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Bright and Dark Spots in Project Studies: Continuing Efforts to Advance Theory Development and Debate

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Abstract

In this special issue, we encouraged project scholars to be bold and construct their voices. We now reflect on the results, which include the *bright spots* in four areas: project organizing (organizing and collaborating in and between projects), project value (organizing value in and through projects), project citizenship (living in and through projects), and project scholarship (reflecting on project theorizing and scholarship). We then dared to voice our views on three dark spots: a lack of diversity in the project scholars' ethnicities, geographies, and genders; in disciplines that extend beyond management and organization studies; and in modes of reflexivity.

Introduction

This special issue was born out of discomfort with the current debate and theory development in project studies. Indeed, theory development and debate are building blocks of any scholarly community; they reflect and develop the understanding of what the scholarly community stands and cares for (Geraldi et al., 2020). It is well known that theorization and debate work in tandem, as advancements in theory require scholars to engage in debates with peers within, as well as outside, their own community and to "cite, engage, struggle, argue with each other, at times vigorously and incisively" (Hardy & Clegg, 1997, p. S14).

However, we perceive that the increasing concerns with career advancement and publication in high-ranked journals contribute to a preoccupying shift from content to form. For example, the debate and conversation in project-related conferences often center on the craft of writing an article: how the introduction, method, and discussion are framed and argued. Scholars spend considerable time second-guessing what reviewers might say; rename research and empirical observations to fit trending academic interests; and spend more time and energy in writing and rewriting than in the actual data collection and analysis, all to fit the requirements of a select few high-ranked journals. This is a potential problem that we would like to address.

The focus on publishing in the so-called top journals is undoubtedly important for individual careers and, broadly, for the recognition of the project studies as a vibrant scholarly community and area of research. In recent years, several project-related papers in top journals have clearly contributed to improved academic recognition of project studies, the knowledge of theoretical concepts from other fields, and the academic-writing ability of scholars within the field of project studies. However, our concern is that the preoccupation with writing with the words of others, for other audiences, might have taken too much attention at the expense of addressing relevant questions in project studies. Consequently, this has sacrificed the discussion of the actual content of the theorizing.

We need an ongoing reflection on the actual and pressing empirical and research problems, the data, its potential insight, implications for our understanding of projects as phenomena, and the value of the research: What are the pressing realities that need to be addressed to advance our understanding of projects and the field of project studies? Is it worth being written? If yes, to whom and why? Continued reflexivity on these issues is central to the future development of our field and should

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remain in the foreground for the interactions among scholars in our field.

Moreover, the disproportional focus on publishing might very well negatively influence our engagement with practice (Söderlund & Maylor, 2012) and lose touch with the pressing realities of managers. This might be problematic, as project studies have always had their ears close to the ground, always trying to understand new management problems and challenges. Research in project studies has traditionally benefited from an in-depth understanding of the empirical field and the ability to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with project practitioners, reflect on practice and through practice, and consider creative and innovative possibilities for the future in collaboration between academics and practitioners. As a consequence, our papers tend to be more phenomenon-driven rather than focused on providing solutions to theoretical puzzles, while many top management and organization journals seem to encourage theoretical puzzle solving at the expense of empirical investigations (Tourish, 2020).

Having said that, top management journals have, in recent years, experienced a shift toward a stronger focus on empirical problems—particularly of societal concern (Courpasson, 2013), including greater concerns for the so-called grand challenges of management. This tendency is strengthened by the growing demand of national funding agencies for management and organization studies research to contribute to the movement around grand societal challenges. Moreover, general management and organization studies have been accused of being in an identity crisis and that they struggle to strike a chord that is relevant to and that resonates with practitioners. Commentators perceive a "McDonaldization" (Hayes & Wynyard, 2002) of academia, which includes but is not limited to the mass production of papers through formulaic styles (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013), sometimes obscuring the obvious (Tourish, 2020) to increase the number of publications in top-ranked journals (Aguinis et al., 2020). As Courpasson (2013) concludes after five years of acting as the editor in chief of *Organization Studies*, "[The] current system of scientific manufacturing creates more papers to review, with less committed and less timely reviewers, with a lower density of challenging ideas, as well as of ideas that are less significant for 'the world'" (p. 1246). Therefore, as we mimic the discourse and paper fabrication practices of the more established management disciplines (e.g., strategy), we should avoid the risk of missing project studies' empirical embeddedness—as this might, in fact, be the road ahead for project studies, not only to contribute with interesting theory in project studies and general management, but also to stay close to the ground of practice.

In this context, the present special issue sought to open the window to further advancements in debate and theorizing. In that regard, we wanted to promote what Courpasson (2013) calls "passionate scholarship"—that is, a scholarship that produces less but cares more about both the quality of theorizing and the societal issues that it addresses. In particular, we encouraged project scholars to boldly construct their vested voices through conceptual papers or essays. The project studies community accepted the challenge. We received 47 proposals, of which 23 were invited to be developed into full papers. We worked with authors intensively over more than two years, and the result is 13 contributions divided, as a special issue, into two parts.

Editing this special issue was far from a straightforward project. We believe that our project benefited from what Hirschman (1967) refers to as the "hiding hand," which providentially was shielding our ignorance and allowed us to commit to the project and make it work in the end. As we initiated the project, we were confident about the extent of our commitment. We have edited special issues many times before and worked together on other projects; we trusted and respected one another. Yet, this special issue was in many ways extraordinary. We worked with the submissions over the course of up to three years going through between two to five rounds of revisions, from the submission of the extended abstract to the publication of this second part of the special issue.

We asked authors to publish their contributions in the form of essays. The review and revision process was anything but trivial; after all, developing one's voice is tough not only for authors but also for reviewers (and surely for us as editors), as this deviates somewhat from traditional journal papers. As Gabriel (2016) argues, "what the essay allows is the use of different forms of reasoning, including analogies, illustrations and narratives, as well as different legitimate rhetorical and stylistic devices which appeal to emotion to explore, develop, defend, challenge or qualify a position." (p. 245) Such writing style is refreshing and gives space for the developed of vested voices we welcomed. Voices were indeed personal and vested, and we definitely experienced the passionate scholarship we were looking for (Courpasson, 2013), which we welcomed, admired, protected, and polished throughout the review process. Indeed, we made difficult decisions along the way that may have disappointed reviewers and authors. Whether the issue turns out to be "providential" or not, only history can say. However, we indeed brought the project to the finish line, and we are proud to share a wide range of well-grounded and also bold voices of project scholars.

In the introduction of the first special issue, we explored the value of debate and theorizing more generally; in this special issue editorial, we take stock of this project. We summarize the debates and theorizing published in the two special issues and reflect on the voices that remain silenced and forms of activating them. We start with an integrative map that synthesizes the "advancements in debate and theorizing" published in these special issues. Subsequently, we reflect on the bright and dark spots of project studies around three approaches to avoid an excessive focus on publishing and instead enhance diversity in the concerns of our field: diversity in project scholars, disciplines, and kinds of reflexivity.
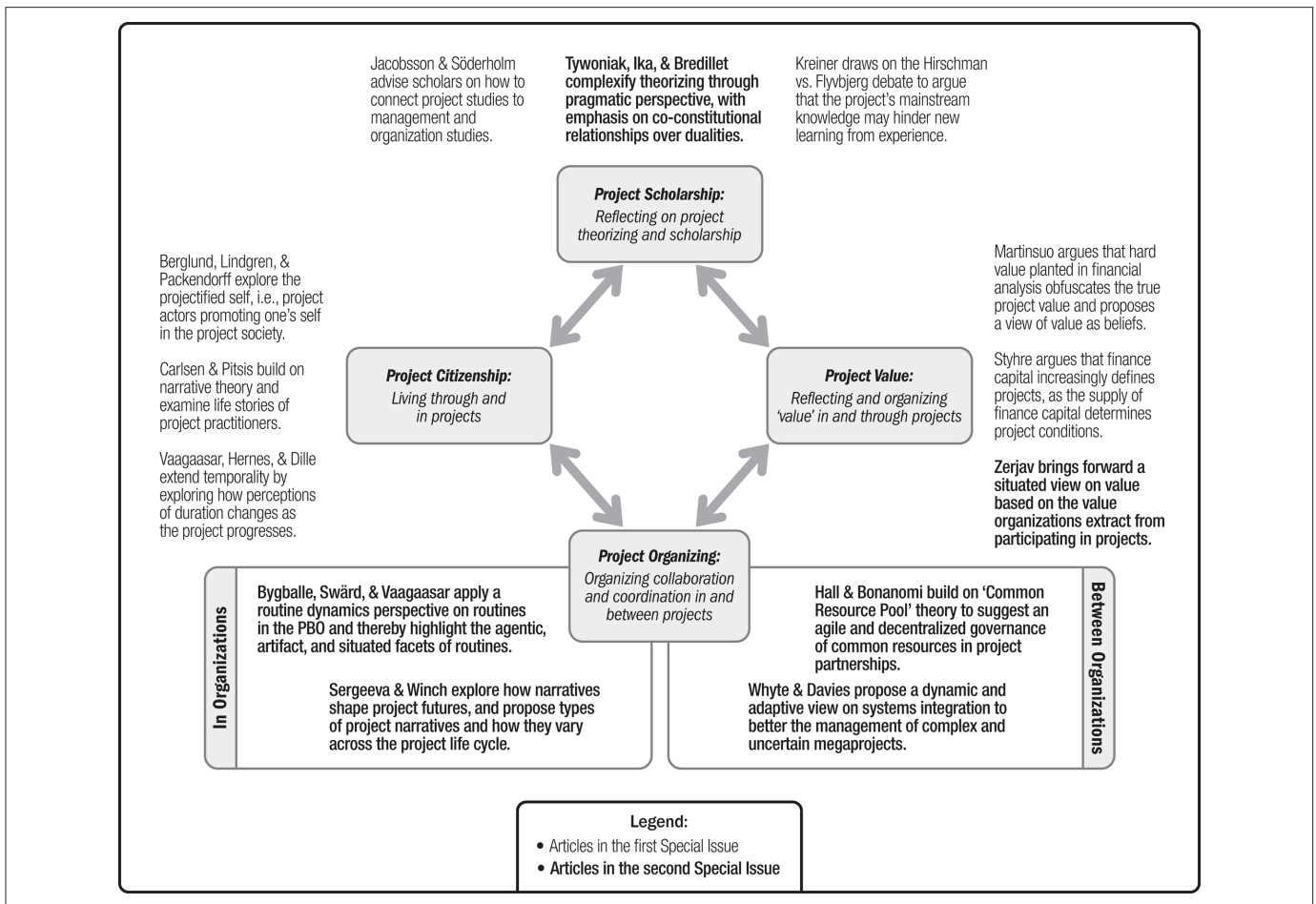
Figure 1. Mapping themes of the first and second special issues on debates and theory development in project studies.

Mapping the Debate and Theorizing Across the Two Special Issues

We have clustered the articles in the special issue thematically and inductively into four themes: project scholarship, project value, project organizing, and project citizenship (Figure 1). The objective was to logically connect the articles to each other and to more general discussions that speak to the wider organization studies community. Below, we describe these four themes and introduce each of the contributions; in particular, we emphasize the articles published in this second special issue (see Geraldi et al., 2020, for a comprehensive introduction to the articles in the first special issue).

Project Organizing

This area of work represents the core of project studies—how projects are organized in and between organizations. In *Reframing Systems Integration: A Process Perspective on Projects*, **Jennifer Whyte** and **Andrew Davies** frame interorganizational projects as an adaptative and flexible process of systems integration. The authors criticize current perspectives

on systems integration for their insufficient adaptability and argue for a systems integration—where both organizational and technical elements of systems can work together successfully because they adapt to one another and to the context, which is characterized by high complexity and uncertainty. Such a perspective is particularly relevant today, because society needs its projects to tackle complex and uncertain challenges such as climate change. While the focus was on project organizing and its relationship with the complex tapestry of sociotechnical systems in society, the article also makes a conceptual contribution to project studies, as it does not negate or criticize our engineering and technical roots but, instead, revitalizes it with a more dynamic perspective in line with contemporary management discourse and societal challenges. In this regard, this contribution is reflexive, as it indirectly questions a widely accepted argument that the traditional engineering roots of project studies should be replaced by a more nuanced, social science–inspired, perspective.

Continuing with a macro view on project organizing between organizations is the article by **Daniel M. Hall** and **Marcella M. Bonanomi** entitled *Governing Collaborative Project Delivery as a*

Common-Pool Resource Scenario. A common-pool resource (CPR) is defined as a sufficiently large resource that is shared, with little control, among many users. When applied in integrated project delivery, multiple independent firms collectively share financial risks and rewards among themselves and with the project sponsor. An example of such CPR is alliancing, in which a project distributes risks and rewards among its participants. The author suggests that CPR scenarios should not be understood from traditional market theory but from CPR theory. This is a valuable contribution to the debate on PPP (public–private partnership) projects, in which the overuse of common resources by the partners is potentially problematic. Hall and Bonanomi found that agile and decentralized governance structures used in collaborative projects are more effective than centralized and hierarchical governance structures.

Moving to the inner dynamics of project organizing, the article by **Natalya Sergeeva** and **Graham M. Winch** entitled *Project Narratives That Potentially Perform and Change the Future* applies organizational narrative theory to the field of project studies. While Carlsen and Pitsis (2020), in the first part of this special issue, applied narrative theory on the level of the project manager, Sergeeva and Winch applied it to the project level. Their aim is to explore the performative power of project narratives to change a project's future. The theory on organizational narratives understands organizations to be a corpus of text in which its constituting objects—change and continuity—are continuously enacted through narratives using various discursive strategies. Project narratives can thus have strategic influence during the project life cycle. Based upon three UK case studies, the authors contribute to the debate on project narratives with the understanding that different types of project narratives develop throughout the project life cycle. The article sheds new light on the debate on project narratives as strategic change instruments (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Hornstein, 2015).

In the final contribution on the theme of project organizing, **Lena E. Bygballe, Anna Swärd**, and **Anne Live Vaagaasar** explore the intriguing relationship between projects and routines in the article *A Routine Dynamics Lens on the Stability-Change Dilemma in Project-Based Organizations*. Some have said that projects and routines are opposites on a continuum (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). For example, Grabher (2002) states that projects are cool, while routines are boring. Others have stated that projects change the routine (Obstfeld, 2012). However, the relationship between projects and routines is much more nested and essential to our understanding of capabilities, learning, and change in organizations. Bygballe et al. apply a routine dynamics perspective and seek to open up the black box of routines in project-based organizations. Their contribution offers three key insights that add nuance to the stability-change dilemma typically inherent in such organizations: the role of agency and actions in routines, the relationship between routines and artifacts, and the relational and situated nature of routines. By offering these three insights, the authors develop new grounds on how our understanding of capabilities in project-based organizations could move forward with a novel view on routines and routine dynamics, which also

advances an alternative take on the well-known knowledge/learning dilemma frequently observed in these organizations.

Together, the contributions address important and widely recognized aspects of project studies and represent the core of project studies—organizing in and through projects. The particularities in this form of organizing raise empirical and theoretical problems that can continue to feed generations of researchers and may contribute to addressing some societal challenges, which are, likewise, organized in and through projects. In other words, here is our stronghold as a knowledge area; hence, it is worth nurturing and developing with care and dedication.

Project Citizenship

As discussed in our previous editorial, under "Project Citizenship" are reflections on living and working in and through projects, both in terms of the inner dynamics of projects (van Marrewijk et al., 2016) and between projects (Jensen et al., 2016). This relatively new stream of work comes from the realization of the impact of projects not only in organizations but also in organizing work at large in society (Lundin et al., 2015) and reflects on the implications, particularly for the individual project citizen (Braun et al., 2012; Drouin et al., 2021).

This stream of thought was represented in three contributions published in the first special issue. First, the work of **Arne Carlsen** and **Tyrone Pitsis** (2020) builds on narrative theory to explore the life stories of project practitioners. The authors found that project managers frequently construct their professional identity on narratives of the projects they have been working on. Second, based on the notions of presumption, **Karin Berglund, Monica Lindgren,** and **Johann Packendorff** (2020) offer a critical glance into the nature of the projectified self as entrepreneurs who shape and promote their own profile as an object of value to organizations and society. The authors call for a critical voice about the consequences of the projectification of society. Finally, **Anne Live Vaagaasar, Tor Hernes,** and **Therese Dille** (2020) delve into one of the fundamental aspects of projects: temporality. The authors explore how people *in projects* experience and relate to time, and they offer a dynamic view of project duration as the time that is left and the time that has passed. In addition, they offer a situated temporal view on projects, bringing the strong process view (e.g., Hernes, 2007; Jarzabkowski et al., 2017) into the study of temporality in temporary organizations and thereby addressing a recent call for more process studies (Sergi et al., 2020) in project research.

Project citizenship extends project studies into the areas of sociology and philosophy, as it accounts for possible sociological consequences of projects as a form of organizing work. More empirical work on project citizens and project citizenship is beneficial to connect personal experiences and reflections to implications for individuals and society (Drouin et al., 2021). Further work could also benefit from connecting micro- and

macrolevels of analysis: What does it mean to lead or govern in a project society, where individuals navigate from project to project and potential futures are increasing surrender to the present (Pantic-Dragisic & Söderlund, 2020)?

Project Value

Reflections on project value turn the focus of inquiry into the outcome of project work. The first two reflections published in the first part of this special issue point to contradicting aspects of project value. **Alexander Styhre** (2020) focuses on finance not only as a value but also as an essential aspect of project management. He argues that finance capital increasingly defines projects—as the supply of finance capital, whether thinly or thickly capitalized, determines the conditions under which projects are initiated, planned, and managed. This article is important, as it points to the importance of finance not as a form of valuing project outcomes but as a management tool assisting project processes. In contrast, **Miia Martinsuo** (2020) argues that such *hard value* planted in financial analysis and instruments obfuscates the *true value* of a project. She advocates for an alternative perspective of project value based upon the concept of values as beliefs, that is, subjective, idiosyncratic, and dynamic. The contribution extends the debate on value management with organization culture theory.

Finally, in this special issue, **Vedran Zerjav**, in *Why do Business Organizations Participate in Projects? Toward a Typology of Project Value Domains*, offers a different angle to value based on a fundamental yet still unresolved question: "Why do organizations participate in projects?" Taking Winch's (2014) organizational typology as a starting point, Zerjav discusses different rationales that project owners, project-based firms, and the actual project (or temporary organization) use to justify their participation in projects and explores patterns of value creation and destruction in each type of organization. The article contributes with a contextualized view on project value according to the organizations undertaking projects. It thereby favors a situated view on value over a universal view.

Research on project value counteracts the dominant focus on project delivery on time, within budget, and according to preestablished requirements and adopts a more nuanced view of project outcomes. New research on project value tries to include nonfinancial benefits and gives more attention to the practices and mechanisms through which values in projects are bestowed. The articles in these special issues extended the current literature with new theoretical perspectives and crossroads between research on value and other fundamental areas in project studies. Arguably, projects exist to create value. The study of project value is therefore one of the pillars of project studies. Despite extensive studies on value, scholars are still crafting foundational concepts such as the very concept of value. This area of studies is therefore relevant and requires further debate and theory development to aid the understanding of value creation in, on, and between projects.

Project Scholarship

Finally, under the label of project scholarship are contributions reflecting on the theorization of projects. The contributions represent an interest in reflexivity of each individual author and of the field. According to Archer (2007), reflexivity is "the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to theory (social) contexts and vice versa" (p. 4). In this regard, reflexivity is an "internal conversation" that can be extended to a community effort if the community engages in reflexive dialogue. Such reflexive dialogue is encouraged in scholarly work (Geraldi & Söderlund, 2016; van Marrewijk & Dessing, 2019) and advocated for in this special issue. Thus, reflexivity takes place not only as scholars reflect on their own thinking process but also as they expose it to the community and enter into dialogues or debates "not in order to discredit scientific knowledge but rather to check and strengthen it" (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 4). Connecting concepts from Archer (2007) and Bourdieu (2004), we argue that most articles will engage in reflexivity in one way or another, as they critically position the work in relation to current debates and are exposed to scholarly critical engagement. However, some contributions are in nature more reflexive than others, and this set of contributions has a particular focus on reflexivity, as they focus explicitly on the ways of thinking about projects, and hence extend what Bourdieu (2004) terms the analytical artifacts for reflexivity.

The special issue offers three contributions to project scholarship. First, addressing Tsoukas's (2017) criticism that scholars "acknowledge the complexity of the world but deny it in [their] theorizing" (p. 135), **Stephane Tywoniak, Lavagnon Ika**, and **Christophe Bredillet**, in *A Pragmatist Approach to Complexity Theorizing in Project Studies: Orders and Levels*, offer an opportunity to complexify theorizing by taking a pragmatism approach. The article focuses on theories about complexity in projects and argues that complexity theorizing in projects is, ironically, overly simplistic. By taking a pragmatism perspective, the authors encourage theorizing that perceives "reality" as dynamic constellations of things connected in co-constituting and non-dualistic cycles. In particular, the authors advocate for third-order theorizing, "where ideas shape one another in complex ways" (Tywoniak et al., 2021) and across multiple levels of analysis. Although the focus is on complexity theorizing in projects, the approach and perspective advocated in the article can inspire theorizing in project studies in general.

The other two articles were published in the first special issue. **Mattias Jacobsson** and **Anders Söderholm** (2020) propose an "escape artist manual" to help project scholars break out of project studies and frame possible contributions to the larger academic community. Such "escape" could facilitate project studies reflexivity as it allows theorizing to be in contact with different perspectives and views and, through such contrast, creates reference images that can be used in fixing identity (Hardy & Clegg, 1997, p. S14). However, **Kristian Kreiner** (2020) warns that crossing to other domains does not

guarantee reflexivity. Instead, he suggests that project scholars' and practitioners' values and assumptions prevent learning and challenge project scholars not to accept ideas from other fields but, instead, draw inspiration from these ideas and do the rethinking ourselves. In his essay, Kreiner (2020) uses the debate between Hirschman (1967) and Flyvbjerg (2014) to contrast two inherently different project onto-epistemological choices and, thereby, different possibilities to learn from experience. **Kristian Kreiner** (2020) contends that the mainstream body of knowledge in projects represented by Flyvbjerg (2014) is blinding the possibility of learning something new from experience.

Scholars reflecting on their scholarly work, as well as the "edifice of knowledge" in projects (Kreiner, 2020) and its consequential bright and dark spots, is fundamental to the pursuit of academic work in general and to theorization and debate in particular. Yet, as with the focus on top-ranked journals, the excessive pursuit of reflexivity should not derail attention from the actual research. We will return to the discussion on reflexivity in the next section.

Taking Stock and Moving Forward: The Bright and Dark Spots in Project Studies

While these two special issues are not necessarily representative of project studies as a scholarly community, we would like to connect trends observed during our special issue project with our perception of the field to suggest three alternative themes not yet sufficiently pursued here, which might be important and relevant to enhance debate and theorization. In particular, we allude to the topic of diversity to bring about nuance and spur development of our field: diversity among project scholars, diversity in disciplines, and diversity in modes of reflexivity. These are not exhaustive, of course, but instead shed light on some dark spots.

Diversity of Project Scholars

We believe the field and its intellectual development would benefit from maintaining a high degree of diversity among project scholars. The representation of project scholars, in terms of background, gender, and nationality, is of growing concern within academic institutions, as well as in academic journals. In the project studies debate, female scholars are still underrepresented, and contributions from non-Western scholars and cases from developing countries are frequently missing (Ika et al., 2020). With delight, we note that our special issue had a relatively balanced gender representation. Seven of the papers were first-authored by males and six by female peers (Table 1). Our delight came not only from the balance but also from the fact that we did not consciously act to create such balance. While this might be a fortunate coincidence, we observe a growing representation of female scholars in tenure-track professorships and quite a number now even reaching professorship positions—for example, Tina Karrbom Gustavsson, Anette Hallin, Kim van Oorschot, Miia Martinsuo, Martina Huemann, Catherine Killen,

Table 1. Representation of the Gender and Nationality of Authors

Criteria	Representation in the Special Issue
First author's gender	7 males, 6 females (where 2 articles were solely written by females and 7 by males)
Authors' genders	15 males, 10 females
Authors' academic homes	Scandinavia: 15, Canada: 3, United Kingdom: 6, Switzerland: 1

Janice Thomas, Monique Aubry, Jennifer Whyte, Naomi Brookes, and Nathalie Drouin. These scholars have a central role in the field of project studies as editors of special issues, contributors to highly cited papers, and leaders of large-scale research programs. We also observe leadership roles in our core journals being taken by women. For example, the editors-in-chief of both the *International Journal of Project Management* and *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business* are women (Huemann and Drouin, respectively), and many female scholars are associate editors for the leading journals in our field.

While the strong representation of Scandinavia in our special issue might explain our gender distribution (as several leading female scholars in project studies are in Scandinavia), we are hopeful that our field has been able to welcome and provide opportunities for female scholars; that gender balance is achieved not by design, but by chance, as an inherent characteristic of the gender distribution of the field; and that the questions addressed by the field attract people with different backgrounds and genders.

Notwithstanding the balanced gender representation in our special issue, the contributions from non-Western scholars and cases from developing countries were completely missing[1]; in the first special issue, all first authors had their academic residence in Scandinavia, whereas in the second special issue, three of the six papers had first authors based in London (see Table 1). The limited geographic spread may be the result of cultural differences between Western and non-Western scholars and of historic developments in our field. The imposing of one's values and worldview upon others, also conceptualized as ethnocentrism (Adler & Ghadar, 1993), is a definite risk in project studies. A more regiocentric approach (Adler & Ghadar, 1993), which allows for local interpretation and situations, would give space to more indigenous project management topics and debates (e.g., mindfulness, which emerged as an important project philosophy of Chinese megaproject management; Wang & Zhu, 2021):

> It's [managing projects] like cooking the *stir-fried eggs with tomato* [a Chinese famous traditional course, emphasis ours]…. The key to success is that you [are] mindfully cooking the meal with full awareness of all the critical and risky spots, like you are doing this for the first and the last time. If you are not following the rules strictly and mindfully and paying attention to the details, hardly you could make the most of it. (p. 208)

In a multicentric approach (Adler & Ghadar, 1993), it is acknowledged that there should be institutional rules (on research and publication) but that these rules should respond to the local conditions. Cultural sensitivity is then essential for both reviewers and authors of publications on project studies to prevent ethnocentrism. To overcome the geographical vacuum not only in the scholar's country of origin but also in empirical settings, special care should be given to stimulate empirical studies in, for example, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe, as these can represent a rich and complex field of project studies. Hirschman (1967) has thematized projects in developing countries, and Ika et al. (2020) recently took over that initiative by promoting a closer link between these two fields of inquiry. Such developments are relevant and welcomed and should be continued, particularly as we reflect on the role of projects for not only firms but also society.

Purposeful Interdisciplinarity Around Projects

We believe that diversity in disciplinary backgrounds and the potential for interdisciplinary work is a stronghold of project studies and can be further nurtured in terms of both increasing diversity and capitalizing on our technical/engineering heritage. Do project studies constitute a subfield of management studies? In the closure of this special issue, we would like to free the field from this assumption. Surely, the field has drawn inspiration from management and organization studies and mirrors their developments. Many of the most prominent scholars within the field are now working in business schools and consider their academic home in the intersection between projects and another area of specialty in management, be it learning, strategy, innovation, marketing, or the like. Such development is enriching and undoubtedly positive, but it does not have to be restrictive. Project studies is an interdisciplinary field frequently fragmented over university departments, with scholars coming from diverse fields. Accordingly, some developments in project studies are adjacent to management and reached geography, sociology, philosophy, and psychology. For instance, certain special issue initiatives have attracted the interest of geography scholars to advance our understanding of the linkages between temporary organizations and networks (Grabher, 2002), which, subsequently, have become an increasingly central part of the core of project studies (e.g., Thiel & Grabher, 2015). Moreover, others have taken on the psychological aspects of project work to better understand contemporary work–life issues and problems associated with identity and project overload (Zika-Viktorsson et al., 2006) and decision-making (Stingl & Geraldi, 2017). Yet others have advanced the linkages between urban planning and projects and contributed to our understanding of how intentional efforts build and transform modern society. It is also noteworthy that the most cited scholars in project studies have backgrounds other than management (e.g., Bent Flyvbjerg, Peter Morris, and Gernot Grabher). In many of these examples, scholars would probably prefer that project studies be seen more as an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary field than a subject area only within business schools. An identity of being a subdiscipline to management studies might run at odds with the future development of the field.

As Davies et al. (2018) point out, in their research policy paper, that to make the interdisciplinary development of project studies work, it seems important that project scholars draw from different fields and engage in different sets of theories. They highlight the need for metatheories (such as learning theory and institutional theory) to advance the field and thus make it easier for different fields to interact and learn from one another.

Moreover, we are now rejuvenating our engineering heritage, not as something negative and hidden, but as a potential to understand the sociomaterial nature of projects and solve societal problems. The sociomaterial lens understands social and material processes and structures as mutually enacting (Orlikowski, 2007). This lens challenges Cartesian dualistic thinking, where the mind is seen as distinct from the material world. Such a perspective has long dominated organization and management studies (De Molli et al., 2020). Sociomateriality theory in organization and management studies is discussed at a philosophical level but is hardly operationalized in empirical studies. In contrast, engineering has a long history of empirical engagement with the material world (Florman, 1996). Engineers do not privilege the social over the material but grant equal credits to the roles of the material, technology, and physical environment in its own right. By highlighting material artifacts and technologies, engineers have come to acknowledge the significant and active roles these play in organizational practices and processes. This empirical engagement with materiality is something that organization and management scholars can learn from (project) engineering.

With its long history of solving technical problems, the engineering heritage can also be useful for addressing complex or wicked problems in society. Wicked problems are characterized as socio-technological systems with multiple constellations and changing settings (Jones et al., 1998), for example, the transition to sustainable energy and a circular economy. These transitions are "long-term, multi-dimensional, and fundamental transformation processes through which established socio-technical systems shift to more sustainable modes of production and consumption" (Markard et al., 2012, p. 956). For successful transitions, close interdisciplinary collaboration is needed between scholars from, among others, engineering, project studies, organization studies, and social studies. These scientists have to work together in consortia with public and private partners to implement new materials, technologies, and processes while developing new social practices, identities, and business models for the organizations involved. The contribution of such temporary consortia to stimulate transition is an interesting future challenge for project studies, one in which its engineering heritage can be useful.

There are also weaknesses in the engineering heritage of project studies. The lack of reflexivity of project participants frequently hinders project-based organizations from learning from innovations and adapting to a changing context. Furthermore, engineering tends to undervalue the social aspect, thereby, when taking this into account, seeing the cultural as a separate domain (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016) as something that has nothing to do with actual work. This is what Alvesson and Sveningsson (2016) call an "anti-culture," in which people do not see the value of culture and do not want to participate in (project) culture shaping through reflexive practices.

Therefore, our argument is not to go back to technocratic roots that entrapped our knowledge domain for years but, instead, rejuvenate this background and integrate it with the diversity of knowledge areas, including but going beyond management and engineering.

Reflexivity in Project Studies

Reflexivity is fundamental for theorizing. As Hardy and Clegg (1997) explain, "Reflexive theoretical positions are those best able to account for their own theorizing, as well as whatever it is they theorize about" (p. S13). Hardy and Clegg (1997) emphasize the role of reflexivity particularly in conceptual work, as reflexivity offers a form of obtaining objectivity that substitutes positivistic claims of truth for reflection on the conditions of knowledge's own existence, partly as an exercise of the author and partly as a conversation with its academic community. The contributions in this special issue invite such a conversation. The scholars boldly share their vested voices while exposing weaknesses of the field and questioning assumptions taken for granted in past theorizing processes. In summary, we think we got what we wanted. Should we have been more careful with our wishes? Weick (1989) reminds us that:

> Kant was probably right: perception without conception is blind; conception without perception is empty. Theorists who find it difficult to move back and forth between perception and conception may find themselves stuck in reflexive acts and be unable to help us see anything other than doubt as the core of the human condition. (p. 803)

Therefore, reflexivity is a fundamental part of any academic community, and works solely dedicated to conceptual developments, integrative work, and debates are essential. This was what we asked for and what we received. Now, after taking stock, we look forward and consider the need for the field to foster reflexivity not only abstractly and by looking inward but also in line with empirical observations and actual challenges—for projects and for society. We therefore call for diversity in modes of reflexivity. Future debates and theorizing can be empirical and content rich, discussing the questions worth asking and asking them passionately, creatively, and intelligently. In this regard, we believe that the next step is to foster passionate scholarship as a bridge between conception and perception. Hence, further work on project scholarship as specific points and moments for reflexivity are welcomed,

but they should not overshadow empirical work and a deep understanding of project practice.

Concluding Notes

There is much to like about the field of project studies. One thing for sure is that it is on the move—there is progress being made and ample opportunity to influence and make a difference—both in practice and in academia. Project scholars thrive on projects, and the three of us have clearly thrived on this project, learned from it, reflected on it, and hopefully, influenced the field with it. All three of us have our favorites among the published articles in these special issues. We do hope that you will find your own favorite—a companion that you can use for your future travels and travails in the realm of project studies.

Moreover, we hope that there will be more interesting and challenging projects in the future of project studies. We need those challenging projects to stay alive and push the boundaries of our field. There will be new special issues, new concepts, and new meeting places—both virtual and face to face, where debates and theory development can continue to flourish. We hope that these projects and future meeting places will benefit from some of the ideas presented here and that there will be refinements, criticisms, and alternatives published. Time will tell.

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1. Although one of the editors, Joana Geraldi, and one of the authors, Lavagnon Ika, of the special issue are from Latin America and Africa, respectively, they have held academic positions in Western countries since they completed their PhD.

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