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PROJECTIFIED ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE AND CHALLENGES OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Research has shown that we are facing multiple urgent sustainability challenges in the ways in which our societies are organized. To address these challenges we need governance systems that are adaptive in order to absorb new knowledge and creative in order to generate innovative solutions. Yet, 'institutional inertia', or the tendency of institutions to resist change, slows down the adaptation to these complex challenges. A core concern is thus, how to address institutional inertia in the context of sustainability.

The goal of this dissertation is to evaluate the role of projects in generating institutional change toward sustainability. The use of projects – cross-cutting organizations that are employed to reach well-defined objectives during a specified period of time – to implement public policy has lately attracted scholarly attention. The increasing reliance on projects, or 'projectification', resonates with the need for managing uncertainties and unpredictabilities in contemporary environmental governance and involves cross-sectoral cooperation in society. To explore the role of projects in institutional change processes, this study focuses on two dimensions of 'institutional work': participation – the processes of including actors and different knowledges in projects as well as promoting deliberation among project participants – and innovation – the generation and diffusion of new knowledge and ideas produced in projects.

This dissertation studies two programs that fund projects to implement public policy: the European Union's LEADER Program and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) implemented by the Natural Resource Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture. While both programs rely on projects as funding mechanisms, they differ in how they are organized and in terms of their historical significance. Taken together, the differences between the two programs provide interesting insights into the role of projects in institutional change processes. The data from the two cases, including interviews and central policy documents, was analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

This dissertation highlights important contradictions regarding the question of projects serving as fruitful sites for instigating institutional change. The findings emphasize that institutional inertia is generated by a list of mechanisms including cost, uncertainty, path dependence, power, and legitimacy. The results also highlight that inertia has important temporal implications. Not only does inertia slow down change processes, challenging the development of timely responses to sustainability problems, but also calls for a temporally sensitive approach that acknowledges the multifaceted nature of time. The analysis of the empirical cases shows that projects can serve as vehicles for including actors from different sectors with different knowledges. The analysis also highlights the deliberative nature of project work, which

serves as a basis for social learning among project participants. The lack of external participation in projects once they were initiated, however, raises some doubt as to the full extent of inclusion of actors and prompts the question of excluded critical voices in project work.

The question of innovation sheds critical light on the capacity of projects to initiate institutional change. The analysis suggests that the ability of projects to engage in 'exploration' and generate innovations can be significantly restricted by bureaucratic rules and traditions of administrative top-down control. The dissertation also points to the challenges of diffusing project knowledge to permanent organizations. Two types of innovation diffusion in projectified environmental governance are identified. Vertical diffusion refers to the process of scaling up project knowledge to higher levels of decision making in permanent organizations, such as regulatory agencies and project-funding organizations. The analysis highlights the challenges of vertical diffusion for projects that are locally situated and have decentered decision-making procedures. Horizontal diffusion, in turn, assigns more weight to the project participants themselves to make sense of and utilize project knowledge in future instances, either in their own work or in new projects. Here, projects function as points of contact, where aggregated and accumulated knowledges converge, which in turn generates new combinations and the potential for broader change.

The dissertation expands the discussion of projectification in two ways. First, previous research on projectification has thus far relied on single-country or single-region analyses. While the aim of this dissertation is not to conduct a formal comparative analysis of LEADER and RCPP, it represents one of the first attempts to illustrate the significance of projects and projectification by building on empirical findings from Europe and the USA. Second, this dissertation introduces two ideal types, 'mechanistic' and 'organic' projectification, proposing an alternative approach to conceptualizing projects and their role in institutional change in a public policy setting. Deemphasizing rationalism and embracing tensions, inconsistencies, and the 'untidiness' of projectification could help us gain a fuller understanding of different institutional change processes toward sustainability.

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Johan Munck af Rosenschöld

Helsinki, March 2017

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LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

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I Munck af Rosenschöld, J., Rozema, J.G. & Frye-Levine, L.A., 2014. Institutional inertia and climate change: a review of the new institutionalist literature. *WIREs Climate Change*, 5(5), pp.639–648.

II Munck af Rosenschöld, J., Honkela, N. & Hukkinen, J.I., 2014. Addressing the temporal fit of institutions: the regulation of endocrine-disrupting chemicals in Europe. *Ecology and Society*, 19(4), p.30. [online] URL: http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol19/iss4/art30/

III Munck af Rosenschöld, J. & Löyhkö, J., 2015. LEADER and local democracy: a comparison between Finland and the United Kingdom. In L. Granberg, K. Andersson & I. Kovách, eds. *Evaluating the European Approach to Rural Development: Grass-roots Experiences of the LEADER Programme*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp.13–31.

IV Munck af Rosenschöld, J. & Wolf, S.A., 2017. Toward projectified environmental governance? *Environment and Planning A*, 49(2), pp.273–292.

The publications are referred to in the text by their roman numerals. Although one of the publications is a book chapter, I will for the sake of simplicity refer to them as 'articles' throughout the text.

Authors' contributions in coauthored publications

In *Article I*, all three coauthors contributed to the review of the literature. I contributed to the introduction, discussion, and conclusion. In *Article II*, I developed the core idea for the paper and contributed to the theoretical framework. Honkela contributed to section 2 and the results. Honkela and I contributed to the discussion and conclusion. Hukkinen contributed to the paper as a whole. In *Article III*, I developed the core idea for the paper, contributed to the theoretical framework, discussion, and conclusion as well as collected and analyzed data from the UK and from one Finnish case. Löyhkö and I collected and analyzed the data from the two remaining cases in Finland. In *Article IV*, the idea for the paper was developed by myself and Wolf. Both authors collected the data and contributed to the analysis. Contributions to the rest of the paper were done jointly.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AEP	Agrienvironmental policy
AWEP	Agricultural Water Enhancement Program
CCPI	Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative
EDC	Endocrine-disrupting chemical
EU	European Union
GHG	Greenhouse gas
LAG	Local Action Group
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NI	New institutionalism
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
RCPP	Regional Conservation Partnership Program
SCS	Soil Conservation Service
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF DISSERTATION

Research has shown that we are facing multiple urgent sustainability challenges in the ways in which our societies are organized. To address these challenges we need governance systems that are adaptive in order to absorb new knowledge and creative in order to generate innovative solutions (Folke et al. 2005; Plummer et al. 2013). Yet, institutions are generally slow to adapt to complex challenges in social-ecological systems (Galaz et al. 2008). Institutions include formal rules and regulations as well as informal norms and cognitive structures, which "provide understanding and give meaning to social arrangements" (Suddaby & Greenwood 2009, p.176). The "stickiness" (Pierson 2004, p.8) of institutions and their tendency to resist change is commonly referred to as 'institutional inertia'. We encounter a basic dilemma: rapid institutional change is required to move toward sustainability (Leach et al. 2012), but institutions tend to change slowly. A core concern is thus how to address institutional inertia in the context of sustainability. In this dissertation I will specifically focus on the role of publicly funded projects in this endeavor.

Sustainability as a concept and practice is contentious and has been used and misused in making sense of the relationship between social, economic, and ecological systems. One of the most famous definitions was coined by the Brundtland Commission that referred to the term as the "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, p.43). In the most general sense, sustainability entails the harmonization of social and economic development as well as environmental preservation. There is however great variation in terms of which of the three elements are emphasized, where (mainstream) economists typically focus on economic development and environmentalists highlight the ecological aspects of sustainability (Dresner 2002). With its emphasis on both intergenerational and intragenerational equity, sustainability is also an inherently temporal concept, highlighting that time is at the core of environmental policy and politics (Held 2001).

Adger and Jordan (2009) argue that sustainability is concerned with two key dimensions: outcomes and processes. The outcomes of sustainability, put simply, refer to the extent to which sustainability goals are achieved. It is clear that outcomes are crucial for evaluating the success of sustainability efforts and this has been the *modus operandi* among natural scientists and economists. In this dissertation I conceptualize sustainability mainly as a 'process', or the "change in the way that society is organised…[and] how human societies have sought to alter the myriad ways in which they exploit the world around them in line with the ecological principle of sustainability" (Adger & Jordan 2009, pp.4–5). Seeing sustainability as a process is closely

linked to the concept of governance (Adger & Jordan 2009), which highlights the importance of how efforts toward sustainability are organized.

During the last few decades, environmental governance has been a popular approach to studying changes in which environmental policy is designed and implemented (Lemos & Agrawal 2006). One aspect of governance has been the increasing utilization of projects – cross-cutting organizations that are employed to reach well-defined objectives during a specified period of time (Lundin & Söderholm 1995) – to implement public policy (Sjöblom 2009). The prevalence of projects can be seen as an expression of new forms of cooperation in various policy fields between societal actors, including governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private companies (Stoker 1998; Lemos & Agrawal 2006), and responds to a need for managing uncertainties and unpredictabilities (Andersson 2009). The complexity of contemporary problems requires more tailor-made solutions taking into account the peculiarities of specific contexts (Ostrom 2007). As organizational forms, projects are often depicted as particularly capable of responding to the need for adaptive measures in uncertain times, as they are often characterized by flexibility and collaboration (Lundin & Söderholm 1995; Hodgson 2004; Sjöblom et al. 2013). In addition, they are most often decoupled from their permanent organizations, which makes them fruitful sites for experimentation and generation of new knowledge and innovations (Sydow et al. 2004; Lindkvist 2008). The growing popularity of projects has even lead scholars to talk about 'projectification', or the "increasing reliance on temporary organisations, typically projects, in order to enhance action and strategic effort" (Godenhjelm et al. 2015, p.328).

Despite their apparent virtues, projects need to be assessed critically. Projects may skew participation and exclude actors with little knowledge or experience of project work (Kovách & Kučerová 2009), which has negative implications on the cooperative potential of projects and may hinder the generation of novel ideas. Focusing on the potential and challenges of projects can thus broaden our understanding of environmental governance and how responses to calls for institutional change are organized.

The goal of this dissertation is to evaluate the role of projects in generating institutional change toward sustainability. To do that, I will explore the drivers of institutional inertia in sustainability with reference to climate change policy and regulation of endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) to form a basis on which the relationship between projects and institutions can be studied. I will specifically examine the participatory capacity of projects, on the one hand, and innovation, on the other, both of which are seen as closely interlinked (Folke et al. 2005; Ansell & Torfing 2014). As will be evident, studying the means of including actors and different knowledges in projects as well as the capacity for innovation generation and diffusion – interpreted here as 'institutional work' – allows for a more comprehensive analysis of institutional change processes in projectified governance. On the whole, the research process was guided by an integrative approach, which involved a continuous dialogue between theory and

analysis throughout the work involved in the dissertation (Maxwell 2013). This allowed for flexibility in interpreting the results from each article included in this dissertation and building on insights obtained in previous studies to contribute to the conceptual framework.

Empirically, I will explore two programs that fund projects to implement public policy: 1) the European Union's (EU) LEADER Program and the 2) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), implemented by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Both cases serve as interesting sites for studying the role of projects in institutional change processes, as, on paper, they both emphasize the inclusion of actors and innovation.

LEADER (acronym of "Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale": Links between actions for the development of the rural economy) plays an important role in EU rural development. Since its initiation in 1991, the primary objective of LEADER has been to find innovative solutions, concepts, and techniques for rural development that can later become models for all disadvantaged rural areas (Ray 1997). LEADER differs from other types of EU initiatives, as the everyday administrators of the program are not local public authorities, but so called Local Action Groups (LAGs). LEADER seeks to stimulate innovative approaches in rural development by encouraging small-scale actions at the local level through the use of projects. The emphasis is on local participation and bottom-up based development, where local people are the source of new ideas and the main actors in implementing them. In addition to innovation, LEADER underlines the importance of sustainable development and generating long-term goals for the locality (High & Nemes 2007).

RCPP is a newly formed agricultural conservation program, which was legislated by the United States (US) Congress in 2014 and implemented by the NRCS, a conservation agency of the USDA. RCPP is built on the notion of partnerships between agricultural producers and non-producers, such as private companies, NGOs, and universities. These partnerships take the form of projects that aim to "increase the opportunity for partners to bring innovative ideas and resources to accelerate conservation on private lands" (USDA 2014, p.1). RCPP can be seen as one of the first explicit attempts to introduce the notion of projects into US agrienvironmental policy (AEP) that is mainly organized by top-down steering and implemented by establishing relationships with individual farmers and landowners. A turn toward empowering local groups to manage agricultural conservation would entail a new trajectory in US AEP.

LEADER and RCPP highlight two particular aspects. First, LEADER can be discerned as a 'mature' field that has considerable experience of working with projects. As a newly formed program, RCPP, in turn, signifies an 'emerging' field that is one of the first attempts to explicitly involve projects as a means to organize work. Second, the institutional context differs in both programs. The organization of LEADER is guided by the principle of locally driven development and RCPP can be seen as an initiative that is closely aligned with the existing top-down

bureaucratic structure. The aim of this dissertation is not to provide an evaluation of the programs as a whole, but to utilize them to illustrate the ways in which project-based governance operates in two different contexts.

Overall, the study of projectified environmental governance and institutional change contributes to the debate on the apparent "tension between *short-term devices and long-term objectives*" (Sjöblom 2009, p.167, italics in original). If we grant projects a prominent role in reaching long-term goals, such as the EU's intention to cut greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 80 percent (below 1990 levels) by 2050 (European Commission 2011), it becomes crucial to critically assess how actions taken in the present or near future work toward distant targets. In this dissertation I provide insights into the challenges of and potential for converting short-term endeavors and the results stemming from them into broader institutional change toward sustainability.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To explore the role of projects in institutional change toward sustainability I pose two research questions. Given the importance of institutions, RQ1 explores the drivers of institutional inertia in the context of sustainability. Gaining an understanding of the different forms that institutional inertia can take functions as the foundation that guides the discussion of the role of projects in institutional change processes.

RQ1. What are the central drivers of institutional inertia in the context of sustainability?

Building on RQ1 and by pointing to the importance of 'organization' in environmental governance and the need for a temporally sensitive approach when studying institutions, RQ2 relates to the ways in which institutional inertia can be confronted. It explores the conditions for instigating institutional change by focusing on two dimensions of institutional work in project-based governance: participation and innovation. By taking both dimensions into consideration, RQ2 addresses the challenges of project-based governance to influence permanent organizations and structures, which is seen as central in achieving more broad-ranging institutional changes.

RQ2. How can institutional inertia be addressed through projects?

1.3 DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

The dissertation consists of this summary chapter, three published journal articles, and one book chapter. Although this summary chapter is an independent part of the dissertation, it is based on these four publications and serves to contextualize the findings of each article in a broader thematic discussion. Each publication is summarized below.

- *Article I* conducts a literature review to highlight the ways in which institutional inertia is explained in the new institutionalist literature on climate change. The article identifies five main drivers of institutional inertia: cost, uncertainty, path dependence, power, and legitimacy. The article concludes that these drivers can be addressed by focusing on the research on institutional entrepreneurship and institutional work, which emphasize the role of agency in institutional change processes.

- *Article II* develops a framework for understanding temporal misfits existing in complex policy regimes. By using the 'timescape' approach developed by Adam (1998) the article investigates how the regulation of EDCs in the EU is characterized by institutional inertia with reference to four relevant temporal dimensions. The article concludes that broadening the actor base of EDC governance could serve as a response to the inertial situation.

- *Article III* analyzes the inclusive capacity of LEADER in rural areas in Finland and the United Kingdom (UK). The article analyzes LAGs and LEADER projects from a set of perspectives, including social inclusion, knowledge integration, and project outcomes. The article concludes that while LEADER is predominantly closed to external participation, internally the program is characterized by deliberation. The article also raises doubts as to the effectiveness of scaling up knowledge produced in projects.

- *Article IV* engages critically with the projectification thesis by analyzing RCPP, a recently initiated conservation program of the USDA. The article explores the implications of projects from two perspectives: participation and innovation. The results indicate that RCPP signifies a movement toward a broadened scope of actors engaged in agricultural conservation, but that the innovation surplus is expected to be limited due to standardized practices of conservation.

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this section I will elaborate on the conceptual framework of this dissertation. I will pay attention to how environmental policy is implemented with a particular focus on the significance of participation in environmental governance, the role of projects in organizing social action, and the dynamics of institutional stability and change. Finally, I present a synthesis of these parts that forms the framework portraying projectified environmental governance and the process of institutional work. As highlighted in Section 1.1 and as will be elaborated in Section 3, the research process was influenced by an integrative approach involving continuous dialogue between theory and analysis during the course of the dissertation work.

2.1 GOVERNANCE AND PARTICIPATION

For the last few decades, 'governance' has been somewhat of a buzzword within the field of environmental social science (and beyond). According to Jordan (2008), environmental governance has been conceptualized in the literature in three ways. First, governance has a normative dimension. Here, governance refers to the ideals for how public affairs is organized, exemplified by the concept of 'good governance' (Sjöblom & Godenhjelm 2009; Rauschmayer et al. 2009). For example, the management of public affairs should be transparent, accountable, and effective as well as provide channels for inclusion of citizens in decision-making processes. Second, governance can be seen as theory (Toikka 2009). From this perspective, governance constitutes a framework that guides research and highlights central variables of interest for analysis. Third, governance reflects changes in how environmental policy is crafted and implemented in developed countries (Hogl et al. 2012). Lemos and Agrawal (2006) distinguish four main developments in relation to environmental governance: globalization, the adoption of market-based environmental policy instruments, the appreciation of scale, and decentralization. Globalization, with its flows of capital, people, knowledge, and environmental risks, challenges the traditional hegemonic role of the nation-state in social and environmental regulation. As a result, we have seen an increasingly dominant role of global organizations, such as multinational corporations and international NGOs, in environmental decision making (Falkner 2003). Globalization has thus granted non-state actors expanded opportunities of authority over functions previously solely managed by the state.

The trend toward decentralization has pushed for new opportunities for local actors to partake and influence local decision making. In this line of thought, governance should be separated from the concept of 'government',

which focuses on the dynamics of the state and local governments (Flinders 2002). One driver of decentralization is the distrust in the capacity of national governments and bureaucracies to effectively address environmental problems. This is partly a result of deficits in information. Crafting and implementing solutions to environmental problems requires in-depth knowledge of local conditions and embeddedness in local contexts. A response to this information deficit has been to focus on local communities (Ostrom 1999; Dietz et al. 2003) as well as on collaborative and participatory approaches to governance (Dryzek 1997).

Environmental governance is closely related to the popularity of 'new environmental policy instruments' (Jordan et al. 2005), such as tradable permits, environmental taxation, and voluntary agreements. Compared to traditional regulatory approaches, these new instruments share the logic of the market and direct the attention to non-state actors, who allegedly are in a better position to decide, for example, how to reduce their GHG emissions efficiently. In this regard, traditional bureaucracies have been argued to perform comparatively worse than market actors (Busch 2014).

A focus on scale has given rise to a greater understanding of how different levels of decision making are linked. In addition to the transfer of power to global and local levels, we are also experiencing a deconstruction of hierarchical silos of authority and a movement toward cross-scale interactions (Adger et al. 2005; Paavola et al. 2009). For example, referring to the Cities for Climate Protection program, Bulkeley (2005) shows how local level actors are connected in networks that span territorial boundaries of nation-states. It casts critical light the relationship between national level policy making and the actions of lower levels of government.

While these four developments might give the impression that governance entails a radically new mode of steering without governmental influence, the reality is arguably more complicated. Most scholars agree that there is no governance without government. This is highlighted, for example, in the concept of 'meta-governance', where public actors steer governance arrangements by allocating resources or using more direct methods, such as direct involvement in those arrangements (Sørensen & Torfing 2011). Governance arrangements may indeed be fairly autonomous, but public agencies limit the range of actions allowed and may adopt an active role in steering governance. It seems that some kind of consensus has been reached in the literature: governance entails a change in how policy is crafted and implemented, and that the governmental influence has changed rather than diminished.

In this dissertation I adopt a fairly general definition of environmental governance: "the set of regulatory processes, mechanisms and organizations through which political actors influence environmental actions and outcomes…It includes the actions of the state and, in addition, encompasses actors such as communities, businesses, and NGOs" (Lemos & Agrawal 2006, p.298). This definition embraces the notion that environmental governance involves multiple actors as well as various policy mechanisms and

organizations. For the purpose of this dissertation I will elaborate on the role of participation in governance settings.

Participation is a broad theme that has received great interest by scholars. Participation can be seen as a means of emancipation, increasing legitimacy of political processes, and effectiveness (Newig & Kvarda 2012), although blends of instrumental and democratic approaches to participation is often emphasized in the field of sustainability (Rydin 2008; Lidskog & Elander 2010). From an emancipatory perspective, participation benefits individuals involved in governance arrangements by strengthening their capacity to act as political actors. For example, the early struggles of modern social movements was partly driven by a quest for empowerment of non-state, non-business actors (cf. van Tatenhove & Leroy 2003). Participation also has implications for the legitimacy of activities. Including individuals and organizations that have a stake in certain decisions are thought to lower the opposition of decisions and increase the legitimacy of the process (Rozema et al. 2012). Legitimacy and emancipation relate to the core democratic values of Western societies – the fair representation by individuals affected by a decision and transparency of political decision-making (Newig & Kvarda 2012).

Under the umbrella term 'effectiveness' a wide range of approaches can be identified. What is common among these approaches is the view that participation influences the capacity of governance arrangements to achieve certain outcomes. One of the outcomes discussed in the literature is social learning (Newig & Fritsch 2009; Cundill & Rodela 2012; Scholz et al. 2014). Participation is seen to spur deliberation among actors that may achieve mutual understanding regarding political issues. It involves "the classic political activities of thought, discussion, debate, education, coercion, and the exploitation of accumulated social experience" (March & Olsen 1989, p.126). Scholars agree that learning entails a cognitive change as a result of new available knowledge or information (Argote & Miron-Spektor 2011; Ansell & Torfing 2014, p.11). Other scholars argue that this cognitive change will in addition have to generate additional behavioral changes in order to classify as learning (Edmondson 2002; Zito & Schout 2009; Swan et al. 2010). Despite these ostensible tensions, there seems to be an acceptance in the literature that learning can be conceptualized as either cognitive or behavioral change (Easterby-Smith et al. 2000; Argote 2013). Newig et al. (2010, p.24) pinpoint two key processes for fostering learning: 'information transmission' and 'deliberation'. The former is concerned with the channeling of information and knowledges among actors, which serves as a first step in initiating learning. The latter entails discussing the information transmitted as a process of collective rationalization (Hartley et al. 2013).

The importance of learning in governance arrangements links to the 'knowledge gap' (Fazey et al. 2013), or incomplete knowledge, that centralized, 'mono-knowledge' social arrangements often have to cope with. Transforming centralized authority and control toward a polycentric system, and dispersing authority and agency to multiple locally-situated nodes, is seen to spur

experimentation (Ostrom 2010). It entails the inclusion of governmental, market, scientific, and civil society actors as well as both expert and lay knowledge (Ansell & Gash 2008; Torfing et al. 2012). The participation of actors with different knowledges is seen to enhance social learning (Valve 2006) and the capacity of governance arrangements to be flexible and dynamic enough to adapt to often complex sustainability challenges (Folke et al. 2005).

The qualities and characteristics of participation can take different shapes depending on the organizational setting in which the process takes place. As my focus in this dissertation is on project organizations, the next section will discuss in more detail how projects relate to participation. Furthermore, the next section introduces the notion of innovation that is at the core in project research.

2.2 PROJECTS AS ORGANIZING WORK

Projects are ubiquitous in contemporary society. To depict the popularity of projects, both in terms of the number of projects initiated and their significance in public discourse, scholars even talk about the emergence of 'project society' (Rantala & Sulkunen 2006). Project management has developed into an increasingly broad field of research and encompasses multiple disciplines (Godenhjelm et al. 2015). There have been many attempts to define what a project is, and certain elements of projects are emphasized depending on which discipline the scholar represents. Project research can be divided into two general streams: a rationalistic tradition that builds on engineering science, and a critical tradition that views projects through a social scientific lens (Söderlund 2004). One of the defining differences between the strands is that the former "avoids uncertainty to achieve determinateness, while the [latter] assumes uncertainty and indeterminateness" (Söderlund 2004, p.186). According to the critical strand, projects need to be situated in a broader social, political, and economic context. Andersson (2009) argues that projects should be seen as 'late modern' interventions that are, compared to permanent organizations, better equipped to manage inherent complexities of contemporary social and environmental problems.

Despite the noticeable different approaches to studying projects, most definitions of projects agree that they are 1) limited by a specific time frame, 2) task-oriented, 3) composed of a designated team of actors, and 4) initiated with the intention to achieve change or establish novel processes (Lundin & Söderholm 1995; Packendorff 1995). With this in mind, a project can be defined as "a temporary organization to which resources are assigned to undertake a unique, novel and transient endeavour managing the inherent uncertainty and need for integration in order to deliver beneficial objectives of change" (Turner & Müller 2003, p.7).

First, projects embody the notion of time and temporariness. In contrast to permanent organizations such as companies and regulatory agencies, projects

have an end date after which time they are dissolved. Because of their temporary character, projects are often subject to 'time compression' (Modig 2007, p.808), which injects a sense of urgency into project work (Söderlund 2010). Second, the focus of a project tends to be on specific tasks that relates to a distinct problem, rather than responding to general goals or overarching missions of an organization. From this perspective, projects can be seen as an expression of 'adhocracy' (Mintzberg 1979), organizations that are purposely built to address specific problems of limited scope. Third, the project relies on the relationship between the core team consisting of actors with assigned roles and tasks and stakeholders, in other words actors who in one way or another have an interest or stake in the processes or outcomes of the project (e.g., Tryggestad et al. 2013). There are at least two rationales for including stakeholders in a project: it ensures that knowledge can be exchanged between the project and the environment in which it is implemented (Bakker et al. 2011; Kotnour 2000), and it can strengthen the legitimacy of the project and its outcomes (Rowley 1997, p.889).

Fourth, projects are designed to generate new practices and innovative solutions. Projects are generally seen as focused on creating a "non-routine process and/or…non-routine product" (Packendorff 1995, p.327), which has the potential to produce transformative change (Lundin & Söderholm 1995). Projects are often regarded as beneficial sites for experimentation with new ideas and concepts in order to generate innovations (Sydow et al. 2004; Lindkvist 2008). As project activities are detached from everyday work routines, project participants are able to take on new job roles and strategies to address specific problems for a limited period of time. It is assumed that the change of environment and collaboration between actors with different knowledges and networks create a climate that is conducive to learning and creative problem solving. A distinction can be made between projects that focus on 'exploitation' and 'exploration' (cf. March 1991; Brady & Davies 2004). In the former, projects rely on existing information and techniques that are implemented in new contexts. In the latter, projects are expected to generate new insights, findings, and knowledge regarding specific problems (Scarbrough et al. 2004, p.1580).

While projects may be applauded for "getting things done" (Hällgren & Wilson 2007, p.92), the continuity of project activities and integration of project knowledge in permanent organizations are central concerns for projectified governance arrangements. The temporariness of projects thus becomes an issue of juxtaposing short- and long-term goals (Sjöblom 2009). The integration of project knowledge can be seen as 'innovation diffusion', or the "process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (Rogers 2003, p.35). Diffusing knowledge generated in projects to other organizations has proven to be a particularly challenging task (Bakker et al. 2011). Project knowledge is often highly contextual and embodied in localized practices, which makes the scaling up of project knowledge challenging (cf. Carlile

2002). Sydow et al. (2004) illustrate the apparent disjuncture between 'innovation generation' and 'innovation diffusion' in projects as follows:

> *Being focused means that you care less or not at all about things outside the project; working fast means that you have little time to reflect on and document your experiences or lessons learned; and being autonomous means that you or your project team may develop into a knowledge silo, not available to members in other projects or the firm more generally.*
>
> *(Sydow et al. 2004, p.1481)*

These findings seem to conflict with the notion of projects as sites for instigating more far-reaching institutional change. While projects and project results are most often confined to local or regional areas, the scope of the problems that projects address can be much larger, especially in the field of sustainability. For example, the pursuit of energy innovations and the challenges of developing non-fossil energy alternatives stretch beyond the scope of single projects. The question of diffusion becomes central, as the knowledge generated in projects most often need to be transferred from the local context to a wider audience in order to have broader impact.

The discussion of projects normally revolves around the agentic qualities of projects, in other words their capacity for spurring change and innovation. Engwall, however, reminds us that "[n]o project is an island" (Engwall 2003, p.789), highlighting the contextual factors that influence projects and their ability to reach their goals. The contextual approach to studying projects has extended the analysis from individual projects to include 'project ecologies' referring to the "relational space which affords the personal, organizational, and institutional resources for performing projects" (Grabher & Ibert 2011, p.176). A project ecology perspective thus puts projects into perspective and acknowledges the need for seeing them in relation to their contexts, including the aims, intentions, and expectations of project-funding organizations.

2.3 NEW INSTITUTIONALISM AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

To understand the relationship between projects and their broader institutional context, I will here discuss the literature on 'new institutionalism' (NI) and 'institutional work'. NI was originally a reaction toward the behavioralist movement that was popular in the mid-20th century (Immergut 1998). Early NI scholars claimed that the research on social behavior and social problems must not be reduced to the level of the individual, but should focus on the institutional factors that shape behavior (March & Olsen 1984). Since the 1980s, NI has become a popular approach in the fields of environmental policy and governance (O'Riordan & Jordan 1999). NI is in

itself divided into three streams. Rational choice institutionalism is favored among economists and political scientists who regard human and organizational behavior as rational and self-maximizing (Olson 1965; Ostrom 1990). Within this strand researchers often treat institutions as external rules (both formal and informal) that limits and regulate individuals' behavior (North 1990). Historical institutionalism sees institutions as rules as well as norms, but not existing 'outside' of the actor. This strand focuses on the often path-dependent development of institutions, including political conflicts, and their influence on organizational behavior (Peters et al. 2005). Sociological institutionalism sees institutions to include values, routines, norms, and symbols (Powell & DiMaggio 1991; Hall & Taylor 1996). It also assigns comparatively more importance to the socializing role of institutions and how they influence actors' preferences and cognitive structures in the first place (cf. rational choice institutionalism).

Although some scholars question the compatibility of the three strands (e.g., Vatn & Vedeld 2012), others (e.g., Young et al. 2008) see them as complementary to the understanding of institutions. The objective of this dissertation is not to delve into this discussion to any larger extent. I settle for a fairly commonly accepted perspective that sees institutions as regulative, normative, and cognitive (Scott 1995), but with an emphasis on sociological institutionalism. In this sense, "[i]nstitutions may take the form of rules or codified social arrangements, norms of conduct, or cognitive structures that provide understanding and give meaning to social arrangements" (Suddaby & Greenwood 2009, p.176).

What is common in the three institutional streams is the view that institutions are stable. Stability can be seen as the central attribute of institutions (Hoffman 2011) – without stability institutions cease to exist. Stability does not however mean stagnation. While institutions tend to resists change, a trait commonly referred to as institutional inertia, institutions do change. Institutional change has been explained in the literature by referring to exogenous shocks that generate sudden changes to the dynamics of an institutional system and, consequently, induce change (Baumgartner & Jones 1993; Mahoney 2000). Institutional change has also been explained by endogenous processes. An increasing number of scholars, especially within the sociological strand, have begun taking seriously the role of actors and agency to make sense of the process of institutional change. This can be exemplified in the research on institutional entrepreneurship (DiMaggio 1988; Hardy & Maguire 2008; Garud et al. 2007) and institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby 2006; Sarasini 2013). Both strands place emphasis on the capabilities of actors to influence institutions and attempt to move away from ostensibly deterministic accounts of institutions (Pacheco et al. 2010, p.466; Zilber 2013). Whereas institutional entrepreneurship tends to favor the study of creating or changing institutions, institutional work also includes the maintaining of institutions as well as unsuccessful attempts of change. Focusing on a wider range of behavior responds to the criticism directed at institutional entrepreneurship for viewing actors in a too 'heroic' fashion

(Jones & Massa 2013). In addition, institutional work enables different outcomes of agency to be identified, including intended and non-intended consequences. The theoretical and methodological bases for both strands, however, remain the same, which is why I build upon both concepts in this dissertation. I focus on institutional work as an umbrella concept for studying behavior occurring in institutional settings.

Paying attention to agency in NI is not straightforward. One challenge relates to methodology. Zilber (2013) argues that there is a trade-off between studying change and the dynamics of change. To study change, she argues, one needs to employ a retrospective research approach, for example utilizing time series data. Change rarely happen overnight and observed changes in practices in the present may not necessarily generate institutional change. Conversely, studying the dynamics of practices requires an approach that focuses on the present and is able to uncover the processes of institutional work. Another challenge relates to the concept of 'embedded agency' (Seo & Creed 2002; Battilana & D'Aunno 2009): "if actors are embedded in an institutional field and subject to regulative, normative and cognitive processes that structure their cognitions, define their interests and produce their identities…how are they able to envision new practices and then subsequently get others to adopt them?" (Garud et al. 2007, p.961). In line with Giddens's work on 'structuration' (Giddens 1984), one response to this dilemma is to see institutions as simultaneously constricting and enabling – ascribing agentic attributes to actors means that they are reflexive and able to challenge the "taken-for-granted social rules and technological artifacts" (Garud et al. 2007, p.961). Thus, although institutions influence behavior, it is at the same time the behavior of actors that reproduce institutions.

The research on institutional work has recently started to pay greater attention to relational aspects. The emphasis here is on the relationships between actors and how it influences the process of institutional work (Wijen & Ansari 2007; Topal 2015). The literature on institutional work has tended to focus on the action and behavior of powerful actors that are able to navigate institutional change processes (Martí & Mair 2009). Less powerful actor may, however, use different tactics to influence institutions. For example, actors with limited resources may generate change through "their creative leveraging of relationships within social networks" (Abrams et al. 2015, p.678). This is similar to what Fligstein calls 'social skill', the capacity "to engage others in collective action…that proves pivotal to the construction and reproduction of local social orders" (Fligstein 2001, pp.105–106). Central to the engagement of actors is the integration of different forms of knowledge (Sotarauta & Mustikkamäki 2015). The authors also point to the importance of paying attention to the processes of social interaction that leads to knowledge generation. To gain a better understanding of institutional work thus involves seeing collaboration and knowledge integration as important elements of institutional change processes.

As noted earlier, it is important to note that institutional work does not only focus on processes of change, but also on resistance to change. Powerful actors may have an interest in preserving existing rules, norms, ideas, and understandings of 'reality' (Lawrence et al. 2009). Initiatives may meet opposition among actors, who feel that changes to current institutions is against their interests. Similarly, Rydin and Holman (2004) emphasize that the 'bonding' capacity of social capital, which strengthens the ties among members in a community, may in fact hinder change by excluding certain groups within a community from participating in networks and partnerships. Institutional work should thus not be seen as a fluid, but a 'messy' process of institutional change and maintenance.

2.4 SUMMARY: PROJECTS AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

In this section I present a synthesis of environmental governance, project management, and new institutional literatures. As pointed out earlier, the research process was guided by an integrative approach involving continuous dialogue between theory and data analysis (Maxwell 2013). The framework for exploring institutional work in projectified governance was not defined a priori, but emerged as a result of that dialogue (cf. Denzin & Lincoln 2000).

To move toward higher commitments to sustainability, changes in institutions that constrain and enable individual and organizational behavior are needed. What, then, does institutional change entail? Recalling the description of the different strands of NI in Section 2.3, different understandings of the forms of institutional change exist. As rational choice institutionalism sees institutions as rules existing 'outside' of actors, institutional change involves altering these rules to be better aligned with actors' endeavors to materialize their endogenous preferences. From a sociological perspective, and acknowledging the 'structurated' (Giddens 1984) relationship between structure and agency, institutions are both constraining and enabling actors' behavior. Here, institutional change is not limited to altering external rules, but also norms, conventions, and frames. I adopt this holistic perspective in order to understand the intricacies of the challenges of institutional change in the context of sustainability.

Another question relates to the difference between institutional change and policy change. On the one hand, formal institutions, such as environmental laws, regulations, and codified administrative guidelines, can be seen as parts of the environmental policy toolbox used to address problems (Tennekes et al. 2013). On the other hand, informal institutions, such as norms, conventions, and frames, can be conceived to constitute the context in which policy is formed (Hukkinen 1999). It is possible that one can identify a change in policy without significant changes to the institutional order. For example, if a new policy does not challenge the prevailing, legitimized perception of how

sustainability is framed and acted on, that policy is likely to be path dependent. In other words, the degree of change is most likely incremental, involving little modifications to the surrounding structure of social relationships and 'ways of doing things'. Institutional inertia can thus be seen as a broader concept than policy stagnation – it also involves the broader context in which policy is realized, debated, and contested.

In this dissertation I focus on the role of projects in addressing institutional inertia. Ideally speaking, projects are created by gathering actors for a limited time with a limited budget to achieve some kind of change to the status quo, be it a creation or development of a product, service, idea, proof of concept, routine, organization, or network. Projects can, in other words, be seen as 'relational spaces' (cf. Kellogg 2009) that create, change, or maintain institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby 2006) by bringing actors together in collaboration (Ansell & Torfing 2014). The project is "the articulation of institutions with practice" (Abrams et al. 2015, p.678), or the site where institutions are acted upon. This makes studying projects an insightful approach to the dynamics of social change processes (cf. Zilber 2013).

Article I and *II* serve as the background for studying the capacity of projects to achieve institutional change. *Article I* studies the drivers of institutional inertia in the context of climate change and introduces the concept of institutional work as a strategy for dealing with and making sense of inertia. *Article II* deals with the temporal dimensions of institutional inertia exemplified by the regulation of EDCs in the EU. It portrays the incapacity of a regulatory regime to adapt to novel challenges in a timely manner due to the entanglement of knowledge production, uncertainty, and regulation in multiple temporal dimensions. Taken together, *Article I* and *II* highlight the challenges of institutional change and the need for adopting a temporally sensitive approach to dealing with institutional inertia.

To address the challenge of institutional change toward sustainability I pose the question: What are the conditions for institutional work occurring in projects? For the purpose of this dissertation I view institutional work in project-based environmental governance as consisting of two core dimensions: participation and innovation (see Table 1). The focus on these two dimensions is guided by existing research on institutional work as well as their relevance in the environmental governance and project management literatures. Studying projects, that per definition are temporary, calls for attention to continuity of project knowledge and results, which is essential from the perspective of institutional change. Combining participation and innovation, thus, allows for a more comprehensive analysis of institutional change processes.

Participation is seen as the basis for collaboration and learning. It is assumed that a wide participation of actors with different knowledges (*participation width*) serves to increase the capacity to learn and utilize different know-hows and experiences of actors (*participation depth*). This capacity is dependent on the level of deliberation among project participants. In *Article III*, participation width is studied from the point of view of which

actors are involved in LEADER and what forms of knowledge are represented. Is the program dominated by public administrators or do we see a wider range of actors, including businesses, local associations, and local citizens, represented? Furthermore, are LEADER activities driven by expert or lay knowledge? Similarly, in *Article IV* participation width is studied from the point of view of who is involved and whose efforts are supported in RCPP. This signifies an important question, as moving toward partnerships across sectors would entail a new trajectory in US AEP which relies on contracts with individual agricultural producers. The depth of participation is studied in *Article III* by examining the decision-making process in LEADER. Are decisions made using formal means, such as voting, or are they made after deliberation? It is assumed that a decision-making process driven by discussion is conducive for knowledge sharing among participating actors. Taken together, the articles illustrate how participation can be organized and realized in project-based governance settings.

Table 1. *Interpretation of institutional work processes in project-based environmental governance.*

Dimension	Interpretation	References (incl.)
Participation	*Width* *(narrow-wide)* The extent to which projects involve actors from different sectors	(Folke et al. 2005; Valve 2006; Torfing et al. 2012)
	Depth *(shallow-deep)* The extent to which projects induce deliberation and learning among project participants	(Newig & Fritsch 2009; Cundill & Rodela 2012; Scholz et al. 2014)
Innovation	*Generation* *(exploitation-exploration)* The extent to which projects are capable of creating new knowledge and ideas	(March 1991; Lindkvist 2008; Sydow et al. 2004)
	Diffusion *(knowledge isolation-integration)* The extent to which project knowledge is transferred to other organizations	(Rogers 2003; Sydow et al. 2004; Bakker et al. 2011)

The other dimension of institutional work is innovation. Innovation is here defined as the "*intentional and proactive process that involves the generation and practical adoption and spread of new and creative ideas, which aim to produce a qualitative change in a specific context*" (Sørensen & Torfing 2011, p.849, italics in original). Rogers (2003) underlines the subjective nature of innovations by arguing that what is regarded as 'new' will vary among actors. Innovation thus involves the process of producing new knowledge and ideas

(*innovation generation*) as well as the transferring them from the project to other organizations (*innovation diffusion*). In a governance setting it is assumed that in order for project results to have wider impact, the knowledge produced in projects should be made available to a larger pool of actors. Similar to the concept of 'social innovation' (see e.g., Neumeier 2012), it stresses the collaborative elements of innovation processes. This view can be contrasted to the innovation literature focusing on the private sector that often sees innovations as a means of gaining an edge over competitors (Hartley 2005).

Innovation generation is discussed in *Article IV*. It explores the capacity of RCPP-funded projects to expand on existing problem definitions and scope, which would involve the generation of new knowledge. It is assumed that in order for new knowledge to emerge, projects need room to maneuver and freedom to experiment with new ideas and practices. The prevailing model of conservation in US AEP is largely reliant on centralized control and codified methods of conservation practices. In this context, allowing experimentation and flexibility in projects would entail an important development. Innovation diffusion is analyzed in *Article III* with reference to the extent to which project results are transferred or made available to permanent organizations. The focus is on the reporting requirements to project funders and their relationship to LEADER activities taking place 'on the ground'. It is worth noting that the notion of innovation used here is not the same as 'democratic innovation', which refers to strategies and tools promoted by public authorities to create new forms of participation (see e.g., Kuokkanen 2013).

Taken together, participation and innovation resonate with the notion of institutional work as a relational exercise that may or may not induce institutional change. Gaining a deeper understanding of the conditions for institutional work in project-based governance arrangements thus contributes to the discussion of the challenges of institutional change. A specific focus on temporary endeavors in the form of projects also contributes to the debate on the (thus far understudied) role of time in governance research. It advances our understanding how actions taken in the present or near future contributes toward distant targets, which is central to sustainability.

3 PRESENTATION OF EMPIRICAL CASES

To explore the institutional work processes in projectified environmental governance, I analyze two programs that fund projects to implement public policy: LEADER and RCPP. While they both rely on projects as funding mechanisms, they differ in how they are organized and in terms of their historical significance. Taken together the differences between the two programs provide interesting insight into the relationship between projects and institutional work.

3.1 LEADER

Scholars have noted that the EU is a forerunner in utilizing projects to implement public policies (Godenhjelm et al. 2015). Utilizing projects in the quest for sustainability is particularly evident in the EU's rural and regional development programs and the EU's Structural Funds more generally (Jackson & Roberts 1999; Roberts & Colwell 2001). Although it is suggested that the implementation of sustainability varies in different European regional contexts (Argüelles & Benavides 2014) and that clear guidelines for evaluating environmental and economic integration are lacking (Clement 2005), the Structural Funds are nevertheless generally regarded as an important arena for generating and promoting innovative solutions to sustainability problems in the EU (Moss & Fichter 2003; Streimikiene et al. 2007; Argüelles & Benavides 2014).

LEADER is an EU rural development initiative launched in 1991. In most general terms, the initiative focuses on the ways in which local knowledge can be used to develop rural areas in a sustainable fashion (Hyyryläinen 2007, p.21). According to Saraceno (1999), LEADER has seven main characteristics: it is locally based focusing on small geographical areas, it is a bottom-up method by which ideas evolve from the local level, it emphasizes the freedom of local areas to decide on allocation of funding, it focuses on 'innovative action', it strives to interlink actors from various sectors, it encourages networking between local areas, and, finally, it relies on LAGs to manage the program on the local level.

The architecture of LEADER is tied to the notion of local community. Because of the comparatively small amount of public funding allocated to LEADER, Ray (2000) sees the involvement of the voluntary and private sector as a prerequisite for the initiative to work. Thus, LEADER is built on the concept of governance, where public, private, and civil society actors together attempts to solve local problems. In addition, Ray argues that LEADER includes an "anarchic element pervading the design and implementation of development activity in localities" (Ray 2000, p.165). With the emphasis on localities and collaboration across sectors, LEADER symbolizes a different way in which rural development can be promoted. LEADER can be seen to challenge the prevailing

approach in the EU where rural development is organized in separate sectors with emphasis on hierarchical steering and top-down funding (Böcher 2008; Shucksmith 2010; Wellbrock & Roep 2015). Seen from this perspective, LEADER presents a distinct form of EU funding, as it allows a great share of autonomy on the local level. The LAGs themselves determine the development path for their regions and which projects to fund. Because of its 'radical' nature, LEADER has been called a "rural development 'laboratory'" (Ray 2000, p.166).

From a functional point of view, one of the cornerstones of LEADER are the LAGs. With the emphasis on bottom-up development and the delegation of decision-making power to the LAGs, LEADER operates to a large extent according to the distinctive features of the localities. The LAGs aim to stimulate innovative approaches in rural development by encouraging small-scale actions at the local level through the use of projects. LAGs are either ad-hoc organizations operating on the local level or incorporated in existing structures, such as local governments, and are responsible for the day-to-day management of LEADER. The LAGs consist of two 'divisions': the staff and the board. The staff is responsible for the administration of LEADER and is the main contact point for potential applicants. The 'deciding branch', or the board, of the LAG is made up of actors from various sectors of society and is responsible for choosing which projects will receive LEADER funding. Each LAG should represent the actors and their interest in the region (Böcher 2008). The composition of the LAG is regulated differently in the EU Member States. For example, in Finland all LAGs are independent ad-hoc organizations, whereas in Wales a LAG can be an independent, semi-public or public organization. The composition of the LAG boards also varies. In Finland the board consists of public, private/civil society actors, and non-affiliated individuals, whereas in Wales and England the non-affiliated individuals are generally replaced by the voluntary sector.

The process of applying for project funding in LEADER typically begins when a potential project applicant has an idea for a project. After first contacting the LAG staff, the project idea is then further elaborated and discussed both within the LAG itself and between the LAG and the applicant. The staff typically gives guidance and offers support for writing the final project application to the LAG. Generally, at this point the staff makes a decision whether the idea is eligible for funding through the LAG, ensuring that the project resonates with the development strategy of the LAG and LEADER regulations. Thus, the LAG functions both as a support as well as a primary 'filter' of LEADER applications. After discussion between the applicant and the staff, the project application is submitted to the LAG board which approves or denies the application. During the board meetings the submitted project applications are discussed and examined. If needed, LAG staff may be consulted or external actors may be involved. There were some minor differences in how the LAGs decide on the applications in Finland, Wales, and England. In Finland, the board considers every LEADER application regardless of how much LEADER money is applied for, whereas in

Wales and England the board is only involved when larger grants are decided on. In other cases, the staff itself is responsible for making the decision.

If the application is approved, it is then sent to the public authority that governs LEADER. The task of the authority is to confirm the legality of the application and to give a final acceptance of the project. At the time of collecting the data for *Article III*, in Finland this authority was a regional-based authority as was the case in England before the restructuring of the regional development agencies. In Wales the managing authority was the Wales Assembly Government (WAG) located in Cardiff. After the project is initiated, the applicant generally keeps in contact with the LAG. During and by the end of the project, the project manager reports to the LAG on project progress. In sum, the role of the LAG in the LEADER process in each country is similar – the LAG functions as a first point of contact for the project applicants, it decides which applications will receive LEADER funding, it is in contact with the public authority concerning the project application, and finally offers assistance for managing the project.

3.2 REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

RCPP is a US agricultural conservation program that was authorized by the Farm Bill of 2014 and implemented by the NRCS, a conservation agency operating under the USDA. The main goal of RCPP is to "enhance regional cooperation to more effectively implement and maintain conservation activities,...[which] will increase the opportunity for partners to bring innovative ideas and resources to accelerate conservation on private lands" (USDA 2014, p.1). RCPP funds projects that address conservation concerns on the regional and watershed level, and involve both producers as well as private and civil society actors – individual farmers cannot apply for project funding. To understand the design of RCPP and its significance it is important to understand the history of the NRCS and US AEP, more broadly.

During the 1930s, the US suffered from severe dust storms, colloquially referred to as the 'dust bowl', resulting from droughts and, as a result of significant agricultural expansion, the failure to prevent soil erosion on agricultural land. The 'Great Plains' region, with prominent agricultural production, was particularly affected and led to mass emigration from the region. In response to the dust bowl and as part of the 'New Deal' governmental reforms, the federal government established the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) in 1935. SCS became a permanent agency and was organized under the USDA. The SCS centralized soil conservation and the agency saw a significant increase in staff, funds, and responsibilities, and this development continued in the following decades (Helms 1992). In the 1970s growing concerns about environmental problems spurred a series of initiatives that obliged federal agencies to report the environmental impacts of their activities. The work

toward agricultural conservation was further strengthened with the enactment of the 1985 US Farm Bill. The bill introduced several conservation programs and coerced landowners who received benefits from the USDA to comply with conservation guidelines set out in the bill (Helms 2003). Due to the broadened mission, in 1994 the SCS was reorganized and renamed the 'Natural Resources Conservation Service' (NRCS). This occurred in a time of shrinking budgets of federal agencies as well as attempts to outsource authority and activities to private actors (Wolf 1995). The predominant role of the NRCS has since then been to enhance conservation through various programs and to offer financial assistance for conservation (NRCS 2016).

Despite changes in scope and structure of US AEP, the regime nevertheless relies on centralized and standardized formal bureaucratic procedures, while at the same time emphasizing voluntary commitment by agricultural producers (Potter & Wolf 2014). The NRCS is built on a hierarchical model of governing, with a strong central office and regional offices that report to the center. Efforts to promote public-private partnerships in the NRCS regime can be seen to have materialized fairly late, with the advent of conservation programs, such as the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) and Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI), both established in the 2008 US Farm Bill, emphasizing cooperation between producers and non-producers in conservation activities. Compared to other NRCS conservation programs, both AWEP and CCPI have been modest from the point of view of available funding. Pressure on the USDA and NRCS to legitimize their activities may also explain why RCPP, with its decentralizing discourse, has been advanced.

RCPP can be seen as an attempt to capitalize on the idea of partnerships in previous programs. In addition, when RCPP was created as part of the 2014 US Farm Bill there was a desire to consolidate programs in order to streamline activities and reduce overall costs. The first RCPP projects were initiated in May 2015. NRCS is responsible for evaluating project applications. $100 million per year has been dedicated to the RCPP as well as a 7% share of funds from other NRCS conservation programs. RCPP relies on project applicants to provide private contributions to complement public funding. The expectation is that the RCPP will mobilize $1.5 billion in the next five years.

3.3 SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL CASES

Based on the presentation of both programs, some conclusions can be drawn. First, the two programs differ in their familiarity with working with projects. LEADER represents a 'mature', projectified field, where the use of projects is institutionalized and where the administrative structure has considerable experience of working with projects in a public-private setting. More broadly, the EU is a central actor in utilizing projects to implement public policy (Godenhjelm et al. 2015). In contrast, RCPP represents an 'emerging' field that has only recently started to incorporate the notion of projects as a way to

organize work and has less experience of working with projects. Also, the notion of using projects as a public policy strategy is arguably not yet institutionalized in US scientific or practitioner discourse as is the case in the EU. Second, the two programs differ in how they are organized vis-à-vis centralized and decentralized authority. LEADER, with the critical role of LAGs in organizing the program on the local level, represents a model that, despite increasing bureaucratic control, still tenably retains strong elements of its initial goal of decentralized, bottom-up development (Ray 2000). The RCPP is situated in an administrative context with traditions of top-down steering and standardized practices. The scope of activities that are eligible for federal funding in NRCS programs is prescribed in the Farm Bill and, while some variation between states is noticeable, conservation practices under the NRCS are strongly guided by technical guidelines of the agency.

My main goal in this dissertation is to evaluate the role of projects in generating institutional change toward sustainability. The role of the empirical cases is to study the conditions of the programs for triggering participation and innovation. As argued earlier, I view these two elements as central in institutional work processes in project-based governance.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To conduct research we need tools and concepts to make sense of our environment. Existing sets of belief and theories guide our view of knowledge and consequently influence our research decisions. These different approaches to research, or paradigms (Kuhn 1996), can be seen as theoretical vehicles for making sense of the world and influence the researcher's selection of ontology (what is), epistemology (how do we know it) and methodology (what tools do we use to discover it) (Lincoln et al. 2011). In this dissertation I adopt a moderate, or contextual, social constructionist position (see e.g., Burningham & Cooper 1999; Jones 2002), which is a popular approach in environmental social science. Compared to stricter forms of constructionism that sees reality as constructed through social interaction, contextual constructionism adheres to a realist ontology and relativist epistemology. This means that while our attempts to uncover patterns in socio-ecological systems are prone to be partial and incomplete, it does not imply that no objective reality exists. For example, the fact that a certain environmental problem is not yet constructed as such does not imply that the problem does not exist, but that we lack a common understanding of it that makes it 'real'.

The choice of paradigm influences decisions regarding how research is designed. Research design, simply put, guides the way in which the researcher conducts research and is commonly characterized as either tight or loose with regards to the extent to which the research is steered by a predetermined strategy (Miles et al. 2014). A loose research design is seen to be beneficial when the researcher enters a previously unknown field or when the object of research is considered to be too complex for a fixed research approach. In these cases the researcher tends to regard all data as potentially important for the study and the strategy for data collection is vague. Conversely, a tight research design is often more appropriate when working with more commonly understood topics and concepts. Because the researcher has good insight into the object of research, the research design allows for a more directed and predetermined data collection strategy.

In this dissertation I adopt a middle ground approach to research design. The approach resembles what Maxwell (2013) calls an 'integrative' research design where the core components of research, including goals, conceptual framework, research questions, and methods, interact throughout the research process. Similar to 'bricolage' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000), it is an adaptive strategy, where the researcher remains open to new interpretations emerging during the research process, which often motivates changes to the initial conceptual framework and research questions.

The work for the thesis was driven by the goal of gaining a better understanding of projects as vehicles for addressing institutional inertia in the context of sustainability. This dissertation is based on this summary chapter

and four independent research papers that illustrate different dimensions of institutional change and projects. Although some changes were made to the theoretical and empirical scope as the dissertation took shape, the overall aim and central themes of the dissertation set out in the beginning of the dissertation project did not change. From a theory point of view, while preparing *Article I* that focuses on the factors that slow down institutional change in the context of climate change, I became convinced that 'time' needs to be treated carefully in order to advance our understanding of institutional change. This insight was materialized in *Article II*. Both articles shed light on the importance of studying institutions when assessing the conditions for addressing sustainability challenges.

From the point of view of empirical data, the dissertation utilizes a case study approach, which is commonly used in organizational research (Bryman & Buchanan 2009). Initially, the idea was that the analysis of LEADER (*Article III*) would form the empirical part of the dissertation. Having completed that study, and with an increased interest in project-based governance, I decided to extend my analysis to another empirical case. RCPP (*Article IV*) allowed me to study projects in a context where using projects as part of public policy has traditionally not been prevalent. *Article IV* also enabled me to refine my conceptual framework, building on prior analyses. The two cases can thus be seen to constitute parts of a 'heuristic case study' (Eckstein 1992), where their role is to "typify" (Peters 1998, p.148) how projects operate in contemporary governance arrangements. While the selection of two cases allow for a degree of comparison, the prime focus is not to conduct a formal comparative analysis of LEADER and RCPP. Rather, for the purpose of this dissertation, the role of the cases is to gain a fuller interpretation of publicly funded projects and their use in environmental governance.

4.1 SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION

The empirical data included in this dissertation (and utilized in *Article III* and IV) was collected in two separate studies. My involvement in studying LEADER started in 2010 in the research project "LAGging behind of LEADER in Local Democracy?" (LAG project) funded by the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (led by Dr. Kjell Andersson and Prof. Imre Kovách). The aim of the project was to gain a deeper understanding of the role of LEADER with a specific focus on participation and local democracy. I was involved in Andersson's research group during the course of the project. My involvement in the LAG project spurred my interest in the role of projects in contemporary governance arrangements.

The LAG project applied a non-probability sampling approach, where the selection of cases was done in a non-random manner (Walliman 2006). The sampling was done in three rounds. First, four EU countries were selected for the study: 1. Finland, 2. the UK, 3. Hungary and 4. Romania. Second, both

Andersson's and Kovách's research groups selected areas and LAGs in each country to include in the study. Andersson's research group selected the cases for Finland and the UK. The selection of cases was done after deliberation within the research group and based on previous research endeavors in the three selected areas. Snowball sampling was also utilized to reach out to additional LEADER stakeholders.

Drawing upon the findings from the LAG project and with an increased interest in the issue of projectification, I decided to extend my analysis to another public policy program that relies on projects in a different politico-administrative culture. Together with Prof. Steven Wolf, I was involved in a study of the RCPP and the role projects in implementing US AEP. The study lasted between 2014 and 2015. The context in which RCPP is implemented differs significantly from that of LEADER. Projects, as a means of organizing work, have not received much scholarly attention in the field of environmental governance and management in the US (but see e.g., Wolf 2012). This can be explained by the ostensible lack of a 'project discourse' within US public administration, especially compared to the EU. Due to the perceived 'novelty' of utilizing projects in public policy and the top-down bureaucratic context in which RCPP was created, RCPP thus presented an interesting opportunity to extend the analysis from the 'mature' project context of EU rural development to US AEP.

Due to the fact that RCPP was recently initiated at the time of data collection, we decided to apply a 'theoretical sampling' approach that involves selecting a sample of individuals that expectedly knows the most about the topic at hand (Walliman 2006). We therefore reached out to central policymakers, administrators, policy analysts, and RCPP project managers. Snowball sampling was also used to identify relevant participants for our study.

The use of interviews to collect data is prevalent in qualitative research where the researcher is interested in understanding phenomena and how actors conceptualize them. Qualitative interviews can take different forms depending on how strictly they follow predetermined guidelines. Interviews can be either structured, semi-structured or unstructured, where the interview topics and questions range from being fully predetermined to co-created (Cassell 2009). The choice of approach is influenced by the research topic at hand and the epistemological position of the researcher: is it possible to derive objective truths from interviewees' responses or are they simply context-dependent narratives that bear no reference to the 'outside' of the interview context? In the former, the interviewer needs to formalize the interview process to minimize all potential biases during the interview, for example by using mostly closed questions and progressing through the interview in a predetermined manner. In the latter, the interviewer lets the interviewee direct the process and the collected data is seen to be a product of a two-way dialog where the interviewer is an inherent part of the interview (King 2004). In this dissertation I adopt a contextual social constructivist position that allow for combining both positions by acknowledging the embeddedness of interviews, and the data obtained from them, in social settings, but also

stressing that interviews shed light on the "wider experience" (King 2004, p.13) of the interviewee. Using a semi-structured approach also allows for flexibility in interview situations (Packer 2011), where the interviewee may find the predetermined topics and interview questions irrelevant or misplaced.

The data used in this dissertation was collected in two rounds. First, during the LAG project I conducted 37 interviews in Finland and 16 in the UK between November 2010 and January 2012 with LAG staff, LAG board members, and LEADER project representatives. I conducted part of the Finnish LEADER interviews together with my research project colleague Johanna Löyhkö. Second, in the RCPP study I conducted 8 interviews with key administrators of the program, AEP analysts in federal agencies, and NGOs between September 2014 and January 2015. Prof. Wolf conducted four additional interviews with managers of projects supported by RCPP funds (see Table 2 for an overview).

Table 2. *List of data collected and background material for the dissertation.*

Case	Type of data	n
LEADER (Article III)	Interviews	
	• Project managers	13
	• Project stakeholders	7
	• LAG staff	14
	• LAG board members	19
	Other material	
	• 2007-2013 Rural Development plans for Mainland Finland, Wales, and England; Project and LAG websites	
RCPP (Article IV)	Interviews	
	• Public administrators	3
	• Policy analysts	5
	• Project managers	4
	Other material	
	• Agricultural Act of 2014 (2014 US Farm Bill); RCPP Announcement of Program Funding; NRCS website	

The interview locations were selected so that possible interference from other individuals was minimized, while acknowledging that choosing an interview location is not neutral and that the location will have an influence on the interview itself (Cassell 2009). Most interviews took place primarily in private rooms, such as in interviewees' homes or office meeting rooms. When these options were inconvenient, the interviews were conducted in semi-public spaces such as cafés. When face-to-face interaction was impossible, interviews were conducted over the telephone.

'Interview guides' were used to assist the collection of data. Interview guides are commonly used in semi-structured interviews to guide the interviewer through topics of interest, allowing for flexibility in how the interview progresses. Compared to 'interview schedules', interview guides do not require the

interviewee to answer according to a certain format or force the interviewer to pose every question listed in the guide (Mason 2004). The interview guide for the LAG project was based on the seven criteria laid out in the theoretical framework (See Table 2.1 in *Article III*): actors, institutional linkages, forms of participation, forms of knowledge, conflict resolution, outcome, and accountability. Separate, though interlinked, interview guides for LAG and LEADER project interviewees were developed (see Appendices 1 and 2 for interview guides). During the data collection phase and based on the experiences from the conducted interviews, some questions were changed and some were deleted, as they felt irrelevant to the interviewees. The broader topics and structure remained nevertheless the same. The interview guide for the study of RCPP focused on the history of the RCPP, how it is organized and implemented, and the aspirations and meanings the actors attach to it (see Appendix 3). Explicit attention was paid to the question of how, if at all, the RCPP is different from previous and present NRCS conservation programs. The interview guide remained more or less the same during the data collection phase.

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative content analysis was utilized to analyze the empirical cases in this dissertation (*Article III* and *IV)*. As the name implies, qualitative content analysis is a useful approach when the focus of the analysis is on the content of language (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). Qualitative content analysis is concerned with *what* is being said and is ostensibly more descriptive compared to discourse analysis, where the focus is on *how* things are said and how language constructs social reality (Schreier 2012). Bearing in mind the ontological and epistemological stance explained earlier, the 'what' that is being said should, however, be treated critically and with an appreciation of the influence of the social context on the interview situation. At the same time, this position does not contend that the data generated in interviews has no resemblance or connection to the interviewee's 'real' experiences (King 2004). Content analysis is seen to involve both categorization of explicit content as well as interpretation of implicit themes in relation to the research questions at hand (Hsieh & Shannon 2005; Vaismoradi et al. 2013).

Qualitative content analysis can be used in different ways depending on the scope and nature of the object of study. *Article III* studied LEADER using seven predetermined criteria. A 'directed', or 'deductive', content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon 2005; Elo & Kyngäs 2008) was deemed appropriate, as the data collection focused on these criteria specifically and, more generally, the goal of the study was to contribute to theoretical debate on the broader democratic elements and capabilities of LEADER. In addition, LEADER is a widely studied program, which gave us the confidence to apply a more structured approach using predetermined themes emerging from existing theory that were deemed most relevant for the research (Julien 2008).

The article sets out to identify representations of 'aggregative' and 'integrative democracy' as two main ideal types of the democratic decision-making process (see March & Olsen 1989). Aggregative and integrative democracy signified the two main themes of the analysis. The themes were further divided into categories organized by seven criteria: actors, institutional linkages, forms of participation, conflict resolution, types of knowledge, outcome, and accountability (see Table 2.1 in *Article III*). For every criterion we defined categories, for example in terms of conflict resolution the categories included 'political bargaining' and 'deliberation between actors'. In the analysis we used codes including 'voting', 'discussion', and 'giving advice'. This allowed us to identify how decisions were made and the role of information transmission and deliberation in the process (cf. Newig et al. 2010).

Article IV studied RCPP from the point of view of how it is different from previous and current NRCS conservation programs. When collecting and analyzing the data, we were not aware of other studies that would have explored the program in detail. Due to the novelty of the program, our interest was directed toward three main questions:

1) To what extent does RCPP formalize a reliance on projects within AEP? (How is conservation organized?)
2) To what extent does RCPP broaden the scope of participation within AEP? (Who is involved?)
3) To what extent does RCPP expand the scope of conservation priorities within AEP? (What is conserved?)

These questions were derived from our engagement with the existing literatures on environmental governance and project management, and from an interest in providing an overview of the central traits of the program. In this case we also applied a deductive content analysis approach, while remaining open to emerging topics in the data. For example, the question of 'scope of conservation' involved exploring the conservation activities eligible within RCPP (using codes such as 'water quality' and 'flood prevention') as well as how the conservation activities pursued are controlled and supervised by the NRCS (e.g. 'try new things' and 'flexibility'), which allowed for an evaluation of the scope of conservation practices within RCPP.

4.3 RESEARCH ETHICS

For the interviews I conducted, I first contacted the potential interviewees directly by telephone or email, thereby minimizing influence from external actors (such as employers or colleagues) that could pressure individuals to participate in the study. The individuals were asked if they are willing to participate, which offered them the possibility to opt out of the study. When contacting them, I explained the scope of our research, why I contacted them,

how the data is collected, and how the data will be analyzed and disseminated. For the LAG project, all but one individual decided to participate due to time constraints. For the RCPP study none of the contacted potential interviewees declined to participate. Before commencing the interviews, I also explained to the participants in both studies that they do not have to answer all questions if they so decide. Interviewees were also offered the possibility to withdraw from the study at any time.

I was careful to ensure that the interviewees were not aware of the other interviewees participating in our studies. For example, I did not name other informants to the people we interviewed or make references to what had been said in previous interviews. Some exceptions had to be made. For example, as the contact details of the LEADER project managers were rarely freely available, I had to consult the staff of the LAGs to obtain this information. Thus, they were aware of which projects we had selected, or at least contacted, for the study. Also, we asked the LEADER project manager to name central project stakeholders and provide their contact details, which would be challenging to obtain without the input from the project manager. It is worth noting that LEADER is a fairly small program and implemented locally, and sometimes the involved actors were at least aware of each other even without our 'intervention'. In the RCPP case study, because the program had only recently been initiated during the data collection phase, snowball sampling was used to explore the central actors. Although this strategy also potentially involved privacy risks, the research topic was not deemed particularly sensitive or personal in nature, which made the sampling strategy more acceptable.

All interviews were recorded and stored securely. The anonymity of the interviewees was secured by omitting any identifiers in the analysis. The collected raw data and identifiers were not disclosed to individuals or organizations outside of our research group. In *Article III* the names of the LAGs are mentioned, but all possibilities to identify organizations in the analysis were eliminated.

The LAG project was funded by the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the government department that was responsible for governing LEADER on the national level in Finland during the time of the research project. We organized a workshop, where we disseminated the results from our project to public officials working with LEADER. Although they showed great interest in the research project, neither the Ministry nor affiliated public officials influenced or tried to influence the process or results of the research project. Funding for the RCPP case study was provided by a personal ASLA-Fulbright award that supported a 12-month visit at Cornell University. Neither the USDA nor any funding body attempted to influence the RCPP study.

5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In the introduction I presented two research questions:

RQ1. What are the central drivers of institutional inertia in the context of sustainability?

RQ2. How can institutional inertia be addressed through projects?

Based on the findings in the publications included in this dissertation, I will answer these questions in the following sections.

5.1 CENTRAL DRIVERS OF INSTITUTIONAL INERTIA IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABILITY

Institutional inertia presents clear challenges for sustainability. Given the urgency for structural change to move toward sustainability (e.g., Leach et al. 2012), there is a clear need for a deeper understanding of the drivers and processes that contribute to the slowness of institutions to adapt to sustainability challenges. I address this need in *Article I* and *II* from two distinct, yet interrelated perspectives. As the process of institutional change toward sustainability is a complex endeavor involving different sectors in society as well as multiple concrete problems, I focus on two sets of 'wicked problems' (Lazarus 2009; Brown et al. 2010): climate change and endocrine-disrupting chemicals.

Article I presents a review of the NI literature on climate change to identify the central drivers for institutional inertia portrayed in the literature. Climate change can be seen as the most serious problem contemporary societies face, having serious impact on ecological, social, and economic systems. It is estimated that a rise in global mean temperature by more than 2 degrees Celsius will have wide-ranging negative impact on livelihood for rural and urban populations, food systems, and ecosystems (IPCC 2014). In addition, there is potential for the climate system to 'tip' into a new equilibrium, generating "large-scale impacts on human and ecological systems" (Lenton et al. 2008, p.1786). *Article I* speaks to the issue of addressing climate change effectively, not least regarding the ambitious goal of limiting the rise of global average temperatures to 2 (or even 1.5) degrees Celcius compared to preindustrial levels, as decided in COP21. Moving to that trajectory will require major transformations of technological systems (including electricity decarbonization and speeding up innovation in low-carbon technologies) and individual behavioral change (IEA 2014; Gifford et al. 2011). The possibility of realizing those transformations depends to a large extent on the capacity of institutions – including laws, formal rules, norms, frames, and taken-for-granted routines

– to change. *Article I* thus contributes to the discussion of how to make sense of the barriers to achieve changes in institutions of climate policy.

Based on the review, we identified five main mechanisms of institutional inertia: cost, uncertainty, path dependence, power, and legitimacy. Costs refer to the perceived high costs of climate change mitigation and can be divided into two specific issues: cost of freeridership and transaction costs. Freeriding becomes a problem if actors refrain from contributing to an agreement on climate change and at the same time benefit from the contribution made by others. The threat of freeriding generates a standstill, as committing actors want to ensure that their efforts are matched by others. Transaction costs refers to the costs of changing institutions, including the communication and negotiation required to change the status quo.

The uncertainty of impacts of climate change has significant influence on the framing of the problem. The possibility of sudden changes in the climate system makes climate change highly unpredictable, and ultimately challenging to model. Uncertainties make the framing of climate change important, as the lack of clear problem definitions hinders actors from understanding the scope and significance of the problem.

Path dependence is concerned with the challenge or inability to change development paths that are based on decisions made in the past. Path dependence involves not only already made investments in carbon-based technology and infrastructure, but also practices and routines. Path dependence can thus be seen in relation to the position of an organization within the economic structure or knowledge networks that influence decisions made vis-à-vis climate change.

Power as a driver for inertia is explained by referring to the structure of political systems. In international climate negotiations any agreement or effort need to balance between 'sovereignty claims' made by nation-states and broader 'burden-sharing' discourses. On the national level, the structure of representative democratic systems is shown to be inefficient to address long-term objectives of climate change that stretch beyond multiple electoral periods and where the benefits of action can only be identified in the far future.

Dealing with the uncertainty of climate change also involves contestation of legitimacy. New climate initiatives may be resisted if they lack legitimacy or political and social support. Also, certain framings of how to address climate change, such as prioritization of certain policy instruments, may be legitimized or delegitimized depending on the claims made by powerful and generally regarded legitimate actors.

The findings in *Article I* thus stress the multifariousness of institutional inertia in the context of climate change. It shows that inertia is not only a result of costs, which arguably seems to be a popular framing, but of multiple drivers. Uncertainty as a driver of inertia is further discussed in *Article II* and expands on the discussion of the role of knowledge in governance arrangements. It also discusses the significance of the role of time when studying the challenges of institutional change.

Article II deals with the concept of temporal fit of institutions by highlighting the challenges of EDC regulation under REACH, the primary instrument to regulate chemicals in the EU. The article addresses the dangers of exposure of EDCs for humans and ecosystems. It also highlights the challenges of developing sufficient regulatory responses to chemicals whose characteristics and effects confront existing knowledge structures. In its most basic sense, temporal fit is understood as the temporal connection between institutions and biophysical systems. Temporal fit has been conceptualized in the literature and utilized as a research approach to studying institutions in various ways. However, the existing literature on temporal fit has not taken seriously the complexity of time, the fact that time can take various forms. The aim of the article is to clarify the concept of temporal fit by diagnosing the multiple dimensions of time and how those impact EDC governance. The study builds on Adam's (1998) concept of 'timescapes' that highlights the contextual and historical embeddedness of time. Time is a result of a series of events, both natural and man-made, and involves natural, social, and cultural accounts of time.

EDC governance and temporal fit was studied from four temporal dimensions that emerged in the empirical analysis: time frame (how long?), sequence (in what order?), timing (when?), and tempo (how fast?). The results show that uncertainties of EDC impacts lead to challenges in how to develop criteria for analyzing EDCs. Criteria are essential for regulation, as they define the parameters for evaluating the impacts of chemicals that then may or may not warrant regulatory action. Much of the struggles to develop criteria are due to knowledge production practices within the classic toxicology paradigm that have been shown to be inert toward the complexities of EDCs (compared to more 'traditional' chemicals). The analysis identifies that temporal misfits occurs in the four temporal dimensions simultaneously. The inability to sufficiently regulate EDCs and to overcome the inertial characteristics of knowledge production under REACH is a result of a coexisting misfits occurring in different temporal dimensions.

At least two expressions of institutional inertia can be identified in *Article II*. First, the slow development of regulatory intervention itself is a form of institutional inertia. This relates to the notion of institutions as regulative, or rules that guide behavior. Second, institutional inertia can be identified in the reliance on traditional toxicology to make sense of the uncertain nature of EDCs. From this perspective, institutions take the form of norms of conduct and frames that influence behavior. It is likely that changes to the ways in which EDCs are understood are slow, as EDCs challenge the very basic assumptions of toxicology and the existing frames of what constitutes acceptable forms of knowledge and methods in EDC regulation (cf. Bisaro et al. 2010).

Article I and *Article II* show that inertia is a complex phenomenon involving multiple dimensions. In addition, the articles emphasize that institutional inertia is an inherently temporal phenomenon involving multiple dimensions of time. Both climate change and EDCs involve uncertainty and limitations of existing knowledge to fully grasp the problems. Both articles

note the important role of framing and interpretation of problems in developing responses to the problems.

5.2 ADDRESSING INSTITUTIONAL INERTIA THROUGH PROJECTS

In this section I will elaborate on how institutional inertia can be addressed. I will first discuss the findings from *Article I* and *II* with regards to how institutional inertia can be addressed in the case of climate change and the regulation of EDCs, after which I will focus specifically on the role of projects in addressing inertia based on the findings from *Article III* and *IV*.

The research on inertia has traditionally interpreted the influence of institutions on behavior in a fairly deterministic manner. However, more recent studies within institutional research have started to pay more attention to the processes through which institutions are created and altered, as well as how they are sustained. The focus has moved toward understanding agency, and its relationship to structure, in institutional processes. Based on the review of the NI literature on climate change, *Article I* discusses the role of institutional entrepreneurship and institutional work in addressing institutional inertia. The article notes that while agency has been more frequently discussed in the rational choice institutionalism literature, it has lately attracted great interest in historical institutionalism and especially sociological institutionalism in order to better understand the processes of institutional change. This interest has given rise to two interrelated concepts: institutional work and institutional entrepreneurship. While the accounts of institutional inertia may give the impression that institutional structures are more or less untouched by human behavior, the recent agency-focused literatures highlight how actors, although institutionally situated, are able to act influence institutions.

In terms of climate change, *Article I* points to potential strategies for addressing the five drivers of institutional inertia (see Table 1 in *Article I*). Addressing the costs of climate change mitigation and adaptation involves, among other things, creating incentive systems that lower transaction costs for institutional change. This would involve ensuring the existence of spaces where actors can come together and discuss the benefits of mitigation and, ultimately, generate trust among parties. Uncertainty of climate change can be countered by creating favorable frames for change to reach consensus on climate change among various actors. Developing a mutual understanding and interpretation of the problem which multiple actors can agree on serves as an important step in generating advantageous conditions for change. Intriguingly, path dependence has been portrayed in the literature both as a driver of inertia and as a potential strategy to address inertia. In the latter case, if attempts to implement a proactive climate policy initiative are successful, they have the potential to create new low-carbon trajectories that can be sustained over time.

However, the success of establishing new paths depends on the ability of actors to overcome existing path dependencies. Power in institutional inertia can be addressed by creating coalitions or formations of actors that have a common agenda. Acknowledging the importance of power, political brokerage can induce cooperation and apply pressure toward change. With regards to legitimacy deficits concerning change, any strategy for change need to be sensitive to how alternative pathways are conceived and whether or not they enjoy acceptance within the broader regime. Again, this relates to the success of reconciling divergent interests and bringing actors together in change processes.

With regards to the regulation of EDCs, *Article II* puts forward ways to address the temporal misfits occurring within REACH. As shown in Section 5.1, one fundamental challenge of EDC regulation is the disconnection between regulation, traditional knowledge production, and the behavior of the chemicals. A potential way to overcome this inert situation would involve expanding scientific evidence from purely quantifiable data to also include more qualitative forms of evidence. By making references to environmental impact assessment procedures, EDC governance could be restructured in a way that allows for engagement and inclusion of a broader range of actors, which potentially would increase not only the legitimacy of the regime, but also enable social learning among policy makers, scientists, and stakeholders. This reconfiguration of EDC goveranance would entail creating spaces for deliberation and knowledge integration, where alternative visions and strategies could be discussed.

Article I and *II* highlight a list of strategies that can be employed to address institutional inertia. Taken together, the articles emphasize the role of cooperation and deliberation between actors and the need for creating new visions and frames for alternative trajectories. In addition, both articles point to the organizational side of addressing inertia – how do we organize efforts to create more inclusive (both in terms of actors and knowledge) methods of work? *Article II*, in particular, also raises the need for an approach that is sensitive toward temporal complexity. These findings form the basis for interpreting the results in *Article III* and *IV*.

Article III introduces the empirical analysis that focuses on institutional work processes in projects and points to the challenges of utilizing projects to achieve institutional change. As discussed in Section 2.2, projects are often depicted as being apt for disrupting existing work routines and allowing for experimentation and learning among a broader scale of actors. In addition, projects are argued to be an appropriate organizational form for managing uncertainty and unexpected events (Rämö 2002; Andersson 2009). *Article III* adopts a 'project ecology' perspective (Grabher & Ibert 2011) and studies both projects and their funding organizations (LAGs) within LEADER in Finland and the UK.

Article III is situated in the broader landscape of the 'differentiated countryside' (Murdoch et al. 2003), illustrating the development of rural areas from relatively homogenous societies tied to resource extraction and agricultural production toward spaces facing multiple and sometimes

contradictory expectations of rural renewal and environmental protection (Andersson & Kovách 2010). European ruralities are confronted with increasing scarcities of natural resources, pressure to address the drivers and effects of climate change, and low political capacity to govern themselves (Marsden 2009). To address these multiple challenges, since the 1980s calls have been made for more integrative approaches involving a movement from sectoral toward territorial rural development. These approaches favor a greater involvement of local actors and knowledge as well as development of new solutions in the regions (Shucksmith 2010). Simultaneously, in order to instigate broader institutional change toward rural sustainability, scaling up experiences and knowledge produced on the local and regional levels is emphasized (Truffer & Coenen 2012). Yet, rural development is still chiefly organized separately in sectors, which hinders the potential for collaboration and learning (Wellbrock & Roep 2015). Integrating sectors pertaining to rural development, such as energy, tourism, forestry, and agriculture, is crucial for moving toward rural sustainability (Kitchen & Marsden 2009).

LEADER has been portrayed as an attempt to challenge sectoral rural development (Shucksmith 2010). From this perspective, one of the central aims of LEADER is to mobilize local ideas and generate innovations in an era of differentiated ruralities. *Article III* illustrates the composition of actors and its deliberative characteristics as well as the diffusion of knowledge, two central dimensions of institutional work in project-based governance arrangements. One of the challenges of projectified governance is the fragmentation and 'localization' of knowledge (cf. Carlile 2002). Project knowledge is situated in a specific time and space, which challenges efforts to scale up knowledge to achieve institutional change. With regards to institutional inertia, a central question is how knowledge produced in projects can generate new shared meanings and frames of rural sustainability.

The analysis in *Article III* was organized by seven criteria. These criteria can be further arranged into four main groups or components (criteria in parentheses): input (actors, forms of knowledge), participatory processes (forms of participation, conflict resolution), output (outcome), and organizational context (institutional linkage, accountability). These groups highlight different phases of the LEADER process and the broader context in which projects operate. The selection of criteria was guided by the notion that a broad representation of dimensions and perspectives is needed in order to gain a fuller understanding of the democratic decision-making process in LEADER.

In terms of input, projects were dominated by non-public actors and combined expert and lay knowledge. Local knowledge was usually seen as important for the success of the project. For the LAGs, the composition of actors was more structured and included both public and non-public actors. The LAG work involved both expert and lay knowledge. Concerning participatory processes, the projects offered limited possibilities to participate in the implementation of the project (e.g. influencing project design and activities), but the focus was more on the opportunities for participation

created by the projects, by organizing citizen workshops, for example. Despite the limited amount of 'external' participation, the decision-making process in the projects was open and driven by deliberation. The possibilities to participate in the LAGs were limited to formal means of participation, such as becoming a member of the board. More informal ways of participation were not common. However, similar to the projects, the decision making in the LAGs was driven by discussion and deliberation. In terms of output, projects wrote interim and final reports to the LAGs, focusing on indicators and quantitative data. Some project representatives argued that the project reports were ill-suited for gathering the most important information about their projects and their activities. All LAGs submitted annual reports and reports on project funding as part of the bureaucratic requirements to the regulatory agencies and in some cases local governments. Some LAGs conducted evaluations on their own work, either formally or informally through discussions among LAG actors, whereas others did not.

Regarding the organizational context, the projects were closely linked to the LAGs with no direct involvement with regulatory agencies. The projects were seldom connected to other projects. According to project representatives, the relationship between the projects and the LAGs was generally good. A common topic in the interviews was the amount of bureaucracy involved in project management and some interviewees highlighted the functional role of LAGs in facilitating the process of complying with the administrative requirements. The accountability structure in the projects was also clear. The LAGs were closely connected to the regulatory agencies governing LEADER as well as other LAGs. The accountability structure within the LAGs was also clear. In the UK, LAGs can be either independent organizations (as in Finland) or part of local government. Both alternatives were represented in the cases included in this study.

The analysis in *Article III* thus suggests that both projects and LAGs were fairly similar in that they involved different forms of actors, including companies, NGOs, and private citizens. The analysis also shows that the activities in both projects and LAGs were guided by informal decision-making processes, such as deliberation and discussion, rather than bargaining between interests and conflicts. However, the LAGs and projects were largely closed toward external participation or used formal means of participation, which meant that although LEADER proved to include various actors, there were few opportunities to influence everyday LAG activities or project activities once they were initiated. In addition, the analysis questions the ability to scale up knowledge produced and experience gained in projects. Apart from the required reports that are submitted to the LAGs, the analysis suggests that no other mechanisms are in place that would go beyond the quantitative and standardized data collected in the reports.

These findings illustrate, and give valuable insights into, the institutional work processes in projectified environmental governance arrangements. The results concerning participation raise the question whether patterns of selective

involvement in project activities exist. The notion of 'project class' (Kovách & Kučerová 2009) implies that some actors have considerable project experience and are able to act on the expectations of project outputs and master the 'jargon' of project management. An interesting question emerges: how does institutional work play out in a project-driven arrangement with little or no project experience? With regards to participation, can one assume that participation in an 'emerging' project-based governance arrangement takes different forms than in a more 'mature' one? With regards to innovation, should one expect the level of exploration in the projects to be high or low? Based on the results from *Article III* and because of a sustained interest in projects, I decided to extend the analysis beyond the 'projectified' EU and to include a project-led program implemented in a field that has considerably less experience of working with projects. Including a non-EU program would also help to contextualize the findings from the LEADER study. The RCPP case presented in *Article IV* highlighted some interesting findings that stand in contrast and correspond to those from LEADER. Bearing in mind the recent initiation of RCPP, some of the findings are more indicative rather than definite.

Article IV is concerned with agricultural conservation and the possibility of projects to expand the scope of actors involved in conservation and to generate new knowledge. This corresponds to the aim of RCPP, which is to induce cooperation across sectors in order to create innovative ideas to accelerate conservation on private lands. The quest for broader participation and innovation should be seen in relation to the centralized regime of the USDA and NRCS with strong steering of conservation practices. The strong steering from public authorities signifies an expression of institutional inertia, where the 'center' prescribes eligible activities in administrative codes of conduct and where reliance on 'bilateral' contracts with individual farmers has been the tradition. The point of interest is the capacity of projects to build new partnerships and generate new knowledge and routines that would widen or challenge existing prescribed methods of conservation (cf. Bisaro et al. 2010).

The analysis suggests that the RCPP provides an opportunity for including actors that previously have not been involved, or have had only a limited role, in NRCS-funded activities. From this perspective, RCPP signifies an interesting trajectory. Instead of relying on contracts with individual farmers, the RCPP requires agricultural producers to collaborate with non-farmers, for example businesses, NGOs, and researchers, and set up projects with a regional scope. The requirement of including non-farmers has, understandably, clear implications for the question of who participates in the projects, although it is too early to evaluate if there is a trend in specific types of actors involved. At this stage, it is impossible to dismiss the possibility of 'cooptation' (Selznick 1949) by superficially sharing power and authority to address legitimacy deficits in US AEP. Nevertheless, because of the requirement of non-farmer participation, RCPP is arguably allowing for new forms of knowledge and experiences to be represented in the projects.

At the same time, the study also suggests that the capacity for innovation generation and 'exploration' (March 1991) in RCPP projects is low. Project scope is regulated by a predetermined list of eligible activities that is decided on by the NRCS. While RCPP seems to be well-suited to include new actors and knowledges, the projects are, in other words, less concerned about finding new ways of addressing conservation challenges. Instead, a reliance on existing practices embodied in bureaucratic standards could be identified. This could be explained by the fact that RCPP places an emphasis on projects' abilities to attract external project funding. This raises the question to what extent the rationale for involving external actors is economic or 'functional' in bringing in new forms of knowledge and experiences. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the link between projects and the permanent structure will be strong due to the standardized project activities and it can be expected that the aggregation of project knowledge will be fairly effective.

The differences in the historical and political contexts in which LEADER and RCPP are situated are notable and shed light on how project-driven programs operate in different environments. Both programs paint a somewhat contradictory picture of the institutional work processes and the role of projects in generating broader institutional change. Allowing a broad representation of actors and knowledges as well as deliberation among project participants represent the first dimension of institutional work as conceptualized in this dissertation. LEADER seems to be both 'wide' and 'deep', which suggests that it engages a broad range of actors and that the work is guided by deliberation and discussions about different viewpoints and experiences. However, the fact that LEADER was mostly closed to external participation may have reduced the amount of disapproving voices of LEADER activities. These findings can be compared to the results of Nousiainen's (2015) study of decision making in Finnish LAGs. He argues that the apparent quest for consensus among LAG participants may in fact lead to a homogeneity, rather than heterogeneity, of ideas and thinking. In relation to the findings from my analysis, this is an important remark that points to the notion of power in institutional work and the 'messiness' of the processes involved. Despite being a recently created program, RCPP shows clear signs of a broadening scope of participating actors in US AEP. The organizational design of projects alone introduces a new 'way of thinking' in the NRCS, as the projects need to involve non-farmers in order to obtain federal funding. This in itself serves to expand participation and introduce new forms of knowledges and experiences into the regime. In the RCPP case, projects can be seen to play an instrumental role in allowing a broader representation of actors.

The generation of new knowledge and integrating that knowledge into permanent organizations and structures signify the second dimension of institutional work. The study on RCPP shows that projects do not per definition emphasize experimentation and generation of new knowledge. The level of exploration is limited due to predetermined eligible project activities set out by the NRCS. This does not imply that no new knowledge is expected

to be produced; the implementation of conventional practices in new contexts requires modification and rearrangement of existing knowledges. It does, however, set limits to the extent to which projects are able to produce entirely new framings of problems and means to address them. LEADER, in turn, exemplifies the challenges of project knowledge diffusion. The study highlights that LEADER activities are conceptualized and realized in a holistic manner, but that the mechanism of transferring that knowledge is rather weak. The skewness of project reports towards quantitative data raises doubts that the diversity of knowledge produced in projects can be made available to permanent organizations.

6 DISCUSSION

The findings presented in the previous section have important implications for the discussion of the role of projects in generating institutional change toward sustainability. The aim of this section is to examine these implications by elaborating on the linkages between institutional work, institutional inertia, projects, and sustainability. Furthermore, I will discuss how a compartmentalization of projectification into two ideal types can expand our understanding of the process of institutional change in project governance.

The findings from the articles included in this dissertation highlight the breadth of sustainability. As a concept, sustainability embodies the multisectoral and multifaceted nature of challenges contemporary societies face. For example, the policy domains covered in the articles are mentioned in the UN '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', stressing the need for taking urgent action to address climate change, reducing the exposure to hazardous chemicals, supporting rural development, and promoting sustainable agriculture (United Nations 2015). Because of the inherent complexities of integrating social, economic, and ecological development, some authors regard the dynamism of sustainability as inevitable (Voss & Kemp 2006; Connelly 2007). The breadth of the concept can in fact be seen to challenge us to better understand the suitability of existing social and political systems in addressing multiple challenges (Weale 2009). While it is possible to establish targets and 'planetary boundaries' (Steffen et al. 2015) of socio-ecological systems utilizing best available knowledge, the process of transforming these boundaries into goals and implementing them involves actors in different sectors (Voss & Kemp 2006). It can therefore be suggested that the implementation of sustainability requires a variety of approaches in different domains (Hajer et al. 2015).

On a general level, there is discernible overlap between the policy domains covered in this dissertation. For example, with changes in temperature and levels of GHG emissions in the atmosphere as well as a higher prevalence of extreme weather events, climate change poses clear challenges for agriculture, which has generated calls for stronger responses to water conservation and biodiversity protection (Beddington et al. 2012). Many pesticides used in agriculture have been identified as disrupting the endocrine systems of wildlife and humans, turning the attention to finding less harmful substitutes (Mnif et al. 2011). Rural development, in turn, needs to address increasing scarcities of natural resources and develop capacities to respond to climate change, both in terms of mitigation and adaptation (Marsden 2009).

My intention is not, however, to pinpoint the linkages between the policy domains in terms of substance, but to explore the ways in which sustainability challenges is acted on in the domains, thereby highlighting the tension

between institutions and agency. The findings from the different policy domains highlight the importance of integrating sectors and knowledges in organizing efforts to address sustainability challenges. The policy domains also experience similar difficulties in generating new shared norms, visions, and frames that would confront institutional inertia. Bearing in mind the complex nature of sustainability, my goal has not been to provide a complete list of institutions orienting efforts toward sustainability. Instead, my ambition has been to concentrate on key institutions in the four policy domains included in this dissertation, which provides a broad representation of institutional inertia in the field of sustainability.

The results presented in Section 5 show that institutional inertia is a result of different drivers including cost, uncertainty, path dependence, power, and legitimacy. Acknowledging complexity is therefore necessary when studying institutional change processes. The results also highlight that inertia has important temporal implications. Not only does inertia slow down change processes, challenging the development of timely responses to sustainability problems, but it also calls for a temporally sensitive approach that acknowledges the multifaceted nature of time. The findings point to at least four temporal dimensions that are relevant when studying sustainability: time frame, sequence, tempo, and timing. Projects, and projectification more broadly, act as an interesting avenue for addressing the multifaceted nature of inertia. If we take projectification seriously, we are ostensibly facing an increasing 'permanence of the temporary', which motivates critical evaluation of the organizational dimension of governance and the qualities of institutional work in projectified environments.

The findings from the articles highlight the significance of context in which projects operate. LEADER and RCPP signify distinct environments, especially in terms of familiarity with working with projects as part of public policy. LEADER needs to be seen in relation to the long tradition of using projects to implement policy in the EU. This familiarity of projects could at least partly explain the apparent high degrees of deliberation within LEADER. Also the emphasis on bottom-up development in LEADER arguably facilitates the inclusion of actors. If we assume that project participants have had possibilities of gaining experience of project work and collaborating with actors in the region, the threshold for joining projects is lower and participants are aware of the expectations of projects. The findings also show that the high degree of deliberation needs to be treated in relation to power. The limited possibilities of external participation in LEADER may reinforce 'inside' actors' framings of problems and the exclusion of disadvantaged actors. This can strengthen the status-quo of LEADER-related activities and institutional inertia more broadly.

The high level of deliberation within LEADER must also be put in relation to the apparent challenges of scaling up project knowledge in order to have broader institutional implications. As highlighted earlier, mechanisms for gathering information beyond quantitative and standardized data is limited.

Bearing in mind the long traditions of working with projects within the EU, it is striking that innovation diffusion still proves to be challenging. There can be numerous explanations for the apparent low degree of knowledge diffusion in LEADER. In the light of the analysis of drivers of institutional inertia, one explanation could be insufficient resources (both human and monetary) dedicated to gathering project knowledge. Low degree of diffusion could also be explained by the challenges of streamlining knowledge from localized and contextualized projects, underscoring the uncertainties of applying project results in a wider context. Lastly, the difficulties of knowledge diffusion could also be illustrated by the misfit between the temporal orientation of short-term projects and long-term permanent organizations. While the work of the former is driven by unpredictability and need for adaptiveness, the latter is concerned with routines and efforts to create coherence (Rämö 2002).

From this perspective, the possibility of moving from a sector-driven rural development approach to a more integrative, territorial one – involving the generation of new shared frames and understandings of rural sustainability – should be treated critically. This is not to suggest that the projects themselves necessarily reproduce the prevailing institutional order of sector-driven rural development. Quite the contrary, the inclusion of various actors (businesses, NGOs, and local citizens) in projects clearly signifies an expression of a more integrated approach. The influence of these individual projects is, however, arguably local.

RCPP symbolizes a different context. Interestingly, one would assume that the tradition of top-down control in the NRCS would be ill-suited for broadening the scope of participation in RCPP. Although it is too early to give conclusive evidence of the nature of participation in RCPP projects, the inclusion of new actors in the program signifies an important change in how the NRCS operates. Despite the promise that projects funded in the program serve to widen the actor and knowledge base, confronting the tradition of centralized steering in RCPP appears to be challenging. The analysis suggests that the opportunities for generating new frames of agricultural conservation and expanding the scope of legitimate methods of conservation within the NRCS are rather limited. The frames of 'appropriate' methods of conservation embodied in codified administrative rules signify a robust instance of institutional inertia. The 'exploitation' of predetermined activities and goals is expected.

Involving new actors in RCPP projects may, however, have unexpected consequences, in spite of rigid bureaucratic control of activities. Although it is too early to tell, it is unclear how the narrow codes of eligible conservation practices will be acted on in the projects. The collaboration between land owners and major market actors, for example, may spur discussions and contestation of what types of activities are deemed appropriate and what kinds of practices will be favored in individual RCPP projects. A critical approach to studying participation in RCPP thus remains important. Including new actors in RCPP may play a functional role, such as gathering different forms of knowledges and local insight into conservation, but may also involve

cooptation of local actors in order to increase legitimacy of US AEP without actual redistribution of authority and power. Both power and legitimacy may thus limit the 'weight' of participation in RCPP. In terms of RCPP it is too early to tell how the reporting requirements will influence the learning capacity of the NRCS. Given the comparably narrow window of eligible project activities in RCPP, it is expected that the connection between projects and the NRCS will be strong and that the activities and results stemming from the projects will presumably be anticipated and thus more easily scalable.

More broadly, both LEADER and RCPP highlight the tension between 'separation' and 'integration' of projects (Johansson et al. 2007). Does one choose a strategy that allows projects more room to maneuver and experiment, but reduces the capabilities of diffusing those results effectively, or a strategy that aligns projects closely with permanent organizations, including funding agencies and bureaucracies, increasing oversight and transparency, but at the same time reducing the potential for experimentation in projects? This tension is critical if we take seriously the need for diffusing project knowledge *vertically* – in other words, local and decentered projects feeding into permanent organizations and structures operating on regional and national levels (and beyond). The 'separation' and 'integration' strategies shed critical light on role of projects in institutional change. The former strategy allows for experimentation, but the chances of those results having effects on the broader context can be assumed to be limited, as the capacity of diffusing that knowledge outside of the project is low. The latter strategy allows for less experimentation, but focuses more on connecting projects and project results to the broader context. Although a system of capturing project knowledge exists, the chances of creating new knowledge, meanings, and frames are supposedly lower, thereby casting doubts on the possibilities of initiating institutional change. Seeing the role of projects solely from a vertical perspective paints a fairly negative picture of the capacity of projects to instigate institutional change.

Assuming that diffusion occurs only from the bottom to the top may obscure some of the institutional work occurring in projectified governance arrangements. From a *horizontal* perspective, the focus is not so much on the flow from projects to permanent organizations (often existing on higher levels), but on how projects, through mobilization of actors, can function as sites for social learning. Instead of highlighting the process of scaling *up* project knowledge, the focus is on scaling *sideways*, spreading knowledge among project participants, and beyond. This horizontal perspective is supported by studies casting doubts on the ability of permanent organizations to learn from projects (Sydow et al. 2004; Bakker et al. 2011). The peculiarity of projects and their embeddedness in the local contexts make deriving universally applicable 'lessons learned' challenging.

Due to the defining traits of a project being limited in time and well-defined in terms of budget and aims, one sometimes fails to acknowledge the context in which projects operate. Conversely, in line with the project ecology

approach, Grabher (2004) sees projects as engaging actors that themselves are part of larger personal networks and sets of organizations. If we take this insight seriously, projects can be seen as temporally distinctive events in a broader long-term development of knowledge, practices, and ideas. The idea is then not so much to rely on the vertical, but on the horizontal diffusion of project results. For example, in the case of LEADER, where many respondents saw the aims of the projects in a broad manner and where limited capabilities to diffuse that knowledge existed, the significance of projects may thus be their role in generating new knowledge, experiences, insights, practices, and ideas as part of a long-term process of innovation. Berg and Hukkinen (2011) note that the use of national public programs can result in deliberation among program participants, which in turn can lead to both intended and non-intended results. Hay and Wincott (1998) similarly argue that strategic action can have effects on both the institutional context in which action takes place and on the participating actors themselves. In the latter case, action can alter actors' "perceptions of what is feasible, possible, and indeed desirable in the light of their assessment of their own ability to realise prior goals" (Hay & Wincott 1998, p.956), which eventually can lead to future action (Normann 2015) in other contexts. Grabher (2004, p.117) suggests that project knowledge diffusion should be viewed more holistically by pointing to an open-ended "awareness space that extends beyond and beneath the actual production ties and that stretches around more lasting networks".

The division between vertical and horizontal scaling of knowledge has important implications for projectification. Building on the findings from the articles included in this dissertation as well as the distinction between aggregative and integrative democracy utilized in *Article III*, it can be suggested that we encounter two projectification ideal types that can be called 'mechanistic' and 'organic' projectification (cf. Burns & Stalker 1961). The ideal types are guided by distinct interpretations of projects as well as the rationales and expectations for using projects as a means to organize work and to implement public policy (see Table 3).

Mechanistic projectification builds on the notion of projects as instruments to implement broader strategies by relying on formal project management techniques, including forms of participation, to reach project goals. Due to the strong connection to broader strategies, the feedback of project knowledge to permanent organizations is expected to be effective. As an illustration of this, Godenhjelm and colleagues (2015, pp.340–341) argue that "integrating projects into overarching policies and the priority of a project in relation to the long-term goals and strategies of the permanent organisation are crucial for understanding project outcomes". From this point of view, institutional change can be seen as a result of successful vertical feedback processes of project knowledge. A mechanistic approach is less apt if the primary objective is to encourage experimentation and exploration of new knowledge, as the framework for project activities is relatively fixed. Although more studies will be needed to give concluding evidence, RCPP seems to share traits with the

mechanistic ideal type with regards to innovation, as the raison d'être of projects seems to be the exploitation of predetermined practices encoded in bureaucratic rules.

Table 3. *Outline of 'mechanistic' and 'organic' projectification ideal types.*

	'Mechanistic' projectification	**'Organic' projectification**
Participation	Domination of expert project participants; Knowledge integration among project stakeholders low; Reliance on formal means of participation	Broad spectrum of project participants; Reliance on social learning and knowledge integration; Informal forms of participation favored
Innovation	Clear link between project results and broader strategies based on knowledge exploitation; Aggregation of project results to higher levels of decision making as basis for institutional change (vertical diffusion)	Vague link between project results and broader strategies favoring knowledge exploration; Diversification and localization of projects as basis for institutional change (horizontal diffusion)

Organic projectification, in turn, stresses the dynamic traits of projects and questions the possibility, and even usefulness, of systematized management of projects. Projects are seen to exist in 'messy' social environments where uncertainties, both scientific and socio-political, are common. Due to the uncertainties and the impossibility of deciding on detailed strategies, the connection between projects and permanent organizations is relatively weak. As projects are less bound by requirements imposed by funding organizations, the local context and the project itself guide project activities (cf. Andersson 2009). In organic projectification, the focus is on horizontal innovation diffusion among project actors with less weight given to formal knowledge diffusion to permanent organizations. Institutional change is expected to be a result of the creation of a diverse set of projects and diffusing the knowledge generated in the projects horizontally. Also, the nature of participation differs from the mechanistic type with emphasis on broad representation of actors and knowledges and deliberation among project participants. The organic approach fares worse in terms coordination of project activities and broader strategic goals. The dynamism and 'freedom' of organic projectification may, however, be weakened by path dependence occurring in broader project networks. Over time, the reoccurrence of collaborations between network actors may create routines that lower the 'transaction costs' of collaboration, but also limit what kind of projects are favored and initiated (cf. Sydow 2009).

LEADER seems to fit the organic projectification ideal type to a large extent in terms of participation with its emphasis on bottom-up development and the

deliberative nature of project work. LEADER is also sharing many traits with the organic projectification ideal type concerning innovation, as the capacity to transfer localized, diverse project knowledge to permanent organizations is limited. This is in line with earlier depictions of the anarchic traits of LEADER in terms of decision-making processes in localities and the experimental nature of LEADER activities (Ray 2000). Although it is too early to give a conclusive account of the qualitative nature of participation in RCPP projects, the organic ideal type can also be identified in the RCPP with broader representation of project participants and inclusion of different knowledges in project work.

Although most projectified governance arrangements presumably share both mechanistic and organic traits in practice, they do however raise interesting questions regarding institutional change in the context of sustainability. Sustainability challenges us to acknowledge the need for and value of cross-sectoral collaboration and approaches that recognize the peculiarities of local and regional contexts. If we take seriously the notions of polycentricism (Ostrom 2010) and adaptive governance (Folke et al. 2005), organic forms of projectification arguably fare better in creating fruitful conditions for institutional work and, ultimately, institutional change. This is not to say that all sustainability challenges are the same; some problems are better addressed using the more linear approach of mechanistic projectification, for example when implementing 'tried and tested' technologies in relatively unchallenging environments. The more complex the challenge, the more relevant an organic approach would arguably be.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this dissertation was to evaluate the role of projects in generating institutional change toward sustainability. I utilized three strands of research – environmental governance, project management, and new institutional theory – to conceptualize and better understand the relationship between projectified environmental governance and challenges of institutional change. Two programs, LEADER and RCPP, were studied to illustrate the different qualities and characteristics of project-based governance.

I highlight important contradictions regarding the question of projects serving as fruitful sites for instigating institutional change. The analysis focused on two important dimensions of institutional work in projectified governance: participation and innovation. The empirical analysis shows that projects can serve as vehicles for including actors from different sectors with different knowledges. The analysis also highlights the deliberative nature of project work, which serves as a basis for social learning among project participants. The lack of external participation in projects once they were initiated, however, raises some doubts about the full extent of inclusion of actors and prompts the question of excluded critical voices in project work.

The question of innovation sheds critical light on the capacity of projects to initiate institutional change. The analysis suggests that the ability of projects to engage in 'exploration' and generate innovations can be significantly restricted by bureaucratic rules and traditions of administrative top-down control. The room to maneuver in projects is dependent on the broader context in which projects are implemented and the legal and normative boundaries set out by funding bodies are important.

The analysis also points to the challenges of innovation diffusion, or transferring knowledge generated in projects to permanent organizations. I postulate that (at least) two types of innovation diffusion can be identified in projectified environmental governance arrangements. Vertical diffusion refers to the upscaling of project knowledge into higher levels of decision making in permanent organizations, such as regulatory agencies and project-funding organizations. The analysis highlights the challenges of vertical diffusion for projects that are locally situated and have decentered decision-making procedures. Being localized, there is a risk for creating a misfit between project reporting and the actual activities taking place in projects. Horizontal diffusion in turn assigns more weight to the project participants themselves to make sense of and utilize project knowledge in their future work or projects. The idea is that knowledge generated in projects becomes embodied in participants who, after the project disbands, can act upon that knowledge in a separate context and time. Projects function as points of contact where aggregated and accumulated knowledges converge, which in turn generates new combinations and potential for broader change. From this perspective, the role of social

learning and deliberation among project participants can be seen as central in institutional change processes.

Overall, the findings from this dissertation emphasize the importance of studying projects and their role in institutional change processes in the context of sustainability. The literatures on project management and environmental governance have largely developed separately and only lately have there been attempts at cross-fertilization. This dissertation contributes to that discussion. The stakes of taking temporary organizations seriously in governance literature are high, as a growing reliance on projects for implementing public policies – or projectification – is noticeable. Environmental governance has traditionally been occupied with questions about space and scale and has expanded our understanding of multi-level, multi-scale, and multi-sector endeavors and interdependencies. Bearing in mind the centrality of time in sustainability, it is noteworthy that environmental governance has not yet directed much attention to the concept of time. Concerning the relationship between projects and their wider organizational field, perhaps the most apparent issue is the dynamic tension between short and long time frames. Future studies within the field of environmental governance would benefit from paying closer attention to the implications of adopting transient measures when working toward long-term sustainability goals. Organizing activity in short-term projects involves decentralization of authority and agency, but can also give rise to 'temporal fragmentation', favoring short-term goals over future-oriented strategies. Exploring the balance between the 'immediate present' and 'distant future' in projectified environments would be fruitful.

The findings from this dissertation also contribute to the literature on project management by building on the social scientific understanding of projects. The study shows how agency within publicly funded projects, especially with regards to generating and diffusing new knowledge, may be suppressed in practice. The generation and diffusion of new knowledge may be hampered by bureaucratic rules and norms, which contradicts much of the promise ascribed to projects. Conversely, this dissertation gives support to the claim that projects can be valuable sites for instigating and enhancing participation and deliberation. These findings resonate with earlier studies stressing that projects are sensitive to their contexts and that projects 'turn out' differently depending on social, administrative, and political traditions. Instead of insisting on the vertical processes of diffusion, future studies would benefit from taking a more holistic view by seeing projects perhaps not as unique events that produces novelty that can be transferred to permanent organizations, but as expressions of ongoing processes of knowledge accumulation. Paying more attention to how loosely structured networks of project actors are involved in these processes would be useful. Which factors and conditions spur routinization, or path dependence, of project activities in networks, and which facilitate collaboration and exploration of new ideas? How do structures of power influence the development of project networks and knowledge accumulation?

The study has important implications for new institutionalist theory by illustrating the challenges of institutional work in project environments. The short time frame of projects compels us to explore the relationship between inertia and change, and critically evaluate the agentic qualities of projects. The apparent limited possibilities of scaling up localized project knowledge, and subsequent restrained potential for institutional change, urges us to look beyond the bilateral relationship between projects and project funders as the main arena for instigating change. The findings from this dissertation support these ambitions, as projects were found to have an instrumental role in broadening the scope of actors involved in governance as well as allowing for deliberation among participating actors. Future studies would benefit from exploring more carefully how the short time frame of projects influences processes of institutional work. Over time, as actors are involved in multiple projects 'in sequence', how does knowledge generated in earlier projects influence the strategies employed in order to attempt to modify or maintain institutions in the present?

Finally, the novelty of this dissertation is that it expands the discussion of projectification in two ways. First, previous research on projectification has thus far relied on single-country or single-region analyses. While the aim of this dissertation was not to conduct a formal comparative analysis of LEADER and RCPP, this dissertation represents one of the first attempts to illustrate the significance of projectification by building on empirical findings from both Europe and the US. More cross-national comparisons will be needed to advance our appreciation for the influence of different politico-administrative contexts on institutional work in projects and institutional change. Second, by introducing two ideal types of projectification (mechanistic and organic), this dissertation proposes an alternative approach to conceptualizing projects and their role in institutional change in a public policy setting. Especially in terms of innovation, the existing debate is mostly concerned with the mechanistic elements of projectification, emphasizing 'scaling up' project knowledge and seeking cohesion in an otherwise complex environment. Deemphasizing rationalism and embracing tensions, inconsistencies, and the 'untidiness' of projectification could help us gain a fuller understanding of different institutional change processes in the context of sustainability.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LOCAL ACTION GROUP INTERVIEWS

Note: Finnish and Swedish translations were also used for the selected cases in Finland

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Actors

- Who are the LAG actors?
- How has the Leader started in your region?
- Where is the centre of the LAG? Why?
- What is the share of men and women in the LAG?
- What is the share of associations and citizens in the LAG? E.g. "organisational careerists" vs. "everyday problem-solvers"?
- What kind of bond exists between the actors? Do the actors know each other from before?

Rules and practices of democratic representation

- How is the board elected?
- Does the board's "tripartite" (1/3 local administrative representatives, 1/3 NGOs and enterprises and 1/3 local people) principle work in practice?
- Who is formally eligible to the board?
- Who is entitled to "elect" members?
- Who is the president (if there is) of LAG? Why?

What are the internal power relations?

- Is it characterised by a hierarchical power structure or by horizontal cooperation?
- Is there a sense of homogeneity and consensus in the LAG? (E.g. differences in areas covered by the LAG)
- How is this related to the internal power balance among the actors? Are all actors given "equal weight"?
- Are there divisions of activity and functions in the LAG among its members/actors? How does this division look like? Who engages with what?

- Are there economical, political and social mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion (internally and externally and territorially)? Are there institutional and structural barriers between the actors?

Institutional linkages

- Which sectors are engaged in the work of the LAG? (Public, private, civil society, political parties)
- Are local, regional, national and European actors involved?
- Do you engage with other LAGs?

Character of institutional linkages and linking mechanisms

- How do the relationships look like?
- How do you keep in touch? (Formal vs. informal)
- For how long have you worked together? (Ad hoc vs. permanent)
- Is there a requirement to cooperate with other actors? (Compulsory or optional)
- Is the relationship bureaucratic or is there room for more free cooperation? (Bureaucratic "command and control" or two-way deliberation)

New types of organization and work

- Does the LAG participate in wider networks? (e.g. municipality, association of local authority)
- Is the LAG exchanging ideas and knowledge with other LAGs, actors and authorities?
- Does the LAG participate in other local projects not related to LEADER? If so, why?
- Are there economic, social or political restrictions for external cooperation?
- How important is the Internet in the LAG?

The LAG in the local context

- How do you see the role of the LAG in the area?
- How big of a role does the LAG have in the area politically (relationship to public administrations)
- How big of a role does the LAG have in the area socially (education, social service, community building)
- How big of a role does the LAG have in the area culturally? (tourism, sport)

- How has the media portrayed you LAG?

Participation

Forms of participation

- Who participates in the LAG? (= To what extent do local people participate? To what extent are LAGs run by managers and external actors?)
- How do you participate?
- Is participation restricted to organs such as the board and committees?
- Do you need to be a member to be able to participate in your LAG?
- Under which circumstances is the public able to express opinions?
- Are local people consulted continuously or fragmentally?
- Does the LAG organize public meetings, questionnaires and web forums etc. that make it possible to express opinions?
- How much time/ money do you use for including local actors in the LAG?

Contents of participation

- Can local citizens only give feedback on existing practice or can they develop new practices in the LAG?

Bottom-up activity and development

- From where do the development ideas originate – local citizens, local firms, managers, authorities, others?
- Do you prioritize certain actors?
- How much local bottom-up activity is taking place outside LEADER?
- What are the relations to this other kind of activity and organisations?

Conflict resolution

The decision-making process

- How do you make decisions in the LAG? (discussion, voting, lottery, "dictated")
- Do you have a certain decision-making system?
- Who makes the decisions?
- What is the decision based on? (e.g. bargaining, win-win)
- Have you had conflicts/different understandings related to the decision-making among the participants of the LAG?

- How have you tried to solve these conflicts? Is it dependent upon the situation or is there a standardised procedure?
- Who decides about the wider objectives of the LAG?

Forms of knowledge

- How do you organise everyday tasks in the LAG? (Do "official guides" or regulations define the work of the LAG or is it more casual?)
- If problems arise (e.g. concerning managing the bureaucratic aspects of the LAG), are they solved by the LAG itself or with the help of other actors (e.g. public authorities, other LAGs)?
- Is the organisational structure of the LAG defined by "official guides" or regulations or is it more casual?
- Have you used outside consults in the work of the LAG? Have these been useful?
- How do you manage information in the LAG? E.g. do you use documentation and data banks?
- How does the LAG make use of local knowledge (e.g. knowing the area, informal contacts, hands-on experience)? Has it been helpful?

Outcome

Purpose of the work of the LAG

- Do you have specific goals for your organization? (E.g. Economic growth, population development, employment, visitors, local welfare and well-being, publicity, the state of the environment)
- Do you attempt to strengthen local democracy?
- Do you attempt to create a rural development capacity in general?
- Which goals are prioritised?
- Which goals are the hardest/easiest to achieve?
- Who are the main target group of the LAGs? (Civic organizations, entrepreneurs, institutions and governmental actors)? Why?

Future of the LAG

- Why do you want to maintain your LAG?
- If relevant, do the interests among private and public actors differ?
- What is the perceived lifespan of the LAG?
- Is it seen as a long-term solution to develop your rural area?

LAG as a local bottom-up development system

- Does the LAG pay enough attention to local needs?
- How could these be strengthened?

LEADER as a national and a European system

- Do you see the LAG as a part of a national or European network?

Accountability

- Who is responsible for the work of the LAG?
- Is someone "in charge" of determining and supervising long-term outcomes?
- Do you think that you have a moral responsibility to maintain the LAG?

Response to criticism and negative publicity

- How do you respond to criticism or negative publicity?
- Is the response to criticism dependent upon the origin of the criticism (e.g. public or private criticism)?
- Is the response to criticism dependent upon the form of criticism (e.g. economic, social, political)?

Evaluation of results

- Do you evaluate results? Why/Why not?
- Who evaluates?
- How do you evaluate? What criteria?
- Are ideas originating from different actors evaluated equally?
- Do you use the evaluation reports in developing the activity of the LAG?
- Are evaluation reports used in LAGs practical work?

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LEADER PROJECT INTERVIEWS

Note: Finnish and Swedish translations were also used for the selected cases in Finland

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1. The main goals of the project?

2. The duration of the project?

3. How did the project originate?

Did the project originate from a grassroots' initiative?

Did the project originate from a top-down initiative?

4. Who's involved?

Private persons, firms, associations, public organisations?

Who was in charge of the project?

(Is it coupled to specific interests, power structures etc. (informants)?)

Is it possible to join the project after it has started?

Are the originating actors still active in the project? Have they changed since the start of the project? / Were all originating actors involved during the whole duration of the project?

Is the project involved with other projects, e.g. in Finland/Europe?

5. Who is financing the project?

Is the project depending on LEADER funds?

What is the share of different financing sources?

If relevant, is the project “owned” by someone? How does this affect the project?

6. How is the project supervised?

Who is the supervisor of the project?

What is the relationship to the “supervisor”?

How much time is spent on administrative tasks? (= Do the project participants feel bureaucratic constraints?)

7. How is the project lead?

Who is the project leader?

Who makes decisions in the project and how (a board, a steering group etc.)?

Who is able to comment on the project? E.g. local people, associations, entrepreneurs?

If relevant, when may actors comment on the project?

8. Forms of knowledge?

Has the project made use of insider and/or outsider consultants/experts?

Are lay and expert knowledge integrated? How are they integrated?

How are different forms of knowledge evaluated?

In which situations is either form of knowledge regarded as more appropriate?

What kind of knowledge is the most important in the everyday life of the LAG?

9. How is the achievement of the project measured?

Is evaluation mandatory?

Do you measure or evaluate the project? If not, why?

Who evaluates?

How do you evaluate the project? E.g. cost-efficiency or quality of result?

10. What is the most important "real" purpose of the project?

Do you have specific goals for your project? (E.g. Economic growth, population development, employment, visitors, local welfare and well-being, publicity, the state of the environment)

Who are the main target groups of the project? (Civic organizations, entrepreneurs, institutions and governmental actors)? Why?

Does the project have other "indirect" goals? (= To get things done or strengthen local democracy? And if so, what distinguishes it from the LAG? Does the project attempt to create a rural development capacity in general?)

Which goals are prioritised?

Which goals are the hardest/easiest to achieve?

To pursue "hidden goals" **(informants)**?

If relevant, does the administrative burden make it harder to achieve the goals of the project?

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR RCPP INTERVIEWS

1. Introduction

- Please briefly elaborate on your professional background
- How does your work relate to RCPP?

2. The larger context

- According to you, what are the biggest threats and possibilities in the field of conservation?
- How big of a role do voluntary programs, like the RCPP, play in addressing these

3. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

- Can you give an account of how the RCPP evolved?
    - What were the main drivers?
        - Greater use of project forms in implementing policy?
        - Geographic concerns?
    - Who were the main proponents of the program?
    - Where do the funds for the program come from? (From which budgets?)
- How do you see the role of non-public funding in the RCPP?
- What can you tell me more about the main goals of the RCPP? What are your goals with relation to the RCPP?
    - Who decided on the goals?
    - What are the problems that the RCPP is supposed to address?
    - What are the problems that have not yet been solved which are relevant to the RCPP?
- How will the program operate in practice?
    - How will the partnership with NRCS look like?
    - What is NRCS's role in these partnerships?
    - Will citizens/interest groups/others be able to follow the progress of the partnerships/projects
- To what extent does the RCPP differ/is similar to previous or other programs?
    - Has something like the RCPP been tried before in other contexts? For example in EPA, DOI?
- What do you see are the potential strengths and weaknesses of the RCPP?
- How has "the field" responded to the RCPP?

More specific questions regarding the funded projects

- What is your take on “risky” projects?
- How much experimentation do you allow in the projects that you fund?
- How do you envisage the short and long-term impacts of the activities within the RCPP?
    - How do you see your role in the generation of these impacts?
- Do you expect working in individual projects/partnerships will generate added value compared to other ways of working?
    - Innovations?
    - Economic gains?
- What will happen with the partnerships when the project ends?
    - How do you capture the knowledge generated in the partnerships?
- What would in your mind be an ideal partnership / How would it look like?
    - How do you see the RCPP relates to questions about participation and social inclusion?