations employed the same small group of researchers, and they used the same playbook to repeat their efforts to ‘manufacture doubt’ with respect to the effects of burning fossil fuel on climate change.

Media, in its various forms, has been identified as a key platform for engaging in the manufacture of ignorance (Bonneuil, Choquet, & Franta, 2021; Franta, 2021; Supran & Oreskes, 2021). Spreading the seeds of doubt, countering new findings, and vocalizing a different standpoint is central to efforts to maintain ignorance about new findings (Strömbäck et al., 2022). Coalitions, industry associations, and other forms of meta- and partial organizations have also been shown to be central in such efforts. Brulle (2021, 2022) charts the climate change denial coalitions in the US over twenty years, showing the ebbs and flows of membership and activities and the engagement of significantly more industries than fossil fuel producers.

## An epistemological challenge

The point that ignorance can be socially constructed and that society is kept ignorant for pecuniary or other mundane reasons is well-established and also fully consistent with the expected actions of rational economic actors in a system that does not include the cost of the full externalities of economic activities. It is an important insight that ignorance may be wilfully constructed and maintained in our efforts to understand how we can handle the grand challenges that face humankind (Edman & Arora-Jonsson, 2022). It is not, however, a straightforward task to determine *when* there is manufactured ignorance and when there is genuine uncertainty about new knowledge. Even researchers with an agenda do not normally outright falsify results but often

use more subtle methods – such as biased research design and interpretation of experiments and studies. Intent may be difficult to prove (Carrier, 2020).

In a recent study, Vesa, Gronow, and Ylä-Anttila (2020) indirectly point to a further challenge for agnotologists. The majority of the studies within the field of agnotology has been on U.S.-based firms. Being a non-corporatist society, resistance to new ideas and knowledge in the U.S. often needs to be furnished in open(ish) debate. State and industry and workers collectives are, in many cases, at an arms-length distance, and new knowledge that may induce state regulation needs to be opposed by generating broad opinions against this (Djelic, 1998; Hall & Soskice, 2001). In contrast, in a corporatist economic system, like in the Nordic welfare states, there are closer and less visible channels of influence between industry and state (Glete, 1994; Henrekson & Jakobsson, 2003). Not everything needs to be opinionated through the media; the essence of the ‘third way’ is close collaboration and discreet dialog between industry and state (Blyth, 2003; Lewin, 1994).

This constitutes an epistemological challenge for agnotologists; if media is a less important conduit of influence, how can efforts at constructing ignorance be identified? Another country-specific difference is in the use of courts to regulate the activities of firms. The U.S. system of corporate regulation is more prone to use the court system, and in which case internal documentation of firms can become publicly available – as in the cases of tobacco litigation investigated by Oreskes and Conway (2011).

We argue that one way to mitigate some of these limitations is to look to earlier work that has studied the production and spread of knowledge and, in particular, models of the spread of management knowledge. The idea is, quite simply, to make use of insights from these models and invert them; systems that have been shown to be used to produce and disseminate management knowledge should also be possible to use to create and disseminate ignorance as well.

## Production of management knowledge – a system of inter-dependent actors

How is management knowledge created and diffused in specific industries, fields, markets, or even globally is a question that Kerstin Sahlin and Lars Engwall asked in the influential book “The Expansion of Management Knowledge. Carriers, Flows, and Sources” that they jointly edited in 2002. The question, as such, was not new at the time. Nor was there a lack of research that was interested in understanding how models, ideas, and perspectives designed and developed to support the organization and governance of (primarily) business

enterprises travelled from one setting to another, but they approached the question in a novel and interesting way.

Sahlin and Engwall were part of the Scandinavian Institutional tradition that emerged in the Nordic countries during the 80s as a consequence of close cooperation between Scandinavian scholars with North American sociologists – John Meyer, Walter Scott and Woody Powell – and their French counterparts Bruno Latour, Michael Callon and Pierre Bourdieu. In their work on the production of business knowledge, Sahlin and Engwall combined two hitherto parallel streams of reasoning in their quest to explain how different actors, individually and collectively, shape the content of such knowledge as well as its diffusion and popularization.

Influenced by the translation perspective that argues that ideas do not spread but are translated into different contexts (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996), they argued that management knowledge needs to be understood in terms of ideas that are constantly re-shaped – or ‘edited’ to use Sahlin’s concept that she developed in her earlier writings – as they move across different organizational contexts. In these contexts, and in accordance with a set of institutionalized editing rules, the ideas get infused with new meanings, new content, and new packaging,

From the Stanford-based institutionalists came ideas about different types of actors that, through the production and legitimization of rationalized knowledge, contribute to the establishment of global structures (institutions) that organizations adhere to in mostly uniform ways. From this follows the implication that different actors – as they contribute to the expansion of business ideas and practices – simultaneously also limit the spectrum of alternative views (rationalities) these ideas and practices might represent. Or differently – by competing with each other in markets for business knowledge, they tend to produce and proliferate ‘more of the same’.

The work of Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall is important to our development of an understanding of how ignorance is constructed on two accounts. First, they show how the production of knowledge is not a one-off event – it is continuously produced, contextualized, and modified – and they theorize the carriers that spread management knowledge – namely consultancies, business schools, and (business) media. These actors have different roles in the production process as they relate differently to the practice that underlies the emergence and spread of knowledge at hand. Business consultancies transform existing knowledge by adjusting it and developing it in relation to specific organizational or industry contexts. Business schools are more oriented towards generating knowledge based on studies of the practice and disseminating this knowledge through teaching and selection of future practitioners. Business

media, in turn, feed the process of knowledge production by making the work of others publicly accessible – both in terms of own interpretations and by way of functioning as an arena for these actors.

Over the years, a fourth type or category of actors has been added to this trinity involved in the production and diffusion of global management knowledge. These are global change agents, which includes organizations such as think tanks (Djelic 2017; 2020 – see also Garsten in this volume), business associations, international NGOs, or labour unions (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006). These organizations, and especially think-thanks, generate business knowledge that is more policy-relevant as it is formatted in terms of ideologies and public interests rather than context and time-specific practical relevance (Sörbom & Garsten, 2023).

The role of these actors – both in relation to ‘the practice’ and to each other – is guided by a specific set of rationales, values, and preferences that shape both the ways in which business knowledge is produced and disseminated and how it is perceived and acted upon.

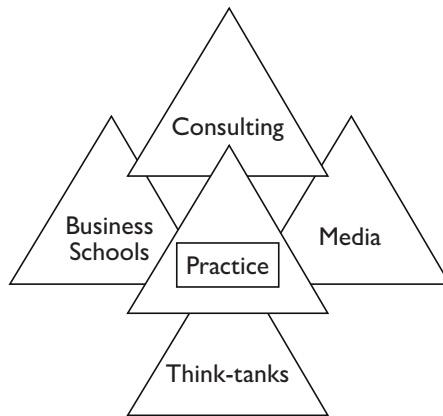


Figure 1. *Carriers of management knowledge (adopted from Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002).*

We can use the reasoning of Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall to divide rationales, values, and preferences of the different actors as relating to four types of activities through which they contribute to the production and travel of management knowledge: generating, validating, legitimizing, and popularizing. Consultancies and business schools are some of the main generators and validators of management knowledge, whereas think tanks and business media legitimate and popularize knowledge. Business schools, in this perspective, are central as they often engage in all four aspects – generating, validating, legitimating, and popularizing – management knowledge.

Table 1. *Carriers and their roles in production and proliferation of management knowledge. X=primarily focus, O=secondary focus.*

	Consultancies	Business Schools	Think-tanks	Business Media
Generating	O	X	X	O
Validating	O	X	O	O
Legitimizing	X	O	X	X
Popularizing	X	O	O	X

The main takeaway from the reasoning of Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall and their colleagues is an understanding of management knowledge as being: a) expressed in terms of ideas, models, behavioral scripts, and templates that guide, formalize, and standardize the practice of organizations within specific fields; b) directed towards practices that in essence are based on legitim norms, rules, and values; and c) formed and diffused by a work of actors/carriers that possess specific qualities to preserve and/or challenge the foundation on which the knowledge is based.

### The generation and popularizing of ignorance

Our thesis is that we can use the work of Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall to better understand how ignorance is constructed. To do this, we suggest the thought-experiment of applying their model to the creation of ignorance (i.e., substituting their term ‘practice’ for the term ‘ignorance’) and thinking about how it is generated and popularized. This leads to several insights. The model of Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall problematizes the fundamental assumption in earlier work of scholars promoting a diffusion perspective on the spread of management knowledge (e.g., Scarbrough & Swanon 2001; Abrahamson, 1996) by substituting this perspective with a view where the notion of translation is central. Analogously, ignorance is not once-off generated by researchers and subsequently diffused through society with the help of media, but it should be thought of as continuously translated and re-produced through its cycle. Moreover, instead of conceptualizing a world of creators and spreaders of ignorance, Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall help us distinguish between different stages – generation, validation, legitimization, and popularization – in which different actors can play different roles. Individually and by influencing each other’s work.

This means that in contrast to standard conceptualizations within the agnotology literature, the role of researchers is more multifaceted, from being seen as partial generators to possibly being involved throughout the entire

generation, legitimization, and popularization process. Another insight from the work of Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall is that the different actors work in symbiosis with each other. Consultancies and academics draw on each other in the generation and legitimization phases, and likewise with media. The process of generating, validating, legitimating, and popularizing ignorance is thus quite complex.

This little thought-experiment also provides potentially new questions. Some of the steps, such as generation and validation, translate easily to the standard agnotology framework, but what about legitimization and popularization? How is ignorance legitimated? What are those processes? Proctors (2008) first two forms of ignorance – as passive and virtuous – would probably require little legitimization (virtue is a form of legitimization). How is strategic ignorance legitimated? Perhaps the oft-repeated importance of economic growth as a justification is one way in which strategic ignorance is legitimated; we need to ignore the consequences of what we are doing because the alternative would preclude economic growth, and we ‘cannot’ go there. A type of ‘no alternative’ legitimization. These questions require further work. Similarly, thinking about how ignorance can be popularized gives a different angle on the question rather than asking how it can ‘spread’. The term ‘popularized’ holds the connotation of a willing choice, a satisfaction with adopting a stand of ignorance. Is that what we see? How is that achieved? How can ignorance become popularized? This is another type of question that requires further work.

### *An example from management: agency theory*

Agency theory is a management theory that represents knowledge about how to control an organization. At its core is an assumption that the people that populate the organizations are ‘...self-seeking with guile’ (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Williamson, 1975). A very broad definition of ‘control’ of an organization is that those employed in the organization are acting in ways that are consistent with the wishes of the owners of the organization. Employees, being close to operations, can, under most circumstances, be assumed to have better information about the organization and its running than the managers, and the managers know more than the owners. This information asymmetry, in conjunction with the assumption of agents being self-seeking with guile, leads to a problem that agency theory sets out to solve: how can (essentially untrustworthy) employees and managers be made to work for the interests of the owner? The solutions are complex but essentially center on aligning the incentives of the employees and the owners through formal and implicit contractual arrangements.

This is one of the most influential management theories around (Jensen, 2010), and most of the large firms around us are run according to some of its principles. It is taught in most business schools, and it constitutes a core field of management research. Some claim it is also a theory that is harmful to organizations as well as societies (Ghoshal, 2005). By assuming that people are untrustworthy and rigging management systems to treat people as such, agency theory risks making people untrustworthy and undermining the functioning of organizations and societies.

Whereas this is not the place to ‘settle the score’ with agency theory, it can serve as a useful example of how agnotology can be usefully infused with an understanding of how management knowledge is generated and popularized. We thus set aside the judgment on agency theory but treat it – for the sake of argumentation – as an example of the largely successful creation of ignorance in the sphere of management knowledge. Its arguably hazardous effects on organizations and society seem to have been successfully muted, as there is relatively little current discussion about these issues among business schools and practitioners. The question then becomes: how is it that we are (by and large) ignorant of the detrimental effects of using agency theory as managerial knowledge?

The first step in an analysis would be to investigate the generation of such ignorance. The first question is to ask what type of ignorance this would represent. Proctor (2008) distinguishes between ignorance as a passive (resulting from research choice), virtuous, or strategic state. This is not a simple question. A guess would be that ignorance may have been initially passive; researchers did not think about the possible negative effects of the theory and, therefore, did not design studies that even considered the possibility. Also possible is that once the theory had become popularized and legitimated in business schools, and generations of scholars had staked their careers on becoming agency theory experts and consultants, there could be incentives for ignorance to be strategic. Especially as neo-liberal think tanks have picked up the underlying principles of agency as a part of their policy suggestions, such as those focusing on reforms in the privatization of welfare services (Christiaens, 2020). There would have been costs, career-wise and otherwise, with letting go of the ignorance of the negative effects of agency theory.

A second step in analysis would be to look closely at how such ignorance could be generated, validated, legitimated, and popularized. Here is where the work of Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall (2002) comes to the fore. A summary of such an (imaginary) analysis can be seen in Table 2. Important is to see that, in contrast to many earlier studies in the field of agnotology, researchers (at business schools) are present throughout the process, from generation to

Table 2. *Carriers and their roles in production and proliferation of ignorance in the context of agency theory. X=primarily focus, O=secondary focus.*

	Consultancies	Business Schools	Think-tanks	Business Media
Generating	O	X	X	
Validating	O	X	O	
Legitimizing	X	X	O	O
Popularizing	X	X	X	X

popularization. We are, thus, possibly at the absolute core of the production of ignorance. Also interesting to note is that the media, which in standard agnological studies are quite central, seems to be less central in this setting. This is, naturally, an imaginary analysis that also needs to be contextualized with respect to the economic system in which it operates. In Sweden, for instance, a few business groups and the business school that trains most executives for industry would likely be important actors in the construction of ignorance.

The symbiosis between actors is another aspect that the model of Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall brings to the fore. Consultancies and business school academics are, as have been shown earlier, symbiotically related in the generation, legitimization, and spread of knowledge and would likely be so in the construction and spread of ignorance. Business school researchers, especially in times when outreach is becoming more central to the standing of researchers – individually and as a group – will also be symbiotically related to think-tanks. Having your findings picked up and enacted into policy is status-enhancing, and think-tanks benefit from having ‘cutting edge’ ideas from research. Those researchers who have staked their careers on agency theory and think tanks that have promogulated these ideas for policy implementation will likewise be symbiotically interested in keeping doubts about the theory as invisible as possible.

## Discussion

The question of why so many socially and environmentally unsound practices persist requires a better understanding of how society, broadly, can develop and maintain collective ignorance. How come we persist with activities that are so harmful? If we can understand this, the reasoning goes, it may be possible to undermine some of the creation of such ignorance and, thereby, make the world a better place (the alternative is that we are, in fact, not ignorant and that the state of the world is irredeemable is too gloomy to take seriously). Fundamental to this perspective is the idea that ignorance, like knowledge, is a

social construction. Agnotology is the study of ignorance, and this is a central concept on which we have built this chapter.

We have argued that we can better understand the question of ignorance in society by drawing on what we know from the generation and popularization of management knowledge. We simply performed the thought experiment to use the model popularized by Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall (2002) but ‘turning it around’ to ask how ignorance – rather than knowledge – is generated and popularized. This allowed us to develop further our understanding of the construction of ignorance, by suggesting that it is an ongoing process that can be conceptualized in four steps: generation, validation, legitimation, and popularization. We have further seen that this perspective suggests that researchers, in many instances, can be far more important in this ignorance production system than earlier thought. Not only do we generate and validate, but we can also serve as crucial elements in the legitimation and popularization of ignorance.

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# COLLEGIALITY AND GOVERNANCE



# An island of collegiality

## Notes from the university “shop floor” of teaching

*Anders Forssell*, Uppsala University

*Lars Fälting*, Uppsala University

*Emilia Kvarnström*, University of Gävle

### Prologue

In 2016, Kerstin Sahlin and Ulla Eriksson-Zetterquist published the book “Kollegialitet – En modern styrform” (“Collegiality – A Modern Mode of Governance”). At the biannual conference of the Nordic Academy of Management in Bodö in 2017, Kerstin then held a keynote talk on collegiality. By coincidence, at the same conference, we presented a paper in which we tried to show how collegial discussions helped develop the professional judgement of a team of teachers. In their book, Kerstin and Ulla claim that collegiality in contemporary universities exists as scattered islands of a diverse range of collegial practices<sup>1</sup>. In this essay, we claim that the teacher team we described could also be defined as such an island.

At the time of that conference, we never got the opportunity to discuss issues of collegiality with Kerstin (or Ulla). Therefore, we are taking this opportunity to do that. So, in this essay, we will seize upon some of the ideas on collegiality presented by Kerstin and Ulla and discuss them in the view of our own experiences from the “shop floor” of teaching – more specifically from the practices of a teacher team in which we, the authors, were involved for several years.

We start this essay by summarizing some of the most important points on collegiality made by Kerstin Sahlin and Ulla Eriksson-Zetterquist (2016 a, b). Then we shall present the course that we were involved in, focussing particularly on the team meetings and the marking camp where collegial discussions

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<sup>1</sup> Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist coin the concept “islands of collegiality” in chapter 3 in their 2016 book.

took place. We then end the essay by discussing our experiences in light of the ideas of Kerstin and Ulla – and vice versa. Our common purpose, we believe, is to find ways to bring all of the separate islands of collegiality closer together.

## What is collegiality?

When collegiality in universities is discussed, it almost exclusively concerns issues of governing and the formal structures and procedures for decision-making. In these discussions, collegiality is often criticized—for instance for being slow and inefficient, but also for being elitist and undemocratic (e.g. HSV 2001). In short, for critics, collegiality is obsolete and other modes of governing universities, mainly bureaucracy and managerialism, are proposed. The former has been around for a long time, co-existing with collegiality, but also in a constant struggle with it for influence. Managerialism is newer, surfing on the backwash of the New Public Management reforms of the '90s, becoming increasingly influential and, according to Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2016b), even rising to be the dominant mode of governing in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In several works, Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2016a, 2016b) have set out to investigate collegiality, what it is, and how it works. Although they focus on collegiality as a form of governing, they remark that “collegiality is as much a culture of how work should be pursued as it is a structure for planning, decision-making and follow-up procedures. Collegiality, in other words, should primarily be defined as a work process.” (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016a, p.3). To further emphasize this concrete and practical aspect of collegiality, they write: “...collegiality is verified and renewed when it is practiced. And similarly, collegiality will not be verified and renewed when not practiced.” (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016b, p.53, our translation).

According to Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist, collegiality cannot exist without the presence of a *collegium*: a professional group of colleagues who are engaged in the governing of affairs. They add that historically, the collegium in the university used to consist of the (full) professors (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016b). But, following what they write about collegiality as a work process and a culture, we would like to broaden the concept of collegium to include all professional groups that are engaged in some sort of common enterprise where collegial discussions are at the centre. These discussions could have different aims; one is to come up with proposals and decisions on the issue at hand.

With a broader definition of collegiality, this also means that collegiality as a way of working is not limited to universities. It can be found in many

knowledge-based organizational settings. Here, Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist mention media, consulting, architects, and lawyers as other contemporary examples of spaces where collegial ways of working can be found (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016b, p.82). Although collegial modes of governance are old – Weber (1983) traced them from the antiquity to his time – the examples above show that they are highly relevant even today. Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist even claim that collegiality is very much a modern mode of governance.

Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist give several instances of collegiality in universities but in particular, they emphasize the importance of the *seminar*. “The seminar is not only one example of collegiality as a work practice; it is also the forum where you learn, develop and form collegiality” (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016b, p.74, our translation). Central to the seminar is the open discussion among colleagues. The aim is not necessarily to come to an agreement but to achieve a better understanding and an increased knowledge of the issue that is discussed. The seminar is an institutionalized forum for the handling of scientific disputes. The arguments should matter rather than the position or status of participants. Even if this ideal is not always completely fulfilled in practice, the idea that the strongest argument should prevail is deeply entrenched within academia.<sup>2</sup>

*Collegial discussions* are not only crucial for a healthy seminar culture. We would argue that collegial discussions are crucial for all “islands of collegiality”: for the seminar itself, of course; in committees electing academic leaders or deciding on promotions and the employment of teachers and researchers; and for the application of peer review in regard to decisions on publication and research funding. In Sweden, collegial panels of experts have also been used for evaluating the research and teaching of colleges and universities.

All these examples are mentioned by Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist, but we would like to add the many meetings, conferences, working groups, committees, and boards at all levels of academia. We, the authors of this chapter, have attended many meetings of different kinds and purposes. Collegial discussions were used there to come to a better understanding of a certain problem or issue and sometimes even to come to a decision, for instance concerning a new course or program. The same probably applies to all organizations that use forms of collegiality.

Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist discuss matters of *judgement* concerning collegiality. For instance, they criticise the increasing use of bibliometrics

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<sup>2</sup> Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist discuss the deviations from the ideals of collegiality in chapter 4 in their 2016 book.

when research and teaching are evaluated, a use that they mean “hollows out collegial judgements” (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016b, pp. 71–72). We would like to stress this point further. We believe that matters of judgement could be seen as being at the core of the practice of researchers and teachers. Hasselberg (2009), for instance, claims that the professional judgement really constitutes the identity of professional groups.

The professional judgement often exists as tacit, unspoken knowledge (Bornemark, 2020) but is possible to articulate and make explicit, and can thereby be shared with others, with colleagues. But not anything goes. The professional must argue for his/her assessment based on the norms and criteria that are accepted within the profession. These norms create a “space” that separates what is acceptable from what is not acceptable. Within this space, assessments can differ between two professionals. This means that two simultaneous assessments can be reasonable and legitimate, and it is possible to argue for both. Lamont uses the term “scientific taste” to denote this difference (Lamont, 2009). These arguments constitute the core of the collegial discussion where a professional assessment is made.

University teachers are a professional group that use their judgement skills to assess the work of both students and colleagues. This is practiced and exercised in many contexts but foremost in the research seminar. In teaching, there are fewer similar established organizational settings for collegial discussions of this kind. Instead, they must be created within a course or a department.

When Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist list “islands of collegiality”, most of them concern research or governing issues (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016b, ch 3). Since teaching is the other major task of universities, there should be similar islands there. We claim that the teacher team constitutes – at least potentially if not always actually – such an island.

## Collegiality at the “shop floor” of teaching

Above, we emphasized the importance of collegial discussions as “the engine” of collegiality as a culture and way of working. In this section, we will therefore focus on two organized settings that were created to enable and facilitate collegial discussions within a course. The first of these organizational settings was the weekly teacher team meeting, where student seminars and lectures were planned and prepared. The second was the “marking camp” that was held during the final week of the course. Student papers were assessed and graded at this camp.

The course that we are basing our experiences on was called *Marknadsföring och Organisation* (Marketing and Organization). It was the introduction

to the Bachelor Programme in Business and Economics at Uppsala University. The course started in the autumn term of 2010 and went on with minor changes until the spring term of 2020. Two of the authors, Anders and Lars, created and headed the course for several years. The third author, Emilia, participated as a junior teacher on several occasions.

All teachers voluntarily chose to teach on this course. Some taught there for several years, while others for shorter spells. The teacher team came to consist of a mix of senior and junior teachers with many of the latter being doctoral students at the time. In this sense, the course served as a “teachers’ school” where many junior teachers got their first experience of teaching. They also got their first experience in evaluating, assessing, and marking the performances of students.

The course ran for nine to ten weeks, equal to half the term, and represented 15 ECTS credits. The course ran twice a year: every fall and spring term. The number of students varied between 260 and 320, which made it the largest course at the department. Half of the students took the Bachelor’s program in Business and Economics. For these students, this course was often the first course taken at a university level. The program was one of the most popular at the university. The students, aside from being young, had very good grades from upper secondary school. The other half came from other university programs, like law or engineering or took the course as a separate, free-standing course. This half of the students was generally a few years older than the first half.

The course was divided into two parts. During the first part, the focus was on the course literature. Every week a new theme was introduced, for instance consumer marketing. The weekly theme was introduced by several lectures for all students and ended with a seminar held in smaller groups. This first part ended with a written exam. During the second part, the students worked in teams of three to four and wrote a course paper of ten pages and a short (three or four pages) individual essay on a theme related to the course literature.

The students were divided into seminar groups (classes) of 20–25 students. The seminar groups were then divided into teams of three to four students. In this way, the course consisted of a number of seminar groups (A, B, C, etc.), each containing about five to six teams (labelled A1, A2, etc.). For the whole course, this meant that there was a total of 60–80 teams.

The seminar groups met for a seminar about once a week under the supervision of a teacher. Most teachers were responsible for two such groups. The student teams prepared the seminar by working with a specified assignment. The assignments differed dependent on the theme. If the theme concerned consumer marketing, the assignment could, for instance, deal with the marketing strategy of a particular company. The data could be gathered from dif-

ferent types of sources: web pages, interviews, or their own observations for some examples. Then, the task could be to present their findings and analyse those observations by using concepts/models from the course literature. One main idea behind the seminar assignments was to get the students to understand the distinction between a common-sense analysis and an analysis based on theoretical assumptions.

## Settings for collegial discussions

### *Teacher team meetings*

The day before the seminar, the teachers gathered for a team meeting. Ideally, the teachers would have had time beforehand to read the students' assignments. Based on these and the weekly theme of the course, the teachers used the meeting to prepare the seminar. The seminars had a basic structure consisting of one or two group exercises, supplemental to the home assignment and the weekly theme, done in small mixed groups (five to six students), followed by a discussion as the whole group led by the teacher. At the teacher team meetings, those exercises were presented, discussed, and eventually modified; tips on how to structure the seminar were shared and a rough schedule for the seminar was outlined. At the meetings, other tasks were also discussed and divided among the team; for instance, it was decided who should construct the upcoming written exam.

The teacher team meetings were based on the idea of collegial discussions. The head teachers led the meetings, but all teachers were invited to take part in the discussions and to provide suggestions for alteration. Often the meetings evolved into a true and engaged seminar where concepts, models, and theories of interest that particular week were discussed, or the discussion could even turn into a mini seminar on research methods or philosophical issues.

### *The marking camp*

During the latter part of the course, the students individually wrote an essay on a given theme (e.g., "Winners and losers of globalization") and in their teams, they wrote an elementary but full paper on one of the course themes under the supervision of their teacher. These papers followed a standard template with an introduction, theoretical framework, methods, investigation, analysis, and conclusion. The papers were discussed at the final seminar where the basic teams commented mutually on each other's papers.

The final seminar was scheduled on the Tuesday or Wednesday of the last week of the course. On the Thursday and Friday, the teachers gathered for the "marking camp". The purpose of this camp was basically twofold. The first

	1AG	2IL	3LF	4AT	5DB	6BK
EK A	G- VG	G VG	G VG	VG G+	G G	G G
EK B	G G+	G G	G G	G+ VG?	G+ VG	G G
OJ C	VG G+	G G	G G	G G	G G	G G+
FS D	G- G	G G+	G+	G G	G G	G- G
OJ E	G G	G+ G+	G G	G+ G+ G	G+ VG	VG G+
IL F	G G+	G VG	BLANK	G G	G+ G	G+ VG
LF G	G G	G+ VG	G G	G+ G+	G+ VG	G- G+
KH H	G VG	G+ VG	G+ G-	VG+ VG	G VG	VG VG
IL J	G- G	G G VG	G G	G G	G G	G G+
AG K	G G+	G G G	G+ G-	G G	G G	G G+
AG L	G G	VG VG+	G G	VG G-	G G	G G-
KH M	G VG	G+ VG	G G	G G	G- G	G G
N	VG	G G	G- G	G- G	VG VG	G G

Figure 1. The marking whiteboard. Rows indicate seminar groups (black letters) and columns indicate the basic teams of each seminar group. Initials indicate teachers (supervisors – rows, second reader – columns).

was to finish all the marking within the time span of the course rather than prolonging it for weeks, as had been the case in the past. The second was to do the marking through collegial discussions.

On Thursday morning, all teachers met and then drove to a conference centre. The conference centres we chose were situated in the vicinity to minimize travel time but still far enough away to prevent the teachers from coming and going. The idea was that the team should stay at the centre until “mission completed”, i.e., all marking was done and registered.

The team members were asked to bring two copies of each paper with them to the camp. The papers were distributed among the teachers; every paper was read not only by the supervising teacher but also by a second reader. This means that each paper was read and marked by two readers/teachers. After the papers were distributed, an intense reading started. Late in the afternoon, the reading was finished and now the teachers started to fill a whiteboard with his/her suggestions for marks.

The picture shows how it looked when all teachers had written their suggestions for marks (Figure 1). On rare occasions, papers could be marked as Failed but four marks were mostly used: G- (not satisfactory), G (passed),

G+ (better), VG (passed with distinction). For every paper, the second reader wrote his/her suggestion for the mark on the left and the supervisor on the right.

Cases in which the marks differed more than one step were circled. In these cases, the two teachers involved had to discuss and argue for their marks. The supervisor had the final decision. If two readers were unable to agree, a third teacher read the paper to help reach a final verdict. In many cases, the teachers also discussed papers even when they did agree. Actually, most teachers found these discussions fun and interesting and a lively and engaged discussion often took place.

Through these discussions, the professional judgements of the teachers were tested and calibrated. By having to argue for one's marks, the teachers had to formulate what were otherwise often unclear or tacit assessments. Listening to and comparing one's argument with the arguments of others furthermore helped the teachers to develop their judgement skills.

The first day of the camp ended with a dinner. The next day, a few hours were first used to discuss and calibrate the marking of the individual essays. Then, the teachers engaged in a short evaluation of the course: what worked well, what did not, and what could be improved for the next term? After this evaluation was finished, the marking camp was over. For all teachers, except the head teachers, this also meant that very little work remained. So, on Friday afternoon when we left the conference centre, the course was actually over for the majority of teachers. Through the collegial discussions that had taken place, their professional judgements had been tested and, presumably, sharpened.

## The teacher team – an island of collegiality

Since managerialism has become the dominant mode of governance of the contemporary university, Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist concluded that collegiality nowadays mostly survives as scattered islands of collegial practice. With the broad definition of collegiality and collegial structures used in this chapter, we claim that the teacher team described above constitutes one of those islands. Certainly, there were elements of managerialism present: the course was headed by two senior teachers who were assigned by the department. These two planned most of the course beforehand, such as schedules and student assignments, and they also headed all teamwork. But plans could be revised. The whole team of teachers were invited to discuss and eventually change, for instance, the assignments for and outlines of student seminars.

If collegiality is not only a mode of governance but also a culture and a way of working, there is a need for introducing and socialising junior participants into collegiality. To this end, being part of a teacher team helps. We interviewed three junior teachers, and they all appreciated the way of working practiced at the course.

Regarding the teacher team meetings, one junior teacher reflected that at first, he was mostly listening and collecting ideas at the teacher team meetings as he did not have enough experiences to contribute himself. After some time of teaching, he was able to participate in the discussions and to share ideas and said: “At the first semester I copied the ideas discussed at the teacher meetings, later I started to experiment and combine ideas myself”.

Another junior teacher described how she used the teacher meetings as a way to test ideas. She asked: “What do you think about doing the seminar in this way? Most often the answer has been – yeah why not? Try it”. She highlighted that she had appreciated this freedom and the possibility to try her own methods and ways to conduct a seminar.

Reflecting on the marking camp, the marking moderation that took place was an opportunity for junior teachers to get a feeling for what a good paper is. One junior teacher summarised it as: “the first year, I didn’t really know what to look for [in the papers], I had no frame of reference to compare with”. All three junior teachers admitted that they had been nervous to participate in the marking camp the first time, and specifically to reveal their marks. One of the reasons was that it was a “little bit scary” if your own marks would differ significantly from the second marker’s. Another junior teacher stated that it had also been important to hear that even senior teachers did not always agree on the marks. Another experience put forward by the same junior teacher was that she had learned to argue for her point in marking discussions. She had also learned, however, that it is possible and sometimes valuable to change her opinion after hearing the arguments of other teachers.

The marking camp was also described as a place for discussing pedagogical issues that were not directly related to the specific course. One junior teacher says that questions such as ‘what is teaching actually about’ or ‘how does teaching differ at universities and schools’ were discussed. Furthermore, the junior teachers saw the marking camp as a place for forming an identity as a teacher. However, this identity formation was not formalized in a specific activity. It was rather something going on continuously during the marking moderation, the meta-discussions and the side activities such as breakfast, dinner, and transportation back and forth to the camp.

Did we, Anders and Lars as head teachers, always deliberately try to apply a collegial way of working? The answer is no. The team meeting was used in

many large courses as a way of organising the teacher team, so we did just as we were used to without giving it much thought. The marking camp was an innovation, but it did start out of frustration: the grading of papers took weeks when the teachers were left on their own to finish it, so we tried to make it more expeditious. It was only later that we realized that it also helped all involved, juniors and seniors alike, to sharpen their judgement skills. So, over time we started to think more and reflect on what we were doing in terms of collegiality. One major conclusion was that incorporating collegial work practices in teaching works well both in regard to practical matters of teaching, but even more so on the difficult issue of marking essays and papers that really put the judgement skills of the teachers to the test.

## Challenges to collegiality at the university “shop floor” level

Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist write that collegiality at the same time interacts, coexists, competes, and sometimes even clashes with two other modes of governance, bureaucracy and managerialism. We will not go into a detailed discussion on these two modes here<sup>3</sup>, but can only conclude that both are present even on the “shop floor” of teaching. One example where both bureaucracy and managerialism tend to mistrust collegiality concern issues of marking and examination.

The problem—from a managerial and bureaucratic perspective—with marking papers and other student work based on teachers’ judgements is that it cannot be trusted to be completely consistent: two teachers can give different marks to the same work. To solve this problem, other ways of marking are proposed. These are ways that try to replace making judgements with measuring. The most common method here is to elaborate on the criteria used for assessment, multiply them from a few to many—we have seen examples of more than 30 criteria used—and even give them different weights in an assessment matrix. Using an assessment matrix like this, the grade given will then (seem to) be the result of an, almost, automated process of summation.

This approach may look “objective” since the final mark is the result of a seemingly rational and automatic process. It is easy to justify in regard to the students. The problem is, of course, that for each criterion an assessment must be made – and it must be made by someone, a person. The seemingly objective process thus is a sum of several subjective assessments. So, how objective

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<sup>3</sup> Instead, we strongly recommend reading Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2016a, b) on these issues.

is it then?<sup>4</sup> This objection has been lifted by others, e.g., by Bloxham 2009 and Bloxham et al 2016. We, the authors of this article, do not think this to be a feasible way of solving the basic problem of achieving a fair and equal assessment and grading of essays and papers.

To make this point even stronger, we cannot replace the judgement of teachers with attempts to measure the quality of work that by its nature is not possible to measure. Instead, we have to rely on the professional judgement of teachers, and it thus becomes even more important to find ways to train and maintain their judgement skills. One such way is to plan for and create specific occasions and spaces for collegial discussions about assessing the work of students, like the marking camp at our course.

On this issue, we can once again refer back to the critique by Kerstin Sahlin and Ulla Eriksson-Zetterquist on the use of bibliometrics when evaluating research and researchers (2016b, pp.71–72). Using bibliometrics tends to turn collegial qualitative judgements into numbers, similar to the process of cutting up student papers into pieces, marking each piece separately, giving it a number, and finally adding the numbers into a final grade.

## Connecting islands of collegiality closer together

Teacher teams are common in higher education, even at universities and schools where managerial forms of governance dominate and collegial ways of organisation otherwise are weak. But as we mentioned in the introduction, besides teacher teams there are many other forms of collegiality in practice, e.g., research teams, committees, conferences, panels, working groups of different kinds, boards at different levels, or the use of peer review in certain instances. This means that many, perhaps all, academics at some point get involved in a collegial way of working and/or governing, from the most basic operational level to the highest strategic levels. Therefore, over time, they will acquire a personal experience of collegiality in practice.

However, this does not mean that the participants automatically are aware that they are involved in a collegial practice. They are even less so able to explain what characterizes collegial ways of working and to contrast it with other ways of organizing and governing, notably managerialism or bureaucracy. Here, we can refer to ourselves; although we in many ways applied a collegial way of working in our teacher teams, it was only later that we started to frame this way of working as collegial. This lack of awareness is one reason why Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist talk of islands of collegiality: forms of col-

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<sup>4</sup> In the future with the development of AI, perhaps assessment of this sort to some extent can be automated, but right now, no.

legial practices are scattered around universities, but they are not connected with each other and therefore vulnerable to challenges. In their advocacy for collegiality, Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist therefore propose that a better awareness of and knowledge on collegiality would help connect these islands and thereby strengthen collegiality.

For that to happen, they suggest that knowledge on collegiality should be part of internal courses for employees, and included whether they deal with administrative legislation, labour law, or pedagogical issues. This kind of knowledge is also particularly important when new staff is introduced. And, we would like to add, why not use their book in these courses?

But this is not enough. Collegiality must be part of many everyday discussions. In these discussions, it is important to contrast collegiality with the other modes of working and to discuss how it could interact with these other modes (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016b, pp.163–164). Doing this more frequently would help make unspoken and tacit knowledge on collegiality become articulated, explicit, and more generally known.

Our experiences from the teacher team furthermore emphasize the role that collegial ways of working, in particular collegial discussions, play in training and calibrating the judgement skills of teachers, juniors as well as seniors. For this purpose, the existence of a group of colleagues – a collegium – is crucial. Any teacher might develop judgement skills on her/his own, but then these skills risk becoming biased, private and idiosyncratic. The existence of a group of colleagues, with whom teachers can trustfully discuss and compare thoughts and assessments, instead helps them to form a common, professional knowledge on judging and assessing. This could then apply not only to the work of students but by extension also to other types of academic and scientific work. In that way, collegial ways of working in teaching could, through the accumulated experiences of the teachers involved, be transferred to other occasions, for instance when participating in examination committees at doctoral disputations or reviewing research proposals. The teachers/researchers, part of a teacher team on one occasion could at another be involved in making assessments and decisions at other levels of universities, assessments, and decisions with other purposes. In that way, the experiences and knowledge acquired at teacher teams and other collegial bodies can be become distributed over the university and help create a coherent network of collegial practices from what is now separate islands of collegiality. But for that to happen, we will need a language that enables us to talk about collegiality. For that purpose, the framework proposed by Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist makes a good start.

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# A Vice-Chancellor in action

*Lars Engwall*, Uppsala University

## Introduction

More than seventy years ago, Sune Carlson published his classic monograph *Executive Behaviour* (1951/1991) reporting on the working conditions of corporate executives. His study was a collaboration with a dozen Swedish executives, who had agreed to keep records of their activities. The results of the study pointed to a work situation characterized by recurrent disturbances. This completely changed Carlson's view of executive work (Carlson, 1951/1991, p. 46):

Before we made the study, I always thought of a chief executive as the conductor of an orchestra, standing aloof on his platform. Now I am in some respects inclined to see him as the puppet in a puppet-show with hundreds of people pulling the strings and forcing him to act in one way or another.

Sune Carlson was followed by others, among them Rosemary Stewart (1967), Henry Mintzberg (1973) and John P. Kotter (1982, 1999), who confirmed his results. Mintzberg (1991, p. 98), in a paper commenting on Carlson's study on its fortieth anniversary, thus wrote:

Executive Behaviour remains perfectly contemporary and insightful. This is largely because of the current state of this body of research as well as the sophistication of Carlson's original work [...] but also because – happily for Professor Carlson – managerial work does not really change over time. Thus rereading Executive Behaviour in the 1990s is a bit like rereading a cherished old novel: it never gets dated because insights into human nature never lose their appeal. Indeed, again like that novel, the passage of time can render those insights even more penetrating.

However, Stefan Tengblad (2002, 2006), following up Carlson's study, found that executives in the present century experience longer undisturbed periods. He also found that executives spent less time in their offices and were travelling more. The first difference can be explained by an increasing creation of

boundary-spanning units that protect the executives (Engwall, 2018a), while the latter is an effect of increasing internationalization.

Another modern strand of leadership research concludes that the role of present-day leaders is to make sense of the activities of subordinates rather than to direct their work (see e.g., Smircich & Morgan, 1982). This applies particularly to organizations with loosely coupled activities. Among them, professional organizations – where the employees make a career by being prominent in their profession – constitute prime examples. In addition to classic examples, like doctors, lawyers, and accountants (Abbott, 1988), academic faculty belongs to this group. Like hospitals, law firms and accounting firms, universities require a special type of leadership in that they depend on the professional competence of the various individuals. Leaders in such organizations, as pointed out by Goodall (2009), therefore to a high extent build their legitimacy on their professional competence. Traditionally, university leaders have therefore been elected as *primus inter pares*. In recent decades, however, there have been a number of deviations from this recruitment method. Among them, the University of Oxford constituted a spectacular example as this institution, starting education in the eleventh century, brought in an external Vice-Chancellor in 2004: John Hood, a businessperson from New Zealand. Also, his successors – first the Yale provost Andrew D. Hamilton and after him, the Vice-Chancellor of St. Andrews, Louise Richardson – were brought in from the outside. In contrast to Hood though, they had both a solid research background. There is also similar evidence from other universities of this development of external recruitments. Studies of the recruitment of Vice-Chancellors to a population of Swedish universities and university colleges (Engwall, 2014, 2016, 2021) thus demonstrate that by 2021 all 30 institutions in the population had had at least one externally recruited Vice-Chancellor.

Against the above backdrop and the increasing significance of academic institutions, this paper will provide further insights into the conditions of Vice-Chancellors. In so doing, the paper will use a method similar to that of Sune Carlson by means of an analysis of the diary notes covering half a year for one Swedish university Vice-Chancellor as well as an interview with the keeper of that diary. Before presenting the results, the following section will briefly summarize earlier research on academic leadership.

## Academic leadership

The difficulties of leading academic institutions have been highlighted in a study by Carin Eriksson (1997) on the working conditions of heads at four departments at Uppsala University (see also Engwall & Lindvall Eriksson, 2012). Using Sune Carlson's diary method, she was able to confirm that the situation of Department Heads was very similar to that reported in the study of CEOs in the 1950s. They experienced a very fragmented life and were under constant pressure to provide information and to solve problems in a way that led Richard Cyert and James March (1963) to characterize organizations as fire brigades responding to upcoming problems. She also found the demands on Department Heads to be diverse and incompatible. They had expectations of being prominent in all areas: knowledgeable administrators, established researchers and experienced teachers. At the same time, Department Heads had expectations to be a colleague, servant, adviser and inspiration as well as a manager, strategist, diplomat and decision-maker (Eriksson, 1997, pp. 42–43). In this way, the role of Department Head for many appeared to be very unclear and difficult to handle.

Carin Eriksson's study of heads of department not only supports Sune Carlson's results, it also presents findings consistent with previous studies of academic leadership. In a study of British Vice-Chancellors, Middlehurst (1993) thus, like Goodall (2009) later, concluded that academic leaders need to have a broad legitimacy in order to carry out their duties and the tyranny of short-term requirements. Similarly, in an earlier study of Vice-Chancellors of universities and university colleges in Sweden (Engwall, Levay & Lidman, 1999), there was evidence in line with the results reported by Carlson. While the Vice-Chancellors wished to give high priority to long-term strategic work, they were in practice primarily devoting their time to short-term tasks, particularly representational duties.

In addition to the above-mentioned monographs by Middlehurst (1993) and Goodall (2009), a number of books have extended our knowledge regarding academic leadership. There are encounters of earlier university and college presidents (e.g., Bowen, 2011; Casper, 2014; Kennedy, 1997; Kerr, 2001; Kerr, Gade & Kawaoka, 2003; Weill, 2009; and Wilbur, 1960) as well as portraits of university presidents (Padilla, 2005). Others have dwelled upon the changing conditions for academic presidents in the 1990s (Bornstein, 2003) and analysed failures of university leaders and how to prevent them (Trachtenberg, Kauvar, & Bogure, 2013).

Together the mentioned titles illustrate well the multifaceted task of top university leaders. Nevertheless, a study by means of Sune Carlson's diary

method appears to add to our understanding of top university leaders in action. The results of such an empirical study follow.

## The data and the context of the study

### *The data*

The former Uppsala University Vice-Chancellor Stig Strömholm facilitated the diary study as he kindly made available his agenda for the period June 6, 1990 to December 16, 1990. In order to transfer the handwritten diary into digital form with optimal accuracy, Ingrid Fagerström, Stig Strömholm's former secretary, assisted in the transformation of the content into a Word file. A conversion of the text into an Excel file resulted in 383 entries with information regarding day of week, date, month and activity.

As shown in Figure 1, the average number of entries per day was 2.7, with the highest average in September and the lowest in August, both a result of the transition from the summer break to the start of the fall semester. Looking at the variations of entries between days of week (Figure 2), there were averages of 3.0 and above during the first four days of the week with a maximum on Tuesdays. Even Saturdays and Sundays had their entries.

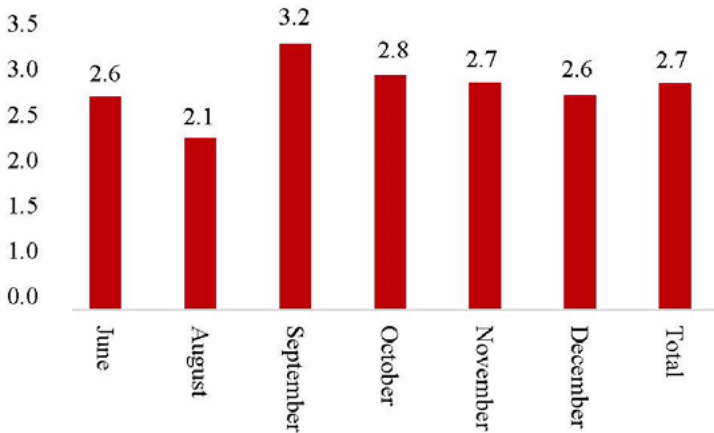


Figure 1. Average number of diary entries per day and month.

The entries included texts amounting to 1,668 words and 11,173 tokens. After deleting punctuation marks, figures, and words of less importance for the analysis such as conjunctions, prepositions et cetera, the population for analysis consisted in total 490 different words with 1,343 occurrences.

Obviously, the diary used for this paper is not comparable to the diaries of the managers in Sune Carlson's study. Strömholm's diary only covers *appointed*

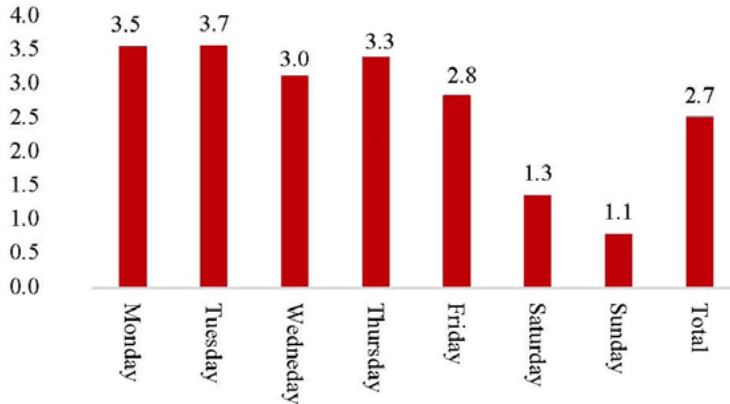


Figure 2. Average number of diary entries per day of week.

activities. Therefore, it cannot shed light on the unplanned interruptions of phone calls, interaction with staff members, spontaneous visits, etc. Nevertheless, the data provides significant information about the actions of a top university leader.

In addition to the diary, an hour-long video interview provided further insights. This interview was the first in a series of interviews with four former Vice-Chancellors of Uppsala University, all digitally available (Engwall, 2009). In the following, evidence from the Strömholm interview supplements the diary information. However, before turning to the results it is appropriate to provide information about the context of the study.

### *The context of the study*

At the time of the diary notes, 1990, Sweden had six universities (Uppsala, Lund, Gothenburg, Stockholm, Umeå, and Linköping), five professional schools (the Karolinska Institute, the Royal Institute of Technology, Chalmers Institute of Technology, the Stockholm School of Economics, and the Swedish Agricultural University), and 18 regional colleges. With the exception of the private Stockholm School of Economics, all of them were state institutions. Uppsala University and Lund University (founded in 1477 and in 1666, respectively) were the oldest. In the nineteenth century, there were a number of new foundings in Stockholm and Gothenburg. The universities in Umeå and Linköping and the regional colleges appeared in the 1960s and the 1970s.

In the autumn of 1990, the 29 institutions mentioned above had totally 152,131 students. Of these, around 10 per cent were students at Uppsala University making it the fourth largest Swedish university at the time after the universities in Lund, Stockholm, and Gothenburg. None of the institutions

charged student fees. Admission to academic studies was based on *numerus clausus*. Overall, the universities and the university colleges were relatively strictly regulated by the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance. The Vice-Chancellor was still the chairperson of the University Board, which had equally strong representation from (1) externals, (2) faculty members, and (3) students and non-faculty employees.

Uppsala was not only the oldest university but also the most complete institution, with faculties of Theology, Law, Medicine, Pharmacy, Arts, Languages, Social Sciences, Educational Sciences as well as Science and Technology. Totally, Uppsala University at the time had revenues of MSEK 1,700, of which the main part (two-thirds) was government funding (*Verksamhetsberättelse 1989/90, Uppsala universitet*).

## To become a Vice-Chancellor

Stig Strömholm was born in 1931, and at the time of the analysed diary, he was 59 years old. He holds law degrees from Uppsala but also from Cambridge and Munich. In 1969, he was appointed to a Chair of Law at Uppsala University. Four years later, he became Dean of the Faculty of Law, something he described in the interview (Engwall, 2009) in the following way:

I was elected Dean of the faculty, which is a small faculty. I think we were then say something like a dozen chairholders. You more or less fell into the ranks. I was a full professor, relatively young. One or two were impossible. There we were, and I had to accept that. Really did not think much about it. That meant automatically at that time that you became a member of the University Council, the Consistorium, which at that time was composed of the deans of the faculties. That is how I came into contact with say the central university leadership.

The Vice-Chancellor of the Uppsala University at the time was the Sociology Professor Torgny Segerstedt, who had come into office in 1955 and would stay until 1978, a tenure of almost a quarter century. Deputy Vice-Chancellor since 1970 was the Anaesthesiology Professor Martin H:son Holmdahl. As Holmdahl succeeded Segerstedt as Vice-Chancellor, Strömholm became Deputy Vice-Chancellor. Again, in his own words:

And, when [Segerstedt] left in seventy-eight, I was asked, I suppose. I mean I certainly did not offer my services, you didn't at that time. Today of course, you print brochures about yourself but one didn't. [...] I was asked by a few persons, I do not remember who in fact, whether I was prepared to stand for election as a Deputy Vice-Chancellor.



Table 1. *Words with frequencies equal or above 10 in the diary.*

Swedish word	English translation	Frequency
Uppsala universitet	Uppsala University	127
Stockholm	Stockholm	58
Besök	Visit	48
Avresa	Departure	36
Sammanträde	Meeting	32
Uppsala	Uppsala	32
Mottagning	Reception	30
Ankomst	Arrival	22
Arlanda	Stockholm Airport	22
Professor	Professor	20
Vitterhetsakademien	The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities	19
Hemma	At home	18
Lunch	Lunch	16
Hotell	Hotel	14
Rektorsämbete	President in Council	14
Slottet	Royal Palace in Stockholm	13
Institution	Department	12
SK	Flight code for SAS	12
Nation	Student nation (geographically based social club, etc.)	11
Tel	Telephone	11
Konferens	Conference	10
Kungliga	Royal	10
Sammankomst	Gathering	10

The institution – Uppsala universitet (F=127) and its location, Uppsala (F=32) – are for natural reasons frequent. However, it is also clear that the Vice-Chancellor's work took place at other locations as well. Indications are the following entries (frequencies in parentheses): Stockholm (58), Departure (36), Arrival (22), Arlanda (the Stockholm Airport, 22), The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities (19), Hotel (14), the Royal Palace in Stockholm (13), and SK (Flight code for the airline SAS, 12). These entries are thus in line with Stefan Tengblad's findings that present-day leaders travel more and spend less time in their office.

In terms of the significant tasks, the results of this study are also consistent with those of our earlier questionnaire study. The days of the Vice-Chancellor

are full of different kinds of social interaction: Visit (48), Meeting (32), Reception (30), Lunch (16), Conference (10) and Gathering (10).

### *Tasks, counterparts and locations*

A coding of the 383 entries according to the dimensions (1) Tasks, (2) Counterparts and (3) Locations provides further information. In terms of *Tasks* (Figure 4), the analysis demonstrates that more than half of them (53%) were Meetings, followed by Representational Duties (Receptions, Ceremonies, Lunches and Dinners, 36 %), Travel (12 %) and Other Activities (Lectures, Rest, etc., 7 %). In relation to Meetings, they were, using the terminology of Goffman (1959), expressions of front-stage activities. Many of them required back-stage preparations, which led Strömholm to mention “reading memoranda [...] with bad prose” as an activity that he considered as taking much of his time.

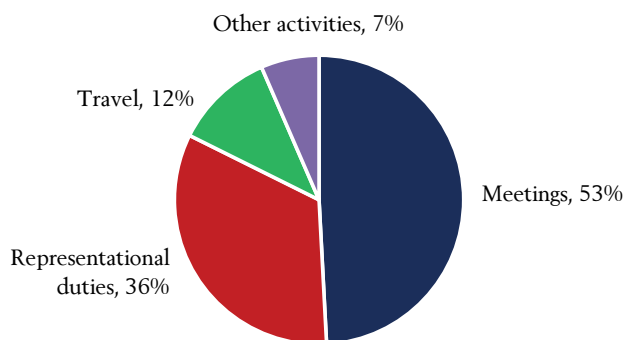


Figure 4. *Distribution of tasks (per cent).*

Among Meetings, visits to departments were an important part, particularly in the beginning, which provided insights:

I managed to get to visit [...] I think something like half the number [of the 150 departments], in my eight years [...] That was very, very interesting. Of course, there were places you saw the head of the department standing on the stairs waiting for you and bringing you into his office. Closing the door. Offering you nervously a cup of tea or coffee and no one else could hear you. And, there were others which were completely open.

In terms of Representative Duties, Strömholm in the interview pointed to the importance of Ceremonies for an academic institution:

A university should sort of appear on the stage with due pomp and not without elegance. [...] It is essential for a spectrum of community outside. Should not be done foolishly, should not be done sort of too pompously, [...] but to

anyway convince of the excellence of the institutions that they see. And, here to act with a certain dignity.

Strömholm even found the representational duties valuable:

I do not blush to say that I sometimes enjoyed it. Not necessarily because the food was good, or the wine was excellent, they were not mostly. But, you met people after all.

Among tasks not caught by the diary are (1) Long-term initiatives and (2) Threats requiring action. One of the first kind was the creation of the Ångström Laboratory:

I felt very strongly when I had been elected that there was a certain malaise in the Faculty of Sciences. [...] I thought it was very important to gain, and to gain quickly, the confidence of that sector of the university. So, I started really preparing quickly what became [...] the Ångström Laboratory as a building, a new building for some parts of the physics department, which in fact became a very big thing, and cost a lot of money. And, you had to convince the others [...] People were very loyal about that. That was my big thing.

Two other initiatives of Stig Strömholm were the creation of the University Museum in Gustavianum, the seventeenth century building housing one of the oldest anatomic theatres in Europe, and the resumption of chronicling the university's history. The latter since the existing "full-blown history ends in 1792" (Annerstedt, 1877–1931, now followed by a series of four parts of which the first is Frängsmyr, 2010).

An example of a threat was the claim of Government to consider the donations to the University as State property:

That was of course very extracurricular action for me. I mean really, I [...] faxed to the relevant Parliamentary Standing Committees, to the Prime Minister, to all the Ministers involved, saying Uppsala University will defend property in all courts in Europe and in Sweden, really. [...] We gained the day [...] and it is very secure now.

Another Government intervention, during Strömholm's first year of tenure that caused considerable tensions in the academic community as well as funding organizations was the proposal that all grants, even those from research councils, should pay overheads to cover full costs. At Uppsala University, a hearing in the University Auditorium was a clear manifestation of these strains. Afterwards, the Registrar thus commented to his new Vice-Chancellor: "The honeymoon is over".

The tasks in the diary had *Counterparts* both outside and inside the university (Figure 5). As a matter of fact, almost two-thirds (64 %) were Exter-

nal counterparts, while the remaining counterparts were Internal (30%) and Students (6%), the latter being a category in between. This means that the Vice-Chancellor largely must act as a Foreign Minister to handle external relations. At the same time, the role requires a focus on internal affairs to handle upcoming problems. However, as far as the internal counterparts are concerned, Strömholm did not complain: “The number of fools and the number of intrigues and the number of plots and conspiracies [...] is very small given the fact that there are some 5,000 high-powered individuals employed here plus 30,000 or so odd students”. However, he did admit that problems popped up, adding that “as soon as something happens of that kind, of course there as a Vice-Chancellor you can’t let it pass for a long time without trying to do something”.

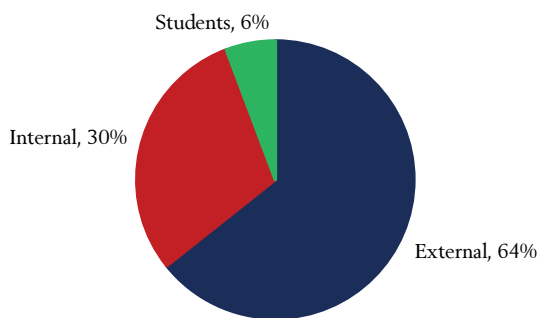


Figure 5. *Distribution of counterparts (per cent).*

In terms of *Location*, about half of the activities (47 %) took place inside the university (Figure 6). Among the different tasks, four had shares undertaken internally above the average: Reception (80%), Lunch (75 %), Dinner (57 %) and Meeting (57 %). Representational Duties were thus to a high extent undertaken inside the university with the Vice-Chancellor as the host.

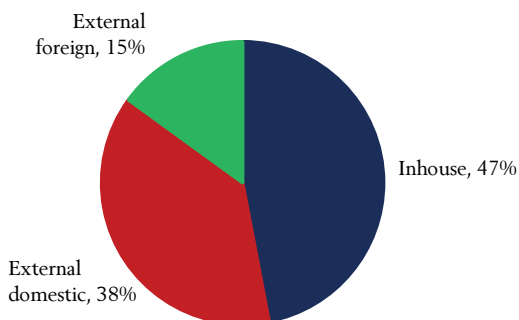


Figure 6. *Distribution of locations (per cent).*

However, more than half of the activities occurred outside the university. Of these, the larger portion (38 %) occurred in Sweden, particularly in Stockholm (a 40-minute train ride from Uppsala). The foreign external activities mirror the travelling shown in Figure 4.

## Concluding discussion

It is obvious that this study has limitations. It is a case of one individual Vice-Chancellor in one university in one country in Northern Europe, and the data is more than thirty years old. It is therefore a need to supplement the evidence presented here with data that are more recent from other Vice-Chancellors working in other institutions and in other countries. Nevertheless, there seems to be reasons to take the evidence presented above seriously since it seems to be in line with the findings in earlier research on top leaders, Vice-Chancellors included. Thus, although Strömholm was able to take certain initiatives, for instance the construction of the Ångström Laboratory, the creation of the University Museum, the resumption of the record of university history, and visits to departments, he was subject to continuous demands on his attention. On a direct question in the interview with reference to Sune Carlson's study, he thus responded:

Well, you are tied to a very great extent. I wouldn't describe myself as conductor of an orchestra, no. That would be unfair, [...]. A university is composed of a great number of units, small units of very varying quality with very different personalities. [...] I don't think it is for university leaders to say, now our strongest points are these and these, let's go in for them. Because you do not know. That may be very different three years later.

Instead, Strömholm looked upon the position as Vice-Chancellor in the following way: "the first duty is to keep the thing going and to keep the thing reasonably intact, including its property" and as a *primus inter pares* "who had to listen [and] to make people meet". This is consistent with the views expressed by the 1992–2000 Stanford President Gerhard Casper and the 2004–2008 Chairman of the Stanford Board of Trustees, Burton McNurtry. Casper (2014, p. ix) thus concluded that "University governance, to a large extent, is self-governance by faculties as constituted in departments, schools, and institutes", while McNurtry, a risk capitalist, was even more outspoken in an interview (Engwall 2018b, p. 7):

Universities are essentially inverted pyramids in that the President of the university is at the bottom of the pyramid, not the top. Because the faculty form the bulk of the pyramid and the President is basically there to do what the faculty directs or expects the president to do. [...] It's a difficult system to

manage because the President had better not act as if he is some authority figure who could tell the faculty what to do.

In terms of Tengblad's findings, the data in this study cannot shed light on the undisturbed periods but supports the observation of leaders being away from their office. Thus, more than half of the activities took place externally. A further demonstration of the external orientation is the fact that external counterparts constitute a majority.

The Strömholm case also provides some evidence of the tendency to move away from the election of leaders among professors. Strömholm's election as Deputy Vice-Chancellor had already been challenged when the Union of Lecturers tried to broaden the recruitment pool. Upon his election as Vice-Chancellor, representatives of the Faculty of Sciences launched an external physics professor as a contender. In fact, if they had succeeded, Uppsala University in 1980 would have been a frontrunner among the major universities to recruit an external candidate as Vice-Chancellor, before Lund (2000), Gothenburg (2003), Stockholm (2004), and Umeå (2010). Instead, the first external recruitment in Uppsala occurred in 2012 (Engwall, 2014).

As mentioned above, by 2021 all Swedish universities and university colleges had recruited at least one external Vice-Chancellor. This is part of a corporatization of academic leadership, an effect of large corporations through their visibility becoming role models for other organizations in society. Further evidence of this development is the introduction of courses for prospective and current university leaders. Such courses did not exist at the time of Stig Strömholm's election. They came later during his tenure:

Courses came little later in life. In fact, there was in the nineties, I remember. I was invited, when I was in fact already Vice-Chancellor as I felt myself fairly able to do the job. We were invited to sort of courses of management experts, sort of pouring out their wisdom. And, we were not always enthusiastic about that. Took us away from our job. And, mostly in very pleasant places, sort of conference hotels. But, listening to very considerable amount of rubbish I should say.

More generally, the case demonstrates the external demands on university leaders. In terms of a governance model we have developed (Engwall, 2018a): they have to handle regulators, market actors and scrutinizers. In so doing, they appear to have fewer possibilities of delegating these actions to boundary-spanning units than corporate executives do, as they have expectations to act as front figures for their institutions. In fact, a significant role of Vice-Chancellors appears to be that of boundary-spanning actors protecting their organizations from disturbances in order to facilitate teaching and research.

The external demands, in turn, take Vice-Chancellors away from their own organization, often leading to complaints that the top leaders are not visible. In order to counteract this critique, a number of Swedish Vice-Chancellors have started blogging (Lövgren, 2018). A pioneer was the Stockholm University Vice-Chancellor Kåre Bremer, who inspired a number of followers, some of them (Åkesson & Malmberg, 2020) like Bremer (2015) getting their blogs published afterwards. These blogs may also provide a future opportunity for analyses of the world of Vice-Chancellors. Other sources of studies of Vice-Chancellors are the above-mentioned interviews with former top leaders of Uppsala University (Engwall, 2009) and Stanford University (Engwall, 2018b). There can be no doubt that the topic of academic leadership is important and that we need to know much more about its nature. It would be particularly interesting to find out to what extent the work of Vice-Chancellors have changed over time and how it varies between institutional contexts. In this way, it would be possible to demonstrate whether the idea of Vice-Chancellors as strategic leaders is wishful thinking or whether it is still, in the words of Warren G. Bennis (1997), the herding of cats.

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# Travelling with an idea

*Ulla Eriksson-Zetterquist*, University of Gothenburg

## Introduction

How do ideas travel and how are they acted upon in organizations? In 1996 Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson presented her study of these processes, and introduced a concept of *editing*, describing the role of the editors, editing rules, and how editing was used out in different cases of translation. The reasons for attempting a translation could be different, too. For example, an identity crisis within an organization could lead them to imitate other organizations – similar or different, as when public sector organizations started to look at private sector organizations to find new management models. In general, however, organizations tend to imitate success, even if members of a particular organization do not necessarily know what is going on in other organizations. They translate filling the distance between the desired outcome and the model with their own ideas of how to do things.

In this chapter, I will use some of the concepts launched by Sahlin-Andersson to describe some of our joint work on collegiality and various "governance mixes" within universities, but also to analyze some of the comments I have received when travelling to present collegiality for various groups and universities. The discussions taken place at such presentations revealed a great heterogeneity in how collegium and collegiality are locally interpreted. It became obvious that the issue of inclusion in universities' decision making also awakes the question of "who is equal?", and that collegiality, surprisingly enough, brings in the global dimension of university as an institution. While the present interest in collegiality can be seen as an example of attempts to "imitate success", the experience made me realize that sometimes the presenters become the editors of this alleged success. I start with a brief description of our project and the definitions we used and will continue presenting the notes from my travels with these ideas.

## What is "collegiality?"

When the Swedish government initiated a public debate on what was to be called "the autonomy reform" for universities and colleges in Sweden, the notion of "collegiality" was suddenly up for discussions in these organizations. Soon came from many places a message "we need collegiality!", a request instantly followed by question "what is collegiality"? This question was asked by scholars, by policy makers, by employees from universities under the impact of the reform, and by the academic unions. Kerstin Sahlin (2012; 2014) was among the first to enter the debate, and therefore invited to give seminars on "collegiality and university governance". She started giving presentations at universities and colleges all over the country, and her presentations were highly appreciated. The audience left those presentations somewhat better understanding the present situation of universities.

A need emerged to learn about the history of the concept, thus the professor of history of science and ideas at the University of Gothenburg, Henrik Björck, was recruited for the task. On a commission from the Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers, (SULF), Björck (2013) prepared an overview of the origins and the historical changes of the concept of collegiality. His report attracted much attention.

In June 2012, I met Kerstin at EGOS cocktails at the conference opening ceremony in Helsinki. After we talked for some minutes, Kerstin suggested that we write a book together, joining her experience of talking about collegiality with my experience of writing textbooks. This short encounter turned out to be a start of a very exciting journey on my behalf. In December 2015 we sent the final version of our manuscript to the publisher (we have often explained this extended writing process saying that "collegiality takes time"), and in January 2016 we held the hardback printed "Collegiality – a modern governance form" (2016a) in our hands.

In the book, collegiality is defined as composed of three elements: 1. A decision-making body consisting in majority of academic staff, elected by peers to use their scientific competence in formal decision making; 2. A leadership position that is non-permanent and not full-time. While the choice is based on the principle of *primus inter pares*, leader's scientific merits are of main importance; 3. Peer review processes including external experts decide the quality and ranking of positions, promotions, research funding, and the weight of publications (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016a). We added to it a requirement for *collegium* based on the definition by the sociologist Malcolm Waters (1989), inspired by work of Max Weber (1922/1983). According to Waters, collegium participants are expected to possess high degree of exper-

tise, respect the assumption that everyone in the collegium is equal, and that decision-making must lead to a consensus,

The book was accompanied by several other publications exploring the contemporary changes of university governance in Sweden (Sundberg 2013; 2014; Ahlbäck Öberg, 2014; SOU 2015; Wedlin & Pallas, 2017, to name but a few). We have presented our ideas at various venues even before our book has been published, but with the book printed, new invitations started to arrive. We were soon regularly invited to talk about collegiality addressing university boards, faculty boards, department meetings, and the audiences at several Nordic and national conferences. One could then say, quoting Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson (1996), that in this way we became two of many editors of collegiality and university governance. Obviously, we not only presented our thoughts – we have learned a lot about collegiality from the reactions and comments to our presentations.

## Heterogeneity of imitation attempts

As Sahlin-Andersson (1996, p. 70) put it, “[t]he actual process of organizing might reveal an even greater heterogeneity than the one found by looking at presentations of labels used for various forms, reforms and practices.” Many authors who have had the opportunity to travel around to present their new study at different places, would recognize the need to update the former presentation, adding some adjustments dictated by the specificity of the expected audience, or by questions asked by the organizer of seminar or conference. As Sahlin-Andersson pointed out:

By using the term “editing”, I want to emphasize that the models are told and retold in various situations and told differently in each situation. (...) Some of my illustrations describe a process that seems to leave room for creative reformulations. Prototypes are presented in so many reformulations that they become almost unrecognizable. However, it is just as clear that it is a process characterized by social control (1996, p. 82).

A heterogeneity of ideas concerning the ways universities should be organized have also been revealed in the very invitations to seminars. Sometimes it was the Head of Department who invited me, and sometimes the HR-manager. At one university to which I was invited by the HR-manager, it turned out that the professors did not know the election procedure used by the recruitment committee of which they were members. The HR staff who organized the seminar did know and told them. “Professors will be scrutinized by the faculty board, which after a discussion, will elect those who shall represent the faculty. The elected representatives will be summoned by the HR-department

to attend the recruitment committee meetings”, the HR-manager explained. Starting from this information, the discussion at the seminar focused on clarifying issues of mandate and legitimacy of the members of the recruitment committee. Some of the professors had previously assumed that they were appointed because they were chosen by the HR-department. Having heard the description of the election process, they understood their mission within the committee much better. All of a sudden, they could see themselves as embodying the first dimension of collegiality: They were members of “a decision-making body consisting in majority of academic staff, elected by peers to use their scientific competence in formal decision making”.

At other universities and colleges where the HR-staff invited me their argument has been that “we are into a great transformation right now and need to know more about collegiality”. Yet others told me that they needed to improve collegiality within their organizing practices. As HR-staff are part of the bureaucratic governance of universities, their initiatives surprised me at first. According to the bureaucratic ideal type, HR-staff would follow bureaucratic rules and procedures, rather than being interested in the collegial governance form. Such a formal distinction was however not possible to maintain in practice, as these “bureaucrats” turned out to be the greatest supporters of collegiality in some organizations. Though it must be added that some of these HR bureaucrats were threaten by collegiality as a governance form, as they felt excluded from parts of the decision-making. I will return to this issue.

As Sahlin-Andersson noted, “change processes are problem-based”, and “local problems are constructed through comparing the local situation with that of other organizations” (1996, p. 70). Within the university organizational field, it is well known that the highest ranked universities are run by a special idea of governance (see e.g., McCormack, Propper and Smith, 2014). Such universities are often old, successful in recruiting students and scholars, famous for their research, and enjoy high legitimacy in the society at large. Even if the internal operations of such universities as Cambridge and Oxford are unknown, they are the “success models” for other universities to imitate. The distance between the model and the local practice is filled locally.

## Equals doing the editing

A central aspect of collegiality is that it is governance conducted by equals (Waters, 1989). This means, ideally at least, that the governors respect each other’s work, that they can understand and evaluate its qualities, and they

share the responsibility for managing the operations of their organizations. In the past, such group of equals was made up of the faculty professors who met regularly to discuss scientific issues, teaching matters, and governance aspects. This was also the case in Sweden until 1977, when a reform introduced both students' and administrators' representations into faculty boards. In the autonomy reform (2010), this was further strengthened, becoming a general model for various deciding bodies within universities. Thus, when giving presentations of collegiality, a core issue is to sort out who should be included. Should PhD candidates to be included? What about regular students? Adjunct teachers? It is usually assumed that lecturers, assistant lecturers, and professors should be included when the internal operations are discussed. Some universities include PhD students and adjunct teachers in the collegium. I have still not heard a discussion about collegiality pleading for inclusion of undergraduate and graduate students.

A somewhat surprising but honouring invitation came from the university librarians who wanted me to talk about collegiality, and especially about how such governance form could strengthen their contribution to the university. It was fairly easy to describe them as a collegium, as they see each other as equals, they use arguments leading to consensus in most of their decision making, and so on. Furthermore, librarians are a key asset to universities in the knowledge seeking procedure. Still, they are challenged by “seek motors” such as Google, and digital contents, it might be that fewer within universities will see them as help in information seeking, and as providers of courses in reference tools.

As mentioned above, some non-scholars have been threatened by the description of collegiality as performed by academic staff only. What about the financial officers, communication officers, and HR-staff within universities? “Shouldn't we be included in decision making, being seen as equals?” they asked. There are at least two answers possible. Firstly, each profession can, and probably does, form their own collegium, expanding over organizational boundaries (Denis, Veronesi, Régis & Germain, 2019). Secondly, according to the ideal type of collegiality, academic staff decides over the content in research and teaching (including staff issues, such as promotion, evaluation etc.), while other professions and academic staff meet to make decisions according to the other ideal types of governance, namely bureaucracy, and enterprise. After all, universities at present include all of these.

## Editing support: an example of consensus

Another question brought up at presentations concerned “consensus in decision making” (Waters, 1989). What does this mean, how does such a decision-making process proceed, if it is at all possible? On one occasion, a somewhat agitated social sciences professor claimed, that “true consensus” could very seldom, or never, be reached; hence this advocating of consensus needed to be revised. The arguments quoted made me understand that there existed research about this kind of decision-making processes that I did not know. At this occasion I immediately received support from a second professor, well-known in her discipline, who started to question the research and arguments made by the first professor. This second professor agreed that there is no such thing as “true consensus”, and no one with more insights in decision-making did expect that to occur; but something close to it could be achieved. Obviously, by quoting Waters’ (1989) statement about consensus in decision making, I had stepped into sensitive matters.

As our project has developed into an international comparative study, we have been encouraged to search for the Latin origins of concepts used<sup>1</sup>. According to Wiktionary,<sup>2</sup> consensus comes from ‘consentio’ meaning “feel together; agree”, and as expanded into ‘consensus’, the meaning is “agreement, accordance, unanimity”. One of its roots is “consent”, that is con as in together, and sentire as in ‘feel’. Collins Dictionary helps further, as *-tus* (made in English into “sus”) is a suffix of verb meaning “action”<sup>3</sup>. That is, in this definition consensus is made up of: together, feel, and act. Further explanation from Collins Dictionary sorts out difference between compromise and consensus:

A compromise is a deal between different parties where each party gives up part of their demand. Consensus is the result of a group decision-making process in which group members develop and agree to support a decision in the best interest of the whole.

Thus, the discussion about the meaning of a “true consensus” between the two professors can be given some further explanation. While the first professor who questioned “true consensus” could see compromise as the best solution, the second professor seen a possibility by reaching some consensus by the group working together over time. Thus, a decision made in consensus can be seen as the best the group (“together”) could come up with at the point of

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<sup>1</sup> Special thanks to Paolo Quattrone.

<sup>2</sup> Consensus – Wiktionary, accessed November 2, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Consensus definition and meaning | Collins English Dictionary (collinsdictionary.com), accessed November 2, 2022.

decision-making. And as indicated by “-tus”, there is also action in consensus, but not necessarily a detailed one. A group may have reached consensus as to the general direction the future actions should take, but obviously there will be further decisions to make later on, and the future consensus may take a different turn. The consensus in collegiality governance amounts to a promise about the group working together, and continuing their decision-making in agreement in the future.

## What about collegiality in daily practice?

During the first years of my travels with presentations of collegiality, the organizers of the seminars mostly asked me to present Kerstin and my work. The presentation of the ideal types for governance (bureaucracy, enterprise, and collegiality) was most often met with great interest, as they helped to label the daily practices experienced by the audience in their different university settings. After a while, however, the organizers began to ask me to say something of how they should act when the different governance ideals met and collided in daily practice. In the concluding chapter of our book such a road map has been presented under the title “A modern collegiality”. In brief, we recommended to “1. Develop the conditions for collegiality, 2. Clarify the interaction between governance forms, 3. Modernizing of the collegial governance form, 4. Maintain an active discussion of the goal of the operations” (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016a). In presentations, examples and discussion in the book were seen as somewhat too abstract. The audience wanted to know what to do in their daily work when the bureaucracy and enterprise ideals threatened collegiality.

As management of universities (like all other organizations) includes all sort of activities, constantly going on, inside both formal and informal structures, it is impossible to answer the “what to do?” question when governance ideals collide. What may be an answer to “what to do?” for instance, how to sort out bureaucratic budget aspects with collegial ideas when preparing a new course in one organization, may not at all be relevant in another setting. When one is not there, observing the development of event-evoking principles must suffice.

Other aspects of “what to do?” have concerned such issues as construction of a collegium, peer review, and the boundaries of universities. Some audiences have reported that do not have a collegium, as everybody is working on individual research projects, and there is no collaboration. As academic work and the collegium also include blind peer review (Bennett, 1998; Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016), scholars are dependent upon the international

network to develop the content and quality in their research. This means that they are already involved in a collegium, albeit at a distance. Such distance also means that the local employer may be less important in a discussion of the content in teaching and research, as the colleagues all over the world are involved in it. Indeed, those vice-chancellors, deans, and head of departments who see themselves as decision makers, rather than *primi inter pares* can become somewhat concerned about their decision realm. For scholarly work, however, global disciplinary boundaries may be of greater importance than organizational boundaries. When it comes to bureaucratic matters as budget, wage settlement, and application for leave of absence, the local organizations have more to say.

When hiding behind principles, not involving myself in the daily operations of the listeners, I as a speaker truly become a “merchant of meaning” (Czarniawska, 1990; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996), like those consultants who are travelling around, providing similar toolboxes to all organizations they visit. But in contrast to consultants Sahlin-Andersson (1996) followed in her study, the meaning we spread is restricted to the context of universities and colleges. (Another difference is of course the consultants’ fee. Sometimes I have been paid a “lecture hour”, other times received lunch or coffee as the reimbursement—nothing in comparison to consultants’ levels.) But even more important, we make it quite explicit that “[t]he distance between the supposed source of the model – a practice, or an action pattern – and the imitating organization forms a space for translation, filling in and interpreting the model in various ways.” (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996, p. 79). We do not tell our audiences “what to do”, but present a problematization of the present situation in universities, and offer ideal types, thus opening for translation into local solutions. After all,

In the adoption of a model in a setting several prototypes may be mixed or at least adjusted, so that they do not seem to contradict (Rottenburg, 1989). Thus, the editors’ translation may be affected and restricted by local tradition, or, in other words, the history of the local setting may restrict the translating. Another possibility when potentially contradictory models are adopted is that they are decoupled from each other. In such cases, one can expect each single model not to be edited as much in the local setting, but to remain decontextualized... (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996, p. 86).

Thus, the presentations of collegiality may be seen first of all as travels with the *idea* of collegiality. Its materialization and translation into practices will mix with other prototypes of university organizing, developed so as not to contradict each other, or possibly decoupled. The hope is that such presentations may provide some food for thinking into the daily messy life of organizing.

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# Project collegiality

## Boundary work and boundary integration in governing science

*Fredrik Tell*, Uppsala University

### Introduction

Recent debates in Sweden and elsewhere have yet again highlighted questions regarding the characteristics and viability of collegial governance of universities. As academic institutions, one task of universities is to nurture practices that are conducive to discovery through critical investigations and discourses. This involves both the overarching endeavor involving the scientific project as such, as well as on-going scientific practices where researchers are involved in projects engaging in the piecemeal foundation of scientific progress. Characterizing science as a project that is involving the quest in searching for the truth, Bengt Kristensson Ugglå (2023) suggests: “[...] science is a *project*, a continual process, and its primary focus of interest is upon what we do *not* know—or, more precisely, what we *do not yet* know” (p. 14, italics in original). One of the key challenges in conceiving and execution the scientific project, Kristensson Ugglå argues, is how science is to remain to be understood as a joint and shared project, despite apparent endogenous and exogenous pressures towards fragmentation. How can this tension in the scientific project be managed in academia? In this essay, drawing upon Kerstin Sahlin’s work, we take a closer look at the relation between some project characteristics of scientific practices and implications for collegial governance in academia.

In the area of management of projects, Sahlin-Andersson (1989) reports on the establishment of the project that eventually led to the building of Stockholm Globe Arena (since 2021 renamed Avicii Arena) which hosted the World Championship in Ice Hockey 1989. In her interpretation of this multi-organizational megaproject rests on a decision-making perspective she labels the execution of the project as “a strategy of ambiguity” (“Oklarhetens strategi”). Her analysis points to that provided the uncertainties and complex-

ities emanating from the number of actors involved in the project and unclear specification of its objectives, the common conditions required for the establishment of a clear project management plan and common/taken for granted ground were lacking. Instead, an emerging process of organizing served not only as a replacement but also an enabler for collecting diverse ideas, trends and intentions. Project ambiguity allowed for sharing across diverse interests by being incomplete and thus still possible to influence, creating excitement, and enabled new networks to form. Actors' preferences were thus not set initially but rather emerged over time in the decision-making process. Instead of inducing uncertainty by lack of clarity as may have been expected, such a process characterized by ambiguity allowed for involvement and negotiation among actors which eventually led to a common understanding of the project objective in terms of the label "The Globe" and subsequent action-orientation. The findings in Sahlin-Andersson (1989) are further developed and refined in Sahlin-Andersson (1992; 1996; 2002). In this essay, we focus our attention on Sahlin-Andersson (2002), where she expands on the parallels between working in projects and scientific work, in terms of boundary work (Gieryn, 1999).

As an example on Sahlin's work on university governance, Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2016a; b) discuss different governing regimes with a focus on universities. Collegiality, bureaucracy, and management governance are analytically compared and understood as parallel governance models being present simultaneously in contemporary universities. Each one is built on principles with origin in different ideal type perspectives on the organization and on how it should be governed. To put it simply, collegiality is based on self-governance of those having fundamental knowledge of the operations, bureaucracy is based on rules and regulations to be followed and management on a reliance on top management as the source of decisive power on what to do.

We proceed with this examination by delineating some boundary features of both projects and science that point to dimensions of boundary work and boundary integration. Our contention is that collegiality as a form of governance play an important role in managing scientific project practices in academia. We seek to integrate research in the two research streams project-based organizing and collegiality in university governance to outline managerial tensions within and between different models of university governance and how these can be addressed. The essay is organized accordingly. In the following section, we discuss how organization of science and academia can be fathomed from a project perspective. We then zoom in on two boundary features of projects and science – boundary work and boundary integration – and then move on to discuss how collegial governance can be understood in relation to projects and project-based organizations. We conclude by briefly interrelating

collegiality-based governance in project-based organized academia where we introduce the notion of project collegiality.

## Science as a project and as project practice

Sahlin-Andersson (2002) asks how projects are similar to science; we take her point and ask the other way around: how does science relate to projects and temporary organizing?

Science is a project and is not a project at the same time. Or rather, it is never a completed project. It is not a temporary organization (cf. Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). Hence, assessing the success or failure of science as a project is not readily accomplished (cf. Flyvbjerg, 2017, but also traditional understandings of project management). Rather, perhaps, science is a project in the sense that it is an idea that scientists (and others) nurture, with the aim of being complete (striving for truth as discussed by Kristensson Uggla, 2023). In so being, it is highly *projective* in character (Emirbayer & Mische, 1989).

### *Projective framing*

What goes on in scientific practice? One way to conceive of science is as an endeavor where knowledge seekers *formulate/frame* and *solve* difficult problems. Formulation involves the demarcation both what the problem consists in and for whom it is relevant (what implications of solving the problem are). The formulation involves rationalization of the problem at hand, in light of previous evidence and theories. It also involves the important activity of zooming in; both on what can be rationally understood and examined and also outlining the confines of problem, enabling both examination and conceptualization of a specific phenomenon. The endeavor of solving the problem thus becomes the scientific project. In a more general or aggregated sense, however, another way to go about it is by perceiving scientific conduct as a method securing the aim of a rationally understood world, a higher end itself. While these two project presentations of science may seem disjoint, they do interact in practice as means and ends. The scientific project as an end in itself is supported by the ability to formulate and execute an indefinite number of conceived problems to attempt to solve them scientifically.

### *Project practice*

Another conspicuous feature of science and projects are their collective nature. While ingenious scientists are awarded fame in historical pastime and by awards bestowed upon them, scientific discoveries are products of collective efforts across time and space. The proverbial “standing on the shoulders

of giants” may be interpreted as a collective effort across time, as suggested e.g. by philosopher of science Karl Popper (1979) and Michael Polanyi (1962) as explicit theories, previous data collected as well as scientific traditions are transferred across generations of researchers. Accordingly, there is a converging force in science, allowing for rewards to specialization into specific epistemic domains (Holzner, 1968; Knorr-Cetina, 1999). Concomitantly, however, both the need for novel perspectives on problematic phenomena as well as increasingly complex problem solving, require utilization and spanning across specialized knowledge domains. Therefore, not only collective traditions are needed, but also collective bridging across communities of researchers, possibly also across geographical locations. Ergo, in more common terms – to science and project lingo alike – disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity are core elements of science.

## Managing boundaries in science and projects

Two salient aspects in managing projects with implications for the organization of science concerns project scope and project practice. Both the formulating and undertaking of projects involve working with boundaries, as “...the creation of a project involves the introduction of boundaries, e.g., boundaries in time and in space, boundaries in terms of task, boundaries regarding who is to be involved, and so on.” (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995, p. 453). Accordingly, such boundaries may arise between, for instance, individuals, cognitive domains, (organizational) tasks, space, and time-orientations (Tell, 2017). Conceiving projects and science more generally as organized contexts oriented towards problem-solving (March & Simon, 1958; Cyert & March, 1963), puts the understanding of boundary management at center stage. In the following, we relate two features of boundary management – boundary work and integration across boundaries – to problem-solving activities (denoted as problem framing and problem solving).

### *Problem framing and boundary work*

Project scope – that is, a definition of what a specific project is about (what we discussed as *formulation/ framing* above) that goes on in planning (Ben Mahmoud-Jouini, Midler & Silberzahn, 2016); what Lundin and Söderholm (1995, p. 446) call “mapping by rhetoric”. Project scope can eventually be crafted into a project goal/task, which then sets one of the key parameters in relation to which project performance can be evaluated (cf. the “iron triangle” in project management: scope, time, cost, Toor & Ogunlana, 2010).

Mapping by rhetoric is thus the way in which a particular situation is made to appear real, tangible, and less ambiguous to the “listeners”. For anyone taking part in the specific undertaking, it is very difficult to have an opposing view or to ignore a successfully presented rhetorical framework. Details can be negotiated, but the general rhetoric is not to be opposed, and, if it is, it means that the existence of the temporary organization itself is being called in question. The ability to handle the temporary organization's rhetoric is thus of prime importance for anyone trying to influence or govern it. (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995, p. 446)

Mapping by rhetoric thus involves crafting, framing and editing the boundaries of a project allowing it to be fathomed, contested and enforced in project work. Such endeavors may accordingly be conceived of as boundary work. Sahlin-Andersson (2002) draws the parallel between organizing projects and science by elaborating the notion of boundary work (Gieryn, 1999). She builds upon Gieryn's definition of boundary work in science as essentially a discursive attribution of selected qualities of academic actors and practices to define and delimit boundaries around what is scientific and not. More specifically, Sahlin-Andersson shows how the often long and arduous process of establishing large projects involves temporal, task, and institutional boundary work. By providing examples from three major projects – the Stockholm Globe Ice Hockey Arena, a theatre in Umeå, and a research park in southern Stockholm (Södertörn) – she analyzes how actors involved in the projects (denoted project entrepreneurs) strategically performed boundary work in outlining and negotiating project scope over time. Sahlin-Andersson (2002) discusses this aspect of formulation/framing as boundary work accordingly:

...- controllability and unpredictability – follow from the possibility of delimiting a project.” (p. 241) [...] “...project boundaries do not appear automatically as the project is formed, and are not set in stone once and for all. Instead, they are socially formed, and boundaries have to be continuously defined, sustained, or changed. This is why I suggest that boundary setting, revision and maintenance are such important aspects that they deserve to be defined and analyzed as distinct aspects of project management. (p. 243)

Boundary setting thus involves both defining and delimiting the project. Sahlin-Andersson (2002) suggests that these activities take place in relation to three boundaries that give rise to temporal, task and institutional boundary work. Temporal boundary work involves such control mechanisms as rhythms, sequences and time horizons and timing. Using the example of deadlines in the Stockholm Globe project, Sahlin-Andersson (2002) argues them to be a forceful instance of temporal boundary work as “[...] deadline focused attention and exerted a certain time pressure on the project. The somewhat ambiguous nature of the plans, directives, and proposed alternatives were accepted be-

cause of the time pressure” (Sahlin-Andersson, 2002, p. 247, cf. also Lindkvist, Söderlund & Tell, 1998). Temporal boundary work through deadlines ejected a number of alternatives from the decision-making process and allowed for swift organizational action. As complex projects involve the conduct and completion of a plethora of tasks, Sahlin-Andersson (2002) proposes that task boundary work serves an important function in delimiting tasks. In conducting task boundary work, project scope is under scrutiny. In many megaproject settings, while a broad scope may be enrolling many stakeholders, it also runs the risk of extensive costs and dilution of commitment. Accordingly, Sahlin-Andersson (2002) suggests that task boundary work oftentimes is an oscillating activity. She displays an example from the construction of a new theatre in Umeå, where the final go-ahead of the project – after many years of discussing and planning – was made possible by its subdivision into two projects. Finally, institutional boundary work involves demarcation of projects in relation to institutional embeddedness. As institutions are pivotal in framing issues and actors’ ways of perceiving the problem to be solved, boundary work in this setting may revolve around institutional continuity and discontinuity. Both with respect to stakeholders and the public, major projects such as the Stockholm Globe Arena, attract attention and can be legitimized by conforming to, supporting and breaking with institutional rules. As Sahlin-Andersson (2002) shows these processes can occur simultaneously, and that the extraordinary label associated with such grand projects may allow for institutional change, for instance in relation to how control is being exercised.

### *Problem solving and integration across boundaries*

Project practice is about project execution and implementation (what we have discussed as *problem solving* above) (see e.g., Ben Mahmoud-Jouini, Midler and Silberzahn, 2016). Practicing project management implies ensuing decoupling by bracketing, (temporal) members, task partitioning, and planned isolation (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). Surely, project practice is enabled by sound and rigorous planning and scheduling, but sequential plans may have to be overthrown in favor of more flexible means as unexpected events unfold and time pressure is getting high (Sahlin-Andersson, 1989; Lindkvist, Söderlund & Tell, 1998; Alimadadi, Davies & Tell, 2022). While we, drawing inspiration from Sahlin-Andersson (2002), suggest that project scoping activities involve a great deal of boundary work, we also want to recognize that project practices also involve knowledge integration across boundaries (Tell et al, 2017) as project members come together to solve complex tasks (Lindkvist & Söderlund, 2002).

Turning to integration across boundaries, similarly to boundary work it involves spanning across, for instance, temporal, task, and institutional bounda-

ries (Tell, 2017). Both the generation of new knowledge and solutions as well as the integration of knowledge to get these solutions to work, involve the spanning of specialized knowers (individuals and communities) with different role orientations (Holzner, 1968). Role orientations are sources of diversity with respect to epistemic criteria and justification, and as such they give rise to both opportunities and challenges for integration across boundaries when aiming to solve problems. As pointed out in the literature on knowledge integration and innovation (Tell, 2011), the searching of a solution space provided by a diverse set of knowledge-bases increases the chances for novel (re-) combinations (Fleming and Sorensen, 2001). On the other hand, differentiated thought worlds (Dougherty, 1992) and occupational structures (Bechky, 2003) increase the risks for misunderstandings and lack of communication (Postrel, 2002), preventing the advancement of learning and new knowledge.

Accordingly, in social settings characterized by scientific quests and project aspirations, there is a need for governance mechanisms that allow for not only boundary work but also boundary integration. Previous literature has pointed to the role of boundary-spanning as important mechanisms to achieve innovation (Zahra & Van de Ven, 2017). Such boundary-spanning can be both social – as in nodes in social networks (Burt, 1992) or as specific organizational roles (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981) – and cognitive work involving the integration of knowledge by socialization and internalization as well as by articulation and codification of knowledge (Håkanson, 2007).

## Collegiality as a mode of governance *in* and *of* science: a project-based view

It is in light of its potential role serving as a governance mechanism for boundary management in terms of both boundary work and boundary integration that we would like to draw upon the discussion provided by Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2016a; b; 2024) to discuss some features of collegiality. In line with the discussion above, Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2016a, p. 10) point out that collegiality is a mode of governance that focuses knowledge generation as well as knowledge justification and trials, and that knowledge is the “basis on which collegiality rests” (pp. 34–35). We suggest that generative traction can be gained from a conversation between understandings of knowledge governance in project-based and temporary organizations on the one hand, and collegiality on the other.

In their extensive review of collegiality studies and definitions, Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2024), elaborate two dimensions of collegiality: vertical and horizontal. The vertical dimension of collegiality refers to the formal de-

cision-making bodies where collegial principles are implemented or adhered to as in the noun of (having a) collegium. They write (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist (2024, p. 5):

Vertical collegiality concerns decision-making structures within a formal organization and a set of rules. Along the vertical dimension, collegial decision-making is organized around faculty authority. It involves university boards, senates, and committees; the selection of primus/prima inter pares as academic leaders [...]; and rules for the promotion and appointment of professors, resource allocation, recruitment, new curricula, etc., with faculty participation in these decisions.

As highlighted by this definition, the vertical dimension zooms in on collegiality as authority, appointment and the decision-making procedures that follows from principles of collegiality. Such expressions of collegiality are instantiated in academic institutions, but under threat of increasing supervision (Engwall, 2016). The vertical dimension of collegiality serves as one – out of many – important contexts where horizontal collegiality as denoted by Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2024, p. 5) takes place: “horizontal collegiality involves social relations or companionship and encompasses dynamics among communities of peers in departments and universities, reviewers of academic outputs, conference attendees, and scholarly networks. Hence, horizontal collegiality is not confined to university boundaries, as peer relations span such boundaries”. The horizontal dimension of collegiality thus centers on the communal activities and practices that science and academic work encompasses. A key feature of such interactions is their focus on knowledge generation, reflection and diffusion through critical dialogues among peers (see Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016a).

There are many implications of seeking cross-fertilization between collegiality and the management of projects. We return to the initial discussion inspired by Kristensson Ugglå (2023) on science as a project and suggest a bifurcation of the analysis. First, on the level of scientific practice as project execution, we may think of this as primarily concerned with questions relating to collegiality as governing projects *in* science, where such endeavors are often conducted in temporary groups characterized by “institutionalized termination” (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). We here take inspiration from Lindkvist (2005) to discuss boundary work and boundary integration in terms of knowledge communities and knowledge collectivities. Second, there is also governing projects *of* science, where questions arise regarding how the projective character of science surface in sustained governance, that is, allowing for both evolutionary trajectories and practices in permanent ways while at the same time allowing for temporary organization and variation. We draw here

on extensions of theories of temporary organization (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995; Jacobsson, Lundin & Söderholm, 2013) and features of project-based organizations (Prencipe & Tell, 2001; Söderlund & Tell, 2011).

*Collegial governance in science: managing community and collectivity dilemmas*

Fundamentally, conducting science in academic practice is a collective exercise whereby projects are undertaken, exercised, engaged in, completed and/or discontinued. The temporary nature of science of a project challenges some of the traditional notions of communities of practice (as expressed for instance by Lave & Wenger, 1991, or Brown & Duguid, 2001). In terms of collegiality, the problem of too tight bonds between actors are identified by Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2016a; 2024), as they emphasize that collegiality is not to be equaled with friendship. Rather, it is a question of critical citizenship; a behavioral norm that encourages dialogue and debate as key practices supporting a rational pursuit of truth through employment of collective reason. Moreover, knowledge generation is fostered not so much by homogeneity of knowledge-bases and interests, but rather through cross-disciplinary work where different perspectives and theories are employed during (creative) abrasion. As such, there are parallels to Lindkvist's (2005) discussion of knowledge work in groups, where he distinguishes the knowledge communities that arise from the working principles of communities of practice: decentered knowledge recorded in blackboard memory in communal activities and narratives where knowledge base similarity is the main integration principle. Such knowledge communities he contrasts with knowledge collectivities stemming out of collectivities of practice: distributed knowledge memorized in networks but residing in individual knowledge and competences, where the main integration principle is the well-connectedness of knowledge bases. Lindkvist (2005) argues that the knowledge collectivity is a more apt concept than the knowledge community to capture what goes on in many projects, where instead of having an operating basis in dispositional and encultured knowledge, individual members are encouraged to articulate their knowledge and use it in interaction with others in problem-solving activities.

Translating these notions to instantiations of collegiality in scientific work, we can highlight a few intersections. Thinking of science as merely a scientific endeavor in terms of knowledge community seems to indicate that communal forces are "paradigmatically strong" (cf. Kuhn, 1962) both in terms of pressures towards conformity of scientific practices themselves as well as the administrative routines adhered to by academic institutions. Collegiality may thus serve as a counterforce that opens up for questioning and individual

agency in the scientific system in its knowledge seeking endeavors. In terms of the vertical dimension of collegiality, not only are governing bodies populated by individual experts trained in expressing ideas and providing rational arguments. Oftentimes, these individuals are also trained in “communities” (such as the disciplines where they are active) and collegial organization opens up for articulation of basic principles and taken for granted assumptions during discussions. Finally, the temporary notion that applies to most project teams is also a central element to much collegial work, where positions are rotated as new members of boards and committees are elected and serve for a limited time. Such project transitions are of course salient in other types of project work (Jakobsson, Lundin & Söderholm, 2013). Some of the arguments provided above also apply to the horizontal dimension of collegiality, but perhaps even more accentuated. Arenas for collegiality such as seminars, conferences, academic associations and publication processes are permeated by principles of knowledge collectivities in action. They serve as temporary occasions for critical knowledge-seeking interaction under the auspices of scientific progress. While the role of communal traditions serves as a hinge to enable conversations, dialogues and debate, a healthy balance between knowledge community and knowledge collectivity needs to be struck. Particular instances where these proportionalities need to be attended to surface in boundary work (problem scoping) and integration across boundaries (problem solving) as previously discussed. Both these activities are often framed using dispositional features, and collegiality may here serve as an important means allowing for articulation to demarcate and integrate across knowledge boundaries.

### *Collegial governance of science: managing temporary-permanent dilemmas*

The discussion above has mainly focused a project-level perspective of science and collegiality in academic institutions. But there is also a temporal dimension underlying the argument of drawing parallels between projects and scientific endeavors. As alluded to in the introduction of this essay, science is both *a project* and *a multitude of projects*. Accordingly, thinking about collegiality and scientific practice in project terms also involves contemplating the interaction between (ideal types of) aspects of permanency and temporariness. Scientific endeavors (as epitomized by the horizontal dimension of collegiality) and academic procedures (more in line with vertical dimensions of collegiality) take place in organizational settings and processes that are on the one hand temporary – like events, occasions, and projects. On the other hand, they are parts of a much more inertial set of e.g., accumulated knowledge, rules and conventions guiding actions. The latter may be thought of as an idea of sci-

ence, but, perhaps less ambitiously, also formal governance of universities and research organizations.

This governance dimension has in the literature on projects and temporary organizations often been expressed as an interest in project-based organizations (see e.g., Hobday, 2000; Prencipe & Tell, 2001; Söderlund & Tell, 2011). Project-based organizations are generally conceived of as permanent organizations that carry out their main activities through temporary projects. While much research on project-based organizations has pointed to their saliency in high-tech and engineering industries, an organization such as a university (in particular its research activities) also exhibits project-based characteristics. From a knowledge generation and integration perspective, the similarities between high-tech engineering and science should not be that surprising, despite evident differences regarding more general governance issues such as ownership, stakeholders and organizational purpose. In these organizations, the temporary constellations of knowledge-differentiated experts provide the setting in which new ideas and knowledge are generated, honed and critically examined. The temporary research project is often organized as such for reasons of resources (e.g. provided by research grants of certain duration) with more or less explicit goals set for what knowledge that should be produced. Much science is conducted in teams where researchers with different expertise collaborate in designing studies, executing studies and interpreting results. Findings from projects are often inscribed collectively in research reports, scientific articles and books, and collective writing constitutes a non-negligible part of the research process.

The above point to some of the features of projects that make them conducive for activities such as science. At the same time, there are several drawbacks for the “larger” project of science. Projects are temporary and there is a need secure that knowledge gained for future research so that the continuous process of knowledge accumulation and potential paradigmatic shifts in interpretation can continue. On a horizontal level, collegiality here serves as perhaps the most important mechanism in pushing for the publication of scientific contributions so that these are easily retrievable by future generations of researchers. There is a permanency in academic societies and specialized associations that organize conferences and the backing of the longevity of scientific journals are mainly upheld by collegial processes of electing editorial teams. While of critical importance for universities as project-based organizations, such academic practices providing permanency in the main take place outside the confines of any single university (or national university system). On the local level, routines like e.g., seminar culture serve a similar function to uphold patterns of interaction despite turnover of faculty and PhD students.

However, while making sure that seminars and conferences are organized can be viewed as a vertical provision of collegiality, the very activities therein are under less formal control. Accordingly, there are also vertical collegial systems that operate in parallel (and sometimes complementary) to the horizontal ones. Collegiality as a vertical form of managing the temporary permanency dilemma appear in different forms. The setting up of decision-making bodies and committees that are regulated by law or local statutes are perhaps the most conspicuous form of engaging scientists involved in a stream of temporary present activities in coordination and making decisions from a far-reaching science and academic perspective, both regarding its past and its future. Such collegial entities decide procedures for e.g., recruitment, promotion, and examination that, despite obviously being subject to occasional changes, promote the retrieval, sustaining and development of scientific knowledge.

### *Some remarks on discrepancies between managing in academia and projects*

While the discussion above has pointed to how thinking about science and its organization benefit from project-inspired reflections, there are also obvious limitations. First, as is pointed out by Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2014a; b), collegiality seldom appears on its own. Collegiality co-exists with bureaucracy and management as modes of science governance in universities and higher education systems. Even though some proponents of either one of the models would claim that there is only one way to govern a university, they are mixed in practice and exist in parallel. Thus, none of them are superior to the other. In some cases, different domains of a university are dominated by either one of the models, in other cases they are mixed and confronted where principles of one model give in for those of another one. The same reasoning of course also applies for projects and project-based organizing. While conceiving scientific activity as conducted in terms of knowledge collectivity highlights individual contributions, it is still a collective notion. The scientist as an individual remains an important feature of the knowledge generation process, not entirely captured in such conceptualizations. Moreover, many academic practices (such as teaching) is perhaps more programmatic (or even permanent) than what is acknowledged when thinking of universities as project-based organizations. Furthermore, in settings outside the realm of science, collegial practices are not always dominating. For instance, project management and the emphasis on the project manager as a leader is a salient feature of how temporary organizing is governed. Project managers are seldom appointed collegially, and their execution of power represent the ideal type of management more than that of collegiality. Finally, Project management is

full of bureaucratic procedures and standards as e.g., exemplified in extensive use of project planning and scheduling of activities. Such instances indicate substantial divergence from principles of collegiality and projects, other issues also arise where special attention is needed to promote long-term quality. These include quality assurance, medium-long term strategy and leadership appointments.

## Managing science in academia through project collegiality

Recurring themes in this essay are parallelisms and interactions between projects and the organization of science, where we have taken inspiration from the work of Kerstin Sahlin and her colleagues. For instance, we have discussed science as an eternal project and scientific practices as temporary organizing of projects, as well as the notions of boundary work and boundary integration. The governance mechanism of collegiality in and through projects suggests a linkage between these themes. Taken together, *project collegiality* appears as a potentially useful concept to highlight some of the intersections examined. Paraphrasing Kristensson Ugglå (2023, p. 186; pp. 215–216), we suggest that science is an activity in the present that has a past and a future. Herein lies characteristics where projects and project-based organizing become salient. Projects take place to initiate action in the present, demarcated in relation to the past, and projecting possible futures. We suggest that project collegiality may aid actors in accomplishing such complex and ambiguous endeavors. Project collegiality relate to management of boundaries in science as a project-based enterprise, vertical and horizontal dimensions of collegial practices pane out in academia at large, and in organization of universities. In conjunction with other governance mechanisms, project collegiality is practiced in both boundary work and integration across boundaries. While organizational and institutional drivers – even possibly science itself (Kuhn, 1962) – may push towards conformity and longevity, project collegiality has the potential to support countervailing forces supporting collective individuation, examination through cross-fertilization and knowledge transformation in academia. Surely, it is no panacea, but one potentially interesting extension is to observe its role in other knowledge-intensive organizational settings. Project collegiality possibly translate across university boundaries in multilateral directions, allowing for academia and scientific practices to be compared, contrasted and integrated with other project-based activities in society.

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# PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT



# The road not taken

## Notes on administrative reform

*Bengt Jacobsson, Södertörn University*

For many decades, organizational theory has contributed substantially to the knowledge about public sector organizations and public sector reforms. Since the 1980's, Kerstin has been part of a group of scholars – at the F-section at Stockholm School of Economics, at the Stockholm Centre for Organizational Research (Score) and at Uppsala University – advancing knowledge about organizational decision-making, organizational change, big projects, organizational reforms and many other issues concerning public sector organizations. This tradition in organizational theory is also one where frequent interaction between research and practice has occurred. In the middle of the 1990's, Kerstin and I were appointed as members in a commission set up by the Government, with the aim to develop a comprehensive state administrative policy. This essay starts at that point in time, and I will in the text follow some of the routes that administrative reform (and research) has taken since then.

The early 1990's marked a formative period in the development of administrative reforms in Sweden. Market ideas and management ideas – later that decade referred to as *New Public Management* (NPM) – had become institutionalized as the proper way to think about reform. Some of these ideas had been around for a while. Managerial ideas had been introduced already in the late 1960's, with Program Budgeting and other techniques of rational planning, but in the 1990's they penetrated most organizations. By and large, organizational reforms were routine, and organizational consultants were used extensively in all public spheres (Brunsson, 1989). A notable example of this trend in the 1980's was the appointment of a major Swedish consultancy by the government to manage the Swedish Rail Company (SJ).

Therefore, NPM ideas had been gaining popularity for some time. However, with the passage of a bill in 1987 concerning the Management of State Administration (*Verksledningsreformen*), they became firmly institutionalized. People were no longer talking about public administration; instead, they were discussing public management. What happened in Sweden was part of

a broader wave of reform that influenced many countries. This process was fueled by writings and comparisons coordinated by the OECD (Lerdell & Sahlin-Andersson, 1997).

The institutionalization of NPM-ideas – in this broad concept – could also be seen in specific policy fields. The school field in Sweden was totally reorganized in the beginning of the 1990's with the use of the modern paraphernalia of administrative reform. The governance of schools was decentralized to the municipalities. The old state agency, The National Board of Education (*Skolöverstyrelsen*), often criticized as a bureaucratic disaster, was replaced by a new knowledge-based and goal-oriented agency. The new agency, The National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*), was not meant to have direct interactions with individual schools but rather to provide knowledge to the municipalities upon their request (Jacobsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 1995). Formulärets överkant

It was administrative reform in progress, but still rather fragmented. Until now, reforms in the state had also mainly been orchestrated by organizational actors connected to the Ministry of Finance, which could explain the focus on market and management ideas (Sundström, 2003). However, it was clear to the Swedish government that something more comprehensive was needed. Organizations such as the OECD wanted to compare public management policies across all of its member countries. In response to these demands, the government appointed a minister to be responsible for these policies. The government also promptly initiated the appointment of a public commission with the aim of developing a more comprehensive Public Administration Policy.

In the commission's instructions, it was clear that everything was up for discussion, or everything except for the current steering model in use. It was a model advocating a rather rigid version of management by objectives and results (*mål- och resultatstyrning*), developed by the Ministry of Finance and its auxiliary agencies. A former minister with a background in law was appointed as chairman of the commission and, interestingly enough, some researchers in the field were appointed as members (Kerstin and I were two of them), along with some civil servants. The commission worked for a couple of years, and the process was far from easy. While some members thought it necessary to delve into the dominant steering model because of what they saw as its harmful consequences, other members were more reluctant.

## Challenges facing the state

After two turbulent years, the Commission of inquiry (Förvaltningspolitiska kommissionen) published the results of its considerations (SOU 1997:57). It began by specifying the challenges facing the Swedish state. Three factors were highlighted. The first was internationalization. The state had become more dependent than before on a European and global world, and this had profound consequences for governance that had not been properly discussed previously. Not only the European Union (of which Sweden recently had become a member at this point in time) but many other European, transnational and global organizations and activities contributed in the shaping of national structures and policies. The Swedish state had become deeply integrated in European and transnational networks, resulting in far-reaching consequences.

The second factor pointed out by the Commission was what was perceived as an increasing fragmentation within the state, i.e. that different activities more than before had come to be conducted separately from each other. There was a lack of coordination. Units and policies that would have benefited from talking to each other did not do so. It was believed that the so-called downpipe organization (silo organizing) had become an obstacle to necessary coordination. As an effect of the obsession with managerial ideas, agencies also increasingly had come to see themselves as 'real' organizations boosting their own visions, identities and agendas, something which hardly favoured coordination and cooperation.

The third factor – the difficulties in governing – could to some extent be seen as a consequence of the two previous ones, although governance problems had always existed. As pointed out above, the commission had been given instructions not to touch the steering model that was in use in the state, i.e., the management by objectives and results model. The Government (in fact, the Ministry of Finance) seemed confident that this was the proper way to govern. Despite the directive not to touch the model in use, the Commission in its final report proposed that the model needed to be reassessed, particularly in light of its detrimental unintended consequences. The problem according to the Commission was not the underlying principle, but rather a technocratic implementation of the model.

The three factors that were pointed out have hardly become less important since the commission submitted its report. The European Union is even more important today. Swedish state agencies in general are highly influenced by the EU, devote a large part of its working time to EU issues and perceive the consequences of the EU as substantial. But it is not only the European Union. A multitude of organizations is involved in processes of issuing rules directed

towards states and monitoring these rules, as well as all kinds of consultations, rankings, peer reviews and other discussions concerning states. Among these regulators are also international organizations, non-governmental organizations, standardization organizations, professional organizations, consultancies, corporations, and a host of others.

Part of what all these organizations are involved in, is governing directed towards states. Governing should here be understood in its broad meaning. It includes rulemaking in the traditional sense – that is, the issuing of formal laws and directives – but also the production and supply of standards and recommendations as well as more discursive and meditative activities. There are multiple regulators, many of them basing their authority in their specialized expertise or in their connection to values of development, democracy, and progress (Djelic & Sahlin, 2006). These systems of governing quite seldom resemble hierarchies (it is often the opposite, and there are sometimes strong conflicts between rule-makers). They are rather loose constellations of different organizations claiming authoritative knowledge about what states should do in specific fields. These activities could be quite consequential, an example being the Pisa comparisons carried out by the OECD.

The second challenge pointed out by the Commission was fragmentation, which has also gained significance. There are examples of officials working in different parts of the state. They sometimes demonstrate greater affinity and loyalty towards their colleagues in European and global organizations than towards officials at home in political fields other than their own. Civil servants working in the fields of competition policies and monetary policies are two examples of this. In both fields, national policies largely align with European consensus. Vifell (2006) referred to these phenomena as 'enclaves within states'—small units in specific fields tightly connected to counterparts in other countries, while being loosely connected to other parts within their own state.

In the early phases of organizational reform in the Swedish public sector there was a tendency to see public agencies as 'real' organizations. The reinforcement of organizational ideals, emphasizing individuality, leadership, and goal-directed rationality, also paved the way for the adoption of general management models. All this had profound effects on the everyday actions of agencies. Even if there was a lot of discussions about the importance of coordination and cooperation, agencies mainly had to account for their own activities. It was argued by Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson that entities in the public sector that previously had been described as arenas or agents had become transformed into more complete organizations by reinforcing local identity, hierarchy and rationality (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000).

Concerning the third challenge pointed out by the Commission, that of governing, a couple of questions need to be addressed, partly as a consequence of the developments presented above. How do you govern a state when state activities to a large extent are governed by others? And how is it possible to achieve coordinated action between separate state agencies (and between state agencies and other organizations in society) when agencies are absorbed by its local identities and rationalities? The governing issues should undoubtedly be a central focus of administrative reform. Nevertheless, in this field, powerful stakeholders are concerned about losing influence. This is also why the government initially attempted to exclude the existing steering model (management by objectives and results) from the discussion on administrative reform.

## Reforms trying to improve governing

The major problems in governing are well known. There is a great demand for politicians to govern in order to solve problems, but problems often turn out to be difficult to solve. Complexities abound, knowledge of causal relationships are ambiguous, and typically there are significant goal conflicts. In addition, realization of ambitions necessitates that many organizations can work together. It is the appropriateness of the whole organizational set-up that determines whether a policy will succeed or not, not the efficiency of an individual agency. But as has been pointed out, there are many obstacles to effective coordination (Peters, 2015).

There are basically two ways to govern in these complex circumstances. One is to try to increase the capacity to steer and coordinate activities, to ensure that all essential information is gathered at the central level. This is made possible through elaborated information systems, massive internal control and review. Swedish governments have long chosen this path. Strong path dependencies are in force here. One may recall the minister in Kjell Espmark's poem from 1975. He (it is definitely a man that is portrayed) thought that he had a language to reform the world, and said: "... You must be aware of/that it is largely in this house/that our country becomes real/There are fragments of life out there/But no basis to act...". The house in the poem is equivalent to the Government Offices.

Governments of all colours have for several decades invested in managerial capacities in order to be able to govern. To begin with (in the late 1960's), this way of governing seemed to be well suited to the then dominant ideals of planning and social engineering. When social planning as an ideal began to be replaced by more liberal or neoliberal ideas, one could have guessed that these

techniques should go out of fashion. But they didn't. They lived on but they were legitimized differently. A search for a rationally planned society was replaced by the pursuit of rational organizations. The important thing was now to create 'real' organizations, and this focus on strong organizational ideals opened up for all kinds of management methods and techniques.

As the American sociologist John Meyer argued in the beginning of the 1990's:

An older world in which schools were managed by educators, hospitals by doctors, railroads by railroad men now recedes into quaintness. All these things are now seen as organizations and it is this that produces a great expansion, almost everywhere, of management... A disembodied management, which can be applied in any time and place and activity setting... One can now discuss what constitutes the proper basis of organization without much mentioning the actual substantive activities that the organization will do. (Meyer, 1994).

This captures the essence of change. If everybody thinks about agencies as 'real' organizations, this opens up for the whole paraphernalia of managerial methods and techniques. And managers do not any longer need to know that much about their own field (the actual substantive activities) as long as they are good managers.

The main aim of the model with management by objectives and results was both to govern less and to govern more. Managers of agencies should be given more autonomy than before in managerial and operational decisions. They should be more like 'real' managers. They should be subject to oversight but not micromanagement. Goals should be formulated by the political level and managers should be held accountable for the results produced, that is if goals were reached. The experiences from management by objectives and results as a steering instrument for politicians have, however, consistently been negative. Political governing has not been facilitated. Unsurprisingly, politicians often delegated the formulation of goals to civil servants. It turned out to be difficult to measure performance and even more difficult to measure effects and impacts. In spite of all these problems, lots of efforts were put into this way of governing.

The model never became a success story (Jacobsson et.al. 2015; Statskontoret, 2020). About a decade after the previous Administrative Policy Commission had completed its work in 1997, another government inquiry (Styru-tredningen) submitted its report to the government (2007:75). This inquiry raised serious criticism towards the administrative model in use. The inquiry pointed out that the problems that had existed with the dominant steering model should not be characterized as poor implementation. Instead, it was the model in itself that was problematic. As a result of this critique, the govern-

ment decided to reduce certain elements in the steering model and stressed the necessity to have a somewhat more flexible model. However, there was no basic change in the steering model.

This is the story of management by objectives and results, so far. There was an attempt by the Social Democratic government from 2014 and some years ahead to advance what was called trust-based control (*tillitsbaserad styrning*) as something that could replace the dominant New Public Management paradigm. This reform was talked about for some years, but did not really challenge the dominating NPM-ideas. Thus, lots of time and energy has been put into forms of governing that are short-term, narrow and that have produced reports and documents that rarely have been used by those who are supposed to govern. For several reasons, this is a problem. One is that it costs a lot of money and energy. But even more important is probably that all the work that has been put into these (to a large extent dysfunctional) models, has become an obstacle for exploring other and potentially more fruitful options when it comes to governing.

## Governing in practice

As said above, there are basically two ways to think about governing in circumstances with difficult, and even wicked, problems. The first is to increase the capacities to steer and control. In Swedish administrative reforms, this has mainly been the road taken. The second way of governing – the road not taken, if we link up to the poem by Robert Frost – is not primarily to increase the capacities, but to reduce the need to steer and control in a detailed manner. Keywords here are delegation as well as trust in experts and professionals. This way of governing is often superior. It is also used in practice but – and this is disturbing – without any assistance from those occupied with administrative reforms.

In situations with ambiguities concerning technologies as well as preferences, and in circumstances where environments of organizations often are transformed in ways that are difficult to predict, strict control from the centre is usually a bad idea. It seems highly unlikely that governing can start with politicians specifying goals that they want to reach, followed by civil servants operationalizing these goals. Politicians often know roughly in what direction they want something to change and they often know what kind of problems that need to be attended to, but they are reluctant to exactly specify their goals (and for very good reasons).

The alternative to the model of governing that has guided reforming for so long should be about reducing the need to gather information to the center, and instead trusting that those working in the day-to-day operations mostly

(though not always) know what should be done. Many would say that this is abdicating the task of governing, but it is not. It is a different way of governing. You don't leave politics to experts, but you trust that experts and professionals within the institutional framework that the politicians establish are able to manage their own work.

The important thing from a governing point of view is not to formulate goals and detailed reporting requirements, but to ensure that there is a basic organizational set-up that makes it possible to realize the political ambitions. The challenge is to put an institutional framework in place. Political governing is about creating this organizational infrastructure. This organizational infrastructure is the primary expression of politics. Through the way you organize, you build in certain perspectives (but not others) and certain repertoires of action (but not others).

Governing in practice operate through two components (Jacobsson et.al. 2015). The first is metagoverning (or organizing). To metagovern is to create an institutional framework that makes it possible for a system to respond to pressing issues as well as to initiate the changes wished for. Metagoverning decisions are made about: the regulatory framework; which agencies to have and about their tasks and resources; how agencies should be connected to other parts of the state and society; how relations between the government and agencies should be fashioned; but also, how to create legitimacy around changes made. One may say that metagoverning is designed to facilitate political and professional informed action, while at the same time protect the politicians in the centre from overload.

Metagoverning implies that you let experts and professionals manage the day-to-day operations. When something unexpected happens – as it always will – the politicians however must have ways to be able to influence, but without jeopardizing the basic organizational set-up. In the Swedish system where policymaking for centuries has been separated from day-to-day activities, informal and subtle methods of microsteering have been developed (ibid). Typically, officials in the agencies are quite good in anticipating what is expected from them. Sometimes they have to ask for guidance and at times they may push issues up to the political level. Now and then politicians also see to that issues that they want to attend to by themselves are hauled up to the political level. Microsteering, which refers to subtle adjustments and decision-making at lower levels, typically takes place without jeopardizing the prevailing institutional framework.

This model of how to understand governing – through metagovernance and microsteering – has been developed through extensive studies of governance in the Swedish state. The model is fully presented in Jacobsson et.al.

(2015). It shows how politicians govern in fields when they want something to happen: it shows governing in practice. The system allows the experts and professionals in the agencies to provide for due process and routine matters while the politicians can focus their attention on strategic decisions and policy planning. Informal contacts are critical to the functioning of the system, and it is a system that is based on loyalty and trust.

Can civil servants and professionals, then, be trusted? The theories that have largely motivated the reforming of administration with managerial methods has been a theory from economics about principals and agents. The basic idea is that the government (the principal) must create incentives to make the agency (the agent) do what the principal wants. If such incentives do not exist, there is a risk that the managers of the agency will behave irresponsibly (this is usually called moral hazard). This has been the basic idea behind much of the thinking about the introduction of managerial ideas.

How do we know that professional civil servants do not do what they want themselves, if they don't constantly have auditors and other reviewers hanging over their shoulders? Can we really be sure that they are doing their best to realize the politicians' ambitions? After all, we have all seen sir Humphrey Appleby, the permanent secretary in the sitcom *Yes Minister*, always defending status quo when his minister thinks that he wants change. These are relevant questions, and there has to be a certain amount of scrutiny concerning the use of public money. But by and large, the answer to the question about if we can trust civil servants and professionals is: probably yes.

Research on the Swedish public administration, as well as numerous memoirs from former politicians, is relatively unanimous in the view that civil servants are extraordinarily loyal to their politicians (Niemann, 2013). There is little evidence that government officials are trying to use their information advantage to further their own interests. Of course, they want more investment to be made in their own area of operations, but so do politicians. The civil servants rarely seem to be those sneaky agents who, whenever the opportunity arises, strive to further their own interests.

In fact, informality and trust largely characterize the relationship between politicians and civil servants (and between civil servants among themselves) in most fields. For the politician or official who wants something, it is relatively easy to get in touch, either to find out something or to share what you know. This means that governance within the framework of the institutional set-up often can take place informally. Signals of various kinds can be effective political tools, and civil servants are typically good at anticipating the will of the politicians (exceptions are cases where governments constitutionally are not allowed to intervene).

The long-standing high-trust relations between politicians and civil servants, of course, may change, but historically they have served us well. To govern at a distance does not mean that a field is politically uninteresting, but rather that politicians trust its expert agencies. Situations may occur that make politicians feel compelled to reorganize a field, but this cannot happen too often. And the fact that politicians do not take a lot of initiatives in an area does not mean that they do not have any ambitions. It can instead be seen as a sign that the institutional system that has been established is able to handle issues in an appropriate way.

## Where do we go from here?

Governments always struggle with issues of how to govern complex societies and how to address wicked problems. As pointed out above, societies are increasingly characterized by embeddedness in European and transnational structures, fragmentation and – as always – strong interest groups pursuing their own agendas. The Norwegian sociologist Gudmund Hernes once said – this was as early as in the late 1970's – that democracies in the West struggle with an abundance of social complexity and a shortage of governing capacity (Hernes, 1978). It is an illusion that this imbalance can be solved by putting faith in managerial systems with a narrow organizational focus.

It seems as if the challenges facing public administrations in the 2020's are not so very different from the ones in the 1990's. But the stakes are higher. Today's pressing issues (concerning welfare systems, security, climate change etc.) will certainly require a substantial transformation in our societies. And this means that there is an urgent need for governing capacities: politicians that are able strategically to think about how to create institutional structures that can be of use in such transformations; as well as to create space for civil servants and professionals to coordinate and cooperate on the basis of their expert knowledge.

We need to develop governing capacities, and in this we can learn from others but we can also learn from our own experiences. It is astonishing that the actual way of governing – how politicians govern when they want something – has been overlooked in the discussions about administrative reform. The belief in managerial ideas has been so strong that alternative ways of thinking about governing have been disregarded, and even been ridiculed. No efforts have been put in advancing ideas about governing on the basis of existing trajectories and practices over the years. This is the road not taken. The explanation of this is to some extent path dependencies: managerial ideas entered the state in the late 1960's and have since then have strong supporters.

When the Administrative Policy Commission was established in the mid-1990s, it was an expression of a newly gained insight that issues of governing and organization were important. This awareness does not exist in the same way today. Administrative politics has largely become the policy area that disappeared. Few initiatives are taken, in spite of the fact that there is an urgent need to bolster governing capabilities. Certainly, there is a minister that is responsible for this field, but few know what kind of ambitions that the government has. It shouldn't be like that, since there are many pressing issues that need to be attended to.

Societal issues warrant careful attention, and politicians must design institutional systems to address them. In this endeavour, they deserve better support than what the existing administrative approaches provide. What we need is a decisive departure from the old dysfunctional system. Part of this change should involve establishing an agency or organizational unit responsible for advancing knowledge about governing beyond conventional managerial practices. It is imperative that this unit operates independently of the custodians of the old system. The role of the new unit should be both to exploit existing experiences in governing in Sweden and elsewhere, but also to explore new forms of governing. If we could enter on this road – that up until now has not been taken – that would hopefully make all the difference.

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# Renewing powerful ideas

## The Nordic model as an ‘ecology of circulation’

*Haldor Byrkjeflot*, University of Oslo

*Silviya Svejnova*, Copenhagen Business School

The world will be studying the Nordic model for years to come.  
*The Economist*, 2013

Time will tell to what extent the Nordic model can adapt and handle the challenges. The resilience of the model will definitely be tested.  
*Frelle-Petersen, Hein, and Christiansen*, 2020 (*Deloitte Insight*)

### Introduction

Why do certain ideas keep their power over time, while others fade away? What allows sustaining the interest in them not only by scholars but also by practitioners and policy makers alike? The Nordic model of economy and society – a holistic set of ideas, policies and practices related to the governance of welfare and work – is an example of such staying power and ongoing renewal (Byrkjeflot et al., 2021). First recognized in the 1930s in reference to Sweden’s “middle way” between capitalism and communism (Childs, 1936), it has evolved to cover shared policies and practices in Norden, i.e., between Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. Despite its complexity and contextual embeddedness, the Nordic model has sustained its popularity over the years, inspiring policy translations and adoption of practices associated with ideas labelled as Nordic or Scandinavian<sup>1</sup> (Fukuyama 2011/2014; Scheuer, 2021).

Yet, the success of the Nordic model has not been exempted from controversies and predictions for its demise. For example, some have argued that the Nordic model is getting less attractive due to geopolitical developments and the challenges facing the welfare state (Mouritzen, 1995; Browning, 2007),

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<sup>1</sup> Norden and Scandinavia, as well as Nordic and Scandinavian are used as synonyms in this article (see e.g., Østergård, 1997).

as well as eroding as a consequence of the influx of neoliberal policy ideas and institutions (Andersson, 2020). Others have suggested that such a unified Nordic model has never existed, as the Nordic states are too different and follow their own distinctive paths (Mjøset, 1992). Yet, amidst such claims for demise or even non-existence, the range of meanings associated with the Nordic model is expanding in the scholarly literature since the 1970s, as shown in the mapping of multiple kinds of Nordic models and their intertwined circulation (Rom-Jensen et al. 2022; Byrkjeflot et al. 2021). It could be argued that such an expansion in meanings has been influenced by as well as has contributed to the sustained circulation of the Nordic model and its recent status as “the next supermodel” (The Economist, 2013).

This intertwined, sustained circulation is multidirectional. In some instances, Nordic ideas and models have been named as such at the source. For example, *Ny Nordisk Mad* (translated from Danish into English as *New Nordic Food*, *New Nordic Kitchen*, or *New Nordic Cuisine*) was labelled as such at its creation and established through a Manifesto signed by 12 Nordic chefs in 2004 (Byrkjeflot et al., 2013). Other ideas and models have originated in a Nordic country and then have been adopted (and adapted) initially by its Nordic neighbors due to proximity and affinity, as with the case of the ombudsman (we discuss it in some detail later in this chapter). Originated in Sweden, the notion of ombudsman spread to Finland, Denmark, and Norway and from there it travelled farther, becoming a global phenomenon. Yet in other instances, such ideas have been noticed and labelled as models from the outside and then reflected upon and reacted to by the Nordics themselves. For example, Sweden’s “middle way” was a term introduced by Marquee Childs (1936), an American best-selling journalist. Scandinavian design, which became a recognizable style and a movement, acquired its label in the US in the 1950s (Halén & Wickman, 2003; Mordhorst, 2021).

These examples hint not only on multiple diffusion, dissemination and translation paths, but also on these paths’ entanglement as well as the rather flexible translation of the ideas, as they travel. For instance, *New Nordic Cuisine* has been legitimated with both the Nordic welfare model for the democratic movement driving it and Scandinavian design for its simplicity, among other references. Family policy and gender equality models, e.g., the Norwegian model of board quotas for women (Teigen, 2021), as well as parental leave quotas for the father (Windwehr et al., 2022), have gained further visibility and recognition by being associated with the strong reputation of the Nordic welfare states. Another equality-oriented model that has been exported in recent years is the Swedish government’s unilateral criminaliza-

tion of the purchase of sex in 1999<sup>2</sup>. It initially spread to Norway and Iceland in 2009. Then it was picked up, modelled, re-interpreted and applied (rather loosely and with a diverse set of meanings) in a global context, e.g., Canada in 2014, Northern Ireland in 2015, France in 2016, Ireland in 2017, and Israel in 2020. While content and patterns of adoption vary, all in all these ‘exports’ of ideas and models contribute to re-affirming Nordic exceptionalism (Sørensen & Stråth, 1997) and the idea of an advanced Nordic welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

Taken together, the examples reveal complex, intertwined, and multidirectional processes of meaning renewal, with multiple “interactions between translators, translations, and translation processes over time” (Westney & Piekkari, 2021, p. 58), which we denote as an ‘ecology of circulation’. Ecology of circulation is a term inspired by the Scandinavian institutional perspective (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996; Boxenbaum & Pedersen, 2009) and, particularly, Sahlin and Wedlin’s (2017) notion of ecology of translation as well as its subsequent elaboration in terms of multidirectional idea travelling (Nielsen, Mathiassen & Newell, 2022). Yet, an ecology of circulation differs from these concepts in that it denotes an interest in not only multidirectionality, but also the ongoing and entangled back and forth between originators, translators, and audiences and across organizational fields. It involves connecting management ideas with ideas related to governance, policy, and culture, influencing both the ideas’ staying power and their renewal. Hence, in this chapter we ask: How does the Nordic model as an ecology of circulation sustain its power and renew its meaning?

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, we briefly introduce three perspectives on how ideas travel – diffusion, translation, and ecology of ideas – and offer some arguments as to why they could be brought together through the notion of ‘ecology of circulation’. Second, we distinguish two main kinds of Nordic models – policy and cultural models – that have distinctive circulation. Third, we put forward an illustration of how Nordic models circulate, highlighting some milestones in the circulation of the ombudsman institution as a policy idea. We conclude with some insights and implications from examining the Nordic model as an ecology of circulation as well as some directions for future research.

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<sup>2</sup> Today this policy approach to prostitution is also known as the “Sex Purchase Ban” or the “Abolitionist” or “Equality Model”.

## Three perspectives on how ideas travel

To overview the theoretical repertoire for studying the circulation of Nordic models for renewal, we bring together elements from three perspectives that have been associated with or served as a background to the previously mentioned Scandinavian institutionalism (Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017). The first perspective of relevance for this inquiry is diffusion of innovations and knowledge (Rogers, 1962; Abrahamson, 1996) as the multiple kinds of Nordic models are based on innovations in specific domains. The second perspective is translation of ideas (Czarniawska, 1996; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996) given that some of these ideas acquire new meaning as they get engaged with and/or adopted in organizations in other contexts. The third perspective is ecology of ideas (Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017) as there are multiple ideas (as well as ideas stemming from multiple domains) associated with Norden that influence the circulation and renewal of the Nordic model. While the diffusion perspective has served more as a 'straw man' in order to launch the translation perspective as an alternative, we still think there is a value in the way this perspective has focused on travel routes and patterns of adoption. The two other perspectives have been presented more as new and alternative approaches, but also here we see value in combining the approaches to arrive at a multidirectional perspective. We think that the term ecologies of circulation could be used as a sort of meta-concept for three interconnected ways of studying how models move back and forth and what contributes to their renewal.

In the first perspective, *diffusion of innovations and knowledge*, there is a tradition for asking why and how actors emulate a certain model with a focus on travel routes and patterns of adoption rather than changes in the content of the practices and ideas. The questions asked are, for example: How does the curve of adoption look like? How do early adopters differ from late adopters? What reasons do early vs late adopters have for emulating a particular idea or model? (Rogers, 1962; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). Whereas Rogers studied the spread of innovative ideas in agriculture, Tolbert and Zucker examined the diffusion of formal structures of civil service reform in cities. Rogers established the distinction between early and late adopters, while Tolbert and Zucker found that the early adopters were motivated by the need to improve processes, whereas the later adopters were motivated more by the need for social legitimation. The focus in these kinds of studies is whether a model is adopted or not and differences over time in patterns of adoption. Overall, however, the implied role of the receiver of the new ideas is rather passive and the expected outcome is homogenization (Alvarez, Mazza & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2005).

In the second perspective, *translation of ideas*, we find studies that explore how a particular idea changes its meaning and is adapted or 'edited' to new circumstances as it is translated into a new context. As noted by Czarniawska and Joerges (1996, p. 81), "the creation of new forms and innovative elements are part of the imitation process since there are no ready-made models which remain unchanged as they spread". Researchers working from this perspective are concerned with where and how ideas travel, through what means, as well as how they are reembedded in a new context (Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005; Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017; Waldorff & Madsen, 2022). Rather than diffusing, ideas are 'consumed' through active selection of what concepts and practices to apply, and contextualization (Alvarez 1997; Byrkjeflot, 2003; Alvarez et al., 2005; Røvik, 2023). The travel and translation of ideas become inseparable processes leading to continuous change (Westney, 1987; Czarniawska, 1996; Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996).

In the third perspective, *ecology of ideas* (Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017), one interrogates why some models circulate and are sustained over time, whereas others are more fad-like. Interest is in the set of actors at a global or an international stage that may serve as carriers and translators as well as combine a set of ideas. For example, it has been pointed out that European business schools developed a network of consultants, publications and gurus that had circulated American management ideas continuously since the 1980s (Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002). Westney and Piekari (2020) use the notion 'translation ecology' to refer to the conceptual approach and 'translation ecosystem' to refer to the empirical phenomenon associated with the circulation of ideas and models. They investigated how a small group of American management translators carried and maintained the inflow of ideas of Japanese management, which became an American and European import in the 1970s and 1980s (Westney & Piekari, 2020). The translation started out among organization behavior scholars but developed into a translation community with several sub-disciplines, such as engineering, quality control and production and operation management. In the main, this literature has focused on management ideas in public and private organizations. It has also considered the role of globally distributed translation communities, such as the neo-liberal Atlas network or those associated with accreditation and ranking institutions (Djelic 2014; Davis et al., 2012). International organizations and epistemic communities also play an important role in processes of translation (Sommerer & Tallberg 2019; Meyer et al., 1997).

Combining aspects from these three perspectives, we argue, allows identifying different pathways through which a variety of ideas and models are intertwined in their circulation. It also allows acknowledging the role of dif-

ferent carriers, translators and consumers of ideas and models across different fields.

## Varieties of Nordic models

As noted earlier, in this chapter we shed some light on the circulation of Nordic models. Overall, a group of phenomena and/or approaches to these phenomena are referred to as Nordic on the basis of both similarity and distinction. The similarity is in how these phenomena are understood, organized, and managed among the Nordic countries, whereas the distinctions refer to assumptions about how these Nordic phenomena differ from similar phenomena outside of the Nordics. The characteristics of the Nordic model that are most frequently mentioned in the literature are: a generous (universal) welfare state; a central or coordinated wage setting in tripartite negotiations between employers, trade unions, and government, as well as a trust-based non-corrupt bureaucracy, and active gender equality and family policies (Byrkjeflot et al., 2021; Dølvik et. al., 2015; Jensen, 2018). These characteristics have been related to assumptions, among others, of Nordic exceptionalism (Sørensen & Stråth, 1997) and a “mythical” Nordic developmental path (Fukuyama, 2014). Overall, these characteristics and assumptions constitute the Nordic model as a complex ideal-type, e.g., Esping-Andersen’s (1990) social democratic regime, or alternatively a more culturally embedded historical version (Sørensen & Stråth, 1997).

Associated with the belief in a general Nordic model, there are multiple varieties of Nordic models referring to specific domains. These varieties are delimited or partial vis-à-vis the holistic Nordic model of welfare and work. They could be considered both innovations (e.g., the development of New Nordic cuisine brought a new set of culinary practices and Nordic ingredients to the attention of the global fine-dining sector) and partial translations of certain aspects of the holistic Nordic model with a focus on a specific domain. In this chapter we suggest that it could be helpful for analytical purposes to distinguish between two main partial model varieties. The first variety is *policy models*. These are innovations related to regulation of and/or reforms in a given domain (e.g., education, gender quotas, family policy) or to specific legally bound institutions (e.g., the ombudsman). The second variety is *cultural models*. These capture innovations in the sphere of culture that engage not only policy makers but wider audiences (e.g., consumers) by constituting distinctive innovations (e.g., in the sphere of design, food, film or lifestyles). While the diffusion of policy models often involves or invokes a logic of rationality, the travel of cultural models is rather driven by a logic of fashion

related to creativity and style (Abrahamson, 1996; Godart & Galunic, 2019; Godart, Seong & Phillips, 2020).

Policy models are, for example, the Nordic model of education (Antikainen, 2006), the Nordic prison policy (Fransen & Smith, 2022), as well as more specific policies, such as the father's quota that reserves certain weeks of parental leave for the father (Windwehr et al., 2022) or the gender quotas in politics or in corporate boards (Teigen, 2021). Cultural models include e.g., Scandinavian design (Mordhorst, 2021), Nordic cuisine (Svejenova et al., 2022, Byrkjeflot et al., 2013), and Nordic Noir (Agger, 2016), among others. These delimited Nordic models, related to different policies and cultural practices, are associated with, or mutually sustained by the interest in and the popularity of the holistic Nordic model, anchored in work and welfare (Dølvik et al., 2015). The admiration and attention associated with Norden as a utopia, or a prototype may provide legitimation and motivation for translating such Nordic-related policy models and cultural models that are more delimited in scope. Yet, what exactly the interplay between diverse partial models and the holistic Nordic model is and to what effects for circulation and renewal is not well understood.

## Renewing Nordic models in circulation: the case of the ombudsman

To show how attention to an ecology of circulation could shed light on the staying power and renewal of the Nordic model in interplay with other partial Nordic models, we delve into the legal institution of the ombudsman. The example below is used to show the value of integrating the diffusion and translation perspectives into an ecology of circulation perspective put forward in this chapter. Below we apply the previously introduced three perspectives – diffusion, translation, and ecology of translation – to the case of the ombudsman.

*Diffusion.* Since it was established in Sweden in 1809, an ombudsman has been viewed as an office of complaint, which protects individuals against mistreatments of state power and corrupt administration. The initial diffusion involved Finland (1919) and Denmark (1955), followed by Norway and New Zealand in 1962. The ombudsman institution spread further across the Anglo-Saxon nations in the 1960s. By 1983, there were 21 national and 6 local variants (Rowe & Gadlin, 2014). At its 200-year anniversary in 2009 it was estimated that there were 945 offices in 140 countries (Ayeni, 2014). The ombudsman title has also spread across different fields, being used by many international organizations (Ladi, 2011; Erkkilä, 2020; Cardenas,

2014). Its spread beyond the Nordics in the early 1960s was enabled by how the term evolved when established in Denmark. In the 1953 amendment to the Danish Constitution, the Swedish medieval word “ombudsman” was revived, and the original meaning of the institution was reinterpreted as the citizens’ monitoring agent for government administrators. As noted by Gellhorn (1966, pp. 3–4), “while not wholly ignoring the Swedish prototype the Danish parliament improved upon rather than slavishly copying what had previously existed”. In that, it was not the original model or the first adaptation of the Swedish model that was spreading, but a revised model presented as Scandinavian by the Danish ombudsman already in the late 1950s (Hurwitz, 1960).

*Translations.* The ombudsman is an example of the kind of global script that Sahlin-Andersson (1996) has referred to. Such global scripts are interpreted and edited so as to fit the local institutional terrain and prevailing cultural norms. Rom-Jensen (2021) has outlined how there was first a failed attempt to adopt the model at the federal level in the U.S., followed by a later adoption at state and organizational levels at a speed that by some has been referred to as “Ombudmania” (Rowat, 1973). Rom-Jensen (2021) argues that in some contexts the translators of the ombudsman model had to conceal their Swedish or Nordic origin in order to have it adopted, due to the controversial status of the Swedish model in the United States in this time period. In other contexts, however, it may have been an advantage to connect it to the idea of a Nordic welfare state. Connecting and concealing are two frequently discussed approaches in translation studies and social anthropology, denoted as foreignization, i.e., referring to the ideas’ context of origin, and domestication, i.e. avoidance of referring to origin (Venuti, 1995). While the ombudsman was originally understood as a kind of a legal overseer, which was the prevailing meaning of the term in the Nordic countries, it later also became a mediator, an institution for conflict resolution as well as a guardian of human rights and good governance (Erkkilä, 2020). The contemporary ombudsman is as much a human rights body as it is an institution for the promotion of administrative justice. It is also an example of a public sector role that have been transferred to the private business sphere and large corporations (Rowe & Gadlin, 2014). In 1987 the total number of corporate ombuds-offices had risen to an estimated 200 (Rowe, 1987).

*Development of a translation ecosystem.* The travels of the ombudsman involve a wide and diverse translation ecosystem with different actors, in which “ideas can become intertwined with other ideas as they are translated and adopted and may both build on and reinforce each other” (Wedlin & Sahlin,

2017, p. 114). For example, the first Danish ombudsman Stephan Hurwitz<sup>3</sup> has been credited as a key figure in spreading early awareness of the institution (from the late 1950s) by becoming an “international advocate of the office” and “enthusiastically and persuasively describing its success to other nations in speeches, interviews and publications” (Gwyn, 1980, p. 324). The active dissemination work by Hurwitz both inside and outside the Nordics allowed the model to move to international contexts outside of Norden (Erkkilä, 2020). Further, the legal profession and the more specialized International Ombudsman Association (IOA), established in 1978, have actively promoted the institution as a concept. Later on, we see a variety of international organizations and also firms picking up the concept and developing variations of it. As a result, it has become a meta-idea that has been used for multiple purposes (Erkkilä, 2020). In addition, various kinds of cross-national collaborations have played important roles in the ombudsman circulation particularly from the 1960s to 1980s, as well as later. These include, for example, the international efforts to codify National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in the 1993 Paris Principles of the United Nations (UN).

In terms of meaning, the diffusion of the ombudsman can be linked to global discourses such as human rights (since the late 1980s) and good governance (since the mid-late 1990s). Recently, international organizations for development economics, such as the World Bank, have been active in promoting ideas, particularly linked to the discourse on good governance and transparency. Likewise, the UN and later also the European Union (EU) have been promoting the ombudsman idea. Hence, the ombudsman model may qualify as what Meyer et al. (1997, p. 145) refer to as world models that have “been in operation as shapers of states and societies” as they “define and legitimate agendas for local action, shaping the structures and policies of nation-states”. Accreditation and ranking institutes have also been important in contributing to its spread since nation-states and organizations that have an ombudsman institute score higher in various indexes (Erkkilä, 2020).

Overall, that is a very wide and diverse ecosystem, which has contributed to both sustaining the power and continuously renewing the meaning of the ombudsman institution. Our application of the three different perspectives to the travels of the ombudsman concept and institution shows that each lens allows illuminating different aspects of the journey, from the diffusion of the innovation through its translation within its original context to its multiple shifts in meaning as different actors get interested and involved in its adoption

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<sup>3</sup> Stephan Hurwitz was a Danish law professor and first Danish Ombudsman (Parliamentary Commissioner for Public Affairs).

and dissemination, crossing from its original field to multiple other fields. Further, there are important insights and implications to be gained from bringing these three perspectives together as an 'ecology of circulation' perspective, in which these processes are followed over a long period and across different translations.

## Insights and implications from an ecology of circulation perspective

There are several insights and related implications to be gained from the study of the Nordic model as an ecology of circulation. Below we highlight four main insights.

1. *Attention to an ecology of circulation involves examining the multi-directional, cross-field, and long-term travel of ideas.*

Studies of translation of management ideas within Scandinavian institutionalism have tended to focus on one idea or model and follow its movement from source to receiver, with emphasis on the translation work done at the receiving end (Czarniawska, 1996; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). More recently these ideas have been expanded to involve both the translation ecology and the multidirectional travel within a field (Wedlin a& Sahlin, 2017; Westney & Piekkari, 2020; Nielsen, Mathiassen & Newell, 2022; Røvik, 2023). As an extension of these later developments, we suggest that it could be useful to examine these processes with attention to long-term processes and ideas that travel across fields. Since the models of our interest share the word Nordic (or Scandinavian and its national variations) yet differ in the domains in which they are conceived and diffuse, it is possible to explore how different kinds of ideas and models that refer to a shared Nordic identity relate to each other, renewing their power in the process of circulation. For example, as we noted in the case of the ombudsman, there has been a broadening of the concept's use over time along with the development of an ecology of circulation around it that spans different fields. Whereas most studies of management ideas, for instance, have focused on the way models have been adopted and adapted into a given context (e.g., Wæraas & Nielsen, 2023; see also Sturdy et al., 2019), the Nordic models which we referred to cannot be fully understood without considering the carriers and mediators involved in the continuous circulation and maintenance of the models.

2. *Complex models, while less likely to be exported, may be important for social authorization of more delimited policy and cultural models.*

For the possibilities of effective idea transfer it matters whether what travels is a complex interactive model (The Nordic Model) or more delimited policy or cultural models, like the ombudsman or New Nordic Cuisine. Complex and interactive models, like the Nordic social model or tripartism in labor relations may be much more difficult to export than the delimited models. However, such complex, highly admired and (for some) almost utopian ideas may still be central motivators for those who are looking for solutions in the domain of family policy and gender equality for instance, where there is a menu offered relating to kindergartens, father quotas, board quotas, etc. The chance for a model to spread, we argue, will increase if its origin is not only known but also associated with progressive ideas related to welfare and a high growth economy, combining equality and prosperity.

3. *Translators may label something as Nordic or not, depending on its reputation in the organizational fields in which an ecology of circulation is embedded.*

Earlier, we mentioned the attempted introduction of the ombudsman to the United States where a failed initial attempt to adopt the model at the federal level was followed by later adoption at the states' level. We also noted how in some US contexts the translators of the ombudsman model had to conceal its Swedish or Nordic origin to have it implemented. Skilled translators are thus able to shift between translation strategies, e.g., from foreignization (in which the context of origin is essential) to domestication (in which the originating context is concealed). Another illustration of such strategy switching by translators can be observed in the context of Japanese management models' translations to the US and Europe. Initially, a successful import was based on foreignization, referring to Japanese management using original Japanese concepts like Kanban, Kaizen, "the Toyota way" etc.<sup>4</sup> Japan was admired as a model nation in the 1970s and 1980s, believed to be on its way to outcompete Americans in manufacturing and economic growth. In that setting it was possible and attractive to use Japanese words referring to particular management concepts and techniques. Since the 1980s, however, the Japanese economy has slowed down, and Japan has accordingly become less attractive as a supplier of models.

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<sup>4</sup> See Wikipedia for an overview of 48 Japanese business concepts: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Japanese\\_business\\_terms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Japanese_business_terms).

#### 4. *The status of a model in circulation could be “tacked” from outside.*

The status conferred to a model does not have to be initiated or agreed upon by the entity considered as a model. For example, in the case of Sweden, the Swedish prime minister and Social Democrat Olof Palme rejected the idea of a Swedish model launched by the French best-selling author and intellectual Servan-Schreiber in the late 1960s but had to appropriate the idea as his own as the competing political party, *Moderata Samlingspartiet*, picked up the idea during the election campaign in the 1970s (Hellenes, 2021). Also, the idea that there is “Scandinavian design” seems to have emerged first outside of Norden and was sometimes met by skepticism by the Nordics themselves. Likewise, most chefs that had once subscribed to the idea that there was a particular Nordic regional cooking-style referred to as New Nordic cuisine in the 2000s, became critical of the idea and has avoided the label in recent years. The idea had, however, become institutionalized in media and food magazines so the modelling of Nordic cuisine continued as Nordic cuisine has expanded further globally, long after the local chefs associated with the idea in the first place had left it behind (Svejenova et al., 2021). As argued elsewhere, such contestation and disagreements over labels imposed on new ideas by external parties involve politics of meaning and lead to enriching the semantic network of the ideas or models involved (Rapacioli, 2017; Slavich, Svejenova, Opazo & Patriotta, 2020).

In the longer run, however, there must be a two-way acceptance of the label and its related meanings for an idea, or a model labelled as Nordic to be sustainable. This two-way acceptance may involve negotiations in order to gain footing and stabilize as a model and have impact (Svejenova et al., 2021). This does not mean, however, that the entity that is being modelled may control how their model status is depicted by others. In the case of “the sex purchase ban”, sources suggest that an international movement for “the Nordic model” developed with a life of its own, independently from the discourse around that law in the Nordic countries (Crowhurst & Skilbrei, 2023).

### Ecology of circulation of ideas and models: towards a research agenda

By exploring the possibilities and potential of an ‘ecology of circulation’ perspective that is attentive to diffusion and translation across fields and over time, this chapter is a response to the call to expand translation theory “from its relatively exclusive focus on translation of general ideas into recipient units to also include translations from source units” (Røvik, 2016, p. 290) and also into other contexts than has been the focus in studies of management ideas

and traditional policy translation studies, and also for more interdisciplinary perspectives (Byrkjeflot et al., 2021). Below, we note four ways in which this perspective could enrich our understanding of how ideas sustain their power and experience renewal in the process.

*First*, our understanding of translation processes could be enriched by further attention to translation processes originating in the so-called periphery, i.e., in societies that are considered outside the established innovation and knowledge centers. For example, the tenets of translation theories could be expanded by examining how such societies from the periphery become sources of ideas that transform into models, as well as draw attention and interest, thereby being recognized as reference societies.

*Second*, it could be useful to investigate processes of social authorization and modelling. For example, it has been argued that an idea or policy model that is socially authorized will travel further and faster than other ideas (Røvik, 2007). Social authorization happens when an idea/recipe (for instance the ombudsman) is associated with an entity that is not only regarded as legitimate but also as an exemplar, benchmark or an authoritative center by other organizations, professionals, or policy makers. Focusing on social authorization could allow to unravel intended and unintended consequences from translation of ideas and policy scripts.

*Third*, further research is also needed to develop the concept ecology of translation (Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017). For example, a recent contribution (Rom-Jensen et al., 2022, p. 16) to the understanding on models put forward the following hypothesis:

If Nordic societies did not perform relatively well in international comparison over a comparatively long time period, it is highly unlikely that they would have generated the attention they do attract. Similarly, it would be unlikely that the explanations to this performance would be analysed and communicated in terms of models.

While it could be difficult to prove or disconfirm such a counter-factual statement, it is critical to identify the webs of actors that sustain processes around making and circulation of models over a longer term and across organizational fields. In this paper we have mainly referred to organizations and cultural communities or movements as carriers of ideas, but we believe it will be useful to focus on the ecology of networks of actors crisscrossing national and international organizations and sub-domains. Also, it will be useful to see how ideas and actors are coupled in such translation ecosystems. For example, an exploration into how the many rankings of nation-states have developed and been received and used may give an indication of the relationship between

such international status hierarchies and the making and circulation of models. One possibility is to study the networks between politicians, bureaucrats and experts (e.g., related to rankings) and how they interact with such modelling and branding efforts.

*Fourth*, this chapter is also a response to the call for studying Nordic models in their global context (see Byrkjeflot et al., 2021), acknowledging that in the making and circulation of models there is at least a two-way exchange between periphery (e.g., Norden) and center (e.g. USA, United Kingdom). As attention to the circulation of Nordic ideas continues, it is important to explore the role and involvement of other contexts (e.g., Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America) in the resilience and renewal of the Nordic model. In that, one could examine whether Behrends et al's claim that "travelling things create centers and peripheries by their very circulation" holds in the case of the Nordic model and the ecologies of ideas related to it (Behrends et al., 2014, p. 12). Further, while we mostly looked at ecology of circulation of varieties of Nordic models in reference to their past trajectories, interesting further work could involve their possible paths for the future, especially in relation to the models' resilience and their potential to inspire solutions to global societal challenges, as suggested in a recent somewhat overambitious initiative of the Nordic prime ministers.

In conclusion, our chapter on renewing the power of the Nordic model through its multidirectional, cross-field and long-term circulation was inspired by the seminal contributions of Kerstin Sahlin and colleagues on translation processes and ecologies. Engaging further with her contributions across empirical contexts and theoretical domains would open up opportunities for new insights as well as allow these ideas' ongoing renewal.

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# Trust: not just another idea that travels?

## Translation and adaptation of trust in local eldercare

*Elisabeth Sundin*, Linköping University

*Magdalena Elmersjö*, Södertörn University

### Introduction

This chapter describes how trust is used as a management tool in eldercare in a Swedish municipality in the first decades of the 21st century. Behind the description is one of the main challenges facing contemporary Sweden and other parts of the world: the increasing number of older persons in need of more advanced healthcare and care. This increase can be seen as a positive consequence of better living conditions and improved healthcare but is more often seen as a problem. The problem orientation includes, increased costs linked to the need for supported housing and pensions. In addition, there is a need to provide adaptations, and health and social care personnel. As a consequence of the latter, a shortage of work force is presented as another challenge facing Sweden's welfare system.

The focus of this chapter is on eldercare, which in Sweden is the responsibility of its almost 300 municipalities. The organizational principles behind municipalities are dependent on many aspects such as size, demography, history and tradition, and political preferences. They have also been affected by international trends, sometimes introduced by consultants on public organizations (Forsell, 2005; Sahlin-Andersson, 2005). Many municipalities were early adapters of new public management (NPM), which spread across the world over a number of decades (Hood, 1996). Adaption, however, was not identical in every location and not even the same in all parts of a single municipality, as aims and roles varied. Some areas are covered by legal obligations

while others are voluntary commitments, which complicates organizational and management arrangements.

While NPM was broadly implemented, problems were quickly acknowledged in different parts of the public sector from central government to care workers in a single home care area (Bringselius, 2018). The Swedish Government launched a Trust Commission on reform of public sector organizations in 2016 (Dir. 2016:51). Public sector organizations were invited to take part in a research programme (Dir. 2017:119) to identify and disseminate new ways of managing. This chapter presents one response to the call by a Swedish municipality. The municipality's presentation to the Trust Commission concerned new ways of organizing home care for older persons in one of twenty service units. This chapter addresses the factors in the success of this service reform, which shed light on how ideas on management, control and trust are given space and handled in a specific context, and how these were treated and discussed in other parts of the municipality. The chapter describes and analyses how trust are translated and adapted at the local level of Swedish municipalities by service providers and their employees. The service in focus is home care service one of the most dispersed services markets, and both tradition and knowledge are context dependent. We avoid describing municipalities as isolated phenomena that can be studied without considering context and conditions – both local and national. It is rarely possible to talk about municipalities in general, rather than in terms of national conditions. Knowledge, and how different kinds of knowledge are used and developed, is a key dimension for understanding. One unit of a home care service in one municipality is used to illustrate trends and local adaptations.

We carefully underline the importance of the fact that we are discussing a municipal example in the chapter, and that the knowledge contributions should be seen as part of an ongoing discussion on trust and how it can be understood in relation to municipal conditions, ambitions, and resources. The chapter also presents some aspects of the historical tradition and national characteristics of trust and the perspective on the travel of ideas, especially ideas on management. We present the global master idea of NPM in the national context of Sweden, and its application at different levels and in different sectors. We also place trust as an idea of management in this context.

## The travel of management ideas and organizational trends

Organizations and organizing are prerequisites for contemporary western societies. More than two decades ago, Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson (2000) wrote in *Organization Studies* how “people construct organizations rather than other social forms”. These organizations must be managed and how to do so is a constant discussion. To emphasise organizing rather than organizations may increase the understanding of social as well as economic phenomenon (Arora-Jonsson et. al., 2020). Theories on organizations and organizing have been spreading all over the world. The concept of “travel” is used to illustrate this (Czarniawska & Sevón 2005). Although these theories, or rather concepts and findings, make universal claims, translation and adaptation are required. Consequently, international, or global theories and concepts receive local interpretation in different contexts. National characteristics are believed to influence how international trends are implemented.

NPM is an international trend that has been, and still is, much in use all over the world. There is an enormous literature on NPM. We, like many others, go back to Christopher Hood, who is possibly the most influential researcher on the practice. Hood already in 1991 presented seven doctrines he found in his studies of NPM inspired reforms. A frequent argument was that public organizations should first and foremost aspire to be more like private sector organizations, which were assumed to be more efficient and effective. The doctrines aimed to achieve this ambition with the help of management principles that would influence everyone in the organization by imposing standards, output controls and discipline. In a study comparing the adaptation of NPM in different countries, Hood describes Sweden as an extreme case as it is both a welfare state and an extreme adapter of NPM doctrines (Hood, 1996; Hood & Dixon, 2016).

Some aspects of these management trends have been frequently discussed, such as the financial consequences for production, as well as problems regarding steering and control, and relations between different actors and groups of actors (Kovalainen & Sundin, 2012). As one of the main methods in NPM, control was too often constructed as a way signalling distrust. The reformulation of citizens as customers also influences relations between public servants and citizens (cf. Blomberg & Petersson, 2017; Petersson, 2017; Newman, 2011). The problems and shortcomings of NPM-influenced systems were all emphasized from a professional perspective. An administrative logic was often implemented that created administrative routines and controls. The classical “occupational professionalism” was replaced by new managerialism or “organizational professionalism” (Evetts, 2006; 2011; Nordesjö 2020). These changes

and consequences are found everywhere – in administration (Jacobsson, Wallinder & Seeing, 2020) concerning welfare (Alvehus & Andersson, 2018), in the healthcare system (Hasselbladh & Bejerot, 2016), in social work (Abramowitz & Zeinick, 2019; Nordesjö, 2020; Wiljan, 2021; Nothdurfter, Hermans, 2018) teaching (Blomqvist & Winblad, 2022) and the police (Ivarsson Westerberg, 2020). The same shortcomings identified in the police and healthcare, which are overseen by central government and the regions, were found in many municipalities. This led to the establishment of a Trust Commission, which has echoes of the often mentioned and sometimes ridiculed “social engineering” in seeing a problem and trying to fix it (cf. Hirdman, 2010).

## Trust as a response

The Trust Commission was set up in 2016 in a decision taken by the Swedish government and supported by parliament (Bringselius, 2018). Responsibility for managing its work was given to the minister of Home Affairs. A secretariat was recruited with a high proportion of research staff. The main aim of the commission was to work with public sector organizations on the “development of a more trust-based system of governance and management” at both the agency and the national level, as well as in municipalities and parts of municipalities at the local level. The Commission used different methods, such as hearings, workshops, creative networks, the testing of methodologies and dissemination of good practices.

Trust-based management is defined as emphasizing the aim of an activity and putting the focus on the end-user (Bringselius, 2018: 67). It was summed up in seven guiding principles by the Trust commission: (a) trust, or having positive expectations of and trusting the individuals or organizations you meet; (b) a citizen focus, by understanding what people want and valuing this; (c) a holistic view, which involves everyone at all levels being responsible for the whole; (d) freedom of action, which should be dispersed as widely as possible; (e) support, which must be given to core workers; (f) competence, which should be increased through active learning, certified practice and scientific knowledge; and (g) openness to accepting new knowledge and information, and passing it on, and also to criticism.

In the Swedish context, trust as a management principle is now established as a norm and as something positive. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKR) supports trust-based management and the definition used in the seven guiding principles. The SKR publicizes arrangements on trust and management specialists write articles on trust (Bringselius et. al., 2021). Trust is valued and supported in municipalities and regions throughout

the country. However, we believe that a closer look at the messaging is less unequivocal, as statements like “we trust our employees” can be followed by decisions to introduce new technology that makes “minute-control” possible, or the introduction of technology to measure and control might be followed by a declaration that “we practice trust-based management”. Such statements provide little knowledge on organizational practice but illustrate how concepts travel. A study made by Håkansson (2022) shows how the trust concept is used although other principles are used in the name of economy and efficiency. Trust has a positive image in the Swedish context firmly located in history. The next section discusses this tradition.

## Swedish municipalities: unique public organizations showing trust

The Swedish nation is classified as a Scandinavian welfare state. As the welfare obligations contained in care for older persons, childcare and schools are the responsibility of the municipalities, perhaps “welfare municipalities” would be more appropriate. There are 290 municipalities of various sizes from less than 3000 to almost one million inhabitants. A 2006 article by one of the authors of this chapter (Sundin, 2006) emphasizes the diversity of obligations, sizes, number of employees and level of resources, compared to other organizations. The municipality is itself often the largest employer in an area. Its employees are among the most educated and the least educated in the Swedish labour market. Municipalities are democratic organizations governed by elected politicians but managed by a professional administrator. The municipalities are mainly financed by taxes or fees set by elected politicians.

The last two points are often classified as the key characteristics of local self-government, which has deep historical roots. Local government is an integrated part of the position of trust. In the World Values Survey (WVS)<sup>1</sup>, Sweden stands out as a country that combines secular-rational values with values of self-expression. The other Nordic countries belong in the same category, which is labelled Protestant Europe, that also includes the Netherlands and Germany. Sweden is called the outlier country by Pettersson and Esmer (2005), and Dehly and Newman (2005) use the concept Nordic exceptionalism. This extreme position has interested national and international researchers, as some dimensions, especially trust, are considered to have positive consequences for individuals, organizations, and nations. According to Holmberg and Rothstein (2017, p. 1645), referring to influential researchers such as the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iffs.se/kalendarium/iffs-play/world-values-survey-cultural-map/>

Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom: “Trust helps to build what have been labelled ‘successful societies’ and trust keeps societies together”. They emphasize that “the importance of interpersonal social trust is difficult to exaggerate” as it has comparatively low transactions costs and demands high levels of social trust and a minimum of difference in trust between groups. Referring to the World Value Survey, the authors state that the quality of service and impartiality of public institutions is crucial. Alexius and Vähämäki (2021) states that classical NPM-norms, like control, in some contexts is a prerequisite for trust for actions and organisations. Trädgårdh (2018) concludes that impartiality and trust are easy to say but difficult to achieve. He concludes that the historical and religious roots, indicate that management ideas, on trust among other things, can be better understood if Sweden as an extreme context is acknowledged.

## The case: local interpretations of general trends

As mentioned above, the Trust Commission was looking for examples of good trust-based management practice. Many organizations in municipalities, agencies and regions responded to the call to present their activities and why they thought these would be of interest to the Commission and by extension a national audience. Sundsvall municipality was one such organization that was considered to be of interest and invited to make a presentation. Later, the authors of this chapter were asked to use Sundsvall as their example. The findings and discussion below are from this study (see e.g., Elmersjö & Sundin, 2018; 2021). Sundsvall, a municipality with almost 100,000 inhabitants, was the applicant and the example of good practice concerned home care, mostly for older persons but also for others in need of help, in a part of the municipality called Skönsmon. Skönsmon used to be a municipality on its own before a major municipality reform in the 1970s. It has 6000 inhabitants, a centre of its own located 15 kilometres from the city centre, and a rural and distributed population. The home care organization has its office and meetings rooms in a building in the local town centre.

Sundsvall, like most municipalities, had been facing significant problems with its home care service of different kinds for several decades (i.e., Halvarsson Lundkvist & Gustavsson, 2018). High turnover among employees was linked to poor working conditions that involved fragmented work patterns and NPM-inspired control systems. Something had to be done. One of the managers in the social sector was inspired by a model for change elaborated by a firm of consultants (Seddon, 2008). The model emphasized ‘systems thinking’, an established perspective in mainstream organizational theory (Hatch,

2018) that can be called a holistic view, as is mentioned in the Commission's terminology. The manager was appointed as a change agent and began with the unit in Skönsmon, where her thinking was met with support and interest not by everyone, but from key actors. A prerequisite for starting work was the support of the lead manager of the social unit. At the time, this was a newly recruited person who approved of and developed enthusiasm for the changes.

The new ways of working according to the Skönsmon model (SM) can be summarized in three concepts: continuity, flexibility, and time. It took as its starting point the frontline employees, mainly care workers. They worked in small, stable groups of five or six persons, taking responsibility for a small number of service users. The employees decided themselves on the distribution of tasks. Service users met fewer employees than they had before as it was always one member of the stable group who came to visit, which led to increased continuity. The users could also make contact at any time as one group member always carried a mobile phone and would answer it – not just for one hour in the morning as had been the case previously. That made the users feel safe. If a frontline employee saw a need for a nurse, a psychotherapist or another professional or semi-professional they could request assistance and support through their manager. All of this meant increased flexibility and time. This practice made the front-line employees the absolute decision makers and key-producers, while other personnel groups became the support workers. This was a shift in power and the turnover rate for front-line personnel was reversed. Both these consequences were a dramatic change. At first this demanded new ways of thinking on how organizations, and all members of the organization, should be managed. The frontline employees had to be prepared to take responsibility, and for the new ways of working, while the others, including professional and semi-professional staff, had to trust frontline employees and agree to act on demand. Management would have to be supportive in both theory and practice. These changes challenged established practice, so information, training and time for reflection and discussion were required and provided through the involvement of a consultant and the change agent.

The unique features of cases are always a point for discussion: What is general and can be used by others and what is necessary? We see local examples as puzzle pieces in a possible overall picture of what is going on. We ended our report on our first study of the SM in practice (Elmersjö & Sundin, 2018) with eight recommendations for organizations seeking to use trust-based systems in their home care services. At the same time, we described our knowledge contribution as a snapshot. Most important in our recommendations was that the competence of front-line employees should be trusted as their judgement

and decisions influence employees at all levels and lines of the organization. To be accepted, the primacy of the front-line employees must be supported by senior management. Transparency and the distribution of information to everyone concerned is also important. Our recommendations were similar to the guiding principles on trust-based management published by the Trust Commission. Two on our list, however, on *enough time for change work* and *staff involvement in planning and implementation*, were missing from the Commission's list. We think they should have been there. The success of the SM spread across the country. The change agent received many questions from other municipalities and was asked to give, or sell, her prescription for the SM of how to organize a home care service. Her constant answer was that there was no prescription to distribute as home care services must be organized according to local conditions. We believe that the change agent's stance on the issue of "no prescriptions" challenges a simple and uncomplicated understanding of the travel of ideas as "something positive and forceful in municipal development". She was aware of that to reach this positive outcome time for reflection, information and training must be set aside as established norms and relations were challenged.

## Discussion

### *Trust in different editions*

When we left the SM unit at the municipality, an implementation process aimed at introducing the model in all 17 of its community home care units was under way. Five years later, we are informed of that "the Skönsmo-model is dead" (Sundsvalls Tidning 16.11.2021). This is untrue, but much has happened, and much has changed. In this final section we restrict ourselves to some perspectives and conclusions concerning the home care services in Skönsmon and other parts of the Sundsvall municipality. The points of discussion concern both practice and rhetoric, and description and interpretation.

First and foremost, the SM is still very much alive and working well in Skönsmon. However, implementation of the model in the entire home care service system has not been realized. There is no single dominant explanation, but a number of reasons and conclusions have been articulated. Together they indicate that the change agent was right when she claimed that context was important in the home care services and that the relevant context has to be carefully demarcated. Further, as mentioned above, time for reflection, information and training must be set aside.

The travel of ideas has to make a stop and be examined before being accepted and implemented in practice. The boundaries of the relevant organiza-

tion turn out to be rather narrow when it comes to these kinds of services. Some units never accepted the SM as a model for their own practise of eldercare service. They claim to be producing a high-quality service without marketing themselves either locally or on the national stage. They support the importance of the quality dimensions – continuity, flexibility, and time – but define them differently. The dimension of continuity for some is even more narrow than the SM of a small group. Care workers in some other units argue that there is a unique personal, almost familiar, relation between themselves and ‘their users’. Both these care workers and their managers argue that implementing continuity in the SM way would break these bonds, resulting in a lower quality relationship. Flexibility is handled in these units through the assistance of other professionals and semi-professionals organized along established rules and principles of both care workers and managers and within time limits decided given to them. Some of them argue, in line with findings presented by Alexius and Vähämäki (2021) that control of the NPM-kind is a prerequisite for trust.

Even in units with acknowledged problems with recruitment and retention, SM was not always welcomed. One advocate state that implementation of the SM in the other units was weak in many dimensions: too fast, too insensitive to local conditions and neglecting need for education and information both on organisation, management, and the home care service system. Resistance also indicates that there may be other good ways of delivering services and support than those stated in the SM. Different management principles can exist side by side. In this case this is accented by the joint experience of lean-models and an ongoing competition for financing.

### *Change as an ongoing condition*

Based on our studies of the SM, we draw the following conclusions:

- trust-based management is also an idea that is travelling;
- trust in the organization studied is concretized in many ways;
- quality home care requires all dimensions of trust but especially flexibility;
- the demands placed on the “inverted organizational pyramid” challenge established organizational thinking that SM, with its revolutionary auto-formation in terms of home care service, cannot be exported without modification.

These conclusions are valuable but also demanding especially as home care services still face increased demand, high staff turnover and high costs, and have too little time to offer clients both in Sweden and in the municipality

of Sundsvall. Something must be done, and the SM was an attempt to resolve these problems. Although successful in Skönsmon, the SM was not welcome in other units of the home care service. Management continues to search for a solution that will suit employees, taxpayers, and end-users. Another reorganization is planned, in line with the prerequisites of contemporary modern societies identified above. Following this reorganization, the SM home care service group will leave its current location in the village and be based together with other units in the central municipal area. The reasons for this are linked to changes in relations and responsibilities in health care for older persons, as well as economics and efficiency savings. This means that the group of employees based at Skönsmon will have to alter some of their activities. They must drive to Skönsmon and will lose their daily local contacts in the centre of Skönsmon. How this will influence them is an interesting question that deserve to be answered. Additionally, there is a need for knowledge on whether the rhetoric on home care services, competence, and trust, or working conditions and relations with the service will be affected.

Home care service for older people is an extreme service – it must be continuous for 24 hours, 365 days a year. Services are distributed to users' homes and delivered behind closed doors in a physical user/producer situation. This is done without any possibility for managers to control what is going on. Consequently, home care service is impossible to manage without a degree of trust. Nonetheless, constant attempts are made to control care workers more and more. Time reporting using smartphones is just one example – a form of control that has been heavily criticized because it increases the amount of documentation required and the detailed management of care workers' tasks. As stated in the headline, and above, change is an ongoing process. However, to meet the unresolved problems in home care for the older persons, change must take place according to the needs of the service uses and at the same time acknowledge the importance of care workers working conditions.

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# How big projects become imitated

*Barbara Czarniawska, University of Gothenburg*  
*Guje Sevón, Stockholm School of Economics*

For most younger scholars, Kerstin Sahlin is mostly known as the apostle of collegiality that needs to return to contemporary universities, which are both bureaucratized and pretending to be corporations (see e.g., Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016). But we were impressed and inspired by her earlier works and can clearly see the connection between those and the recent ones, together forming a clear chain of knowledge production throughout the years.

It begun with Kerstin's studies of large projects, a topic of her dissertation<sup>1</sup> (Sahlin-Andersson, 1986). Her next study was the construction of "Globen", a large indoor arena in Stockholm, and discovered something like a magic attraction to big projects. Such projects, when successful, are used as umbrellas for many actions already in existence, giving meaning and legitimacy to those about to begin, and providing a space for plans and designs (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Her scrutiny of several such projects suggested that to many initiators, it does not seem to matter so much what the



<sup>1</sup> Guje Sevón was the "opponent" at her dissertation at Umeå University.

project is, it is the scale that matters. Thus, large buildings are more appreciated than small buildings, big research projects better looked at by foundations than small projects, and long-range plans appear as more serious than the short-term ones (Sahlin-Andersson, 1989).

What she has also discovered was that those big projects, much as they usually emphasize their uniqueness, are often a result of imitation (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). It is not only the size that attracts, but also a success of the enterprise. Also, the imitation is not limited to similar organizations only (though it is most common within the same organizational field). But how can different organizations imitate? Sahlin-Andersson developed the suggestion formulated by Guje Sevón (1996) that imitation is a dynamic process, whether neither the starting point nor the outcome are given at the outset. An intense editing of "success stories" is usually taking place, with various agencies involved in the process, making the story "fit" the local needs.<sup>2</sup>

But imitation is not limited to construction projects: various organization tools, symbolic and/or virtual are widely imitated as well. Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson (1997) studied one of them – transparency – and noticed the paradox that it shared with many other fashionable terms: It is opaque, and open to a many different interpretations.

As to the reasons for the pursuit of transparency, apart from the obvious but rarely mentioned imperative to follow global fashions, three are usually quoted. Transparency facilitates individual choices (a central concept in the marketized public sector); it helps to increase efficiency and the quality of products; and it prevents corruption (Czarniawska, 2015).

Sahlin-Andersson concluded her analysis saying that transparency's instruments – regulation, accounting, and audit – make certain things and aspects visible, while hiding others. In other words, transparency must be constructed, mediated, and edited.

Later, Sahlin-Andersson and Sevón (2003) made another paradoxical comparison – between imitation and innovation. Apparently opposite, in organizational practice they are often unified, as presenting an imitation as an innovation (in a specific time and place) positively contributes to creation of an organizational image.

After that Sahlin-Andersson and her colleagues (Hedmo et al., 2005) adopted and developed James G. March's (1999) inventory of different modes of imitation: the broadcasting mode, the chain mode, and the mediation mode. It was the last mode, in which the relationships between those being

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<sup>2</sup> This text helped Barbara Czarniawska to understand why Lund University decided to imitate Stanford University research park (Sahlin-Andersson, 1990). The editors forgot to mention the climatic difference between Stanford (sunny) and Lund (rainy).

imitated and those imitating are mediated by other organizations, that was of most interest to the authors. After all, imitation does not always proceed from those imitated to those imitating, from fashion leaders to fashion followers. Researchers, media, expert committees, and international organizations are presumed to report on actions and events occurring elsewhere. In fact, they not only mediate and edit ideas, but also influence and shape the activities that are assumed to be straightforward translations of the original ideas. The present fashion of mergers and acquisition at the universities (Czarniawska, 2019) is a very good example of such complex processes.

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