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Cato Christensen & Therese Dille

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## Projectification of religion: an analytical framework

Cato Christensen <sup>a,b</sup> and Therese Dille <sup>c\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Archaeology, History, Religious Studies and Theology, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway; <sup>b</sup>Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo, Norway; <sup>c</sup>Department of Business, Marketing and Law, University of South-Eastern Norway, Hønefoss, Norway

### ABSTRACT

The spread of project organizing to an ever-expanding array of industries and sectors has garnered considerable attention in recent decades – particularly in the fields of organization and management studies, but also in sociology and philosophy. Some have characterized this ‘projectification’ as a fulcrum for profound cultural shifts, with ramifications extending beyond the boundaries of management, work life, and organizations. Perspectives have been put forward on projects permeating even the very ways we live our daily lives. The study of religion, however, has remained notably inattentive to such perspectives. In this article, we advocate the importance of studying projectification in the realm of religion. Drawing on examples from the national Lutheran churches of Sweden and Norway, we outline a framework for studying projectification of religion along three analytical trajectories: organizational projectification of religion, projectification as a structuration of religious interaction and adherence, and projectification as a shift in religious discourse.

### KEYWORDS

Religious organization;  
religious adherence;  
religious discourse;  
projectification; project;  
organizational  
projectification; societal  
projectification

## Introduction

A few years ago, Princess Märtha Louise of Norway, the country’s most famous ‘New Ager’, announced on social media that *Soulspring*, the so-called ‘angel school’ she had co-founded, was closing down. In an Instagram post, she expressed feeling ‘so blessed to have been part of this amazing project’, but that she was now looking forward to ‘new projects’.<sup>1</sup> In Norway, this was a media event. As a member of the royal family, Princess Märtha Louise had been in the spotlight all her life, and in the last decade or so, her affiliation with alternative religiosity had become a prime source of newsworthiness (Gilhus 2014; Kraft 2015, 2008). This article is not about Princess Märtha Louise’s religious affiliations. Rather, it takes as its starting point one particular term used by the

**CONTACT** Cato Christensen  cato.christensen@uit.no

\*Shared first authorship

<sup>1</sup>Princess Märtha Louise (@princessmarthalouise). Instagram post. September 13, 2018. <https://www.instagram.com/princessmarthalouise/>

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princess when conveying the message that *Soulspring* was closing: She talked about her religious activities as ‘projects’.

At first glance, there is nothing noteworthy about talking about ‘projects’. In fact, we all might do it, some more than others, in various contexts and situations of life. ‘Projects’ have become part of our everyday vocabulary, and most of us, most of the time, probably do not pay much attention to it. Perhaps this was the case with the princess as well. However, the fact that we surround ourselves with notions of ‘projects’ is arguably something that is worth talking about. And arguably, it is particularly interesting when religious activities are talked about as ‘projects’.

‘Project’ is a well-established term in the world of management and business, often conceptualized as a temporary organization set up for handling specific tasks. The concept of project embodies a highly influential post-bureaucratic organizational standard, involving the implementation of specialized project management tools and processes, and constituted by the professionalization of project managers (e.g., Hodgson and Cicmil 2007). However, as project organizing has spread to new industries and sectors, and also beyond the boundaries of management and work life, several scholars have argued for broader perspectives on projects. The diffusion of project organizing, and project ideas, is seen as consequential enough to talk about the ‘projectification of society’ (e.g., Lundin et al. 2015; Packendorff and Lindgren 2014) and even the ‘projectification of everything’ (Jensen, Thuesen, and Geraldi 2016).

The realm of religion has mostly escaped exploration in terms of such processes of projectification, perhaps resulting from a scarcity of cross-disciplinary works combining organizational studies and religious studies (Gümüşay 2020; Tracey, Phillips, and Lounsbury 2014a, 2014b). Rather, religion and religious organizations, discourses, affiliations, and identities are often regarded as quite stable and enduring entities, far removed from the type of temporary engagements that the use of the term ‘project’ often implies.

However, there are good reasons to take projectification seriously in the study of religion. For instance, Jałocha, Góral, and Bogacz-Wojtanowska (2019) report on widespread use of project organizing in the Roman Catholic Church. Jałocha, Góral, and Bogacz-Wojtanowska (2019) focus particularly on the recurrent Catholic ‘mega-event’, World Youth Day, finding that over the course of its occurrences, the event has become increasingly professionalized through the adoption of standardized project management tools and methods. They also observe that World Youth Day has served to influence the use of project approaches more widely throughout the complex organization of the Roman Catholic Church. As they put it: ‘the scale and diversity of projects in [*sic*] Catholic Church make one assume that projects pose an extremely important, integral part of the activity of the Catholic Church as they concern every one of its areas’ (Jałocha, Góral, and Bogacz-Wojtanowska 2019, 303).

Such findings are an incentive for further exploration into the phenomenon of projectification in religious settings. Among other things, they tap into a long-standing realization in the sociology of religion: the erosion of differences between religious organizations and other, secular organizations (Chaves 1993, 1994, 1996, 2004; Hinings and Raynard 2014). Still, Jałocha, Góral, and Bogacz-Wojtanowska’s (2019) findings are grounded in a fairly narrow organizational analysis, in which the Roman Catholic Church is reduced explicitly to ‘an organization, and not a community of faith’ (299). As such, it remains to bring research on ‘projectification’ into dialogue with ongoing research in the study of religion.

In this article, we aim to do so by outlining a framework for studying projectification in the realm of religion. The framework integrates current research on projectification with prominent perspectives and areas of research in the study of religion. Rather than confining attention to organizational analysis alone, our framework connects analysis to a broader spectrum of issues relevant to understanding religion today, particularly those of individual religious behavior and religious language/discourse. In doing so, the framework also aligns with the diverse ways in which ‘projectification’ has been conceptualized and understood across disciplines such as organization and management studies, philosophy, and sociology.

To provide empirical grounding for this endeavor, we draw on material from the Lutheran national churches in the Nordic countries of Norway and Sweden. From 2021 to 2023, we tracked uses of the term ‘project’ in material accessed on the respective websites of these churches. This material serves as an entry point for suggesting three *trajectories* or *routes* for further studies of projectification in the realm of religion:

The first of these pertains to studying the implementation and potential consequences of projects as an organizational form in religious contexts. The second pertains to studying how projectification restructures social interaction and potentially also religious adherence. The third pertains to studying how projectification acts to introduce ‘project’ as an object of knowledge in religious discourse.

We believe that expanding the study of projects and projectification into the domain of religion along these trajectories has the potential to refine our understanding of catalysts driving changes in religious landscapes. Specifically, this pertains to illuminating the interplay and potential mutual adaptation between forms and structures of religious communities and organizations, on the one hand, and changing patterns of individual religious behavior, on the other.

Moreover, studying projectification underscores the fact that religion does not constitute a distinct structural domain, confined to a unique institutional logic, but rather that repertoires for religious practice – at organizational, and also at individual and discursive levels – are profoundly impacted by ‘concepts’ and organizational forms originating in other societal domains. Exploring this interplay can deepen our understanding of the boundaries between the secular and the religious, particularly how adaptation to ‘project’ in religious settings potentially contributes to a blurring of those lines.

The article is structured as follows: In the following, we give an outline of ongoing research on projectification in management and organization studies, sociology, and philosophy. We distinguish between two main strands of research, which respectively conceptualize ‘projectification’ either in a narrow sense, as the spread of an organizational form, or in a broader sense, as a more profound cultural and discursive phenomenon (cf. Packendorff and Lindgren 2014). Thereafter, we present our findings from the two Nordic churches, followed by an outline of the three trajectories for further studies of projectification in the realm of religion.

## Organizational projectification

The term ‘projectification’ was first introduced by Midler (1995), who studied how the French firm Renault shifted its organizational structure, increasingly relying on projects to manage a substantial portion of its operations. Midler’s analysis formed the idea of the

‘projectification of the firm’, and what later, in more general terms, is referred to as ‘organizational projectification’ (cf. Jacobsson and Jalocha 2021; Maylor and Turkulainen 2019), signifying the fundamental restructuring of organizations worldwide as they have adopted the project-based mode of operation.

The roots of ‘organizational projectification’ can be traced to planning techniques employed in weapon system development during and after the Second World War. As the practical field of project management advanced, engineers from military projects frequently shifted to other industries or pursued careers as independent project management consultants (Blomquist and Söderholm 2002; Engwall 1995). In recent decades, professional membership associations such as the Project Management Institute (PMI) and the International Project Management Association (IPMA) have played a crucial role in introducing practical project management models to various industries and sectors (Blomquist and Söderholm 2002; Hodgson and Cicmil 2007; Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm 2002a). Consequently, a robust and influential field of practical knowledge has emerged, offering practitioners universal tools and methodologies to achieve project success.

In conjunction with this practical development, project management has become a distinct research field, which can be categorized into two main streams. The first stream, within which much of the research on projects is grounded, is based on the idea that projects serve as organizational and managerial solutions for the challenges faced by modern organizations (Hodgson et al. 2019b). In this view, projects are regarded favorably as natural consequences of changes in the market and business, offering solutions to the problems that organizations must deal with to improve their effectiveness. They are set up for handling specific tasks within a given timeframe, as a way of dealing with complexity and compartmentalizing work from everyday operations (Maylor et al. 2006). Projects are thus understood as means to provide control, order, and focused interventions. Simultaneously, they are viewed as promoting flexibility, entrepreneurship, change, and innovation (Godenhjelm, Lundin, and Sjöblom 2015; Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm 2002a).

Alongside this favorable view of projects, a second, more critical stream of research has emerged, focusing on the actual practices and consequences of projects rather than ideal expectations (Hodgson et al. 2019b; Hodgson and Cicmil 2006, 2007, 2016). These contributions have, for instance, explored the consequences of projects’ temporary nature on organizations and people. Projects are, by definition, temporary (Bakker et al. 2016). They have a predefined beginning and end, and their ending, marked by milestones leading up to a final project deadline, affects how activities are organized and perceived (Lundin and Söderholm 1995; Vaagaasar, Hernes, and Dille 2020). For instance, Shih (2004) has observed that continuously chasing deadlines can result in stress and heightened work pressures, whereas Enberg (2012) has documented issues related to knowledge integration and learning. Additionally, public investments executed in the form of projects are well known for their delays and collaboration problems (Dille and Söderlund 2013; Dille, Hernes, and Vaagaasar 2023) and what is commonly referred to as ‘megaproject spending’ (Flyvbjerg 2014). Or, as Hodgson et al. (2019a) highlight in their analysis of public organizations, the increased use of projects can lead to fragmentation and short-sighted solutions.

Such critical examinations seem to be particularly important as project ideas have become part of everyday operations in a wide array of organizations, such as public organizations

(Fred 2015), nongovernmental organizations (Golini, Kalchschmidt, and Landoni 2015), as well as larger institutions such as The European Union (Godenhjelm, Lundin, and Sjöblom 2015; Hodgson et al. 2019a; Mukhtar-Landgren and Fred 2019). In other words, the expansion of project structures into new industries raises the question of whether it should be regarded as a reason for celebration or concern. This matter remains a topic of ongoing discussion and deliberation ‘that is still very much in play’ (Hodgson et al. 2019a, 3).

### Societal projectification

Another category of research delves into the notion of ‘projectification of society’, reaching beyond the organizational level. This line of research suggests that scholars should recognize the pervasive nature of projects and project-related ideas as cultural and discursive phenomena that carry profound societal consequences (Kuura and Lundin 2019; Packendorff and Lindgren 2014).

Following this line of thinking, projects are conceptualized as more than an organizational restructuring, ‘but also as a multifaceted phenomenon to be studied in its own right’ (Packendorff and Lindgren 2014, 7). Consequently, projects are seen as a phenomenon that needs to be addressed in other research disciplines as well, beyond management and organization studies (Kuura and Lundin 2019; Packendorff and Lindgren 2014). As argued by Packendorff and Lindgren (2014, 10), by limiting research on projectification to an organizational context only, ‘many questions concerning reasons, implications and consequences of projectification are left unanswered and suppressed’.

The most well-known effort to outline this societal projectification can be found in Boltanski and Chiapello’s (2005, originally published in French in 1999) attempt to explain how society and capitalism have evolved since Weber’s monumental work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2012, originally published 1904–1905). Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) argue that the projectification of society, which they refer to as ‘the project world’ (*‘project cité’* in French), marks the emergence of a third spirit of capitalism in the 1980s. This third spirit of capitalism, they note, differs from the bourgeois capitalism of the late nineteenth century and industrial capitalism of the 1940s–1970s because it leans on networks and connections as the primary guiding principles that validate the arguments and actions of individual actors. They also explain how the inherently temporary nature of projects makes disengagement a virtue as well, as individuals must be able to extend their network by making new connections and establishing new relationships. As a result, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) emphasize the significance of adaptability, flexibility, creativity, and mobility as fundamental concepts for understanding and effectively navigating society. In other words, success in this ‘project world’ is not determined by an individual’s position in the hierarchy but by their ability to connect, as well as to engage and inspire others.

Jensen, Thuesen, and Geraldi (2016; see also Jensen 2009, 2023) more recently put forward similar arguments, making projects a fulcrum for a broader societal diagnosis. They position their work against Foucault’s (1975) notion of the disciplinary society, arguing that the project society ‘exists on the top and in dialogue’ with the disciplinary society of planning and control (Jensen, Thuesen, and Geraldi 2016, 7). A fundamental difference between the ‘old’ disciplinary society and the ‘new’ project society is that *activity* rather than *space*, *relations*, and *time* becomes the primary impetus of planning, organizing, and the unfolding of events. This is manifest, for example, in the structuring

of our lives around temporary relations set by certain activities, unimpeded by predefined temporal, spatial, and relational restraints, and a strive toward non-repetition. This transformation, they note, does not mean that projects did not exist before or that all activities are organized as projects today. Rather, it is indicative of a change toward a society where projects have become the prevalent way of organizing human activity, even to the extent that projects constitute ‘a human condition’ that is vested deeply in society. Jensen, Thuesen, and Geraldi (2016) even argue that a ‘project structure’, as well as the naming of things as ‘projects’, has become intrinsic to our lives, permeating what we do, how we speak, and even how we think of our daily activities. In fact, they go so far as to propose that there is a comprehensive ‘projectification of everything’, wherein the influence of projects permeates all aspects of our existence.

To summarize: The introduction to research on projectification above illustrates the omnipresence of project organizing and ideas. ‘Project’ is more than a superficial corporate buzzword; it is a tangible phenomenon that carries implications for individuals, groups, organizations, and societies at large. Nevertheless, while the expansion of projects into new organizational spheres has been extensively studied, the full extent of its impact remains largely unexplored. This is particularly the case when extending from research, such as that of Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) and Jensen, Thuesen, and Geraldi (2016), which seeks to operationalize ‘projectification’ in terms of its constituent components, such as the structuring of activities as temporary and compartmentalized, notions of tangible goal attainment, and the idealization of action, adaptability, flexibility, creativity, and mobility. And it is particularly the case when explorations of projectification delve into areas of society that are typically overlooked in organization and management studies. The case in point here, of course, is religion.

### Empirical setting and methodology

To further explore the issue of projectification in the realm of religion, as well as its potential implications for the study of religion, we examined the use of projects in the Lutheran national churches in the Nordic countries of Norway and Sweden. Drawing on *practice-oriented document analysis* (Asdal and Reinertsen 2021), our point of departure was the use of the term ‘project’ (‘prosjekt’/‘projekt’) on the respective websites of the churches, which we tracked from 2021 to 2023. In crude numbers, we found around 2,000 unique postings on ‘project’ for the Church of Norway and a stunning 6,200 for the Church of Sweden. These figures are a clear indication of the extensiveness of explicit project organizing going on in the churches.

While the Nordic churches operate at another scale than the global Roman Catholic Church – whose use of project organizing, as previously mentioned, has been studied by Jałocha, Góral, and Bogacz-Wojtanowska (2019) – these Nordic churches are still religious organizations of significant magnitude, holding the majority of the population of the respective countries as members (Norway, 63.7%; Sweden, 52.8%). In addition, these churches are interesting examples of religious organizations in transition away from state ownership and thus also adaptation to both increased state secularization and religious competitive tendering (Furseth et al. 2018). Both are former state churches that, following constitutional changes (Norway in 2012, Sweden in 2000), have gained more corporate and financial autonomy.



The websites examined are, respectively, [www.kirken.no](http://www.kirken.no) for the Church of Norway and [www.svenskakyrkan.se](http://www.svenskakyrkan.se) for the Church of Sweden.<sup>2</sup> For both churches, the website functions as a primary medium for audience outreach and various types of information. Both websites are comprehensive, with an extensive menu selection. They contain information about the churches' organization, work done by the churches, various church services, contact information, job announcements, and articles on various faith-based matters such as Christian holidays, rites of passage, and doctrinal questions (e.g., what it means to be a Christian, the reformation, prayer, faith, existence, etc.). The websites are updated semi-daily with newsfeeds and press releases containing, among other things, news from local parishes. The websites also function as search engines for web content from dioceses, pastorates, and parishes under the central Church organizations, where these local organizational units can post their own content. The websites provide links to the Churches' accounts on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter/X, and Instagram, as well as blogs (the Church of Sweden provides its own blogging platform).

In reviewing material from the websites, we commenced from a fairly open-ended conceptualization of 'projectification', encompassing perspectives on both 'organizational projectification' and 'societal projectification', as discussed above. The term 'project' in our material was thus thought of as a 'sensitizing concept' (Blumer 1954; see also Bowen 2006), inviting analytical conceptualizations of 'projectification' at both these levels. While most of our observations regarding the use of projects in the Nordic churches were related to what could be considered administrative and managerial projects, thus pertaining to 'organizational projectification', we also came across several instances that did not fit this category. These were 'projects' related to the churches' roles as social institutions, oriented toward religious adherence, even at an individual level. Furthermore, we encountered numerous cases where the term 'project' was employed in conveying religious notions and ideas, such as references to 'God's projects'. The range of these 'projects' confirmed the usefulness of reviewing our empirical material in light of both perspectives on organizational and societal projectification. Accordingly, despite our empirical material from the Nordic churches being embedded in an organizational context, it also indicated 'projectification' as a broader societal phenomenon. The observations of how projects were used in different ways enabled us to identify three main categories or levels of projects in the Nordic churches.

### Findings: projectification of the Nordic churches

In subsequent sections, we present the different types of projects we identified in the Nordic churches of Sweden and Norway. We refer to these as respectively organizational projects, social projects, and projects as talk. Thereafter, we outline how these three categories can serve as 'groundings' or entries for a more general framework for studying projectification in the realm of religion.

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<sup>2</sup>All quotes reproduced from this source material in the article have been translated from Norwegian or Swedish into English by the authors.



## Organizational projects

The majority of references to ‘project’ in our material refer to the use of projects as a structural arrangement in the management and administration of church activities, what we refer to as organizational projects. These projects are employed to structure internal organizational and corporate work processes and workflows, as well as to coordinate work with other organizational actors. They include key project characteristics such as clearly defined project timeframes, project objectives, designated project teams, budgets, schedules, and formalized project reports, similar to what Jałocha, Góral, and Bogacz-Wojtanowska (2019) found in the Roman Catholic Church. While these projects vary significantly in scope and outcome within both the Church of Sweden and the Church of Norway, we can broadly distinguish between three different kinds of organizational projects: internal development projects, founding projects, and collaboration projects. An overview of these different types of organizational projects is summarized in Table 1.

As shown in the table, there are several examples of various types of organizational projects. Projects in the first category, which we can call internal development projects, are conducted within the church organization and may involve activities such as implementing new IT systems or reorganizing the church structure. Those in the second category, collaboration projects, on the other hand, typically involve working with other organizational actors, including both religious and nonreligious organizations. For instance, these projects often engage churches in temporary community and civil society initiatives, both locally and globally, partnering with organizations such as the Red Cross, municipalities, and schools.

The third category of organizational projects, referred to as founding projects, stands out as a type of project extensively utilized by the churches. Both the Swedish and Norwegian churches praise these founding projects for their significant role in the ongoing development of their organizations and depict their use of such projects as catalysts for innovation, sustainability, and societal change. To illustrate the integration of innovation into these projects, the leader of the Norwegian Church Council emphasized their focus on funding projects in an interview that was posted on the webpage:

For the fourth year in a row, we are announcing funds for innovative projects. [...] With this money, we want to inspire the development of new projects that fit with the times we live in. [...] In this grant scheme, we specifically point to the goals of eradicating poverty, good health and quality of life, reducing inequality, responsible consumption and production, and halting climate change.<sup>3</sup>

In sum, a substantial number of activities within and arranged by the church organizations are not only labeled ‘projects’, but also heavily integrate specified project traits, tools, and structures. The commitment to such project-based approaches is further supported by educational programs for church employees. A notable example is the 15 ECTS course titled ‘Professional Management and Innovation in the Norwegian Church’. This course, designed for and partially sponsored by the church organization, places a significant emphasis on ‘insight into project management’.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>The Church of Norway, ‘Kirkerådet lyser ut 1,6 millioner til utvikling av diakoni,’ March 25, 2023, <https://www.kirken.no/nb-NO/om-kirken/aktuelt/kirker%C3%A5det%20lyser%20ut%2016%20millioner%20til%20utvikling%20av%20diakoni/>

<sup>4</sup>Norwegian Association for Church Employers, ‘Fagledelse og innovasjon i Den norske kirke,’ March 23, 2023, <https://webportal.ka.no/Course/Main/CourseDetails?courseid=58dc9097-737c-ed11-81ad-000d3ade21f9>

**Table 1.** Overview of organizational projects, key characteristics, and examples of projects from the churches.

Project type	Key characteristics	Examples
<i>Internal development projects</i>	<p>Projects that are used for internal restructuring within the central church organization</p> <p>Typically feature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal project group</li> <li>• Limited duration, few months to several years</li> <li>• Specific project mandate, including objectives, budget, schedule, and risk analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reforms concerning the management and restructuring of overarching organizational matters</li> <li>• Skills development among staff</li> <li>• Implementation of communication and IT systems</li> </ul>
<i>Collaboration projects</i>	<p>Projects that involve collaboration between the church and nonreligious organizations (private, public, nongovernmental organizations) or other religious organizations</p> <p>Typically feature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common project group, i.e., participants from different organizations or representatives from the church are participants in other organizations' projects</li> <li>• Limited duration</li> <li>• Budget indicated but not necessarily specified on the webpage</li> <li>• Objectives are more generally formulated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community development projects</li> <li>• Projects on interreligious dialogue</li> <li>• Environmental/sustainability projects in the Global South</li> <li>• Larger conferences and events</li> </ul>
<i>Founding projects</i>	<p>The central church organization regularly promotes calls for 'development projects' to actors such as parishes, local congregations, educational/research institutions, and nonprofit organizations</p> <p>Typically feature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited duration: 6 months to 3 years</li> <li>• Economic size ranging from €10,000 to €100,000</li> <li>• Only funding for the project period, not for operations/activities afterward</li> <li>• Project must include a specific goal, often within a specific religious domain</li> <li>• Often specified that projects must be 'innovative' or 'creative'</li> <li>• Project must include an implementation plan with milestones and follow specific reporting guidelines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing digital resources in faith education</li> <li>• Implementing specific teaching material</li> <li>• Initiatives to advance recruitment for jobs within the church (priests, deacons, catechists, cantors)</li> <li>• Construction projects (e.g., conservation or renovation of church buildings)</li> <li>• Projects on environmentalism and sustainability (e.g., the promotion of 'green congregations' and faith education programs on mission with a green perspective/environmental awareness)</li> <li>• Research-oriented and innovation projects (e.g., research of sermon and baptism or innovation within diaconia)</li> </ul>

## Social projects

Among the projects observed in the Nordic churches, one thing that stands out is the utilization of projects as an arena for social interaction. In terms of understanding projectification in the realm of religion, this is particularly interesting as it not only pertains to the administrative and managerial workings of religious organizations, but also to their public exposure and the complex dynamics of social and communal interaction of which they engage and participate.

In the material from the two Nordic churches, the most salient aspect in this regard is how they use projects to structure the *interfaces* or *contact zones* toward (potential) adherents. In

such cases, projects seem to have become a platform for adherents' engagement with the communal aspects of religion offered by the church organizations. Examples include both templates for project founding, which adherents are encouraged to apply, and a wide range of activities defined and structured as 'projects' that they are invited to join.

One particularly interesting example is the Church of Sweden's championing of pre-schools that adopt a 'project-oriented approach' in their educational endeavors for children. Here, organizing activities as projects in and of itself becomes a social tool to foster pedagogy and community bonding. The project-oriented approach is explained like this:

We learn through projects. Working with a project-oriented approach means delving into and elaborating on a subject area for a shorter or longer period of time. Children constantly perceive and learn about their surroundings using all their senses. Through a project-oriented approach, children's learning can become diverse and interconnected. There are many different starting points for a project. It could be play, a consideration, or a problem that the children have encountered. It could also be something that we adults want to introduce to the group of children. In the project work, children should experience joy, feel the desire to create, and have the opportunity to develop their imagination.<sup>5</sup>

Other examples are youth choirs, gospel choirs, drama groups, and dance groups to which adherents are invited to participate in a temporary 'project form' fashion. For example, under the heading 'Dance in project' promoted by Fresta parish under the Church of Sweden, it is noted that 'project' is the working format for the dance group. As explained on the webpage:

Fresta church dancers gather in project form for approximately four worship services per year. On these occasions, we meet three times to practice and create choreography based on the theme of the worship service, choreography that conveys the gospel.<sup>6</sup>

While the meaning of 'project form' is not specified in this context, it is stated that it involves a temporary commitment and that the dancers only meet on specific occasions. Furthermore, it appears that the term 'project' is employed to enhance the appeal of these activities. For instance, in brief advertisements for a choir group, it is touted that '[t]he choir performs a mixed repertoire and operates on a project basis'.<sup>7</sup>

Related to such 'social projects', we also observe that activities arranged by and in the churches (as projects) are multidirectional in terms of input and agency, in that the input from adherents seems to be (nearly) as important as the 'doctrinal' output from the organization. This is even manifested in the actual use of the resources of the churches, the physical church premises themselves. Evidently, at least for the Nordic churches in question, the church premises are not just spaces for one-sided preaching from church representatives to adherents, but also multipurpose spaces for the expression of initiatives from members of the congregation.

In Sweden, this shift to increased multifunctionality to cater to the needs of various projects has even led to the permanent remodeling of several church buildings. In such cases, typically, the naves of the churches are either permanently downscaled by

<sup>5</sup>The Church of Sweden, 'Projekt. Vi lär genom projekt,' June 13, 2022, <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/linkoping/projekt-angeln>

<sup>6</sup>The Church of Sweden, 'Dansa i project,' May 7, 2021, <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/fresta/dans-i-gudstjanst>

<sup>7</sup>The Church of Sweden, 'Körer för vuxna,' September 5, 2023, <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/karlshamn/korer-for-vuxna>

walls or equipped with drapes or sliding glass doors to make room for a greater variety of uses. In some places, these areas have been equipped with easily available kitchens, dining tables, and even service counters (to run a café), as illustrated in the pictures below from two churches in Sweden.<sup>8</sup>



**Pictures.** Examples of remodelled churches in Sweden. Photos by Lars Björksell, used with permission

<sup>8</sup>The Church of Sweden, 'Multifunktionella kyrkor,' March 21, 2022, <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/goteborgsstift/multifunktionella-kyrkor>.

Consequently, the activities determine what kind of space the church is, as well as the range of actors using it, hence constituting a shift in the relational institution of the organization. The temporal dimension of this space changes as well. The church is no longer (as we would imagine that it once was) constituted as a place the use of which is fixed over time but rather a place that is reconstituted time and time again depending on the purpose of its use (activity) and which actors are running the show (relations). Simply put, the project at hand determines what the church is.

### *Projects as talk*

While most references to ‘project’ in our material from the Nordic churches explicitly index structural formations (at organizational or social levels), the term ‘project’ is also used apparently more casually to denote any sort of human initiatives, actions, and endeavors.

There are several examples, from the Church of Sweden describing the maintenance of the church’s website as a ‘a project’, to the term ‘project’ being used in reference to the adjustment of how psalms are performed in a Christian youth choir.<sup>9</sup> A particularly notable example, which includes a large amount of such ‘project-talk’, is the various references to The Cathedral of Hope – a monument raised on the initiative of the Church of Norway.<sup>10</sup> While the construction of the monument itself was organized as a project and thus represents an instance of organizational projectification within the church, the documentation of this initiative also illustrates the discursive elasticity of the term ‘project’. ‘Project’ is not merely used to describe the process of raising the monument but also its intended societal and even individual emotional impact. The cathedral is described as a ‘peace project’, as an ‘interreligious project’, and, perhaps most notably, as a ‘project of hope’. Here, the term ‘project’ clearly carries positive connotations, pointing towards being a facilitator for change and engagement, and even venturing into abstract issues and the narration of core Christian theological virtues (the concept of hope). As described on the webpage:

The Cathedral of Hope is an initiative for a national effort to erect a spiritual symbol constructed from collected ocean plastic, organized by the Borg bishop and diocesan council. The project’s vision is to transform pain into good and show that there is hope when we work together.

Expanding on this vision, it is noted that:

Many are looking for a concrete project where they can contribute to making the hope for a sustainable future alive [...]. The Cathedral of Hope will mobilize nationally and internationally, and be a creative and important symbol in the fight to preserve nature, the ocean, and the values that lie therein.<sup>11</sup>

While such language acts are perhaps random and incidental, they are, arguably, not neutral, as all language acts are constitutive of meaning-making and the production of

<sup>9</sup>The Church of Sweden, ‘Psalmer på nytt sätt,’ June 20, 2020, <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/hollviken/psalmer-pa-nytt-satt>

<sup>10</sup>The Church of Norway, ‘Håpets katedral: Et grensesprengende håpsprosjekt!’, February 2018, <https://www.kirken.no/nb-NO/gamle%20sidersnarveier/smm-temaside-gammel/om-oss/nyheter/aktuelt/presentasjon-av-prosjektet/>

<sup>11</sup>The Church of Norway, ‘Håpets katedral: Et grensesprengende håpsprosjekt!’, February 2018, <https://www.kirken.no/nb-NO/gamle%20sidersnarveier/smm-temaside-gammel/om-oss/nyheter/aktuelt/presentasjon-av-prosjektet/>



knowledge. As previously mentioned, the naming of activities as ‘project’ is also highlighted in research on ‘projectification’ (Hodgson and Cicmil 2007; Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm 2002b). That is, inherent in some of the research on projectification are also discussions on the discursive ramifications accompanying the diffusion of projects as an organizational form. These discussions are calls to think of ‘project’ as more than merely a tool for the arrangement of activities, but also as a vehicle for thinking and making sense of activities in a certain way. In other words, they highlight projects as a specific *discursive figuration* or *object of knowledge* (Hodgson and Cicmil 2007).

In the religious setting at hand, it is also noteworthy that we even find several examples of ‘project’ operating as an object of knowledge in the discursive articulation of transcendent reality. A frequently used concept is that of ‘God’s project’. For instance, in the context of missionary activity in the Church of Norway, it is postulated that ‘Mission is God’s project, an expression of God’s outreach to the world in love’.<sup>12</sup> In such cases, the range of what the term ‘project’ entails is extended. That is, it is not only human endeavors that are referred to by the term ‘project’; even the central transcendent figure of Christian doctrine, God, is interpellated into the term’s orbit. Hence, the rhetoric of ‘project’ is not just restricted to matters of immanent reality but also, it seems, extends to transcendent reality.

### A framework for studying projectification of religion

Our findings from the Church of Norway and the Church of Sweden indicate that the utilization of projects is extensive. Furthermore, our findings suggest that projectification in this context can be understood as more than merely an administrative organizational matter; it is also something that is deeply embedded in the churches’ structuring of social interaction toward other organizations as well as toward (potential) adherents. It also influences the rhetoric of the churches more generally, even to the extent that ‘project’ operates as an object of knowledge or discursive figuration in the way religious notions and ideas are conveyed.

As generalizable data on widespread projectification of the religious landscape, the examples explored here are obviously somewhat limited. However, they do warrant more than a cursory observation, not least due to how deeply vested and diverse ‘projects’ seem to be in the religious contexts at hand. The empirical material from the Nordic churches thus serves as illustrative examples that might help to analytically pivot further studies of projectification in the realm of religion in certain directions and along certain trajectories or routes.

Grounded in our empirical material, we suggest analysis along three trajectories, which together might constitute a framework for further studies of projectification in the realm of religion. We account for the three trajectories of the framework below, where we specify their adherence to perspectives on ‘organizational projectification’ and/or ‘societal projectification’, as well as point to potential research implications. See [Table 2](#) for an overview of the framework.

<sup>12</sup>The Church of Norway, ‘Å dele tro, tid og talent,’ September 9, 2022, <https://www.kirken.no/nb-NO/gamele%20sidersnarveier/smm-temaside-gammel/om-oss/nyheter/misjon-og-trosopplaring/>

**Table 2.** Overview of the framework for studying projectification in the realm of religion.

Trajectory of analysis	Perspective(s) on 'projectification'	Empirical premise	Potential research implications
Organizational projectification of religion	Organizational projectification	Religious organizations have implemented different types of projects to structure administrative and managerial matters	Study how project organizing intersects with the core principles upon which religious organizations are founded Study consequences of short-term time horizons, organizational fragmentation, compartmentalization of initiatives, and market orientation
Projectification as a structuration of religious interaction and adherence	Organizational projectification and societal projectification	(Individual) religious adherence and behavior have become project-based	Study how projectification intersects with, e.g., religious individualism, seekership, and bricolage
Projectification as a shift in religious discourse	Societal projectification	'Project' has become an <i>object of knowledge</i> or <i>discursive figuration</i> in religious language and even in the discursive configuring of religious ideas and notions	Study how projectification changes (talk about) religious matters, ideas, notions, and faith Study projectification as translation

### Organizational projectification of religion

The first trajectory of analysis in our framework pertains to studying projectification in terms of its impact on organizational forms of religion. This trajectory rests on a fairly narrow understanding of 'projectification', meaning the study of 'organizational projectification' and the potential diffusion of project-based approaches to religious organizations and as templates for religious organizational formations.

As our findings indicate, projectification of religious organizations can indeed be conceptualized as an organizational matter, consistent with how management and organizational scholars have documented 'organizational projectification' in other sectors of society. Extending from this stream of research, an obvious way of approaching projectification in the realm of religion would be to focus on the adoption of standardized project management tools and methods by religious organizations, as Jałocha, Góral, and Bogacz-Wojtanowska (2019) demonstrated in their study of the Roman Catholic Church. Additionally, fundamental questions arise, including the extent to which religious organizations are embracing projectification more broadly and, crucially, on the implications for these religious organizations, particularly regarding how projectification may intersect or conflict with their core principles.

A fulcrum of processes of 'organizational projectification' in a religious context is that it contributes to eroding the differences between religious organizations and other, secular organizations. Such processes are nothing new. Indeed, since at least the 1970s, sociologists of religion have been 'concerned with the extent to which religious organizations are subject to the same social processes as all organizations' (Hinings and Raynard 2014, 167; see, e.g., Struzzo 1970; Benson and Dorsett 1971; Brannon 1971). For instance, Chaves (1993, 1996, 2004) has remarked on widespread 'internal secularization', referring to processes wherein religious authority gives way to secular structures of agency within religious organizations. However, most of these discussions have revolved



around bureaucratization and professionalization. While projectification is tied to both, it also adds another layer, accelerating religious organizations' susceptibility to trends and management concepts that pervade the broader field of organizations, regardless of any religious–secular divide.

Comparative gazes across any (presumed or not) distinction between religious organizations and other, secular organizations can be highly relevant in this context (cf. Hinings and Raynard 2014). They can help understand potential paths for religious organizations as they navigate 'organizational projectification', and also provide direction for future research. Of particular note is the abovementioned growing field of research on the usage of projects in public sector organizations. The findings from public sector organizations hold (at least) some translatability to religious organizations, in that the fulcrum of their decision-making processes are, in principle at least, ideological rather than technocratic, and in that their rationales are, at least in principle, communal rather than profit-driven (Hodgson et al. 2019a). Public sector organizations also seem to share in the highly positive imagery of projects found both in the Roman Catholic Church and in the Nordic churches. As highlighted by Hodgson et al. (2019a, 4), projects in public sector organizations 'seem to offer attractive and relatively cheap ways to "test out" or roll out new ways of working, to encourage bottom-up innovation from within those organizations who deliver services and even to generate a mode of entrepreneurship'.

However, findings from public sector studies teach us that while projects can foster innovation, they can also bring about unintended consequences. For instance, projectification tends to reduce social activity to instrumental and rationalized action, erasing 'the political, social, and ethical dimensions of activity' (Hodgson et al. 2019a, 4). Put differently, while projects do not dictate actions, they can act as tools or catalysts for action, becoming more shaping (than anticipated) as participants put them into practice. Increased competition and fragmentation are other potential consequences that should not be overlooked, as highlighted by Fred (2018), who shows how activities in Swedish municipalities that used to be organized within the ordinary administrative structures and budgets are now organized and managed through individual projects that civil servants apply for. This way of organizing activities, he stresses, supports a market-based form of administration that promotes competition and supports short-term solutions for long-term challenges. Consequently, there is also an issue of projects' orientation toward time-limited, sequential, and task-oriented activities adding to diminish organizations' historical memory and to reduce the overall time horizons in which they operate.

Translated to a religious organizational context, equivalent processes to these would, no doubt, be matters of profound structural and even cultural changes, that should neither be overlooked by the organizations themselves, nor in research. For instance, if the Nordic churches or the Roman Catholic Church are on the way to becoming thoroughly project-based, they may inadvertently redefine themselves from being perceived as timeless pillars with open-ended time horizons into fleeting, short-term, and task-oriented structures. Moreover, it could potentially challenge the systems of authority within these organizations, as traditional systems of hierarchies within the organizations are being sidelined by the growing influence of project managers. Finally, when various religious activities are organized as projects funded by a central church organization, which various internal and external actors can apply for, it can foster competitive

relationships among, for instance, local parishes and congregations as they vie for the same financial resources. As a result, local church activities become built around competition, short-term solutions, and market-based logic.

### *Projectification as a structuration of religious interaction and adherence*

The second trajectory of analysis in our framework pertains to studying ‘projectification’ as a structuration of social interaction and religious adherence. This trajectory adheres to perspectives on both ‘organizational projectification’ and ‘societal projectification’, but perhaps most importantly, their interconnectedness. That is, analyses might seek to explore the interconnectedness between projectification pertaining to organizational forms of religion (‘organizational projectification’) and projectification as a broader ‘societal’ phenomenon, particularly pertaining to the structuration of individuals’ approach to religion.

This trajectory of analysis also finds grounding in our material from the Nordic churches. Although our empirical material is drawn from an organizational religious context, it points both explicitly and implicitly to project-structuring as a way of catering to changes in religious behavior among potential adherents. As such, the material indicates the relevance of addressing questions pertaining to projectification in the realm of religion also from the vantage point of broad conceptualizations of ‘projectification’, even extending into notions of project society (Jensen, Thuesen, and Gerdal 2016) or the project world (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). From such perspectives, projects not only (re-)structure operations of organizations, but also bring about institutionalization of arrangements for behavior in society at large, including in the lives of individuals and collectives at various levels.

For example, a tendency of religious organizations to adopt project-based approaches could reflect deeper, more fundamental shifts in religious engagement among believers. This assumption gains credibility when considering that the use of projects closely aligns with several dominant trends that have been highlighted as features of religious adherence in the contemporary religious landscape. Be it reports on increased religious individualism, on religious bricolage and eclecticism, or on what is commonly referred to as ‘the spiritual turn’, they all account for movements in religious behavioral traits that could (at least to some extent) be interpreted as consistent with notions of widespread projectification of religious identity (see, e.g., Bellah et al. 1985; Fuchs 2015; Heelas et al. 2005; Hervieu-Léger 2008; Hoffmann 2019; Madsen 2009; Roof 1993, 1999; Sutcliffe 2016; Watts 2022; Wuthnow 1998).

For example, Davie (2006, 281) describes a shift in people’s affiliation with religion in North America and Europe from ‘a culture of obligation or duty to a culture of consumption or choice’. Reading from Davie’s description, this is a situation where religious adherence has become not only increasingly goal-oriented, but also increasingly particularized and immanent in its goal orientation. This is a situation where religious adherence has become, at least potentially, accessible as a temporary resource, as opposed to a long-lasting commitment. Religious adherence, dare we say, could be understood as project-based.

Similar perspectives have also been voiced explicitly pertaining to the Nordic context, from which our empirical examples are drawn. For instance, studies of the ‘religious

mainstream' in Sweden (af Burén 2015; Thurfjell 2015; Willander 2020) have found that individuals often value the autonomy of selecting beliefs, mirroring a broader trend of reflective religious engagement. This inclination toward choosing and shifting one's beliefs, and indeed also identifying with several religious designations at the same time, as highlighted especially in af Burén's (2015) concept of 'simultaneity', underscores a preference for eclectic and temporary religious practices over strict adherence to a single faith. As Willander puts it: 'Settling fully for one religion is looked down upon while considering aspects from several religions or mixing religious content with philosophy and ideology is favored' (Willander 2020, 67).

Our point here, of course, is not that the likes of Davie, af Burén, or Willander have missed out on 'projectification' as a core momentum present in their fields of expertise. Rather, our argument is that current studies of religion already host significant perspectives that could shed light on the potential unfolding of projectification as a phenomenon extending beyond religious organizational contexts. Indeed, religion organized as 'project-based' social arenas might simply be a way of catering to a situation where people's interaction with religion has become more ambulant between traditions, increasingly ephemeral, temporary, compartmentalized, and less run by a sense of permanent loyalty to one religious tradition or organization – what Voas (2009) describes as 'fuzzy fidelity'. In concrete terms, participating in an occasional 'project' organized by, for example, the Church of Norway, may resonate more with such preferences for religious autonomy than identifying as 'being a Christian'. Studies on projectification of religion might thus illuminate important tendencies concerning *both* the structuring of religious organizations and people's modes of membership in them.

The significance of such an approach is further underscored by the generally limited exploration of the interplay between individual and institutional religion over the past two decades – as 'research on contemporary religion developed a strong interest in religious expressions outside the context of traditional religious institutions and the ideological positions of the élite, under headings such as "lived religion" or "everyday religion"' (Nielsen and Johansen 2019, 510). According to Ammerman (2020), the drive toward theoretical takes on individualism, bricolage, and seekership that have flourished as part of these research trends (of which she herself has been a driving force) is indeed exemplary of a certain ignorance. They are the outcome of approaches to religion that have a one-sided emphasis on individuals while underemphasizing religious traditions and institutions. The problem, as Ammerman puts it, is that 'emphasis on choice and individualism makes sense in the Western contexts where institutional religion is comparatively weak, but it leaves unexplained the religion that takes organized form, as well as the religion that is located in other cultures, nations, and social settings' (Ammerman 2020, 10–11). A similar point is made by Repstad (2019, 61), who criticizes the surge of studies 'in the lived religion tradition' for 'structural blindness', in the sense that they overstate the notion of individualization and thus overlook the significance of structural frames shaping even individual, subjective approaches to religion.

At least in Western contexts, further studies of projectification in the realm of religion might indeed help answer such calls for 'integrative' analyses that allow for the simultaneous exploration of both organizational and individualist constitutions of religion. The take on 'project society' by Jensen, Thuesen, and Gerdali (2016) is perhaps

particularly interesting in this respect. It pertains to how projects as a pervasive ideal at *all* levels of society have contributed to reordering our priorities, the way we encounter the world, our lives, and our identities. From such a perspective, studies of projectification would not only apply to the way in which ordinary people interact with religious systems, traditions, and organizations, but also the other way around. Thus, projectification could serve as a lens to explore the interplay and potential mutual adaptation between how religious communities and organizations arrange things (or are formed), on the one hand, and changing patterns of individual religious behavior, on the other. Perhaps both adhere to projects as an omnipresent ideal.

### **Projectification as a shift in religious discourse**

The third trajectory of our framework pertains to studying ‘projectification’ as a discursive change in the realm of religion. This trajectory rests primarily on perspectives on ‘societal projectification’ and its centering on the spread of ‘project’ as a kind of logic or ‘object of knowledge’.

Such a perspective is, for instance, highlighted by Hodgson and Cicmil (2007). Drawing on Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), they demonstrate how the current status of ‘the project’ as an object of knowledge has been constituted by and through a project management body of knowledge. Thus, while the term ‘project’ has been in use for a long time, the current meaning invested in the term has increasingly come to denote a standardized notion of organizing through the emergence of project management as a field of practice and study. Following this line of thinking, we might say that projectification can be seen as a double process. It not only denotes a process in which project organizational structures are spreading to increasingly new sectors and industries, but also a broader discursive formation in which ‘project’ is both produced as a meaningful category and reified around an increasingly fixed notion of what ‘project’ is. This brings attention to the term ‘project’ in and of itself, not just the organizational structures it often refers to. It brings attention to the discursive act of using the term ‘project’.

Conceptualizing projectification through such a lens opens a level of analysis that is particularly interesting in a religious context, as it pertains to processes of meaning-making, language use, and communication. One might even argue that it pertains to the discursive conditioning of the phenomenon of religion itself. Indeed, ‘taking talk seriously’, as Wuthnow (2011) puts it, is key when studying religion (cf. Beckford 2003; Engler 2006). Or, as highlighted by Hjelm (2014), discourse can be seen as a form of social practice, contributing both to the reproduction of religion and to religious change. From a certain perspective, discourse is even taken to be the defining characteristic of religion, as the concept of ‘religion’ itself often is defined based on a need to distinguish meaning-making about and communication with a transcendent reality, from other types of human meaning-making and communication. This distinction is at the core of several frequently referenced definitions, such as Geertz’s (1973, 90) thoughts on religion as a particular kind of ‘system of symbols’ that ‘formulate conceptions of a general order of existence’.

What, then, do we make of it when ‘project-talk’ is introduced into such a ‘system of symbols’? And, perhaps more importantly, is it significant enough to affect even the

‘conceptions of a general order of existence’? To put it more clearly, if projectification can be seen as introducing new objects of knowledge into religious discourse, does this change processes of religious meaning-making? How fundamental would that be to the grammar of religion? Can processes of projectification be seen as in any way altering religious beliefs?

However, studying projectification as a shift in religious discourse is not only relevant because of the primacy of language in the construction of religious realities, but also because usage of the ‘project’ term on matters of religion might connect to those ‘everlasting’ broader discussions on secularization, disenchantment, and ‘the fate of religion in modern times’, as Knibbe and Kupari (2020, 158) call it. Indeed, discursive projectification in a religious setting could perhaps be examined as a form of ‘translation’, where things that might usually be described in other terms (e.g., ‘calling’, ‘seeking’, ‘obligation’, ‘path’, ‘responsibility’, ‘tradition’, ‘fate’, ‘destiny’) are increasingly referred to in terms of ‘projects’. When speaking of translations of this kind, it could be relevant to consider Habermas’ (2010; 2008; see also Sikka 2016) notions of the translation of religious discourse into secular discourse. From there, we could even argue that naming aspects of religion as ‘projects’ is exemplary of what Asad (2019) calls ‘secular translations’; that is, processes of shifting meaning-making of religious matters toward increased investment in human capacity. Or put differently, perhaps the term ‘project’, to the extent that it impinges on matters of religious discourse, serves to downplay the necessity of divine powers for the fulfillment of human potential and capabilities. After all, if nothing else, the term ‘project’ carries notions of activity, tasks, transformations, and transitions. It connotes human agency rather than that of external forces.

On the other hand, as we have seen, human endeavors are not the only ones subject to translations in this way. As mentioned, the material from the Nordic churches, for instance, includes several references to ‘God’s project’, implying that such translations even affect the churches’ representation of core religious beliefs. While we need not read much into such cases, there is no denying that this sort of introduction of ‘project’ as an ‘object of knowledge’ in discourses of transcendent reality, or ‘the sacred’, to paraphrase Durkheim, is interesting in and of itself. What is perhaps more striking is that such conceptualizations of ‘divine projects’ also seem to be invested with notions of a particular structural form, concerning, for instance, planning, goal attainment, and temporariness. In other words, what can be observed here is not just cases of haphazard usage of the term ‘project’, randomly infused into discourses of the sacred, but a mode of usage that is coherent with the institutionalization of an increasingly standardized discourse of project management (cf. Hodgson and Cicmil 2007). This becomes particularly prominent in statements such as ‘God’s project never stops’.<sup>13</sup> Here, arguably, ‘God’s project’ is implicitly contrasted to those of humans’, where notions of the innate temporality of projects are used discursively to distinguish God’s workings in the world from the, perhaps, feeble and temporary engagements of humans. In other words, to again put it in Durkheimian

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<sup>13</sup>For example. The Church of Norway, ‘Nyopning av Gjesdal kyrkje’, August 30, 2020, <https://www.kirken.no/globalassets/bispedommer/stavanger/dokumenter/biskop/prekener-og-foredrag/gjesdal%20gjen%C3%A5spring%2030.%20august%202020.docx.pdf>

terms, although God may be a different kind of project manager from us, it is not just *the profane* that is being projectified; *the sacred* is coming along with it.

## Concluding remarks

While scholars across various disciplines, especially in management and organization studies, have noticed the ubiquity of projects and developed complex analytical tools to study them, scholars of religion, for the most part, have not. Neither have there been attempts to apply the concept of projectification in any elaborate analytical manner to the subject matter of religion. The goal of this article has been to encourage such engagements and direct further research. If projectification truly affects ‘everything’ (Jensen, Thuesen, and Geraldini 2016), examining its implications for the study of religion is imperative.

By drawing on empirical examples from the Church of Sweden and the Church of Norway, we have laid out a multidirectional framework for the study of projectification in the context of religion. The empirical basis for the framework is situated within a specific organizational context (Christian, churches, national, Nordic, etc.). Still, it exemplifies ranges of projectification in the realm of religion, also beyond matters of administration and management, that need further studies. The framework draws attention to trajectories for further research that might both supplement and challenge core assumptions regarding catalysts for changes in religious organizing as well as in terms of religious behavior and discourse. For instance, while much current research on religion has highlighted trends such as secularization, individualization, and increased marketization (see, e.g., Furseth 2021), little attention has been paid to how and in what ways management ideas and specific structures of organizing interact with these trends.

Projectification might change religious organizing, impede traditional structures of authority, and align religious organizations more with secular organizations. Further studies can thus follow up on, for instance, Chaves’ (1994) notion of ‘internal secularization’, to explore ways in which project ideas displace or challenge the legitimacy of faith-based agencies in religious organizations.

Furthermore, as outlined in the framework, projectification as organizational processes in the context of religion should be viewed in relation to how they are supported by, and perhaps also shape, individuals’ approaches to religion. This is perhaps particularly relevant as projects serve as templates for social interaction, influencing the interfaces between institutional religion and individual religious behavior. Studies of projectification might thus be one way to respond to calls for overcoming ‘structural blindness’ (cf. Ammerman 2020; Repstad 2019), linking the study of everyday ‘lived’ religion with structural changes in religious organizations and broader religious landscapes.

By expanding the study of projectification into the domain of religion, we also believe that this framework might contribute to further advancements in the theorizing on projectification, as developed in disciplines such as organization and management studies, philosophy, and sociology. This particularly pertains to connecting different conceptual threads of ‘projectification’, as the domain of religion provides an opportunity to not just study ‘projectification’ in a narrow organizational sense, but also in a broader sense, pertaining to more profound cultural and discursive aspects of projectification. Religion influences individuals and societies at various scales, and changes in the domain of



religion are never merely organizational or administrative. Therefore, understanding the extent, ways, and circumstances under which religion is influenced by projectification should concern scholars even beyond the field of religious studies.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### Notes on contributors

*Cato Christensen* is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at UiT The Arctic University of Norway and Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway. His main research interests include indigenous religions, cultural memory, religious diversity, and identity politics. He has explored these topics primarily in the context of media representations, education, and professional practice.

*Therese Dille* is Associate Professor of Management at USN School of Business, University of South-Eastern Norway. Her main research interests include institutional complexity, temporality, projectification, and professional identity. She has investigated these topics primarily in the context of large-scale interorganizational projects, major sports events, and religious organizations.

### ORCID

*Cato Christensen*  <http://orcid.org/0009-0003-8284-0774>

*Therese Dille*  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6149-3580>

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