An institutional theory perspective on the role of project management associations for projectification of society: the case of Germany

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to provide insights into the role of project management associations for the projectification of society from an institutional theory perspective.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is based on a mixed methods approach. It draws on the research propositions of a recently conducted qualitative study and builds on them by analyzing the empirical data of a quantitative case study.

Findings – The results indicate that the projectification of society in Germany is well advanced and continues growing. The economy plays a leading role, which resonates with other sectors of society. The actions of project management associations have only an indirect influence on the projectification of society, which cultural–cognitive institutions are mediating. Both findings are novel compared to the literature.

Practical implications – Taking an overall view of the findings, project management associations gain a better understanding of the projectification process and important guidance on their role.

Social implications – The results offer all people interested intriguing insights into the contemporary phenomenon of the projectification of society, along with its current state and future evolution.

Originality/value – The application of institutional theory to the projectification of society in the framework of this case study enables an in-depth analysis of the underlying social processes and interactions between the regulative, normative and cultural–cognitive activities of project management associations on the one hand, and institutions on the other hand, at the societal level. This opens up new and promising perspectives for further research.

Keywords Projectification, Society, Institutions, Institutional theory, Project management association, Germany

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Projects have enjoyed increasing popularity in recent years and are particularly utilized in the economy as a temporary form of organizing complex undertakings or introducing change, innovation, or new ventures (Auschra *et al.*, 2019). Especially in times of serious societal challenges, such as the climate crisis or the COVID-19 pandemic, there is growing

demand to meet these challenges sustainably by using projects and project management (Cerne and Jansson, 2019). While research has extensively explored the increasing prevalence and use of projects in the corporate world (Maylor and Turkulainen, 2019), empirical research at the level of society has lacked so far (Söderlund and Sydow, 2019). In particular, there are questions about what can be done to scale project management concepts practiced in business to other sectors of society (Bogacz-Wojtanowska and Jalocha, 2016) and what role project management associations should play in this process (Wagner et al., 2021).

The research around the increasing prevalence of projects in corporations has its starting point with Midler (1995), who, based on a longitudinal study at the automobile manufacturer Renault, found that over time the number and importance of projects increased significantly, and this also had an impact on the organizational structure, culture and teamwork in the corporation. He coined the term "projectification" for this. However, the diffusion of projects is increasing beyond the corporate world into other areas of our society. Jensen et al. (2016) even speak of "the projectification of everything", implying that projects are omnipresent in business and society and everyone's life. With reference to management and organizational sciences, sociology, and institutional theory, analysis has focused on the interactions of temporary and permanent organizing within and across organizations or project networks (Lundin, 2016; Sydow and Windeler, 2020).

Scott (2008a) emphasizes the embeddedness of organizations in an institutional environment that molds social behavior and ensures stability and predictability through a variety of rules, norms, and cultural–cognitive imprints. Here, institutions are understood as social structures composed of regulative, normative, and cultural–cognitive elements that, with associated activities, mold behavior in a specific trajectory (Scott, 2010). Project management research has engaged institutional theory primarily in projects (Söderlund and Sydow, 2019) and in the context of project-oriented organizations (Scott, 2012). However, an application to the topic of societal projectification has yet to occur. It is mainly unexplored how projectification occurs at this level, which actors are involved, and what role institutions play in this process (Scott, 2008b; Barondeau and Hobbs, 2019). Professional associations, such as the German Project Management Association (GPM), seem to be an important actor in the projectification of society, as they foster the creation, maintenance, or disruption of institutions (Lundin et al., 2015). Therefore, further research is needed, to better understand how projectification unfolds at the societal level.

This research aims to fill the gap and examine projectification at the level of society, using Germany as an example. The Institutional theory was applied to show how this development unfolds and how institutions and actors, especially project management associations, influence it. Based on institutional theory and a quantitative case study (Yin, 2018), the interactions between institutions and project management associations were analyzed together with their impact on the projectification of society. Primary data from a survey are used and reconciled with secondary data (Saunders et al., 2019).

With the research, four important theoretical and practical contributions are made. First, through the quantitative case study, the current state and the evolution of projectification at the societal level in Germany are illustrated. Not just in the economy, as other studies have done before, but for the first time also in other sectors of society, e.g. civic engagement. Second, while the institutional theory has been used on an organizational level, its application will be extended to the societal level. This opens up a promising field of research and also provides several interesting practical insights into the evolution of projectification at the societal level. Third, the institutional theory is being applied to analyze the role of institutions and actors together with the interactions they posit with each other in the projectification process. Using Germany as an example, it will be revealed which institutions have the most significant influence on this process. Fourth and most importantly, the results will shed light

on the role of project management associations as one of the actors in the process of projectification. These associations are important actors because they involve members from across society. GPM serves as an example of a mature and multi-layered association with relationships among relevant sectors of society. It will be determined what this association is currently achieving for the projectification and what potentials for improvement exist. This research provides decision-makers at all levels of society with an understanding of projectification, institutions, and actors involved and enables them to identify actionable measures.

The paper is structured as follows: In the theory part, the projectification of society and the context in which projectification occurs will be addressed with reference to institutional theory. Moreover, the role of institutions and the various actors, particularly the role of project management associations, will be examined. Following this, the context of the study and the methodology are presented. The results section of this paper will highlight the main findings based on the research propositions made in previous research and the hypotheses. Finally, the implications of all findings with their limitations and an outlook for future research are offered.

2. Theoretical grounding of the study

Drawing on the "Scandinavian School", research in recent years has increasingly focused on the embeddedness and interactions of projects within their context (Jacobsson *et al.*, 2016). The project is understood as a temporary organization with specific objectives, such as the development of a new product or the redesign of an organizational unit, where the process builds on previous activities and embraces dynamic change (Bakker *et al.*, 2016). It is argued that "projects have become intrinsic to our lives" (Jensen *et al.*, 2016, p. 22). They are carried out by various actors who enter into relationships that "are dissolved and reconfigured through the practice of episodic project collaboration" (Henneberry and Parris, 2013, p. 231). The realization of projects is affected by the institutional context, which at the same time exerts influence on their immediate and broader environment (Söderlund and Sydow, 2019).

With his research in the automotive industry and the publication of a paper entitled "Projectification of the firm," Midler (1995) laid the foundation for a phenomenon that has since been the subject of intense scrutiny (Kuura, 2020). The phenomenon refers to the increasing importance of projects at the level of an organization and the organizational transformation that follows (Aubry and Lenfle, 2012). Research has addressed various aspects of projectification at the organizational level, such as the role of projects in the early stages of an organization (Auschra *et al.*, 2019), in the context of project-based organizations or inter-organizational project networks (Maylor and Turkulainen, 2019) as well as the impact of projectification on institutional change (Tukiainen and Granqvist, 2016). By describing projectification as a response to larger societal and cultural processes, Packendorff and Lindgren (2014) have significantly broadened the scope for exploring the phenomenon also at the macro level of society.

2.1 Projectification of society

On the one hand, projectification of society can be understood as process or development towards an increasing importance of projects in broad areas of society (Munck af Rosenschöld, 2019). On the other hand, it "indicates an interest in the outcomes and consequences of projectification on parts of the society or on society at large" (Jacobsson and Jalocha, 2021, p. 1593). It has become generally accepted that projectification extends beyond single organizations' boundaries. For example, in the film industry, project networks have emerged in which companies team up in temporary partnerships to work on projects and then

break up again after completion (Manning and Sydow, 2011). Chains of projects, programs, and project portfolios are realized in and between organizations through networking (Maylor *et al.*, 2006; Maniak and Midler, 2014), forming a project business specializing in implementing projects (Artto and Kujala, 2008). Boltanski and Chiapello (2018) even describe projectification as a path to a "new spirit of capitalism" that focuses on projects as an integral form of networked collaboration. However, it remains unclear how far this development has progressed so far.

Up to now, empirical studies have mainly focused on assessing the impact of projectification on economic activities (Schoper *et al.*, 2018). The measurement was based on the share of working time spent on projects relative to the total working time. This share has risen above 30% and continues to grow. Comparing figures internationally, it is noticeable that there are significant differences with regard to projectification of different sectors (Ou *et al.*, 2018). This may be due to country-specific differences in the importance of sectors or due to a varying level of development (Radujkovic and Misic, 2019). In Germany, for example, projectification is less prevalent in public administration than in manufacturing (Wald *et al.*, 2015), whereas in other countries, projectification in public administration is well advanced (Hodgson *et al.*, 2019).

Conceiving this development further, beyond the context of economic activity, it can be assumed that projectification has spread to other areas of our society. Although empirical research on projectification at the level of society is not available yet, some preliminary descriptions of the phenomenon have been presented. Jensen (2009) portrays a "project society" in which everyone realizes projects, their own and those with other people. Likewise, Lundin (2016) describes the path to a project society and denotes that projects spread everywhere. Grabher and Ibert coined the term "project ecology" as a conceptualization encompassing "social layers on multiple scales, from the micro-level of interpersonal networks to the meso-level of intra- and inter-organizational collaboration to the macro-level of wider institutional settings" (Grabher and Ibert, 2012, p. 176), which builds on professional organizations and specialists enabling cumulative learning (Henneberry and Parris, 2013).

2.2 The application of institutional theory to projectification
Thinking projectification further, from a narrow conceptualization of projectification as organizational transformation described by Midler (1995) as well as Söderlund and Tell (2009), into "an interest for cultural and discursive processes in a society in which notions of projects are invoked" (Packendorff and Lindgren, 2014, p. 7), projects are characterized as constitutive of social life. Various actors coordinate their joint activities in temporary networks to meet again later in other constellations (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2018).

The institutional theory seems to be suited to better understand the process of projectification from a broader perspective, as it "considers the processes by which structures, including schemas, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behavior" (Scott, 2005, p. 461). Institutional theory allows a comprehensive view on the actors with their relationships and joint activities in an established, institutional context (Healey, 1992). With the application of the theory, both the effect of the institutions on the social process and the reverse effect of the institutions on the process can be analyzed.

Contemporary research, drawing on neo-institutional theory, is primarily concerned with how organizations and organizational practices are increasingly converging, for example, "organizations become projectified because other organizations are becoming projectified" (Sydow, 2022, p. 3). The very notion of institutional theory focuses here on institutionalization as a process of creating reality through social interaction (Scott, 1987). Emphasis is placed on the stability and order of institutional arrangements (Scott, 2008a). In this context,

institutions are defined as comprising of "regulative, normative, and cultural cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life" (Scott, 2014, p. 56). However, changes to these arrangements are also of increasing interest to researchers, triggered by internal and external events. "Institutional theory and analysis address the processes by which social structures, including both normative and behavioural systems, are established, become stable and undergo changes over time" (Scott, 2012, p. 29). These processes involve individual actors and a variety of collective actors, ranging from individual organizations to networks of organizations and organizational or institutional fields, representing a set of independent and diverse organizations "that participate in a common meaning system" (Scott, 2014, p. 106). On the one hand, actors act (consciously or unconsciously) according to the institutional set-up and thus perpetuate it in their milieu; on the other hand, through their activities they also influence the institutions and change them in a certain direction (Zilber, 2002).

In this context, "institutional work" is also referred to as "the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions" (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). Regulative actions presuppose a position of power of an actor who monitors and sanctions compliance with laws and rules and exerts coercion on others, while normative actions aim to enforce standards and routines in everyday life and thus influence actors' habits to adhere to these standards. Finally, cultural–cognitive actions aim to align actors' thoughts and actions through identification with predetermined values, beliefs, and behaviors (Scott, 2014). Altogether, this highlights the recursive and dialectical interaction of actors and institutions (Lawrence *et al.*, 2011) and is therefore also of interest to us as an explanatory model for projectification at the level of society.

In recent years, scholars in the field of project management have increasingly pointed to links between project-based activities and their institutional context, but at the same time emphasize that relatively little research has empirically examined these links (Söderlund and Sydow, 2019). While there is research on projects undertaken by project-based construction companies and interactions that occur within their institutional environment (Lieftink *et al.*, 2019; Eren and Henneberry, 2021; Narayanan and Huemann, 2021), there has been a lack of empirical research on the projectification of society by systematically applying institutional theory.

2.3 The role of professional associations for projectification
Scott (2010, p. 13) points to the fact that "in all fields, a diverse set of 'intermediaries' evolves to facilitate or broker exchanges, or to collect, organize and evaluate information so as to affect interaction among the 'principals'." As an example of such intermediaries, he points to professional associations and professionals as "institutional agents" (Scott, 2008a, b, p. 219). Morris and Geraldi (2011) also refer to professional associations, notably project management associations, when it comes to shaping the institutional environment of projects. Project management associations together with associated professional service providers (e.g. PM consultants, trainers, and coaches) and professionals have a stabilizing capacity and are supposed to affect the projectification of society positively.

For example, through *regulative* actions, the association can exert influence on the environment, and respective institutions in which it operates, such as through the support of the legislation in the development of laws and regulations that affect project-related work and, in turn, affect the dissemination of projects. The *normative* actions of project management associations are often aimed at developing project-related standards that are utilized for qualifying and certifying professionals. Finally, *cultural–cognitive* actions aim to disseminate shared beliefs and practices based on previous projects or role models (Muzio *et al.*, 2013). Hence, we propose that the actions of project management associations will positively influence the projectification of society and derive the following three hypotheses:

H1. A project management association's regulative actions positively affect the projectification of society.

H2. A project management association's normative actions positively affect the projectification of society.

H3. A project management association's cultural–cognitive actions positively affect the projectification of society.

The role of project management associations is viewed rather critically due to their interest in maintaining the status quo rather than advancing it (Hodgson *et al.*, 2015) and their primary focus on the corporations, giving priority to their specific interests and thus losing sight of broader societal considerations (Muzio *et al.*, 2011).

The state of development of the project management associations differs across countries. The Association for Project Management (APM) in the United Kingdom, for example, was awarded Royal Chartership in 2017, which provides special recognition to the project profession and opportunities for the association that has championed its cause (Hodgson *et al.*, 2015). However, this situation is unique and cannot be easily imitated by associations in other countries. The situation seems to be quite different at the Project Management Institute (PMI) in the USA, at the Istanbul Project Management Association (IPYD) in Turkey or at the German Project Management Association (GPM) in Germany.

GPM has not yet been granted status as a fully-fledged professional association (Nicklich *et al.*, 2020), and is striving to gain traction through offerings such as training and certification. It traditionally relies on networking of its members, exchanging experiences, and sharing stories of successful projects. Great emphasis is placed on education, ranging from secondary school and vocational training to advanced project management courses at universities and corporations (Wagner, 2009).

The entanglement and interrelation of project management associations' activities with the institutions and other actors have, for example, been explored in Italy (Sabini and Paton, 2021). It shows that the path toward projectification was first attempted through regulative actions of the government. Later, mainly due to the influence of international associations, the European Union, and pressure from the economy, normative actions were applied, such as the establishment of project management standards. Hence, it depends on the existing societal institutions as to how the actions of a project management association on the path towards projectification of society unfold (Sabini and Muzio, 2017).

The following hypotheses reflect these thoughts:

H4. Societal institutions mediate the effects of project management associations' actions on the projectification of society.

H4a. Regulative institutions mediate the positive effect of regulative actions on the projectification of society.

H4b. Normative institutions mediate the positive effect of normative actions on the projectification of society.

H4c. Cultural–cognitive institutions mediate the positive effect of cultural–cognitive actions on the projectification of society.

In conclusion, it can be stated that in the literature, the increasing dissemination of projects has so far been acknowledged mainly in the context of the corporate world, and only in recent years has it been explored at the level of society. Empirical analyses, however, exist only for the economy (Henning and Wald, 2019). Other sectors of society, so as society at large, still await examination. A more detailed empirical analysis of which actors impact which institutions and how this affects society's projectification is still missing.

While literature attributes an important role to project management associations for the professionalization of project management and the dissemination of projects in general (Muzio *et al.*, 2011). Nevertheless, it remains unclear how project management associations exert their influence, in what ways, and how strong this influence is compared to other actors.

3. Research approach and context
3.1 Research approach
A mixed-methods research approach was used to answer the pertinent questions and to test the hypotheses. Following up on a previously conducted qualitative analysis of the interrelationships (Wagner *et al.*, 2021) that resulted in several research propositions, an exploratory case study was conducted (Yin, 2018), which provided insights into the projectification of society, its evolution, and the role project management associations assume. This paper focuses on the results of that case study. "Such case studies seek increased understanding, a detailed description, or an in-depth illustration of a phenomenon, and the researchers remain outsiders to the case they are investigating" (Martinsuo and Huemann, 2021, p. 419). In order to analyze how institutions and project management associations affect the projectification of society, the focus was on the German Project Management Association. On the one hand, because GPM is already established in Germany for more than 40 years, and on the other hand because secondary data were available. The case study included available and accessible information on GPM, such as its website, the regularly published magazine "PMAktuell", and insights from a qualitative survey (Wagner *et al.*, 2021). Finally, a questionnaire was used to collect further data on the topic to deduce theoretical findings (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). The respondents addressed were mainly professionals who were able to relate GPM and its activities at the level of society and who are themselves involved in projects in one way or another (Pesämaa *et al.*, 2021).

3.2 Germany as a case
With approximately 83 million residents, the Federal Republic of Germany is the most populous state in Central Europe and a constituent member of the European Union. The federal-state comprises 16 federal states, which have their responsibilities, such as internal security, education, culture, and municipal administration (Göbel *et al.*, 2018). In 2019, a GDP of 3.45 trillion euros was generated. The economic system in Germany is sometimes referred to as a "co-ordinated market economy" (Jackson and Sorge, 2012) or a "social market economy" (Hasse, 2017) and has followed this economic model since the reconstruction after the end of Second World War. Closely related to this economic model is the structure of the economy, nearly 94% of which is made up of medium-sized, family-owned businesses (Schlömer-Laufen and Schneck, 2020). This goes hand in hand with a long-term orientation, high innovative strength, and flexibility in response to market change through highly skilled personnel (Welter, 2018; Parella and Hérnandez, 2018). In this context, some of these medium-sized companies even play on the international stage as "hidden champions" (Audretsch *et al.*, 2018) and are being compared to entrepreneurship as seen in Silicon Valley (Pahnke and Welter, 2019).

In contrast, public administration in Germany is often characterized as centralized, lacking flexibility and performance (Wegrich, 2021), as evidenced by a large number of failed public infrastructure projects, such as Berlin's major airport (Fiedler and Wendler, 2015) or in the case of disastrous floods (Rudolph and Kuhn, 2018). In response, grassroots movements are forming, self-organizing as in the case of the energy transition (Langer *et al.*, 2017),

forming protest movements like "Fridays for Future" (Wallis and Loy, 2021), or preparing the field for new technologies with the help of "field-configuring projects" such as in the case of electromobility (Bohn and Braun, 2021). However, there have been no studies on the prevalence of projects in sectors outside the economy.

GPM was founded in 1979 as a non-profit association that aims to promote and advance project management in Germany and foster its application. In recent years, GPM has grown to nearly 8,000 members, the vast majority of them are personal members, usually project professionals in the private sector, and 400 corporate members, mostly organizations with project business or service providers. GPM finances its non-profit activities primarily through income generated through its activities in the qualification and certification of project professionals.

4. Data collection and data analysis

In the qualitative research preceding this study, eleven internationally renowned experts in the field of projectification were interviewed, and a detailed survey was conducted with GPM's leadership group on their role in the projectification of the society in Germany, from which research propositions were derived (Wagner *et al.*, 2021). As a first step and a starting point for this exploratory case study, publicly available information were analyzed to gain an overview of the evolution of GPM since its founding, its strategic orientation, and its main activities. Further insights were provided by the available issues of "PMAktuell" covering the past 20 years. To empirically test the research propositions as well as the hypotheses and ultimately answer the research question, an online survey focusing on project professionals in Germany was conducted. The survey was accessible via the GPM website and a directly linked to the SurveyMonkey platform between January 18 and February 26, 2021. With GPM's newsletter in January, 13,000 recipients received a notification of the study. The introduction to the questionnaire explained the current situation regarding the subject of the survey, the objectives and target group, and the benefits of participation.

The questionnaire was validated with a focus group of seven experts to the field (Smithson, 2008). At the beginning of the survey, the participants were asked about major trends in society, the state of projectification of society overall, projectification of the economy, projectification of public administration, projectification of leisure, sports, arts and culture, and projectification of civic engagement.

Participants were then asked about institutions, actors and the actions of the project management associations and their impact on institutions as well as on the projectification of society. The survey ended with questions regarding the participants' fields of activity, roles, the number of employees within their organizations, and the types of projects they typically engage. With this set of questions, we aimed at testing the research propositions.

To test the hypotheses, the actions of project management associations concerning regulative, normative, and cultural–cognitive institutions were considered as independent variables, whereas the institutions themselves represented mediating variables within the model. For the dependent variable, projectification of society was modeled as a second-order reflective-reflective higher-order construct (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2019), comprising of projectification of economy, projectification of public administration, projectification of leisure, sports, arts, and culture as well as projectification of civic engagement on the first-order level. All questions on the impact of a particular factor used a Likert scale from 0 (= no impact) to 7 (= full impact).

Moreover, the within and between model relationships were estimated using SmartPLS 3 (Ringle *et al.*, 2021). Two reasons justify the choice: First, the prediction-oriented partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) is well suited when the research aims to

identify key drivers of constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2017). As the goal was to expand further the understanding of drivers of the projectification of society, PLS-SEM presents an appropriate choice. Second, PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 3 enables evaluating mediation models without the need for tandem approaches often displayed in factor-based methods (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2020). A path weighting scheme with a mean replacement algorithm, a maximum of 500 iterations, and a stop criterion of 10^7 in the PLS-SEM algorithm settings was used (Hair *et al.*, 2018). Finally, a bootstrapping procedure with 2,000 subsamples was applied for testing the hypotheses.

5. Results

5.1 Characteristics of the sample
A total of 200 participants completed the online survey. Table A1 in the Annex summarizes the characteristics of our sample. More than 2/3 of the respondents are from the business sector, either an industry or a service company. The spectrum of companies ranges from small entities (<25 employees) to international corporations (>50,000 employees). Almost half of the participants are in leadership positions; about 40% are active in project management. The average percentage of working time spent on projects in the respondents' organizations is 64%. The main focus of their project activities is on R&D, customer, and organizational change projects. Finally, participants indicated having an average of more than 20 years of experience in delivering projects, and 40% of them are members of GPM.

5.2 Present state and evolution of projectification of society in Germany
The present state of projectification of society in Germany was perceived by the respondents with a value of 4.27 on the scale from 0 to 7. The value five years before comes to 3.43 and five years later to 5.32, representing a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 2.4% in the past five years and an accelerating CAGR of 3% in the coming five years. This is consistent with the findings of Wald *et al.* (2015), who predicted that the CAGR for the projectification of the German economy will be up to 3% between 2013 and 2019.

Since this study was the first to collect empirical data on the state of projectification in broader society, the results are of particular interest. Table 1 reveals that projectification in the economy is perceived to be already well advanced and substantially ahead of the other sectors. The study by Wald *et al.* (2015) also showed a significant difference between the economy and public administration at an earlier stage, which our data could confirm. However, no comparative values have been available yet for the other sectors.

In response to the question of which institutions influence the projectification of society and how the cultural–cognitive institutions were given greater weight than the regulatory and normative institutions in a direct comparison (see Table 1). Cultural–cognitive institutions comprise, for instance, the shared perceptions, beliefs, and values in a community. They often operate unconsciously and are taken for granted. For the participants in this study, the most essential cultural–cognitive institutions include a preferably positive image of projects, followed by exemplary enterprises and entrepreneurs, along with an attractive narrative of successful projects.

Finally, it was also interesting to know which actors in Germany are of particular importance for the projectification of society. In a direct comparison, organizational actors, including but not limited to exemplary enterprises, service providers, and project management associations, ended up ahead of institutional fields and individual actors (see Table 1).

Other than described in the literature, the direct influence of project management associations was viewed rather critically by the study participants. In a ranking order of the

| The state of projectification in various sectors of society in Germany (on a scale from 0 to 7) | |
Sectors of society	Score
Projectification of society (overall)	4.27
Projectification of economy	5.53
Projectification of public administration	3.99
Projectification of civic engagement	3.43
Projectification of leisure, sports, arts and culture	3.92
Impact of institutions on the projectification of society (on a scale from 0 to 7)	
Institutions	Score
Regulative institutions	3.71
Normative institutions	3.78
Cultural–cognitive institutions	4.13
Impact of actors on the projectification of society (on a scale from 0 to 7)	
Actors	Score
Individual actors	3.85
Organizational actors	4.34
Institutional field	4.20

Table 1.
Selected survey results on the projectification of the society in Germany

organizational actors, the association was conceded merely a moderate influence (see Table 2). This somewhat surprising assertion was to be investigated in more detail using the structural equation model.

5.3 Measurement model results
Following Hair *et al.* (2020), a confirmatory composite analysis (CCA) was applied to evaluate the measurement models. For the reflective-reflective second-order measurement of projectification of society, first the indicator loadings and their significance for the higher-order construct were estimated. Except for "Projectification of Leisure, Sports, Arts, and Culture" all first-order constructs exceeded the typical threshold of 0.708 and were highly significant with t-values greater than 1.96. While the loading for projectification of leisure, sports, arts, and culture was 0.606, the relationship was highly significant. Additionally, projectification of society displayed satisfactory values for construct reliability as indicated by composite reliability (CR) greater than 0.700 and convergent validity indicated by an average variance extracted (AVE) above 0.500 met the conventional threshold. Thus, the projectification of leisure, sports, arts, and culture was kept in the study.

Last, the discriminant validity was confirmed via the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations below 0.850 (Henseler *et al.*, 2014). The analysis confirmed that the model met

Organizational actors	Average rank
Exemplary company	2.2
Service provider	2.7
Educational institution	2.8
Professional association	3.4
Public authority	4.1
Others	5.6

Table 2.
Impact of organizational actors on the projectification of society

the necessary quality criteria and could be used to further investigate the proposed relationships (for details, see Tables A2 and A3 in the Annex).

5.4 Structural model results
First, the structural model collinearity was assessed. As indicated by a value inflation factor (VIF) below 3.0, multicollinearity was not an issue on the structural level. The data fit the model well, as indicated by the coefficients of determination ($R^2 = 0.249$) and Stone-Geisser's ($Q^2 = 0.117$) values (Hair *et al.*, 2020). The path coefficients and their corresponding significances were estimated by using a bootstrapping procedure with 2000 subsamples to test the hypotheses (Hair *et al.*, 2018). The results are displayed in Figure 1.

Project management associations' regulative actions display no significant direct effects on the projectification of society. Thus, hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are not supported. Instead, significant positive effects of PMA's actions on their respective institutions can be found, which present the necessary conditions for the proposed mediation effects of H4. In initial support of H4a, regulative actions positively affect regulative institutions ($\beta = 0.253$, $p < 0.001$). In line with H4b, normative actions positively affect normative institutions ($\beta = 0.279$, $p < 0.001$). In line with H4c, cultural–cognitive actions are positively related to cultural–cognitive institutions ($\beta = 0.179$, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, regulative ($\beta = 0.223$, $p < 0.001$) and cultural–cognitive institutions ($\beta = 0.351$, $p < 0.001$) display significant positive effects on the projectification of society. However, normative institutions do not significantly affect projectification of society ($\beta = 0.051$, $p = 0.524$).

Finally, to validate the mediation hypotheses, the direct and indirect effects of PMA's actions on the projectification of society were investigated. Results are displayed in Table A4. Direct relationships of PMA's actions on the projectification of society were not significant. However, regulative ($\beta = 0.056$, $p < 0.01$) and cultural–cognitive actions ($\beta = 0.063$, $p < 0.05$) showed significant indirect effects via the respective institutions on projectification of society. Normative actions do not display a significant indirect effect ($\beta = 0.014$, $p = 0.550$). Hence, following Zhao *et al.* (2010), the results indicate full mediation for the effects of PMA's regulative and cultural–cognitive actions, while normative actions do not affect the projectification of society directly or indirectly. Therefore, the results support H4a and H4c, while H4b is not supported.

6. Discussion
The purpose of this research was to gain insights into the role of project management associations for the projectification of society through the lens of institutional theory. Based on a previously conducted qualitative study, Germany was now used as case study of a projectified society, analyzing secondary data, and performing a quantitative survey to first determine the current state and evolution of projectification at the societal level in Germany. Subsequently, it was analyzed how regulative, normative, and cultural–cognitive institutions and actors affect projectification. The project management association in Germany was the main focus of these investigations.

6.1 State and evolution of the projectification in the German society
The results illustrate that the survey participants perceive the projectification to be already well advanced in Germany's society and expect it to grow by an average of 3.0% annually over the next five years. Although projectification is most advanced in the German economy, it has also arrived in other areas of society and is also developing in public administration, civic engagement, and areas such as leisure, sports, art, and culture. Studies focusing on the
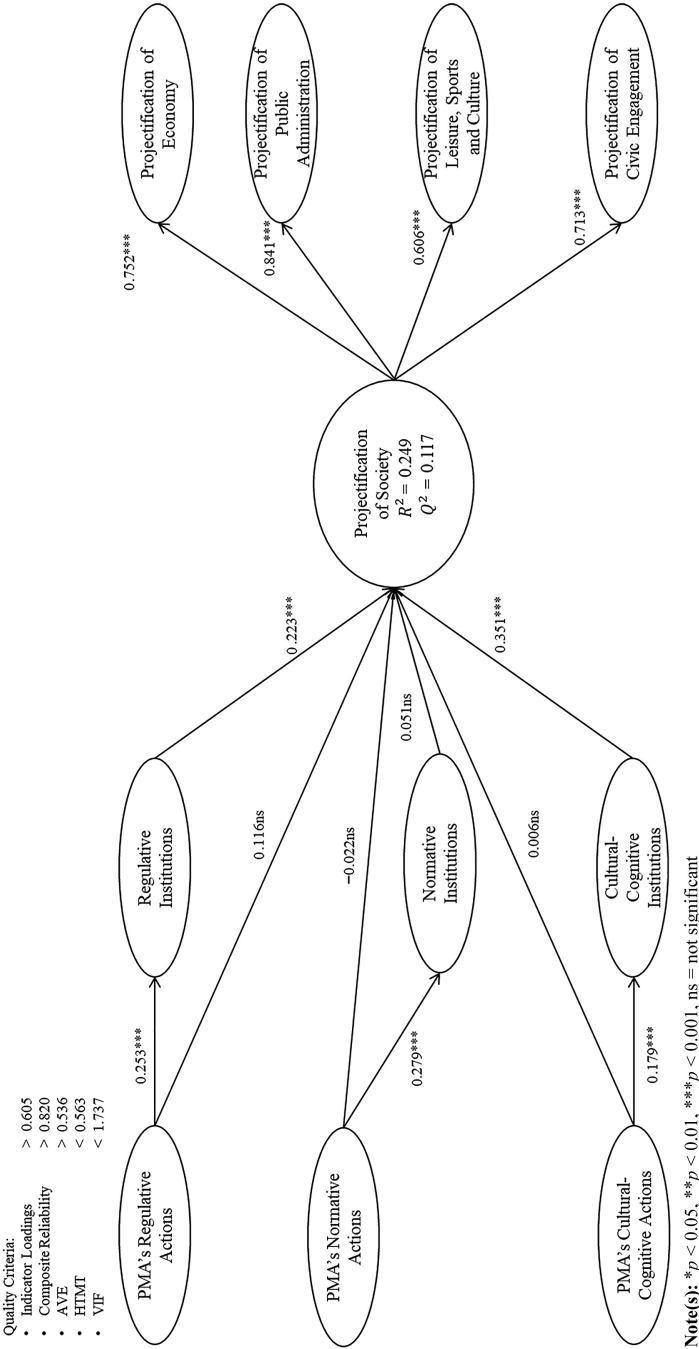
Figure 1.
Results of the Analysis
using PLS-SEM

economy have already highlighted that the phenomenon is growing significantly in the corporate world during the past few years (Schoper *et al.*, 2018).

While this study is the first to explore the state and development outside of the economy, it reveals that there are remarkable differences between the projectification of the economy and other sectors in Germany. One possible explanation could lie in the importance of the economy for the society and the particular economic model (Hasse, 2017), whereas there are voices that express a clear need to catch up in the public administration (Wegrich, 2021). Another reason may be that the German project management association has focused more on the economy in the past (Wagner *et al.*, 2021). The fact that about 2/3 of the respondents were from the business world and therefore better able to assess this sector than the others could also have impacted the results.

6.2 Institutions and actors involved in the projectification of society
When asked which institutions exert the most significant influence on the projectification of society, respondents ranked *cultural–cognitive institutions* well ahead of both *normative and regulative institutions*. This is surprising, as the focus in the literature to date has been primarily on the latter two (Sabini and Paton, 2021). It might be specific to the German economy, which is dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises (Welter, 2018); thus no "push" through coercion or normative adjustment is desired, but instead a "pull strategy" through a positive image, role models, and success stories is applied (Wagner *et al.*, 2021).

Moreover, the answers to the question regarding the most important actors involved in the projectification of society resulted in a rather surprising result. Although the literature (Hodgson and Muzio, 2012; Lundin *et al.*, 2015) emphasizes the unique role of project management associations for the projectification of society, this study reveals that the project management association in Germany only occupies a mediocre position in the overall list when compared directly with other actors such as exemplary enterprises, service providers, and educational institutions. This may have to do with the fact that GPM has not called sufficient attention to its work in the past and that exemplary companies, service providers and educational institutions are regarded as more capable in this context.

6.3 The interplay of institutions and project management associations
While the institutional theory has so far been applied primarily in the context of projects (Söderlund and Sydow, 2019) and project-based organizing (Narayanan and Huemann, 2021), for the purpose of this research it was related to the process of projectification at the level of society. Institutional theory was used as an explanatory model to examine the interactions between institutions and actors and how they each, alone or together, influence the process of projectification. Particular attention has been paid to the role of project management associations.

While literature (Scott, 2010; Lundin *et al.*, 2015) suggests that project management associations have a considerable influence on society's projectification, Hypotheses 1 to 3 were used to examine whether regulative, normative, and cultural–cognitive actions of project management associations affect the projectification of society. Surprisingly, these three hypotheses could not be confirmed. It means that the actions of project management associations do not directly influence projectification. One explanation for this finding could be that other organizational actors (i.e. exemplary companies) have a more significant and rather direct influence on the process of projectification than the project management association, that the latter does not reach the entire breadth of society with their activities, or that the activities of the project management associations are not effective enough. This is consistent with the analysis of secondary data on the strategic direction of GPM, which to date has not explicitly focused its activities on the common good and supporting society.

However, results show that the project management association's actions have an indirect effect, i.e. via the mediating institutions on the projectification of society. In this context, actions targeting cultural–cognitive institutions exhibit the highest impact on the projectification, followed by actions targeting regulative institutions. Hence, the hypotheses 4a and 4c were supported, whereas the path via the normative institutions is not significant, and thus, hypothesis 4b is not supported. Moreover, the results suggest that it is not the coercive regulations or dominant norms that foster the diffusion of projects as GPM intends it, but primarily the understanding of the purpose, the corresponding values and the belief in projects as a means of achieving ambitious goals. Altogether, this contrasts the prevalent view in the literature, which has previously assumed that projectification occurs primarily through the regulative and normative actions and institutions, such as government prescribing laws and regulations (Sabini and Paton, 2021), or project management associations issuing a body of knowledge for certifying project personnel (Hodgson, 2002).

To date, research has focused primarily on the development of projectification in the economy (Wald *et al.*, 2015; Schoper *et al.*, 2018). With this study, the focus was significantly broadened, and the case of Germany was used as an example to show that the projectification of the economy is most advanced but is also perceived to increase in other sectors of the society. In the future, projectification can be expected to continue spreading across the breadth of society (Jensen *et al.*, 2016). The application of institutional theory provides a gateway to a better understanding of the processes behind the projectification of society and the actors involved in it, yet the full potential of institutional theory is still to be realized (Sydow, 2022). It offers promising perspectives for research allowing a more detailed understanding of the prevailing interactions and the societal and cultural processes (Karrbom Gustavsson and Hallin, 2015).

Unlike the prevailing view in research (Hodgson and Muzio, 2012) that it is primarily the project management associations through normative and regulative institutions that exert influence on the projectification of society, this results reveal new modes of interaction. In particular, the study expands the view to include actors such as exemplary enterprises and entrepreneurs who, in direct comparison, have more influence on projectification than the associations do because they positively shape the image of projects and are more likely to convince other actors of the relevance of project management by setting an example.

A key contribution of this research is that projectification of society can be explained through the lens of institutional theory as a social process involving interactions between actors, their actions, and societal institutions. Institutions take on a mediating role, reinforcing the activities of actors and thus exerting influence on the projectification. In particular, the results identify the direction and mode of effect that project management associations' actions have on the projectification of society via certain institutions. Furthermore, it became clear that the process of projectification is ongoing and can be supported by purposive actions.

Since the focus of this study was on the project management associations, they may reconsider their strategic positioning and support projectification with intentional actions based on these findings. Moreover, the results of this research provide those responsible at all levels of society with insights into an important phenomenon that requires appropriate responses, especially in times of societal challenges such as the climate crisis.

This study is the first empirical application of institutional theory to the process of projectification at the level of society and with focus on fundamental relationships. Future studies could examine the processes of projectification in more detail, taking other actors into account, such as exemplary enterprises or entrepreneurs (Lundin *et al.*, 2015; Kalff, 2017). For instance, structural equation modeling could be utilized to determine whether those actors contribute directly or indirectly to the projectification of society and what role institutions play in this process.

7. Conclusion

Using institutional theory, this paper examines the underlying social processes and interactions between the regulative, normative and cultural–cognitive activities of project management associations on the one hand, and institutions on the other hand, at the societal level, using the example of GPM in Germany.

The results of this study in Germany show that the phenomenon of projectification is not limited to the economy, yet it is increasingly emerging in other sectors of society as well. For the first time, the state and the evolution of the projectification in all sectors of society were explored. The application of institutional theory opens up new perspectives on the projectification of society and helps to analyze the interplay of institutions and actors. As a result, the multitude of actors and their interactions with institutions are explicable in projectification.

This also significantly puts into perspective the view in the literature that project management associations are key enablers of projectification. According to this study, the project management association in Germany ranks only in the middle of the list of organizational actors and merely exerts an indirect influence on the projectification. The answer to the question, how institutions and project management associations affect the projectification of society, reveals that the associations do not have any significant, direct impact, instead predominantly in an indirect way via the cultural–cognitive institutions, followed at some distance by the regulative and normative institutions. These findings are surprising compared to the literature, as they suggest that associations have a rather indirect influence on the projectification process. Moreover, they emphasize the mediating role of institutions, especially the hitherto somewhat neglected cultural–cognitive institutions.

It was also highlighted the potential that project management associations have in times of major challenges, such as the pandemic or the worsening climate crisis. For example, the associations could increasingly connect with societal groups outside the economy and work with them to develop solutions to the above-mentioned challenges. Clear pointers for a new direction were provided. For example, project management associations can be much more effective through cultural–cognitive actions, e.g. by promoting the image of projects or disseminating success stories that encourage others to follow suit. In this respect, the door was opened for a further exploration of the projectification at the level of society, bringing with it not only theoretical but also practical implications.

However, several limitations must be considered when interpreting the results. For example, it has already been mentioned that 2/3 of the sample came from the business sector, which may have biased the responses. Further studies could be conducted here that focus on the other sectors more intensely. This study was also a snapshot at a certain point with little consideration of past developments and prospects. This is an area where research could conduct longitudinal studies and elucidate patterns of development. The investigations were limited to Germany. It can be expected that in other countries also other conditions prevail. Consequently, there is an interest in applying the study design in other countries and making related comparisons. Finally, it was mainly looked at the increase of the projectification in society, but not at the consequences of the projectification for society and the people, be it beneficial or detrimental. This certainly remains an intriguing subject for future research. This research area thus offers sufficient breadth and depth for further activities.

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Annex

Fields of activity of participants	Share [%]	Role of the participants	Share [%]
Industrial enterprises	28.5	Member of the board	20.1
Service companies	38.3	Executive with leadership tasks	29.4
Public administration	9.5	Project management expert	39.7
Leisure, sports, art and culture	2.4	Subject matter expert/clerk	4.6
Civic engagement	6.3	Others	6.2
Research and education	10.3		
Others	4.7		
Number of employees	Share [%]	Types of projects	Share [%]
<25	21.9	Research and development	27.3
25–49	4.1	Investment	9.3
50–99	9.2	Org. development/change	17.0
100–249	10.7	Pers. development/HR	4.1
250–499	3.6	Process improvement	15.5
500–999	6.6	Marketing/Sales	2.1
1,000–2,499	11.7	Customer/Business	1.0
2,500–4,999	4.6	Others	4.6
5,000–9,999	5.6		
10,000–49,999	8.2		
>50,000	10.2		
Not specified	3.6		

Table A1.
Characteristics of the
sample

Construct	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Projectification of society	4.23	1.13	1										
2. Projectification of economy	5.56	1.14	0.658**	1									
3. Projectification of public administration	3.96	1.67	0.662**	0.348**	1								
4. Projectification of leisure, sports, arts and culture	3.46	1.67	0.759**	0.308***	0.233**	1							
5. Projectification of civic engagement	3.93	1.71	0.828**	0.439**	0.329**	0.606**	1						
6. Regulative institutions	3.74	1.61	0.303**	0.223**	0.240**	0.236**	0.195**	1					
7. Normative institutions	3.81	1.55	0.285**	0.354**	0.187**	0.157*	0.195**	0.377**	1				
8. Cultural–cognitive institutions	4.10	1.66	0.385**	0.344**	0.148*	0.247**	0.404**	0.0810	0.354**	1			
9. PMA regulative actions	2.70	1.60	0.242**	0.190**	0.152*	0.153*	0.233**	0.263**	0.386***	0.173*	1		
10. PMA normative actions	3.65	1.66	0.133	0.156*	0.152*	−0.023	0.148*	−0.008	0.294**	0.286**	0.450**	1	
11. PMA cultural–cognitive actions	2.17	1.51	0.159*	0.127	0.172*	0.064	0.121	0.076	0.269**	0.189*	0.596**	0.460**	1

Note(s): *Pearson correlation coefficient is significant at the 0.05 level; **at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table A2.
Inter-construct
correlations

Measurement validation of second-order construct – Projectification of society

Second-order construct	First-order construct	Items	Loadings	*t*-value
Projectification of society	Projectification of economy	How much does projectification affect the economy in Germany?	0.752	18.091
CR = 0.821	Projectification of public administration	How much of an impact does projectification have on public administration in Germany?	0.841	43.144
AVE = 0.537	Projectification of leisure, sports, arts and culture	How much does projectification affect leisure, sports, arts, and culture in Germany?	0.606	9.953
	Projectification of civic engagement	How much of an impact does projectification have on civic/ voluntary/social engagement in Germany?	0.713	16.604

Note(s): AVE = Average variance extracted; CR = Composite reliability

First order constructs – PMA's actions and societal institutions

First-order construct	Items
Regulative institutions	How strong is the overall influence of regulatory institutions on the projectification of the company in Germany?
Normative institutions	How strong is the overall influence of normative institutions on the projectification of society in Germany?
Cultural–cognitive institutions	How strong is the overall influence of cultural–cognitive institutions on the projectification of society in Germany?
PMA regulative actions	How strong is the influence of GPM on regulatory institutions (laws, regulations, guidelines, etc.) in Germany?
PMA normative actions	How strong is the influence of GPM on normative institutions (norms, standards, certificates, etc.) in Germany?
PMA cultural–cognitive actions	How strong is the influence of GPM on cultural–cognitive institutions (views, beliefs, values, etc.) in Germany?

Discriminant validity assessment – Heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT; Henseler *et al.*, 2014) ratio of correlations

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Projectification of society	0										
2. Projectification of economy	NA	0									
3. Projectification of public administration	NA	0.602	0								
4. Projectification of leisure, sports, arts and culture	NA	0.232	0.329	0							
5. Projectification of civic engagement	NA	0.308	0.439	0.348	0						
6. Regulative institutions	0.364	0.236	0.195	0.24	0.223	0					
7. Normative institutions	0.356	0.155	0.193	0.186	0.34	0.377	0				
8. Cultural–cognitive institutions	0.466	0.247	0.404	0.148	0.344	0.081	0.351	0			

Table A3.
Constructs, items and validation results

(*continued*)

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Discriminant validity assessment – Heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT; Henseler *et al.*, 2014) ratio of correlations

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
9. PMA regulative actions	0.287	0.148	0.223	0.148	0.185	0.253	0.367	0.167	0		
10. PMA normative actions	0.191	0.022	0.144	0.149	0.152	0.007	0.279	0.278	0.442	0	
11. PMA cultural–cognitive actions	0.188	0.06	0.116	0.167	0.117	0.074	0.25	0.179	0.562	0.456	0

Relationship	Direct effect	Indirect effect
Regulative actions → Projectification of society (PoS)	0.116	–
Regulative actions → Regulative institutions → PoS	–	0.056[**]
Normative actions → Projectification of society	–0.022	–
Normative actions → Normative institutions → PoS	–	0.014
Cultural–cognitive actions → Projectification of society	0.006	–
Cultural–cognitive actions → Cultural–cognitive institutions → PoS	–	0.063[*]

Note(s): [***] significant at $p < 0.001$; [**] significant at $p < 0.01$; [*] significant at $p < 0.05$

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