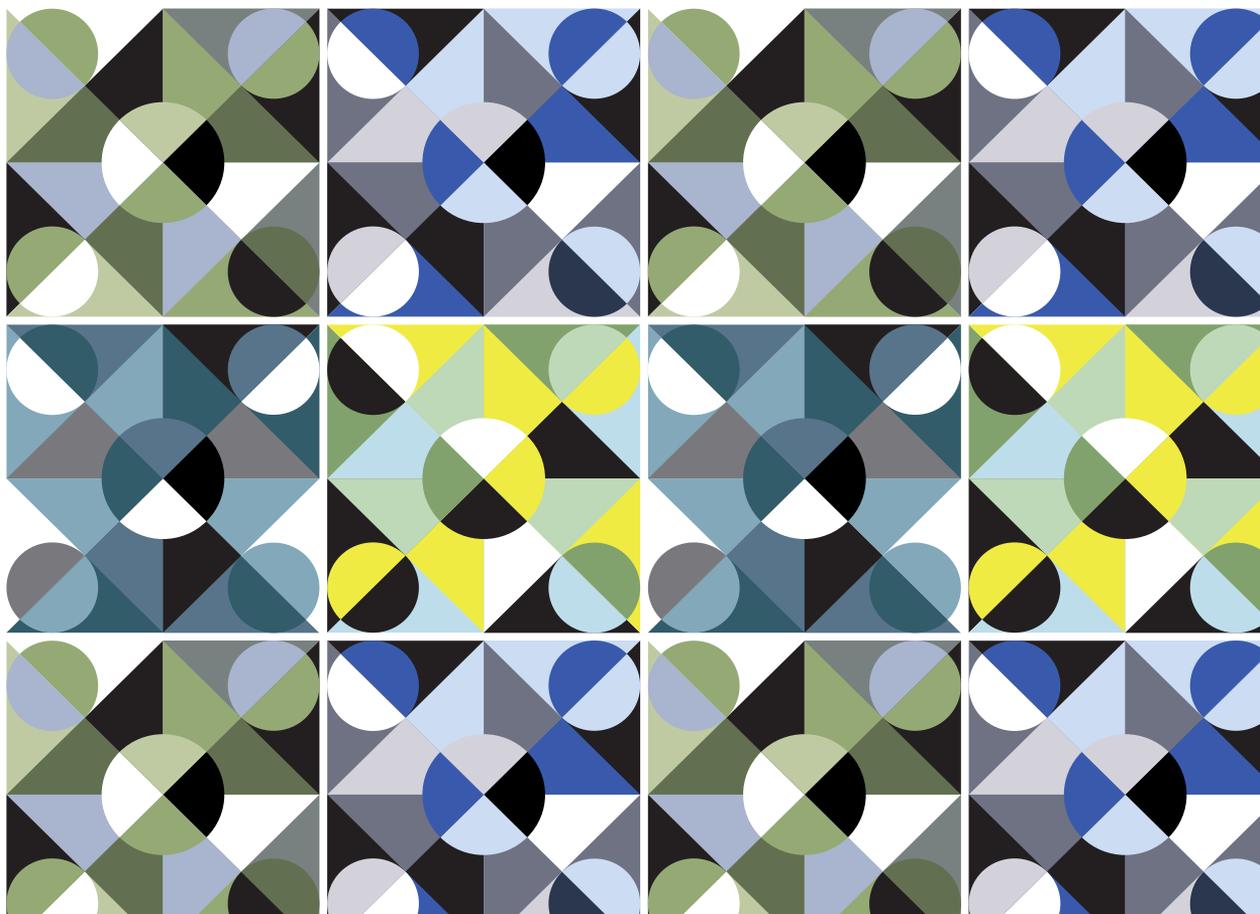




David Scott

(Dis)assembling Development

**Organizing Swedish Development Aid
through Projectification**





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David Scott

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Political Science

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Aid through Projectification

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“There is no social order. Rather, there are endless attempts at ordering”. (Law 1994:101)

“Today, we do not deem ourselves subjugated *subjects*, but rather *projects*: always refashioning and reinventing ourselves”. (Han 2017:1)

“I despise the kind of book which tells you how to live, how to make yourself happy. Philosophers have no good news for you at this level. I believe the first duty of philosophy is making you understand what deep shit you are in!” (Slavoj Žižek)

Table of contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	6
1 INTRODUCTION	9
<i>THE PROJECT</i> AND ITS EMBEDDEDNESS IN CONTEMPORARY GOVERNING ARRANGEMENTS	11
HOW TO DEAL WITH A PATCHWORK - APPROACHING <i>THE PROJECT</i> AS AN ASSEMBLAGE	13
STUDYING THE PROJECT ASSEMBLAGE IN SWEDISH DEVELOPMENT AID	15
AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	20
THESIS OUTLINE.....	21
2 ASSEMBLING INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PROJECTIFIED TIMES – A CONTEXTUALIZATION.....	23
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS A MANAGERIAL PRACTICE	23
PUBLIC SECTOR TRANSFORMATION IN TIMES OF MARKETIZATION AND MANAGERIALIZATION	32
<i>New Public Management</i>	32
<i>Consultants – Mobile carriers of market and management thinking</i>	38
<i>Projectification – An overview</i>	41
<i>Projectification as a managerial practice in international development</i>	46
ASSEMBLAGE STUDIES	50
<i>Assemblage and its philosophical underpinnings</i>	51
<i>Assemblage thinking mobilized – Theoretical and empirical divergences</i>	57
Assemblage as an analytical tactic and space of inquiry.....	58
Mobilizing assemblage to explore processes of composition.....	60
Concluding remarks	66
ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK – MOBILIZING CONCEPTS FOR EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS	68
<i>Exploring the construction of the project through processes of translation</i>	69
Setting the analysis in motion – An analytical strategy.....	72
3 STUDYING <i>THE PROJECT</i> IN PRACTICE - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND MATERIAL.....	76
INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS ON ASSEMBLAGE AND METHODOLOGY	76
DEFINING A STUDY OBJECT – FOLLOWING <i>THE PROJECT</i>	78
THE POLITICS OF METHODOLOGY	81
THE CASE RATIONALE – <i>THE PROJECT</i> AS A PARADIGMATIC CASE	82
CONSTRUCTING THE ASSEMBLAGE	83
<i>Access to the field</i>	91
<i>Initial considerations on data generation</i>	94
Interviews.....	95
Focus group interview	98
Observations.....	99
Documents	100
DATA ANALYSIS - DEPLOYING A RHIZOMATIC APPROACH	103
RESEARCH ETHICS.....	108
A NOTE ON TRANSLATION	113

4 ASSEMBLING THE PROJECT IN SWEDISH DEVELOPMENT AID	114
ASSEMBLING APPLICATIONS – THE JOURNEY TOWARDS AN APPLICATION	114
<i>Gaining access to funding</i>	115
<i>Assessing the suitability of funding</i>	117
<i>Writing the application – translating technical guidelines and establishing the “tone”</i> .	119
Translating guidelines and instructions – Engaging with the template.....	119
Consolidating cooperation – Teamwork.....	125
Appearing attractive to the funder	127
<i>Mobilizing expertise for the use of mindsets and models</i>	133
<i>Concluding summary – An application process without a center</i>	135
ASSEMBLING APPRAISALS – THE JOURNEY TOWARDS (DIS)APPROVAL	137
<i>Mobilizing criteria</i>	137
<i>Mobilizing supporting artifacts – Using the handbook</i>	146
<i>Mobilizing expertise</i>	148
<i>Concluding summary – An appraisal process without a center</i>	154
ASSEMBLING IMPLEMENTATION AND REPORTING	155
<i>Building the evidence base</i>	155
<i>Managing the project logic – Exploiting advantages and handling contradictions and pressures</i>	158
Managing administrative requirements – Producing the report.....	159
Stuck in the unpredictability and rigidity of the project logic	166
<i>Maximizing success – Mobilizing support systems for project implementation</i>	173
<i>Using platforms for knowledge exchange and experimentation</i>	174
Self-organized platforms – Learning in a network setting	174
Funder-organized platforms – Learning under experimental conditions.....	178
<i>Maximizing success through informal means</i>	180
<i>Concluding summary – An implementation and reporting process without a center</i> ...	182
ASSEMBLING AUDITING	183
<i>Funder-organized audit</i>	183
<i>Externally-organized audit</i>	186
Organizing evaluation in a context of outsourcing	186
Conducting the evaluation – an interplay between conflict and alignment	189
<i>Concluding summary – An auditing process without a center</i>	195
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION – THE PROJECT AS A RESULT OF TRANSLATION.....	196
5 (DE)STABILIZING THE PROJECT.....	198
PROCESSES OF STABILIZATION – TAMING COMPLEXITY, AMBIGUITY AND UNCERTAINTY	198
<i>Stabilization through brokerage</i>	199
Human brokers straddling social worlds	199
Documents as brokers	202
<i>Stabilization through calculation and standardization</i>	206
Subjecting the project to calculation – The performativity of numbers.....	206

Travelling models – Following global forms.....	211
Scientific repertoires	215
STABILIZATION THROUGH MARKETIZATION	216
<i>Assembling an application market</i>	217
<i>Assembling a consultancy market</i>	218
ASSEMBLING PROJECT TIME.....	221
THE FRAGILITY OF ASSEMBLING – DESTABILIZATION	222
<i>Absorbed destabilization</i>	223
<i>Ambiguous destabilization</i>	224
<i>The obstruction of absolute destabilization</i>	227
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION – (DE)STABILIZING <i>THE PROJECT</i>	228
6 THE POWER IMPLICATIONS OF PROJECT ASSEMBLY	232
THE DEPOLITICIZING CHARACTERISTICS OF <i>THE PROJECT</i>	232
<i>Outsourcing politics to experts – The case of development consultants</i>	233
<i>Manufacturing consensus around the market logic</i>	236
<i>Mending a fractured assemblage - Erasing contradictions and conflicts through maintenance and repair</i>	237
<i>The growth of bureaucratic organization – The paradox of the “flexible” project</i>	243
<i>The construction of the bureaucratic civil society organization</i>	244
Administrative systems and procedures	245
The creation of managerial roles.....	247
<i>Concluding discussion – The depoliticized project</i>	250
<i>THE PROJECT AS A DEVICE FOR REPRODUCING MODERNITY AND COLONIALITY</i>	251
<i>Concluding discussion – A struggle between talk and silence</i>	256
7 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION	258
THE THESIS AND ITS OVERALL CONTRIBUTION	258
RENDERING <i>THE PROJECT</i> STRANGE – DEALING WITH “GHOSTS”	266
<i>Marketization, managerialization, optimization and transparency</i>	267
<i>Standardization and rationalization</i>	270
<i>The project as a Janus face – Part neoliberal, part modern</i>	272
<i>Challenging the project society</i>	273
REFERENCES.....	276
APPENDIX 1	296
APPENDIX 2.....	304

List of Tables

Table 2.1 The analytical strategy	75
Table 3.1 The studied sites of emergence	86
Table 3.2 Studying <i>the project</i> as a multi-sited practice – a summary.....	102

List of Figures

Figure 4.1 Extract from the implementation plan of an application template	121
Figure 4.2 Example of risk matrix	124
Figure 4.3 Example of timeline for activities.....	132
Figure 4.4 Example of results framework from intermediary organization	139
Figure 4.5 Example of assessment template from intermediary organization	143
Figure 4.6 Example of activity matrix	161
Figure 4.7 Example of questions for follow-up visits	185
Figure 5.1 Numbers in activity matrix.....	209
Figure 5.2 The constituent components of the project assemblage	231

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1 Introduction

On a mild Swedish winter day, there is a dialogue meeting arranged by a state funder of Swedish development aid. The meeting works as a platform for the funder to provide information to a group of civil society organizations who have submitted, or plan to submit, applications for a specific grant that enables them to work with peace and security issues in developing countries. The meeting starts with three funder representatives providing information about general conditions for funding and the criteria used for assessment of applications. The general conditions span over multiple areas. The funder expects that a project that has been approved be continuously reported on, as this is important material for further reporting to the government. Furthermore, there are rules for using external accountants if the fund received exceeds a certain amount, and routines to be followed if funds need to be re-allocated or re-funded. The funder also emphasizes that the organizations should be prepared for possible spot checks. Specific criteria are used to assess applications; organizations need to link their applications explicitly to the goals of the funder as well as to three predetermined thematic priorities (conflict sensitivity, gender equality and environment and climate issues) that should permeate all development activities. As support in the appraisal process, the funder has at its disposal an expert group consisting of scholars and civil society representatives who read all applications and provide input.

After the presentation, the meeting is re-organized into a discussion format in which small groups discuss and provide feedback on rules and routines. Their task is to provide a “CSO wish-list” detailing how they want rules and requirements to function. The themes for the discussions are how the organizations perceive issues of formal character, such as application and reporting routines, and issues related to the different forms of funding available (as there is funding both for specific project ideas and for the regular activities and functions of the organizations). The application procedures are organized through meticulous templates in which the applicants are required to describe a time-limited project with specified goals,

activities, indicators, expected results and budgets. Thus, they contribute to organizations being in a state of labor and struggle through the application process, as they constantly have to interpret and translate the templates in relation to their own realities. The formalized character of the application templates and the requirements they contain are perceived as difficult to deal with; some requirements are seen as unmotivated and as forcing applicants to repeat themselves. Some of the participants especially highlight that the requirement of being “innovative” causes heavy interpretation work and risks excluding other modes of working. The application templates are also perceived as requiring so much work that applying is not worthwhile as the sum applied for is too small.

As the discussions are summed up together with the funder representatives, these challenges as well as other problems are voiced. Some participants point out that the short-term character of funding is a problem as it affects the employment conditions for project workers. A democratic problem is also pointed out: “Complex applications can stand in contrast to a pluralistic civil society, since they have an exclusionary function”, one participant argues. The funder receives the feedback and ends the meeting with outlining the main events for the year to come, in terms of application periods and new dialogue meetings. The participants leave and return to their offices, presumably to continue working with interpreting requirements and writing applications and reports.

This scene illustrates the common way of organizing development aid through *the project*; an organizational form that allows imagining a particular problem to be solved through a time-limited intervention that is thoroughly planned and subjected to continuous monitoring. The way *the project* unfolds in the above-described scene displays some of its characteristics. Through the invention of a series of steps, such as applications, appraisals and reporting, *the project* can be carved up in manageable components that contribute to the idea that every aspect conceivable can be organized and ordered. *The project* is a window which allows us to discover power in its various guises; the power to

form, sustain and dissolve a particular organizational form. Using the project format has political consequences, as is touched upon, albeit in a brief manner, in the above example: it influences how resources of various kinds are distributed; it introduces particular practices, techniques and processes that must be used and adhered to in order to succeed in the project “market”; and it redraws the boundaries between state, market and civil society domains by redistributing the functions and tasks traditionally confined to these spheres.

Hence, *the project* as an organizational form is a practice in which power relations are reproduced and contested, thereby influencing the way politics is organized in modern society in the sense that it both broadens and narrows the scope of political discretion. How these power relations are upheld and contested as *the project* is constructed and produced is the focus of this thesis. To study them requires an approach that refuses to consider *the project* as an apolitical and neutral practice. Before presenting this approach, however, I describe briefly how *the project* is embedded in the transformation in governing arrangements that have taken place over the last few decades.

The project and its embeddedness in contemporary governing arrangements

The emergence of *the project* as a popular mode of governing has not occurred in a vacuum. During recent decades, the way contemporary societies are governed has transformed radically, and *the project* should be seen as embedded in this transformation in governing arrangements. There is a vast research field discussing how the governing of contemporary societies has transformed in the wake of political and economic changes. While disagreement is rule rather than exception, this research shares the preoccupation for how a more complex, flexible and decentralized form of governing should be understood. There is a range of scholarly depictions of how this complexity is to be understood, captured in analyses of the shift to “governance without government” (Peters and Pierre 1998); the shift from a fordist to a post-fordist governing architecture (Fraser 2003;

Jessop 1996); the transition to a “postbureaucratic” landscape (Hodgson 2004); and a “neoliberalization” of society, referring to concrete privatization and deregulation reforms as well as the economization of politics in general (Brown 2015; Harvey 2006).

While these labels focus on different aspects, all these types of research point to, firstly, the phenomenon of “governance-beyond-the-state”, meaning the devolution of the responsibility of governing to actors outside the state, such as civil society and the private sector (Swyngedouw 2005). Secondly, they highlight the intensification and proliferation of a range of new governing practices that are mobilized by such actors, often associated with marketization and management arrangements. An example of these governing practices comes from the public sector, which has undergone a substantial transformation since the 1970s. This transformation consists of a turn to marketization and managerialism, captured in the concept “New Public Management” (NPM). Although encompassing wide transformations in the public sector, the concept captures the techniques mobilized to make a bureaucratic public sector more effective, such as the introduction of principles of competition, flexibility and performance measurement (Hood 1991). Attached to NPM is also a general shift towards managerialism which can be considered an ideology professing a belief in a generic set of practices, methods and procedures that can be applied to govern the public sector more effectively (Painter 2011). *The project* as an organizational form should be seen against this wider backdrop of transformation in governing arrangements. Although the use of projects cannot be seen as miraculously emerging as an effect of this transformation (they were around before the shift began), *the project* finds a fertile ground to thrive in thanks to it.

The fact that *the project* has found a fertile ground to thrive in can be noted in the shift in research during recent years. While the use of projects, combined with an ongoing adaptation of organizational work to the project logic, has been a distinct component in organizational research for some time (Clegg and Courpasson 2004; Hodgson 2004; Midler 1995; Räisänen and Linde 2004), its introduction and effects in

other sectors have more recently started to get more scholarly attention. In this research, it is noted how *the project* harmonizes with the managerial transformations in the public sector. As the public sector has taken a big leap towards establishing a more effective administration, incorporating flexible governing forms together with control, *the project* has attained a status as an attractive organizational form. As Hodgson et al. (2019:5) argue:

The rise of projects and project management has been welcomed by many as an organisational form which enables both flexibility and control, and as a practical apparatus for the production of and documentation of measurable outputs.

Although the research on the use of projects started out as a problem-solving project management literature aiming to make projects more effective, it has since expanded as the possibly damaging effects of project proliferation in terms of increased rationalization and instrumentalization have been observed (Hodgson et al. 2019). Thus, the increased focus on the power-related effects of *the project* has constituted a much-needed contribution to the project literature, as it recognizes that the insertion of the project logic in particular contexts introduces an intensified form of governing that includes a multiplicity of repertoires and practices that give a particular activity an ordered and stable character. These repertoires and practices are key to understand what type of power relations are reproduced and contested in the making of projects. For the purposes of this thesis, this calls for an engagement with an adequate theoretical perspective that makes an analysis of these power relations possible.

How to deal with a patchwork - Approaching *the project* as an assemblage

Returning to the dialogue meeting described above, it is clear that for *the project* to come to life and sustain itself, it is dependent on the mobilization of a range of repertoires, processes and practices. Thus, funding practices influenced by competition ideals, bureaucratic application and reporting practices and different forms of expertise are

all present simultaneously, creating and sustaining the relations needed to construct *the project*. Therefore, *the project* appears as a complex and messy patchwork combining a multitude of elements that do not always seem to fit logically with each other. As I touched upon above, these components are key to understand the power relations being reproduced and contested as *the project* is constructed. What theoretical resources are available for studying such a patchwork of diffuse and nebulous power relations? During recent decades, many contributions have been made to the discussion on how a complex, decentralized and interconnected society can be understood. Thus, concepts such as “network” (Castells 1996); “actor-networks” (Latour 2007); “meshwork” (Ingold 2007) and “Empire” (Hardt and Negri 2000) have surfaced as attempts to conceptualize an ever messier society in which governing is embedded in increasingly complex arrangements “beyond the state” (Miller and Rose 2008).

While not disapproving of these contributions, I have settled for a concept that I argue is sensitive both to the overall complexity and messiness of contemporary governing arrangements and to the power inherent in them. Hence, in order to understand the complex components making up *the project* and how power relations are reproduced and contested as they are mobilized, I have chosen to engage with the concept of *assemblage*.

Deleuze and Guattari (2013), who introduce the concept in their seminal work *A Thousand Plateaus*, argue that the world we inhabit can be understood as unstable configurations that can be called assemblages. These assemblages are made up of heterogeneous components that strive to gain order and stability but which can never attain a status of full unity and consistency. The components making up an assemblage are not limited by taken-for-granted boundaries and binaries and can consist of human practices, nonhuman elements as well as discourses and norms. A central element in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s (2013) theorizing is also that assemblages can never be reduced to a single essential logic that determines their functioning. In this way, an assemblage does not obey an “arborescent model”

(Deleuze and Guattari 2013:381), meaning that it is not governed by a center ordering the assemblage in particular predetermined hierarchies. Rather, an assemblage is made up of multiple components striving to give it its organized character. Deleuze and Guattari have spurred a lively research tradition in which the concept of assemblage is used to study a range of empirical phenomena. A common denominator for this research is its focus on studying everything from policies to development projects as complex configurations which cannot be reduced to a single logic but instead are composed by a multitude of components.

Approaching *the project* as an assemblage, or rather as an outcome of processes of *assembling*, makes possible not only an analysis of a study object that is a complex and messy patchwork made up of multiple components, but also a more nuanced and fine-grained power analysis. Since assemblage as a concept builds on the notion that the unstable formations surrounding us cannot be reduced to a single center of power, it recalibrates the research gaze towards *multiple* centers. In this way, it takes into account a decentralized approach that I find necessary in order to capture those nodes of power that can sometimes be ignored in theoretical frameworks favoring the reduction and subsumption of power to one or a few structuring principles.

Studying the project assemblage in Swedish development aid

Up until now, I have described the way assemblage as an analytical concept can be mobilized to untangle the power relations that are reproduced and contested as *the project* is assembled in practice. In this section, I describe and explain the motivations for the case which I use to analyze how *the project* is constructed through the piecing together of multiple components. As has been briefly touched upon in the previous sections, it is the assembly of *the project* as an organizational form in Swedish development aid that is in focus for this study. The choice to study this field was, at the inception of this thesis, influenced by my own preoccupation with how the transformational ambitions of development aid are affected when they have to be

adapted to a managerial framework. As I immersed myself in the field, it receded to some extent into the background (but without being deemed unimportant), and I discovered a particular organizational practice – *the project* – which started to captivate me more than the field itself. However, my preoccupation with how this managerial practice is installed in a field in which transformational ambitions are more or less ubiquitous still influenced me and is the reason why a study of this field is particularly relevant.

Since its establishment as an object for both academic and practical reflection, development aid has been stuck in a paradox. While development aid has been built on transformational ambitions, ranging from eradicating poverty to increasing the respect for democracy, a requirement has always been that such ambitions should be accomplished within a specific framework imagining development interventions as technical and expert-based solutions to objective and clearly delimited problems. As Escobar (1997:91) argues:

Development fostered a way of conceiving social life as a technical problem, as a matter of rational decision and management to be entrusted to that group of people – the development professionals – whose specialized knowledge allegedly qualified them for the task. Instead of seeing change as a process rooted in the interpretation of each society's history and cultural tradition [...] these professionals sought to devise mechanisms and procedures to make societies fit a pre-existing model that embodied the structures and functions of modernity.

According to Escobar (2012), this has been a characteristic of development aid since its inception after World War II when an all-encompassing development apparatus extended itself around the globe to rectify a range of political and economic problems through technical measures. Certainly, the ambitions have not waned and the methods and tools have grown more sophisticated. There is now a growing field of development research critically exploring issues of development management (Dar and Cooke 2008; Eyben et al. 2015; Mosse 2005; Rottenburg 2009) which refers to the introduction of managerial practices that help making development aid governable and effective, such as performance measurement systems, results reporting and auditing procedures. *The project* harmonizes with this managerial

context as it embodies the dream of making development rational and expert-based. As *the project* is installed in development aid, it brings with it a range of sophisticated technical practices and artifacts that heighten the paradox referred to above; that the ambitions of development aid cannot be realized except within a managerial framework. It is therefore reasonable to argue that the installation of a practice such as *the project* in development aid will influence and possibly recalibrate these ambitions, thus creating a conflict with the overall goals of development aid. As we will see next, this is particularly true for the Swedish case, which during a long time has had transformational ambitions while a thorough managerial revolution has occurred.

Swedish development aid as a policy area has a rather sprawling trajectory. Provisional acts of supporting development have been around since the end of the nineteenth century when Swedish missionaries started to support education and health improvement efforts in a range of African countries (Engh 2009; Hydén 2010). This work continued during the first half of the twentieth century through the work of civil society and popular movements which started the first bilateral aid projects and laid ground to Sida, the Swedish government agency for development aid. During this period, the rather unique composition of objectives and methods characteristic of Swedish development aid, appeared. As the first aid ventures focused on supporting industrial development in for example construction and mining as well as more social development, epitomized in family planning (Odén 2006), the Swedish aid policy started to appear as having both “hard” and “soft” components. While one part of the Swedish aid concentrated on transferring “hard” technology to develop industry, agriculture and infrastructure (Bruno 2016; Öhman 2007), another part concentrated on the soft transfer of how to create a strong social fabric in developing societies. This last objective was materialized in the support extended to family planning efforts. According to some scholars, the radical transformation of Sweden into a welfare state worked as a pivotal influence on these projects as they reflected the visions and policies of the welfare state (Holmberg 1989).

The ideological component of the welfare state became visible in the family planning projects as they were not only about transferring the technology needed to create effective family policy, but also about transferring ideological notions on family and gender roles (Berg 2010; Engh 2007, 2009).

Presumably, these more ideological aid projects became an important platform for drafting the first aid bill in 1962 that contributed to institutionalize Swedish aid policy. In this first bill, the overall motive for Swedish development aid – the solidarity rationale – was formulated. In the bill, the motives for aid were based on feelings of “moral obligation and international solidarity” and the “importance of human values and social equality” (Government 1962). According to many scholars, this motive has been stable during a long time and remains the overall guiding principle for Swedish development aid (Danielsson and Wohlgemuth 2005; Vähämäki 2017). From the 1960s up until today, the solidarity motive has been translated into a range of ambitious goals, such as growth of resources, economic and social equality, economic and political autonomy, democratic development of society, sustainable use of natural resources and gender equality (Danielsson and Wohlgemuth 2005).

At the same time as these ambitious goals have remained, Swedish development aid has become more professionalized because of extended requirements for so-called “results-based management”, meaning an increased focus on the need for development efforts to be results-oriented. Attached to this orientation towards results is also an increased inclination of funding agencies to introduce heavier control measures, evident in practices such as monitoring and evaluation. Although results orientation has been an integral part of Swedish development aid since its inception, the focus on measurable results has undoubtedly increased during the recent decades (Brolin 2016). The general managerial turn in international development, mentioned above, is, of course, an important factor in this increase, but the general managerial turn in Swedish public administration must also be taken into account. As has been described previously, NPM has been a central

driver for the transformation of the public sector. Sweden is often mentioned as a country in which NPM reforms have received the most impact. Worth mentioning here is that it is mainly the reforms pertaining to managerialism that have gained a strong foothold in Swedish public administration, such as the introduction of auditing and evaluation systems and results-based management (Ahlbäck Öberg and Widmalm 2016).

Swedish development aid, thus, represents an interesting case, as the far-reaching ambitions of development aid, which were marked out already in the 1960s, have to be realized in a context in which the requirements of using management practices are strong and originate in both national and international policy developments. Exploring the installation of *the project* as a vessel for conducting development work provides a window onto ways in which radical demands for political change are influenced by being incorporated into a managerial framework. Swedish development aid also constitutes a particularly suitable case that can be explored using the assemblage framework. As Swedish development aid has grown more and more professional, a myriad of managerial practices and components have become more common. These practices pose a challenge, as they have to be reconciled with the overall transformational ambitions present in development aid. A theoretical framework using the concept of assemblage is particularly adequate to conceptualize and analyze how these managerial practices are reconciled with transformational ambitions in complex and contingent processes of assembly.

Before going further into the aim and research questions of the study, I want make a brief comment on how *the project* as an assemblage is understood and studied. The term *project* elicits an image of a particular organizational form with distinct attributes. These specific attributes often put *the project* as a distinct organizational form on the opposing side of more modern forms for organizing development aid, such as program approaches, core support or organizational support. In this thesis, when studying how development projects are assembled

into contingent configurations, I do not refer to an organizational form with a number of fixed attributes which distinguish it from other forms.

Rather, in this study, *the project* refers to an organizational form which is emptied of all preconceived manual-like definitions of what a project is. Instead, I treat it as an empty signifier with no unambiguous referent to empirical reality (Laclau 2007), meaning that it is not primarily specific empirical projects that interest me, but rather the managerial elements characterizing them, evident in the belief that a problem can be identified and subject to a time-limited intervention with measurable activities. *The project*, thus, becomes a metaphor for an intervention which imagines development as being able to split reality into measurable activities that are supposed to be executed during a specific time period. This means that organizational forms that are not called projects in the empirical field itself are treated as such for the analysis as they display the same characteristics of time limitation, activity-focus and measurability. For the analysis, therefore, I foreground *the project* as a practice of governing. This is also the reason for italicizing this term; it is to show that I refer to a general form of managerial governing rather than a specific empirical project (see Chapter 2 for a development of this mode of reasoning).

Aim and research questions

With the previous background in mind, the aim of this thesis is to analyze how *the project* as an organizational form shapes Swedish development aid and makes it governable.

The aim is concretized in the following research questions:

RQ 1. How is *the project* produced and constructed in practice?

RQ 2: How is *the project* kept together and stabilized in the face of tensions?

RQ 3. What power relations are reproduced and contested as *the project* is constructed in Swedish development aid, and how do they challenge its transformational ambitions?

Thesis outline

Together with this introduction, this thesis consists of seven chapters. Following this introduction is a theoretical chapter which situates the thesis in relation to previous research and carves out an analytical framework clarifying the specific theoretical concepts used for the analysis. The literature briefly touched upon in this introduction is further elaborated on in this chapter. Three fields of research play an important role. Firstly, I situate the thesis in relation to literature on international development and especially the literature focusing on the organization and governing of development work. Secondly, I develop the discussion on how contemporary governing arrangements have transformed in accordance with market and management rationalities and how this has functioned as an impetus for an increased use of *the project* as an organizational form. Thirdly, and finally, I further elaborate on the concept of assemblage and how it has been used in different forms of research. This elaboration is then used to create an analytical framework. In this framework, the operational concepts used for analysis are described.

The analytical framework is followed by a chapter in which I describe the research methodology of the thesis. My focus here is to describe how the analytical framework has been translated into a specific form of “assemblage analysis”. To this end, I present methodological considerations pertaining to the generation and analysis of empirical material. After this chapter, the analytical section of the thesis follows. This section consists of three analytical chapters. The first analytical chapter corresponds to the first research question and is an empirical chapter in which the constitution and construction of *the project* is analyzed, with a focus on the myriad of components and practices that constitute it. The second analytical chapter corresponds to the second research question and is a further analysis of the construction of *the*

project with a focus on the character of components that give it its stability and coherence in the face of tensions. The third chapter corresponds to the third research question and discusses the implications of how *the project* is pieced together, with a special focus on the power relations being reproduced and contested. The analytical chapters follow logically on each other, and although constituting case studies in their own right, they build on each other and should be read in the order I have described here. The thesis concludes with a discussion chapter in which some general conclusions are drawn and the results are discussed.

2 Assembling international development in projectified times – A contextualization

In this chapter, I aim to situate the thesis in previous research and theory which, at a later stage, is used to construct an analytical framework. I deem it necessary to situate this study in relation to a number of literatures since it connects to several research fields. Firstly, I situate the thesis in the literature on international development which is the empirical field in which this study is set. Here, I make a general contextualization of research in this field and delve deeper into more specific areas of research, focusing on the introduction of managerialism in the practice of development. Secondly, I contextualize the thesis in relation to research on public sector transformation in the wake of marketization and managerialization. In relation to this review, I present research on projectification that can be considered a practice that is given particular impetus through market and management reforms. Thirdly, and finally, I review research on assemblage thinking which serves as the main theoretical framework informing the analysis. The focus in this section is to give an overview of how the concept of assemblage has been conceptualized theoretically and deployed for analytical purposes. The review of assemblage studies, together with central elements of the other literatures, serves, then, as the foundation from which I construct an analytical framework.

International development as a managerial practice

This study is conducted in the context of international development which has been subject to substantial research. As the study is focused on a particular development practice – that of how development ambitions are translated through *the project* as an organizational form – the aim here is to relate this to research focusing on organizational practices in international development, specifically in relation to the introduction of managerial principles and how they contribute to constructing and assembling development schemes in particular

contexts. However, this research connects to long-standing theoretical and empirical discussions in the field of international development, and I deem it necessary to give a schematic overview of these discussions before going into more specific areas of research.

Development has a long historical trajectory and has its origins in the early 1900s when the radical transformations of society characterized by massive urbanization, poverty and unemployment were actively problematized as “underdevelopment” (Cowen and Shenton 1995). However, development as an explicit political goal and the emergence of an interdisciplinary field explicitly aiming to research the practice of development can be traced back to the post-World War II period. The birth of development studies as an academic pursuit is commonly dated to the 1949 inaugural address of American president Harry Truman, and marks the beginning of the first period in the history of development thought, ranging from the 1950s to the 1970s. In the speech, Truman promised to make available the benefits of industrial progress and scientific advances to “underdeveloped areas” that suffered from disease, malnutrition and a stagnant economic life. This support was deemed pivotal to combat a form of poverty which was a threat both to poor people and to more prosperous areas (Buch-Hansen and Lauridsen 2012; Bull and Bøås 2012)

Truman’s plan spurred a research paradigm based on a clear problem formulation and solution. The problem in “underdeveloped” countries was the lack of the necessary resources to combat poverty and the solution was to become more similar to modern industrialized nations. Thus, expertise, knowledge and technology from the Western advanced nations were transferred to “underdeveloped” countries in order to facilitate the same transition there as the one Western countries had gone through. Researchers advocating for this kind of development are often grouped under the name of the *modernization school*. This school is more multifaceted than is often described, but one scholar frequently associated with development as modernization is Rostow (1960), who translated the quest for modernization in the “stages of growth-model”. In this model, Rostow argues that “underdeveloped”

countries have to go through a planned process of development, epitomized in the concept of “developmentalism”. In order to reach the highest state of development, there was a need for transfer of financial resources “and integration into the capitalist world economy” (Bull and Bøås 2012:321).

As a response to the modernization school, the Marxist-oriented *dependency school* (Baran 1957; Frank 1966) argues that so-called underdevelopment was not a result of the inner “backwardness” of “underdeveloped” countries, but rather a consequence of their incorporation into the capitalist economy. Through the integration of the “underdeveloped” countries in the capitalist world economy, an asymmetrical relationship was established between them and the so-called “developed” countries. The developed countries - labelled “satellite states” - could exploit their position by forcing “underdeveloped” countries – the so-called “periphery states” – to export products aimed for the markets of Western countries. For the dependency school, thus, capitalism was not a necessary step to achieving progress but the instrument for the satellite states to find opportunities to exploit new markets, thereby keeping underdevelopment intact.

After the heyday of the dependency school, the modernization school achieved a kind of renaissance through the neoclassical revolution in economics. The development of neoclassical economic thinking maintained the assumption that underdevelopment was a characteristic of the developing world itself and that specific measures had to be taken to overcome it. The answer was an increased focus on decreasing the role of the state in favor of giving more power to the market. These measures were often translated into concrete reform packages named “structural adjustment programs” (SAPs) aimed at decreasing the size of the public sector and privatizing public goods (Buch-Hansen and Lauridsen 2012; Bull and Bøås 2012).

Although these theoretical schools have developed as responses to each other, they share fundamental assumptions. One such assumption is

that underdevelopment is an objective “fact” that can be solved through thoroughly defined measures. This assumption, along with other characteristics of the dominant development schools, was challenged by a sprawling critical school of development studies that can be grouped under the label *post-development*. In the literature on post-development, a number of assumptions of development thinking as well as the measures forged to accomplish development are challenged and criticized. Escobar (2012) famously deconstructs the assumption in previous development research that underdevelopment is an objective fact. In contrast, Escobar (2012) argues that development efforts as they were designed after World War II were stimulated by the active problematization of underdevelopment. Hence, poverty was not discovered as an objective problem but actively produced as such, thereby creating the rationale for intervening in certain countries. The design of these interventions was influenced by an ideal of professionalism and a general belief in the idea that technical expertise could be successfully mobilized to achieve a higher state of development. Development, thus, became a field dominated by professionals and experts who deployed a range of techniques and strategies to accomplish development. This professionalism does not only characterize development as it was practiced at its inception but still today and refers to development as an object of expert knowledge. According to Escobar (2012:45), professionalism

is accomplished through a set of techniques, strategies and disciplinary practices that organize the generation, validation, and diffusion of development knowledge, including the academic disciplines, methods of research and teaching, criteria of expertise, and manifold professional practices; in other words, those mechanisms through which a politics of truth is created and maintained, through which certain forms of knowledge are given the status of truth. This professionalization was effected through the proliferation of development sciences and subdisciplines. It made possible the progressive incorporation of problems into the space of development, bringing problems to light in ways congruent with the established system of knowledge and power.

Hence, the professionalism has resulted in the creation of an army of experts problematizing “Third World” poverty and devising various expert interventions (Escobar 2012). Ferguson (1994) follows the same

path as Escobar but conducts a deeper ethnographic study of a specific case to showcase the professionalism of development work. Through a study of a rural development project in the African state of Lesotho, Ferguson shows that development is premised on the need for constructing objects of development and the design of technical measures for its accomplishment. These measures are characterized by their generic and standardized character and can, thus, be inserted in every context, regardless of contextual differences. Ferguson argues that they also result in the unintended effect of depoliticization. Since the interventions designed to address problems in this area are conceived as technical solutions, they recast political problems into technical ones. Ferguson (1994:xv), therefore, coins the expression “anti-politics machine” to describe a development apparatus that depoliticizes “everything it touches”.

The post-development school of thought has given rise to various offshoots that are sometimes explicitly and sometimes more loosely related to it. However, they all share an interest in the introduction of managerial principles which rest on the belief that an activity such as development can be transformed into manageable units that, in turn, can be subjected to organization and control measures (cf. Green 2003). An important practice accompanying this belief is the mobilization of technical and scientific procedures that are deemed to be universally applicable. In the following, I go into literature that, in various ways, connect the issue of development as a managerial practice to the main preoccupations of post-development thinking.

The contemporary development landscape is characterized by the requirement to produce results and evidence in development work, resulting in a range of peculiar practices in international development: baseline data, performance measurement indicators, logical framework analysis, theories of change, results reporting, randomized control trials and impact evaluations (Eyben 2015). Eyben (2015) refers to these as results artifacts, which are used for implementation, monitoring and reporting, and evidence artifacts, utilized for the purpose of assessing proposals and evaluating effectiveness and

impact. The introduction of these kinds of practices and artifacts has spurred different scholarly contributions. A particular literature here relates to what is called *development management*, an approach which combines an empirical focus on management practices in development with normative analyses of their harmful implications. Here, there are some major publications dealing with the installation of management practices in development contexts (Dar and Cooke 2008; Green 2003; Gulrajani 2010; Mowles 2010). Dar and Cooke's (2008) volume on what they call "the new development management" consists of various contributions on how managerial practices are installed and sustained in a myriad of contexts and situations, mainly "on the ground" in specific implementation schemes. An important aspect of their work is the focus on how development administration in its colonial form is perpetuated through new forms of development management as it builds on the same managerial beliefs of modernization through the application of technical measures.

Thus, there is a close link between development management and the continuation of a colonial quest for modernization. In conjunction with the post-development school, the so-called *decolonial school* has pointed to the fact that colonization has not only been about territorial conquest but also about introducing an epistemological order rooted in Western modernity. As the colonial powers renounced their claim for territories, a period of "coloniality" has replaced it, meaning the continuation of colonial power in culture, human relations and knowledge production (Grosfoguel 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Quijano 2000). Coloniality is characterized by the dominance of notions pertaining to modernity, homogenizing colonial territories according to Western ideals and precepts. Santos (2003) argues that particular "monocultures" that introduce fixed conceptualizations of temporality and knowledge are disseminated, making alternative understandings non-existent. Thus, in modern development management, which displays traces of increased belief in science, expertise and professionalism, there are attempts at ordering and translating development according to Western precepts.

A focus in the above mentioned research is how managerial practices are acts of homogenization and ordering. In fact, a tangible change that has taken place in development studies is that development is now considered an act of creating order and coherence. In this way, “disjuncture comes first” (Lewis and Mosse 2006:3), meaning that the particular organization of development is a way to institute order, however a fragile one. The installation of managerial practices can be understood as a way of instituting order in an unruly development context. This has spurred a form of development research exploring how development is a way of producing coherence through managerial and technical practices. While development management has a clearer relation to post-development thinking in the sense that it considers managerial forms of organization as a continuation of the modernization paradigm, the research on development as the production of order and coherence invents approaches that strengthen the focus on development being produced through struggle and compromise in particular contexts, thereby opposing some of the tendencies in the post-development school to equate development schemes with the imposition of an anti-political machinery (Lewis and Mosse 2006; Mosse 2005).

A common denominator for this research is how development schemes are acts of producing coherence. Reacting on the excessive focus on policy steering development efforts in a linear way, this research points to the labor being invested on the ground to actually accomplish development policy. Here, the ethnographic focus of, for example, Ferguson (1994) becomes even more detailed, and research traces the actors and artifacts performing all the mundane and necessary tasks for development to come to life. Li (2007a) argues that development can be seen as a process of assembling heterogeneous elements. In an influential study on community forest management, Li (2007a) deploys an analytic of assemblage to study how it is managed and maintained over time. Her main conclusion is that for this policy field to emerge as an entity for intervention and maintenance over a period of time, there is a need for forging alignments among various parties with the purpose of aligning interests, recasting interventions into

technical measures, and specifying the particular knowledge needed. Furthermore, there is a need to solve conflicts and forge compromises as well as depoliticize possible contentious issues. Li's (2007a) contribution here is to emphasize that development work on the ground requires the hard labor to make heterogeneous elements cohere with each other. This is, furthermore, not a question of the imposition of hegemony but it has to be "worked out" through compromise (Li 1999).

Other scholars operate in the same tradition and emphasize the work needed to make development happen. Numerous researchers here argue that development is facilitated through the work of brokerage and translation. Given the diversity, disjuncture and complexity of modern development work, multiple actors and artifacts need to be mobilized into producing coherence. Mosse (2004, 2005) and Lewis & Mosse (2006) argue that for a development project to be successful, various brokers must be mobilized. Brokers often occupy roles as "gatekeepers, representatives, liaisons, itinerant guides or coordinators" (Koster and Leynseele 2018:803) and mobilize translation skills to create coherence. In this research, the notion of translation comes from actor-network theory (Latour 2007), meaning that it refers to broader processes of both linguistic translation and the alignment of actors. In a heterogeneous context of multiple stakeholders with possibly diverging interests, brokers become important connective agents between for example development institutions and local communities. Between these stakeholders, they occupy the role of "skilled brokers [...] who read the meaning of a project into the different institutional languages of its stakeholder supporters, constantly creating interest and making real" (Mosse 2005:9). Consequently, translation should not be understood only in a linguistic sense, but as a wider process of mediating between interests and enrolling supporters. The translation skills displayed by brokers also include the ability to construct problems and formulate them in such a way as to attract financial support (Campos and Zapata 2013).

An important effect of understanding development as being produced in this way is that coherence is not attributed to a rational design but to the work of brokers, mediating between interests, mobilizing support and translating goals into various languages (Mosse 2005). Rottenburg (2009) argues that translation in heterogeneous circumstances requires a so-called “metacode” – a universal and technical language – in order to facilitate communication and exchange of information. The work of translation points to the assembly work that is needed for various parts of development interventions.

This introductory section on international development helps set the scene for the forthcoming analysis by providing important insights and analytical tools. The “managerial turn” in development studies as well as the increased focus on development efforts as a form of ordering are important for the analysis in several ways. The overall interest in managerialism helps recalibrate the research focus towards these very practices, that is, towards possibly mundane practices that serve to make development a governable activity, such as results and evidence artifacts (Eyben 2015). This recalibration is important since it provides an analytical lens on the messy contexts and situations in which development actually comes to life. Thus, instead of focusing on the grandiose development policies of nation-states and international institutions and how they are supposedly implemented, this micro-focus on managerial practices redirects the research gaze towards how development schemes are constructed and produced on the ground. Here, the ambitions of grand policies are translated into managerial frameworks of understanding in order to make them come to life. Thus, the “disjuncture” characterizing development on the ground can be ordered and made coherent in various ways. Here, the literature also provides concrete analytical concepts. For example, the notion of brokers creating meaning and mediating between interests is useful for identifying and analyzing how development efforts can erase disjuncture and be made to appear coherent. Finally, the research mainly associated with the decolonial school offers an opportunity to detect and critically scrutinize how managerial practices introduce

particular “monocultures” molding development practice according to Western “coloniality”.

Public sector transformation in times of marketization and managerialization

The managerial turn in international development has not occurred in a vacuum but must be related to wider trends of marketization and managerialization. While these market and management trends are mobile in the sense that they circulate freely and can be installed by various actors in development interventions, the use of market and management techniques in the public sector plays an important role in how development aid is organized. In the following, I therefore present research detailing the transformation of the public sector in the aftermath of the introduction of market and management reforms. In this part of the literature review, I first outline how the public sector has been transformed through new public management reforms. Thereafter, I go into literature with a particular focus on the role of consultants in making these reforms come alive.

New Public Management

During recent decades, there has been a rather strong consensus in research on the radical transformation of the public sector in the wake of the introduction of market and management reforms. While the research certainly differs on how to understand these changes as well as their origins and effects, there seems to be little dispute regarding the importance of these reforms for how the public sector functions. One way to start understanding this transformation is to delve deeper into the research on *New Public Management (NPM)*. As the research on NPM is vast, it is an impossible task to review the field in its entirety, and I, therefore, focus on how market and management reforms have been introduced to make the public sector “more ‘business-like’ and ‘market-oriented’, that is, performance-, cost-, efficiency- and audit-oriented” (Diefenbach 2009:893). The origins of NPM are debated and a range of suggestions have been provided regarding the primary drivers of its implementation. Firstly, the rise of neoliberalism as an

ideological project in the 1980s is said to have had a decisive influence on the evolution of NPM. Specifically, the Washington Consensus, epitomized in reforms of overall liberalization and privatization and furthered by particular states (for instance the US and the UK) and international institutions (for instance OECD, IMF and the World Bank), has proved a fertile breeding ground for the evolution of NPM. In addition, academic knowledge production, such as research on managerialism, public choice theory, agency theory and transaction cost economics, has been a source of inspiration for the design of NPM reforms (Boston 2011).

The concept of NPM is associated with Christopher Hood (1991) who coined the concept to describe a thorough transformation of the public services in the UK in the 1980s. Hood describes the introduction of reforms that challenged the traditional Weberian model of public administration as it relied on practices inspired by prevailing market and management trends. According to Hood (1991), new public management consists of seven features. Firstly, identified managers are given more power to govern in a more explicit way, and thus become “free to manage”. Secondly, there is a greater emphasis on steering public administration towards measurable performance, leading to the formulation of goals, targets and indicators of success. Thirdly, there is a focus on results and outputs, leading to a greater demand for successful outcomes than for the most appropriate processes. Fourthly, there is a greater division of large units into smaller ones for the purpose of, among other things, separating production and provision. Fifthly, there is a greater prevalence of principles of competition, resulting in the introduction of practices such as contracting and tendering processes. Sixthly, management styles taken from the private sector are used to a higher degree, which is visible in the departure from a “public service ethic”. Seventhly, and finally, greater austerity in resource use is emphasized.

Since Hood’s seminal contributions, the research field of NPM has exploded and a great number of studies covering different topics have been produced. During the recent decade, there has been a discussion

on the possible demise, or even death, of NPM, leading to other ways of governing, such as “New Public Governance” (Osborne 2010). Many scholars have disagreed and pointed to how NPM is still alive, both in political debate (Hyndman and Liguori 2016) and in the incorporation of NPM ideas in new governing schemes (Hyndman and Lapsley 2016). This has led for example Pollitt (2007:113) to declare that “the NPM is not dead or even comatose”. I agree with these scholars and will, therefore, not dwell on this discussion but rather recognize that NPM is a set of practices and techniques with strong continuing influence in the public sector, and go into characteristics of NPM that are of importance for this thesis.

Managerialism is a central ingredient of NPM, as the name suggests. Although both older and more diverse than NPM, it is a central characteristic of it, which is evident in the alternate term “New Managerialism” (Painter 2011). According to Painter (2011), there are four characteristics of managerialism. Firstly, it consists of a belief that there is a specific set of practices, skills, methods and procedures that have universal applicability, regardless of sector. Secondly, and in line with Hood (1991), managers are seen as deserving discretionary power to deliver results. Thirdly, managerialism is incentive-based, meaning that there is an assumption that individuals perform as a response to incentives. Fourthly, and finally, managerialism implies the establishment of specific tasks, intended outputs and desired outcomes that individuals and organizations aim for in order to secure efficiency, cost-effectiveness and accountability. Managerialism is, thus, an ideology and discourse that is manifested through a concrete reform package such as NPM (Clarke 2004).

There are many examples of how the managerialist logic comes to expression in reforms, practices and techniques associated with NPM. The public sector has been reformed through packages of techniques, models and practices that are characterized by “abstract managerialism”, meaning that they are homogeneous and universal and can be used in any organization (Townley 2002). In order to enhance the effectiveness of public sector organizations, standardized

and formalized packages, informed by abstract managerialism, have been introduced (Diefenbach 2009; Hall 2012). As the public sector is primarily seen as a generic organizational entity through the eyes of abstract managerialism, it can be governed by a set of generalized models (Hall 2012). There is therefore abundant research on the introduction of “best practices” that can be used to govern the public sector. Thus, the introduction of general and universal practices and ways of working - often named in branded terms, such as Management by Objectives (MBO), Total Quality Management (TQM) and Lean Management - has been studied in various contexts, such as in healthcare (Germov 2005) and childcare (Theedvall 2018a).

The focus in managerialism on the devolution of discretionary power to managers has led to decentralization but also to a need for new forms of control. This has led Power (1994, 1999) to coin the concept of “audit society” in order to describe a situation in which the state has transformed into a regulatory entity, dedicating a substantial amount of energy and time to control and inspection. Power (1994, 1999) notes that auditing accepts the fundamental fact that direct control is impossible. In the audit society, therefore, auditing can be likened to “control of control” since it tends to control internal control or inspection systems rather than actual activities. This has led to some interesting paradoxes in NPM. Although historically introduced as a reform package promising cost-efficiency and effectiveness, the implementation has led to more centralization and bureaucracy. As discussed by Hood (1991), a characteristic of NPM is the act of giving discretionary control to managers, who can be decoupled from the political level. At the same time, the political level must ensure some form of control which is secured through different forms of governing by results, for example performance targets and thoroughly formulated contracts (Christensen and Lægreid 2001). This leads for example Courpasson (2000:157) to state that “contemporary managerial strategies try to create new forms of centralization”, meaning that target setting and contracts result in the concentration of power in central functions. The strategies of centralization also actualize the growing bureaucracy. As performance targets and auditing practices

proliferate, a control bureaucracy arises. Hall (2012) uses the term “management bureaucracy” to designate the specific form of bureaucracy that has developed in the wake of management reforms. Up until now, NPM has been regarded as a purely managerial phenomenon. This reflects the focus of the research as NPM has been treated as a “limping concept” (Funck and Karlsson 2020:364), emphasizing management-based reforms, and to a certain degree marginalizing the investigation of market-based reforms (Funck and Karlsson 2020). Consequently, I deem it necessary to highlight this feature of NPM more thoroughly.

A favorite tale from the neoliberal storybook is that markets emerge spontaneously when market forces are let loose. However, markets should rather be understood as emerging through acts of purposeful construction and design. This form of marketization is common in the public sector as different tasks formerly conducted by the public sector, for example in education, are now outsourced on the private sector. There is also a construction of markets *in* public sector organizations (Hall 2012)¹. The literature shares the point of departure that markets are actively fashioned but differs in other respects. Firstly, there is a literature focusing on how markets are constructed through the mobilization of organizational elements, that is, organizational work stands as a model for the construction of markets. Ahrne, Aspers and Brunsson (2015) argue that there is a range of organizational elements characterizing markets. Firstly, there is a need for establishing memberships which refers to decisions on who can act as buyer and seller in a given market. Secondly, rules must be formulated, such as how buyers and sellers should behave, how prices should be set and how products should be made. Thirdly, there is a need for monitoring in order to ensure that sellers behave according to specific standards. Fourthly, adequate rewards and punishments must be designed. A fifth and final organizational element is the institution of hierarchy, for example through making binding decisions for members in a given market.

¹An example is the internal buy-and-sell systems in public agencies.

A central component in this organizational literature is also that the state is considered an important driver of market construction and maintenance, spawning the coining of the concept “market state” (Andersson, Erlandsson, and Sundström 2017). The market state actively constructs markets and intervenes to secure their functioning, for example through particular agencies. This has prompted research to note the increasing entanglement of state and markets. In this entanglement, the state has not withdrawn from the process of constructing markets. In the words of Birch and Siemiatycki (2016:185): “Markets are not simply an imposition *on* the state, they are very much integrated *within* the state; thus markets are not instituted as an alternative or replacement for the state”. The active involvement of the state in the construction of markets can be observed for instance in markets for service delivery and contractual arrangements.

Another literature on marketization is based in science and technology studies (STS) and shares the idea that markets are constructed. However, organizational elements as described by Ahrne et al. (2015) are not in focus here, but rather the more unpredictable assembly of heterogeneous components (Callon 1998). These are different from the aspects highlighted by scholars associated with the organizational perspective, as scholars in the STS tradition argue that elements from a range of registers – from material and intellectual sources - are mobilized to create markets (Çalışkan and Callon 2010; Prince 2017). Çalışkan and Callon (2010), for instance, argue that material elements, such as calculation tools, technical equipment, and texts are important for markets to function.

In sum, the research on marketization as a process of instituting markets sheds light on the market reforms associated with NPM which have been somewhat neglected (Funck and Karlsson 2020). What is of particular interest is the focus on how marketization is characterized by the complex process of designing and maintaining markets.

While the research on NPM has provided insights into the transformation of the public sector along market and management lines, NPM is sometimes understood as a fixed set of ideas that is rolled out as coherent reform packages. However, market and management reforms are translated into the public sector rather than implemented as a static set of ideas (Hyndman and Lapsley 2016). Management consultants are important drivers and translators of market and management ideas. Although not an entirely new phenomenon, the use of management consultants has increased as NPM has strengthened its grip on public administration (Lapsley 2009), and therefore I now go into research detailing their role.

Consultants – Mobile carriers of market and management thinking

In tandem with the introduction of market and management reforms in the public sector, management consultants have started to play an important role as implementers and translators. There is even talk about the emergence of a “consultocracy” to describe the heavy reliance on consultants in the public sector (Hood and Jackson 1991; Ylönen and Kuusela 2019). Hence, although the increased growth of management consultant companies has provided a steady supply of consultants during recent decades, the transformation of the public sector along managerial lines is a main driver for the establishment of a consultocracy. The eagerness for reform inherent in NPM has given consultants a pivotal role as they are deemed to possess knowledge that the public sector does not have when reforms are to be implemented (Beveridge 2012). The role played by consultants varies when it comes to how they contribute to management reforms. Consultants can be implicated in rather tangible public sector reforms, such as privatization schemes. They can be promoters of privatization and support governments by giving strategic advice on how to create competition in various policy areas, such as healthcare (O’Mahoney and Sturdy 2016). Continuing on the theme of privatization, consultants can be used as financial experts, for instance during the privatization of the Berlin Water Company in which consultants

monitored the bidding process from private companies (Beveridge 2012).

Furthermore, in line with audit society, consultants are recruited to evaluate public sector programs, not mainly to assess effectiveness but to lend objectivity and neutrality to the evaluation process (Speers 2007). In fact, recruiting consultants for the purpose of building legitimacy is rather common. Lapsley and Oldfield (2001) note that consultant knowledge is sometimes purchased without transformational purposes but is used to legitimize prior beliefs, thereby only having a symbolic value. Some studies also point to consultants not merely implementing management reforms but serving to legitimize decisions and ideas as well as preventing resistance against particular transformation processes (Czarniawska-Joerges 1990; Kirkpatrick et al. 2019).

The increased reliance on consultants in the public sector has caused concern about how expertise influences democracy. Beveridge (2012) argues that the use of consultant expertise in public administration results in a shift of political decision-making from public arenas to private ones which are not subject to the same public scrutiny. Furthermore, Ylönen and Kuusela (2019) have completed a comprehensive study of the detrimental effects of consultant use in the public sector and argue that, apart from weakened accountability as described by Beveridge (2012), there is a number of other problems. Firstly, there is the problem of privatization of knowledge, meaning that public information is transformed into a private commodity. Secondly, consultant knowledge can contribute to the erosion of tacit knowledge inside public sector organizations. Thirdly, the use of consultants tends to promote instrumental rationality. As new public management trends have strengthened the focus on effectiveness and the search for specific solutions that can help achieve this, consultants are used to make public administration more effective. This arrangement often leads consultants to come up with technocratic solutions to deeply political problems.

The role of consultants in introducing technical governing arrangements points to a more general problem in NPM, which is the impact of marketization and managerialism on politics. In a variety of scholarly branches of research, the transformation epitomized in NPM is criticized from both institutional and philosophical standpoints. From an institutional standpoint, the lack of transparency and accountability when politicians lose control of the public sector is often emphasized (Christensen and Lægreid 2001). From a philosophical perspective, the wide market and management reforms of the public sector have been critically scrutinized as creating a state of “depoliticization” which is the ultimate consequence of normalizing neoliberalism as a rationality (Brown 2015). Associated with scholars in political theory (Brown 2015; Mouffe 2005a; Rancière 2014), depoliticization can be understood as the hollowing out of the conflictual character of politics in favor of a consensus-based view. Thus, neoliberal reforms of marketization and managerialization have been transformed into a “common sense” which cannot be subjected to political debate. The resorting to managerial practices and consultant expertise attests, consequently, that NPM and consultocracy represent a certain depoliticized consensus regarding the best way to organize the public sector.

The different research strands on marketization and managerialization covered here together create an important backdrop for the forthcoming analysis. While the research on NPM gives insights into how the public sector has been transformed, it is often on a macro-level, covering general reform trends. The research on marketization, with origins in organizational research and science and technology studies as well as the growing interest in consultants, provides important insights on how markets and management reforms are installed and translated in public sector operations. This cross-fertilization of research provides the basis that allows me to investigate how *the project* is constituted through the installation of markets and managerialism. In addition, a consideration of the depoliticizing characteristics of marketization and managerialization is important for exploring the political implications of projects.

Projectification – An overview

The project as a mode of organization enjoys a particularly prominent position in contemporary society, in part thanks to the managerial revolution described in the previous section. Projects are used as the primary mode through which to organize a range of activities in the private, public and civil society sectors in temporary and time-limited interventions. However, the project as a mode of thinking also permeates society as a whole, leading to “a projectification of everything” (Jensen, Thuesen, and Geraldi 2016). Chiapello and Fairclough (2002) even consider the project logic as central to the justification of contemporary capitalism. In what they call “the Project-oriented *cit *” (as a justificatory regime), a prosperous individual bases her life on activities, and prioritizes flexibility and adaptation to an unstable and flexible environment:

In the Project-oriented *Cit * the general standard with respect to which greatness is evaluated, is *activity*. [...] In the Project-oriented *Cit * activity overcomes the oppositions between work and non-work, steady and casual, paid and unpaid, profit-sharing and volunteer work. Life is conceived as a series of projects, the more they differ from one another, the more valuable they are. What is relevant is to be always pursuing some sort of activity, never to be without a project, without ideas, to be always looking forward to, and preparing for, something along other persons, who are brought together by the drive for activity. (Chiapello and Fairclough 2002:191–92)

Thus, the proliferation of projects in contemporary society can be said to be underpinned by a regime which puts primacy on activities, flexibility and temporariness. At the same time, the project promises control and order as it represents a task-specific and time-limited organization form (Packendorff and Lindgren 2014; Sahlin-Andersson 2002). The project, thus, represents an attractive organizational form in today’s society as it challenges the supposed rigidity of traditional bureaucracy. Numerous scholars have noted that the project is considered a superior format in today’s post-bureaucratic landscape in which more flexible organizational forms are deemed necessary to handle complex problems (Fred 2018; Jensen, Johansson, and L fstr m 2013; L fgren, Godenhjelm, and Sj blom 2013; Packendorff and Lindgren 2014). In the project, the traditional working routines of

the bureaucracy can be challenged and replaced by more flexible working formats, such as affording managers a greater degree of discretionary control (Fred 2018).

The attractiveness of the project format in a landscape of post-bureaucracy and the influence of a “Project-oriented *cité*” have resulted in the proliferation of temporary forms of organization that are characterized by the execution of specific tasks. For the remainder of this section, it is important to note that the notion of the project does not necessarily denote a *specific* project form to which there is only one meaning attached, specified by project management experts or manuals. Instead, the ongoing projectification is to be understood as the spread of a particular organizational *form*:

The projectification of everything is thus not a question of the proliferation of a word. It is instead a proliferation of a temporary, future-oriented, purposeful, time-limited organizational form that is more agile, sensitive and flexible than the disciplinary codification and planning which operates [sic] in one-off activities. (Jensen et al. 2016:25)

Interest in the proliferation of projects has a long trajectory in organization research and the term “projectification” was coined by Christopher Midler (1995) in a study of how the car company Renault restructured its production according to a project logic². Organization research has continued along this line and explored the introduction of project management in a variety of organizational settings. A core focus in this research is on how organizations are transformed as a result of projectification. Projectification is considered a process which entails the introduction and consolidation of project management practices and structures and the development of individual skills in project management. Organizational projectification is, thus, not only the increased use of projects but denotes the transformation and

²Important to note here is that I do not go into the more technical project management literature which often has the practical purpose of improving project management. Instead, the focus here is the migration into and normalization of the project form in various sectors as well as its consequences.

consequences of the project format in particular organizational settings (Maylor and Turkulainen 2019).

A number of studies have investigated this form of organizational projectification and its consequences. Especially, the promise of project management as an organizational alternative in times of post-bureaucracy and its effects on organizations have been studied. A conclusion in these studies is that the project as an organizational form does not bring flexibility but rather more bureaucratization, rationalization and centralization. Clegg and Courpasson (2004) argue that project management is characterized by increased centralization and a “soft despotism”, meaning that although managers are given discretion over particular tasks, power is still centralized in particular governing bodies that deploy extensive control measures. Hodgson (2004) argues that project management systems result in rebureaucratization of organizations as formal project management methodologies and techniques are introduced. The same line of reasoning is followed by Räsänen and Linde (2004) who study the introduction of the project management model “PROPS” in a multi-project organization in order to establish a standard for project management. They argue that this model is a form of standardization that “makes sense of project management by focusing, structuring, simplifying, and classifying information and co-ordinating functions and roles” (Räsänen and Linde 2004:110). Although it had simplifying characteristics, the model brought with it formalized practices that resulted in an increased bureaucratization of activities.

This research on organizational projectification represents what Packendorff and Lindgren (2014) refer to as a “narrow” view of projectification, meaning an exclusive focus on how organizations are re-structured as they try to adapt to initiatives taken to “increase the primacy of the processes of projects within a central organization and its supply networks” (Maylor et al. 2006:666). It is only recently that projectification as a broader phenomenon (Packendorff and Lindgren 2014) has become more important in research, which has led to an interest among scholars in the migration of the project logic into new

contexts. The projectification of the public sector is one such development that has broadened project research substantially. While projectification has been a steady component in organization research, it has taken longer for it to interest public administration scholars. A possible reason is that project management has been confined to engineering and business management and the transfer of project management to public administration has occurred gradually and silently (Sjöblom 2009). However, during recent years, the introduction of the project logic into the public sector and the consequences of that shift have spurred more research. The focus in this research is on the practices, drivers, and consequences of projectification in the public sector.

To begin with, and in congruence with the research referred to above, the project as an organizational form is attractive in order to cope with requirements for a more effective public administration than the traditional one that is sometimes considered to suffer from an excessive bureaucracy. Thus, it is not a coincidence that projects have become more prevalent as new public management reforms have been rolled out in the public sector (Fred 2018; Godenhjelm, Lundin, and Sjöblom 2015; Jensen et al. 2013; Löfgren et al. 2013). Fred (2018) returns to Hood's (1991) description of the features of NPM and argues that these resonate well with the project logic. Thus, Fred (2018) argues that the project format represents a management technique that fulfills the requirements inherent in NPM, such as the focus on results achievement through standard project models. Furthermore, the requirements in NPM for competition and austerity in resource use can be accommodated through the focus in projects on competing for external funds. The focus on external funding is also an important driver in itself. International institutions such as the EU and the World Bank organize much of their operations through the funding of projects (Hodgson et al. 2019). As Godenhjelm et al. (2015) argue, however, the pressure for projectification does not need to be external, but can be internal pull mechanisms in the form of "good examples" migrating into the public sector through for example experts.

While these studies occur on a macro-level, exploring the increase in projectification and its drivers in the public sector generally, other studies have more thoroughly studied the roll-out, normalization and consequences of the project logic in concrete public administration contexts. Jensen et al. (2013) examine the use of projects as policy tools to implement public sector reforms. Specifically, they study the phenomenon of project organizations to describe how discrete organizational entities are often created in order to realize public sector reforms. Using public health reforms as examples, they show that the requirements for control and evaluation from the government stimulate the use of project organizations, but these are also isolated to a high degree from the permanent organizations in which they are embedded. Fred and Mukhtar-Landgren (2019) deepen the analysis of how public administration is projectified at the local level. With a focus on how project funding from the EU is handled at the local level, they show how particular agents and tools are mobilized. Here, consultancy firms, for instance, are important agents and mediators offering training and courses on how to access EU funding. These examples show that the operations of public administration are transformed substantially as projectification expands itself. The complexity and reach of projectification in contemporary public administration is further described by Maylor and Turkulainen (2019) who argue, with the British government's management of its project portfolio as a case, that an "advanced" form of organizational projectification can be detected. This form of projectification is not only an increased use of projects but

a more developed use of the project form of organizing, project structures and practices, language and symbols as well as the professionalization of the project management discipline. Further, it encompasses project, programme and portfolio levels of consideration, as well as the institutional requirements for projects to be successful. (Maylor and Turkulainen 2019:571)

The research on public sector projectification is both similar and different from the research that primarily focuses on organizational projectification. While recognizing that the project logic introduces new bureaucratic procedures, thereby not representing a break with

traditional bureaucracy (Fred 2018), this research also emphasizes the possible clashes between the project logic and the political logic underpinning the public sector, thereby possibly reducing politics to technique. Hodgson et al. (2019:5) argue that

the technical apparatus of projects and project management can come to stand in for the more conflicted and contestable aspects of politics and political decision making, such as ideology, party politics, and electoral cycles. If projects can provide a rational language with which to describe, monitor, and rank the value-laden work of politics, then they represent an alluring, and potentially de-politicising, mode of political organization.

In sum, the interest in projectification has increased as projects have migrated into the public sector, especially since there are consequences when it intermingles with a political mode of organization. This possible conflict becomes even more pressing when the project format is mobilized in international development.

Projectification as a managerial practice in international development

While the use of projects in international development has a longer historical trajectory than in the public sector, an explicit focus on projectification and its consequences has been rather absent from research on this area. Recognizing that projectification and its effects have been thoroughly examined in for example critical management studies (CMS), Frenzel et al. (2018:588) argue that “CMS’s critique of projectification in ID (international development) remains relatively underdeveloped and thus constitutes a fertile area for further theoretical and empirical research”. However, although their contribution was written in 2018, there have been earlier attempts to explore projectification in international development, both through the lens of critical management studies and from other theoretical perspectives. Certainly, some of this research has been subsumed under for example general studies of the new development management (Dar and Cooke 2008) but there is also research focusing specifically on projectification in international development. A

common denominator in this research is that projectification is a complex process, incorporating actors, financial resources and technical measures. In addition, the effects of projectification on power relations are emphasized.

Ika and Hodgson (2014) note an increased use of critical theoretical perspectives to study projectification in international development, for example in the volume on the new development management by Dar and Cooke (2008). Specifically, the contributions of Kerr (2008) and Dar (2008) serve as illustrations of how projectification recalibrates development practice. Kerr (2008) describes the introduction of project management techniques in an aid agency, and shows how especially logframes (used in the logical framework approach, LFA) have such agentive powers that they can induce behaviors among professionals that perpetuate what Habermas calls instrumental reason, that is, a means-ends rationality. Dar (2008) specializes in the practice of project report writing which she argues serves to homogenize development practice. As the practice of reporting consists of emphasizing certain activities and values, it is also, at the same time, a process of silencing experiences, discourses and texts. This form of homogenization caused by projects is further illustrated by Green (2003:123–24) who argues that standardization trends in development cannot only be attributed to the uniformity of how development problems and solutions are formulated but

it is also a consequence of the kinds of practices used to plan and implement development as a process of transforming policy visions into *manageable* realities through the social constitution of ‘projects’ subject to specific techniques of audit, organization and control.

What is of interest here is, thus, to describe and criticize a long tradition in international development of using rationally planned projects, and associated tools and techniques, for the purpose of solving different problems (Ika and Hodgson 2014).

The continued use of managerial strategies and tools in order to both start and sustain projects has spurred further research. When these

tools and strategies are deployed, the project appears as much more complex, incorporating a range of actors, resources and technologies. Sampson (2003) argues that “the social life of projects” should be studied, meaning an in-depth investigation of a complex project architecture made up of funders and their regulations, implementing partners, consultants, ideas and knowledge. The power inherent in this architecture is important as it is not equally distributed. Other types of research have, to certain degree, followed this path by taking an interest in the complex endeavor of initiating and sustaining projects, as well as its power effects. For example, research has concentrated on how the funding architecture is constructed for civil society organizations. By investigating primarily project application procedures and techniques for selection, this research notes that these procedures are powerful technologies for molding civil society in a particular entrepreneurial and managerial form (İşleyen 2015; Kurki 2011).

Others have used assemblage analysis to describe how projects are designed and sustained. Li (2007a, 2016, 2019) shows how development projects construct a delimited problem and technical measures to rectify it. The imagination of the development project as a technical endeavor creates an active process of projectification characterized not by actors passively waiting for projects but an active problematization and design of technical interventions to create projects. Li (2007a, 2016, 2019) argues that projectification silences politics as technical interventions encourage the transformation of political problems into technical ones. Freeman (2014) also uses assemblage analysis to study how projects are assembled in the Haitian countryside. He argues that constant labor is put down to make projects come to life, including the problematization of space, the imposition of a particular temporal regime and the legal formalization of organizations. The problematization of space implies problematizing weaknesses which can be subject to an intervention by means of a project. The project, furthermore, introduces new time frames, meaning that work in the Haitian countryside is transformed by the strict time division mobilized by the project in opening,

implementation and termination stages. Finally, the project requires a higher degree of formalization of organizations. Hence, in Freeman's study, projects are formed through the drawing together of multiple heterogeneous components, such as space, time and legal obligations.

In conclusion, both the longer tradition of projects in international development and the managerial transformations of the public sector during recent decades create a fertile breeding ground for the continuous use of projects. This is important to keep in mind in order to understand the case that is studied in this thesis. Both the general international projectification trend and the increased inclination in the public sector to outsource activities on projects are important conditions for the projectification of international development in the Swedish case.

To summarize, the existing research on projectification contributes to my study in various ways, but I also see possibilities for contributing to this body of literature. The contributions of organizational research on how the project introduces bureaucratic procedures and how it risks depoliticizing political work when translated into public administration are all important for the forthcoming analysis as they make these very logics visible. However, the research on projectification in international development displays more awareness of the messy construction of projects. For example, Sampson's (2003) focus on "the social life of projects" offers a more complex view of projects as being constituted by a range of practices, actors, ideas and knowledge. The works of Li (2007b, 2007a, 2016, 2019) and Freeman (2014) are attempts at incorporating this complexity in their studies of projectification in international development. By using the notion of assemblage, they conceptualize projects as unstable configurations of multiple and heterogeneous components being drawn together. As I am interested in performing a similar analytical operation, that is, using assemblage as an analytical concept to study how projects come to life and are sustained through the mobilization of heterogeneous components, these studies are important as sources of inspiration and as an ongoing research debate to which I can make a contribution.

Consequently, in the following, I delve deeper into the concept of *assemblage*.

Assemblage studies

Up until now, I have situated the thesis both in relation to specific research on international development and in relation to research that deals with general issues of public sector transformation. Now it is time to introduce the concept of assemblage which constitutes the main theoretical figure that I use to construct an analytical framework. Although assemblage as a theoretical concept was introduced in the mid-1980s by Deleuze and Guattari (2013), it is during the last decade that it has been transformed from a purely philosophical notion to a concept being mobilized for the purposes of empirical research. It is now possible to discern a field that can be called “assemblage studies” in which this concept is employed for empirical research. Some comprehensive literature reviews of existing assemblage research have been conducted, for example Briassoulis’ (2019) review of assemblage-inspired studies on governance; Savage’s (2019) description of assemblage thinking deployed on policy-making and policy transfer, and Baker and McGuirk’s (2017) review of how assemblage as a concept can inform methodology and empirical analysis. I have no ambitions to reproduce these reviews but aim to present assemblage literature in a way that is relevant for this thesis. I structure this literature review by dividing it into three parts. The first part describes the philosophical axioms that underpin assemblage thinking, thereby clarifying its ontological and epistemological presuppositions. The following two sections focus on empirical uses of assemblage thinking in contemporary research. The first part reviews the literature on how assemblage thinking is mobilized as an analytical tactic to frame empirical research, while the second part explores the concept of assemblage as it is mobilized to study concrete processes and practices of assembly in different contexts.

Assemblage and its philosophical underpinnings

All we know are assemblages. (Deleuze and Guattari 2013:24)

The concept of assemblage has a rather long historical trajectory and its genealogy is not covered in depth here, but I deem it necessary to briefly discuss its origins in French poststructuralist thinking. The concept of assemblage is introduced by philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari in their seminal work *A Thousand Plateaus* (2013). In fact, assemblage is only one of the concepts introduced in this theoretically dense work which presents a radically new way of thinking that serves as an alternative to Western philosophy. The introduction of the concept in *A Thousand Plateaus* was not made in a theoretical vacuum as Deleuze, in particular, elaborated it by drawing heavily on Michel Foucault's notion of *dispositif* (Armstrong 1992)³. For Foucault (1980:194), the *dispositif* refers to a heterogeneous ensemble of discursive and material elements, such as “discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions”. Foucault emphasizes that a *dispositif* is not to be reduced to the mere collection of these elements, but that there is a system of relations between them. The *dispositif*, whose elements create an ensemble, serves strategic ends and strives for particular effects in terms of the exercise of power (Foucault 1980).

As Deleuze and Guattari (2013) incorporated the Foucauldian figure of the *dispositif* into their own philosophical project, assemblage was not the primary term with which they described heterogeneous

³In recent years, philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2009:14) has also elaborated this concept and offers a wider conceptualization, incorporating the notion of *capture*: “Further expanding the already large class of Foucauldian dispositives, I shall call a dispositive literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings. Not only, therefore, prisons, mad houses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines, juridical measures, and so forth (whose connection with power is in certain sense evident), but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular phones and – why not – language itself, which is perhaps the most ancient of apparatuses”.

ensembles.⁴ Rather, the term *agencement* in their work was translated into English as *assemblage*.⁵ Using a term with its roots in the verb *agencer*, they intended to capture how the world is constituted of floating and unpredictable processes of arranging, drawing together and fixing heterogeneous components into unstable configurations (DeLanda 2016; Wise 2005). In a widely cited passage, an assemblage is said to be

a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures. Thus, the assemblage’s only unity is that of co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a “sympathy”. It is never filiations which are important but alliances, alloys. (Deleuze and Parnet 1987:69)

The radicalism of this claim becomes apparent in how an assemblage-oriented ontology is formulated. A social world constituted by assemblages is a world replete with arrangements consisting of multiple and heterogeneous components that give the appearance of coherence and unity. These arrangements organize every level of society, from nation-states to organizations, and have as their only common ground that they strive for coherence:

[An assemblage is] first and foremost what keeps very heterogeneous elements together: e.g. a sound, a gesture, a position etc., both natural and artificial elements. The problem is one of ‘consistency’ or ‘coherence’, and it is prior to the problem of behavior. How do things take on consistency? How do they cohere? (Deleuze 2006:176–79)

⁴The connection to Foucault’s *dispositif* actualizes the question to what degree assemblage thinking resembles governmentality analysis (Dean 2010; Miller and Rose 2008). Assemblage thinking has its roots in a Foucauldian conceptualization of power but has branched into its own literature in which the notion of *dispositif* and governmentality is rather invisible. Although clearly related to *dispositif*, I see assemblage as a distinct concept that can be used in its own right. I also see some advantages with using the concept of assemblage analytically. As assemblage thinking has been more prevalent in anthropological and political-geographical literature, it has incorporated a more substantial focus on practices which brings out the messiness of power more clearly while this aspect has been criticized as lacking in governmentality studies (cf. Walters 2012). Assemblage thinking has, in addition, incorporated a focus on materialities which is not alien to governmentality studies, but it is my impression that it is more common to analyze discursive formations of power in governmentality studies.

⁵Nail (2017:22) argues that this translation does not entirely reflect the meaning of *agencement* as assemblage refers to the “gathering of things together into unities”, while *agencement* is an arrangement of heterogeneous components. However, I stick to assemblage as it is the most commonly used term in contemporary research.

In order to conceptualize how order and coherence are produced, Deleuze and Guattari (2013) argue that an assemblage can be understood along the axis of territorialization and deterritorialization. Territorialization is the process through which the internal homogeneity of the assemblage is strengthened and its spatial boundaries sharpened, while deterritorialization, reacting on the piecing together of elements in a possibly awkward and ill-suited way, increases heterogeneity and tears down boundaries. In Deleuze and Guattari's thinking, the spatial perspective dominates, strengthening the impression that these processes only concern territories in the senses of terrains. However, as DeLanda (2006) emphasizes, territorialization and deterritorialization can also refer to non-spatial processes which strengthen or diminish homogeneity. Indeed, non-spatial territorialization processes can be everything from a membership exclusion in an organization to segregation processes in a local neighborhood (DeLanda 2006).

When it comes to processes of deterritorialization, Nail (2017) argues that Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of this concept includes various forms of change and "lines of escape". Nail (2017), therefore, distinguishes between four forms of deterritorialization. Firstly, "relative negative deterritorialization" refers to the obstruction and incorporation of processes of change, thereby reproducing an existing assemblage. Secondly, "relative positive deterritorialization" refers to an "ambiguous" change that is difficult to determine if it will be incorporated or is a sign of radical transformation. As Nail (2017:35), argues, "it is both the possibility of a new world and the possibility of co-optation". Thirdly, "absolute negative deterritorialization" concerns the form of change that undermines all existing assemblages, but at the same time is vulnerable to co-optation. Fourthly, "absolute positive deterritorialization" refers to changes that succeed in not only undermining existing assemblages but also in creating new ones (Nail 2017).

Having introduced a rather theoretically dense discussion on this conceptual couplet of territorialization and deterritorialization, let me

illustrate, for the sake of clarification, how they can be understood, using two examples. A macro-level concept that is constantly used in daily political and academic discourse is “the market”. From an assemblage perspective, the market is a concrete and tangible amalgamation of heterogeneous elements (cf. DeLanda 2006). These elements include the act of producing commodities, the creation of technologies to install competition, the establishment of memberships to regulate inclusion and exclusion, as well as the invention of calculation tools (Çalışkan and Callon 2010; Prince 2017). Likewise, turning to a meso-level concept such as “organization”, this entity can be considered as being made up of humans populating it, the practices they deploy to solve different tasks in the confines of it, the discourses and norms legitimizing particular behaviors and the nonhuman elements – machines, buildings, documents – that construct the organization.

From a Deleuzian point of view, both the market and the organization are constantly subject to forces territorializing them, that is, making them homogeneous and ordered, and deterritorializing forces tearing them apart and opening up lines of escape. For example, the market is territorialized through the establishment of memberships and the invention of rules that give the market sharp boundaries and internal homogeneity. However, it is also deterritorialized through attempts to add new elements, such as new members, or the questioning of rules and procedures. Similarly, the organization is subject to territorialization through, for example, the selection of legitimate members and the creation of a set of practices, discourses and cultural values by which members should abide. However, also here the organization is subject to deterritorialization through the inflow of new members and the possible challenges levelled against deeply taken-for-granted practices and norms.

The way assemblages are made to cohere or fall apart through territorialization and deterritorialization cannot be explained in terms of essential and immutable components governing and holding the assemblage together (DeLanda 2006; Nail 2017; Ong and Collier

2005). As Bennett (2010:23–24, my italics) argues, “assemblages are *ad hoc groupings*, of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts”, but “they are not governed by any central head: no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group”. Thus, there is no assemblage that is governed by a set of essential components, leading Deleuze and Guattari (1987:406) to consider an assemblage as a “veritable invention”.

Accordingly, there are no predefined rules for what can be assembled (Müller 2015) since all assemblages are formations that have emerged as elements, perhaps conflictive and contradictory, are pulled together. In Deleuze’s and Guattari’s work, the concept of “machine” is used to describe assemblages that are not built on principles of unity or essentialism (Nail 2017). A unitary phenomenon consists of component parts that together work to reproduce it, almost like the human body in which each organ performs specific tasks in order to sustain the body itself. Many components of the human body, for example the heart, are essential and if they do not perform their functions, the body will cease to be. In this way, the human body resembles an organism whose unity “is given in advance of the emergence of the parts and subordinates the parts to an organizing principle or spirit” (Nail 2017:23). In this way, a unitary phenomenon also has an essence since it has distinct features that define it. An assemblage is, in contrast, more akin to a machine since its component parts do not play essential functions in order to sustain its harmony, but can be unplugged and recombined without destroying the machine. In this way, assemblages are characterized by “relations of exteriority”, meaning that a “component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different” (DeLanda 2006:23).

A consequence of the non-essential character of an assemblage is the multiple possibilities for combinations incorporating various heterogeneous elements, both of human and nonhuman character. Hence, in Deleuzian philosophy, the primacy of the human is collapsed,

meaning that nonhuman elements can be assembled together with other elements, perhaps creating awkward formations that somehow go against the taken-for-granted truths of what can be assembled. In this way, even nonhuman elements can gain a degree of agency. Jane Bennett has the following remarks on the assemblage of human and nonhuman elements:

I think that *human* agency is best conceived as itself the outcome of or effect of a certain configuration of human and nonhuman forces. When humans act they do not exercise exclusively human powers but express and engage a variety of other actants, including food, micro-organisms, minerals, artefacts, sounds, bio- and other technologies. There is a difference between a human individual and a stone, but neither *considered alone* has real agency. The locus of agency is always a human-nonhuman collective. (Khan 2009:101)

Indeed, we can think of the most mundane phenomena in our surroundings as non-anthropocentric assemblages in which human and nonhuman elements are configured into unstable wholes that do not exist as objective entities. This is the argument of Mol (2002) who claims that for example diseases are enacted through the interaction between medical practices, objects and humans. In this way, Deleuze's philosophy is also an endeavor to deconstruct core assumptions in the Western philosophical tradition of modernity that are based on clear binaries, such as human/nonhuman.⁶

However, it is important to emphasize that although an assemblage lacks an essence and multiple elements transcending human and nonhuman boundaries can be combined in it, it is not "a random assortment of things" (Savage 2019:7). Rather, an assemblage is an amalgamation in which heterogeneous elements have been pulled together for strategic purposes. An assemblage should be understood

⁶With this focus, the Deleuzian assemblage literature also has affinities with Actor Network Theory (ANT) which takes as a starting point that "'society' has to be composed, made up, constructed, established, maintained and assembled" (Latour 2000:113). Through ANT, a range of theoretical concepts have been introduced to analyze how human and material elements are joined together in provisional networks, thereby giving the same ontological status to both human and nonhuman elements. While acknowledging the similarities between the literatures, I do not cover it here as it is not part of the analytical framework of the thesis; instead, readers interested in the ANT perspective can consult key authors, such as Latour (2007), Callon (1984) and Mol (2002).

as always reflecting some form of strategic purpose but without being reduced to a particular essence (Savage 2019). Briassoulis (2019) has found a way of conceptualizing this dual characteristic of assemblages when speaking about assemblages as being put together for the purpose of governing. These so-called governance assemblages are “the provisional, situated, unique compositions continuously emerging from the process of heterogeneous components coming together for the purpose (desire) of steering to achieve particular, issue-related goals” (Briassoulis 2019:440). Accordingly, the way an assemblage is made to cohere does not obey any essential principles but at the same time, acts of assembly does not occur at random but with the purpose of governing.

Assemblage thinking mobilized – Theoretical and empirical divergences

Assemblage as a concept for empirical research has grown very popular over recent years. As Savage (2019:1) argues, “assemblage thinking has exploded” and researchers in a variety of fields and academic disciplines have engaged with the concept, resulting in a lively debate on theoretical conceptualizations and empirical applications. A range of publications that do not always agree on the meaning and the analytical potential of the concept have surfaced (Acuto and Curtis 2014; Anderson and McFarlane 2011; Clarke et al. 2015; Collier 2014; DeLanda 2006, 2016; Higgins and Larnar 2017; Li 2007a; Newman and Clarke 2009; Ong 2014; Ong and Collier 2005; Sassen 2006). In fact, the field of assemblage studies is characterized by pluralism and there is a “remarkable diversity” in how the term has been mobilized for research purposes (Anderson and McFarlane 2011:124; McFarlane 2011). In this section, I depict this diversity by dividing assemblage research into two traditions. This division serves as a foundation for carving out my own position.

Assemblage as an analytical tactic and space of inquiry

During recent years, assemblage as a concept has been taken up by scholars who use it to open up new spaces of inquiry and mobilize “analytical tactics”. This research somewhat loosens the connection to Deleuze and Guattari (although not entirely) and uses the assemblage concept to destabilize established meanings and reframe empirical fields.

Sassen (2006, 2013a, 2013b, 2014) is one of the scholars using assemblage thinking with the purpose of destabilizing powerful meanings. One of Sassen’s primary preoccupations is the inertia of grand concepts and categories in social science, such as the economy, the government, the family and the city. According to Sassen, these concepts cannot be used to explain rapid political, social and economic transformations. Rather, to address such changes, these categories should be actively destabilized (Sassen 2013a). In the concept of assemblage, Sassen finds a fruitful way of dealing with complexity and destabilizing powerful meanings. Thus, for Sassen (2014), assemblage functions as an “analytical tactic” to discover hybrid forms of organization that traditional concepts make invisible or cannot conceptualize. In Sassen’s (2013b:102) own words:

I use the term “assemblage” as an analytic instrument that allows me to detect an organizational format that deborders established institutional domains – the economy, the polity, the state, society – and recover the contingency of how each of these is constituted, and the fact that across time and place, they were constituted differently.

In *Territory, Authority, Rights – From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (2006), Sassen finds in assemblage a way to formulate an understanding of globalization and the role of the state. Because of an interest in destabilizing grand categories and concepts, it becomes possible to imagine another role for the state in globalization. In mainstream understandings, the state is often considered as being in a state of erosion because of processes of deregulation, financial liberalization and privatization. However, according to Sassen, the state reconfigures itself in order to further globalization, giving it a

more substantial role. Hence, the state creates the conditions for its own disassembly and globalization appears as a hybrid formation in which the role of the state is shaken up. This way of using assemblage thinking has been taken up by international relations scholars interested in understanding the increased complexity in the provision of security. Abrahamsen and Williams (2014) finds Sassen's way of using assemblage, as a descriptive term which facilitates the discovery of complex formations of governing, useful. In their studies on the provision of security in African countries, assemblage as a descriptor, they argue, helps describe a hybrid form of provisioning security, including both private and public forces. What can be discovered through using assemblage as a concept, returning to Sassen, is therefore a hybrid constellation of elements:

Analytically, using assemblages allows me to detect and construct formations that include only *elements* of established institutions. In this regard, an assemblage cannot be reduced to an institution (the state, the economy, etc.) but rather contains elements of diverse institutions or other identifiable entities which cohere through specific, often situated dynamics or logics. (Sassen 2013b:102)

The work of Ong and Collier (2005) represents another way of using the assemblage concept. Their work on global assemblages (Ong and Collier 2005) aims to offer a new "style of inquiry" (Collier 2014:33) and not about applying a theoretical package. They are closer to the tradition of "assemblage thinking" than "assemblage theory" as it is described by for example DeLanda (2006, 2016), in the sense that their work is about calibrating scientific inquiry so it can capture "contingency and uncertainty" (Ong 2014:19)⁷. Collier (2014) follows the same mode of reasoning in the sense that assemblage thinking is

⁷Manuel DeLanda (2006, 2016) has taken on the task of constructing theory out of Deleuze and Guattari's writings on assemblage. DeLanda's project is about building assemblage theory by incorporating it into a coherent critical realist framework in which assemblages are objectively existing but characterized by non-totality and non-essentialism. Thereby, it is to be understood more as "assemblage theory" than "assemblage thinking" which is more about mobilizing a style of investigation that reframes an empirical field and offers a range of concepts that can be used to study an assemblage/processes of assembly. Thus, although some of DeLanda's arguments can be found in both the theoretical and the analytical part of the thesis, I do not provide an exhausting review of his work and the notion of assemblage theory here, as I position this thesis in the tradition of "assemblage thinking".

about framing concepts and questions differently in order to view global configurations in a new light. Although Ong and Collier's (2005) work approaches assemblages in the way that is in focus for the next section – as the process of assembling diverse components in contingent formations – they are not always close to Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual repertoire but use assemblage thinking in a general way to shake up and reframe various phenomena related to globalization in order to explore how they are in a constant process of assembly and disassembly. An example of a contribution to this way of assemblage thinking is Öjehag-Pettersson's (2015) thesis on globalization and regional development. Using a mix of Sassen and Ong and Collier, Öjehag-Pettersson (2015) studies the production of globalization discourses in the governing of Swedish regional development by mobilizing assemblage as a tactic and as a framing device to delimit a space for empirical inquiry. The practice of regional development, in this version, is understood as an assemblage in which global forms (Ong and Collier 2005) are inserted, leading to the reproduction of different discourses on globalization.

While this form of assemblage thinking centers on how the concept can be used to create a space for empirical inquiries, thereby facilitating the discovery of hybrid formations of power, the next section puts more focus on how the concept of assemblage is mobilized to investigate the processes of composing unstable configurations out of different materials, discourses and practices, and how these very processes make various phenomena consistent and fragile at the same time.

Mobilizing assemblage to explore processes of composition

Assemblages can be understood as fragile compositions of heterogeneous elements in which power is not equally distributed (Bennett 2010). In this way, Deleuze and Guattari (2013) provide the basic ontological and epistemological premise from which a large bulk of empirical research has been produced during the recent decades. The common denominator for this research, although internally heterogeneous, is its focus on taking seriously the Deleuzo-Guattarian

notion of assemblages as always in the making. Taking this as a starting point, research has focused on exploring the unpredictable and contingent *processes of assembly* that create order and coherence. The interest guiding this research is how various elements can be made to cohere in observable and structural formations, while, at the same time, being provisional and prone to falling apart.

Thus, the concept of assemblage rests on a dual logic which retains a focus on assemblages having some form of structural qualities but not being able transform into “a coherent whole” (Allen 2011:154; Marcus and Saka 2006; Newman and Clarke 2009). The active and laborious dimension of pulling together potentially contradictory elements is in focus, highlighting the fact that assemblage, while grammatically a noun, refers to a phenomenon which semantically signifies a verb (Anderson and McFarlane 2011). When emphasizing assemblage as a noun, it risks being transformed into a “pre-existing thing of the world with pre-given properties” (Rabinow 2014 quoted in Savage 2019:5) which would downplay the fact that assemblages are results of complex processes of fixing and arranging. As the focus is on processes of assembly, the analytical gaze is directed towards the “mundane, everyday, and seemingly trivial” (Prince 2010:172) labor invested to make the elements constituting the assemblage cohere with each other (Clarke et al. 2015; McCann 2011). As Li (2007a:264) argues:

Assemblage flags agency, the hard work required to draw heterogeneous elements together, forge connections between them and sustain these connections in the face of tension. It invites analysis on how the elements of an assemblage might – or might not – be made to cohere.

This basic preoccupation with exploring how different configurations of heterogeneous elements are assembled into provisional wholes can be said to characterize a bulk of research produced during the recent decades. A popular move has been to use the notion of assemblage to break into what is often considered homogeneous and unitary phenomena or processes in order to show that their perceived homogeneity is preceded by assembly work. In the following, I give a number of examples of how assemblage has been deployed in this way.

Social science is replete with taken-for-granted general concepts under which a range of political, economic and social phenomena are subsumed, thereby granting them great explanatory power (cf. Ong 2007). One such concept is neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, especially in Marxist accounts (Harvey 2006), has been described as a unitary phenomenon with a specific set of characteristics that, when set in motion, has predictable consequences regardless of context. Although this simplification has been challenged by terms such as “neoliberalization” that aim to highlight the more complex and hybrid character of neoliberalism, the concept still seems to be understood as a “big Leviathan” (Collier 2012) with “a core of common, salient features” (McGuirk and Dowling 2009:176). In order to challenge this conceptualization, research rooted in human geography and anthropology has drawn on poststructuralist traditions to combat the “complete silence on the techniques of neoliberalism, the apparently mundane practices through which neoliberal spaces, states, and subjects are being constituted in particular forms” (Larner 2003:511). Thus, neoliberalism has been subject to studies treating it as a phenomenon that is assembled in particular ways in specific contexts. This means that concepts related to neoliberalism, such as marketization and managerialization, have been studied as phenomena being constituted by multiple and diverse elements in specific contexts. In a range of publications, different facets of neoliberalism are treated as assemblages whose assembly is subject to in-depth empirical scrutiny (Higgins and Larner 2017). For instance, markets that are typically seen as a central to neoliberalism should be conceptualized as processes of marketization which take work to sustain. Among other things, marketization requires the establishment of buyers and sellers, the transformation of objects into commodities and the establishment of rules for exchange (Çalışkan and Callon 2010; Callon 1998; Prince 2017).

Apart from marketization, other features of neoliberalism have been treated as assemblages. McGuirk and Dowling (2009), drawing on a case study on the privatization of Australian urban housing, argue that

many theoretical conceptualizations have reduced this development to relentless neoliberal urban privatization. However, instead of taking this for granted, they explore how different forms of housing are products of public-private entities making housing projects possible through trying to satisfy both commercial and social needs, thus opening up the possibility that the neoliberalization of housing cannot be attributed to a coherent neoliberal project but is a product of multiple actors, logics and norms being pulled together. Clarke (2015) mobilizes assemblage thinking in order to explore another facet of neoliberalism which is the reshaping of various sectors in accordance with management logics and techniques. Taking British universities as a case study of this managerialization, Clarke argues that this process is made possible by global repertoires of managerial vocabularies, devices, identities and scripts which function as the raw material from which a managerialized university can be constructed.

The concept of assemblage has played a similar role in developing the field of policy analysis as it has been deployed to conceptualize policies as products of heterogeneous elements being pulled together. A policy, in the common use of the term, is often seen as a document defining social, political and economic problems and possible solutions. With the introduction of the notion of policy assemblage (Clarke et al. 2015; Gorur 2011; Savage 2019; Savage and Lewis 2018; Ureta 2015), policies are reconsidered as emerging from a range of different sources and also as being mobile in time and space. The policy assemblage research has emerged from a critique of rationalist and instrumentalist models that conceptualize the policy process linearly (Gorur 2011). Instead of following this path, research oriented towards policy assemblage analyzes policies in a range of policy fields to describe how they emerge through the drawing together of multiple components.

McCann (2011:144), in following this line of research, considers the emergence of drug policy in the city of Vancouver as “a purposive gathering of people, institutional capacities, expertise, models, techniques, technologies, political sustenance etc. from local sources, and, crucially, from elsewhere”. This focus on policies being produced

at various sites and by mobilizing multiple resources is visible in other case studies on policy-making. In a study on a policy to combat homelessness in Australia, Baker and McGuirk (2017) show that it comes to life at multiple sites and by the work of multiple actors and cannot be confined to particular bureaucratic decision-making sites. Furthermore, Savage and Lewis (2018), argue, with the case of the introduction of teaching standards in the Australian school system as a basis, that global ideas, norms and scripts with origins in transnational institutions work as influential repertoires to create these standards. In this way, assemblages are characterized by “global forms” which refer to practices, technologies and models that can be abstracted from a particular setting, rendered mobile and re-inserted in new settings (Ong and Collier 2005). The global forms can take the form of different types of best practices or models that travel and can be inserted in the assembly of policies in different territorial settings (Peck and Theodore 2015). In order to assemble coherent policies in a context of fluidity and mobile global forms, they have to be translated in various ways, which is the main argument made by Clarke et al. (2015) in their volume about how policies move.

Furthermore, Ureta (2015) offers an illustrative analysis of the public transport project “Transantiago” in Chile using a policy assemblage lens. Ureta charts the development of the project from its inception to its ultimate policy failure and views its construction as an assemblage of heterogeneous devices, practices and discourses. This construction was engaged in a struggle between territorialization and deterritorialization, meaning that the project, because of the threat of disintegration, required ordering and organization. A flawed part of the transport system was its material constitution (such as non-functioning fare systems and poorly designed bus seats) which was severely criticized by Santiago inhabitants. However, this did not lead to the disassembly of the system, but gave rise to repair and maintenance measures being taken. This included delegitimization of the disruptive public and the creation of a more positive image of the system.

In tandem with transformations on a global scale, assemblage as a concept has been mobilized to explore global governing arrangements as well as improvement projects designed to solve problems of supposed poverty and underdevelopment around the globe. During recent decades, the various attempts to govern processes that transcend national territories have received attention in the international relations literature. Bueger (2018) finds in assemblage thinking fruitful tools to discover different governing arrangements around global issues. In order to capture the fluidity and contingency of these arrangements, Bueger (2018) exploits the focus in assemblage thinking on how order is constructed and maintained in a fragmented global landscape of multiple power sources. This helps Bueger (2018) in, for example, exploring an expert assemblage, in which best management practices play a decisive role in governing the international efforts to combat piracy.

The creation of an international development apparatus that has extended globally since the post-World War Two era has also actualized assemblage as fruitful concept. A characteristic of the current development apparatus is its fragmented character, meaning that multiple actors – states, international organizations, NGOs, private companies – are involved in development efforts. In addition, these actors use a variety of techniques to make development happen. Li (2007a) mobilizes assemblage thinking to make sense out of the complexity of development projects. Li argues that these projects do not emerge “fully formed from a single source” but “are formed through an assemblage of objectives, knowledges, techniques, and practices of diverse provenance” (Li 2005:386). Thus, to capture the workings of these schemes, it is important to study how they are “pulled together from an existing repertoire, a matter of habit, accretion and bricolage” (Li 2007b:6). In order to study this assembly process, Li (2007a) suggests an analytical framework for the study of assembly by articulating six generic aspects: forging alignments, rendering technical, authorizing knowledge, managing failures and contradictions, anti-politics and reassembling. By mobilizing these aspects to community forest management, Li (2007a) shows that for

this field to become governable, actors have to be aligned with each other, the field has to be made into an object of governing and political debate has to be foreclosed and reduced to technicalities⁸.

To conclude, the literature referred to here is, naturally, internally heterogeneous, not only in terms of the empirical fields being investigated but also in terms of how assemblage thinking is mobilized. For example, there are divergences regarding to what extent concepts from the Deleuzian apparatus are used, or whether new conceptual apparatuses are invented (cf. Briassoulis 2019). Having said that, my aim with this literature review has been to focus on the basic notion of assemblage as an active and creative process of construction and arrangement.

Concluding remarks

In light of the pluralism in assemblage thinking, I deem it necessary to spell out the analytical insights that I have gained from this research. Of great importance for the forthcoming analysis is the decision to conceptualize assemblage as a verb; as a *process* of arranging and composing elements into ostensibly coherent formations that are always contingent. This creative act of assembly is often neglected in social science research and the coherence that is taken for granted often serves as a starting point for research, rather than being studied in itself:

When social scientists add the adjective “social” to some phenomenon, they designate a stabilized state of affairs, a bundle of ties that, later,

⁸Here it is worth mentioning that the work of Tania Li has been an important source of inspiration for this thesis and in the analysis, I refer to her work to illustrate my argument. However, although Li has developed a comprehensive model for assemblage analysis, I have refrained from using it for the following reasons. Firstly, Li’s model requires, in my view, another empirical study object. While I have constructed my study in a such a way that I follow *the project* as an organizational form with a specific set of managerial attributes, Li’s model requires a closeness to a *specific* project whose assembly can be analyzed in relation to a particular context (see Chapter 3 for a methodological discussion). In addition, although Li’s model builds on Deleuzian thinking, it does not engage with specific analytical concepts from Deleuze and Guattari. I have seen an added value to engage with Deleuzian concepts for the analysis (to which I return later on in this chapter) and therefore I have decided not to use Li’s model.

may be mobilized to account for some other phenomenon. There is nothing wrong with this use of the word as long as it designates what is *already* assembled together, without making any superfluous assumption about the *nature* of what is being assembled. (Latour 2007:1)

Assembling as an act of composing and arranging reality in contingent formations is a way out of the trap of imagining reality as a “stabilized state of affairs” and is instead an invitation to study how the world *becomes* stabilized. In my view, an understanding of the assemblage concept as a way of discovering and analyzing processes of arrangement and composition offers a way to deconstruct phenomena that are enacted as if they are coherent (Clarke 2015).

This means that I do not align myself with other understandings of assemblage, mainly notions of assemblage as an analytical tactic (Ong 2014; Sassen 2006, 2013a, 2013b, 2014) or as a general framing of empirical studies (Collier 2014; Öjehag-Pettersson 2015; Ong 2014). It is not so much that I disagree with how the concept is used in this research, but that it constitutes an unnecessary “detour” for my own study. The above-mentioned scholars share a common platform in that they mobilize assemblage thinking as a tactic for discovery and framing of an empirical field so that hybrid formations can be analyzed. I consider this understanding as already integrated into the conceptualization of assembling as processes of arrangement and composition. Seeing the world as constituted by processes of arranging humans, nonhuman elements, practices and discourses implies a reframing of the empirical world and the introduction of concepts such as “analytical tactics” or “framing of a space for empirical inquiry” as distinct understandings of assemblage seems, in my view, superfluous.⁹

⁹Here, I want to clarify that I view Ong and Collier’s position as standing in both traditions here described. The use of assemblage makes it possible to, on the one hand, reframe an inquiry and thereby discover new hybrid formations, while, on the other hand, I would like to suggest that this operation also makes possible the study of assembly processes.

In addition, these conceptualizations of the concept of assemblage do not always engage with the Deleuzian conceptual repertoire which I believe is important as it provides important tools for empirical analysis (cf. Bueger 2014). In the following, I therefore discuss more thoroughly how concepts derived from Deleuzian assemblage thinking can be used for analytical purposes.

Analytical framework – Mobilizing concepts for empirical analysis

In this section, I specify a more detailed schematic for empirical analysis with the previous literature and theory as a background. Here, I want to stress that the concept of assemblage is the main theoretical concept guiding the analysis, but since there is no ready-made template to study the process of assembly empirically, I need to be creative in order to create my own analytical framework; an operation which needs a wider conceptual framework. What I present here is, thus, the result of the *bricoleur* doing the work of drawing together different conceptual resources for the sake of empirical analysis (cf. Ong 2014).

In the previous sections, I have clarified how assemblage thinking can be mobilized. The concept of assemblage can be said to work as a lens to identify and analyze how empirical phenomena are assembled in various ways. This general understanding of assemblage functions as a guiding principle for the forthcoming analysis¹⁰. However, there is also a need for a more concretized set of operational concepts that can be used to answer the research questions. Before going into these concepts, I need to clarify that I now start to talk about *the project* as an analytical category (evident in the use of italics), meaning that I refer to a general organizational format consisting of a set of managerial characteristics, and not a specific empirical project.

¹⁰Consequently, for the forthcoming analysis, the active dimension of the concept of assemblage is used, meaning that the constitution of *the project* through *processes of assembly* is in focus.

Exploring the construction of the project through processes of translation

In order to account for how *the project* is assembled, I use the concept of *translation* which provides the theoretical basis needed to study processes of assembly and the power relations inherent in them.

Translation is a multi-faceted concept in the social sciences and has been developed in a variety of disciplines (Callon 1984; Clarke et al. 2015; Czarniawska and Sevón 2005; Freeman 2009; Mosse 2005; Rottenburg 2009). Thus, because of its theoretical refinement, the meaning of translation has broadened from being only a matter of “transfer of meanings between languages” (Steiner 1998 quoted in Freeman 2009:4). For instance, in Science and Technology Studies (STS), there has been a theoretical development pointing to the transformation that is always present in translation. Philosopher Michel Serres has been influential in this theoretical development. For Serres, translation is not only linguistic but involves movement, displacement and transformation (Czarniawska and Sevón 2005). The issue of movement and displacement has been taken up by Callon (1984) who considers translation as the dislocation of things and people into new alignments. Thus, for Callon, translation is the act of making displacements in order to connect possibly divergent social worlds. Callon argues that what makes this connection of worlds possible can be both humans and nonhumans. Translation is, thus, not a transfer of meanings in an immutable form but always entails some form of transformation, adaptation and modification. Clarke et al.’s (2015:35) notion of translation as the “active and selective process in which meanings are interpreted and reinterpreted to make them fit their new context” is an eloquent way of summarizing this form of translation.

In research on international development taking inspiration from STS, there has been a conceptual development of translation as a form of brokerage. In the section on international development as a managerial practice, I highlight how scholars such as Mosse (2005) and Koster and van Leynseele (2018) use the concept of “broker” to describe actors who

connect development actors that are distant from each other. What these brokers do is therefore a form of translation, as they mediate between different worlds and enroll supporters for a particular cause. This is also the argument of Rottenburg (2009:xxxix) who argues that “translation brings together things that are separate; it establishes a relation and mediates between multiple elements and makes them compatible and comparable”.

Outside STS, there have been theoretical interventions highlighting translation as power. As translation entails displacement and adaptation of meanings to new contexts, it is inevitably about the exercise of power (Clarke et al. 2015). Specifically, translation makes some understandings and conceptualizations possible while others are silenced. Translation does not occur in a vacuum but always in a discursive context that supplies taken-for-granted material for translation. Clarke (2015:98), in his study of the managerialization of British universities, mobilizes the concept of “repertoires” to describe how this process is possible because of pre-existing “discourses and devices, texts and techniques, roles and resources” that can be borrowed and drawn upon. These repertoires have similarities with global forms (Ong and Collier 2005) in the sense that they circulate freely and can be abstracted from particular contexts and translated in new ones. These repertoires and global forms are always infused with power as they function as repositories for particular taken-for-granted practices and techniques of governing and organization.

Given the diverse theoretical content of the translation concept, I have had to make my own translation of this very concept in order to make it amenable for analysis. The analysis occurs in three different steps and depending on which analytical step, the concept of translation is made operable in different ways.

In the first analytical step, which focuses on how *the project* is constructed and produced in practice, I am interested in a theoretically stripped down notion of translation. Thus, in this analytical step, I use a notion of translation that allows me to come as close as possible to

the labor and hard work being invested to make *the project* come to life and sustain itself. Here, Clarke et al.'s (2015:35) notion of translation as the "active and selective process in which meanings are interpreted and reinterpreted to make them fit their new context" guides the analysis. Hence, translation is used to identify instances of sense-making, interpretation, and the adaptation and invention of suitable languages and knowledge systems in order to create and sustain *the project*. The aim of the first part of the analysis is, consequently, to delve deeply into the empirical world of *the project* with the purpose of describing the practices, strategies, repertoires and material elements mobilized to assemble it.

In the second analytical step, which focuses on how *the project* is stabilized and kept together in the face of tensions, I use a more theoretical notion of translation together with two other concepts in order to study how *the project* gains consistency while also being subject to disassembly. In order to account for how *the project* is in a constant process of stabilization and destabilization, I turn to Deleuze and Guattari (2013) who offer a conceptual apparatus for exploring how assemblages are always in a struggle between striving for consistency and falling apart. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (2013:381) refer to this as "the problem of consistency" which "concerns the manner in which the components of a territorial assemblage hold together". They introduce the conceptual couplet of territorialization and deterritorialization in order to conceptualize this struggle between forces of stabilization and destabilization. I use these concepts as a framework for analyzing how *the project* gains consistency and how its homogeneity is secured, while also being subject to forces undermining this homogeneity. From a Deleuzian viewpoint, these concepts are closely connected to spatial processes but they can also refer to non-spatial processes that increase or decrease the internal homogeneity of an assemblage (DeLanda 2006). However, in order to avoid possible conceptual confusion, I leave Deleuze's and Guattari's concepts here and use DeLanda's conceptualization of territorialization as the creation of homogeneity, stability and coherence, and deterritorialization as the forces undermining stability.

Thus, I use stabilization when referring to territorialization and destabilization when discussing deterritorialization.

Translation is here activated once again as a way to account for the strategies, techniques and repertoires mobilized to make *the project* stable and coherent. As mentioned above, a more theoretical notion of translation is used here. Thus, while the notion of translation in the first analytical step is used to identify instances of sense-making, interpretation and transfer of meaning into new linguistic and cognitive registers, translation is, in the second part, considered a stabilizing and destabilizing endeavor, reproducing particular relations of power. Consequently, I refine the notion of translation here in order to make possible an analysis of translation as playing a *(de)stabilizing function*. Hence, in the second part of the analysis, a more theoretical notion of translation is activated. This means that the concepts of brokerage, repertoires and global forms are used in order to account for how *the project* is (de)stabilized.

In the third analytical step, I do not use the concepts of translation and (de)stabilization. As the focus here is on analyzing the political implications of the process of assembly, I instead activate previous research on depoliticization and colonial regimes of power, as this will help me in the analysis. This fact introduces some analytical challenges as I do not use the concepts described above, but I come back to this analytical operation in the next section.

Setting the analysis in motion – An analytical strategy

In order to clarify the above discussion, I summarize it here as an analytical strategy that can bring structure and guidance to the forthcoming analysis. The analysis of how *the project* is assembled proceeds in three steps. As mentioned above, an important starting point for the analysis is that I use *the project* as an analytical category that serves to capture the general characteristics of assembly pertaining to multiple empirically existing projects. The first step in the analysis is focused on analyzing *the project* as a life cycle with four

distinct phases – the application phase, the appraisal phase, the implementation and reporting phase and the auditing phase. Every phase in this first step is analyzed as instances of assembly, meaning that they are considered as being produced through the drawing together of heterogeneous elements. This implies an activation of the analytical framework in a specific way. It is here that translation is used to identify and analyze the practices and strategies of sense-making, interpretation and transfer of meanings into different frameworks of understanding. This analytical step is the most empirical one as I go deep into the practices, processes and artifacts mobilized to assemble each phase of *the project*.

The second analytical step analyzes, with the first step as a foundation, how the acts of translation in four phases of *the project* serve to stabilize it as a coherent entity while, simultaneously, being targeted by disruptive forces destabilizing it. Here, I do not let the phases of *the project* structure the analysis, but I put the translation practices that stabilize and destabilize *the project* in the forefront.

The third analytical step bridges a gap that I see in many assemblage studies: a thorough discussion on the political implications of the assembly process. The assembly process is always an exercise of power as particular configurations of components are made possible and others not. In this way, particular modes of arranging and putting together, as well as their underpinning rationalities, become normalized, while others are marginalized. However, this step poses some challenges analytically. The assemblage analysis with its particular set of analytical concepts does not continue in this step but is used as a basis to draw out political implications. This implies an activation of theory that is difficult to foresee as it depends on the findings of the analysis. However, in accordance with the general focus on the politics of assembly, this part of the analysis focuses on two particular implications of project assembly; depoliticization and colonialism. Thus, in this third analytical step, I return to two theoretical literatures touched upon in this theoretical chapter. Firstly, I use a broad literature on depoliticization in order to analyze how the processes of assembly possibly reproduce power relations hampering

the articulation of political conflicts. Secondly, I return to the postcolonial literature in order to explore how assembling *the project* risks replicating colonial power relations.

The need for activation of theory in order to discuss political implications can be detected in other forms of poststructuralist analysis. To take the example of governmentality studies, it has a well-constructed framework that is apt to study a range of phenomena related to power and governing in modern societies. However, it lacks a normative vocabulary that can help the researcher in discussing the possibly damaging implications of a particular form of governing. I see this problem in assemblage analysis as well; while providing an adequate vocabulary for analyzing the formation and maintenance of assemblages, it needs to be complemented with other theoretical insights in order to tease out the political implications of particular forms of assembly.

These analytical questions guide the analysis in the following chapters:

1. How is the life cycle of *the project* assembled in the application, appraisal, implementation/reporting and auditing phase?
2. How is *the project* stabilized and destabilized?
3. What power relations are reproduced and contested as *the project* is assembled?

These questions correspond to the research questions, presented in the introduction chapter. Thus, the first analytical question corresponds to how *the project* is produced and constructed in practice, the second question corresponds to how *the project* is kept together and stabilized in the face of tensions, and the third question corresponds to the power relations being reproduced and contested as *the project* is constructed.

In the following table, the analytical strategy is summarized.

Table 2.1 The analytical strategy

Analytical step	Activation of the analytical framework
Step 1, Analytical question 1: Analysis of how <i>the project</i> is assembled in four linear phases (application, appraisal, implementation/reporting and auditing).	Activation of translation to identify instances of sense-making, interpretation, and the adaptation and invention of suitable languages and knowledge systems in order to create and sustain the four life phases of <i>the project</i> .
Step 2, Analytical question 2: Analysis of how <i>the project</i> in its different phases strives for homogeneity and consistency and is threatened by forces trying to tear it apart.	Activation of (de)stabilization and translation to identify processes of homogenization and disruption.
Step 3, Analytical question 3: Analysis of the political implications of how <i>the project</i> is assembled.	Activation of theory and research on the reproduction of depoliticizing and colonial power relations.

3 Studying *the project* in practice - Research methodology and material

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology and material. I begin with a general reflection on assemblage and methodology. Thereafter, I describe how I have used the concept of assemblage to approach and define a study object for the sake of generating data. This discussion is followed by a description of how I gained access to the empirical field and generated data from it, as well as the strategies I have deployed to analyze data. I conclude with a discussion of the ethical challenges that I have faced during the research process and how I have handled them.

Initial considerations on assemblage and methodology

The work of Deleuze and Guattari (1994, 2013) constitutes a rejection of unproblematized foundations of Western philosophy which they smash into pieces in order to offer a set of new concepts with which to understand the world. In this way, their work is inspiring since it offers new and radical ways of thinking about ontology and epistemology and suggests how such new ways of thinking can inform research. However, their work is hardly an invitation to systematic empirical investigation as it does not offer clear guidance on how to translate philosophy into empirical analysis. Consequently, assemblage thinking, at least in its original philosophical form, leaves the researcher quite perplexed when it comes to methodological considerations. If the researcher wants to mobilize assemblage thinking for empirical studies, she is stuck with the issues facing all social science scholars: How is an empirical study object identified and how can it be approached? How is the study object turned into an empirical case? How is data generated and what principles should guide the analysis? What specific ethical challenges arise when conducting research inspired by assemblage thinking?

Although assemblage-inspired empirical studies abound in various disciplines, a description of the translation of epistemological

commitments into methodological practices has been missing in research (Baker and McGuirk 2017). Fortunately, there has been an increase in publications during recent years discussing some of these issues, highlighting how assemblage thinking can be used for empirical studies (Baker and McGuirk 2017; Bueger 2014; Feely 2020; Lisle 2014; Ong 2014). However, assemblage thinking does not provide a template ready for application on a particular empirical phenomenon. I see this as one of the strengths of assemblage thinking as it allows you to create your own methodology. The imaginative use of theory is actually something Deleuze encourages, as he urges the researcher to use his concepts as “a box of tools” (Foucault 2008:208). This box of tools cannot be “applied” according to a universal formula, but, I argue, must be actively *created* in relation to the particular study. Thus, drawing on the way Deleuze and Guattari (1994) discuss philosophy as the creation and invention of concepts, I argue that a methodological framework incorporating assemblage thinking should be invented and not “applied”.¹¹

Thus, assemblage thinking invites an imaginative approach to the construction of your specific methodology. Ong (2014:20) emphasizes the importance of being “artisanal”, meaning that in assemblage thinking “you do not go for an externally imposed formula and try to reproduce it in some way, but rather you are grabbing tools at hand to study what’s before you”. This work, Ong adds, is what characterizes the role of the *bricoleur*. I have undertaken this role to construct the specific assemblage methodology for this thesis in the sense that I have drawn on multiple methodological resources. In the following, I describe this methodology, starting with how I define the study object and approach the empirical field.

¹¹William Walters (2012), discussing the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, warns of using this approach as a fixed toolbox that invites “applicationism”. Rather, “the toolbox must be reimagined as a dynamic and transactional space – more akin to the fluid world of software design than the settled scene of the toolshed” (Walters 2012:5). I interpret Walters as continuously “inventing” governmentality for specific purposes. I try to think in the same way with assemblage thinking in order to escape the trap of applicationism.

Defining a study object – Following *the project*

In *Aramis, or The Love of Technology*, Latour (1996) tells the story about the failed construction of a train system in Paris. In this seminal work in the field of actor-network theory, Latour argues that the failure was not due to deficiencies in the technology of the train system itself but to the difficulties in drawing together the experts, financial backers and political supporters that could sustain the project. Ureta's (2015) study, mentioned in the previous chapter, has a similar approach when focusing on the failure of a transport system in Santiago. Going to the research on the use of development projects, Freeman (2014) focuses on the nature of the development project itself when investigating its assembly in the Haitian countryside. All these studies, with Latour's study as a frontrunner, mobilize a captivating method. Instead of starting in predetermined organizational settings or targeting specific individuals deemed to have specific sovereign influence on a particular practice, the logic of the transport system or the development project itself stands in focus for the research gaze. This conceptualization of the study object allows the researcher to follow the phenomenon to different sites in order to study its assembly.

Policy research in human geography and anthropology has developed a similar form of methodology when approaching policies as study objects. In this research, policies are not primarily understood as the intentional policy-making processes located at specific sites, such as decision-making organizations, but as mobile in time and space, involving and mobilizing a range of actors and practices (Shore and Wright 2011). This has led researchers to deploy a methodology of "following" instead of staying at particular decision-making sites. In contemporary global policy-making, which increasingly disobeys organizational and territorial boundaries, this technique has proved fruitful. Peck and Theodore (2012, 2015) have deployed it when studying how different policy models travel around the globe and are translated and adapted to local circumstances, as they recognize that contemporary policy-making has a "tendency to 'overflow' and exceed both conventional governmental apparatuses and jurisdictional

geographies” (Peck and Theodore 2012:22, see also Baker & McGuirk 2017).

In order to study *the project* as a logic and practice itself, I have, as described in the analytical framework, divided it into phases on which I concentrate my research gaze. This approach is in itself an answer to the basic premise in assemblage thinking that an assemblage cannot be reduced to a single logic or a specific center of power. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari (2013:381):

If we ask the general question, ‘What holds things together?’, the clearest easiest answer seems to be provided by a formalizing, linear, hierarchized, centralized *arborescent* model. [...] It seems more important to us to underline a certain number of factors liable to suggest an entirely different schema, one favoring rhizomatic, rather than arborified, functioning [...].

Studying *the project* as being constructed in different phases means that the direction of the research gaze is not determined by a specific *center* but this form of design will take you to multiple centers that are important for how it is assembled. This is what I believe to be important in Deleuze and Guattari’s (2013) critique of the arborescent model which encourages an analysis of singular centers of power. In line with their work (2013), I have approached *the project* through the notion of “minor” or “nomad” science. In contrast to “royal” science, which focuses on reproduction from a fixed point of view – “watching the flow from the bank” as Deleuze and Guattari (2013:433) call it – nomadic science urges the researcher to be ambulant, to follow the flow in unpredictable directions. Instead of exploring *the project* from a fixed point of view, which is inherent in an arborescent model, I have constructed the study object in such a way that I follow it around to the places where it is assembled.

Conceptualizing the study object in this way – as something to be followed across sites – has had substantial effects on how the empirical field is defined and for data generation. Before going into this specific issue, I want to make a general reflection on this way of defining a study object. Although engaging heavily with human geography and

anthropology in which these methodological considerations are more common and accepted, the theoretical commitments of these disciplines introduce a tension in a discipline such as political science. Although political science has not been immune to outside influences, the discipline is in part characterized by well-consolidated perceptions of the location and content of “politics”. In these conceptualizations, politics is often confined to specific arenas in which decisions are made according to formal rules and decision chains. Following a phenomenon in a more rhizomatic way poses a direct challenge to this understanding, as a neat vision of a political process is transformed into a messy one. John Law’s (2004) writings on the need for messiness in social science research have given me a well-needed push to embrace a degree of disorder in my own methodology. Rather than using social science methodology to identify an ordered and definite world, “the task is to imagine methods when they no longer seek the definite, the repeatable, the more or less stable” (Law 2004:6). This is the main point of departure for the methodological endeavor of following *the project*; it is about challenging the notion that this phenomenon can be studied as an ordered process from the beginning, and about acknowledging that this order is produced.

The strategy of following *the project* results in a redrawing of the empirical field in which I operate. As *the project* and its manifestation in different phases constitute the main object of study, it takes me to various sites, thus not confining the empirical field to a specific organization. Rather, the empirical field is “stretched” beyond specific organizational and territorial boundaries. This highlights the need to imagine the field in a more creative way. For anthropologists, the field has often consisted of “a single and (relatively) geographically bounded place” (Wedel et al. 2005:39). At the same time, there has been a development in the same discipline that a field can consist of multiple sites that are not geographically fixed (Marcus 1995; Shore and Wright 2011; Wedel et al. 2005). Using these developments in anthropology, I imagine the empirical field as consisting of multiple *project sites* that are sometimes within the same geographical territory, sometimes not. Imagining the empirical field as consisting of project sites, allows me

to escape the trap of essentialism. When the aim is to understand a political process such as project assembly, the automatic response is often to start looking for the essential components that “should” be part of the field. In my own experience, I have noticed that this can take you to organizations and individuals considered to “possess” some form of power to determine particular processes. In contrast, foregrounding *the project* itself, forces the researcher to go to unforeseen sites and investigate other types of practices that are equally important.

Imagining the field in this way, however, opens up challenges for how to delimit it, or to “make a cut” in a possibly unlimited field (Falzon 2016). Using a concept such as assemblage always opens up for limitlessness to take over as the assemblage being studied can consist of smaller assemblages (for example, project reports can be seen as assemblages themselves) and be part of larger assemblages (for instance, *the project* is part of an international development assemblage, composed of global institutions and nation-states) (DeLanda 2006). However, as a researcher, you have to perform some form of cut in the unlimited assemblage under study. This cut can have drastic effects and must be justified accordingly. As the research problem in this thesis is derived from an interest in the managerial aspects of the project bureaucracy, I have decided to let the cut be steered by this focus. *The project* is, naturally, part of a specific context which undeniably influences how it is assembled. I have deliberately made a cut that takes away some of this context. Some researchers might say that I have disregarded a key component of assemblage thinking, but since the focus is on how *the project* as a managerial bureaucracy is assembled, I have deemed it necessary to direct my research gaze towards this phenomenon and its general characteristics.

The politics of methodology

It is important to emphasize that this way of constructing the field and the research design is informed by a critical understanding of “the politics of methodology”. The deployment of methodological techniques and rules is no neutral exercise that gives an unproblematic

voice to a particular research project, since methods do “not only describe but also help to *produce* the reality that they understand” (Law 2004:5). Thus, the methodological point of departure that the researcher chooses produces a particular reality in the sense that certain visions of reality are emphasized and others silenced. Assemblage thinking helps in constructing a methodology that does not produce a monolithic and unitary reality since it is attentive to the multiplicity of human and nonhuman practices and artifacts making up the world. Thus, when *the project* is conceptualized as an outcome of assembly in which multiple parties engage, it does not appear as monolithic but rather as mobile, unpredictable and contingent. The use of assemblage as a concept is therefore a political move; a way to avoid creating an excessively coherent methodological framework that subsumes heterogeneity and elusiveness in accordance with a Deleuzo-Guattarian notion of “royal science”, and that, as a consequence, creates a reality that appears monolithic and unalterable.

Having established the field as consisting of multiple sites, I realize that this act of embracing multiplicity has consequences for data generation and analysis. However, before going into this, I clarify the way in which the study object also constitutes a more general *case*.

The case rationale – *The project* as a paradigmatic case

The rationale behind studying *the project* as a practice must be related to a wider discussion on how it relates to case study methodology. I argue that a study of *the project* in this way can also be framed as an illustrative empirical case. However, instead of relying on positivist reasoning in which a case is justified solely through being representative of other empirical cases, I deem it necessary to frame the case in another way. Flyvbjerg (2006) has made a significant contribution on how to justify and delimit case studies by referring to several ideal types. One of these ideal types is the “paradigmatic case” which, according to Flyvbjerg (2006:232), “highlight[s] more general characteristics of the societies in question”. As an example, he uses Foucault’s notion of the Panopticon to illustrate how the prison as an

institution is sustained by practices that can be generalized as striking features of the modern disciplinary society.

In line with Flyvbjerg (2006), I argue that a study on how *the project* is assembled is illustrative of contemporary society and provides a rich example of its characteristics. Studying the assembly of *the project* provides a window which makes it possible to discover and analyze a particular characteristic of contemporary society: its embeddedness in modernity intertwined with the managerialism of the recent decades. Contemporary society can be said to be characterized by “advanced ordering”, meaning that virtually everything can be made into an object of thought and reflection that works as a foundation to make society possible to order (Ong and Collier 2005). This will to order, a key trait of modernity, has spurred numerous attempts to problematize new areas of intervention and design measures to govern them. In contemporary society, furthermore, the will to govern and the instruments deployed have become more sophisticated as market and managerial techniques have extended their reach.

The project illustrates this trend, as it is a way of making a particular facet of society controllable and governable. I argue, therefore, that studying the assembly of *the project* constitutes a paradigmatic case as it illustrates characteristic features of contemporary society.

Constructing the assemblage

As alluded to above, the conceptualization of the empirical field as consisting of multiple sites where *the project* is assembled has had repercussions for data generation. Therefore, I now describe how I have chosen these sites and constructed the assemblage. The notion of *constructing the assemblage* that is to be studied is important here, since, as Ong (2014) also argues, I believe that there is no objective assemblage “out there” that I aim to unveil. Instead, I have constructed my own assemblage that consists of the adequate elements and components that I believe make possible my specific analysis.

I have already defined the study object as *the project* and its different phases, but how can this be studied more concretely? Öjehag-Pettersson (2015) argues that an assemblage manifests itself through *sites of emergence*, meaning that there is a number of sites and practices in which an assemblage is made visible. In a study on the governing of regional development, Öjehag-Pettersson (2015:86) argues that

it is an assemblage formed around parliamentary debates, commission meetings, bureaucratic orders, public-private partnerships and deliberative hearings, but also in closed business meetings, among freemasons, in other private networks of influence, at conferences and throughout academic journals.

I think that this mode of reasoning provides examples of sites and spaces where an assemblage is made visible. The project phases can thus be said to emerge in a variety of sites. I have traced these sites of emergence to the practices of state funders, civil society organizations and consultants. Accordingly, for each phase of *the project*, I have identified which of these sites of emergence that I approach for data generation purposes. In the following I describe these sites as well as engage in a discussion of the challenges of gaining access to such an unruly field. It will be clear from the description that I have not followed one single project but rather many empirically existing projects and therefore I have engaged with a multiplicity of sites. Many assemblage studies are informed by anthropological methodology in which the single case is studied closely to cover its complexity, but my methodological move is different, as I have studied a range of different projects in order to capture the project bureaucracy.

The selection of sites and actors is a result of remaining sensitive to the multi-faceted character of the field. The empirical field consists of a range of possible sites of emergence in which *the project* is assembled, and as a result, I have followed the unpredictable flow to those sites. Thus, the following of flows has been the primary sample strategy. This form of sampling can also be justified through the importance laid on the decentered character of power in assemblage thinking. In line with Foucauldian understandings, power is a capillary-like force present

everywhere and cannot be reduced to the exercise of sovereign power (Foucault 1991)¹². Considering *the project* as constituted through the workings of multiple centers of power, made it important to select sites that reflected the decentered character of power.

I have also used a form of strategic sampling similar to snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a way of letting the actors in the field influence the identification of adequate sites to follow. Although mainly associated with specific data generation methods, such as interviews, I have used snowball sampling to orient myself in the field. This form of sample strategy often starts with the researcher identifying central actors that seem important to approach. Upon entering the field, the researcher lets these actors suggest suitable actors to approach in a later stage. I have used a similar tactic when approaching different sites.

As I entered the field, I realized the need for this type of research strategy. During the first period of fieldwork, I saw a “moving target” (Cohn 2006) materialize in the sense that the construction of *the project* was not confined to a particular site. As I let the field “speak” and “act” on its own terms, I saw that the work of different actors was interconnected. The assembly of *the project* was, so to speak, dependent on multiple actors’ work. In this sense, I let the field point out important threads to follow, which in turn led me to other actors.

In the table below, I describe the sites of emergence.

¹²Foucault’s critique of the sovereign model of power is famous: “What we need [...] is a political philosophy that isn’t erected around the problem of sovereignty, nor therefore around the problems of law and prohibition. We need to cut off the king’s head: in political theory that has still to be done” (Foucault 1991:63).

Table 3.1 The studied sites of emergence

Organization		Organizational type and size		Remarks
Civil organization	society	Small CSO	6 staff in Sweden	Based in Sweden but part of a larger international organization with organizational sections in around 40 countries.
Civil organization	society	Large CSO	intermediary 126 staff (59 in Swedish headquarters, the rest in country field offices)	Formally autonomous foundation based in Sweden working with independent partner organizations in around 20 countries.
Civil organization	society	Medium intermediary CSO	24 staff (no country field offices)	Formally autonomous organization based in Sweden working with international and local organizations in around 100 countries.
Civil organization	society	Small CSO	intermediary 29 staff	Formally autonomous organization based in the Western Balkans. Partner with a large intermediary organization based in Sweden, and partner with local

Civil organization	society	Small CSO 3 staff	independent organizations. Formally autonomous organization based in the Western Balkans. Partner with a large intermediary organization based in Sweden.
Sida		The main state agency for development aid in Sweden. 675 staff	
FBA		State agency responsible for supporting peace and state-building. 150 staff	
Consultancy firm		One of the main Swedish consultancy firms for international development. 26 staff	Works with other consultant companies in consortia. Holds framework agreements with Sida. Main assignments and areas of expertise: Project evaluation, organizational assessments, implementation/ advisory roles, project leader assignments, thematic expertise.

Consultancy firm	One of the main Swedish consultancy firms for international development	Works with other consultant companies in consortia. Holds framework agreements with Sida. Main assignments and areas of expertise: Project evaluation, implementation/ advisory roles
Consultancy firm	Smaller Swedish consultancy firm in international development 9 staff	Works with other consultant companies in consortia. Holds framework agreements with Sida. Main assignments and areas of expertise: Project evaluation, implementation/ advisory roles, thematic expertise
Independent consultants	Independent contractors (in one case, member in consortium)	Main assignments and areas of expertise: Evaluation, Implementation/ advisory roles, trainings

As can be seen in the table, I have approached various organizations in order to explore each phase of *the project*. In order to study how project applications are assembled, a number of civil society organizations have been approached. These organizations can be divided into two clusters that share particular characteristics. The first cluster consists of two Swedish-based organizations. They are larger in terms of staff

and financial strength and can be classified as *intermediaries*, meaning that they have a dual role as both funders *and* recipients of funding. As recipients, they have a close formalized collaboration with the main state funder of development aid in Sweden, Sida (which I come back to later). With this aid, they channel funding further in different financial chains to partner organizations all around the world. The first organization in this cluster is a formally autonomous foundation collaborating with independent partner organizations in around 20 countries. The funding that it applies for as a recipient is often in the form of programs which in a later stage are executed as projects in collaboration with partner organizations. The second organization in this cluster is a formally autonomous organization. It differs from the previous organization as it is organized by a number of Swedish civil society organizations specialized in a particular thematic area. As a recipient, it applies, as in the previous case, for program funding which is then translated into projects by Swedish civil society organizations in collaboration with local partners in around 100 countries.

The second cluster consists of smaller organizations in terms of staff and financial strength. The first organization here is a Swedish-based organization whose primary funder is the state agency FBA (which I come back to later). This member-based organization does not have formal collaborations with autonomous partner organizations, but cooperates with sections in the same organizational family in various parts of the world. Secondly, I have approached two organizations based abroad, in a country in the Western Balkans. The first organization is a network consisting of a number of civil society organizations, and the second one is a research-based civil society organization. They have a developed cooperation with one of the intermediary organizations referred to previously, but also with other funders present in this region. In this cluster of organizations, I have also included three smaller Swedish-based organizations that have not been investigated in depth like the ones described above but that were studied through a focus group exploring issues of application and reporting procedures. During the study of the assembly of applications, private consultants were also of great importance. Here it was mainly

one independent consultant that was studied in order to explore how private consultant expertise is mobilized for the purpose of writing successful applications.

In order to study the assembly of appraisals, one of the intermediary civil society organizations plays an important role as it also receives and thereby appraises applications from partner organizations. However, the focus here is on state funders and their appraisal process. As briefly mentioned previously, two funders are in focus. The first one is Sida which is the main Swedish state agency responsible for international development. The second one is FBA (The Folke Bernadotte Academy), which is a state agency specialized in supporting efforts to strengthen peace and security. It is not mainly known for being a development aid agency, but some of the government's budget for international development is channeled through FBA.

The phase of implementation and reporting is studied through the work of civil society organizations and state funders. These are also important in the study of the auditing phase. However, this phase also implies a deeper exploration of the role of consultants. In contrast to the application phase, in which a specific independent consultant's contributions of expertise is in focus, I have focused on two Swedish-based private consultancy firms that offer expertise in the auditing process¹³. The first consultancy firm is one of the largest in development consultancy in Sweden and has a framework agreement with Sida which includes the provision of expertise in auditing and evaluation. The second consultancy firm is smaller and has a close relationship with the latter consultancy firm as they often cooperate in bigger evaluation assignments, but also has a separate framework agreement with Sida.

¹³Although two consultant companies were included in the analysis, three were approached for data generation purposes.

Access to the field

The identification of the empirical field and its various sites of emergence led to the undertaking of a journey across organizational and physical boundaries in order to generate data. Before going into the data generation methods used, I describe how access was ensured. As the empirical field was conceptualized in such a way that multiple sites were incorporated in the study, gaining access was in several cases a challenge. I made the conscious decision to approach particular individuals not for who they were, but for what they *did*. Accordingly, I met with the *enactors* of development efforts – the experts on methodology, the desk officers responsible for creating assessment criteria, the evaluators and so on. The requirements for gaining access to some of these individuals presented me with challenges and opportunities that influenced both the data generation process itself as well as forced me to present myself in a way that I believed could threaten the integrity of my research.

During the process of gaining access to the actors described above, I was often asked to do some kind of performance. Even if this was not the case for every actor and organization, some form of researcher performance was required in the process of gaining access to the civil society organizations and one of the consultancy firms. The performance often involved some kind of written description of my research in the form of “concept notes” (which is a common way of writing initial project proposals among development professionals themselves) or other research-based papers in which I described background, research purpose/questions, data collection methods, time plan and, in some cases, ethical considerations. A formal meeting during which I presented my research sometimes followed this written statement. The individuals reading my proposals and convening the meetings were, in two cases, people with skills in methodology and had titles such as “methods coordinator” or “advisor” in issues related to monitoring and evaluation. In one case, I also gave an oral presentation on my research at a staff meeting before being able to get organizational access for interviews. During this presentation, I was asked to answer questions about the scientific approach, such as how the collected

material would be analyzed and if my approach could be considered “neutral”.

In some cases, a written description was not asked for but I still wrote these brief papers in order to be proactive. As this preoccupation grew stronger, I wrote papers and concept notes more and more strategically. I followed the strategy of Tornhill (2016) who, when contacting possible interview subjects, described her research project in the terminology of the field itself, which implied the use of specific language, often devoid of theoretical points of departure and with references to words and terms that are commonly used in the field itself. Hence, to catch the attention of the organizations, I provided a background, often grounded in research and existing debates and discussions in the field. The following is an example of such a brief background, written for one of the civil society organizations based in the Western Balkans:

The following research project takes as its point of departure an important shift towards the increased focus on marketization processes and management trends in international development cooperation. These processes and trends include, for example, the increased use of principles of competition in applications for donor funding, the use of standardized and science-based approaches and “templates” for development interventions (e.g. RBM and LFA) and an increased focus on transparency and control which is expressed in practices such as documentation, auditing and evaluation. The introduction of these principles can be traced to important policy changes in international development cooperation related to, for example, the Paris Declaration of Aid Effectiveness.

After providing this background, I described some initial research questions, data collection methods and research ethics as well as a time plan for data collection. Although using possibly ideologically loaded terms such as “marketization processes” and “management trends”, I used general descriptions of practices in international development that people could recognize and related them to central concepts such as RBM (Results-based Management) and LFA (Logical Framework Approach). In addition, I added the reference to the “Paris Declaration of Aid Effectiveness” to show that general market and management

practices can be related to specific policy developments in international development.

While this proved an effective strategy to gain access to civil society organizations, it met with resistance from one of the consultancy firms. The firm requested a more thorough description of my research as well as research ethics. After I had sent the proposal, I received comments on what the firm considered as major scientific flaws, for instance in relation to purpose, method, and contribution to the field of research. After a short clarification of my approach to data collection, the problems were solved and access was granted.

The sometimes complicated task of securing access for data generation purposes influenced the research in a variety of ways, as it was both a source of further problematization of the study object as well as a source of ethical dilemmas. My own work with gaining access to the field, as well as the “answers” that the field gave me when engaging with it, gave me input on how to further problematize my study object and what could be said to characterize it. This was a direct consequence of explaining the research topic to a range of different interlocutors. Karakatsanis (2012:17) describes how this type of experience in the field contributes to changing how the object of study can be understood:

Speaking to a [sic] environmental activist, a Turkish refugee in Athens or the pioneers of a business cooperation, meant not only that a different aspect of my story had to be presented on my behalf, but that this story would also *change the way that my object of study could be thought, problematized and conceptualized*. A new story to tell about my research meant understanding my research through the eyes of my interlocutor, meant trying to persuade my interlocutor about my existing interpretations and critical accounts of the problem constructed.

The fact that I told somewhat different stories to attract attention to my research resulted in answers from the field that gave information on valuable threads to follow in the concrete process of data generation. For example, the apparent need to display my scientific professionalism in the contact with the consultancy firm made me incorporate the role of scientific approaches in consultancy work

during the following interviews. However, the continuous adaptations I made to please the various organizations were also a source of worry as they might give the impression that I provided conflicting and untrue images of my research. This worry was especially prominent as the written papers and concept notes had a non-existing, or in some cases toned down, theory section. In this way, my normative points of departure were kept hidden. Although this posed an ethical dilemma, I argue that describing a research project in different ways depending on the interlocutor is necessary in order to create relevance for different groups. Toning down the theoretical points of departure was a conscious strategy not to appear being too determined regarding possible conclusions to be drawn from research that had not yet been executed.

After having established access to the field, I used different data generation techniques to which I now turn.

Initial considerations on data generation

Doing an assemblage study often implies an empiricist project, meaning that the processes and practices of assembling call for a deeper empirical engagement (Bueger 2014). Therefore, many assemblage scholars value a “mode of inquiry that remains close to practices” (Ong and Collier 2005:4). Although the term “empiricist” is associated with an old branch in philosophy of science professing a belief that reality can be uncovered through the systematic collection of empirical evidence, I do not believe that this is the meaning behind how data generation using assemblage as an analytical lens is imagined. Rather, what I take this to mean is that it is important to maintain a proximity to empirical practices and processes that contribute to the assembly of a particular phenomenon. The reason for emphasizing the empirical aspect of assemblage thinking is also to distinguish it from the purely theoretical and philosophical discussions that sometimes surround it, evident in for example DeLanda’s (2006, 2016) contributions (Bueger 2014).

In order to maintain a proximity to empirical practices and processes, many assemblage studies utilize a range of data generation techniques, such as collection of documents, in-depth interviews and extended ethnographic fieldwork. In line with anthropological methodological techniques, many researchers argue for using mobile methods in order to follow for example policy experts (McCann and Ward 2012). The translation of assemblage thinking into an empiricist methodology has been an important inspiration for the data generation techniques used for this study as I have mobilized a mix of qualitative research techniques to study the assembly of *the project*: semi-structured interviews, collection of documents, focus group interviews and participant observations.¹⁴

Interviews

Data generated through semi-structured interviews make up the bulk of the data in this thesis. During an intense period when I immersed myself in the field, I conducted 36 interviews, with two interviews involving two interviewees. This means that the total number of people interviewed was 38. Out of these interviewees, five represented state funders, 23 represented civil society organizations and ten represented private consultants. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 90 minutes (most interviews were about one hour long) and were recorded. Interviews were conducted in Swedish, except five interviews that were conducted in English. The majority of the interviews were conducted at the work places of the interviewees, meaning that I undertook a field trip to the Western Balkans in order to interview representatives from organizations located in this region. A few of the interviews were conducted outside of the interviewees' work places, primarily in cafés. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.¹⁵

¹⁴A summary of the generated material is provided in Appendix 1.

¹⁵The interviews were thoroughly transcribed but not according to the principles of for example conversation analysis which recommends including all unfinished sentences, sighs, sounds and so on.

For the interviews, I used an interview guide with several sub-themes that I aimed to cover. For each site that I studied, I had a specific interview guide with themes that were adapted to the particular context. During the interviews with the civil society organizations, the interview questions, firstly, revolved around one theme that covered issues of how development efforts were translated into practice. Here, questions about funder requirements and their translation into planning, application and reporting were covered. A second round of interview questions revolved around the theme of perceptions and experiences of translating requirements into practice. In the interviews with state funders, the questions revolved around the theme of how appraisal processes were translated into practice. Finally, in the interviews with consultants, a set of questions were asked around the theme of how assignments were translated into practice and how knowledge and expertise were used in the process of executing the assignments. Although I kept to these themes to a great extent, I also followed up on new themes that came up during the interviews through unprepared follow-up questions. The interviewees were selected both strategically and through snowball sampling. Hence, some interviewees were selected by me as I saw a particular opportunity to study the assembly of *the project* through these individuals' eyes. In other cases, such individuals pointed me to other possible interviewees.

I label the conducted interviews “ethnographic expert interviews” as this term explains a central characteristic of both the subjects interviewed and the interview method itself. The interviewees often hold titles such as “desk officer”, “project manager” and “methods coordinator”. This means that they operate within a specific area of expertise that they use to make *the project* come to life. They are knowledge workers and often display interpretive knowledge (“know-why”) and procedural knowledge (“know-how”) in a specific area of expertise (Littig 2009). In the process of assembling *the project*, they can be said to have interpretive power which is the capacity to “provide and establish significant terms and concepts for interpreting phenomena, for legitimizing decisions and, thus, ultimately for the social confrontation with certain phenomena” (Littig 2009:107).

Focusing on these experts was also a sample strategy as they not only possess a particular knowledge of *how* to mobilize pertinent expertise in the making of *the project*, but also provide the necessary interpretive and justificatory frame for it.

Although a more thorough immersion through ethnographic fieldwork is often recommended in assemblage studies, this does not mean that interviews cannot be used. In contrast, if interviews are adapted and calibrated with an ethnographic imaginary in mind, they can generate as much rich material as ethnographic fieldwork. I have been inspired by the fact that ethnography does not mean the use of specific prescribed methods, but rather implies a “sensitivity”, meaning “a critical and questioning disposition that treats the familiar as strange” (Shore and Wright 2011:15). This ethnographic sensitivity can, in my view, be translated into a range of data generation techniques, including interviewing.

Interviews employing an ethnographic sensitivity can be conducted in many ways, but Peck and Theodore (2015:35) most clearly summarize my approach: “Interviews should be interactive, dynamic encounters, not merely extractive, fact/opinion-gathering exercises; they entail dialogue as much as digging”. I have used this way of understanding ethnographic sensitivity when conducting interviews. When asking informants about *the project* as a practice, there has been an element of fact-gathering as I have been interested in the functioning of formal processes. However, and in accordance with assemblage methodology, these processes can never be unveiled as objective processes but are always assembled in particular contexts in which translation, mediation between interests and power struggles are present. I have therefore let the informants speak freely of their experiences and perceptions of these processes which, in my view, has contributed to making possible “thick descriptions” (Geertz 1973).

Focus group interview

Besides the semi-structured interviews, I conducted a focus group interview with representatives from four smaller civil society organizations. The idea for the focus group came after I participated in a dialogue meeting between the state agency FBA and organizations receiving funding for peace and security projects. As I had already established contact with one of the organizations receiving funding from FBA, I decided that I wanted to gather a group of representatives from other organizations for an interview. I used a contact list provided during the meeting and contacted seven people. Four of them showed interest in participating and an interview was arranged. After the interview, I realized that one of the participants did not represent a development aid organization and was therefore excluded from the following analysis. Although this interview did not feed into an in-depth study of the organizations, I argue that the focus on *the project* as a bureaucratic practice made it possible to study other organizations more superficially as they did not interest me *per se* but only in terms of how they organized themselves through the project format.

The interview format differed from the semi-structured interviews. As the purpose of the interview was to elicit a discussion about *the project* as an organizational form in a group in which the participants could “help” each other uncover new aspects of this practice, the focus group seemed like an appropriate method. The focus group method is particularly adequate when the aim is to gather a group of people sharing a common platform in some way but who can have different experiences and perceptions of a particular topic (Krueger and Casey 2015). The interview was conducted with the help of an interview guide with two broader themes around which the participants could talk freely, rather than a set of specific questions. My role during this conversation was to function as a moderator and ask follow-up questions occasionally. The focus group complemented the semi-structured interviews in the sense that it shed light on new aspects of *the project* as a practice and provided different perceptions of it. If I was the person eliciting such perceptions in the semi-structured

interviews, the participants partly helped eliciting them by discussing *with* each other in the focus group.

Observations

As the interviews started, I received the information that the intermediary civil society organizations organized themselves in different networks which met on a regular basis to discuss issues related to recent developments in the aid landscape, such as funder requirements. These networks were also used as platforms for communication between funders such as Sida and the community of organizations as a whole. Through a former colleague now working in an intermediary organization that was not part of my study, I received contact information to the coordinators of one of these networks. This network gathered professionals with methodological expertise, that is, expertise on how to design aid interventions, measurements, evaluations and so on. I contacted the coordinators who took my request to observe the network meetings back to the network for discussion. The network approved my request and I was able to observe the network for one year which entailed observations during five three-hour meetings. My role was not clear-cut. When the role of the researcher-observer is clear, it is possible to place that role on a continuum between complete participant and complete observer (Mason 2002). My aim before starting my observations was to be as much of an observer as possible and not influence the setting too much. However, as I started, I realized that it was impossible to not also be a participant who perhaps influenced the setting. The way that meetings were structured made me a participant. For example, during the meetings, I was invited to sit at the same table as the rest of the group which did not make me a detached observer sitting in a corner of the room. As the participants would also change in between the meetings, almost every meeting required me to introduce myself and present my research which did not make me into a completely anonymous observer.

As Mason (2002) argues, the fact that it is difficult to place oneself on the participant/observer continuum is not in itself a problem, but rather lack of reflexivity over the fact that complex negotiations influence how the researcher places oneself on this continuum. Thus, I gradually realized that the complete observer status that I aimed at was not always possible nor desirable, as I had to engage with the group to a certain degree in order to establish some form of trust. The fact that my presentations of myself and my research (that also changed slightly from time to time as my research progressed) could possibly influence the setting was not worrisome *per se* as my epistemological grounding is that data cannot be “collected” in an untainted form. While my position moved between positions on the continuum, I would say that my main position during the meetings was as an observer taking field notes. I used field notes, firstly, in an inductive manner, recording and noting the topics being dealt with and what was said during meetings. Secondly, and as the meetings progressed, I started writing brief analyses in the field notes about how I understood the setting. I experienced some difficulties when writing field notes as I felt like an “underdog” in terms of knowledge. The topics under discussion were communicated in a language that was not always easy to follow for an outsider and the participants also shared a common knowledge platform about methods that was not easy to break into, resulting in rather frugal field notes. An advantage here was that I, through the network, had access to an online platform where the network gathered meeting minutes as well as other textual resources. As the meetings progressed and I became more familiar with the platform, I realized that it was not primarily the specific topics dealt with that interested me, but how the network functioned as a general platform for knowledge exchange. This had repercussions for the analysis in the sense that the network in itself became important as a platform from which resources could be drawn to assemble *the project*.

Documents

The interviews and observations resulted in material that was generated by me, in interaction with the interviewees. However, I have

also collected what can be called “naturally occurring texts” which exist independently of me generating them or influencing their content, even though they have been chosen and collected by me. These naturally occurring texts comprise a range of documents, collected from state funders, civil society organizations and consultants.

From the state funders, I have collected the following documents: overall strategies for funding, guidelines and instructions for funding and reporting, checklists and instructions for the assessment of applications, assessments of applications, routines for public procurement and tendering, routines and checklists for continuous follow-up of projects, handbooks, meeting minutes from follow-up meetings and decisions on projects.

From civil society organizations, I have also collected a range of different documents. Here, it must be noted that this type of documentation also reflects the complexity of how civil society organizations operate. Documentation on various levels and of different scope was collected. As previously described, the Swedish-based intermediary organizations can enter into substantial agreements with Sida giving them right to a particular form of funding. Thus, from one of the organizations, I collected documents related to the application for an extension of this so-called framework agreement. This large application gave me access not only to the application document itself but also to budgets, risk matrix, strategies for the organization for the coming years, descriptions of particular programs, results models and so on. As this program funding is later used to fund projects, I also collected applications, reports, a handbook containing guidelines for assessment and assessments of reports from concrete projects.

From the other intermediary organization, I collected documentation regarding a specific program. This program is large enough to comprise different sub-projects, executed by a multiplicity of organizations in various countries. The Swedish organization is the main stakeholder and has applied for funding from Sida to conduct this program in

cooperation with partners in different countries. Thus, the documentation I collected is related to this program, such as applications and reports from participant partner organizations, templates, results assessment frameworks, activity reports and results reports of the whole program to Sida.

From the Swedish-based smaller civil society organization and the civil society organizations based in the Western Balkans, I collected applications and reports for particular projects and corresponding templates. Other templates related to risk analyses and time plans were also collected. Through the online platform of the methods network, I collected meeting minutes, research papers and handbooks. The documentation related to consultants is limited to an evaluation report associated with a specific assignment.

Table 3.2 Studying *the project* as a multi-sited practice – a summary

Project phase	Data generation techniques/sources	Sites of emergence
Assembling applications	Semi-structured interviews, documents (applications, templates, instructions and guidelines for applications)	Civil society organizations, consultants
Assembling appraisals	Documents (guidelines and criteria for assessment, handbook, appraisal memos, templates, evaluations), semi-structured interviews	State funders, civil society organizations (consultants)
Assembling implementation and reporting	Semi-structured interviews, documents (reports), field notes and meeting minutes	Civil society organizations, state funders

from network meetings
as well as material from
online platform

Assembling auditing Semi-structured Consultants, state
interviews, documents funders, civil
(evaluation report, society
handbooks, organizations
instructions for follow-
up, meeting minutes)

Data analysis - Deploying a rhizomatic approach

Up until now, I have described how assemblage thinking has informed the identification of the study object as well as the data generation process. In this section, I delve deeper into how assemblage thinking has informed the process of analyzing the generated material.

Before I started the analytical process in a more systematic manner¹⁶ with the intention of using assemblage as a guiding concept, I spent a lot of time wondering what it really means to analyze empirical material from this perspective. How does the lens I use as a researcher need to be recalibrated to study processes of assembly? How do I need to treat the material to open it for assemblage analysis?

Deleuze's and Guattari's (2013) argument about letting the idea of the rhizome instead of the arborescent model influence how the world is understood appeared fruitful for the analysis of empirical material. But how can the idea of the rhizome be translated into concrete analytical strategies? As I see it, the idea of the rhizome gives the analyst a push

¹⁶Here, I want to stress that I think that the analytical process can never be confined to a specific phase, as it occurs all the time – during preparation for data generation, during the data collection moment itself as new tracks are followed up on, and after data collection when interviews and observations are reflected upon and connected to literature and other moments of data collection. Although this is analysis, it is in a “crude” form that more serves the purpose of giving impetus to the overall data generation process. However, I believe that eventually you come to a point when the data is analyzed in a more focused and systematic way with a more clear guidance from a particular research problem. This is the process to which I refer when I say that my analysis transitioned to a more systematic phase.

away from the fixed hierarchies and strict boundaries and binaries that positivist science imposes on a given empirical field. This is particularly true for political science that often urges the researcher to start out from predetermined objects of study endowed with specific characteristics. The analytical strategy deployed here has been informed by an active struggle not to fall into pre-established categories and binaries.

The overall strategy that I have deployed in order to follow a rhizomatic approach in the analysis can be summarized as a process of “flattening” the material (cf. Hultman and Taguchi 2010). This idea is based on the way in which Deleuzian ontology is understood and conceptualized. Deleuzian ontology is often referred to as “flat” in the sense that all entities, components and things in the world “have the same ontological status” (Grosz 1994:167). Thus, the binaries used to divide the world in separate categories, such as the material and the discursive, are actively collapsed through Deleuzian thinking. In addition, a Deleuzian ontology actively destabilizes the levels commonly used to structure analysis, such as micro and macro level, making it possible to combine components from different levels and registers (Fox and Alldred 2015). This way of thinking has been important for my strategy of flattening the empirical material. In concrete terms, levels and binaries that might conventionally have been used to structure a material like the one discussed in the present thesis have been actively destabilized.

To take an example, I have treated the documents collected for the analysis in a way that follows from the collapse of binaries. Apart from using documents for the purpose of analyzing their content, I have also analyzed them as “vital objects” (Prior 2008:833) that are endowed with a capacity to drive human action. Accordingly, I treat some of the documents collected as artifacts capable of guiding the action of human actors by, for instance, connecting disparate social worlds together (Freeman and Maybin 2011). In this way, I have attempted to collapse the divide between, on the one hand, documents as pertaining to the realm of passive material and, on the other, the human world which is

endowed with agency. Here, I try to follow Karen Barad (2007:22–23) who argues that “agency is an enactment, not something that someone or something has”. Thus, what can make something happen in a process of assembly can be both human and nonhuman (Bennett 2010). Another example is how I have followed unpredictable flows in the material (Feely 2020). In order to follow the practices that contribute to assembling *the project*, but which do not obey an arboreal logic, I have stayed close to practices that seem far away from the project assembly itself. This has sometimes meant following flows that seem unimportant for how processes of assembly operate. Here, following flows has been important to identify instances in the material that serve as *repertoires* to draw upon in the assembly process. As an example, the methods network, although perhaps considered “far away” from *the project*, is an important supporting function and repertoire of knowledge and expertise that is mobilized to assemble *the project*.

A way to concretize a rhizomatic approach is, thus, to think of one’s material as “flat” in the sense that the taken-for-granted hierarchies, levels and categories that many times are attached to the empirical material are torn down. To paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari (2013), the material is “striated” in levels and hierarchies and needs to be flattened through an active effort by the researcher. Related to the concepts used for analysis – stabilization and destabilization – the notion of flattening means that what gives *the project* its consistency or tries to tear it apart is not reduced to particular practices or components, but transcend predetermined levels and divides.

I argue that this way of flattening the material contributes to an analytical practice in which the analysis does not start with predetermined hierarchies and categories that are reproduced. Rather, the myriad of practices, materials and technologies at play in the assembly of *the project* are endowed with the same amount of importance and are not excluded from the analysis. Although opening up the material in ways that are possibly infinite, this move has made

me note the multiplicity in the “raw material” being used to assemble *the project*.

So far, I have described a rhizomatic analytical strategy that incorporates the notion of “flattening” the material. However, how is this strategy deployed when engaging with a particular empirical material consisting of interview transcripts, documents and field notes? The toolbox of qualitative analysis includes a range of different approaches, but generally, coding of material in order to identify patterns and themes is recommended. Although coding is a very common strategy in all types of qualitative studies, it has been problematized and challenged, especially by scholars inspired by Deleuzian thinking. As MacLure (2013:168), argues, “coding assumes, and imposes an ‘arborescent’ or tree-like logic of hierarchical, fixed relations among discrete entities”. I think this is a striking and relevant critique of how coding is sometimes abused as a way to impose a structure on a material that only serves to reproduce taken-for-granted hierarchies and fixations, but I have still in the present thesis used a systematic approach that involves coding in order to analyze the material from an assemblage perspective. In order to avoid the problems of coding identified by MacLure and others, however, I have, when necessary, deviated from a strict coding procedure, as it has sometimes proved inadequate.

Although I have used coding, my aim has not been to reduce the process to the imposition of an arborescent analytical model. In the first stage of analysis, I focused on coding the interviews with the aim of identifying as many themes as possible pertaining to *the project* as a practice. As support in this first stage of coding, I used the computer software NVivo¹⁷. This resulted in a myriad of codes that focused on how *the project* was produced. It was here that the idea of analyzing *the project* as a series of linear phases was born. To get a grip on *the project* as divided in phases, I started summarizing it as a temporal and linear practice. Here, the codes were used as a basis for writing this summary,

¹⁷Important to note here is that NVivo is not a software doing the analysis for the researcher. I have used it as a way of storing and categorizing a vast material and have deployed my own strategies for analysis.

and writing in itself became a central strategy to analyze the linear phases of *the project* (cf. Augustine 2014)¹⁸.

As I had finished this written form of analysis, I dug deeper into each phase by exploring codes. Here, I left NVivo in favor of working analogically. This meant that I printed the codes, and started a new analytical stage in which I characterized each step of *the project*. Post-its, markers and a whiteboard became my new friends instead of a computer software¹⁹. It was during this phase that I noticed that the meaning of coding itself had to be expanded as the material started to “exceed” the logic of coding. As I characterized each step, I reached insights that the logic of coding sometimes could not capture. I tried to expand the coding process to include those insights, but in some cases I simply abandoned it. Let me give two examples. During the analysis of each phase, I found what could be called “irregularities” in the form of contradictions that regular coding sometimes tend to suppress in order to find patterns. However, I still relied on coding for the analysis. This is an example of what I call *expanded coding* – a form of coding that does not refrain from recording the multiple, the mobile or the contradictory. The second example concerns something that I touched upon above, which is the collapse of binaries. This turned out to be significant as I analyzed documents. In some instances, I saw documents not as containers *of* data to be analyzed, but *as* data in themselves, endowed with agency. Here, I abandoned coding of the content of those documents as it contradicted what I tried to achieve analytically.

¹⁸I think writing itself as a form of analysis is neglected in discussions on methodology. Sometimes, writing is imagined as the mere reporting of an analysis that has already been conducted. However, I realized that writing could be used as an analytical strategy as much as the formal analytical process of coding and thematization.

¹⁹Although computer software becomes even more common for qualitative analysis and I have found it useful myself, I argue that it is important not to let technology totally colonize the analytical process. Engaging with the material through rather “old” methods, like printed papers, post-its and markers made me experience the messiness of the material and this, I argue, influenced the analysis in a positive way.

Research ethics

As I have alluded to previously in this chapter, ethical challenges have emerged during the process of generating data as well as during the analysis. My aim here is to discuss these challenges and how I have handled them. I argue that it is necessary to distinguish between ethical challenges arising in relation to data generation and ethical challenges specifically related to the analysis of empirical material.

During interviews and observations, particular challenges have emerged related to the adherence to basic principles of ethical research. The Swedish Research Council has compiled four ethical requirements for research in the social sciences and the humanities: requirements of information, consent, confidentiality and use (Vetenskapsrådet n.d.). In the following, I describe how I have made sure to adhere to these principles. The requirement of information implies that individuals that are identified as participants in a study should be informed about what participation means and what their role will be in the study. They should also be informed about the fact that participation is voluntary and that they can cancel their participation (Vetenskapsrådet n.d.). When I approached interview subjects, I started, in all cases, the initial contact through an e-mail in which I described my research and requested their participation in a research study. In some cases, this was sufficient and I could go on to set up an interview. In other cases, a more elaborate plan was requested. As previously mentioned in the section on access to the field, I then provided short information letters describing my research in more detail. These letters were sent to gatekeepers in organizations which I had planned to study in depth through multiple interviews. The letters were in some cases followed up by a physical meeting in which the conditions for participation were further discussed. Information to the methods network was distributed through the coordinators of the network who informed the participants. As I have previously touched upon, the information letters changed continuously and I avoided describing theoretical points of departure in detail. Naturally, this avoidance can be perceived as dishonesty. However, I argue that this part of the research process must allow for a certain degree of flexibility and not give the impression

to the participants that the framework of the research is fixed in advance.

Concerning the requirement of consent, this was particularly pertinent before the start of the interviews. Before starting each interview, I gave the participants oral information about the fact that they had the right to remain anonymous and to cancel their participation if they wished to do so. By taking this measure, I think that the requirement of consent has been met. Before starting the interviews, I had also, in a majority of the organizations studied, anchored my research project with key persons that gave me access to their organizations. I see these measures as a way of securing consent as well.

The requirement of confidentiality comprises various aspects, such as the prudent treatment of personal details and empirical material (Vetenskapsrådet n.d.). During the period of data generation, the legislation of GDPR was implemented, with far-reaching effects for research practice, especially concerning the collection of personal data. During the transcription of interviews, I erased personal details, such as names or references to organizations, and gave the participants pseudonyms. As other personal details, such as gender, age, ethnicity and political and religious affiliations were not relevant for the research, these were not collected at all, which I argue strengthens the anonymity of the participants. In line with the standards of the GDPR, I also stored the material in the form of transcriptions, field notes and audio files from interviews in an external box provided by my university. I was the only one with access to this box. However, the ethical challenge concerning confidentiality revolves around what can actually be guaranteed. I did my best to anonymize the participants and conduct the analysis in such a way that particular persons cannot be exposed. To conclude, the requirement of being transparent about the use of the results of the thesis, as it is defined by the Swedish Research Council, is not applicable in relation to this thesis since the generated material is not going to be available for commercial use.

Besides the challenges related to specific ethical principles, I have also noted a particular ethical challenge related to the analytical process. Indeed, the ethical considerations relevant for this thesis go beyond securing compliance with particular ethical guidelines pertaining solely to the data generation process. Deficient compliance with this kind of general ethical principles is not the only factor that could possibly harm research participants. Instead, the critical approach informing the analysis as well as my own role as a *bricoleur* (Ong 2014) have created additional ethical challenges. My study diverges from other assemblage studies in the sense that my aim is not only to explore the assembly of *the project* in empirical detail, but also analyze the power relations being entrenched and contested in this very process.

My method diverges from Latour's argument that assembly processes should be described in rich empirical detail without "adding" anything to this description (Collier 2014; Lisle 2014). I disagree with this approach and argue, in contrast, that an assemblage analysis should not only be empirical but also add something in terms of how power relations are reproduced in the assembly process. This focus on power makes my analysis informed by an ambition to expose and critically scrutinize power relations. This, naturally, gives rise to ethical challenges as a thorough exposition and analysis of power relations as they are played out in the assembly of *the project* can be perceived as offensive for participants whose dedication to transformative work in difficult contexts is exposed as only a reproduction of unequal power relations. I think that this aspect of research ethics that pertains to the basic premises of analysis is not discussed to the same extent as the importance of adhering to particular and fixed ethical principles. Therefore, I would like to discuss how I have handled this precarious aspect of a critical analysis focused on power, related to the possible harm it could inflict on aid professionals' identity and sense of self-worth.

My way of handling this ethical challenge has been to exploit the fact that assemblage thinking actually recalibrates critical analysis towards a *practice* rather than organizations or individuals. *The project*

unintentionally reproduces power relations that can be traced to multiple logics, not to “malicious” aid professionals forming development work according to their own self-interest. Thus, the critical analysis has a wider, more impersonal target than particular individuals and organizations; in this case *the project* as a rational practice, with its associated logics and artifacts, that contribute to entrenching power relations. As such, this analysis should not be read as evidence of how particular actors have “failed” in delivering development to beneficiaries.

Mosse (2005) describes an interesting ethical challenge that followed from a critical analysis he made of a rural aid project in India in which he also partook as consultant. Mosse (2005) was severely criticized and the analyses were perceived as “too negative and unbalanced” and even “damning” of all the work that participants had done (Mosse 2005:ix). In defense of the analyses, Mosse (2005) argues that his conclusions are not to be interpreted as an evaluation report that provides a judgement of success with recommendations attached to it. Rather, he is interested in how success is produced through the project by professionals acting like translators and interpreters. In line with this thinking, I argue that this is a fruitful way of explaining how my own analysis should be understood. This study is not an investigation of particular organizations or individuals “failing” to deliver the expected outcomes, but should be read as a more general critique of how *the project* as an ordering practice possibly prevents people from conducting transformative work.

However, despite this argument, I have activated ethical measures to prevent my study from coming across as too critical without the research participants having a say in it. For the purpose of receiving feedback from the participants, I set up a meeting with the methods network where I presented my interpretations and conclusions. This presentation came late in the research process and I concluded that if the presentation rendered a great deal of critique, I could only take into account some of it. The presentation worked as a form of “member checking”, meaning that the research participants internal to a

particular empirical field are given the opportunity to check the credibility of the research (Cho and Trent 2006). It is important to add here that I did not aim for the participants to check if my analyses and conclusions were aligned with their own particular interpretations (and thereby empirically “accurate”) but instead I aimed for a rich discussion on how my particular analysis could be useful for them in their daily work. Thus, it was not a member checking procedure in which I sought the participants’ approval or “correction” of my analyses. The presentation and the following discussion, albeit brief, resulted both in a discussion of the extent to which the participants recognized themselves in my analysis and how it helped them to take a step back and look at their practice from a distance. The presentation also elicited a discussion on how my findings could be made relevant for the participants’ own practice. Here, I could initiate a discussion to the effect that my findings could not, perhaps, feed directly into existing practice, since they constitute a critique of a particular form of governing society. My conclusion after this form of revisit to the empirical field is that it came a little late for the feedback of the participants to have a substantial impact on the research, but that it was successful in the sense that it elicited both reactions and comments on how to make the research useful.

Yet another ethical question requiring reflection is also the researcher’s role in doing an assemblage analysis. I find Gorur’s (2011) discovery of writing as a form of assembly practice striking; if what I study is an assemblage, that makes me into an *assembler* who draws together different empirical accounts with the aim of creating a compelling narrative. This assembly work has been present in the entire analytical process, from gaining access to the empirical field in which I assembled accounts of my research that could catch the attention of possible interviewees, to the analytical work which is characterized by the drawing together of a myriad of materials to create a compelling narrative. While taking responsibility for doing this assembly work in the analytical process, I have tried to be as transparent as possible and account for the complexity and messiness of how *the project* is assembled.

An implication of this mode of reasoning is that I take on the role of a knowledge subject who is influenced by a particular analytical *vision* which is by no means scientifically neutral or objective. This vision is informed by the feminist critique of positivist science and its claims to be universal, objective and value-free (Haraway 1988). As every scientific endeavor is influenced by an embodied vision (it is impossible to view the world from a neutral and impartial position), I see my own statement about the social world as profoundly incoherent and contingent, as a form of non-neutral vision that guides the forthcoming analysis.

A note on translation

In the forthcoming analysis, I am generous with the use of extracts and quotes from the empirical material to illustrate my argument. These empirical illustrations from the material are not supposed to be understood as representative for the entire field within which I operate but rather as illustrative examples of my argument.

As the bulk of the material is in Swedish (although some of the interviews were conducted in English), I have had to articulate some kind of strategy for translation. In the translation of interviews, I have tried to stay as close as possible to the original statements, but with a focus on readability. As a consequence, I have stayed close to the often colloquial tone displayed during the interviews, but sometimes I have been obliged to translate in a way that makes the quote more readable.

4 Assembling *the project* in Swedish development aid

In this analytical part of the thesis, I untangle *the project* according to the linear phases that it goes through – the application phase, the appraisal phase, the implementation and reporting phase and the auditing phase. The analysis proceeds in three stages. The first part of the analysis goes deep into the empirical world of *the project* with the purpose of describing the practices, strategies, repertoires and material elements mobilized to assemble its different phases. This analysis works as an important condition for the second analytical stage in which the ostensible linearity of *the project* is collapsed and the practices and artifacts giving *the project* its (in)consistency are further analyzed. Finally, the third analytical stage draws on the analyses done to discuss the political implications of how *the project* is assembled. It is important to note that the choice of structuring the first part of analysis in a linear way serves as narrative device and not as a description of fixed stages. Rather, I see this first analysis as a necessary first step which later allows me to collapse this linearity and describe the non-linear and heterogeneous processes of stabilization and destabilization that strengthen and subvert the homogeneity of *the project*.

Assembling applications – The journey towards an application

In this section, I delve deeper into the assembly of applications. By describing and presenting material pertaining to how a number of different civil society organizations design applications to funders, I aim to show the various conditions influencing application procedures as well as the practical work of writing. The purpose of this description is to show that making an application is a veritable journey including laborious work from various parties struggling to make people, documents, models, ambitions and even time itself cohere into an ostensible whole. This process is obviously difficult to describe in a linear way, but for the sake of clarification, I divide it into three general stages: gaining access to funding, assessing the suitability of particular funds, and writing the application itself.

Gaining access to funding

The application process starts when a fund becomes available to which different parties can apply. The way a fund becomes available varies for the studied organizations. In the case of three organizations - the smaller Swedish-based organization and the two smaller organizations situated in the Western Balkans - the funds become accessible through open calls. This means that funders announce a specific call to which organizations can apply under conditions of competition. Another form of funding occurs through informal invitations. In this case, funders approach a particular organization that they consider relevant and deemed to have the proper capacity, and invite them to apply. This entails, consequently, a form of pre-selection of organizations before the invitation to apply is made. A third form of funding is through long-term partnerships. In this case, the larger intermediaries can compete to attain a so-called “framework status” that gives them access to a particular civil society fund which is exclusive only for organizations having this status. Thus, these organizations are eligible for a more secure type of funding which gives them a position as long-term partner rather than a one-time applicant for funding. However, the framework status does not entail the cancelation of application procedures, as organizations still need to write formal applications to the specific civil society fund.

The studied organizations do not normally engage in only one type of application process, but their financing comes from various sources. The two larger intermediaries are entitled to funding as framework organizations, the smaller Swedish-based organization engages in competitive calls, and the smaller local organizations are both pre-selected for invitations and engage in competitive calls. The competition-based funding brings with it a set of specific practices that influence the work of the organizations. At a basic level, the dependence on external funding in a competition-based environment creates a constant need to search for funding. An informant at a smaller organization describes this continuous pursuit in the following way:

A very big share of my working time is spent picking up new money, you know, or a lot of my thinking (laughter) is mainly spent on finding new money. And... the first step is to keep up what we already have, but as an organization you also want to develop and then you have to apply for more. (Interview, Informant 11, my translation)²⁰

The type of funding referred to here is often communicated through “calls for proposals”. Keeping track of calls is not a laborious effort in itself, since information is shared to interested organizations, usually through established networks. However, what does take time is to attend preparatory information meetings about the calls and to deal with their unpredictability since there is sometimes no specific time schedule for when they will be announced. Furthermore, a complicating factor in accessing funding is that the application process can be organized in numerous steps that work as sorting mechanisms. For the organizations based in the Western Balkans, the application process can start with the so-called “concept note” which is a short project idea. If the concept note is scored highly enough, the organization can write a full proposal. The high barriers to some funds have contributed to the creation of other funding mechanisms. In order to reach grass-roots organizations that do not have the sufficient knowledge to access large funds, some organizations have created sub-granting mechanisms. Thus, funds specifically directed towards grass-roots organizations, with their own application and reporting procedures, are set up.

²⁰When referring to interviews, I have numbered each informant. In Appendix 1, the informants are presented together with some additional information. Some linguistic remarks for the quotes:

- ... means that the interviewee has trailed off in the middle of a sentence and started on a new one.
- When I put a part of the quote in quotation marks, I highlight that the interviewee gives a fictionalized or real account of something, (a possible scenario, a reference to a generic or real event), or uses a specific label (a model for example).
- [...] means that I have made an omission or added something to make the quote more readable.
- Italicization means that I want to emphasize something in the quote.

In conclusion, the conditions for funding vary greatly for the studied organizations. Some organizations engage exclusively with competitive calls, while others gain access to more partnership-based forms of funding. However, it is important to note that the organizations operate on multiple application markets simultaneously, resulting in hybrid sources of funding for most of the organizations.

Assessing the suitability of funding

Although the pressure to apply for funding is strong, it would be erroneous to claim that the organizations go for every fund possible. Rather, they perform an assessment of the suitability of each fund in order to find out if necessary conditions for applying exist. Firstly, there is the issue of determining whether there are sufficient resources available for engaging in an application process that is both time-consuming and financially costly. Application processes are often perceived as free work that is not paid for, which means that the organizations have to make a careful consideration if this is a desirable investment:

So, both reporting and application are never within what you get paid for. You do the application, and then you get paid and then you have a starting date and you do the activities, and the reporting is... you usually have three, four months after the project deadline has passed and then you do the reporting, so you never get paid or get some kind of funds for reporting or to write the project itself. (Interview, Focus Group, my translation)

Secondly, an assessment must be made of the risk of trespassing into the funding territories of other organizations. As some funds have a clear thematic focus, they are perceived as being earmarked for specific organizations and are thus off-limits for organizations focused on other themes. One informant from a smaller civil society organization tells a story about how there was a discussion internally before applying for a particular fund focusing on peace and security issues. The discussion revolved around the question if this risked giving the impression of “taking money” from smaller peace organizations that matched the fund better (Interview, Focus Group). Thirdly, an assessment is made

whether the fund is relevant in relation to the goals of the organization. Organizations have established their own internal strategies and all funds are not suitable in relation to them. One informant argues that the organization tries to apply for funds whose objectives fit the strategy (Interview, Informant 38). However, this is always a balancing act as the dependence on external funds is so strong that in order to survive financially, adjustments that make the fulfillment of internal goals more difficult are sometimes necessary. Such adjustments can mean that internal goals or problem analyses that have been formulated in relation to the local context must be abandoned, only to fulfill the funder's goals. An informant working in the area of women's rights states the following with regard to this type of mandated adjustments:

You see, that's the main issue, for example, let's say that a grant from Denmark, here, they're distributing grants from Denmark and they're mainly focusing on, for instance, implementing laws, yes, let's say that, but actually, in xx (the informant's home country), the problem mainly is about gender based violence, you know what I mean? So, actually, not aligning their requirements with xx's (the informant's home country) actual requirements. So we had also to do that, and sometimes we have to give up from what society actually needs, so what we as a xx (the informant's home country) society needs to advance gender equality and increase women's rights, just to align with donors' requirements. (Interview, Informant 35)

In parallel to the assessment of the suitability of a certain funding opportunity, other types of assessments occur. As described in the previous section, sources of funding are of hybrid character, meaning that funding can come from numerous funders or from the same funder's different pools of funding. One informant argues that when handling different applications from the same funder at the same time, it is important to distinguish between them. In this case, the funder offers the possibility to apply for two different funds; one being a fund for time-limited projects and the other functioning as a form of operational support. These application forms need to be strictly kept apart in order to avoid overlap (Interview, Informant 7).

Writing the application – translating technical guidelines and establishing the “tone”

The issue of continuous adjustment becomes apparent in the next phase of the application that I delve deeper into now: the process of actually writing the application. This is by far a more complex process than only reading the guidelines and preparing the application accordingly: it entails properly understanding and translating instructions, working in teams, and finding an adequate tone that attracts funders.

Translating guidelines and instructions – Engaging with the template

Starting with the formal guidelines, the different funds are often announced together with instructions and templates. These vary depending on the fund but commonly require organizations to give a thorough description of *the project* in terms of planned implementation, budgeting and monitoring/evaluation in a specific format. Here, I delve deeper into how these instructions are translated into practice as applications are written. Starting with the intermediary organizations, the applications are often not required to be written in a certain template, constructed by the funder, but organizations are free to create their own. In the case of the other organizations, specified and predetermined templates are common. However, despite the differences between the studied organizations in terms of organizational structure and thematic focus, the applications follow a particular format, engaging with specific themes.

Thus, a written application often includes particular headlines, all corresponding to the template. These headlines encourage the applicants to formulate a well-designed intervention that is transparent in all its parts. In the following, I describe these headlines in order to point out the generic composition of applications. An application normally starts with a problem analysis in which the applicant describes the political, social or economic problems that *the project* will address. The aim of this part of the application is to provide

a broader contextual analysis that facilitates the identification and analysis of problems. After this problem analysis has been provided, there is a thorough description of how *the project* will be implemented. This implementation plan often follows the terminology used in Results-Based Management (RBM) and the Logical Framework Approach (LFA), two common models that provide tools for designing development interventions. RBM provides the mindset, meaning that development interventions should be organized with results in mind, while LFA is a tool for realizing this mindset in practice by offering a specific vocabulary which can be applied to *the project*. A more or less modified version of these approaches typically influences how the implementation plan is designed.

In order to illustrate how the implementation plan is designed, I exemplify with a template used by the smaller Swedish-based organization that works with women's rights (see Figure 4.1 for an illustration). This organization applies for funding from the state funder FBA for a project aiming to increase women's participation in peacebuilding processes in three African countries. In the implementation section in the application template, the following headlines appear: intermediate objective, activities, target groups, expected results, indicators and time plan. Below each headline, there are some instructions on how to formulate every part of the section. Applicants are advised to be as exact as possible. For instance, under the intermediate objective headline, the applicant is encouraged to formulate the goal according to SMART criteria, meaning that it should be specific, measurable, accepted, realistic and time-bound.

The intermediate objectives are followed by a description of activities, target groups, expected results, indicators and time plan. The expected results are formulated both quantitatively and qualitatively in terms of increasing the number of women running for election and increasing the knowledge of women of their role in peace-building processes. The expected results are followed by indicators which are the variables used to measure achievement. Accordingly, to follow up on how the expected results will be measured, the organization identifies "number of women

and men participating in activities” and the “level of increased knowledge (percentage) among the participants according to the activity theme” (Document 1, Civil society organization:8)²¹.

Figure 4.1 Extract from the implementation plan of an application template

<p>4.2 PROJEKTETS GENOMFÖRANDE Avsnittet ska beskriva de aktiviteter ni planerar för att uppnå projektets syfte och delmål. Upp till fyra delmål kan anges.</p>
<p>Delmål 1 (ska vara specifikt, mätbart, accepterat, realistiskt och tidssatt och bidra till att uppfylla projektets syfte)</p>
<p>Women activists’ (part of the project) capacity and peacebuilding initiatives are strengthened and improved to further increase the knowledge and awareness of SCR 1325 (WPS Agenda) in selected communities and at the state policy level in Nigeria, DR Congo and Cameroon.</p>
<p>Aktiviteter (vilka aktiviteter ska genomföras, vilka metoder och arbetssätt ska användas och hur hjälper de er att uppnå delmålet?) all below figures are per country</p>
<p><u>Nigeria: Continuing process of Women’s Situation Room (WSR)</u> -Community Peace Dialogue through exchange programs with women from IDP camps and host communities. Training and awareness building on UNSCR 1325, conflict prevention and peacebuilding. (Approx. 6 meetings) -Localization of the Nigerian UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan in selected states, through advocacy efforts, and training of staff at the Ministry of Women Affairs and the local government areas. (Approx. 6 meetings)</p> <p><u>DR Congo and Cameroon: Initiation of Women’s Situation Room in respective country:</u> -Advocacy meetings with the 15-25 largest parties to identify women candidates and advocate for them to be on the parties’ candidate lists. (2-3 days). -National stakeholder launch of WSR, also addressing the importance of conflict prevention and women’s participation in electoral processes as well as a needs assessment of women candidates attending the capacity building workshop (1 day, approx. 60-80 ppl) -Capacity building workshop for 20-30 women candidates including communication, campaigning, empowerment, conflict prevention and peacebuilding sessions (2-3 days). -Popularization of UNSCR 1325 and awareness raising on women in the electoral process. In the form of 4 dialogue meetings, inviting community</p>

²¹When referring to documents, I have numbered each document and indicated who is the author. In Appendix 1, the documents are presented together with some additional information.

<p>members and enabling women candidates from the capacity building workshop to turn theory into practise.</p> <p>-Follow up and evaluation meeting</p>
<p>Målgrupp (vilka riktar sig aktiviteterna till och hur är projektet förankrat hos denna målgrupp?)</p>
<p>Most of the targeted groups, part of this project, have in previous projects and surveys expressed a need to participate in WPS activities to gain capacity. Many of the activities are also building on previously implemented activities within this field, which have revealed a great demand among the target groups for the type of activities included in this project.</p> <p>-Women activists, members of the women organizations part of this project (WILPF Nigeria, DR Congo and Cameroon)</p> <p>-Women and men living in the selected communities as well as CSOs attending the activities in Nigeria, Cameroon and DR Congo</p> <p>-Local and national decision makers in Nigeria, Cameroon and DR Congo</p> <p>-Women and girls with special needs living in selected IDPs camps in Nigeria</p> <p>-Women candidates for the election 2016 in DR Congo</p>
<p>Förväntade resultat av aktiviteterna (Vad förväntas aktiviteterna uppnå, det vill säga vilka prestationer/outputs förväntar ni er?)</p>
<p>-Women in selected host communities and IDP camps in Nigeria have increased understanding and knowledge about their roles in peacebuilding processes</p> <p>-Women and men in DRC and Cameroon have increased knowledge of the upcoming electoral process and the importance of women's participation in line with SCR 1325</p> <p>-Increased number of women candidates running for election.</p> <p>-Women candidates are empowered and have a better understanding of the importance of their role.</p> <p>-Local and national decision makers, both women and men, as well as other CSOs in Nigeria, DRC and Cameroon have better understanding and knowledge about the WPS Agenda.</p> <p>-Women organizations (WILPF), part of this project, have strengthened their legitimacy, visibility and capacity to carry out projects in DRC, Nigeria and Cameroon.</p>
<p>Indikatorer (ska vara konkreta och relativt specifika och används för att kunna mäta om projektets förväntade resultat har uppnåtts)</p>
<p>-Number of women and men participating in the activities above</p> <p>-Level of increased knowledge (percentage) among the participants according to the activity theme: conflict prevention, their role in peacebuilding, electoral process in DRC/Cameroon, WPS, etc.</p>

-Estimated increased visibility and credibility of women organizations (WILPF) in respective country -Staff and members' improved knowledge and capacity to implement activities
Tidsplan (när ska aktiviteterna genomföras?)
Throughout the project timeframe February 2016- April 2017 DR Congo activities that focus on the election will be implemented before November 2016 ²²

In another template, used by organizations applying for funding to one of the intermediary organizations, some of the above headlines are utilized but so-called “means of verification” are also added. These are the sources to be used for follow up, in order to ascertain if the objectives have actually been reached. The sources used can be rather palpable resources of information such as participant lists from implemented activities and reports from trainings. To facilitate comparison, a baseline, which defines the situation prior to a particular intervention, can be provided. The particular activities are also summarized in a work plan in which planned activities are described by establishing how many participants are expected to participate in given activity (expressed in numbers) and also a following column in which the actual number can be added after the activity has been implemented, to allow for comparison (Document 2, Civil society organization).

The implementation plan is afforded a great deal of space in the application template, but also other topics must be dealt with. Identifying potential cooperation partners and establishing their roles in *the project* is an important task. Similarly, formulating a plan for risk analysis and assessment is crucial. In this analysis, internal and external risks that can lead to destructive effects are to be identified. As illustrated below, there are particular templates that can be used to quantify the likelihood and severity of risks (Document 3, Civil society organization).

²²A translation of the parts in Swedish is provided in Appendix 2.

Figure 4.2 Example of risk matrix

RISK (internal or external)	1. PROBABILITY 1 - 5 (Unlikely) - (Certain)	2. DAMAGE 1 - 5 (1=Little or no damage) - (5=Might destroy the project)	3. TOTAL Probability * Damage	4. RISK MANAGEMENT	COMMENTS
RISK 1 CORRUPTION (Internal and External)					
RISK 2					
RISK 3					
RISK 4					
RISK 5					
RISK 6					

In Swedish development assistance, there is an emphasis on working with prioritized thematic areas, such as gender, environmental issues and conflict sensitivity. Thus, the applications must discuss how *the project* aims to integrate these priorities and if it can potentially do harm in the specific context. As a final part of the application, a budget analysis is often requested, in which the applicant specifies the costs of particular activities. In addition, plans for monitoring and evaluation should be elaborated upon. However, working with templates, meant to simplify the process, gives rise to questions about how their level of standardization actually fits the organization. In a conversation with an informant working in a smaller organization, the requirements in the

template to describe how thematic priorities are integrated are considered redundant since these priorities are exactly the working areas of the organization:

Yeah, things are added and most recently, FBA had added another page with three questions where you were supposed to develop how different aspects played into the project... I think it was sustainability, gender equality and a third one, and it is like this... the way I interpreted it, it was because they are subject to increased pressure [...] that we must be able to describe how we work with sustainability and gender equality and conflict sensitivity which was the third one [...] so all of a sudden you are supposed to write half a page more on each aspect which can feel a little bit superfluous when you work... we don't have a single project that doesn't deal with gender equality, conflict and sustainability [...], it's like they ask for something else and you just want to say: "please read the project description, this is exactly what we do". (Interview, Informant 7, my translation)

In conclusion, all organizations use some form of application template which follows the RBM/LFA model. This model encourages transparent and precise descriptions of the various sequences of *the project*, from problem analysis to implementation plan and evaluation and auditing. As the next section shows, however, the guidelines, instructions and templates require a great deal of hard work to understand and fulfill the requirements.

Consolidating cooperation – Teamwork

The application templates and guidelines are always open to some form of interpretation, and various resources and strategies are mobilized for this purpose. Additionally, the ambitions and goals of numerous stakeholders need to be negotiated in the form of teamwork. Let me start first with the issue of teamwork. Completing applications (as well as the implementation and reporting to which I return later) involves the efforts of multiple parties. All organizations studied here conduct *the project* under conditions of various forms of cooperation. In the case of the Swedish-based smaller organization, collaboration occurs with organizations in other countries that belong to the same organizational family. The intermediary organizations cooperate with autonomous partner organizations both in Sweden and internationally.

This collaboration is often governed through formalized contracts. Applications that are written jointly, thus, imply drawing together actors that are distant from each other. In the following, I illustrate the teamwork from the perspective of two organizations. In the example of units cooperating in the same organizational family, there is a need to coordinate the efforts of multiple parties. Usually, one of the parties is appointed as being responsible for writing a specific application, with others doing more specific tasks. An aspect of coordination is the work of keeping together the writing process. In the following interview extract, an informant working at a women's rights organization describes how the work of writing applications is coordinated with sections in the same organization located in different countries:

For the projects financed by xx (an umbrella organization for civil society organizations), Nigeria and Colombia (the organizational sections) have written the main part of the application themselves, then we take care of the formalities, make sure that everything is included, make sure that they have filled in everything correctly and ask supplementary questions [...]. [...] So it goes through us and passes our gaze and goes through our evaluation process. As for the FBA 1325-applications (a specific grant aiming to enhance the use of the UN women, peace and security resolution), we write them almost entirely from here, but it also has to do with the fact that we have written applications with three project countries during the last four years. They have only sent us documentation on... first what they want to do, then we produce a project plan with intermediate goals [...] in which the wishes of all three project countries involved in the project are framed in some way, and then they are sent out again and they complete it with activities that they can do under these intermediate goals, and with a budget for that and then it comes back to us and all these activities must be re-worked and budgeted [...]. They contribute a basis for the different parts so to speak and then we formulate everything else from here, and make budget cuts and... so it's a lot of work from here for the 1325 [applications]. (Interview, Informant 12, my translation)

The written application document is, in this sense, a multi-authored product (Freeman and Maybin 2011), meaning that it cannot be attributed to a single "master author". Rather, an application is the result of negotiation between parties where information is exchanged and control is exercised at a distance.

Another example concerns the writing of applications when one intermediary organization cooperates with formally autonomous partner organizations. Although there are formal application procedures, there are also often informal discussions around applications before they are submitted formally. The intermediary organization functions, here, as a discussion partner and quality assurer. As a discussion partner, the intermediary can lead strategic discussions on what type of activities should be prioritized in applications. Points of departure for these discussions can be the strategies of the intermediary organization and the partner organizations and lessons learned from previous activities (Interview, Informant 19). However, the role of the intermediary can be much more concrete than only being a strategic discussion partner. During the application processes, the intermediary undertakes the role of answering questions and functioning as a “sounding board” for partners, with the aim of assuring the quality of the application:

So, my role is to answer questions while they are in the process of writing applications, if they think something is unclear about what is to be written in a particular section, or if it's budgetary issues for example. [...] “can you have different levels different years or how many... is there a limit for the extent to which we can allocate money to different types of activities?” Concrete questions like that. So, you work with this continuously so it... of course you want a product that is as complete as possible once the application comes to us, so there are no unnecessary mistakes. (Interview, Informant 19, my translation)

Appearing attractive to the funder

Teamwork is one aspect of the laborious effort of writing an application. Another is the work being undertaken to appear attractive in the funder's eyes. This entails the activation of specific working tasks that aim to produce an application that catches the attention of the funder. There are many pitfalls in an application process that can possibly render an application not eligible for funding. The requirements that are stipulated in guidelines and instructions vary depending on the funder and many of them must be interpreted “correctly” for funding to be secured. The requirements can be formulated as non-negotiable and therefore organizations put an effort

into being careful and meticulous in their applications. Sometimes there are ways to interpret the requirements creatively but they nevertheless must be fulfilled in one way or the other. Many guidelines and instructions are given in a specific language that must be deciphered and rendered meaningful when applications are composed. An RBM/LFA approach comes, as was described above, with a set of concepts and instructions whose meaning is not self-evidently clear to the applicants. The instructions are often subject to meticulous work of disentanglement:

So, the things they write, just a thing like this, what is a result? What is a... what is it that they always say... result and... [...] effect! Yeah, effect and result. What's the difference? And they haven't given a proper explanation in the material that is provided, so you have to sit there and really... and it happens very often that we go to each other's rooms and sit there, a group of us, and go: "ok, what do they mean?" [...] When I write my application, I always discuss it with xx (a colleague) and every time we say "yeah, but isn't this an effect or a result, what do they mean?" [...]. Sometimes I wonder why they don't have a more detailed handbook, you know, so you can go in... I don't know if that had made it clearer, but why is there no such handbook that actually explains the meaning of an effect, of a result? (Interview, Informant 11, my translation)

In addition, other aspects that cause even more questions can be added to the instructions and templates. One such aspect is innovation. In some guidelines, applicants are requested to describe how *the project* contributes to innovation. Many informants describe their confusion about this concept and the difficulties in translating it to fit their own activities. An informant at a smaller organization describes the struggle of interpreting the concept:

So, partly we reason exactly like that, thinking: "What do *they* want?" It's always that way that you start there, not in a bit more creative way: "Are *we* innovative in some way?" Ok, so what are *they* looking for? And our interpretation has often been that they are, you know, looking for a new buzzword [...]. So, a couple of years ago you could sometimes get away with writing that you were going to do a campaign in social media, and that was sort of innovative, and now perhaps it doesn't count as innovative. [...] Yeah, perhaps if you want to do a podcast, it feels like they are after something like that. Which for us who always have to scrimp and save feels like... if we write that, then we also have to do it, then we have to put a lot of resources on something that we might not think is the best way to promote our issues, but to be sure of even getting

any money we have to come up with something innovative about what we do. (Interview, Informant 7, my translation and emphasis)

A remark that can be made for both these examples concerns the amount of work being dedicated to fulfill the requirements in the application instructions, particularly when it comes to interpreting various concepts that should be incorporated. In addition, an observation here is that the interpretation process is made possible by the organization trying to take the funder's perspective. For the organization, it is about trying to commit to the guidelines and instructions as much as possible and not foregrounding their own innovative ambitions.

One way of not falling into various traps in the application process is to work in a certain way that contributes to making applications attractive for funders. A pivotal skill here is having contextual knowledge. In order to appear as relevant as possible for the funder, it is important to be well briefed on the funder's priorities and policies and link them to the application. Sometimes, this act of linking can be very explicit so as to make sure that the funder captures the linkage between the applications and its own policies. Thus, one informant working with women's rights describes how working with the typographic format helps emphasize the relationship between application and relevant priorities:

They mention all the time in the proposal that they want women's participation in politics for example, I'm just saying, they have these specific words that they use everywhere, that they have in the goal and the priorities, and everywhere that they put there, objectives. So these calls that they put... [...] ... they have their own objectives, and their own, depending on the donor... EU calls them priorities and then, the overall objective [...], so we have to, whatever we do, we have to contribute to those things, for example those calls, the exact sentence has to be mentioned in the proposal, "like our, whatever, impact or something will contribute directly to the objective of this call which is da da da da...". So you have to mention all these big things, but you also... whenever you can, for example, when they want to include minorities and we always include minorities, so whenever we can... *for example we make the words underlined... we underline it or we make it in bold or whatever or what format we're using, so yeah, because you want to show... because we also know that when you send a forty page... they will read, but still there are parts that they might skim or something, so you want*

to put there... if you really have that, if you really do that they're asking, which it should be if you are applying for these calls, so why not highlight those parts and mention... (Interview, Informant 37, my emphasis)

The tone of the application is equally important to make the funder interested. Many of the studied organizations deal with possibly sensitive and explosive topics, such as rights-based work aiming to criticize power structures in society. As some of the funders are national governments or international institutions, representing states and powerful interests, they can be considered as part of the problem analysis. However, since they are also providers of funding, they cannot be referred to as explicit problems:

When I write an application, I try to write it based on the fact that we are experts on this topic, that's why we should help. It's not like I write: "this is what Sweden is doing wrong [...]". All the time I try to downplay it a little bit in terms that are... yeah, not that critical because I think that... I don't know how they think, I think it can get too sensitive somehow. (Interview, Informant 11, my translation)

Potential problems that are addressed can for instance be various structural power relations in society. They can be perceived as sensitive and therefore the language needs to be toned down. An informant working in a women's rights organization argues that the language must be "softened" (Interview, Informant 34). Other strategies being deployed to write as adequate applications as possible include taking advantage not only of previous experiences of successful applications but also of intra-organizational feedback functions. Previous experiences of successful applications are used to guide new application processes. Here, there is often no feedback, that can be used to tailor-make an application according to exact requests of the funder, available, but the applicant has to have confidence in his or her judgement of what has worked before. Here, previous applications in their entirety – form, substance and financial calculations – can be used as support for new applications. Another source of help in this process is to scan the approved applications of other organizations to see how they have been written. Both these strategies can be seen as a repository of best practices that is used as an informal support system

for writing applications. The feedback functions work through colleagues giving comments on applications, sometimes to look for potential errors and sometimes to facilitate learning for individuals not used to the way of writing. An informant describes the importance of feedback in the following way:

Everyone is very meticulous when it comes to like... are all questions answered, are all documents attached [...], have we done all the calculations right so there is nothing that can, you know, be criticized or that can influence the assessment [...]? So, usually we are very meticulous, and it takes time and you have to involve other people too and make claims on their time, and read through and go through and see so that all the documents are attached, because you get completely blinded. [You need] a few checkpoints if you know what I mean. (Interview, Informant 8, my translation)

Here, the feedback function is about ensuring quality, but the use of the word “checkpoint” signals that a pivotal driving force for using feedback also seems to be the desire to “get it right” and deflect criticism.

Other more practical strategies being deployed to find the right tone in applications include doing sufficient research beforehand and dedicating enough time to present a well-formulated application. Doing international development work is increasingly about making a case for the problem that is going to be addressed. As touched upon above, this argument should be incorporated in the problem analysis of the application. Often it is not enough to formulate the problems intuitively but research has to be conducted to back up the problem analysis. This research can take the form of fact-finding in studies and reports but also other types of more direct research, such as interviews with potential stakeholders. While these examples are illustrative of the informal strategies deployed to write an adequate application, there are also formal strategies that can be mobilized for the sake of making a proper application. One informant, for example, talks about participating in formal trainings on how to write applications to funders with different requirements (Interview, Informant 35).

A particular form of strategy that is present in all the practices of designing an application, from accessing funding to assessing suitability and writing, is to dedicate time. Many informants talk about application work as time-consuming, meaning occasional overtime work, even nights, to meet deadlines. Time is a precious resource that determines whether certain funds are worth applying for. The amount of money allocated by a certain fund often does not influence the amount of time that has to be put in the application, so usually both small and large projects need an equal amount of time. One aspect is also that application work activates a particular conception of time that highlights foresight. Applications are built on the belief that *the project* can address problems that somehow must be formulated a long time before it is actually implemented. As one informant formulates it:

Yeah, but partly it is expected that you should know, very well in advance, what your own activities look like but also how the political reality will look like because often... when you submit your applications it is still a year and a half left until you sit there working on your projects. So, that's how it is, it is expected that one and half year in advance [...] you will be able to say "this will happen in the world" [and] "this is how we will work with this". That's a challenge. And [this] forces you sometimes to write rather vague applications in order to be able to adapt to reality and your own conditions. (Interview, Informant 7, my translation)

Another conception of time that is mobilized is the adaptation of *the project* to a sequential understanding. Thus, *the project* is imagined to have a beginning and an end, and during its life cycle particular activities are to be implemented according to calendar time. In Figure 4.3, a time plan, working as a template for planning, is presented (Document 4, Civil society organization).

Figure 4.3 Example of timeline for activities

"In this timeline you should describe when you plan to implement your activities during the year by putting an **x** in the right boxes. If your project will last longer than one year, you can simply continue the table year two and so forth. Each activity should also have a budget number,

knowledge is the one required for translating activities into models and generic mindsets. The generic character of RBM and LFA implies that they can be incorporated into a training package by consultants. The ways in which transfer of knowledge in RBM and LFA is accomplished became visible when I interviewed an independent consultant who offers training in these models. The interview in itself gave me a clue about what makes the transfer of RBM and LFA knowledge both effective and appealing.

The interview with the consultant made me realize the importance of commitment and charisma. Of the almost forty interviews conducted for this thesis, this interview was one of the most memorable, because of the consultant's commitment. The interview was an argument for the LFA model as the most effective way of realizing the mindset of RBM. Besides showing that charisma and dedication is important, the interview with the consultant also showed how RBM and LFA are rendered mobile and attractive for a wider audience. The primary method of transferring LFA is through hands-on training in which the consultant functions as a form of facilitator. The consultant tells about an assignment given by an intermediary civil society organization that wished to develop skills in writing applications and plans according to the tenets of results-based management, both for itself and for its partners. The consultant describes the practical organization of the training sessions:

In their case, we started with developing their templates, they had templates for their cooperation partners that [weren't] exactly aligned with results-based management, so I started to help them... firstly, we have to make sure that you ask the *right* questions to the cooperation partners [...]. And then I trained their staff at the Stockholm office and then I trained their Swedish cooperation partners [...], key individuals who are also involved in aid work. And then I travelled to all partner countries [...] and we had a three day workshop with [...] five to seven organizations per country [...]. And I trained them in results-based management, how to plan and follow up on results, and at the same time there was a workshop during these three days, so they could sit, each organization [...] at round tables and develop their own project plan and activity plan [...]. (Interview, Informant 9, my translation and emphasis)

This example illustrates how consultant expertise is rendered mobile and transferable in a concrete training situation. However, it is not enough that a consultant renders expertise mobile. There is also something appealing about the models that makes them easier to install in different settings: it is a general *tool* building on the notion that activities can be implemented in “the right way”. Although this type of results-oriented thinking requires adaptations to a specific context, models in line with RBM and LFA consist of a generic composition of logics and practices that provides steering in different processes. This makes it possible for the consultant to design training in such a way that participants can learn that there is a “right” way to use LFA in practice:

And what I usually do when I want to control, [I give] these fun tests at the trainings when I [...] cut project plans into pieces and I ask the course participants to place the words right, what is what, overall goal, project goal, indicator, activity et cetera. So, I take these headlines and I ask them to place them in order, and then people understand if they got it or not, this hierarchy of goals, have they understood the different components of a project plan? (Interview, Informant 9, my translation)

In summary, consultants are able to make a particular form of model available for use in the application process. However, the consultant’s role is not only limited to making it available but also includes translating it for an audience by presenting it in a pedagogical way that indicates that there is a “right” way of applying the model.

Concluding summary – An application process without a center

The purpose of the preceding analysis has been to illustrate that the assembly of applications is not reducible to the workings of a single logic or can be traced to singular center of power (Ong and Collier 2005). Rather, multiple practices and logics operate simultaneously that contribute to the production of a complete application. Thus, instead of imagining an application being the result of a grandiose hidden masterplan (Li 2005) it is rather a result of the continuous work of “calibration”. In this calibration, various things and practices are pulled together – time, people’s ambitions and goals, repertoires of

planning models and personal judgements, consultant expertise and commitment – to form an application, meaning that it is not the result of an imposition of external demands but it is a negotiated endeavor – a product of translation, adjustment and brokerage to which I return in the next analytical chapter.

Although it could be argued that the application process serves one specific purpose, that of gaining funding, the practices of constructing it are not governed by this masterplan. Rather, what is going on can be captured in the concept “tinkering” (Mol 2010:265). Tinkering is visible in the small steps of assembly that do not appear to follow a specific plan. There are multiple logics operating in an application process; to accommodate the organization and its partners, to fulfill the requirements of templates, to find a reasonable tone and so on. The process of assembling applications is also characterized by fragility. There is no linear way of assembling applications that does not encounter tensions. Rather, the process of assembly is fragile and always prone to disassembly due to tensions in interpretation and translation of instructions and guidelines as well as the struggle of finding the right tone (which is influenced by the direction being carved out by artifacts such as templates).

Assembling appraisals – The journey towards (dis)approval

The application is followed by a process of appraisal. In the following section, I describe how appraisals are assembled from various perspectives. If the former section focuses on the work of civil society organizations, there is an addendum here of an actor playing a crucial role in the appraisal process: the state. I have studied two state funders, Sida, which is the main state funder of development aid in Sweden, and FBA, a smaller state agency responsible for financing development efforts in the area of peace and security. Having said that, civil society organizations are present in the analysis since those organizations occupying an intermediate role conduct appraisals of their cooperation partners. Hence, there is no clear-cut distinction between the roles of funders and recipients.

Mobilizing criteria

As in the assembly of applications, multiple elements are drawn together to make appraisals possible in practice. In the following section, I describe some of the support systems on which professionals draw in order to make appraisals, starting with the mobilization of criteria. In order to signal that the appraisal process is not completely arbitrary, funders draw on or formulate particular criteria for appraisal. Regardless of the specific funder's organizational design or the type of activities financed, the funders display some particular similarities in their criteria. The criteria define particular focus areas, skills and capabilities that the applicants must display to be eligible for funding. Here, I describe these criteria, dedicating a little more space to specific and more salient criteria. This is not a mere reproduction of what is written in funder guidelines and instructions but a more analytical summary of the meaning of various criteria. In addition, when warranted, I describe differences in how funders draw on and mobilize criteria. A first distinction to be made is that between appraisal of the application itself and appraisal of the internal infrastructure of the applicant organization.

Starting with the appraisal of the application itself, a number of generic criteria are mobilized. Firstly, the relevance of the application is assessed. *The project* must explicitly relate to different goals and priorities in development aid. Since funders represent various levels in the global development aid system, the goals and priorities are both national and international. In addition, various thematic sectors have their own goals and strategies. In the case of Sida's funding of framework organizations, the fund is governed by the so-called CSO strategy which stipulates the particular goals for supporting civil society through development aid: Strengthened capacity among civil society actors in developing countries to contribute to poverty reduction, and encouragement of a favorable climate for civil society organizations (Document 5, State funder). Strengthening the impact of the strategy through the activities of the organizations is important for the funder. Thus, it is important to balance the funding so that the whole strategy receives an impact in the activities of the organizations (Interview, Informant 1).

There are also specific goals and priorities that are supposed to have an impact on organizations working in particular thematic areas. In the case of one of the intermediary organizations, different international goals and priorities pertaining to labor rights are important in their own assessments of the applications of partner organizations (Document 6, Civil society organization). An important aspect of the funder's appraisal of relevance is to make an assessment on the quality of the applicant's ability to make analyses in particular areas so that relevance can be ensured. In an example of a state funder making an appraisal of an intermediary's application, an assessment is made of the quality of particular analyses that are supposed to ensure that particular perspectives are given impact in the activities of the organization (Document 7, State funder).

Another criterion of assessment is the quality of the design of *the project* from implementation plan to monitoring and evaluation. Here, various aspects are important. Firstly, the funder appraises the formulation of goals and expected results. In the case of Sida's

appraisal of intermediaries, this process is influenced by the tenets of results-based management (RBM) which encourages the formulation of objectives at different levels and with clear descriptions of the causal relationships and assumptions underpinning them (often called intervention logic or theory of change). Although Sida does not consider it obligatory, the intermediaries are still encouraged to use indicators and baselines. These, together with intervention logics, should be compiled in a results framework which is often constructed as a matrix (Document 7, State funder). Results frameworks are also used by smaller partner organizations which are encouraged to use them by their intermediary funders. Although the format is optional, the intermediary provides templates for constructing results frameworks (see Figure 4.4) (Document 8, Civil society organization).

Figure 4.4 Example of results framework from intermediary organization

Name of organisation:

INTERVENTION LOGIC		INDICATORS	BASELINE & SOURCES OF VERIFICATION	MONITORING (what, when, how?)
IMPACT		<i>Not necessary on impact level.</i>	<i>Not necessary on impact level.</i>	<i>Not necessary on impact level.</i>
OUTCOME(S)	1. 2. (if any) 3. (if any)			
OUTPUTS	1. 2. 3.			
ACTIVITIES	1. 2. 3.			

One intermediary also provides pedagogical instructions on how to construct a results framework by explaining basic RBM terminology such as indicator, baseline and monitoring (Document 9, Civil society organization).

The implementation plan must be related to the context analyses provided in the beginning of the application. An informant at FBA who is responsible for assessing applications underscores that the correlation between the context analysis and the objective of *the project* is important:

The starting point for everything is: "why should we do this?" Hence, some form of problem analysis, why should we do it? And that this, in turn, correlates to what we want to achieve. So, that is a shortcoming that actually exists in many applications [...]. [Our grant] is a lot about information, involvement and increasing knowledge. So if you write an analysis about the state of the world, and then you write a project that is, let's say, about increasing the knowledge of students. But the analysis is not about students not having sufficient knowledge about x, y and z, but the analysis is about the bad shape the world is in. Are you with me? So, there should be a correlation there. (Interview, Informant 10, my translation)

There is an underpinning rationality at play behind this appraisal practice, which is that of logic. There is somehow a "right" way of constructing an application in the sense that it must display internal logic and coherence. This can be attained through establishing linearity between context analysis and objective/implementation plan.

Besides the criteria of relevance and quality of implementation plan, there are also assessments of *the project* in terms of its capacity for innovation and sustainability over time. However, while these criteria work as guidelines for appraising the application itself, there is a substantial criterion of assessment that concerns the infrastructure of the organization itself as well as its relations to other organizations. This can be labelled organizational and financial capacity. The modern development organization is characterized by its professionalism and in order to implement *the project*, it must have an infrastructure showing that the organization possesses the proper skills for

implementation, reporting and making the adequate financial arrangements. This requires a particular internal structure that gives the organization inner coherence but also the establishment of rules and routines for the relationships with other organizations. Thus, in the appraisal, various criteria concerning the quality of organizational infrastructure are used. A distinction can be made between internal and external structure. The degree of stability in internal structure is an assessment criterion for all the studied organizations, while external structure in relation to others is more salient with regard to intermediary organizations.

The appraisal of internal structure spans over various areas. Financial management is one aspect being assessed. While budgeting is part of the assessment, control of financial management is not restricted to this criterion. Funders can also require external auditors to make a thorough audit of various internal routines and processes (Document 7, State funder). The internal processes, such as routines, policies as well as ongoing and planned development processes, are subject to scrutiny. The issue of risk analysis and management is also an important criterion of assessment. Here, the funder appraises how the organization has succeeded in identifying, assessing, managing and following up on internal and external risks (Document 10, State funder; Document 11, State funder). Hence, the operation at play is what I would like to call “appraisal of appraisal”. As Power (1999) argues, modern auditing is characterized by “control of control”, meaning that the object of auditing is often the control system in itself. This form of assessment is at play here since the object of appraisal is the risk appraisal system in itself and how well it is constructed.

The logic of assessing the suitability of systems of control becomes apparent also in another aspect of assessment which is that of appraising the external relations of an organization. Relationships between a funder and one recipient are rare. Rather, the channeling of funding in multiple chains of financing is more common in today’s development aid landscape. This is particularly true for the intermediary organizations which channel financial resources in at

least one step to local partner organizations around the world. In one case, it is even more complicated since resources can be channeled to international organizations and to Swedish organizations who take responsibility for implementing *the project* with different partners. This obviously makes the funder's direct influence more difficult. Thus, ensuring that the cooperation follows the rules of the "back funder" (that is, Sida from which the original financial resources come), becomes the responsibility of the intermediary which must have routines and procedures in place to keep the relationship with partners in order.

The quality of the rules for this relationship is subject to assessment by the funder. In a first step, the intermediary must describe the partner organizations in detail, especially their focus and size (Document 10, State funder). The next step is to ensure the quality of the internal structure of the partner organizations. As it is impossible for the funder to control all partner organizations, it must ensure that the intermediary has the routines in place to make the proper assessments itself. Therefore, the funder reviews the tools that the intermediary has at its disposal to appraise its own partners. These tools are very tangible instruments as they take the form of templates with guiding questions.

One of the intermediary organizations working with strengthening labor rights uses different forms of appraisal templates depending on the type of partner. However, some criteria of assessment in the templates are the same regardless of partner. The assessment template dedicates substantial space to the issue of project management and encourages the user to ask questions regarding the partner's ability to describe the project planning process, risk analysis, monitoring and reporting. The responses are then documented in the template and subjected to an assessment according to a traffic light assessment scheme. Thus, depending on the answer, the assessment can be "green", "amber" or "red". The assessment is followed by a recommendation (Document 12, Civil society organization). The template is reproduced in its entirety below (original in English):

Figure 4.5 Example of assessment template from intermediary organization

	A- Organization's position	Response	Assessment	Recommendation
1	When was your latest congress and does your strategic decisions affect the development cooperation projects?			
2	Which global policy processes are of most importance (Global Framework Agreements, ILO conventions, trade agreements, sectoral initiatives, workers councils etc.) in relation to the projects?			
3	What areas of your research are important for you currently? What research tools do you apply for sector and context analysis? How do you engage your affiliates?			
4	What kind of campaigns are relevant in the nearest future?			
B- Project Management				
5	How does a project come about? Describe the planning process of a project?			
6	How do you prioritize among projects and new project ideas?			
7	How do you document decisions on what projects to			

	support, and decisions on changes in the projects?			
8	How do you assess the capacity of the agreement holding partner organizations to handle projects? Do you use any assessment tool? How do you document the assessments? Are there any recommendations?			
9	If you have regional offices (level 4) involved in projects, how are they organized? Are they elected locally or part of the GUF?			
10	What is the role of the regional offices in project management? How are the responsibilities of implementation and PME divided between the GUF and the regional offices?			
11	How do you assess risks in the projects? How are risk mitigation plans made?			
12	How do you monitor the projects? Who decides on changes in a project?			
13	How do you follow-up and measure results in projects?			
14	Describe the chain of reporting?			
15	How lessons are learned used within			

	projects and applied in future planning?			
16	How do you assure sustainability of the results and what exit strategies you have?			
17	Do you have any written guidelines or routines concerning the project work?			
18	Do you share project plans and documents with all partners?			
19	What records do you keep on membership (affiliates), paying members (affiliates), collective agreements? How often are membership numbers (affiliates), revised? By whom? How is information collected? Do you have gender disaggregated data?			
20	How do you communicate the results of from the projects? How is it communicated to the different recipients (donors, affiliates and their members)?			

These kinds of tools and their quality are assessed by the funder (Document 7, State funder). Other criteria for assessment with regards to external relations are the ability to be transparent about how financial resources are channeled in multiple steps and the capacity to adjust to partners' priorities, capacity and implementation systems (Document 7, State funder; Document, 10, State funder). Once again, this is an example of the funder deploying a form of "appraisal of appraisal". Since it is impossible to appraise the capabilities of all possible partners present in the financial chain, the funder mobilizes a

system for appraisal in which the routines and tools of the intermediary organization are subject to scrutiny.

Mobilizing supporting artifacts – Using the handbook

A criteria-based system is an example of a system that provides guidance during the appraisal process. However, criteria offer only general guidance and in the empirical material pertaining to issues of appraisal, there are examples of how this process is subject to further concretization. Funders, at their various levels, activate specific supporting systems aiming to specify appraisal guidelines and offer benchmarks of what constitutes a “good” application. This is particularly salient in the use of handbooks and other forms of written guiding documents. To a high degree, these too are based on general criteria, but they serve to concretize the appraisal process by specifying how each sequence of an application should be assessed. Here, I offer a more detailed description and analysis of how one intermediary organization working with strengthening labor rights uses a handbook as support in the appraisal of applications from partners. The criteria being used to assess applications are similar to those already described but are explained with a more pedagogical and detailed focus in the handbook. Detailed suggestions, dressed in a pedagogical and advisory language, are given for specific parts of the appraisal process.

In relation to the assessment of relevance, the handbook gives a range of suggestions on Swedish and international strategies whose contents should be referred to in the assessment:

In order for the projects that we support to be relevant to Sida, they must relate to one or several of the following international or Swedish strategies or agendas. In the assessment memo, you should describe in what way the project relates to one or several of the following strategies/goals. (Document 6, Civil society organization:24, my translation)

After this advice, the handbook gives suggestions on Swedish strategies (for example the above mentioned CSO strategy) as well as international strategies to which the person conducting the appraisal

should refer and clarify how these strategies have an impact on *the project*. The application should also be embedded in a well-elaborated context analysis, especially with regard to conflict, HIV/AIDS, gender equality and the environment. Under the headline of conflict analysis, the handbook provides the following guidelines:

Our assessment is based on the *Do-No Harm* model. The analysis should describe the conflict dynamic, risks, actors, and possibilities for peace/conflict resolution. The conflict analysis is used to strengthen project effectiveness. The project should not cause harm and the contribution itself should not exacerbate the conflict. (Document 6, Civil society organization:28, my translation)

In this way, the handbook is more detailed than criteria in the sense that it establishes some form of benchmark for what could be considered a well-elaborated conflict analysis. In this case, the central tenets of the “Do-No Harm”-model work as a supportive benchmark for assessing the quality of the conflict analysis.

Following the context analysis is the assessment of the implementation plan. As was described earlier, organizations work hard to translate activities into the application format. The quality of this translation and the degree of exactness it can provide are in focus for the suggestions in the handbook on appraisal guidelines. For instance, questions that the individual doing the appraisal can ask about the application are suggested: ”Is there a clear logical sequence between expected results, related to the activities and the indicators?” “Are the indicators measurable both qualitatively and quantitatively and are they related to a baseline value?” “In what way will the results be verified?” (Document 6, Civil society organization:31, my translation). These suggestions illustrate, firstly, how assessment criteria are concretized in and translated into pedagogical questions that can be asked about the application. Secondly, they are illustrations of how the handbook draws on logic and linear thinking to facilitate the appraisal process. In contrast to drawing on explicit models, such as the “Do-No Harm”-model, the use of logic and linear thinking points to the exploitation of more implicit knowledge repertoires.

Furthermore, models are present in the assessment of how *the project* incorporates a rights-based perspective. The appraisal must be conducted in such a way that it ensures the incorporation of four particular rights, (non-discrimination, participation, accountability and transparency) in the application. This model goes under the name of “Rights-based Approach” (RBA) and the handbook offers guidelines for assessing how these rights should be given impact in the application. Again, there are some benchmarks for what constitutes a well-elaborated analysis incorporating a rights-based approach, but this time it is expressed through particular levels of analysis that are seen as acceptable. The four rights are given their respective headings and under each one, there are two examples of how the degree of incorporation can be appraised. The degree of incorporation of non-discrimination, for instance, can be assessed according to two levels; “sufficient” and “good”. A sufficient level of non-discrimination, for instance, is described as giving a “description of measures to ensure that no discrimination occurs in the project”, and a good level is described as showing an “awareness of discriminatory structures in society and a description of how the project avoids reproducing these” (Document 6, Civil society organization:33, my translation).

In conclusion, handbooks offer more detailed guidelines for conducting the appraisal, especially through their “hands-on” character, visible in pedagogical instructions and suggestions on what questions to ask about the application and descriptions of existing models to use during the appraisal.

Mobilizing expertise

Although overlapping with the previous analysis, it is necessary to highlight the role of expertise in the appraisal process. The mobilization of supporting artifacts is characterized by the use of expertise in terms of models, but there is also a more tangible utilization of expertise which comes to expression in the mobilization of intra-organizational as well as external expertise. In the following, I

concentrate on how the state funders use various forms of expertise to assess applications.

The forms of expertise mobilized are of both internal and external character. The internal expertise is recruited from within the organizations of the state funders. Here, there are various forms of expertise that can be used. Often there are specific individuals designated as responsible for the appraisal but they also recruit colleagues with specialized competencies in particular areas. As development aid encompasses a range of different thematic areas and geographical territories, specific knowledge is required to make proper assessments (Interview, Informant 10). In addition, as has been shown above, the issue of the organizational infrastructure of the applicants is important. Therefore, Sida recruits internal experts in internal management and control, so-called IMC officers, to make assessments regarding the quality of internal processes and routines of applicant organizations (Interview, Informant 1). FBA uses a checklist for control of the internal structure of the organizations, for example reference-taking from cooperation partners, reviews of internal documentation (protocols, statutes and so on) and controls of possible tax debts (Document 13, State funder). In order to assure quality, FBA uses an internal discussion format in which the appraisal process is explained and motivated in multiple steps in the organizational hierarchy:

And then we have a discussion where we are five persons who sit down and talk [and] that gives results. And then we have the Director General who makes the decision. And there, discussions can come up: “have you thought about this?” [There are] extremely few cases where the decision has been altered. But he still asks the question: “have you thought about this, how do you perceive this?” [...] And before that, I also had a meeting with my bosses and presented how we have reasoned [and I also got] questions: “how did you perceive this and why did not... and why not these...?” Just like this, these [applications] have been submitted [...], why didn't they get any money?” And then I have to answer that. So, this is one of many checkpoints of quality assurance. (Interview, Informant 10, my translation)

The internal expertise is complemented with external expertise. This expertise can be recruited among aid professionals external to the funder's organizations or among consultants. FBA uses an appointed

external reference group that assists in the appraisal of applications. This group consists of experts drawn from civil society and academia and works as a quality assurance function before the decision on funding is made. The reference group provides advice on how to prioritize among a large set of applications and often plays the role of taking a fresh look at an application. An informant describes its role in the following way:

And then there is a reference group meeting and there may be a discussion, and there may be new opinions, and that's what happened at that meeting. [...] New thoughts come up: "Yeah, this feels very exciting", in relation to something that made me go "[...] this was nothing special". But a scholar or a civil society representative would [perhaps] think that, "yeah, but this is super exciting because..." and then it is moved closer to the top. And it's this quality assurance that we want them to do, because you can't keep track of it, it's so broad, so big [...], there are so many different types of organizations. (Interview, Informant 10, my translation)

Sida commonly uses external consultant expertise. As the applications are vast in scope, Sida mobilizes a range of consultant expertise as support in the appraisal process. In order to translate the criteria of adequate organizational infrastructure into practice, the assessment becomes a massive endeavor that is deemed to require external expertise. As such, the assessment made before making decisions on funding is similar to auditing, complicating the view of auditing as a practice only mobilized for post-project evaluation.

In the material pertaining to appraisal processes, Sida's assessment of one intermediary is particularly illustrative since it draws on a multitude of consultant expertise to support various decisions, regarding both the amount of funding and particular conditions for the following collaboration. In the assessment, which results in a comprehensive memo detailing all aspects of the appraisal (Document 7, State funder), Sida presents the various contributions made by external consultants. The specific assessment procedures are used mainly for appraising the general capacity of the intermediary to perform its duties, such as having a transparent model for channeling financial resources and incorporating thematic priorities. Therefore,

different types of external expertise are requested as a basis for appraisal. There are some examples of external expertise being drawn upon for assessment that can be grouped in three types: Previously made organizational reviews, financial audits and evaluations/spot checks of particular areas of interest for the funder.

The intermediary referred to here has, before this particular assessment, been subject to a more thorough organizational appraisal, with the purpose of providing a basis for granting or not granting the so-called “framework status”. This previously made organizational review is re-cycled as a basis for making a new assessment. The appraisal of finances is made by relying on external auditors whose statements are used to indicate if specific interventions have been implemented in accordance with contracts and approved budgets (Document 7, State funder).

So-called spot checks and evaluations are used to control a specific area in which the funder has a special interest. Two examples can be mentioned here. Firstly, spot checks are used to control the incorporation of particular thematic priorities in the activities of the intermediaries, such as conflict sensitivity and environmental and climate-related issues. Spot checks can be outsourced to external consultants by buying their expertise. The fact that expertise can be bought introduces a market component in the recruitment of external expertise. Sida occasionally uses the strategy of “call-offs” to a particular group of consultancy consortia that compete for assignments such as spot checks²³. The results of consultancy-based spot checks are used to support Sida’s appraisal of applications from intermediaries (Document 14, State funder; Document 15, State funder).

Besides spot checks of the integration of thematic priorities, other types of evaluations can be made to support the appraisal process. An example I want to highlight here is how Sida as a state funder contracts consultants to make an assessment of how an intermediary organizes

²³This process is analyzed and discussed more thoroughly in the section of “Assembling auditing”.

its financial activities and relations to partners. This example is illustrative of the tendency of funders to recruit consultants in order to receive a comprehensive view of the organizational infrastructure of the intermediary. In the evaluation, the financing structure and the model for cooperation with partners are scrutinized. One specific preoccupation of the funder is the cost efficiency of the model of cooperation which is characterized by both bilateral and multilateral collaboration with partners (Document 16, Consultancy Firm).

While this is an example of how expertise is mobilized for conducting extensive research which can help support the appraisal, it says nothing about how it is *used*. The evaluation referred to above is an example of how expert reports are not put on a shelf and forgotten, but directly and indirectly drawn upon in appraisals. The following is an example of how Sida indirectly draws on the consultant report to encourage the intermediary to clarify and simplify its model of funding:

The multilateral grant model of xx (the intermediary organization) is complex and includes multiple links and actors. In the results evaluation by xx (the consultant company) from 2017, xx is recommended to, for example, develop models to shorten the number of links in the contract chain in order to ensure that the majority of funds reach as far as possible, and in order to decrease transaction costs. It is Sida's overall assessment that the model needs to be simplified and that its system and the implementation of that system [need] to be reviewed in many respects in order to secure aid effectiveness [...]. (Document 7, State funder:14, my translation)

In another example, the reference to the report is even more explicit:

In the evaluation done by xx (the consultant company) in 2017, it is emphasized that the two models can complement each other and the consultants recommend xx to increase coordination between bilateral and multilateral projects, which Sida finds relevant and important that xx does. (Document 7, State funder:20, my translation)

This is an example of how expertise is actively used in the appraisal process. It is especially important to emphasize that consultant expertise is used to substantiate claims made by the funder and back

up particular arguments and critiques, in this case a critique of the basic cooperation model of the intermediary.

The expertise mobilized for appraisal is not only tied to consultants or other external experts. It also appears as general expertise not connected to particular agents. This is particularly true for how risk analysis is conducted. When describing risk analyses earlier in this section, I concentrated on how they are subject to appraisal in themselves. However, funders also make their own risk analyses of applications and proposals. These risk analyses are good examples of how globally circulating expertise guides the funder's own risk analysis. Again, Sida's appraisal serves to illustrate how particular models of risk analysis are deployed. It is clear that a particular model informs the risk analysis in the way that it is structured. In a first step, different risks are identified, according to three clusters: external risks related to goal achievement (for instance political and economic risks), standard risks (risks of deficient organizational management and control) and other risks (for instance security risks and risks of doing harm). The various risks in each cluster are then, in a second step, subject to a deeper analysis according to the model of risk valuation – probability – impact/consequence – risk management. As an example, Sida assesses the risk of deficiencies in monitoring and results reporting as high and with a strong probability of happening in reality. Therefore, it considers the impacts as “considerable” and suggests that the risk must be reduced. In a last step, these risks are specified further by combining a modified traffic light system with numbers. Thus, the risk of deficiencies in monitoring and results reporting is given an amber light with the number three attached to it, making it a relatively serious risk (Document 7, State funder).²⁴

This way of designing a risk analysis points to the way expertise in the form of models is used as a script to facilitate different forms of analytical tasks. It is worth noting, however, that this expertise is decoupled from particular agents, such as institutions or identifiable

²⁴I call it a modified traffic light system since four colors are used: green, yellow, amber and red. Numbers are used on a scale 1-4.

consultants, and instead functions as globally circulating expertise that can be abstracted from particular settings and re-installed in new ones (DeLanda 2006; Ong and Collier 2005).

In conclusion, expertise is a central resource drawn upon in the appraisal process and works as an external voice providing general advice but also as a basis for particular arguments which the funder wants to propagate.

Concluding summary – An appraisal process without a center

As in the concluding discussion on the previous section on applications, I want to clarify how the appraisal process is a result of multiple components being drawn together, just as in the assembly of applications which was the result of a continuous work of calibration and tinkering (Mol 2010). This is also true for the appraisal process. Appraisals are produced through the creation and pulling together of criteria, artifacts and mobile expertise. Thus, because of the creation of tangible support systems, translated into handbooks and criteria that can guide the process, the appraisal is not reducible to a single logic. In an analysis in which the “funder” (whether it is the state or an intermediary) plays a central role, an assemblage approach makes it possible to avoid reducing the appraisal to the funder exercising sovereign power. Rather, the process is much more complex as it entails the mobilization of criteria (whose meaning is always negotiable), the utilization of instructive handbooks and the use of expertise to legitimize particular decisions related to the appraisal.

Assembling implementation and reporting

In case of approval, the implementation phase starts. In the following section, I describe how implementation is assembled. In this part of the analysis, it becomes apparent that I am interested in general aspects of practices of assembling of different organizations in relation to issues of management and organization. Thus, here I do not delve deeper into the particular themes or problems with which the organizations work, but rather tease out some general practices that contribute to assembling *the project* in terms of implementation and reporting using the thematic focus and working methods of the organizations as illustrative examples.

The aim of this section is to discuss the role of research and “evidence” in implementation, the wider management of the “project logic” and the support systems mobilized to maximize implementation success.

Building the evidence base

A central focus for implementation of *the project* is, for many organizations, political advocacy in different forms. Advocacy often builds on a particular diagnosis of the “problem” to be solved. For the problem to gain traction in policy-making circles, it needs to be based on solid evidence and proven to actually “exist”. Thus, organizations draw on research to build evidence for their cause. The research process is characterized by the mobilization of scientific principles and methodological approaches. On the one hand, the staff’s educational background can be used to facilitate the research process:

I learnt when doing my Master studies, there’s always two main aims of research that should be in every project. One, what is its contribution to knowledge, and second, what is its contribution to policy or real life? And we try to always bear that in mind in the design of the research and we wouldn’t do it just to do it, we always do it because we have a purpose for it. (Interview, Informant 38)

On the other hand, while this indicates how basic principles of research can be mobilized, organizations also draw on the scientific process in terms of finding previous research and designing a proper

methodology. This research process is common when for example building an evidence base for awareness-raising around a particular issue. One informant working in a women's rights organization tells a story of how advocacy on domestic violence starts with an orientation in existing research and policies:

What we first do... and I believe you have to do, is a legal and policy analysis and a literature review in order to understand what laws exist, what are the gaps in the laws, to what extent they're aligned with EU directives, so it's important that we know inside our house what these laws and policies are saying. (Interview, Informant 38)

After this step, the own data collection of the organization starts, often with a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods:

After that, and after the literature review, to see what exists already, we work on collecting statistics from institutions related to the themes of for example domestic violence, we would make data requests to the police, to the courts, both civil and criminal, because of the way it is defined in the law, to prosecution, to victim advocates, to centers of social welfare, to shelters, basically everybody who has responsibility, on the number of cases, the gender, the age, ethnicity... [...] Then, usually, we do interviews with institutions because we want to know what their knowledge of their own legal obligations are, what are their attitudes towards their legal obligations, and what are their experiences? (Interview, Informant 38)

The research process can be supported by externally recruited consultants who are deemed to possess some kind of knowledge, for example in technical research on law amendments. This recruitment is sometimes not voluntary but required by funders:

Yes, we work in our projects with them constantly because one of the donor requirements is also to hire external experts and consultants on specific issues in the project. Last year when we were working on the project on the law of gender equality, we had to have a lawyer expert that actually could interpret the law on gender equality and write it in a simple language form that people that are not lawyers could understand, so we have to have consultants like this during the project activities. We try to find consultants from their respective fields, from their respective professions so the project could be more successful. (Interview, Informant 35)

The research process is often not a one-time task but a constant work in progress, as it has to be updated once the results get too dated. In addition, research has to be produced constantly as previous research can lack in rigor which puts effective advocacy work in jeopardy (Interview, Informant 38). The use of research requires adequate skills which are acquired through the training of staff and sometimes through the hiring of external expertise (Interview, Informant 38). This production of evidence is also a way of strengthening the legitimacy of the problems that organizations identify and the solutions they propose:

I think we're taken much more seriously when we come and say that we've done a national household survey and here's the results definitely. Not, "I just talked to three of my friends and this is what they say". It obviously holds more legitimacy. (Interview, Informant 38)

However, although research is a way of convincing policy-makers about the need for action on a specific issue, this is not always enough. Political agendas that go against the solutions proposed or general skepticism against the trustworthiness of research in an era of "alternative facts" work as ways of questioning the legitimacy of evidence (Interview, Informant 38).

The production of evidence is a constituent component in the assembly of implementation as this is given specific attention. For example, in an application by one of the intermediary organizations to a state funder, there is an amendment of a specific "advocacy program" that aims to strengthen labor rights around the world. An important goal of the program is to make context analyses and increase the dissemination of knowledge in relation to issues that bear on union rights. In order to achieve this goal, both quantitative and qualitative studies are to be produced (Document 17, Civil society organization). This apparent need for evidence to function as a solid base for advocacy and awareness-raising shows an increased tendency of science-like knowledge production in the work of civil society, which in turn indicates that advocacy is only possible if "objective" problems can be demonstrated through meticulous research.

Managing the project logic – Exploiting advantages and handling contradictions and pressures

As was described in the section on assembling applications, the applicants are held accountable for a number of promises, ranging from implementing activities according to strict work and time plans and fulfilling administrative duties (such as handling finances and reporting). As such, *the project* can be considered to rest on a particular bureaucratic “project logic” (Fred 2018) that entails both possibilities and challenges for the people involved. In the following, I show how people not only exploit the advantages of the project logic but also are confronted with its contradictions.

It is apparent that the project logic contributes structure and coherence in heterogeneous and complex contexts. One informant describes *the project* as the source of a common language and frame of reference that facilitate communication and mutual understanding: “It helps in order to understand each other, that when they say: “results, 3.1”, then I also know what it’s about so we can continue communicating [...]. It makes it easier that way, it simplifies some things” (Interview, Informant 18, my translation).

Thus, there is a common language – understood not only as a particular nomenclature but also as a cognitive frame of understanding – that helps code a complex environment according to particular universal categories. The project logic also helps divide up a complex reality and creates a beginning and an end of a particular intervention, in order to, as one informant argues, avoid that something lasts “for eternity” (Interview, Informant 17). Finally, the project logic facilitates control over time as predetermined goals can be followed up and possible problems that hamper goal achievement can be identified (Interview, Informant 18).

However, while the project logic is obviously considered to create order and coherence, it also introduces a range of challenges in the form of contradictions and pressures that call for active management. In the following, I give a number of examples of these possible contradictions

and pressures, focusing on managing administrative requirements and the unpredictability and rigidity of the project logic.

Managing administrative requirements – Producing the report

A first challenge resulting in various contradictions is the general management of administrative requirements. Administration takes various forms, but in the following I delve deeper into one example that permeates the implementation process: reporting. This part of the assembly of implementation is not a one-time task but needs to be performed continuously. During the course of *the project*, various forms of reporting must be performed, both financial reporting and reporting focused on results. The results reporting is normally done at the end of *the project* as “completion reports” are prepared, but also while it is in process, in order to track progress and to describe possible deviations from the original plan. The report in itself is a neat product which hides the messy conditions of production that have preceded it. Before a report reaches its intended recipient, laborious efforts have been made to produce it, ranging from preparation, collection of information, engaging with reporting channels and handling different hurdles along the way. The process can be likened to a “journey” towards a final report, thus having clear affinities with the assembly of applications.

There are some basic requirements that set the bar for what is considered a “good” report. As in the application process, templates are common as a way of supporting the reporting process. For many of the studied organizations, these have been predetermined by the funder, but in other cases the reporting format is optional. This has, however, not resulted in a less formal reporting process but rather spurred the ingenuity of some organizations: “[The funder] has no templates for reporting [...] so over the years, we have developed a template that works and that Sida has approved that we use” (Interview, Informant 6, my translation). Thus, in the absence of clear guidance, organizations create their own solutions that sometimes end up in the invention of their own templates.

The reporting of results should refer to the goals set in the application and focus on the results achieved. The results in focus are of both quantitative and qualitative character. This opens up for a hybrid form of results reporting that focuses both on palpable quantitative results (referred to in development language as outputs) and on more abstract results at a higher level (referred to in development language as outcomes and impacts). Thus, qualitative results are often described when the capacities of a group of people have been strengthened, when strategic plans have been produced or when alliance-making has been successful. This is complemented with the reporting of quantitative results, which can be translated into numbers. Returning to the section on applications and the templates used to plan *the project*, the planned activities are detailed in a work plan establishing what *the project* is expected to achieve (expressed in numbers). There is also an empty column in which the actual implemented amount can be filled in after the completion of activities. In the results reports, these are now filled with numbers that allow for a comparison between expected and real values (Document 18, Civil society organization) (see Figure 4.6 for an illustration).

Consequently, the reports of all the organizations display some form of alternation between reporting in qualitative narrative language and reporting in quantitative numerical language. This results in reports sometimes having visually parallel reporting schemes, with qualitative results framed in narrative language and quantitative results summarized in tables and matrixes that only rely on numerical language. There is, thus, a pendulum movement in the report between reduction and amplification (Rottenburg 2009). Reporting presupposes some form of reduction of information, which in this case can be accomplished through resorting to numerical language. However, the narrative reporting has the effect of amplifying the information since it relies on qualitative reasoning that allows for more comprehensive statements about the achieved results.

Figure 4.6 Example of activity matrix

Activities	Target			Actual			Date Implemented	Remarks		
	Qty	Participants			Qty	Participants				
		M	F	T		M	F	T		
Seminars/Workshops										
BENIN										
1. Celebration of the women's day and conference	1	10	20	30	1	09	21	30	16/03/2017	
2. IUF OSH Day celebration	1	0	10	10	1	0	21	21	13/04/2017	
3. Planning workshop for 2018-2022	1	5	10	15	1	5	10	15	18-19/04/2017	
4. Training seminar on the strategies to promote women in trade unions	1	10	20	30	1	10	20	30	28-29/06/2017	
5. Seminar on gender and female leadership: a way to change the trade union movement	1	10	20	30	1	10	20	30	17-18/08/2017	
6. Seminar on the struggle against gender based violence in the world of work	1	10	20	30	1	10	20	30	16-17/11/2017	

Sub-total	6	45	10 0	14 5	6	44	11 2	15 6		
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The actual translation of implemented activities into the reporting format requires preparatory work. By keeping track of implemented activities as *the project* goes along, it becomes easier to incorporate them in the final report. Thus, a form of “self-documentation”, sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit, is activated to keep track of implemented activities. One informant describes a formalized way of keeping track of implemented activities:

For most of us, we have kind of a log book when we do the projects, with all the different activities, articles, blogs, and how many meetings, with whom, how many we met and so on and then you have to take this log book and put it back in the template [...] and justify, well, that it has somehow produced results. (Interview, Informant 8, my translation)

On other occasions, there is a less formalization, but the need to keep track of activities that should be reported constitutes a parallel thought-consuming activity besides implementation itself: “And during the project, when I’m in the midst of it, I think all the time: ‘this must be reported, I mustn’t forget this number, I mustn’t forget this’...” (Interview, Informant 11, my translation).

Financial reporting, which is an equally important part of the reporting process, also requires preparatory work. It is therefore not unusual that staff (for instance accountants) are hired for the specific task of doing financial reporting. Both legal requirements and specific funder requirements influence the amount of preparatory work for financial reporting. The legal requirements are related to the fact that organizations are registered in a nation-state and are therefore subjected to reporting to central state institutions (such as the tax administration) (Interview, Informant 36). The specific funder requirements concern regular reporting in specific formats. The requirements can be detailed, resulting in laborious efforts to understand and fulfill them. In the following account, which is worth

quoting at length, an informant describes a problematic situation of financial reporting:

Now I'm doing the financial reporting, and they have added a question on... in their general terms and conditions, they have different instructions, and they have an accountant instruction and there is a question:" [...] have you given the instruction in the general terms and conditions to your accountant, if not, why?" So, last week, I had to scan these pages and e-mail our accountant, an authorized accountant, whose job it is to be an accountant. Like this, "hi, these are the instructions from the funder". They have all these different accountant templates [...] and they say that "you have received this amount of money and [the accounting] should be done according to the ISO accounting model" [...]. And then you know that, then I had to e-mail the instructions to the accountant [...], and I had to explain... and I thought it was extremely embarrassing because it's her job. She is the accountant, you know. Just so I could say... answer yes in the financial report. And I wrote in the e-mail as well that I'm sorry but I have to, I send this to you now in order for you to have it so I can answer... check this box. [...]. I don't know what it looks like in other organizations, if there are smaller funds that do not need to be audited by authorized accountants, I don't know if it's enough sometimes with an association accountant for the funding they have, but we need a certified accountant, at least for the funding we get. [...] It's like I tell her that she doesn't know how to do her job... because the only thing I need to say is that this should be done according to ISO 800 and she's like "ok". (Interview, Informant 8, my translation)

The quote is an illustrative example of how financial reporting requires a large amount of preparatory work in the sense that further information must be collected from external sources. In addition, this work is not straightforward but fraught with different problems, and possibly challenging professional relationships. The task of collecting and compiling information is a central feature of preparatory work for reporting. As was described in the section on assembling applications, these can be seen as the results of drawing together the efforts of multiple parties. Reporting occurs under similar heterogeneous conditions, as the efforts of multiple parties need to be coordinated in order for information to be compiled. Forms of cooperation among stakeholders result in rather complex reporting chains in which information is collected in one part of the chain for the sake of reporting it upwards. Parts of the chain often undertake a specific role which requires a fair amount of mediation and translation between actors representing different organizations. Particularly the

intermediary organizations standing between state funders and partner organizations perceive a pressure to collect information and transform it to fit the needs of the funder. Two informants argue that a certain form of skill is needed to fulfill these requirements:

Informant: It's our job, you know, [...] I thought you put it so well, what you call translating... that we translate in both directions so to speak, that's one of our roles, to translate... (Interview, Informant 17)

David: What does that mean to you, just briefly?

Informant: [...] When our... when the projects describe their results, we have to transform it, we have to translate it into Sida-speak (Interview, Informant 17)

Informant: Yeah, so the particular department at Sida can incorporate our results in its model. (Interview, Informant 22, my translation)

Hence, translation is considered a central skill in order for reporting to happen. However, the reporting is not only channeled upwards, but some of the complexity in the reporting chain is decreased by creating digital solutions for reporting. One state funder has created a database in which organizations do results reporting and financial reporting themselves. The database offers a way to search for projects being implemented by particular organizations. In the database, information is offered on the goals and expected results as well as achieved results. Thus, instead of the funder requiring information, which results in a complex reporting chain, it can create conditions for self-reporting which puts the responsibility on the organizations themselves.

Although preparatory work in terms of self-documentation and the collection of information has its own in-built tensions, there are specific conflicts and tensions that may appear during the reporting process that sometimes call for immediate reactions from professionals. Although instructions for reporting give the impression of being clear and unambiguous, it can have the opposite effect concerning what to report and the extent of reporting. The emphasis in reporting on requirements related to predefined goals makes the reporting somewhat predictable and there is little room for reporting on results that fall outside set goals:

When we do the reporting, we should do it in relation to our application which is natural in a way, but not in relation to reality [...], that what they are interested in is what we said we would do and how we have accomplished that. Even if there may have been a great many really good things in this context that are relevant... but if they do not correspond to an exact question in the application, it doesn't really matter. (Interview, Informant 7, my translation)

Furthermore, determining the extent of reporting is a balancing act. Informants report on the problem of overachievement in relation to funding, meaning that many organizations are successful in achieving a variety of results despite low funding. This creates a feeling of hesitation when results are to be reported: "Should we report on everything in this project? We want to show that we have done an awesome job, but at the same time we wouldn't perhaps have received the same amount of money for the time, or how to say it, for what we have delivered" (Interview, Informant 8, my translation). Reporting is, furthermore, seldom subject to equal conditions. The availability of resources for reporting can vary drastically, leading to organizations having plenty of resources being able to recruit external expertise that supports them in results reporting, such as participatory research evaluators (Interview, Focus Group). Another unequal condition is that established reporting cycles are deviated from and organizations need to work "on demand" to produce information (Interview, Focus Group).

When the report has been produced, the reporting process is not over, but lives on in the internal institutional machinery of the funders. As in the case with applications, reports are appraised by funders, resulting in the production of assessment memos. Similar to the appraisal of applications, support systems are available in the form of handbooks (Document 6, Civil society organization). A handbook used by one of the intermediary organizations to assess reports from partner organizations offers instructions on what to assess in a report. The memos in which the assessment is written, often comprises the following headings according to the recommendations in the handbook: achievement of results, strategies and methods, possible

deviations, cost efficiency, risk management, follow-up, lessons learned, sustainability and final recommendation on approval or disapproval of report. Besides the advice given in the handbook, the person doing the report assessment has a repertoire of expertise on which to draw. There is a range of standards of what constitutes “quality” in implementation and reporting. As mentioned in the section on assembling applications, the SMART model is required by the funder when formulating goals. This model is further used in the appraisal of the extent to which goals have been attained:

[Our] assessment (the intermediary organization) is that the goal has been achieved according to the expectations, taking the context into account. The goal is not SMART and clear indicators to the approximation of the goal are lacking, which is still a deficiency. However, the completion report consists of sufficient examples of activities and their effects to draw the conclusion that the goal has been achieved. (Document 19, Civil society organization:1, my translation)

Hence, in conclusion, the production of the report is preceded by laborious efforts to draw people and artifacts together. In addition, the report is abstracted from this complex process and is subjected to expert-based appraisal.

Stuck in the unpredictability and rigidity of the project logic

A challenge of the project logic is that it appears as both rapidly changing and rigid at the same time. A rigid aspect of implementation is the inflexibility of application and reporting procedures and activity plans. However, the conditions for implementation also give the impression of being in constant flux, with frequently changing priorities and funding schemes. How professionals are influenced by and deal with these possible challenges is what I turn to now.

Starting with the ever-changing conditions for implementation, the most challenging are insecurities in the provision of funding, both regarding the amount and the duration of funding. Some of the studied organizations are subjected to short-term financing that stretches to a maximum of one year. This makes it difficult to maintain secure

employment contracts. The insecurity creates anxiety and stress over the ability of private individuals and organizations to maintain themselves financially in the long run:

But the worst part of it I think is the stress which... the stress coming from writing a good project so we get the money, because I apply for money for my own salary for example, so it becomes... [...] this goes beyond work, kind of, it affects my private life, to put it bluntly I want a salaried job so I can pay my bills, [...]. So there is stress involved in this work as well. (Interview, Informant 11, my translation)

The funding conditions are also unpredictable and unstable, expressed in delays and cuts influenced by changes in government priorities. Some funders are reluctant to give institutional funding that is meant to sustain the inner infrastructure of organizations, making it difficult to finance administration and staff (Interview, Informant 12). Besides this reluctance, sudden cuts can be made and delays occur. Cuts result in drastic adjustments of planned activities (Interview, Focus Group). Delays in the provision of funding also result in various problems for organizations. As a one-year *project* is short already to begin with, the late provision of funding can cause an unwanted temporal displacement of activities, creating a situation when planned activities must be implemented in a shorter period of time:

If we don't have information on how much money we have and so on, it's difficult to make a plan for the year, you know, it can also disrupt the planning process and create stress... yeah, but when you haven't received the money from the start, you don't really start with a project before, while they (the funder) argue that "start January 1 even though you get the money in April", and then everything gets postponed so you have to do all that work in less time when you had planned to do something else [...]. (Interview, Informant 8, my translation)

Albeit instructions on reporting give the appearance of being clear and predictable, they can be somewhat erratic. One informant tells a story of how a mundane and predictable task such as reporting can be thwarted by the unreliable behavior of the reporting system:

Yeah, all this hassle that comes with it, and it can be small stuff that creates stress [...], you have the reporting form for example and you have completed it and edited it and then you log in to the web portal and

prepare yourself to post some of these parts [...] and then a completely new question appears that doesn't exist in... yeah, that we haven't been warned about in advance and then you have to sit there and... and start with that, shit, I have to add this, it's just for me to sit down and type it in to Word because it's going back in to the portal later. (Interview, Informant 8, my translation)

The constant threat of sudden changes is dealt with in tandem with the rigidity of the project logic. The rigidity comes to expression in the focus on the hard-to-negotiate requirements on delivery, the expectations on working according to specific formats, the focus on measurability, and norms and ideals of professionalism and competition.

Delivering an outcome, whether it is an application, a report or an activity according to a particular plan is difficult to negotiate and can cause problems both inside organizations and in relation to funders. In applications, applicants make particular promises on what the funder can expect, leading to the planning of a range of activities that are to be implemented. These activities must also be formulated in such a way so that follow-up and measurement is possible. The promises made in an application tie organizations to particular activities, making alterations difficult. For example, the activity plan with its strict time plans limits the possibility of reacting to sudden political changes that could be of interest for *the project*:

The project format as such means that we don't have the opportunity to follow... to react to societal development in the same way during the project period. We must continue focusing on something that we said we would focus on one and half years ago. And there is really no room for... not among our cooperation partners either, to really [say], "yeah, now we would like to shift focus". (Interview, Informant 12, my translation)

There is also a fundamental rationality underpinning the notion of "activity" that reduces *the project* to working with specific issues and "examples" instead of dealing with bigger issues. An informant working with women, peace and security elaborates:

Informant: So, I can feel sometimes that [...] this should only be an example, *these small projects should only be examples of the big picture*

but sometimes... but I feel very often that my daily work is only about the examples, very seldom it's...

David: Ok, so, would you...?

Informant: What type of societal development is it that we are trying to... when I say anti-militarization, you know, what form of societal development do we want to see? (Interview, Informant 11, my translation and emphasis)

Informants argue that this focus on activities and "examples" take away focus from the broader goals and visions that they want to achieve. Substantial issues such as organizing, and being able to create opinion around hot political topics are difficult to prioritize when there is a strict activity plan to follow. In an organization working with women's rights, this conflict becomes especially clear:

Before Christmas we talked about writing an opinion piece on the increased militarization in Sweden, not just that they refuse to sign the UN treaty to ban nuclear weapons, or because the law on arms export really doesn't say anything, that we would like to put all this on the table, like, wait this is what we're trying to stop, that's why it's important, that's why we must have a better law on arms export, but those articles, [...] *that work is always downgraded because you always [...] have these projects, these detailed issues*, do you understand what I mean? And sometimes I can feel that [...], if someone who doesn't understand these issues... if I start talking about the idea that Sweden should sign a treaty on banning nuclear weapons, a multilateral ban, people will ask: "yeah, why?". And sometimes I feel, I totally understand why you ask [because] we can never talk about the question of "why". (Interview, Informant 11, my translation and emphasis)

While this is an example of how "detailed issues" become an obstacle to thinking about the big issues, there are also overall working formats whose rigidity influences organizations in a detrimental way. As has been mentioned earlier, funders' requirements extend to thematic priorities but also to the application of particular models to achieve societal transformation. These formats can be completely contrary to the working logics and transformative visions of organizations themselves. An informant working in an intermediary organization focusing on strengthening labor rights among labor unions argues that the funder's overall vision of "Do No Harm" stands in complete opposition to the organization's view on conflict:

We argue that conflict is a working tool, it is used, of course, according to needs and analysis [...], it's not that we want our partners to refrain from using strikes as a weapon if they have to use it, do you understand? It is just so damn weird that they lack an analysis of power and just talk about "do no harm". Yeah, but sometimes you may have to do harm because it's not a fair situation [...], it becomes a part of working with human rights. And here we think that it's completely unsustainable with Sida's... because they can never answer what they really mean by conflict sensitivity, we argue. Because it is so strange to require from the unions that they should be conflict sensitive, when conflict is one... the core issue that you work with. They should not be conflict sensitive because Sida requires it, they have completely other... it is completely absurd. (Interview, Informant 14, my translation)

Furthermore, the inflexibility of the project logic becomes apparent when there is a need for disrupting the work plan. The moving around of planned activities must be explained to the funder. This is not always an easy task as the communication itself is time-consuming, leading to psychological effects on professionals. One informant argues that this type of communication, in which a deviation from a plan must be dwelled upon for long periods of time, has had the effect of "sucking energy" (Interview, Informant 12).

Another rigid element of the project logic is the focus on the achievement of results and their measurement. Although discussions in the international aid community has led to the meaning of "result" being extended so that it now encompasses both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, measurements must still be made. The challenge that arises from this requirement can be called "the scientific problem". Apart from dedicating time to formulating ambitious results and working hard to achieve them, organizations dedicate time to reflecting on the "science" of results and its consequences. All studied organizations work in thematic areas in which measurable goals are difficult to formulate. The issue of how women's and union rights can be strengthened can be subject to quantitative measurement but the qualitative results are often difficult to measure. Thus, a great deal of thought is dedicated to reflecting on the problem of measurement. A first problematic of measurement is that of establishing what should be

counted as a sufficient result. An informant uses the case of union rights to elaborate on the problem of measurement:

If you want to build activism, do you allow money to go to people just meeting each other, without a clear..., so how clear should the outcome be? Like now, we succeeded in gathering fifty people who have never been to a meeting on union rights, and we talk about the right to this particular salary even though you don't have it [...], is it enough that we had that meeting, or should we measure what happened afterwards? (Interview, Informant 19, my translation)

A second problematic concerns the purely scientific aspect of measurement: the establishment of causality and attribution:

Was it thanks to partners that had an influence, thanks to our capacity building, that lobbied their government or was it thanks to our advocacy in the EU that put pressure on the government? It's a little bit difficult... so it's not a top result area because it's hard to know, what do we control here? (Interview, Informant 5, my translation)

Hence, it becomes apparent that scientific discourse is drawn upon in order to try to assert some form of order in relation to processes that are inherently difficult to subject to scientific reasoning. The focus on the scientific discourse of measurability creates a situation in which particular ways of thinking risk being downplayed in relation to other more dominant ways of thinking. One informant argues that development work is characterized by the separation of rationality and emotion in Western philosophy. Rationality becomes particularly evident in the focus on measurability which risks excluding anything that belongs in the realm of emotions. The informant describes how this form of reasoning permeates his work on strengthening union rights:

Sida requires from us a number of results that should be measurable, that is, the number of union leaders doing this and that, and we [in turn] require from xx (a partner) that they should report how many union leaders was doing this and that and xx (the partner), requires in their turn et cetera. And it's this separation [...] ok, how was the degree of democracy affected by all these workshops in this little organization, or this huge organization? It's difficult to obtain harmony between these worlds, and it's very difficult for us, I think it's [...] a learned way of thinking and reasoning. [...] as soon as you're born, you're taught that this is how the world works... there is the emotional and the scientific,

this is especially important and you can't involve emotions in this, and this is the way you should work, and you should deliver results, measurable things, everything else is emotions, you can't involve that. (Interview, Informant 18, my translation)

Thus, the focus on measurability puts something else at stake: science-based thinking rooted in Western philosophy receives the upper hand in the project logic while suppressing that which is not easily measured.

There is, furthermore, another feature of *the project* that appears as rigid, causing another form of contradiction. The project logic is bearer of deep-seated ideals and norms clashing with the ideals of organizations. There are statements by informants that can be interpreted as indicating that *the project* relies on a professional and competitive logic that causes contradictions. A first aspect is that of professionalism. Development work has become increasingly professionalized as implementation is characterized by the execution of strict activity plans and transparent and accurate reporting. The requirements of professionalism are rarely open for discussion and can be seen as constituting a form of rigid aspect of the project logic. A conflict arising from professionalism is the risk of downplaying activism and visionary planning. One informant argues that visionaries in current organizations pose a "risk":

Where is there a space for visionaries in our movement now? [...] everyone is very anchored and there is a lot of [talk] on common values, but visionaries are difficult to manage in this... *because nothing can go wrong either*, [...] for us it's not very far from idea to implementation, but it must be the whole [...], you can't take a risk [...] a lot of energy is spent on maintaining the level and control, you know, and not risking things. (Interview, Focus Group, my translation and emphasis)

A striking aspect of this quote is that visionaries are a possible threat against the "right" way of doing things. It seems that professionalism entails avoiding doing things "wrong". Thus, visionary plans are seen as risky in this work since they can be labelled "wrong" in relation to requirements on professionalism. A second aspect is that of competition. Given that *the project* is to an ever greater extent subject to market mechanisms, competition is a natural element in the day-to-

day work of many organizations. This creates a conflict with ideals of solidarity. One informant argues that cooperation and discussion with fellow organizations are common, but adds: "You don't want to share too much, it's still... they are our friends but they are also our competitors for money" (Interview, Informant 11, my translation).

The reactions against the rigidity and the unpredictability indicate the wider consequences of the project logic. It is noteworthy that even that which is supposed to give the project logic its sense of certainty, such as reporting instructions and plans, gives rise to its very opposite, that is, uncertainty, insecurity and precariousness. The reactions are strong and the informants use emotion-infused language to describe their experiences: they are stressed, frustrated, and anxious, and they experience a draining of energy. However, they dedicate a great deal of time to containment of these feelings. Informants talk about maintaining a façade of pleasantness and not letting emotions show when in contact with funders. One informant recounts:

My experience is that despite those occasions when I have been very... very frustrated, disappointed with our funders, I have had to be incredibly, incredibly nice, acquiescent, because we're so incredibly dependent on our funders. (Interview, Informant 12, my translation)

Hence, an important part in the continuous assembly of implementation is being confronted with the dual challenge of unpredictability and rigidity. Hard labor is put down by individuals in organizations to handle the challenges coming from these two elements. In practice, it turns out to be their responsibility to handle the harsh effects of the project logic.

Maximizing success – Mobilizing support systems for project implementation

In the previous analysis, I have described the general challenges that follow from the project logic. Still, the overall expectations of success remain strong. Hence, different forms of support systems are activated in order to create opportunities to maximize success. In the following,

I discuss a number of different strategies and techniques deployed to create conditions for success in an environment permeated by the challenges and uncertainties referred to above.

Using platforms for knowledge exchange and experimentation

The organizations studied here are all confronted with similar problems concerning the assembly of implementation, particularly regarding issues of methodology, that is, how to implement *the project* in the most effective way. Therefore, they partake in formal platforms for the exchange of experiences and knowledge, organized both by themselves and by funders.

Self-organized platforms – Learning in a network setting

On a cold November day, I find myself walking around from office to office at the headquarters of a civil society organization in central Stockholm. The reason for this walking exercise is that I follow a group exercise in which the participants (all representing different civil society organizations) exchange experiences and knowledge on the theme “evaluation of capacity development”. The group exercise is arranged by a network of intermediary civil society organizations that meet regularly to exchange experiences and knowledge of what can be called the “methodology of development work”, that is, the methods and techniques deployed to implement *the project*. This day is dedicated to a workshop on the sharing of methods for following up capacity development. Some particular aspects of the workshop are telling of what is considered important in this type of knowledge sharing: the “best practice” character of knowledge and the pedagogical framing.

Let me start with the best practice character of knowledge. A couple of days in advance, the participants have been provided a so-called “praxis paper”, authored by “INTRAC” (the International NGO Training and Research Centre) that offers expert services to civil

society. The purpose of the praxis paper is to give a literature review on capacity building and how monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of capacity building can be conducted. The paper concludes with some practical recommendations and also an overview of some tools that can be used to assess the capacity of actors (Simister and Smith 2010). Although this paper is not referred to extensively during the workshop, the discussions circulate around the sharing of best practices. This becomes clear in the design of the workshop. The participants are supposed to interview each other on the following issues:

1. Share an occasion when you used a method of follow-up or evaluation that really helped you to learn about the effects (positive or negative) of your work in capacity building. Think of: What did you do? Who was involved and how? How did they react? How could you use your insights?
2. What made you feel that this method was so useful?
3. What made this method work? What made its use possible?
4. What would happen if more of your follow-up of capacity development was designed in this way?
5. What can you use from this experience when you think of future follow-up of capacity development? (Methods network, Meeting 5, my translation)

Back to my walking exercise. As I walk around to the groups as they interview each other, the focus in many interviews is on sharing general practices that can be applicable on a multitude of contexts. At one of the group sessions, I note that the participants interview each other about practical tools for assessing partner capacity, and the acronym of a particular tool (“MANGO”) is mentioned as an effective way of appraising partners according to a traffic light system (Methods network, Meeting 5).

Besides the best practice character of the group exercise, the pedagogical framing of the sharing of knowledge is striking. The

exercise is said to be structured according to an “appreciative inquiry approach” and is, as already mentioned, conducted through interviews in groups of two people. During the interviews, notes are taken on an A3-paper which is then pasted on the walls of a room in which the participants mingle with each other and talk about their discussions. In this way, the pedagogical framing is also important in the exchange of knowledge.

This is an example of how common platforms are mobilized as support systems for handling complex methodological issues pertaining to implementation. During my observations of the network meetings, I noted that this type of knowledge sharing referred to in the example above is characteristic for how the network functions. The network provides a range of knowledge-sharing opportunities that are supposed to give participants the desirable skills and strategies to confront many of the challenges of the project logic, whether it is the problem of measurement or finding adequate instruments for organizational assessment. Let me tease out some further examples of activities in the network to describe how it functions as a knowledge support system.

The physical meetings are the heart of the network. A standing item at the meetings is for participants to share recent news on particular events and processes related to methodology, for example ongoing reporting processes, updates of policies and handbooks, organizational assessments of partners and so on. During the course of my observations, the goal of this sharing process is altered as people want to discuss particular challenges with which participants grapple and that they want to brainstorm around in a group setting. The challenges span over broad areas and the discussion is intended not only to provide an arena to talk about difficult issues but also to give practical suggestions on how to solve a particular problem.

Two discussions during the network meetings constitute illustrative examples of how complex problems are tackled. During one meeting, as the participants have shared some of the ongoing work in their respective organizations, the conclusion is drawn that a common

denominator for all is the difficulty of creating conditions for learning. Participants want to prioritize reflection and learning and avoid that this only happens at the end of a process. A short discussion on adequate methods arise, and one participant recommends everyone to read a paper authored by an organization called “BOND” (British Overseas NGOs for Development). This paper identifies different forms of barriers to organizational learning and how these can be handled (Document 20, Methods Network). At another meeting, the issue of organizational assessment is discussed, and especially how the level and quality of internal democracy can be measured among partner organizations. Different forms of criteria for internal democracy are discussed as well as to what degree partners should be involved in the assessment. As in the previous example, reading suggestions from the so-called “DemocracyAcademy” on how to strengthen internal democracy in organizations are provided by one of the participants (Document 21, Methods Network).

These two examples illustrate how the discussions on how to manage different challenges end up in practical solutions. There is a plethora of repertoires of best practice (here exemplified through organizations such as “BOND” and the “DemocracyAcademy”) on which the participants can draw for practical solutions to various problems (this is also true for the example of knowledge sharing in relation to instruments for organizational assessment above). Best practices also “spill over” in the activities of the network because of participants abstracting them from their own organizations and disseminating them in the network. For example, during an interview with an informant representing an intermediary, I was told about a particular method for evaluating a particular implemented activity or process, the “After Action Review” (AAR) (Interview, Informant 14). This method stipulates that successful evaluation occurs in four steps. The first two steps aim to establish the goal of the process/activity and what actually happened, and the two last steps aim to compare what was expected to happen and what happened, as well as identify the lessons learned (Document 22, Civil society organization). When following the

network, I noticed that a guidance document on how to use the method had been shared among the participants.

Although concentrating many of their activities to physical meetings, the network is not limited to them. The discussions can continue in between meetings on an interactive online platform where the participants can find a range of resources to draw on for their own work. At this online platform, you can find informative papers on various issues, authored both by scholars and by expert-based networks (such as INTRAC). The topics vary, but one illustrative example is a paper giving methodological suggestions on how to best summarize results across large portfolios of work, thus having a direct connection to one of the problems of implementation referred to above: that of collecting and presenting information. Furthermore, there are suggestions of relevant material for working with different thematic priorities. For instance, there are references to particular “tool boxes” that Sida provides as guidance. Given that many organizations are obligated to integrate conflict sensitivity into their activities, a tool box giving guidance on how to identify risks according to a “Do-No-Harm”-perspective is provided.

Funder-organized platforms – Learning under experimental conditions

The network is an example of a self-organized platform, arranged by organizations having an interest in sharing experiences and knowledge in their own channels. However, funders also create conditions for learning by providing platforms where experimentation is in focus. For instance, Sida provides a so-called “results lab” in which organizations can test methodologies for results-based management. The background for setting up this lab is directly related to one of the problems described in the previous section on the rigidities of the project logic: the problem of measurement. As results are difficult to measure and attribute to specific interventions, the lab functions as a platform for testing methods that can facilitate results-based management. In addition, the funder aims for the lab to become a

platform for mutual learning. The lab is guided by the following principles:

The Lab is jointly owned and shaped by the participating organisations and Sida. Sida's main role is to facilitate the process. Collective problem-solving is central. The work in the Results Lab is dependent on commitment and mutual learning. The Lab is characterised by openness, respect and trust. Participants in the Lab strive for a truly participatory environment and are curious to listen to each other. Failures are OK and are a part of the learning process. (Document 23, State funder:1)

As facilitator, Sida is the main funder for the lab and provides expertise (external consultants, inspirers, and so on) if necessary. As in the network, much of the activity is moved to an online platform where the organizations are expected to present a case with which they want to work. Sida defines a case as “a problem to be solved or a method to be tested and developed, related to results-based management” (Document 23, State funder:2).

During the course of the fieldwork in the methods network, the lab was a standing item at the meetings as it was in the process of construction. The organizations interested in participating in the lab were required to write up an idea for a case with which they wanted to work. Following the discussions on the activities in the lab, it became clear that many organizations wanted to work with specific methods or ways of working related to their specific thematic focus. Two specific methods that gained the necessary traction to be given specific attention in the lab were “theory of change” and “outcome harvesting” (Document 21, Methods network; Document 24, Methods network). Theory of change is a model that aims to illustrate how a desired change is expected to happen. By mapping objectives, outcomes and impacts, a logical chain of how these together are expected to produce a desired change can be revealed. Outcome harvesting is a specific evaluation method that aims to avoid measuring progress towards predetermined objectives, but instead collects information of possible changes in order to try to determine at a later stage whether these changes can be attributed to specific interventions. These two methods were explored through a

series of workshops as well as through contacts with external consultants.

The construction of the results lab and the activities implemented did not occur without tensions. During the construction phase of the lab, organizations voiced their concern about the lab possibly competing with other tasks and people in internal leadership positions wishing for the lab to be related to ongoing organizational processes (Methods Network, Meeting 1). The amount of work was worrisome for some participants and the funder request to involve partner organizations in the lab was deemed by some as only leading to more work (Methods Network, Meeting 2). Another tension was related to the expertise provided in the lab. It came from external consultants that were publically procured via specific agreements and were therefore predetermined. Thus, some participants expressed disappointment about not being able to propose their own consultants (Methods Network, Meeting 4). During one meeting, the excessive reliance of the funder on consultant expertise was mentioned by one of the participants. With a tone of astonishment and tiredness, the participant said that when s/he showed an interest in the results lab, the funder's immediate reaction was: "Do you need help from a consultant?" (Methods Network, Meeting 3). The question seems to have indicated that the funder was interested in nothing else except the potential need for consultant expertise.

Maximizing success through informal means

While the network and the results lab are examples of formal platforms organized for the purpose of exchanging knowledge for the successful implementation of *the project*, there are also examples of informal activities that serve to ensure effective implementation. It is of great importance to focus on the mundane organizational activities that are perhaps not reflected on at length by professionals and which are actions taken in order to find more informal routes to solve the problems of implementation. Because of the requirements of the project logic, there is a need for both formal and informal supporting

structures. One informant talks about the positive experiences of mentorship which includes introducing persons to *the project* early on and mentoring them during the process (Interview, Informant 38). It is also of great importance to hold on to strict work plans:

Look, we have a plan, with all these big problems, you have these huge plans, like work plan, but you also make internal... have internal management meetings and stuff because you have to follow those plans, otherwise you just get lost, it's not like we tell the donors that we just use these plans, we really use these plans, because we cannot function [in an]other way. (Interview, Informant 37)

Other ways of ensuring effective implementation is to build on principles of solidarity and helping each other. In the smaller organizations, it is often difficult to limit work to specific projects, but you have to help each other. Given the complex thematic character of *the project*, it is common to draw on each other's skills and expertise and not approach work tasks as solo endeavors (Interview, Informant 8). Helping each other also means tearing down hierarchies and offering support on the most mundane aspects of implementation:

It's difficult to work in one project when you work in a smaller organization, the distribution of duties is not that well... there's not much of a hierarchy so you have a lot to... for us, for example, to organize an event you have to do everything from sending the banners and taking the pictures, and the PR... dealing with the PR and inviting all the panelists. We basically deal with very technical and also very... with everything, we have to prepare the venue and then take out the trash, just an example, basically everything. And since there's not much of a hierarchy, everyone is doing everything and we also try to also help each other when there is a bigger event so it's not like "oh, it's your project, you have to deal with it". (Interview, Informant 34)

In conclusion, in order to handle the requirements of implementation success, organizations activate a multitude of strategies. In order to handle the more technical requirements of measurement, they partake in formal platforms of knowledge exchange and for the day-to-day challenges, they mobilize more informal strategies.

Concluding summary – An implementation and reporting process without a center

The labor of assembly becomes palpable in the implementation process, as various elements need to be drawn together for implementation to happen, such as the gathering of “evidence”, the production of reports (which, in turn, requires preparatory work), and the mobilization of support functions. While the application and appraisal phases also display tensions, the contradictions seem more acute in the implementation phase. This becomes clear in the description of being “stuck” in the project logic. As the promises made in the application are to be fulfilled, many hurdles must be surpassed.

Sometimes, the contradictions just seem to be accepted, but other times professionals try to solve them actively. One illustrative example is that of measurement. While inherently difficult for many of the organizations, they still dedicate a great deal of work to try to solve the issue, by reflecting on questions of causality and attribution and by drawing on existing support platforms. This is not only an illustration of the laborious work of assembly, but also an example of how implementation is not governed by a singular center of power. In fact, it is possible to detect multiple centers making implementation assembly possible: professionals’ own forms of adaptation and translation of requirements and the mobilization of knowledge “from afar”, available in networks and labs. A feature of this form of assembly is that it is built on responsabilization. The project logic is built on possibly insolvable contradictions, such as rigorous measurement of results that are inherently difficult to measure. However, it becomes the responsibility of the individual organization to try to solve this problem. Therefore, specific measures need to be taken (for example construction of formal platforms for the exchange of knowledge). Thus, a “push-down” effect can be detected here, meaning that the responsibility to handle the contradictions of the project logic is laid on individuals.

Assembling auditing

Auditing is an overlapping process that occurs both during appraisal and during implementation. It is, therefore, problematic to describe this process as only being a post-project endeavor. Hence, in this section, I conceptualize auditing (which is my preferred term here) as a process encompassing both post-project evaluation as well as processes of auditing that occur during implementation. As some aspects of auditing are described in the section on appraisals (especially the issue of *what* is audited), my ambition here is to deepen the analysis of *how* auditing is assembled through the mobilization of different forms of expertise, both internal to funders' organizations and external expertise. I also explore the specific organization of the external expertise as it is increasingly subject to a logic of outsourcing.

Funder-organized audit

Funders have institutionalized the practice of regular audit that occurs continuously. While some of the regular auditing activities can be formally organized through, for example, spot checks that are subjected to external procurement and conducted according to specific methodologies, the funders also use more informal ways of auditing. These, however, do include an element of formalization. Both Sida and FBA use some form of follow up-meetings in order to monitor organizations continuously. For FBA, the follow up-meetings are used to get to know the organizations and gather information on how they function (Interview, Informant 10). For Sida, the follow up-meetings become a bit more complex as *the project* implies cooperation between multiple organizations. Thus, the follow up-meetings occur in different formats. In order to audit and control intermediary organizations, Sida deploys the strategy of "dialogue issues" to structure the discussions. One informant defines this audit strategy in the following way:

It works in such a way that we are supposed to identify dialogue issues, and [...] dialogue issues can be, either that we see that there is a weakness here, here we want to them to improve, we want to follow this in particular. We deem it so important that we want to put specific focus on that in the dialogue. Or it can also be that "wow, this was super exciting,

they are going to work in this innovative way, we want to follow that in particular”. So it can be both. Probably, there is a tendency to focus more on weaknesses as dialogue issues, but there is nothing saying that it has to be that way. So we follow them up, both at our yearly meetings and when we make assessments of... in connection to the assessment of their yearly reports. (Interview, Informant 2, my translation)

The dialogue issues often concern internal management and control, such as systems for channeling financial resources and systems for planning, monitoring and evaluation. The follow up of dialogue issues concerning internal management and control can be of detailed character. As an example, one follow-up meeting dedicates special attention to the deficiencies in one intermediary’s financial control of its partner organizations. Particularly, the shortcomings in documentation pertaining to auditing are discussed. The auditing process consists of determined steps that result in various forms of documentation, such as “management letters” (a statement by an auditor detailing the findings of an audit), and “management responses” (the auditee’s response to the management letter). During the follow-up meeting, the absence of management letters at partner level and the deficiencies of management responses are exemplified as problems for the funder and an incentive for the intermediary to ensure an adequate auditing process (Document 25, State funder). As described in the section on assembling appraisals, the particular role of the funder during these meetings is to conduct “control of control” (Power 1999), meaning that, in this case, the funder does not conduct an audit but aims to ensure that the intermediary conducts auditing according to a specific template.

Control of the partner organizations of the intermediaries is partly ensured through control of the internal systems of the intermediaries themselves, but sometimes more focused control interventions are conducted. Thus, Sida arranges follow-up visits to selected partner organizations as a form of spot check (Interview, Informant 1). As has been shown previously, particular support systems are mobilized in order to gather as much information as possible during the visits. A specific support system that is mobilized is a questionnaire that can be

used in order to ask suitable questions during visits. Sida argues that the aim of the questionnaire is to provide

a useful tool in the form of questions to ask and seek answers to. The questions are generic in nature and need to be specified and formulated based on the context and actor. It is not necessary to ask all the questions, they should rather be seen as inspiration and support. (Document 26, State funder:1)

Furthermore, the questionnaire is guided by a rights-based approach, meaning that four principles should permeate the activities supported by Sida (non-discrimination, participation, openness and transparency, and accountability). In order to concretize this further, the questionnaire suggests the “PLANET checklist” as an adequate instrument for ensuring the impact of a rights-based approach. The acronym “PLANET” stands for participation, link to human rights systems, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and transparency. The questionnaire is then structured according to which aspect of “PLANET” is relevant for each question. For example, under the heading “Achievement of results, sustainability and risk”, the following can be read (Document 26, State funder:5):

Figure 4.7 Example of questions for follow-up visits

	PLANET
Are there conditions for following up the results of the intervention through performance and process indicators that capture what and how the program has ensured the target group’s participation in the intervention?	P, A, T

Hence, in this question that is intended to ensure the follow up of results, three aspects of “PLANET” are deemed relevant: participation, accountability and transparency. Again, as demonstrated previously, the mobilization of support systems, expressed in pedagogical documents, is common also in the auditing process.

Externally-organized audit

While the previous analysis serves to illustrate the funder's own regular audit, there is also another form of audit that can be classified as external evaluation. This form of audit is also subject to a more formalized process. In the following, I, firstly, describe how external evaluation is organized in a context of outsourcing, and secondly, describe the characteristics and possible inherent tensions of evaluation processes.

Organizing evaluation in a context of outsourcing

Many activities in development aid are outsourced on external consultants who undertake a variety of tasks in the life of *the project*, from implementation in which they act as advisors, trainers and project leaders, to audit in which they play the role of evaluators and researchers (Borda-Rodriguez and Johnson 2013). As stated before, the following analysis focuses on how evaluation services are organized. Here, it is primarily the interaction between state (in the form of Sida) and consultants that is in focus, as consultants are contracted by the state to make evaluations. However, civil society organizations are always present as their ability to implement *the project* is often subject to evaluation. There is an additional focus here on auditing in intermediary civil society organizations.

The outsourcing of evaluation services is based on so-called framework agreements. Framework agreements are the result of a competitive tendering process which gives a number of consultant companies right to compete for assignments against a limited number of competitors at a later stage (Document 27, State funder). These framework agreements are not only limited to evaluation services, but also govern the provision of expertise in other areas, such as results-based management or thematic knowledge. One of the principal architects for organizing evaluation services through framework agreements offers the following motive for this mode of organization:

Since I was head of the evaluation unit and was the person responsible for the procurement of the framework agreements, one motive for these procurement processes was for the consultancy firms to feel a little bit more secure, they have three-year contracts, they know they will get assignments even if one of the clients... if there is a unit at Sida that procures an evaluation and is not satisfied with it, still new assignments will come in from Sida as a whole so to speak. (Interview, Informant 24, my translation)

Thus, a reason for organizing evaluation services in the form of framework agreements is to offer security to the consultancy firms themselves. The procurement of evaluation services under framework agreements starts with a “call-off” sent out to the companies having a framework contract. To the evaluation assignment must be attached a “terms of reference” (ToR), in which the procurer describes how the evaluation is to be carried out and the skills and competencies required. The ToR is expected to describe the aim of the evaluation, desired methodology, time schedule and desired skills of the evaluation team (Document 28, State funder).

In order to respond to the call-off with a high-quality tender, the consultant companies organize themselves in specific ways. Framework agreements in evaluation are not primarily granted to individual companies but to consortia, that is, a group of firms with a leading company. After a call-off has been announced, actors in the consortia often report interest to the leading actor who appoints a team leader that is deemed suitable for writing a tender (Interview, Informant 27). One informant describes the role of the team leader in the tendering process:

When you are a team leader it means that when xx (the leading consultant company in the consortium), decides to appoint you, then you get the full responsibility to... I call this risk money... you are supposed to write the tender, you are supposed to find team members, you negotiate with them about budgets, you have to develop the method. These tendering processes are quite large, [...] depending on the nature of the assignment, it takes probably five to seven working days to write a tender and then you can win or lose. In this case, you have only one competitor on Sida’s framework agreement, [...] if there are other framework agreements or if it’s an open procurement, then you can have five competitors, or ten, or twenty. (Interview, Informant 27, my translation)

Consequently, the process of designing a tender is a laborious effort. Because of the often detailed requirements on knowledge and experience, finding adequate consultants that have the right CV is a heavy task:

Sometimes the assignments say... they have a different level of detail, they can be from one page up to thirty pages. So, it states what you need to fulfill, sometimes you look for... often we look for external consultants, it's very controlled, CV-driven, thus, it says something like: "you should have experience of evaluations in human rights, at least five years experience, experience with working with civil society, [knowledge in] French, experience of the Arab region". [...] And then you can say that you look for people ticking the boxes. (Interview, Informant 27, my translation)

This is an illustrative example of the general situation that a tender needs to tick the boxes in order to fulfill various formal requirements. One informant, though, describes a high-quality tender in a way that can be understood as an even more specific search for what is "right": "And that's the basis for the one they choose, the right person, the right method, the right understanding of the assignment, these are the basic things that you have to do right" (Interview, Informant 26, my translation). A successful tender is not only a tick-box exercise but is also about showing the ability to adapt the proposal according to what is considered "right".

A tender, then, is subject to assessment which is a formalized endeavor. Each requirement, for example the quality of the team leader and the participants in the team, the proposed time plan and methodology and price, is subjected to an assessment which results in a qualitative and quantitative scoring of the different proposals:

It's a procurement manual [which] says something like: "we will do the assessment in the following way", and then there is a table: The team-leader's experience in relation to the requirements, twenty percent, method, twenty percent, time plan, twenty percent, the suitability of the team members, twenty percent. Then you weigh that against the price, quality is often eighty percent and price is twenty, and there is a way to weigh this, so every tender gets a score and there is [...] an assessment table in which Sida completes all information, strengths and weaknesses. And then the percentages are converted into scores which are sent to all the tenderers, and in the best case scenario, if it's well formulated, [you

get an explanation] why you got so-so many points [...], so you really can find out why you win or lose. And everyone gets the same information at the same time and you can appeal to the administrative court. (Interview, Informant 27, my translation)

Conducting the evaluation – an interplay between conflict and alignment

While the previous analysis illustrates the organization of the provision of evaluation services, the aim here is to explore how evaluation as a case of auditing is conducted.

Evaluation assignments are often governed by a specific set of questions that the evaluation should be able to answer. These questions often originate in the OECD/DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance: relevance, cost efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability (Document 28, State funder). These criteria are often operationalized in specific questions that require a systematic approach to evaluation. It is therefore common for evaluations to draw on scientific approaches. This is apparent in how an evaluation is conducted and reported and what quality criteria are applied to the process. This process of fulfilling a scientific ideal is, however, fraught with tensions and difficulties. The scientific process that consultants try to follow includes using previous research, using scientific methodology in data collection and analysis and presenting findings in a clear and transparent fashion. Many consultants aim for using previous research used in the specific subject areas for an evaluation, but time and resources are often constraining factors. The assignments can be of very short-term character. Since many consultants are not academics with an institutional affiliation, it is difficult to get access to the latest research published in specific scientific journals. This influences the level of rigor of evaluations:

We try to be methodologically rigorous when we can, but it's something that... resources are required in order to work scientifically and... perhaps the greatest shortcoming is that we don't have the possibility to... understand and benefit from the research in a particular subject matter, like for example, [if] we want to look at what works with regard

to capacity development [...], we can't get access to research on that subject because we don't have these expensive... [we can't] get access to scientific articles that you need to pay a large amount of money for. So it often happens that we look more at gray literature [...] [and] other evaluations and what they have said. But often this becomes a limitation, that you don't have the time to do a proper literature review, even if you would have access to that kind of literature, and then it becomes kind of... perhaps you look at some reports, but doing something more rigorous, which is a background to, partly, what is known in the particular context when this specific intervention is being implemented... it often turns out in such a way that you... only read project documentation and [...] that's really not enough. (Interview, Informant 30, my translation)

In order to answer the evaluation questions, consultants also try to implement some form of data collection process inspired by scientific approaches. The assignment is subject to interpretation so that a functioning research design can be constructed. One informant's preferred method is to start with a "stakeholder analysis", that is, a form of analysis that seeks to distinguish target groups for *the project* that should be targeted for some form of data collection. The data collection methods are of varied character, from web surveys to interviews and focus groups (Interview, Informant 27). Ensuring the validity of findings is also of great importance, leading to the use of triangulation, meaning a method of acquiring confirmatory statements through the use of various sources (Interview, Informant 26). The presentation of findings should also follow a scientific model. Informants talk about being clear about how strong the evidence is for particular conclusions and that these must be backed up by a large quantity of sources (documents, interviewees) (Interview, Informant 27). One informant stresses the importance of clarity in the writing of the evaluation report:

There you have to be, speaking of being scientific, very, very objective, using footnotes, statement, footnote, statement, footnote, so [...] all findings, that is, what you find in the evaluation and the conclusions and recommendations... it must cohere, must be strongly backed up by facts, and what people have told you, you know. (Interview, Informant 27, my translation)

In order to ensure the quality of evaluations, consultants draw on a variety of resources, such as different quality standards set by

international institutions (Interview, Informant 30) and rules for conducting sound scientific research. One informant argues that methodology books used at university can be useful even for evaluations. The informant especially mentions *Social Research Methods* by Alan Bryman, a standard textbook in many university-level courses, as important:

Yeah, I read Bryman, I have it here, I use it very much to look things up, I have it both in Swedish and in English [...] since I don't have a research [background]... well, I have taken some short research courses, but I read a lot about these things at the moment, validity and reliability, so we use those concepts and try to... there is more and more of that, absolutely. (Interview, Informant 27, my translation)

The use of strict scientific methodology is not popular among all consultants, however, especially among those professionals coming from a practitioner background. One informant articulates resistance against the scientification of evaluations and professes to be “wholeheartedly tired of it”, but still tries to make his work appear scientific (Interview, Informant 26).

The use of a scientific approach is not a guarantee for a friction-less process. It is rather a process enmeshed in different forms of power relations. Evaluation appears as a powerful tool; as an instrument for punishment, questioning and legitimization. In order to illustrate the tensions and conflicts of evaluation processes, I return to the example briefly alluded to in the section on the assembly of appraisals in which there was a description of an externally-organized evaluation being used as evidence to substantiate claims about the quality of an intermediary organization and its organizational structure. To reiterate, the evaluation was commissioned by Sida in conjunction with an appraisal of the application for multi-year funding of the organization. The focus of the evaluation was the specific collaboration model of the organization which is characterized by the channeling of financial resources in multiple steps (Document 16, Consultancy firm). As I conducted interviews in the organization, the evaluation had recently been completed and the process described by informants provides an opportunity to explore the power relations nested in an

evaluation process. One informant at the intermediary being targeted by the evaluation describes it as the continuation of a series of audits that served a function of punishment:

The last audits commissioned by Sida [and] which we have been subject to, it has almost been the opposite, it has become like a punishment: “we will look and look until we find something so we can deflect you, huh”, and then it’s not this partnership that we had wished for, that we thought we had. Instead it’s more like “now we’re going to put you on the spot”. (Interview, Informant 17, my translation)

Other informants also highlighted their view of the evaluation as rigged in the sense that the funder wanted to pinpoint particular predefined deficiencies (Interview, Informant 15). The results of the evaluation became subject to intense debate among the funder as giver of the assignment, the intermediary as subject to the evaluation and the consultant company as implementer of the evaluation. The rocky road to the written final product is described by one informant, representing the organization being subject to evaluation:

Then, the Sida desk officer and someone else who was responsible commented on the [consultants’] draft report [and] they questioned their results [...]. We got, then, the opportunity to read [...] their response to the critique where they say: “we don’t agree with Sida here [...] and it’s strange to be questioned on this point and so on and so forth. But we can adjust a little and tone down our writing and do this and that”. So in one way, there was an adjustment to our disadvantage, so to speak, [...], of those Sida comments. (Interview, Informant 15, my translation)

The illuminating aspect of this description is that the final evaluation report is a product of negotiation and struggle. In fact, the entire evaluation process can be seen as occurring in a context of struggle. This brief example serves to illustrate how evaluation processes, although resting on scientific principles, are fraught with conflicts and that evaluation as a form of knowledge production in relation to *the project* is never a smooth process. Successful knowledge production, exemplified by this evaluation process, is about convincing others and winning battles as much as it is about producing and presenting facts.

But is there a way for conflicts and tensions to be foreseen and overcome? An evaluation process is also characterized by the deployment of various strategies that serve to deflect possible conflicts and tensions. Firstly, the evaluation process is divided into particular phases, and the first one which is called the “inception phase” serves to clarify the aims and methods of an evaluation. In this phase, the assignment is concretized through a discussion with the giver of the assignment, the subject of the evaluation and the consultants. This phase ends with an inception report detailing the method and the data collection procedures:

Typically, an evaluation is divided into three phases, an inception period, we call it, then it's about... what is stated in the tender should be specified according to the specific context because when you write the tender, you can have access to project documentation but it's not certain that you always have that, it's sort of a reading phase, that you meet with... let's say that we will evaluate... we do that a lot, we evaluate projects implemented by civil society organizations, [financed by] Sida money, then there is a phase when you meet... yeah, perhaps meet the Sida desk officer responsible for the project and then you meet [...] the person responsible at the civil society organization and discuss the assignment, what is it that they want to focus on, [...], how has the program progressed, is it something specific that the Sida desk officer can say already now that this and that have already happened so that's not good, or to look closer at something else. And then you specify also... you get information about where the project has been implemented, what target group, in order to develop the method according to what has actually happened on the ground [...]. And then you write an inception report [in which you write] what we have found out about the program so far [...] and that's why we will proceed in the following manner, and you develop the method a little more, [...], like, we will interview these people, we will read these documents, we will use these interview tools, and we will do this type of analysis and so on. (Interview, Informant 30, my translation)

One informant refers to this as “expectation management”, meaning that the inception phase serves the purpose of clarifying expectations on what can actually be delivered so as to avoid problems at the end of the process (Interview, Informant 30). In order to maintain a common picture of an assignment and ensure that everyone agrees that an evaluation is on the right track, there are also different forms of debriefings as the process goes along (Interview, Informant 30).

Furthermore, there are actors and systems that can be mobilized to solve possible conflicts and avoid contradictions and tensions. For example, in this triad of stakeholders constituting the evaluation process – the state as a giver of an assignment, the organization being subject to evaluation and the consultants as evaluators – there are mechanisms in place to ensure that the work can go on smoothly. One source of tension in the evaluation process is recommendations. The recommendations given by consultants are often subject to intense discussions because of the possible implications they might have. The state can have a constructive role in trying to solve these tensions. Sida, here, has a central evaluation function that works as a mediator when possible conflicts arise around recommendations, often to ensure the independent assessment of the consultants:

It can often be that Sida or the implementing partner don't like the recommendation and there our broker role usually consists of saying that "this is the consultants' assignment and [they have] the right to formulate this type of recommendations, then you can do a management response, [...] where you explain why you don't agree on a particular recommendation. But the recommendation must remain". So, that's a discussion we often have with desk officers. (Interview, Informant 24, my translation)

In order to avoid recommendations being perceived as completely unexpected, there is a focus on conducting evaluations that are more about learning than accountability. One informant, thus, tells about a "softer" way of working which is characterized by tentative conclusions and recommendations being tested and discussed in a group format:

When the consultant works with the recommendations [we try] to do it in a workshop format, so that they do it together with the intended users, that they produce more tentative recommendations and get direct response in a workshop format, like "this is utter madness because we can't do that, because we have a rule against that", or "there is something to that but I don't understand what you mean, can you elaborate?" And then, there will be a better understanding of the recommendations and in the end a better management response. (Interview, Informant 24, my translation)

Hence, this is a form of anchoring process that occurs in interplay with the stakeholders so as to avoid the formulation of recommendations that are perceived as irrelevant or difficult to understand.

The evaluation is, however, not always possible to manage in this way. Going back to the power of evaluations, the result of evaluations is not always consensus-based. The case referred to above shows that the evaluation ended in a non-consensus-based product. The immediate aftermath of the evaluation shows that such a process can result in unexpected and unintended effects. Part of the story was that the large-scale evaluation process resulted in such confusions and difficulties that the intermediary had to contract a new set of consultants to disentangle what should happen:

Now, we've had such difficulties with Sida, they have these conditions that we feel that we can't understand or live up to. So, we have made a call-off for consultants in order to help us sort out the way forward, also to use a little of what we hope Sida can listen to, that some independent party having independent eyes is involved [...] and we could've done this ourselves but in this situation we don't believe that Sida... they don't listen to us, and then we have to use someone else. (Interview, Informant 14, my translation)

Concluding summary – An auditing process without a center

The assembly of auditing is characterized by a multiplicity of strategies deployed to ensure adequate auditing, both regular auditing and evaluation. In the empirical material, it is primarily the state that initiates auditing, but in practice, it draws on various sources of expertise to make it happen. This expertise is in itself assembled. Firstly, a market with clear rules for consultants is assembled in order to choose the “right” experts. Secondly, they mobilize a form of expertise that is assembled by drawing on scientific approaches.

The fragility of assembling becomes more palpable in the auditing process. Although the evaluation process appears as being transparent and clear, with an organized market and use of a scientific approach, it is also fragile since the assembling occurs within particular power relations. Although the process can be safeguarded by ensuring

consensus among stakeholders about the aims and methods, it is an unpredictable process since the evaluation can never escape power relations and negotiations.

Concluding discussion – *The project as a result of translation*

The above analysis reveals that *the project* is a product of different elements being drawn together. In this discussion, which concludes the first analytical chapter, I aim to clarify how *the project* is a product of different practices of translation. Bearing in mind Clarke et al.'s (2015) notion that translation implies the adaptation of meanings into new contexts and registers, I want to highlight how this practice operates to a great extent as *the project* is constructed. In the assembly of applications, meticulous labor is invested in interpreting requirements and finding ways to align both organizational goals and distant cooperation partners with the technical instructions attached to application instructions. The transfer of meanings is particularly visible in the adaptation to an application language, comprising both the use of a specific vocabulary and the invention of an attractive “tone”. In the assembly of appraisals, various support systems are created in order to lend objectivity to the process. Here, expertise in the form of standards and benchmarks is used to simplify the assessment process according to universal categories. In this way, the appraisal process is transferred into a managerial framework of understanding.

Various adaptations are, furthermore, present in the assembly of implementation and reporting. In order to fulfill the scientific requirements, *the project* is built on the production of evidence in order to legitimize its thematic focus. Similarly, the assembly of reports requires the mobilization of a linguistic and cognitive register focusing on measurable results and financial calculations. The assembly of implementation and reporting, however, displays different tensions, as the scientific approach elicits conflicts and contradictions. Therefore, different forms of expertise - produced, discussed and tested in knowledge exchange platforms and experimental labs – are translated into the making of *the project*. Finally, the assembly of auditing is

dependent on the subjection of *the project* to a logic of auditing and evaluation. This, in turn, requires imagining *the project* as existing in a market which can regulate the expertise needed to audit it.

In conclusion, for *the project* to come to life and sustain itself in its different life phases, constant translation work is needed. The adaptation of language and tone, the incorporation of expertise, and the transfer of *the project* into a managerial framework of understanding are all operations requiring laborious translation work.

5 (De)stabilizing *the project*

While the previous chapter mobilizes the concept of translation to identify practices of sense-making, interpretation and transfer of meanings, I now turn to using this concept in order to investigate how these processes and practices also play a (de)stabilizing function. Thus, the aim is to explore how *the project* as an assemblage on the one hand takes on consistency through processes of *stabilization* that “hold components together, secure the internal coherence of assemblages and underline the constant *labor* needed to (re)connect heterogeneous components” (Briassoulis 2019:426). On the other hand, however, this consistency is always fragile and threatened by processes of *destabilization* that subvert order and consistency. The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to show how *the project* is subject to stabilization as well as destabilization.

Processes of stabilization – Taming complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty

Assemblages are always coming apart as much as coming together, so their existence in particular configurations is something that must be continually *worked at*. (McCann 2011:145)

An assemblage is not the result of an inevitable and automatic pulling together of elements. Rather it takes tremendous work to make sometimes contradictory elements come together (Li 2007a). In addition, maintenance work, or even “repair” is necessary for *the project* to be kept intact and hold its elements together (Bueger 2018; Ureta 2015). In this section, I analyze how *the project* is made possible through processes of stabilization, characterized by attempts to create order and coherence. With stabilization guiding this part of the analysis, I explore the variegated set of human practices, repertoires and nonhuman elements that are assembled for *the project* to achieve a provisional consistency. The following sections are structured by using the concept of brokerage as a way of showing how different elements are aligned with each other to give *the project* its coherence.

Stabilization through brokerage

Development interventions can be considered as being implemented by actors who seek to cooperate under thoroughly heterogeneous conditions (Rottenburg 2009). This is true for *the project*: actors with possibly divergent interests must be made to cooperate under unpredictable contextual conditions; a plethora of bureaucratic requirements must be dealt with, ranging from application to report writing and auditing; and possible conflicts and contradictions related to these requirements must be glossed over. How is order and coherence accomplished in such a situation? In the following, I analyze how both particular human practices and nonhuman artifacts are assembled to create order and stabilize *the project*.

Human brokers straddling social worlds

In the preceding chapter, it becomes apparent that for different requirements to be fulfilled, multiple parties must be made to contribute with their parts for *the project* to follow the desirable path. In every stage of the assembly of *the project*, there are efforts made by particular actors to “forge alignments”, as Li (2007a) calls it. This is the work of *the broker* who performs tasks of interpretation, translation and coordination. Using a Deleuzo-Guattarian concept, the broker can be likened to what they call the “operator”, a component which is so “contingently well placed in an assemblage that its power to alter the direction or function of the whole is unusually great” (Bennett 2010:42). The broker’s role as an operator should not be understood as a central programmer of the assemblage but rather a component in the assemblage which incites change in order to create functioning alignments. Let me go back to the preceding chapter to illustrate various cases of how brokers use their operator role to stabilize *the project*.

In the analysis of the assembly of applications, I highlight the challenge of writing applications when the interested parties are distanced from each other both physically and organizationally. In this process,

particular actors emerge as facilitators of teamwork, keeping together the writing process by requesting information from partners and translating it into predetermined templates. In addition, particular actors can perform the function of quality assurers and act as “sounding boards” in relation to partners. The assembly of applications is also dependent on actors dedicating time to interpretation work and making well-balanced considerations. Being in an application market with a multiplicity of possible funders, relevant funds have to be identified and assessments need to be made about whether the available staff and financial resources are sufficient to engage with a particular fund. During the writing of applications, there is work dedicated to interpreting the requirements and finding a suitable tone to attract funding. The writing process is dependent on actors performing a range of tasks to complete a competitive application: the interpretation of requirements in templates, the translation of specific concepts, the invention of an attractive tone by deploying a suitable language and the mediation between funders’ requirements and internal strategies and visions. A facilitator that emerges in this process is the consultant who plays an important role in introducing adequate models for project planning.

The assembly of implementation and reporting is characterized by meticulous calculations such as making well-balanced decisions about how to report and dedicating a significant amount of time to reflection on the “scientific problem”, that is, how to make *the project* measurable and how to establish causality and attribution. As in the assembly of applications, particular professionals emerge as responsible for collecting and compiling information as well as packaging it in a language suitable for funders and their specific reporting requirements. In order to reduce possible conflicts during evaluation processes, state representatives take on the role as brokers by creating platforms to anchor consultancy-based conclusions and recommendations.

These actors and professionals can be seen as brokers. These brokers appear as central assemblers (Koster and Leynseele 2018) and

translators who interpret needs, improvise with different linguistic registers and create new meanings (Campos and Zapata 2013; Mosse 2004, 2005). Although the broker can be found at particular working positions performing specific tasks, she does not act upon a strict and predetermined script but activates creative forms of translation in order to decrease heterogeneity and complexity. The concept of translation is often associated with language, and although language is important here as well, I argue that it is a more complex process than establishing a straightforward word-by-word correspondence as it entails the “active and selective process in which meanings are interpreted and reinterpreted to make them fit their new context” (Clarke et al. 2015:35). Translation in the form of brokerage entails something broader than mechanically switching between languages; it is about connecting different worlds and making them align with each other (Koster and Leynseele 2018). The alignment in, for instance, the assembly of applications and reporting is made possible by brokers acting as “hubs” for the collection and compilation of information. Intermediaries are central as hubs in these processes as they stand between organizationally different worlds – the world of the funder and the world of the partners – with the aim of collecting information and presenting a coherent story in applications and reports.

Latour (1987) calls these hubs “centers of calculation” which collect information from afar and inscribe them in standardized formats. The upholding of these centers of calculation requires that brokers display particular qualities. Firstly, they play the role of translating information into stipulated formats characterized by the use of a specific language. However, this is not only linguistic translation, meaning the mechanical friction-less translation into pre-established categories, but implies the transfer into new idioms, for example reducing visions and ideals to managerial speak in applications or transforming implemented activities into numerical language in reports. What happens in these centers of calculation, for example among civil society professionals standing between partners and funders, is the work of simplification and adaptation of information in order to make application and reporting more smooth in an elaborate

chain of actors. As Espeland and Stevens (2008:421) describe the role of the center of calculation:

“Raw” information typically is collected and compiled by workers near the bottom of organizational hierarchies; but as it is manipulated, parsed, and moved upward, it is transformed so as to make it accessible and amenable for those near the top who make the big decision.

However, and secondly, the task of upholding the center cannot be reduced to the use of a particular language. As brokers undertake the role of “sounding boards” and offer support during, for instance, the application process, they also establish trust which is an important mediation skill for assembly to take place. I interpret the role articulated by brokers as not establishing their authority but creating a relationship built on trust that facilitates the completion of different tasks. In this way, brokers should not be understood as powerful actors imposing their predetermined will on *the project*, but instead facilitators working creatively by inventing suitable languages and mediating between interests.

Consultants play a crucial role as brokers in the making of *the project*, as they partake in processes of framing, interpretation, legitimization and standardization which all contribute to the establishment of order and coherence. In the assembly of applications, the consultant’s role in meaning-making, which I come back to later, becomes apparent. Suffice it to say now that consultants play an important role in making meaning out of and translating models that can be incorporated in *the project*.

Documents as brokers

The broker described until now is human, embodied in aid professionals in certain roles who use their creative capacity to forge alignments between different social worlds. This creative function should, however, not be understood as being the exclusive domain of humans. I argue that this connection and alignment of worlds are also made possible by an engagement with material artifacts. These artifacts

are also operators in the sense that they have the possibility to make something happen in the process of assembly.

In the analysis of the assembly of the different phases of *the project*, documents play a pivotal role: application documents state the goals of a particular intervention, reports describe the accomplishments, templates govern how applications and reports should be organized, professionals document their work through various informal logbook systems, handbooks are used as support systems and so on. The list can go on to demonstrate the “paperization” (Bornemark 2018) characterizing international development. There has been a focus in research on studying documents as vessels for carrying meaning, leading to excessive efforts dedicated to looking *through* paperwork rather than *at* it (Hull 2012:12). Rather, documents should be seen as artifacts having their own agency, functioning as mediators and “techniques for inter-esting” (Freeman and Maybin 2011:159). Hence, just as human brokers facilitate the connection of worlds, documents too display this capacity. In the following, I illustrate this point by deepening the analysis of the templates described in the preceding chapter, but this time I show how the very structure and graphic organization of documents contribute to forging alignments with human actors. Furthermore, documents help coding *the project* according to a simplified grid that encourages logical and rational thinking (cf. Scott 1998).

As mentioned above, many types of documents circulate through the assembly of the different stages of *the project*. One specific document that I want to highlight here is the *template*. In the preceding chapter, I dedicate some space to a description of the role of the template in the assembly of applications as I briefly analyze the way the constitution of these documents calls for a specific engagement by aid professionals who must do laborious work in deciphering them. These templates return in other phases of *the project*, most notably in the assembly of reporting. My aim here is to deepen the analysis of templates, specifically application templates. The way that the templates are structured and organized has a pivotal influence on how human actors

fill them with content, thereby facilitating the process of deciphering. Thus, the template is what Riles (2006:20) calls a “self-contextualizing entity: the gaps in the form to be filled in contain within themselves all the terms of analysis one would need to understand or complete them”.

The specific application template referred to in the preceding chapter has a particular organization that makes it self-contextualizing. The template has a graphic organization (Hull 2012), visible in the use of boxes and delimited spaces, calling for a particular response. For instance, in the beginning of the template, there are some questions that only require a tick in a “yes” or “no” box. Many times, the answers are self-evident if the applicant organization wants a fair chance in competing for funding. For example, one question is: “For associations: is the association democratic, does it have active members, does it conduct regular activities in which regular meetings and functions such as board elections and statutes are included?” (Document 1, Civil society organization:1, my translation). Attached to this question are two boxes where the applicant can give an affirmative or a negative answer. The template also requests that the applicants give information that shows evidence of its organizational status. Thus, information about juridical status and possible tax debts is requested. In the boxes in which *the project* should be described according to specific headings, the issue of space is important. Although the boxes can be increased or decreased (through an automatic function meaning that the space grows as the applicant types), they are meant to be perceived as limited, making it clear to the applicant that the description must be written in a concise manner. In order to emphasize that conciseness is key, there is a page limit included in the instructions at the top of the template.

The graphic organization strengthens the agency of the template, but there is also another aspect giving it its self-contextualizing characteristic: the focus on pedagogical instructions. While each part of the template has a specific space to be filled with content, it always begins with a question or instruction guiding the applicant in the interpretation of what is requested. For instance, under the heading on “Expected results”, the following question works as guidance for the

applicant: “What type of results are expected from the activities, that is, what outputs do you expect?” (Document 1, Civil society organization:7, my translation). Furthermore, under the heading on “Indicators”, there is an instruction that these should be “concrete and relatively specific and are used to measure if the expected results of the project have been accomplished” (Document 1, Civil society organization:8, my translation).

I argue that the graphic organization of the template, in the form of boxes and delimited spaces, as well as the pedagogical instructions given under the respective headings, contain specific clues on what is expected of the applicants in terms of writing. The aesthetic organization of the template functions as a way of mobilizing actors into providing the requested text. The instructive questions, the delimited spaces under each heading, and “tick-box exercises” create conditions for the applicant to give concise and coherent answers that deploy a particular management language and focus on central topics such as measurability and auditability (Thedvall 2018b, 2019). Accordingly, templates have an agentic function in that they elicit human action. In addition, like human brokers, they also connect different social worlds with each other. Templates are often used as central communication instruments *between* actors. For example, in chains of financing in which intermediaries and partner organizations are connected, application and reporting templates can be used to connect these distant worlds with each other and let intermediaries and partner organizations communicate through them. In this way, the template as an artifact can do the “job” of connecting different organizational worlds, without relying too much on humans steering the process of communication. In addition, templates are able to engage humans into being transparent as the questions they pose have the effect of laying bare the organization for scrutiny.

The existence of documents as artifacts floating around in *the project* actualizes their material character. I want to stress that these templates, despite their function as self-contextualizing entities, do not elicit human action in a deterministic manner. As with human action,

nonhuman artifacts should not be given a higher ontological status. Rather, I understand the agentic character of material artifacts similarly to Bennett who argues that we should not attribute unequivocal agency to nonhuman agents, but rather acknowledge that “agency itself is located in the complex interinvolvement of humans and multiple nonhuman actants which together form an effective assemblage” (Khan 2009:102). Thus, the templates described here have indeed a strong agency that contributes to aligning actors, but human actors actively engage with them, locating agency always in a “human-non-human collective” (Khan 2009:101).

In conclusion, the coherence of *the project* is made possible through the active labor of creating functioning alignments. This labor is carried out by human brokers as well as through nonhuman artifacts. In this way, the coherence of *the project* is accomplished not by central programming but by the laborious work of human and nonhuman artifacts creating coherence by offering particular frames of interpretation that can be used to complete various tasks in *the project*.

Stabilization through calculation and standardization

Mosse (2011), drawing on Craig and Porter, states that current policy models in international development are “travelling rationalities” that assert “the universal over the particular, the travelled over the placed, the technical over the political and the formal over the substantive” (Craig and Porter 2006:120). Evidently, these travelling rationalities give consistency to *the project* as they contribute to translating and subsuming its particularity in universal frameworks of understanding. Below, I illustrate how universality is established by delving deeper into quantitative calculation and travelling models.

Subjecting the project to calculation – The performativity of numbers

That number must rule, that the imperative must be: “count!”– who doubts this today? (Badiou 2008:1)

The calculating exactness of practical life which has resulted from a money economy corresponds to the ideal of natural science, namely that of transforming the world into an arithmetical problem and of fixing every one of its parts in a mathematical formula. It has been money economy which has thus filled the daily life of so many people with weighing, calculating, enumerating, and the reduction of qualitative values to quantitative terms. (Simmel 1903 in Mitchell 2002:80)

Over the last decades, scholars in various disciplines have noted that calculation, measurement and quantification are characteristics of Western modernity. Here, there are various works dealing with the coding of reality in calculated and quantified schemes of organization. Scott's (1998:3) seminal work shows that the state has played a pivotal role in implementing massive projects of social engineering in which the complexities of human life are rationalized and standardized "into a legible and administratively more convenient format". The mobilization of calculation and measurement have been important techniques in this work of "state simplifications" (Scott 1998:4). Mitchell (2002) shows that the production of "the economy" as an object of thought has been made possible through the invention of mathematical calculation tools, introduced by economists. Others have pointed out how statistics and "indicator culture" work as technologies of power encouraging self-management and self-regulation (Merry 2016; Rose 1991). Crampton and Elden (2006) argue that calculation can refer to quantification and the use of numbers as well as qualitative "group management" evident in practices of measuring, ranking and ordering. Calculative practices are widely activated in order to give *the project* its coherence and render it legible in a particular quantified and measurable format.

The assembly of the phases of *the project* builds on various forms of quantification as meaning-making activities. The assembly of applications and reporting is characterized by palpable examples of quantification. As *the project* is planned during the application phase, activities, indicators and expected results are translated into numbers. An example covered in the preceding chapter is the use of specific work plans in which planned activities are described by establishing how many participants are expected to participate in a given activity and

also a corresponding empty column in which the actual number can be added after the activity has been implemented. In the reporting process, this column can be filled with the correct numbers of implemented activities (see Figure 5.1). This means that parts of the reporting process only rely on numerical language to report on results. In order to prepare for reporting, professionals also gather the number of activities implemented.

The assembly of appraisals and auditing is also, to a varying degree, subjected to quantification. In an example of a risk analysis made by the funder, a traffic light system complemented with a number system is used. In addition, the auditing process relies on numbers, an example being the assessment of tenders which builds on the grading of proposals according to numbers. Another aspect of quantification is that of commensuration. Commensuration is, according to Espeland and Sauder (2007:16) “the transformation of qualities into quantities that share a metric”. Commensuration is particularly visible in the assembly of reporting in which the planned activities can be compared to the actually implemented ones. Thus, for instance, an ideal number of participants for a seminar expressed in an application can be compared to the actual number in the report. In the activity matrix referred to in the preceding chapter, numbers are used for the sake of comparing planned and implemented activities (see Figure 5.1). The matrix describes the quantity of seminars/workshops for a given activity and the number of men and women expected to participate as well as the actual number of participants.

Figure 5.1 Numbers in activity matrix

Activities	Target			Actual			Date Implemented	Remarks		
	Qty	Participants		Qty	Participants					
		M	F		T	M			F	T
Seminars/Workshops										
BENIN										
1. Celebration of the women's day and conference	1	10	20	30	1	09	21	30	16/03/2017	
2. IUF OSH Day celebration	1	0	10	10	1	0	21	21	13/04/2017	
3. Planning workshop for 2018-2022	1	5	10	15	1	5	10	15	18-19/04/2017	
4. Training seminar on the strategies to promote women in trade unions	1	10	20	30	1	10	20	30	28-29/06/2017	
5. Seminar on gender and female leadership: a way to change the trade union movement	1	10	20	30	1	10	20	30	17-18/08/2017	
6. Seminar on the struggle against gender based violence in the world of work	1	10	20	30	1	10	20	30	16-17/11/2017	
Sub-total	6	45	100	145	6	44	112	156		

Furthermore, indicators play a central role for the quantification of *the project*. As they are used to control if activities have resulted in the accomplishment of goals, they are often quantified. In the analysis of application templates in the previous chapter, indicators are often expressed in a quantitative fashion, such as number of people participating in a given activity or the level of knowledge being increased, expressed in percentages. An indicator is, thus, important in order to reduce complexities in *the project* as it

provides a transition from ambiguity to certainty; from theory to fact; and from complex variation and context to truthful, comparable numbers. In other words, the political process of judging and evaluating is transformed into a technical issue of measurement and counting by the diligent work of experts. (Merry 2011:88)

Consequently, calculation in various forms plays an important role in how the homogeneity of *the project* is strengthened. It is important to stress that quantitative calculation is performative and creates (not merely reflects) reality in a certain way that makes possible particular uses and interpretations (Desrosières 1998). The reduction of activities into numbers makes possible circulation and mobility. Reporting implemented activities in numbers allows these to be abstracted from their contexts and circulate widely throughout the chain of reporting. It is not difficult to imagine the above table being abstracted from its context and circulated as an example of accomplished results as well as being incorporated in other reports.

The way numbers are organized and presented also invites re-interpretation and re-contextualization (Espeland and Sauder 2007). The way *the project* is assembled through quantification and numbering, for instance through transparent descriptions of activities in templates or presentational tables like the one above, makes possible different forms of re-contextualization. One such re-contextualization is involved when conclusions are drawn about the success of implementation. A table like the one above makes possible various analytical operations. It is possible to compare ideal to reality and make conclusions about whether *the project* has been successful in relation to a given goal. In addition, it is possible to make comparisons between

individual development efforts and possibly establish hierarchies between successful and “failed” efforts. However, the messy conditions of production of these numbers, and the rendering of them as “facts”, are concealed in the sense that processes such as possibly controversial discussions regarding what and how to measure are invisible from the person reading such a table.

In conclusion, numbers and quantification can have a material function of eliciting human action in the form of re-interpretation and re-contextualization. Although they condense information and decrease ambiguity, numbers also invite further reflection and analysis in the form of, for instance, comparisons.

Travelling models – Following global forms

One way of making stabilization visible is to concentrate on the avalanche of acronyms and abbreviations used to denote the organization of *the project*: RBM, LFA, RBA, MANGO, Do No Harm, AAR, SMART, PLANET. All these abbreviations and acronyms represent models for managing a wide variety of tasks associated with *the project*, such as planning, integration of thematic priorities and auditing. Behrends, Park and Rottenburg (2014:1–2) define a model as “an analytical representation of particular aspects of reality created as an apparatus or protocol for interventions in order to shape this reality for certain purposes”. These models are bundles carrying an overall mindset as well as material technologies and specialized vocabularies. Models are illustrative examples of how *the project* is made coherent as they are important repertoires to draw on in order to reduce complexity. However, these models are not appropriated by rational actors who impose them on *the project*; rather they are rendered mobile and translated through subtle means. In the following, I return to the assembly of the different phases of *the project* and explore how different models are activated in order to create consistency. In this exploration, I also deem it important to analyze *how* they are rendered mobile and made to travel in *the project*.

In the assembly of application and reporting, the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) appears as an important model both to present a transparent plan and to use as a template for reporting in a later stage. LFA comes with a specialized vocabulary and material incarnations that can be applied to *the project* regardless of its focus. The vocabulary is characterized by the use of a specific nomenclature including concepts such as goals, activities, indicators and expected results. LFA often also comes with material artifacts, such as matrixes, templates and handbooks. In this way, the LFA works as a repertoire of tangible tools that can be used to act upon reality. It provides professionals with a script through which *the project* can be made manageable. Thus, LFA is a standardized tool which makes possible the reduction of a complex reality into a simplified grid (Martinez and Cooper 2020).

While LFA is used in the application and reporting process, there are other types of models that are installed in the other phases of *the project*. For instance, there are models for the purpose of auditing and assessment, such as MANGO and After Action Review (AAR), as well as instructions for integrating a rights-based and conflict sensitive approach (RBA and Do-No Harm). These come with a specific vocabulary and are incorporated in written documents. The RBA principles, for instance, can be found in handbooks offering pedagogical instructions on how to appraise the level of sensitivity to these principles and are integrated in interview tools for making follow-up auditing.

Similarly, the MANGO model activates a calculation system based on traffic lights which is available through a multitude of sources. Additionally, there is a plethora of risk analysis models that work in a similar way as the MANGO model in the sense that they value risks according to traffic lights. I argue that the models referred to here can be understood as so-called “global forms” as “they have a distinctive capacity for decontextualization and recontextualization, abstractability and movement, across diverse social and cultural situations and spheres of life” (Ong and Collier 2005:11). Models like the ones referred to here have a potential of universal application which

means that they can be abstracted from a specific context and installed in new contexts. In this way, they are also illustrations of the “relations of exteriority” characterizing *the project*, meaning that components can be unplugged from a specific assemblage and re-installed in new ones (DeLanda 2006).

The movement and travel of these global forms are not, however, straightforward and are made possible through various translation activities by expert communities using different platforms and methods. In order to illustrate this, I return to the some specific parts of the analysis made in the preceding chapter. In the analysis of assembling applications, I describe how a model like LFA can be made mobile through the work of consultants. The role that models like LFA should play in the planning of *the project* is not self-evident. Although LFA as a model is a self-contextualizing bundle of rationalities, specialized vocabularies and material incarnations that contains clues on how they are to be used (as described in the section on documents as nonhuman brokers) (cf. Riles 2006), I argue that human brokers actively make them comprehensible and translatable²⁵. By referring to an interview with a consultant specializing in offering training to various stakeholders in LFA (see Chapter 4, “Mobilizing expertise for the use of mindsets and models”), I describe a special way of working that I argue facilitates the travel of the model. The consultant deploys pedagogical training sessions coupled with an emphasis of the model’s generic character as a way of softly introducing it to various stakeholders. By working in this way, the consultant’s role in meaning-making becomes apparent as s/he is able to decipher and make sense of the model for a broader audience. The consultant, thus, is able to translate the intricacies of the model in a pedagogical setting and align the audience to it (cf. Mosse and Lewis 2006).

²⁵When referring to how the LFA model is translated by brokers, I do not only refer to how the so-called logframe, the matrix often associated with LFA, is translated but mainly the specialized *thinking* associated with it, evident in the use of a specific set of concepts which encourages a particular way of thinking about reality.

In the assembly of implementation, other expert communities circulating different models appear. The common platforms referred to in the section on the assembly of implementation, such as the methods network and the experimental lab for testing methodologies, are important spaces for circulating and sharing pertinent knowledge. Here, civil society professionals are the main brokers connecting different parts of the development world to adequate models for organizational assessment, models for evaluation and adequate toolboxes for the integration of thematic priorities. The virtual constitution of some of these platforms are especially important as spaces for making models mobile, as they make possible the sharing of tool boxes and academic and practitioner-based papers. *The project* is, thus, a product of “parts of here and elsewhere” (McCann 2011:145), meaning that models with global reach as well as the always-situational translation of them make *the project* possible.

Different expert communities exploit so-called “interstitial spaces” (Behrends et al. 2014; Rottenburg 2009), in order to install different models in *the project*. The expert community referred to here – consultants and civil society professionals – are effective brokers as they are able to carry models around and install them in various ways. The interstitial spaces are the various “in-between spaces” in which brokers such as the ones described here are able to appropriate a model and translate it to fit a particular audience. According to Rottenburg (2009), interstitial spaces are not the origins of the model, nor zones for its implementation. The training offered by consultants and physical and virtual platforms for knowledge exchange are examples of what I consider interstitial spaces as models do not originate from them nor are implemented in them. Rather, they are spaces for the introduction and translation of models and their later implementation in other contexts. I argue that the specific incarnation of interstitial spaces are pivotal for the success of the dissemination of models. The more pedagogical and inviting the space, the more successful the transfer. The way consultants work with pedagogical workshops, and the way funders offer a permissive environment for testing

methodologies under experimental conditions, are central for the mobility of different models.

Returning to Mosse's (2011) statement that international development is characterized by "travelling rationalities", I argue that the models described here do not only carry a specialized vocabulary with material incarnations attached to them, but they also build on a particular rationality. This rationality is based on the starting point that *the project* as an objective entity can be subsumed into a universal framework of understanding characterized by the application of universal solutions. Accordingly, models are "proxies" carrying a specific rationality that is made to travel (Peck and Theodore 2015:224). Indeed, models as global forms should be seen as mobile bundles carrying specific rationalities, specialized vocabularies and material incarnations, ready to be abstracted and re-contextualized in various settings.

Scientific repertoires

Science, in a positivist form, is an important repertoire from which to draw in order to assemble *the project*. In the assembly of implementation, science is important in order for giving *the project* legitimacy. In order for civil society organizations to be able to advocate for particular solutions, they have to prove that societal problems exist objectively through thorough investigations built on scientific method. In the implementation phase, there is also much time dedicated to reflect on what I call "the scientific problem", that is, the thorough calculation of the logical trajectory of *the project*; determining the causal chain and establishing attribution for a particular intervention. The use of science also becomes palpable in the assembly of appraisal and auditing in which consultants deploy their expertise to give these processes a scientific character. When auditing and evaluating *the project*, consultants draw on scientific methods, such as literature reviews and data collection methods in order to answer the stipulated evaluation questions. Many support systems are available to make *the project* scientific. In order to make implementation scientific, networks

and experimental labs, which introduce scientific practices and make them available to a wider audience, are central. The assembly of auditing is made possible through scientific practices that are institutionalized in material artifacts, such as handbooks and textbooks on social science research.

I argue that two aspects of scientific repertoires are important to understand how they are activated. Firstly, the ontological and epistemological assumptions of positivist science work as an important starting point for the implementation and audit of *the project*. A central tenet of positivist science is that reality exists in an objective sense and that it can be known and measured without being “tainted” by the scholar. This assumption is widespread and can be interpreted as an important prerequisite to even think of *the project* as an objective entity that can be known, measured and evaluated. While the notion of an objective reality that can be accessed constitutes a basic premise for scientific repertoires, I also argue that the specific methodological tools available in the scientific toolbox are crucial. These are very concrete and mundane, and include tools such as literature reviews, various data collection methods (quantitative and qualitative), quality principles for “good” research (for instance reliability, validity, triangulation), transparent report writing and so on. Thus, scientific repertoires offer both the ontology and the epistemology for *the project* to be thought of as objectively existing as well as concrete methodological practices.

Stabilization through marketization

Markets should be viewed, first of all, as *concrete organizations* (that is, concrete market-places or bazaars) and this fact makes them assemblages made out of people and the material and expressive goods people exchange. (DeLanda 2006:17, my emphasis)

One way of giving *the project* consistency is to subject its various phases to marketization. There are various examples of marketization, and a starting point for understanding how this process contributes to order is to consider it as a form of assembly of markets. Here, I take inspiration from research on marketization as a process of active

market construction through the assembly of heterogeneous elements, such as “rules and conventions; technical devices, metrological systems; logistical infrastructures; texts; discourses; narratives [...]; [and] technical and scientific knowledge” (Çalışkan and Callon 2010:3). Thus, markets should not be understood as miraculously arising thanks to an invisible hand, but rather as the result of purposeful construction, implying the deployment of all the recently mentioned knowledges and artifacts. In the following, I discuss two examples of how markets are installed as forms of stabilization.

Assembling an application market

A first example of marketization is the installation of markets for the purpose of regulating the application process. The studied organizations are required to compete for funding, making the purposeful insertion of competition principles a characteristic feature of the application market. However, the degree of competition between organizations and the technologies used to regulate this competition vary. It is possible to discern three forms of competition being fostered. The smaller organizations based in the Western Balkans are subject to the most refined application process in terms of the level of competition. In the case of applying for funding from international organizations, the application process is regulated through calls for proposals. This process is divided into two steps. Firstly, the concept note phase, in which an initial project idea is described, and secondly, if the concept note is scored high enough, a full proposal that is subjected to assessment. Previous research has noted the efficiency of calls for proposals in the process of inculcating a competitive behavior in civil society organizations (İşleyen 2015; Knutsson 2014; Kurki 2011).

The smaller organization operating in Sweden and competing for funding from the government agency FBA is also subject to a competitive process, but the process is not divided into a two-part selection process. However, this process as well results in the inculcation of competitive behavior in the organization as people

working in it need to dedicate substantial time to subject themselves to the competitive character of funding. The larger intermediary organizations operate at the end of the competition continuum compared to the smaller organizations based in the Western Balkans, as they are subject to a less severe form of competition. They have the possibility to enter a framework agreement with Sida which gives them privileged access to a particular civil society fund. The process of being made eligible for framework agreement is subject to competitive application procedures, but once they have been granted the status of strategic partner organization (SPO), they have privileged access to funding. It is important to note, however, that the intermediaries still need to present regular formal applications to the funder. Thus, it seems that although they have been granted funding in advance, it is important to uphold an application market and thereby install artificial competition.

As indicated by this brief summary, the application market is characterized by different forms of marketization processes placing the studied organizations along a marketization continuum; those subject to a refined and detailed competition process and those subject to less severe competition. The application market is defined by clear design, as it is about installing competitive behavior among the civil society organizations. This occurs mainly through calls for proposals. However, there is also competition installed that is less severe, mainly through the use of framework agreements.

Assembling a consultancy market

The consultancy market, which is primarily activated for contracting audit and evaluation services, is also designed to promote competition but has a number of elements that makes it more organized and structured than the application market. Private consultants are the main providers of expertise for auditing and evaluation, making it necessary to subject its provision to public procurement, initiated by the state. When audit expertise is subject to public procurement, a market with its particular arrangements is assembled. A first

arrangement that is made is to determine access to the consultancy market, meaning that there is a selection of what consultant companies should be able to offer their services. This can be likened to a form of membership, determining who should be seen as a legitimate buyer and seller (Ahrne et al. 2015). The access to the consultancy market is, thus, firstly determined by a process of competitive public procurement that results in a selection of a limited number of companies that are granted so-called framework agreements. These agreements grant particular consultant companies the right to compete for specific assignments over a limited period of time. Having been granted this agreement, the selected firms, although having access to a more limited form of competition, are once again subject to competitive public procurement for specific assignments. Thus, it is a consultancy market characterized by the instalment of competition in two steps. Firstly, there is competition *for* the market, that is, for being granted a longer contract. Secondly, there is competition *in* the market among competing providers regarding specific auditing services (Birch and Siemiatycki 2016).

Public procurement under framework agreements involves a set of rules regulating the exchange between consultants and the state (Ahrne et al. 2015). As described in the preceding chapter, a number of technologies are activated as an assignment is communicated under the framework agreement. Firstly, a “call-off” detailing the assignment in terms of reference (ToR) is communicated to the consultant companies. The companies, then, formulate a tender consisting of a description of the team responsible for implementing the assignment and a proposal on how to implement it. After the tenders have been completed and communicated to the procurer, it is important to have a transparent assessment process. The assessment process is guided by the scoring of points on the following criteria: the quality of the tendering organization, its routines and quality assurance systems, and the competencies of the evaluation team. These criteria are scored according to a number scale and the proposal needs to reach a certain number of points in order to proceed to the price evaluation (Document 27, State funder). Thus, an important aspect of the assessment is the

mobilization of calculation tools that give the image of a transparent process. A first calculation tool is that of quantification which is the reduction of the assessment into a process of numbering according to a particular scale. A second tool is that of commensuration. Often there is some kind of common metric against which tenders can be assessed in order to establish that they attain the minimum criteria. These are often also expressed in numbers. Thus, the way the assessment of tenders is transformed into numbers makes possible comparisons of the performance of the tenderers according to the requirements.

Hence, the consultant market is thoroughly organized through the assembly of a range of heterogeneous elements. In order to show that the consultancy market is a result of both material and intellectual labor (Prince 2017), it is important to label the components that are needed to create the market more thoroughly. Firstly, there is a need to determine access to the market and the members entitled to partake in it. Secondly, as the right to access has been established, there is a need to create conditions for competition in the market. The technologies of call-offs and tenders are important devices to instill competitive behavior among consultants. These technologies also mobilize the drawing together of the necessary expertise to create competitive teams. In order to stay competitive, consultants, therefore, organize themselves in consortia consisting of several companies that have different forms of expertise. Thirdly, a range of material elements and calculation tools are needed. Documents detailing terms of reference are pivotal for defining an assignment that can be put out on the market, and various calculation tools, described in documents, are important for the assessment of tenders.

In conclusion, I argue that an important aspect of how *the project* attains consistency is that it is subject to various forms of marketization. With the establishment of markets, different forms of uncertainties and complexities associated with policy-making can be decreased. By letting competition “decide” who deserves funding and outsourcing evaluation and audit to consultant expertise, the messiness of political decisions can be decreased.

Assembling project time

Up until now, I have described how the coherence of *the project* is achieved by human and nonhuman brokers, through quantification, models and marketization. However, *the project* is also dependent on the organization of time. The fact that *the project* is time-limited entails that planning procedures and implementation are adapted to particular time constraints. However, time should not be considered as an inevitable fact imposing its logic on *the project*. In contrast, I argue that *the project* thrives on its ability to organize time (cf. Clarke et al. 2015) in order to achieve its particular purposes. The organization of time is present in all the phases of *the project*. In particular, the planning phase of *the project* is characterized by a strong belief in organizing time to fit its particular purposes.

Returning to the analysis of the assembly of applications, I argue that the project logic requires a belief that the future can be known. As applications are written in advance of implementation, sometimes a year before the starting date, it means that the applicants must be able to envision a future in which it is possible to imagine a situation upon which *the project* can act. The belief that the future can be known is an essential precondition for how the rest of *the project* is planned. Once the “future” of *the project* has been established (in the form of a problem description), it is possible to formulate a design which can discipline time for its specific purposes. The division of *the project* in SMART goals, outcomes and activities is not only an exercise which divides it into manageable and measurable parts, but also a way to organize time. Although development aid is an unpredictable phenomenon, highly susceptible to contextual changes, *the project* aims to reduce this uncertainty by activating a linear understanding of time, making it possible to envision activities occurring in specific phases of the life of *the project*. Thinking time in this way is possible through documental artifacts, such as timetables, in which particular activities can be thought of as occurring sequentially and according to calendar time (see Chapter 4, “Appearing attractive to the funder”). Again, material artifacts have agency in the sense that they encourage a specific conception of time.

The fact that time is susceptible to organization is also visible in how it is perceived as something that can be stretched and worked upon to fix it according to the project logic. For example, the project logic imposes strict time constraints, both in terms of application and implementation, and although application writing is a stressful endeavor, professionals manage their time effectively by working with deadlines, and, if needed, stretching their working hours. Furthermore, the project logic entails that the ambitions in terms of planned results remain high and are “squeezed” into the time plan.

Hence, to reiterate, I argue that time can be organized and ordered to fit the specific purposes of *the project*, not that time exists as an inevitable and fixed condition that relentlessly orders it. Rather, time can be molded and negotiated to fit the specific format of *the project*. Through such specific format, time becomes activity-based in the sense that a particular set of activities should be implemented during a specific period of time. Time can also be effectively organized in such a way that as many activities and expected results as possible are squeezed into the time plan. Thus, project time is contingent on negotiation concerning how many activities (together with other tasks, such as application writing and reporting) can fit into a project period which is essentially limited. Project time has a tendency to be accelerated as ambitions emerge to perform as many tasks as possible.

The fragility of assembling – Destabilization

The focus of the analysis so far has been on how *the project* is stabilized, that is, how it attains consistency and coherence. I have argued that coherence and order is established in a variety of ways; through human and nonhuman brokers connecting different social worlds, through quantitative calculation and travelling models, through marketization and through the invention of project time. This shows the intense labor of assembly being done to decrease ambiguity, complexity and uncertainty. However, the process of assembly is fragile as it is always prone to fall apart and take other directions. An assemblage is, thus, a vibrant and unstable formation characterized by multiple forces

heading in different directions (Bennett 2010). In line with Nail's (2017) discussion of the process of transformation and lines of escape inherent in the process of assembly, I analyze, here, different forms of destabilization (see Chapter 2, "Assemblage and its philosophical underpinnings" for a discussion on destabilization).

The assembly of *the project* is replete with contradictions having the potential of leading to its total or partial disassembly. In fact, every phase of *the project* displays different signs of fragility. As the tasks to be performed in each phase of *the project* are subject to interpretation and negotiation, there is always a possibility for destabilization, since various tensions and alternative modes of thinking are exposed. In the assembly of *the project*, various contradictions are exposed and processes of interpretation and translation do not always go smoothly. The project logic introduces requirements that call for some form of sometimes laborious and painful management. Requirements inherent in the project logic, for instance regarding the measurement of results, the integration of thematic priorities, and the focus on activities give rise to friction and articulation of critique. Let me return to the preceding chapter to exemplify some instances that can be considered as examples of destabilization.

Absorbed destabilization

The fragility of *the project* is visible already in the assembly of applications. In this process, it becomes apparent that the technical requirements are possible sources of tensions that threaten the fragile construction. One particular example serves as an illustration of possible tensions. The requirements related to particular funds can stand in contradiction with the goals and strategies of organizations and are even sometimes perceived as unnecessary and irrelevant. For instance, the requirement of being "innovative" is perceived as something that has to be forced into the applications. It is clear that several requirements create tensions and that informants struggle with them in various ways. In order to deal with tensions and struggle, informants use different strategies to adapt to the requirements

through, for example, using a language that is not overly radical and a tone that can attract funders, even if that means renouncing important values and priorities.

The critique against the requirements are examples of destabilization as they represent a threat to *the project*. However, in line with Nail (2017), I argue that they represent “relative negative” forms of destabilization in the sense that the struggles of informants are not transformed into a sustained critique but they are silenced through different forms of adaptation. Thus, this form of destabilization is absorbed and obstructed, mainly through organizations being successful in adapting to the requirements. Here, both intra-organizational quality assurance systems and external expertise play an important role in securing compliance to requirements.

Ambiguous destabilization

In the assembly of implementation, contradictions and conflicts become sharper and the threat of *the project* being torn apart is imminent. Let me reiterate the contradictions appearing in this phase that are rearticulated by informants as critiques against the project logic. A first articulated critique concerns how *the project* encourages a focus on activities and “examples”, making it difficult to think of the big issues:

So, I can feel sometimes that [...] this should only be examples, *these small projects should only be examples of the big picture* but sometimes... but I feel very often that my daily work only is about the examples [...]. (Interview, Informant 11, my translation and emphasis)

In addition, the difficulties involved in reacting to contextual changes when a plan is already fixed are brought up as a problem:

The project format as such means that we don't have the opportunity to follow... to react to societal development in the same way during the project period. We must continue focusing on something that we said we would focus on one and half years ago. And there is really no room for... neither among our cooperation partners, to really [say], “yeah, now we would like to shift focus”. (Interview, Informant 12, my translation)

A second articulated critique is levelled against funders encouraging the use of specific models to ensure the integration of thematic priorities. One such model is the “Do No Harm” model that aims to ensure that development aid does not cause harm in already politically volatile contexts. However, this model is perceived as directly harmful for organizations arguing that staging a conflict is sometimes necessary to achieve change, and one informant therefore argues that they use conflict as a tool in union activism:

We argue that conflict is a working tool, it is used, of course, according to needs and analysis [...], it's not that we want our partners to refrain from using strikes as a weapon if they have to use it, do you understand? It is just so damn weird that they lack an analysis of power and just talk about “do no harm”. Yeah, but sometimes you may have to do harm because it's not a fair situation [...], it becomes a part of working with human rights. And here we think that it's completely unsustainable with Sida's... because they can never answer what they really mean by conflict sensitivity, we argue. Because it is so strange to require from the unions that they should be conflict sensitive, when conflict is one... the core issue that you work with. They should not be conflict sensitive because Sida requires it, they have completely other... it is completely absurd. (Interview, Informant 14, my translation)

A third critique concerns the excessive focus on making *the project* scientific which is visible in the constant reflection on issues of measurability and the establishment of causality and attribution. One informant points out that the focus on topics such as measurability reflects a deeper rationality in Western philosophy; the division between emotions and rationality. The informant argues that this division becomes entrenched in *the project* through a focus on measurability and science, which means that what is perceived as related to emotions is displaced:

Sida requires from us a number of results that should be measurable, that is, the number of union leaders doing this and that, and we [in turn] require from xx (a partner) that they should report how many union leaders was doing this and that and xx (the partner), requires in their turn et cetera. And it's this separation [...] ok, how was the degree of democracy affected by all these workshops in this little organization, or this huge organization? It's difficult to obtain harmony between these worlds, and it's very difficult for us, I think it's [...] a learned way to think and reason. [...] as soon as you're born, you're taught that this is how the world works... there is the emotional and the scientific, this is especially

important and you can't involve emotions in this, and this is the way you should work, and you should deliver results, measurable things, everything else is emotions, you can't involve that. (Interview, Informant 18, my translation)

Finally, a fourth articulated critique relates to professionalism. Professionalism is seen as an obstacle for visionaries to influence the goals of organizations:

Where is there a space for visionaries in our movement now? [...] everyone is very anchored and there is a lot of [talk] on common values, but visionaries are difficult to manage in this... *because nothing can go wrong either*, [...] for us it's not very far from idea to implementation, but it must be the whole [...], you can't take a risk [...] a lot of energy is spent on maintaining the level and control, you know, and not risking things. (Interview, Focus Group, my translation and emphasis)

These are conflicts having been registered as contradictions and thus articulated as critiques. It is therefore warranted to refer to such tensions as forms of destabilization. Following Nail (2017), I consider these critiques as examples of the “relative positive” form of destabilization which captures a form of change whose status is “ambiguous” in the sense that it is unclear whether it will bring about total change or be incorporated. As Nail (2017:35) argues,

everyone recognizes that a new element or agency has escaped the established assemblage, but it is not yet clear whether it will cause a radical transformation of the whole assemblage or whether it will be incorporated into an already existing assemblage through a relative negative deterritorialization.

I argue that these forms of critique represent a departure from the logic of *the project* in the sense that they are actually not only registered as contradictions *per se* but are also actively understood as threats against particular values or modes of working. Furthermore, these critiques, to a certain degree, capture the contradictions and absurdities of *the project* at a deeper level. In this way, they represent “the possibility of a new world” (Nail 2017:35) outside *the project*. However, it is not clear whether this critique represents a radical transformation, as co-optation is always present as an alternative.

The obstruction of absolute destabilization

Although I have observed struggles and contradictions being registered and re-packaged into critique, I consider what Nail (2017) calls the “absolute positive” form of destabilization, meaning the undermining of existing assemblages to the point of creating new ones, as being obstructed. Even though *the project* is characterized by tensions, struggles and conflicts making it a contingent construction (Li 2005), they are not subversive enough to create another form of assemblage building on other logics and values. Therefore, a total dissolution of *the project* into something new has not been observed in this study. However, I think it is important to emphasize that destabilization does not need to be performed by autonomous individuals who can resignify struggles and contradictions into coherent critique. Destabilization can occur unintentionally when meanings are negotiated and possibly undermined as *the project* is assembled through all the practices, repertoires and artifacts analyzed in the present thesis. What I do claim is that destabilization is more likely to transform *the project* into something new if struggles and contradictions can be formulated as critiques.

Why, then, is *the project* not being torn apart and something new established? Although the critiques accounted for are potentially powerful forms of destabilization, I argue that the stabilization processes are so effective that they are able to stop critique from transforming into resistance. An effective way of preventing absolute destabilization is the containment of critique through the consistent invention of technical solutions to different problems. Although critique against a range of problems associated with *the project* is formulated, it does not seem to be able to challenge the notion that *the project* can be done in the “right way”. When this belief is dominant, a range of technical solutions, such as best practice models and science, can be activated to handle what is, in fact, a sign of deeper problems. In this way, *the project* has the ability to reduce critique to what Rancière (1999) calls “noise”, which are those articulations of critique that cannot be heard in a particular power formation. The techniques of stabilization which work to establish that *the project* can be

performed in the “right” way, are effective in reducing critique to noise as what is “right” is seldom easy to contest (cf. Brown 2015).

Concluding discussion – (De)stabilizing *the project*

If we ask the general question, “What holds things together?”, the clearest easiest answer seems to be provided by a formalizing, linear, hierarchicized, centralized *arborescent* model. [...] It seems more important to us to underline a certain number of factors liable to suggest an entirely different schema, one favoring rhizomatic, rather than arborified, functioning [...]. (Deleuze and Guattari 2013:381)

Let me start this final part of the chapter with a thought experiment. Imagine analyzing how *the project* holds together through what Deleuze and Guattari (2013) call the arborescent model. Perhaps such an analysis would start with an investigation of the master principle or logic holding it all together and use this as a starting point to draw conclusions about how this logic influences how *the project* comes to life and sustains itself. The preceding analysis in this thesis has aimed to avoid exactly this arborescent model by emphasizing that *the project* is a vibrant constellation of heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory elements heading in different directions.

The project is characterized by multiplicity as it is made up of an array of heterogeneous components that are assembled to give it consistency which is always threatened by disassembly. Here, I aim to summarize how the consistency and homogeneity of *the project* are secured while it is also subject to disassembly.

Firstly, *brokers* in various forms are of great importance for the formation and later stabilization of *the project*. Brokers are essential assemblers in the sense that they connect distant actors and worlds with each other. In the initial formation of *the project*, brokers work to connect various stakeholders in order to create an application upon which the participants can agree. The brokers continue to be central for maintaining *the project* during implementation and reporting as they collect the necessary information to satisfy the requirements. They also undertake the heavy task of interpretation and meaning-making by

interpreting requirements and inventing suitable languages. While these can be said to constitute human brokers, nonhuman brokers in the form of documents also play an integral role in aligning different actors with each other through their detailed graphic organization.

Secondly, a range of *repertoires* from which to compose and stabilize *the project* are available. Thus, *the project* is highly susceptible to outside models and expertise (cf. Miller 1998). The common denominator of these repertoires is that they consist of various resources of general and universal character that make *the project* manageable and calculable. It is important to emphasize that these repertoires differ when it comes to their degree of contribution to *the project*. Firstly, it is possible to discern repertoires of models that contribute with rather elaborated resources. Models provide a universal vocabulary, often expressed in material incarnations, which can be abstracted from their context and re-installed in new ones with relative ease. Secondly, a scientific and calculative repertoire can be distinguished. This provides both a general mindset and a set of specific tools for the composition of *the project*. The general mindset that can steer the general design and implementation of *the project* is a belief in science and calculation. By mobilizing a general ontological belief that an objective reality can be acted upon and measured, *the project* is created and sustained. While this repertoire consists of resources pertaining to ontological and epistemological assumptions, it can also provide specific methodologies and tools, such as quantification and scientific methods. These repertoires are important scripts to draw upon to make *the project* manageable, but they are not static and fixed. Rather, they are subject to translation by different expert communities, which make them understandable and attractive for a wider audience.

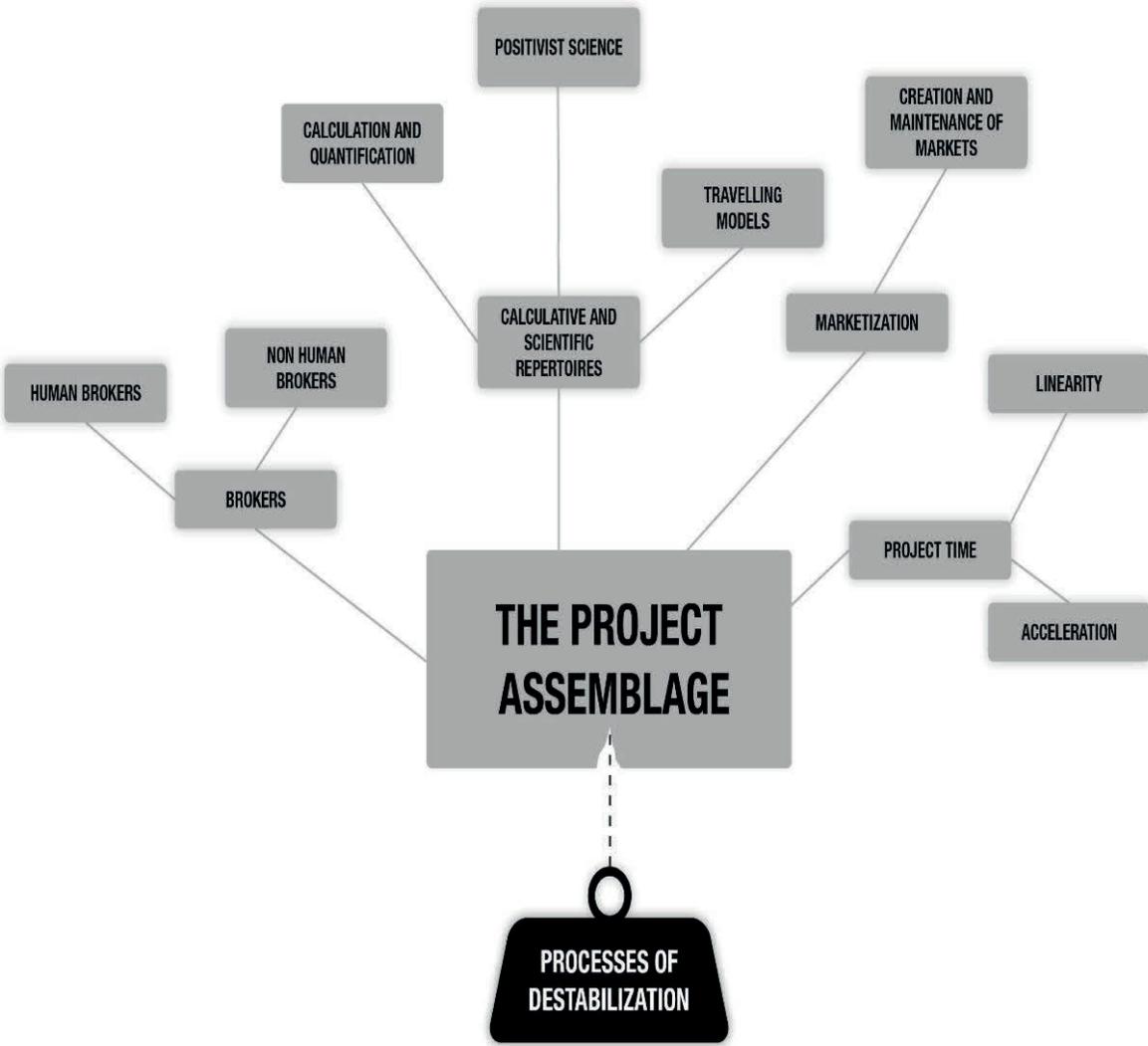
Thirdly, *marketization* is an important process by which *the project* is made amenable to governing and stabilization. Various markets are created in order to organize the different stages of *the project*, such as application markets and expertise markets for auditing and application appraisal. These markets are themselves assembled as they require

intellectual and material labor. Markets need to be fashioned by establishing rules for who should be given access to a specific market. In addition, rules and guidelines for competition in established markets must be constructed, thereby creating boundaries for particular markets.

Fourthly, time is an important resource which can be organized and molded in order to fit *the project*. Time appears not as something that determines *the project*, but rather as something that can be organized, for example through future-oriented planning and activation of linear time. In addition, time can be organized by making it more accelerated in the sense that more and more tasks are incorporated in *the project*.

In Figure 5.2, I summarize the main components of what I call *the project assemblage*, a vibrant alloy of elements that together make *the project* come to life and sustain it in order to decrease ambiguity, complexity and uncertainty. However, it is important to emphasize that this project assemblage is a fragile construction and is dependent on continuous maintenance work. Maintenance work is needed particularly when contradictions are exposed. These contradictions make critique, which threatens to disassemble *the project*, possible. However, this critique is successfully contained through various measures that impede transformational resistance (this is further elaborated upon in the next chapter).

Figure 5.2 The constituent components of the project assemblage



6 The power implications of project assemblage

The way an assemblage is pieced together to form an ostensibly coherent whole has deeply political implications. As Savage (2019:4, my emphasis) argues:

The particular ways in which components are brought together will determine the properties and *effects* of any given policy or agenda; and if the very same components were to be arranged differently, or new components introduced or excluded, then different properties and effects would be produced.

Indeed, the components making up the project assemblage, the way they are made to cohere and the influence they exert have various implications which are deeply political in the sense that particular ways of thinking and doing politics become more possible than others. In the following analysis, I take my point of departure in one of Ferguson's (1994) primary preoccupations in *The Anti-Politics Machine*; that different improvement schemes, although having particular stated aims, can result in various unforeseen and unintended consequences that reproduce power relations. Thus, the reproduction of power cannot be traced to sovereign agents intentionally imposing their will on *the project*. What is of interest here is, therefore, to identify and analyze implications of project assembly related to the reproduction of power relations and their possible contestation. My analysis of *the project* as an assemblage has made it possible to observe that power in the project assemblage cannot be reduced to a single logic, but it is rather distributed among different components, which in turn allows me to explore how power relations that are not reducible to a particular institution or power-holder are reproduced.

The depoliticizing characteristics of *the project*

The ultimate sign of postpolitics in all Western countries is the growth of a managerial approach to government: government is re-conceived as a managerial function, deprived of its proper political dimension. (Žižek 2002:303)

The project poses a direct challenge to the possibility of making development aid into a political issue. Rather, it is characterized by an

assembly of components that denies and silences politics. Certainly, my conceptualization of politics is informed by scholarship emphasizing that politics is characterized by struggles and conflicts that should not be foreclosed or silenced but rather mobilized in “agonistic” debate (Mouffe 2005b, 2013). However, this form of silencing is exactly what has happened in the wake of the introduction of modern technologies of governing. As neoliberal reforms have been rolled out in virtually all sectors of society, new governing forms reducing politics to administration and expert management have become dominant, resulting in a consensus about a particular form of political, social and economic organization which is foreclosed from political debate (Brown 2015; Mouffe 2005a; Rancière 1999, 2014). In the following, I explore how *the project* implies a displacement of politics to markets and experts which reduces it to an apparatus of bureaucracy and administration.

Outsourcing politics to experts – The case of development consultants

The delegation of power to external experts is a characteristic feature of *the project*. This is visible in particular phases of *the project*, such as in the assembly of applications, appraisal and audit. Although expertise is visible in how *the project* is assembled as a whole, I focus here on the use of external expertise embodied in private development consultants. Understanding the role of these consultants is important in order to detect how politics is displaced to experts. Before delving deeper into this, I reiterate, shortly, in what way consultants become crucial for the emergence and the subsequent maintenance of *the project*. At least two parts of the assembly of *the project* display a reliance on development consultants. Firstly, consultants are used in the assembly of applications in which they provide expertise in planning models, such as LFA. Secondly, they are recruited for the purpose of assisting in the appraisal process as well as during post-project evaluations, giving a helping hand in legitimizing funders’ decisions. I argue that consultants are important drivers of the installation of a managerial and standardized mindset in *the project* which contributes to its

continuous depoliticization. In addition, I argue that this is going on in interstitial spaces which are far from democratically transparent.

Starting with the assembly of applications, I argue in the preceding chapter that consultants, who can translate planning models and make them attractive to a wider audience, are pivotal for this process. Consultants are effective mediators in the sense that they do not only transfer models unaltered, but also actively translate and transform them for the specific situation (Hayes and Westrup 2014). While this constitutes creative work on the part of the consultants, their installation of these models result in standardization, which in turn leads to increased homogeneity. Research on consultants has shown that consultancy work is based on rather limited mindsets that serve to homogenize and standardize practices (Seabrooke and Sending 2019; Stirrat 2000; Wright, Sturdy, and Wylie 2012). The installation of a model like LFA constitutes standardization in two ways as described by Sturdy et al. (2012). In their study on consultants claiming to be “innovative”, they find, in contrast, that the work of the consultants offers highly standardized solutions to different problems. They argue that this occurs in two ways. Firstly, consultants promote standardizing agendas which are characterized by the introduction of a particular organizational change that serves to install new organizational cultures, improve efficiency or introduce new systems of technology. Secondly, standardized methods, in the form of identifiable and sometimes branded techniques, often accompany this agenda.

I argue that the way consultants install LFA in *the project* occurs in a similar way. LFA embodies a standardizing agenda since its purpose is to align a particular audience to an effective project management system that gives a development intervention its consistent character. The model itself, then, supplies the necessary material in order to constitute a standardized method, as it offers a ready-made vocabulary and a material template. Consultancy-driven audit also works in a standardizing way. Returning to the analysis of appraisals in Chapter 4, I analyze the way consultant expertise is used by the state in the assessment of an application by an intermediary organization. The

assessment relies heavily on a consultant-produced audit detailing some of the perceived deficiencies in the organization, such as an overly complex model for channeling financial resources and a deficient coordination between aid modalities. This is used to substantiate and legitimize the claims of the funder in its appraisal. The conclusions made by the consultants, which are subsequently amplified by the funder as they are incorporated in the formal assessment, are marked by a standardizing agenda as they focus purely on management issues (better coordination, better routines and systems and so on). I argue that this form of consultant expertise have wider consequences as they are not only about standardization. It is also about instilling managerialism, understood as a belief in the application of universal and abstract management solutions, as a form of ideology into the workings of project-based organizations. Thus, the more *the project* activates a range of functions in which consultant expertise is present, the higher the influence of managerial ideology.

Certainly, this narrows what is deemed important for the implementation of *the project*. Consultants install managerial ideology independently, through offering expertise in planning models, and by giving legitimacy to conclusions and recommendations urging project-based organizations to strengthen their management infrastructure. If consultants install managerial ideology at various stages, this mobilization influences what becomes important in *the project*. Research has shown that development suffers from a “shrinking space”, referring to the limited character of development policies furthered by international organizations. While this research focuses on how international agreements related to trade and intellectual property rights make developing countries adapt their development work in a particular way, thereby leading to the shrinking of development space (Wade 2003), I argue that this concept is interesting in light of how the installment of managerial ideology has a similar effect. This installment, furthered by consultants, ties organizations to the accomplishment of managerial ideals, thereby shrinking the development space in such a way that development is

imagined as, and perhaps equated to, the deployment of managerialism.

It is striking to observe that the work conducted by consultants to contribute to the emergence of *the project* in the first place and the subsequent contributions that they make, are confined to virtually invisible expert spaces. In the case of consultants translating models for a wider audience, and in reference to Behrends et al. (2014) and Rottenburg (2009), I refer to these as “interstitial spaces”, the in-between spaces in which expertise is transferred. This also goes for consultant audit expertise that is transferred in the same type of spaces. This means that these spaces are critical for understanding the workings of expertise and knowledge production. However, these arenas, although crucial for how development aid is enacted in practice, are shielded from public scrutiny. Particularly, the way consultant expertise legitimizes profoundly political decisions concerning the appraisal of applications and approval of funding is an illustrative example of how decision-making occurs in arenas “less exposed to traditional forms of scrutiny” (Beveridge 2012:53).

Manufacturing consensus around the market logic

Neoliberalism is not about the state leaving the economy alone. Rather, neoliberalism activates the state on behalf of the economy, *not* to undertake economic functions or to intervene in economic *effects*, but rather to facilitate economic competition and growth and to economize the social [...]. (Brown 2015:62)

Foucault dedicates some of his later lectures at Collège de France to the phenomenon of neoliberalism, making the claim that what distinguishes neoliberalism in modern times is that it extends the rationality of the market to every domain of society, producing an “economization of the entire social field” (Foucault 2010 in Brown 2015:61). I argue that the market logic is reproduced as *the project* is subjected to various forms of marketization, making it an example of what I would call the abdication of politics in front of a form of marketization that is deemed necessary and inevitable.

An example of how politics abdicates in front of market principles is the role of the state in actively adopting market-like thinking when organizing and assembling markets for applications and evaluation services. In the assembly of these markets, the state undertakes a pivotal role both in installing competition principles and in inventing the necessary tools and devices needed to uphold a competitive market. Thus, the state is involved in what Peck and Tickell (2002:384) call “roll-out neoliberalism” which is “the purposeful *construction and consolidation* of neoliberalized state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations”. The state constructs markets both by instituting competition (which is not a natural state) and by establishing memberships as well as consolidates them by engaging in “maintenance work” (cf. Bueger 2018), for instance through establishing rules and detailed documents and tools in order to keep them functional over time.

The role of the state in both constructing and consolidating marketization through the active design and maintenance of markets for the purpose of governing *the project* points to the active displacement of politics. In Chapter 5, I outline how marketization works as a stabilizing endeavor, and this form of marketization probably makes political decisions related to *the project* easier. The irrationalities of political decision-making are possible to foreclose, or perhaps erase, and can be replaced with the perceived mathematical precision of market solutions. Viewing markets as integral to the public sector is problematic as it forecloses alternatives and makes it difficult to imagine an organization that is non-marketized. The organization of markets described here also gives the impression of being neutral. However, the construction of markets is always political as it is built on decisions that are inherently contestable.

Mending a fractured assemblage - Erasing contradictions and conflicts through maintenance and repair

In a story about the implementation of the massive public transport project “Transantiago” in Chile’s capital Santiago in the mid-2000s,

Ureta (2015) argues that it can be understood as a policy assemblage in the sense that the launch and subsequent implementation required the pulling together of multiple elements: the problematization of the previous flawed transport system and the creation of new roles for citizens in this system. Part of the story was, however, various flaws related to uncomfortable bus seats, technical malfunctions in the bus fare system and confusing timetables, leading to massive protests among citizens. These cracks in the assemblage required measures to be taken. Ureta (2015:141) refers to these measures as “discursive repair”. Examples of discursive aspects in need of repair were the protests and the image of suffering users of the transport system, which threatened the fragile transport assemblage. The need to close the gap between the perception among the public of a flawed system and the improvements made seemed urgent. Therefore, a range of surveys detailing how well the system functioned (for example by describing how the waiting time at bus stops had decreased) in an “objective” way, served to close the fissures in the transport assemblage. According to Ureta (2015:141), this was not only discursive repair, but also “repair by numbers”.

Ureta’s (2015) notion of “repair” and “maintenance work” as used by Bueger (2018:628) are fruitful concepts to mobilize in order to understand the various measures undertaken to stitch together the assemblage when fissures emerge. These measures have the effect of entrenching power relations. In the following, I exemplify these repair measures mainly by returning to the assembly of applications, implementation and auditing.

The project is characterized by a range of conflicts and contradictions that can possibly tear it apart. Although *the project* is constructed around practices and artifacts that can make design and implementation organized and predictable, the potential for contradictions and conflicts is always present since different interpretations and courses of action are possible. Starting with the application process, the process of assembly introduces a series of possible conflicts and contradictions. One concerns particular

requirements on how to formulate an application in order to appear attractive to the funder. Here, informants talk about the difficulties of adapting to requirements that can possibly go against intra-organizational values and ideals or are seen as unnecessary or irrelevant. The various requirements can be seen as introducing contradictions and conflicts. For instance, the requirement of incorporating “innovative” elements is experienced as an imposition on *the project*. Another example is the need to tone down any potentially radical language in order not to repel possible funders.

The reaction to contradictions is often to try to solve them through meticulous and creative work of interpretation and translation. Although the contradictions are problematic for many of the informants, they try to adapt to the best of their capabilities. In the case of incorporating innovation in applications, one informant argues that the way out of the problem is to find a suitable meaning of the concept that they believe that the funder subscribes to and then incorporate it in *the project* (see Chapter 4, “Appearing attractive to the funder”). In the case of using language, one informant mobilizes the proper language in order not to appear excessively radical or critical against the funder (which is often the state, see Chapter 4, “Appearing attractive to the funder”). I interpret all these types of adaptations, interpretations and translations as measures of repair. The various contradictions are possible disruptions of *the project* as assemblage and it risks being torn apart if such disruptions are not handled in a suitable way. Thus, for *the project* to hold together, actors are always on the watch to repair fissures that can grow and possibly disassemble it.

While this is an example of what can be called “repair through interpretation and adaptation”, there are also other repair measures. During implementation, different contradictions and conflicts arise pertaining to issues of effectiveness. The various requirements related to adequate management of *the project*, visible in such demands as measuring impact, doing transparent reports, managing relations with partners, and incorporating thematic priorities, introduce various

contradictions as they are both difficult to accomplish and sometimes also go against ideals and ways of working of the organizations. However, this does not stop professionals from trying to find solutions to problems that can emerge. In the analysis in Chapters 4 and 5, two methods emerge as important in order to solve contradictions that are exposed primarily in the assembly of implementation: establishing networks for knowledge exchange and partaking in funder-initiated experimental labs.

The civil society network functions as a platform for the dissemination of various forms of expertise and best practice that can help organizations in implementing *the project*. Almost regardless of the possible challenges faced by the organizations, the network is able to suggest solutions. In the network, there is a generous exchange of various types of knowledge and expertise on multiple topics. The expertise offered includes models for assessing the level of democracy or organizations, ways of working that can maximize learning and toolboxes for the incorporation of thematic priorities. This form of expertise – sometimes labelled as models and best practices in almost branded terms – gives the organizations an opportunity to find a way to solve some of the contradictions of *the project*. The expertise referred to here often comes packaged with clear vocabularies and material incarnations that render them universally applicable.

While this form of possible disruption of *the project* is repaired by the self-organization of civil society, funders themselves identify possible fissures that they aim to mend through their own initiatives. An example of this is the results lab in which organizations are offered the possibility to test different methodologies in order to facilitate results-based management (RBM). A principle such as RBM gives rise to particular contradictions and conflicts as it aims to introduce a scientific form of thinking that is difficult to apply to an activity as complex as development aid. To reiterate, RBM implies the setting of goals, descriptions of how they are to be achieved and the presentation of suitable methods for evaluation. The results lab functions as a space in which organizations can experiment with different methods in order

to align their work with RBM. The lab offers, therefore, different tracks on “theory of change” and innovative evaluation methods. The format of the lab is supposed to invite experimentation in a permissive setting. Problems should be solved “collectively” and “failures” are permitted when trying to grapple with the requirements of RBM.

I argue that these platforms – the methods network and the results lab – are examples of “repair by expertise”, meaning that knowledge is mobilized to solve various contradictions introduced by *the project*. The fact that various requirements give rise to contradictions is not strange since they often build on scientific precepts, specifically positivist ones. Pairing these requirements with transformational work under contextually difficult conditions exposes conflicts. However, these conflicts are not deemed unsolvable but can be solved through resorting to expertise that is disseminated in permissive settings. This expertise is sometimes translated by consultants, but the expertise in these settings does not need to be connected to identifiable experts, but can be mobile expertise and knowledge produced by research institutes or other expert communities in different parts of the world. This expertise is, therefore, not always translated by identifiable experts but by civil society organizations themselves as they appropriate and disseminate research reports, praxis papers and so on, on these platforms.

Another example, which I would rather like to call “maintenance work”, can be detected during the assembly of auditing. In Chapter 4, I give an example of how the process can be constructed in order to avoid possible conflicts. A first example is through dividing the evaluation process into specific steps in which expectations from the procurer of the assignment (the state) and the implementer of the assignment (the consultants) are calibrated in order to reach common ground. A second example is to find ways to handle the formulation of recommendations. Here, the actor subjected to an evaluation – often a civil society organization – is added to the collection of actors. The stage of recommendations can be particularly sensitive since substantial changes in the operations of the organization being evaluated can be

suggested. Thus, when reaching this stage, the state as a procurer of the assignment offers the consultants the possibility to anchor recommendations through deliberative workshops (see Chapter 4, Conducting the evaluation – an interplay between conflict and alignment”). In this way, they become subject to critical scrutiny and discussion, and feedback can, thus, be fed into the evaluation process. This is an example of what I refer to as “maintenance by creating consensus”. I take this to mean that possible conflicts are foreseen and measures are taken to prevent them from occurring. The measures undertaken are acts of consensus creation. I argue that the concept of maintenance instead of repair is more suitable here as the former is used to prevent conflicts from happening, while the latter is mobilized when contradictions and conflicts have been exposed.

I argue that these examples of maintenance and repair arise because of the unstable character of the project assemblage. It is a “throbbing confederation” (Bennett 2010:23) in which components are awkwardly pieced together and therefore give rise to contradictions and conflicts that must be concealed. I consider the measures of maintenance and repair as depoliticizing measures in the sense that they aim to displace and possibly erase contradictions. The project assemblage rests on irreconcilable contradictions as it tries to combine elements that are difficult to assemble. This is visible in the contradictions introduced in the assembly of applications and implementation. In these processes, contradictions that go against the ideals, values and capabilities of the organizations supposed to design and implement *the project* assert themselves. One example concerns the linguistic adaptation done in applications which compels organizations to put aside their emancipatory visions and ideals in order to appear competitive in the eyes of the funder.

Another example refers to the scientific requirements that sometimes exceed the capabilities of organizations. In a politicized climate, these contradictions would have been contested as they challenge the very core of the organizations. In a managerialized context, different forms of initiatives that are supposed to solve these contradictions are

created. This is reminiscent of the workings of what Rancière (1999:28) calls “the police”. The police is that which institutes order by securing consent, organizing power, and distributing places and roles. The police rests on the will to saturation by accomplishing this process once and for all and supplanting all alternatives, that is, the political. However, this closure is never possible and that which is displaced by the police always threatens the institution of order. I consider the denial of contradictions and conflicts as the result of the police supplanting them as it tries to institute order. I argue, furthermore, that the institution of order makes the contradictions and conflicts invisible. They are concealed through maintenance and repair rather than “rendered strange”, to use a Foucauldian expression.²⁶

The growth of bureaucratic organization – The paradox of the “flexible” project

In *The Utopia of Rules*, Graeber (2016) is preoccupied with a paradox in modern society: the fact that market reforms aiming to decrease state influence give rise to more bureaucratic regulations. Graeber even argues that this is so commonly observed that it is possible to express as a sociological law: “The iron law of liberalism”. This iron law

states that the ultimate effect of any market reform, any government measure aimed at reducing bureaucracy and promoting market forces, is to increase the total number of regulations, the total amount of paperwork and the total number of government bureaucrats. (Graeber 2016:14, my translation)

This paradox is evident in the various processes in which *the project* is assembled. Below, I develop the discussion on how the logics, practices and artifacts introduced by *the project* in fact intensify bureaucratic organization, leading to depoliticizing effects.

²⁶The act of rendering something strange is associated with Foucault’s genealogical method in which the contingency of established truths is exposed. This form of investigation “serves to unsettle habitual taken-for-granted ways of thinking and acting, to undermine their self-evidence, to call into question their apparent necessity. They are rendered strange and unfamiliar, ‘absurd’ in a specifically Foucauldian sense” (O’Leary and Falzon 2010:240).

The project appears as an attractive option in today's society since it "draws upon the central rhetoric of empowerment, autonomy and self-reliance central to post-bureaucratic organizational discourse" (Hodgson 2004:88). *The project* as it is analyzed here does have some of the characteristics of what is called post-bureaucracy: the freedom (at least to some degree) to formulate proposals in collaboration with cooperation partners and the decentralization of design and implementation to formally autonomous organizations. However, I suggest that the similarities of *the project* and post-bureaucracy end there.

In the following, I aim to show that the way *the project* is assembled intensifies bureaucratic organization, leading to possibly harmful consequences for civil society organizations in particular. But what do I take bureaucracy to be? Bureaucracy research is a field of its own, and I do not aim to delve deeper into it, but I think it is necessary to clarify how I define bureaucratic tendencies in contemporary society. I argue, in line with Hall (2012), that the introduction of new public management reforms in the public sector has created its own management bureaucracy that constitutes a new stage in the history of bureaucracy rather than a break with it. Consequently, despite new public management reforms aiming to make public administration more effective, the management bureaucracy has retained and even intensified and developed the traditional bureaucracy. When I speak of increased bureaucracy as a result of *the project*, I take this to mean both the installment of bureaucratic elements, such as rationality and hierarchy, as well as various technocratic practices, logics and artifacts associated with these elements. In the following, I start with how these practices operate at the level of the civil society organization and discuss their effects from a political perspective.

The construction of the bureaucratic civil society organization

The project comes with a set of logics, practices and artifacts that influences the workings of the civil society organization in a variety of ways. In this section, I argue that the project logic strengthens the

organizational attributes of civil society organizations, making them into professional bureaucratic machineries. I start by describing these attributes and how *the project* contributes to their intensification. This is followed by a discussion of why these attributes constitute an example of bureaucratic intensification and their effects on civil society.

Administrative systems and procedures

The project logic induces an organizational infrastructure that can deal with a variety of requirements. This infrastructure consists of a set of administrative processes, routines and policies that are needed in order to strengthen the accountability and visibility of the organizations. The application process activates particular bureaucratic tasks to be performed, such as the production of competitive proposals consisting of logical descriptions of goals, indicators, expected results and activities. The way organizations are audited in the appraisal process is an important driver for organizations to strengthen their bureaucratic infrastructure. As is described in the analysis of the assembly of appraisals, organizations are subject to a form of scrutiny that focuses on the organizational infrastructure. Returning to the analysis of the assembly of appraisals in Chapter 4, I argue that a distinction is made in the funder's appraisal between assessing the application itself and assessing the organizational infrastructure of the applicant. Both processes are designed in a way that contributes to the installation of bureaucratic rules and systems in the organizations. The design of the application appraisal makes it clear for the applicant that particular criteria are used. These criteria focus on the ability of the organizations to produce relevant and logical plans. While these criteria encourage organizations to build the internal capacities needed for accomplishing these requirements, the focus on organizational infrastructure strengthens professional bureaucracy even more.

To reiterate, the assessment of organizational infrastructure focuses on ensuring that the organizations have the proper systems, capabilities and routines to manage themselves and also, in the case of

intermediary organizations, the relations to partner organizations. When it comes to the inner workings of the organizations, a variety of components are assessed, such as financial management, routines, policies and the ability to make adequate risk analyses. As the intermediaries have external relations with partner organizations, it becomes important for the funder to assess the functionality of the collaboration. Since it is impossible to assess this partnership in depth, the funder relies on auditing the guidelines and routines that the organizations have at their disposal, such as tools for assessing partner organizations and the transparency of the channeling of financial resources. Paraphrasing Power (1999), I refer to this form of assessment as “appraisal of appraisal”, since the focus is on assessing the quality of the control systems of the organizations. I argue that the way the appraisal process is designed and executed contributes to bureaucratization as it signals that routines, systems and procedures are important in order to have a chance to receive funding and therefore encourages organizations to develop a professional bureaucracy.

A direct result of this kind of appraisal is the set-up of a documentation system which produces a substantial amount of paperwork, such as templates, handbooks, assessment memos and reports. The reporting system requires its own bureaucratic tasks to be performed. As is described in the section on how a report is produced (see Chapter 4, “Managing administrative requirements – Producing the report”), it becomes clear that it requires intense labor: the collection of information from various parties, the filling in of templates (or sometimes the invention of templates if they are not predetermined) and the engagement with digital reporting channels. Furthermore, the way the auditing system is set up also induces an organizational form that is built around structures susceptible to scrutiny. The regular audits made by funders through meetings and follow-up trips contribute to organizations setting up the systems needed for passing the test as functioning organizations.

The creation of managerial roles

The creation of an organizational infrastructure built around systems, procedures, routines and policies produces particular roles for the professionals working in these organizations. These roles are characterized by their focus on managerial tasks and are occupied by *management bureaucrats* (Hall 2012). The systems and procedures introduced by the project logic requires that very specific managerial working tasks be performed. These, in turn, require specific skills and competencies. The management bureaucrats are occupied with tasks related to planning, implementation and reporting that require a range of expert skills. Planning requires knowledge of the particular requirements concerning applications.

Some of the skills needed are quite tangible and concern language skills, such as writing in foreign languages and mastering a particular vocabulary related to models such as RBM and LFA. Other skills are more implicit and concern the entrepreneurial ability to find different sources of financing, and the logical and rational thinking as well as the analytical and interpretive capacity needed to complete applications and reports. The reporting tasks require a general precision when it comes to documenting implemented activities for the purpose of official reporting (so-called self-documentation) and the co-ordination ability needed for drawing together bits and pieces of information in order to create a coherent story. Furthermore, implementation consists of elements that require specific skills. As implementation is often supposed to be based on evidence, there is a requirement on professionals to produce this evidence through research. In order to conduct this research, skills in positivist research methodology are needed, such as the ability to conduct literature reviews, quantitative and qualitative data collection and report writing.

The project should not be understood as only creating work tasks that are rationally performed by management bureaucrats, but that they offer a set of identities and roles. Thus, *the project* is a subjectifying process which produces a set of subject positions. A first subject position is that of *the expert*. It is rather clear that the work tasks that

the management bureaucrats are expected to perform produce experts. This production does not primarily induce an expert who mechanistically applies a certain set of skills, but mobilizes a particular way of thinking characterized by logic and rationality. A second subject position is *the entrepreneur*. Taking a wide definition of an entrepreneur as innovative, full of initiative and risk-taking, the work tasks of the management bureaucrat inculcate an entrepreneurial behavior. The application process requires the skill to find the most suitable financing opportunities and write applications that can survive a competitive process. In this way, the management bureaucrat takes on the role as an entrepreneur.

I suggest that managerial systems and roles result in the production of strong organizational and bureaucratic attributes, making civil society into a group of fully-fledged professional organizations. But why is this an example of the construction of a bureaucratic organization? In the following, I argue that these managerial systems and roles contribute to the installation of wider bureaucratic and organizational components.

The systems, processes and roles used in *the project* contribute to creating an organization type built on rationality and a strong identity (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000). Firstly, all the above practices and roles contribute to a rational organization that sets clear goals and mobilize the necessary processes to achieve them. These processes are supposed to be rational in themselves as they build on a logical process of identifying goals and formulating indicators, expected results and activities. An aspect of this rational process is that it is a predictable sequence of events that can be monitored. Thus, the processes and systems introduced by *the project* mobilize a rational organization type built around predictable procedures. Secondly, as described by Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson (2000) in their account of important dimensions of constructing organizations, the administrative systems and procedures help create a stable organizational identity with boundaries in relation to other organizations. The appraisal process promotes that organizations endow themselves with a clear identity in

relation to their partner organizations. One criteria of the appraisal process is to have functioning relationships with partner organizations, which is controlled by auditing for example assessment templates. This also contributes to establishing a boundary between organizational entities. In addition, the auditing process makes the organizations transparent and visible as specific entities that can be controlled from a distance.

In conclusion, *the project* introduces a range of technocratic practices, systems and procedures that helps create a particular bureaucratic organization type that reproduces the ideal of a rational and stable organization with a clear identity. This organization type is built on exclusions that have depoliticizing effects. Throughout the phases of *the project*, civil society is encouraged to transform itself into a very particular organization type – the professional and transparent civil society organization. In this type of organization, political work becomes difficult since it does not always fit within the parameters of a rational organization. In an organization in which predictable processes permeated by rationality dominate, political or activist work is difficult because of its unpredictable and irrational character. Formulating emancipatory visions in a rational organizational culture is difficult since such visions are not perceived as manageable according to the rational template.

This form of organization elicited by the project logic is, thus, a way of doing away with politics in favor of accomplishing all the ideals of the rational organization. Another way in which politics is erased is through the organizations becoming preoccupied with doing what is “right”. Mouffe (2005a) argues that a characteristic of today’s post-political landscape is that politics is played out in a “moral register”, meaning that politics has been reduced to an exercise in distinguishing between “right” and “wrong” solutions to different societal problems. A rational organization is dominated by a set of bureaucratic systems, procedures and roles that can only be performed in a “right” way, according to particular protocols. This encourages organizations to do

what is considered “right” at the expense of activism which cannot be conducted in a “right” way.

Concluding discussion – The depoliticized project

I have emphasized how *the project* is depoliticized in various ways in the above analysis. I argue that it is possible to discern different types of depoliticization that can be drawn from a range of literatures. Here, I aim to summarize these different forms of depoliticization.

Firstly, one form of depoliticization is based on the suppression of what Mouffe (2005a) calls “the political”. The political, which can be defined as the conflicts and contradictions constitutive of politics, is silenced in various ways through *the project*, and conflicts related to power cannot be articulated. This is particularly visible in the suppression of conflicts and the manufacturing of consensus. The belief in the primacy of market mechanisms to organize central aspects of *the project* and the measures of repair and maintenance being undertaken to avoid conflicts and contradictions are examples of how the political is suppressed. As a consequence, the work that is deemed important to perform is reduced to the accomplishment of bureaucratic practices, thus diverting attention towards management bureaucracy rather than infusing it with politicization.

Secondly, depoliticization occurs through displacement of political issues to expert domains. This is visible in appraisal and audit which rely on external experts. Although decision-making *per se* is not delegated to experts, the opinion of external experts is important and it is possible to talk about “arena-shifting” in political decision-making, meaning the transfer of important parts of decision-making to experts (Flinders and Buller 2006). In the case of this study, decision-making is not transferred to experts but they are used to build support for political decisions on, for instance, funding. It is, therefore, warranted to speak of a form of displacement of political power to experts.

The project as a device for reproducing modernity and coloniality

One of the most powerful myths of the twentieth century was the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonization of the world. This led to the myth of a 'postcolonial' world. The heterogeneous and multiple global structures put in place over a period of 450 years did not evaporate with the juridical-political decolonization of the periphery over the past 50 years. We continue to live under the same 'colonial power matrix'. With juridical-political decolonization, we moved from a period of 'global colonialism' to the current period of 'global coloniality'. (Grosfoguel 2007:219)

No universal is without the remainder of a particularity. (Laclau quoted in Zerilli 1998:10)

The assembly of *the project* can be spoken of as a tale of calculation, scientification and rationalization. In the preceding chapters, I give a range of examples of how these practices come into being; through the planning and reporting of *the project* in transparent documents, through the mobilization of scientific thinking and methodology for the purposes of knowledge production, such as measurement and auditing; through the ordering of time, and through the use of universal planning and implementation models. All these operations have required different forms of translation. Translation is never a frictionless transfer of meanings but always a process fraught with struggles and negotiations. As Clarke et al. (2015:35) argue, translation is the "active and selective process in which meanings are interpreted and reinterpreted to make them fit their new context".

The processes above are the result of multiple translations; the construction of *the project* in applications requires putting *the project* through a rational thought process in which its constituent parts are described in logical sequences, from problem description to implementation plan, often according to predetermined formats or models. The appraisal process requires the creation of assessment guidelines that make organizations controllable from a distance. Reporting requires the mobilization of quantitative thinking as well as comprehensive qualitative analysis in order to account for different forms of results. Knowledge production in the form of, for instance,

auditing requires imagining how *the project* can be subjected to a scientific process. The ordering of project time requires the activation of linear time as well as a certain amount of acceleration in order to “squeeze” as many activities as possible into a particular time frame.

I argue that these forms of translation should be taken seriously as reproduction of power since they make intelligible particular modes of thinking while silencing others. Thus, this reproduction involves the production of both intelligibility and silence. In the following analysis, I mobilize a post-colonial understanding of translation to account for this process. Although I do not explore the historical trajectory of the concept of translation here, it is important to emphasize its power-laden and colonial dimensions (see Wintroub 2015 for a conceptual history of translation). As has already been stated, translation always implies a struggle resulting in the negotiation and silencing of meanings. Important to emphasize is that a certain imperial form of translation has been pivotal for the emergence and consolidation of a colonial world order, as it has been an important technique for the transfer of knowledge and power (Wintroub 2015).

A significant characteristic of the colonial order has been the invention, dissemination and legitimization of a particular ontology and epistemology. Postcolonial scholars emphasize that colonization in the past was not merely military but also epistemological and ideological in the sense that non-Western territories were not only territorially conquered but also epistemologically colonized through the imposition of knowledge systems based on modern Western science. Processes of colonization included, thus, both genocide as well as *epistemicide* when indigenous knowledge systems were erased (Grosfoguel 2013; Santos, Nunes, and Meneses 2007), as colonization introduced modernity and its associated philosophical worldviews and ideals of knowledge production. These worldviews and knowledge production ideals are related to transcendentalism which emphasizes “homogeneity, stability and essence and a search fixed on the same, equilibrium and the linear” (Teschfahuney 2005:207, my translation).

One way to understand the epistemological power of modernity is to mobilize the concept of *epistemic territory*, used by Vásquez (2011). Modernity, according to Vásquez (2011:28), can be seen as a form of territory that expands itself and “demarcates its proper place”. Translation works as the means to make this territorial expansion possible. I take this concept to mean that modernity as territory is not a physical territory but a boundary-less epistemological space that can include and exclude modes of thinking. I view *the project* as a form of epistemic territory built on a logic of inclusion and exclusion.

Here, I want to return to the conceptual pair of intelligibility and silence to describe how *the project* as an epistemic territory both makes particular modes of thinking and knowledge production systems intelligible and silences others. The processes built into the various phases of *the project* make particular ideals and philosophies intelligible, while others are made invisible. As described in the beginning of this section, a range of translation processes are mobilized in the assembly of *the project*. All these practices can be seen as being an expression of *the project* as an epistemic territory. There are some specific forms of translation that I want to label more explicitly. The assembly that is dependent on acts of translation pertaining to the formulation of measurable goals, quantifiable indicators, and numbered activities, promotes *the measurable* and *the calculable*, as well as, in the long run, *the certain*. The use of management models and scientific approaches to audit and evaluation encourages *the universal* and *the scientific*. The fixation of time into a linear form and the acceleration inherent in the time scheduling for different activities, promote *the linear* and *the accelerated*.

All these acts of translation are, at the same time, productions of silence in the sense that they make their opposites unintelligible. For example, the non-measurable, the non-calculable, the uncertain, the particular, the non-scientific, the non-linear and the non-accelerated do not fit the epistemic territory of *the project* and are rendered silent. *The project* is thus an assemblage in which components based on logic, rationality and universalism are made more intelligible while their opposites are

silenced and made non-existent. It is important to point out that silence and non-existence are actively produced. Santos (2003:238) uses the concept of *sociology of absences* to explain that “what does not exist is, in fact, actively produced as non-existent”. Santos argues that the production of non-existence occurs through the proliferation of what he labels “monocultures” that homogenize thinking according to Western precepts. Three of the monocultures described by Santos are of importance here. Firstly, “the monoculture of knowledge” silences everything that does not fit the parameters of scientific knowledge. Secondly, “the monoculture of linear time” designates the production of non-existence through the dominance of linear time. Thirdly, “the monoculture of the universal and the global” erases what is perceived as local and particular (Santos 2003).

When development takes this form, I argue that it has strong similarities with colonialism. Along the lines of a Latin American research collective (Grosfoguel 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Quijano 2000), I prefer to use the concept of *coloniality* for these similarities as it provides a better understanding of how the assembly of *the project* constitutes a perpetuation of colonial power relations. Coloniality takes its point of departure in the conquest and colonization of the Americas; the start of a massive colonial project which would stand as “a model of power” (Maldonado-Torres 2007:244). According to Quijano (2000), coloniality is built on two axes of power; firstly, that of classifying non-Europeans as inferior with reference to the existence of different “races”; secondly, that of establishing a system of control of labor and resources. As such, coloniality transcends colonialism. While colonialism refers to a historical period of political, social and economic domination, coloniality denotes the inert power relations outliving colonialism (Castro-Gomez and Martin 2002). As Maldonado-Torres (2007:243) puts it:

Coloniality is different from colonialism [...] Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in

aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, we breath [sic] coloniality all the time and everyday.

The way the project assemblage makes modern notions of logic and rationality intelligible while silencing their opposites has the effect of reproducing coloniality as a technology of power. I here take coloniality to be the power structure that sustains Western modern monocultures in the absence of a formal colonial administration (Grosfoguel 2007; Santos 2003). How can the resilience of coloniality be understood in such a mundane device as *the project*? I argue that the reproduction of coloniality is not only an effect of how *the project* is assembled, but also its presupposition. Coloniality should not necessary be considered as an abstract phenomenon. Rather, I would say, coloniality should be seen as existing in discursive and material repertoires that provide the necessary material to compose *the project*.

Valentin Mudimbe's (1988) notion of *the colonial library* serves to prove my point here. Mudimbe coined the concept in relation to the African experience of colonialism, but I argue that it offers general points that help my argument forward. The colonial library should not be understood literally but as a way of expressing how Africa, during centuries of colonialism, has been invented as something different and deviant through the production of a series of texts and systems of representation. The production of difference is central to the colonial library as various textual sources portray colonizers as always being more "modern", "civilized" or "developed" than colonized people. Although referring explicitly to the representation of Africa, I propose that a concept such as the colonial library can be used to understand how *the project* can emerge and be maintained in its modern rational form. I argue that a colonial library, understood as a modified version of Mudimbe's, can be understood as a collection of concepts, binaries, vocabularies and worldviews, existing in material and conceptual repertoires associated with *the project* (such as models and templates, and practices of reporting and auditing), that makes the process of producing intelligibility and silence possible in *the project*. It is this type of library that always works as a premise for the rational construction of *the project*.

Concluding discussion – A struggle between talk and silence

In this final part of the chapter, I aim to make some brief concluding remarks on what makes particular patterns of silence possible.

I would like to think of *the project* as struggle between talk and silence. As described in the above analysis, there is an ongoing struggle between what can be talked about and what is silenced in this very process. In one way, *the project* is permeated by “chatter” and loud talk about planning, calculations, measurements, models and audit procedures, but these belong to a register in which development is made possible to order and govern through technical and administrative means. This can be likened to Dahl’s (2017:97) study on Danish eldercare in which care is made governable by being incorporated in a “political-administrative discourse”, meaning that “care is forced into a discursive straitjacket of being predictable, controllable and transparent”. In this way, other understandings of care are silenced. *The project* is also stuck in a straitjacket of rationalization, calculation and scientification that makes development governable, but at the price of silencing and making the non-rational, the non-calculable and the non-scientific non-existent.

A possible explanation I offer above is that there is a colonial library providing the concepts, vocabularies and worldviews necessary to construct *the project* as a colonial construction. Here, I want to return to an equally important condition for the continuation of coloniality in *the project*: depoliticization. In the previous section, I highlight how the components making up *the project* pave the way for depoliticization. As politics is “rendered technical” (Li 2007a; Li 2007b) through the use of experts and the reduction of political work to administration and technicalities, the political is denied and its ability to articulate conflicts and inequalities related to power is weakened. Hence, the processes of silencing underpinning *the project* cannot be politicized, but are rather intensified, as there is no space to challenge and contest silencing.

In conclusion, *the project* is built on an unequal distribution of talk and silence, making particular ways of thinking intelligible and others non-existent. An important factor that influences silencing is depoliticization. As conflicts cannot be articulated, colonial power relations are allowed to maintain their grip on development practice.

7 Conclusions and discussion

In this concluding chapter, the aim is twofold. Firstly, I aim to draw some general conclusions from the study that has been conducted and spell out its contribution to the literature presented in the theoretical chapter. The second part of the chapter is animated by genuine wonder in relation to how *the project* is to be understood as a form of power and governing in the current historical era. Inspired by Foucault (see O’Leary and Falzon 2010:240), I render *the project* strange by taking a step back from the analysis presented in the previous chapters in favor of discussing how multiple forms of power – neoliberalism and modernity - coalesce in its functioning. However, first I want to discuss how I have fulfilled the aim and how the thesis contributes theoretically to existing literature as well as methodologically to the burgeoning field of assemblage studies.

The thesis and its overall contribution

In order to describe how I have fulfilled the aim of this thesis, a recapitulation of the research questions is necessary. In order to fulfill the aim of investigating how *the project* as an organizational form shapes Swedish development aid and makes it governable, I asked the following research questions:

1. How is *the project* produced and constructed in practice?
2. How is *the project* kept together and stabilized in the face of tensions?
3. What power relations are reproduced and contested as *the project* is constructed in Swedish development aid and how do they challenge its transformational ambitions?

The first research question is answered in the first analytical chapter in which I dig into the practices, processes and artifacts mobilized to assemble each phase in the life cycle of *the project* – application, appraisal, implementation/reporting and auditing. Through activation of the concept of translation, I identify a range of practices, processes and artifacts at play in assembling *the project*. Firstly, in relation to the need for applications to be assembled in a proper way, I show how organizations dedicate time and energy to gain access to funding and

assess its suitability in relation to potential costs and internal goals and strategies. In addition, I analyze the work invested in writing the application, such as creating conditions for effective teamwork, engaging with templates and creating an attractive tone in order to catch the attention of funders. Secondly, for the execution of the appraisal process, I analyze how criteria, support systems (such as handbooks) and internal as well as external expertise are used by funders. Thirdly, I analyze how the assembly of implementation and reporting is made possible through the mobilization of scientific thinking when producing problem analyses for particular interventions and for the sake of writing reports, as well as maximizing success through knowledge exchange in networks and experimental labs. However, this phase of assembly is scarred by tensions as the project logic consists of both unpredictable and rigid components. Fourthly, in relation to the set-up required for auditing to take place, I look into the arrangements made both by funders themselves and by consultants who operate at a competitive market. In addition, I examine the way evaluations are conducted and the strategies and techniques mobilized to smooth out possible tensions during the process. A conclusion that can be drawn from the first analytical chapter is that *the project* is produced and constructed through the mobilization of a multitude of practices, processes, artifacts and repertoires, making it impossible to reduce the formation and the subsequent maintenance of *the project* to a single organizing logic or principle. *The project*, thus, lacks a center.

The second research question is answered through an examination of how the practices, processes and artifacts identified in the previous analytical chapter are ways of giving *the project* a particular stability and coherence. While the first analytical chapter focuses on identifying how *the project* is dependent on different forms of translation, the second analytical chapter deepens the analysis of how this translation contribute to “taming”, and to a certain extent also eradicating, complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty, thereby giving *the project* the appearance of being stable and coherent. Hence, I dedicate this chapter to a more thorough investigation of how stabilization is achieved through the work of (non)human brokers connecting different social worlds and manufacturing consensus. I also analyze how calculation and standardization repertoires, such as quantification and travelling

models, are drawn upon to give *the project* a stable and coherent character. Finally, I explore how the purposeful construction of markets and the activation of a particular conception of time contribute to erasing some of the complexities of *the project*. These processes of stabilization are disrupted by processes of destabilization which arise when the project logic is subjected to various forms of critique. However, this destabilization, I conclude, is not sufficiently strong to break the project assemblage apart.

In the last analytical chapter, I answer the third research question which concerns the power relations being reproduced and contested as *the project* is constructed and stabilized. Here, two specific modes of power reproduction appear. Firstly, *the project* as an organizational form elicits a depoliticized approach to politics. The political (as understood through the lens of Mouffe 2005a) is hollowed out in the sense that the particular marketized and managerialized way of organizing *the project* becomes uncontested and transformed into common sense. In tandem with this process of hollowing out the political, ever more tasks are considered as bureaucratic issues that can be taken care of by non-political professionals and experts. Secondly, the depoliticization elicited by *the project* makes it impossible to politicize and contest relations of power related to the perpetuation of colonialism. As politics is reduced to an issue of administration and technicalities, colonial power relations can maintain their grip on development practice. This is manifested through the normalization of Western philosophies, ideals and epistemologies which, in turn, silence its oppositions, embodied in ideals of the non-calculable, the uncertain and the non-measurable. These power relations can be said to challenge the transformational ambitions of Swedish development aid, as they make *political* work more and more difficult. Although it is problematic to assume that development aid is transformational *per se* (because it is always related to the Western modernization project), Swedish development aid officially aims for the improvement of livelihoods and greater respect for human rights. This implies that a greater politicization of the injustices related to these issues is needed. However, when *the project* gains a strong position as the primary mode of organizing development work, this politicization becomes much more difficult, and the conclusion can thus be made that this

organizational form is indeed a threat against transformational and political work.

This study, in which I have used the notion of *the project* as a methodological strategy to investigate how development work is assembled in practice, has been characterized by a two-step analysis in which I have studied, firstly, the practices of assembly that give impetus to the formation of *the project* and its subsequent maintenance, and, secondly, the power relations being reproduced by particular forms of assembly. I argue that this two-step analysis makes specific contributions to the literature discussed in the theory chapter.

The issue of how development is produced on the ground and the power relations this process possibly engenders has been subject to extensive investigation in both the anthropology of development (see for instance Mosse 2005) and post-development (see for instance Escobar 2012). The literature on the anthropology of development has a clear and well-needed focus on the practices, artifacts and technologies that contribute to making development real in particular contexts (Mosse 2005). By focusing on these practices, it has also been possible to understand development not as an establishment of hegemony but as a constant struggle to make development come true (Li 1999). However, this focus on the practice of making development come true – evident in the processes of translation and meaning-making - sometimes prevents a more explicit analysis of power.

The power analysis is a more prominent component, I argue, in the post-development literature²⁷. Escobar (2012), for instance, takes power as a point of departure in his seminal work *Encountering Development* in which the post-World War II development history is deconstructed as the imposition of a Western understanding of development as a technical solution to “objective” problems. A similar conclusion, although underpinned by a more thorough ethnography, is reached by Ferguson (1994) who observes an “anti-politics machine” imposing itself as improvement schemes are implemented. While this

²⁷These literatures are overlapping and can be seen as *one* literature. However, I see differences in how they deal with power and therefore I consider them as somewhat distinct here.

branch of development studies takes power as a starting point for investigation, it is sometimes prone to view development as the imposition of a unitary hegemony, thereby ignoring the fact that the accomplishment of development is characterized by a messy struggle, implicating different and sometimes contradictory practices, artifacts and technologies. I see this thesis as trying to incorporate the preoccupations of both the anthropology of development and post-development.

In the empirical study, I have incorporated the preoccupation in anthropology of development to stay close to the practice of development. This is evident in the focus on identifying and analyzing the practices, artifacts and technologies stabilizing and destabilizing *the project*. This has made it possible to analyze the growing sophistication of the practice of development management (Dar and Cooke 2008) through the mobilization of, for example, brokers, documents, models, scientific repertoires, quantification and marketization. This focus has helped me take into account how the practice of development is not a result of predefined policy but of a continuous form of unpredictable “tinkering”, meaning the creative and somewhat uncoordinated work of both humans and nonhumans (Mol 2010; Mosse 2005; Rottenburg 2009). However, the power relations being reproduced and contested in these very practices must be analyzed in a way that research in the anthropology of development does not always account for. This is the reason why the empirical study also uses post-development and post-colonial theory in order to show that these practices, artifacts and technologies – however mundane – reproduce notions of rationality, logic and linearity, making *the project* a continuation of a Western modernity and colonialism.

Similarly, the study contributes to the broader literature on marketization and managerialization. Although this is an extensive literature which has covered the spread of marketization and NPM in different contexts, it sometimes suffers from the tendency to describe the development as reforms with a fixed content, sweeping across different country contexts. In this thesis, I have rather aimed to consider marketization and managerialization as practices with a small “m”, meaning that they are not uniformly imposed but translated and

adapted to specific contexts. Thus, in *the project*, marketization and managerialization are rather processes, containing different repertoires, devices and scripts being adapted to its particular context (Clarke 2015). This particular understanding underpins my analysis of travelling models and the assembly of markets.

My contribution to the literature on both international development and marketization/NPM has been made possible by a particular interpretation of the main theoretical figure in this thesis, which is that of *assemblage*. As stated in the methodology chapter, the literature on how to mobilize assemblage thinking for empirical purposes is scarce and the researcher needs to undertake the role of the *bricoleur* in order to construct the particular methodology for empirical work (Ong 2014). This has been a veritable challenge during the writing of the thesis, as there are few methodological guidelines to follow, but at the same time the need for provisional methodological bricolage is also one of the strengths of the assemblage concept. In the following, I aim to clarify how my translation of the assemblage concept into an analytical and methodological framework has contributed to creating good conditions for empirical research with a focus on power.

A general point of departure for working with the concept of assemblage is that I have taken advantage of the fact that it is theoretically parsimonious. Assemblage as a concept has still not taken the route of many other poststructuralist perspectives, for example discourse theory (Glynos and Howarth 2007) and governmentality studies (Dean 2010), around which ever more precise analytical frameworks have been created.²⁸ Although theoretical refinement is not bad *per se*, there is always a danger of tying a framework to a particular understanding which can lead to an increased tendency of research struggling to “apply” analytical concepts according to universal formulas (cf. Walters 2012). However, I have exploited the relative frugality of assemblage as a concept and, according to Deleuzian conceptual thinking, “reinvented” it in relation to this

²⁸For example, Glynos and Howarth’s (2007) so-called “logics approach” has been used to develop the discourse theoretical framework set out by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Dean (2010) has developed a conceptual repertoire in order to construct a particular form of Foucauldian governmentality analysis.

particular study (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1994). I argue that this interpretation has allowed me to retain a creative and imaginative state of mind, both when constructing the methodological framework and when conducting the empirical analysis.

Consequently, I have been able to make my own decisions on what the assemblage concept should mean for this particular study. One specific aspect has been important in how I have fashioned assemblage as an analytical concept in this thesis. I have imagined assemblage thinking as implying an empiricist project, meaning that the analysis of the process of composing *the project* implies a careful and close examination of practices of *assembling* in concrete contexts (Bueger 2014; Ong and Collier 2005). This focus has also allowed me to grasp the mundane labor of assembling – the work of brokers, artifacts, models and numbers - that takes place in constructing *the project* as an unstable configuration. Thus, assemblage thinking is, as Bueger (2014:65) puts it, “an invitation to empirical work”. In this empirical understanding of assemblage thinking, I have also taken seriously the focus on transcending the human/nonhuman divide so zealously perpetuated in the social sciences. Assemblage thinking displays a refreshing refusal to leave materiality outside of empirical analysis and has contributed to the possibility of analyzing nonhuman components. It is important to note here that this empirical focus should not be understood as naïve empiricism which translates assemblage thinking into mere registration of empirical “reality”. Rather, emphasizing the empirical focus serves two ends; firstly, that assemblage thinking provides an opportunity to mesh powerful theoretical concepts with empirical studies in order to study processes of assembly, and secondly, that an empirical focus is a way of explicitly deviating from the tendency to keep assemblage thinking on an abstract theoretical level (cf. Bueger 2014).

Translating the notion of assemblage as an empiricist project into a methodological framework has been a challenge in many ways. Often I have felt like a prisoner between disciplines; on the one hand anthropology, and on the other political science. While anthropology allows the researcher to embrace the messiness of the empirical world, and displays a more radical approach to how an empirical field is

instated and how data is generated and analyzed, political science is rooted in another ontological and epistemological tradition, thereby creating possible conflicts. My way of solving these conflicting approaches has been to acknowledge the multidisciplinary character of contemporary research in the sense that I have not aimed to act as a “pure anthropologist” or a “pure political scientist”. Rather, and here I agree with Ong (2014), the idea behind working with assemblage thinking methodologically is to grab whatever tools that are necessary to study a phenomenon. Thus, in constructing the methodology, I have been inspired by anthropology in the conceptualization of an empirical field and the notion of “following” *the project* as a practice. A political science approach has been important for my decision not to follow one particular empirical project but rather examine broader strategies and techniques of governing and how they contribute to the assembly of *the project* as an organizational form.

A strict adherence to assemblage thinking as implying an empiricist project, however, means that there is a risk of losing oneself in the nitty-gritty of practices, artifacts and technologies mobilized in the assembly process. Having familiarized myself with the field of assemblage studies, my impression is that the issues of power and politics are sometimes neglected at the expense of a thorough analysis of assembly processes. This is the reason behind the two-step analysis in which I study processes of assembly *and* analyze their political implications. Although assemblage thinking has made it possible to identify processes of assembly and realize how an assemblage can never be reduced to a single logic or center of power, it lacks a normative vocabulary which can be deployed to analyze the harmful effects of how a particular phenomenon is assembled.

For example, assemblage thinking has made it possible to detect a decentered form of power, evident in disparate components and practices such as standardized templates, the marketization of funding and the role of expertise in auditing processes. While assemblage thinking provides the conceptual resources to study how these components stabilize *the project*, it does not provide a ground for critical discussion of the political implications of assembling a set of components in a particular way. The discussion of these implications

in the present thesis is a way for me to find a space for letting political science make a contribution to assemblage thinking. If political science, in its most general form, is the study of power and politics, I have used this basic preoccupation in order to explore how the findings from the analysis - the creation of markets, the standardized documentation, the disciplining of time - indicate ways of *instituting politics*, broadening and narrowing the notion of what politics can and cannot do. To conclude, I have conducted an assemblage analysis driven by a preoccupation with how processes of assembly lead to political effects.

Rendering *the project* strange – Dealing with “ghosts”

In this part of the concluding chapter, I take on the task of rendering *the project* strange in the sense that I aim to discuss how different modes of power – sometimes aligned, sometimes contradictory to each other – coalesce in *the project*. This means that I deepen the discussion on some modes of power already touched upon in the analysis, while also taking a step back to introduce new ones and see how they all coalesce in *the project*, aligning as well as creating tensions with each other. This will to render *the project* strange comes from two “ghosts” that have haunted this thesis project from its very beginning: the ghosts of neoliberalism and modernity. This thesis started in a will to understand neoliberalism as a way of organizing politics in contemporary society. As I dived deeper into the literature, I started to see it “everywhere”, as Peck and Tickell (2002:380) starts one of the seminal contributions on how to understand contemporary neoliberalism. Either neoliberalism is present as an ideology, sweeping over the globe with unitary and homogeneous effects (Harvey 2006), or as a technology of governing, evident in contextually situated practices of marketization and managerialization which are always unique and contingent (Higgins and Larner 2017; Larner 2000; Ong 2007). Furthermore, as the meaning of neoliberalism expanded and started to include, for instance, the use of calculative technologies to maximize effectiveness, it increasingly also started to bear the signs of modernity, which during centuries have colonized the world with rationalization and instrumental thinking (Weber 1991). Thus, since I started working on this thesis, I have struggled with whether

neoliberalism and modernity are entangled with each other or two distinct rationalities that need to be taken into account when studying contemporary forms of power.

In this section, I explore how *the project* consists of practices and processes related to both neoliberalism and modernity. The objective is to deploy an assemblage imaginary in order to explore how *the project* comes to life and sustains itself through the work of multiple logics.

Marketization, managerialization, optimization and transparency

The clearest neoliberal components evident in *the project* are practices related to marketization, managerialization and (self)-optimization. As the analysis of how *the project* is constructed and (de)stabilized shows, marketization plays a pivotal role. *The project* is subject to marketization in the sense that markets are constructed for the sake of organizing the application and the auditing phase. Marketization, here, appears as the result of a purposeful design which serves to install artificial competition. In these processes, another dimension of marketization becomes visible, which is that of outsourcing beyond the state. The boundaries of the state become more and more porous and flexible as central functions of development aid is outsourced to civil society (for implementation) and consultants (for appraisal and auditing).

Marketization is considered a way to enhance effectiveness. This is also the aim when subjecting *the project* to a managerial logic. In order to achieve effectiveness, there are attempts to create generic solutions with universal applicability. This comes to expression in *the project* through the reliance on universal models and best practices providing answers to, for example, how effectiveness can be achieved and how thematic priorities can be integrated. These models are also experimented with in laboratories, which is an increasingly more common trait of neoliberal governing (Peck and Theodore 2015). As Öjehag-Pettersson (2015:278), drawing on Ong (2006), argues, regional development can be understood as a space of exception in which “neoliberal technologies are not only let loose but forcefully

experimented with”. *The project* can be understood in the same way; as a space in which models and best practices are disseminated in networks and experimented with in innovative labs.

The enhancement of effectiveness is, furthermore, maximized through transparency. Through total transparency, everything in *the project* becomes open to control and scrutiny. For example, the way reporting and appraisal are organized makes *the project* open to control. Both the form and the content of reporting show that transparency is the ultimate objective. Firstly, reporting is partly dependent on the reporting and circulation of numbers which serve as a way to present naked facts without human interference. Secondly, the particular mode of self-reporting in digital databases, meaning that organizations report their own results without taking the detour through funders, displays a will to be as transparent as possible, without too much distorting interference. Thirdly, the design and the execution of the appraisal process encourage organizations to be transparent about their internal control and management structure in order to make them controllable at a distance.

This form of transparency is characterized by what Byung Chul-Han (2017:38), calls the “superabundance of positivity”. What Han means by positivity is explained in an eloquent way by Landázuri (2019:8): “‘Positivity’ refers to the direct relationship of human beings with facts, and just facts, without any kind of intermediation: overachievement, overproduction, over-exposure to data”. A society of positivity is a society with extreme transparency; there are no limits or restrictions on what can be seen and known. Indeed, *the project* displays this transparency in one way as some aspects of it are made visible. However, although there is total transparency in some respects, *the project* is also marked by its non-transparency. While numbers and reports in databases are naked facts to some degree, the labor of assembly invested to produce them is obscured. For example, the acts of consensus-making that silence possible conflicts around the production of facts are not included in the quest for total positivity but are regularly excluded.

The project displays another set of components that gives it its neoliberal character. What I have in mind here is the self-perpetuating and self-optimizing character of *the project*. *The project*, although building on the logic of time limitation and having a formal end, is designed to be perpetually ongoing. Thus, although occurring in time cycles, there are aspects of *the project* that guarantee its character as a *perpetuum mobile*. For example, despite the fact that each particular project has a formal end, the processes of evaluation and knowledge production function as repertoires from which to draw in order to constantly improve and optimize *the project* as a general practice. Recall how regular auditing procedures containing “dialogue issues” (general areas of improvement that are regularly discussed between funders and civil society organizations) can be seen as technologies that secure the continuous optimization of *the project*. In addition, the constant production of knowledge and expertise disseminated and experimented with in networks and labs shows that *the project* can always be worked with and optimized. This is reminiscent of how Deleuze (1992) describes “control society”. Formulated as a development of Foucault’s disciplinary society in which people are disciplined in closed spaces, Deleuze describes a capillary form of control that cannot be confined to specific spaces. For example, while Foucault sees the school as an enclosed space for discipline, the activities of learning, for Deleuze (1992:5), have travelled outside school through what he calls “perpetual training”. Thus, learning is continuously occurring, making people in societies of control “never finished with anything” (Deleuze 1992:5). Accordingly, the auditing procedures and knowledge production activities are examples of how training directed towards optimization makes *the project* perpetually ongoing as self-reflection and improvement is always present, even outside the time frame of a particular project.

Furthermore, this continuous quest for optimization creates a form of precarious subject - embodied in the project worker. Isabell Lorey (2015) sees contemporary neoliberal society as characterized by “governmental precarization”, meaning that governing is accomplished through instituting insecurity. Insecurity is no longer confined to the “margins” of society, but has spread to become a way of governing the whole of society. In a society governed through

precarization, subjects deploy self-governing to handle different forms of insecurity continuously. The project worker is a subject of this precarization and subjects herself to self-management and self-calculation to deal with the increasing insecurity. *The project* consists of different technologies of governing putting the project worker in a precarious position. The funding arrangements imply that the project worker must be on a constant move for funding opportunities and invent an adequate “tone” and content in order to be “attractive” in an application. During implementation, (and as described above), self-optimization is mobilized by consuming knowledge and expertise. To conclude, what I see in this quest for optimization is a way to deal with the increasing precarization inherent in *the project*.

Standardization and rationalization

Everything that occurs in the project must be subject to planning: planning of the use of time, resource planning, organization. Divide, break up, break down. Structure and calculability. (Hasselberg 2008:82, my translation)

The neoliberal components of *the project* all have something in common, as they point to a state of mobility and contingency. The neoliberal project tears down barriers against transparency, makes the boundaries of the state more porous, encourages experimentation, and promotes a never-ending process of (self)-optimization. While this shows that *the project* is a “throbbing confederation” (Bennett 2010), characterized by constant mobility and change, it is also a bureaucratized entity with particular standardizing activities attached to it. *The project* is, thus, a space for a paradox which is captured by Fredric Jameson:

The paradox that must be our starting point is the equivalence between an unprecedented degree of change at all levels of social life and an unprecedented standardization of everything - emotions and consumer goods, emotions and the built space - which should be incompatible with such variability ... What we then realize is that no society has ever been so standardized as this, and that the current of human, social and historical times has never flowed in such a homogeneous way. (Jameson quoted in Fisher 2011:91, my translation)

The standardization of modern society that Jameson defines as extraordinary is present to a high degree in *the project*. *The project* consists of a range of practices, processes and artifacts that elicit standardization and homogenization. These practices and processes display a significant degree of sophistication, as they are able to subject all aspects of *the project* to ordering and calculation. Three examples are worth discussing here. Firstly, *the project* and its associated practices, processes and artifacts have the effect of creating bureaucratic organizations. *The project* mobilizes a particular organizational form with clear boundaries and relations to other organizations as well as a rational internal control and management system, creating both specific functions and roles for trained professionals. In this way, *the project* displays almost the same characteristics as Weber's (1947) ideal type of bureaucracy. While *the project* displays classical standardized and bureaucratic characteristics, it is worth highlighting the fact that the bureaucracy operating in it does not only emanate from the state, which is the space with which Weber's theory of bureaucracy is mostly associated. As Hibou (2019:156, my translation) states:

Today's bureaucratization should [...] not be understood as an institution or authority - a hierarchical apparatus belonging to the state - but as a collection of norms, rules, procedures and formalities that cover not only the state administration but the whole of society.

Hibou (2019:156, my translation) goes on to add that bureaucracy is not imposed from above but “set in motion through the same actors that are its target”. Accordingly, *the project* is an example in which bureaucratic procedures and practices are not imposed by the state. While there are examples of the state determining rules that civil society organizations and consultants are supposed to follow, these actors also create their own procedures, implicating them in a wider bureaucracy.

A second example of standardization concerns time. Time is standardized by being incorporated in a linear and accelerated way of thinking. Linearity is established by imagining *the project* as having a beginning and an end, with a sequence of activities that are to be implemented according to calendar time. Time is also accelerated in

the project as there is a tendency to consider it as something to be stretched in order to squeeze as many activities as possible into a specific period of time. Thirdly, *the project* is built on various forms of calculation. Through the mobilization of quantification, visible in the use of numbers and indicators, various aspects of *the project* are reduced to matters of counting and measurement.

Although these calculative and bureaucratic attributes of *the project* can be seen as consequences of the neoliberal restructuring of society along the lines of managerialization, I argue that the practices and processes briefly described are also central to the more general project of *modernity* which predates neoliberalism. To summarize modernity as a concept is difficult, but here I take it to mean what Weber (1991) calls “rationalization”, which denotes the process of systematizing knowledge for the sake of mastering all facets conceivable of reality and the general instrumentalization of thinking, meaning the exact calculation of means to achieve a specific end. This process of rationalization is also about the power to erase the non-rational. As Bennett (2009:214) argues, rationalization encompasses processes, “each of which opts for the precise, regular, constant, and reliable over the wild, spectacular, idiosyncratic, and surprising”.

These rationalizing tendencies are evident in *the project* as it is subject to various practices aiming to code it according to a universal language of precision, predictability and calculation.

The project as a Janus face – Part neoliberal, part modern

The preceding sections have been an attempt to discuss whether *the project* is forged by neoliberal or modern technologies of governing. While neoliberalism and modernity overlap considerably, I, here, want to consider them as somewhat distinct rationalities that structure and maintain *the project*. In the literature on neoliberalism, especially the one in which the meaning of neoliberalism is expanded to include a particular way of governing, it is easy to come to the conclusion that managerial practices leading to rationalization and standardization can be subsumed under the master signifier of neoliberalism. Here, I want to make a distinction and consider *the project* as an outcome of the

intermingling of modern and neoliberal logics, creating a particular form of *advanced neoliberal-modern assemblage*.

Both neoliberalism, with its sophisticated set of techniques and strategies for making governing more multiple and decentralized, and modernity, with its will to order, standardize and rationalize, supply the necessary raw material to construct and sustain *the project*. This raw material comprises both discourses providing the conceptual frameworks, and “operational” practices, strategies and artifacts that make the construction of *the project* possible. While these distinct logics reinforce one another and sometimes constitute a smooth amalgamation, there are also possible contradictions. The main contradiction is that bureaucratic principles of rationalization and standardization can stand in contrast to the neoliberal focus on flexibility and experimentation. Thus, *the project* builds on a paradox; the promise of flexibility, mobility and the transgression of boundaries is paired with the belief that these processes can be thoroughly standardized and bureaucratized through rules and regulations.

Challenging the project society

The above discussion reveals a rather dystopian view of *the project* as a space in which two resilient modes of power coalesce. I consider *the project* as a technology of governing that is worthy of contestation since it is ultimately not only a matter of how development aid is assembled, but also a mainstay of how *politics* is assembled in contemporary society. *The project* is fixed by neoliberal and modern notions which significantly narrows the scope for the expression of “the political” (Mouffe 2005a). How can such a practice be resisted and new alternatives be envisioned? I would like to end this thesis with some reflections on if and how *the project* can be resisted and possible alternatives.

I would like to call the first mode of resistance *identifying surfaces of politicization*. During the course of the analysis, I have identified multiple tensions, conflicts and contradictions “leaking” out of *the project*. For example, in the final analytical chapter, I analyze ways in which *the project* is mended through maintenance and repair. I show

how *the project* is fraught by conflicts putting the very possibility of transformational development work at stake. Instead of resisting the practices that obstruct development work, *the project* finds ways to marginalize various conflicts and contradictions through maintenance and repair. In this analysis, I briefly argue that these contradictions should instead be politicized. This is what I mean by identifying surfaces of politicization. These conflicts are not be glossed over but instead highlighted since they harbor the seeds for politicization and contestation. Accordingly, instead of mending the project assemblage, the conflicts that will inevitably rise should be considered *political* and thus be subject to political debate in the public sphere. This politicization could open up a discussion of the fact that *the project* builds on bizarre and unreasonable rationalities from a political perspective. Although *the project* fulfills all the *technical* requirements perfectly well, the political effects are unreasonable in the sense that marketization and managerialization are permitted to colonize the political sphere.

The second mode of resistance is captured in the concept of *constructive resistance*. Constructive resistance was coined to offer a way of not only understanding resistance as opposition to power, but also enacting alternatives (Baaz et al. 2016; Wiksell 2020). What I have in mind here is the possibility of creating alternatives to *the project*; alternatives incorporating the philosophies and epistemologies that have been silenced. Decolonial scholars argue for the need for epistemological “delinking” that “brings to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economy, other politics, other ethics” (Mignolo 2007:453). Thus, alternatives to *the project* can reignite philosophies and worldviews that have been “buried by other dominating paradigms” (Aman 2015:279, my translation). Tlostanova (2012), for example, sees the decolonial critique as an alternative to post-colonial studies which, she argues, study the effects of colonialism through the mobilization of western concepts and scholarly work. In contrast, the decolonial understanding searches for alternatives in subjugated knowledges present in, for instance, the worldviews of the Zapatistas, Caucasus cosmology or Sufism. In one of the interviews made for this

thesis, a civil society representative tells a story that can be seen as a way of resisting colonial categorization by recognizing local knowledge:

What I can see quite often is just that, our way of working is that we require from our partners, at different levels, that they should tell us how many activities they should do, how many seminars that should be done, and then we expect all of these to be done no matter what happens in the country or the region [...]. I remember a few years ago I was in Central America discussing with a teacher there, and what he finally said when we had discussed a number of seminars or meetings or something [was] that “this can happen if the rainy season allows it”. And so he explained that when it rains too much, it will be difficult or impossible for him and that village to mobilize, or... So, everything could fail to materialize depending on the rainy season that no one can predict. (Interview, Informant 18, my translation)

I argue that this quote shows that a source of envisioning an alternative can be found in the local knowledge tradition (the “rainy season”) that cannot be understood through Western temporal organization in which a set of activities must be implemented according to linear time. Thus, there is a possibility of imagining an alternative to *the project* in which the notion of development (which, of course, is a colonial category itself) can be infused with other ways of imagining the improvement of livelihoods; a way that takes into account the non-calculable, the non-linear and the ambiguous and complex. At the same time, this is also a surface of politicization, as a particular way of imagining development can be politicized.

As I believe it is not the researcher’s role to provide practical recommendations, I will not provide a conclusion on what is the most effective form of resistance (who can anyway?) but rather emphasize that it is of great importance to resist project society and imagine alternative visions to it. Otherwise, we have abdicated to what Timothy Snyder (2017) calls “the politics of inevitability” which is the notion that history can only move in one direction in which particular ways of organizing society are uncontestable. The project may seem innocuous but allowing it to be an inevitable principle of societal organization would be dangerous.

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Appendix 1

Summary of empirical material

In this appendix, I give an overview of the empirical material analyzed in the study (semi-structured interviews, focus group, observations, and documents).

Interviews

Informant	Date for interview	Position/Organization
Informant 1	September 26, 2017	Coordinator, state agency for international development
Informant 2	October 26, 2017	Program specialist, state agency for international development
Informant 3	October 16, 2017	Methods expert, civil society organization
Informant 4	October 16, 2017	Grants Manager, civil society organization
Informant 5	November 20, 2017	Regional Head, civil society organization
Informant 6	March 21, 2018 (telephone)	Head of Office, civil society organization
Informant 7	March 15, 2018	General secretary, civil society organization
Informant 8	March 15, 2018	Communications officer, civil society organization
Informant 9	March 26, 2018	Independent consultant
Informant 10	April 3, 2018	Desk officer, state agency for international development

Informant 11	April 12, 2018	Political desk officer, civil society organization
Informant 12	April 12, 2018	International desk officer, civil society organization
Informant 13	April 27, 2018	Desk officer, state agency for international development
Informant 14	May 7, 2018	Head of office, civil society organization
Informant 15	May 7, 2018	Head of Programs, civil society organization
Informant 16	May 8, 2018	Desk officer, civil society organization
Informant 17	May 8, 2018	Desk officer, civil society organization
Informant 18	May 7, 2018	Desk officer, civil society organization
Informant 19	May 8, 2018	Desk officer, civil society organization
Informant 20	May 7, 2018	Methods coordinator, civil society organization
Informant 21	May 8, 2018	Desk officer, civil society organization
Informant 22	May 8, 2018	Program officer, civil society organization
Informant 23	May 23, 2018	Advocacy and Program officer, civil society organization
Informant 24	September 5, 2018	Former Head of Evaluation, state agency for international development
Informant 25	May 22, 2018	Consultant at larger firm
Informant 26	September 4, 2018	Independent consultant

Informant 27	September 3, 2018	Consultant at smaller firm
Informant 28	October 16, 2018	Consultant at smaller firm
Informant 29	September 20, 2018	Consultant at larger firm
Informant 30	September 20, 2018	Consultant at larger firm
Informant 31	September 21, 2018	Consultant at larger firm
Informant 32	September 21, 2018	Consultant at larger firm
Informant 33	September 24, 2018	Consultant at larger firm
Informant 34	October 9, 2018	Project Manager, civil society organization
Informant 35	October 9, 2018	Project Manager, civil society organization
Informant 36	October 9, 2018	Coordinator of Finance, civil society organization
Informant 37	October 10, 2018	Project Manager, civil society organization
Informant 38	October 10, 2018	Program Manager and Lead Researcher, civil society organization

Focus group interview May 21, 2018

Person	Position/Organization
Participant 1	Desk officer, civil society organization
Participant 2	Assistant general secretary, civil society organization
Participant 3	Head of operations, civil society organization
Participant 4	Deputy Head of Office, civil society organization

Observations

Observation	Date and place
Dialogue meeting between state agency for international development and civil society organizations	February 19, 2018, state agency for international development, Stockholm
Methods network, Meeting 1	February 21, 2018, civil society organization, Stockholm
Methods network, Meeting 2	April 11, 2018, civil society organization, Stockholm
Methods network, Meeting 3	June 13, 2018, civil society organization, Stockholm
Methods network, Meeting 4	September 5, 2018, civil society organization, Stockholm
Methods network, Meeting 5	November 7, 2018, civil society organization, Stockholm

Documents

Document	Description of document type	Additional information
Document 1, Civil society organization	Application from small CSO to state funder (2016)	Title of document: “Promoting inclusive security – Women organizations as key actors in implementing UNSCR 1325 in Cameroon, DR Congo and Nigeria (Phase II)”, 2016-2017
Document 2, Civil society organization	Application from union to intermediary CSO for joint project with partners (2017)	Title of document: “Trade unions building peace, equality and quality public services”
Document 3, civil society organization	Application from small CSO to state funder (2018)	Title of document: “Promoting inclusive security – Women

		organizations as key actors in implementing UNSCR 1325 in Cameroon, DR Congo and Nigeria (Phase II)", 2017-2018
Document 4, Civil society organization	Time plan template constructed by intermediary CSO for partner organizations (2016)	Title of document: "Timeline for activities"
Document 5, State funder	Strategy for funding CSOs working in international development, issued by state funder (2016)	Title of document: "Strategi för stöd genom svenska organisationer i det civila samhället för perioden 2016-2022"
Document 6, Civil society organization	Handbook for project management, Intermediary CSO (2018)	Title of document: "Handbok Projekt och Program (Handledning för ansökan, avtal, utbetalningar och rapporter mm)"
Document 7, State funder	Assessment memo of application by state funder (2018)	Title of document: "Appraisal of intervention, final"
Document 8, Civil society organization	Results framework template from intermediary CSO to partner organizations (2016)	Title of document: "Results framework"
Document 9, Civil society organization	Instruction for the completion of application template from intermediary CSO	Title of document: "Instruction application template"

	to partner organizations (2016)	
Document 10, State funder	Guidelines for funding, issued by state funder (2016)	Title of document: “Sidas riktlinjer för ramorganisationer inom anslaget Stöd genom svenska organisationer i det civila samhället”
Document 11, State funder	Guidelines for funding, issued by state funder (2015)	Title of document: ”Folke Bernadotteakademins riktlinjer för Fredsmiljonen”
Document 12, Civil society organization	Organizational assessment template from intermediary CSO of partner organizations (no date)	Title of document: ”Organizational assessment”
Document 13, State funder	Internal guidelines for funding, issued by state funder (2015)	Title of document: “Interna Riktlinjer – Fredsmiljonen”
Document 14, State funder	Routine for spot checks from state funder (2014)	Title of document: ”Rutin för stickprov vid beredning och uppföljning”
Document 15, State funder	Terms of reference for spot check from state funder (2017)	Title of document: ”Terms of reference for spot-checks of integration of environment and climate change in the work of Sida’s framework organizations”

Document 16, Consultancy firm	Evaluation made by larger consultancy firm (2018)	Title of document: “Evaluation of xx” (civil society organization)
Document 17, Civil society organization	Application from intermediary civil society organization to state funder (no date)	Title of document: “Ansökan- Påverkansprogrammet”
Document 18, Civil society organization	Report from partner organization to intermediary CSO (2018)	Title of document: “Project Report, African Regional Project to Promote Women Participation in their Unions”
Document 19, civil society organization	Assessment memo of partner report from intermediary CSO (no date)	Title of document: “PM redovisning, Organisational development and leadership training”
Document 20, Methods network	Meeting minutes, Methods network, April 11, 2018	
Document 21, Methods network	Meeting minutes, Methods network, September 5, 2018	
Document 22, Civil society organization	Guidelines for the AAR method, Intermediary CSO (no date)	Title of document: “After Action Review”
Document 23, state funder	Concept paper on results lab (2018)	Title of document: “Results lab – Developing methods for results-based management”
Document 24, Civil society organization	Meeting minutes, Methods network, November 7, 2018	

Document 25, State funder	Meeting minutes, Annual meeting between state funder and intermediary CSO (2017)	
Document 26, State funder	Questions for follow up visits, state funder (2016)	
Document 27, State funder	Guidelines for public procurement, state funder (2015)	Title of document: "Processbeskrivning för att upphandla varor och tjänster"
Document 28, State funder	Evaluation handbook, state funder (2018)	Title of document: "Sida's Evaluation Handbook – Guidelines and manual for conducting evaluations at Sida"

Appendix 2

Translation of Document 1, Chapter 4

The implementation of the project

The section shall describe the activities you plan in order to fulfill the objective and the intermediate goals of the project. Up to four intermediate goals can be formulated.

Intermediate goal 1 (should be specific, measurable, accepted, realistic and time-bound and contribute to the fulfillment of the objective of the project)

Activities (what activities are to be implemented, what methods and ways of working are to be used and how do they help you in achieving the intermediate goal?)

Target group (to whom are the activities directed and how is the project anchored in this target group?)

Expected results of the activities (What achievements are expected from the activities, that is, what outputs do you expect?)

Indicators (should be concrete and relatively specific and are used in order to be able to measure if the expected results of the project have been achieved)

Time plan (when are the activities to be implemented?)



(Dis)assembling Development

The project enjoys a prominent position as a mode of governing in contemporary society. In a political landscape in which marketization and management principles exert great influence, *the project* has found fertile ground to thrive in, as it offers both flexibility and control. This thesis explores how *the project* is used to organize Swedish development aid and the political implications for transformational work.

Exploring how civil society organizations, state funders, and consultants organize development work through *the project*, the thesis illustrates the importance of assembling a wide array of components, ranging from consensus-building among stakeholders to the mobilization of artifacts, standards, expertise, and markets. The drawing together of these components displays a high level of organizational capacity, as they stabilize *the project* into a depoliticized form of governing in which administration and expertise displace politics. Furthermore, depoliticization hampers the possibility to politicize the colonial notions of rationality, logic, and linearity upon which *the project* rests. *The project*, thus, reproduces power relations that are specific for modernity and neoliberal modes of governing, thereby warranting a critical approach to its use.

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