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Editorial

Projects to create the future: Managing projects meets sustainable development

1. Why we think projects create the future

Concerns about the depletion of Earth's natural resources may date back as far as the early 18th century, when Saxon Mining Officer Hans Carl von Carlowitz published the first comprehensive treatise about sustainable yield forestry. However, it was the post-World War II economic growth era that sparked new concerns about the consequences of mankind's use of earth's natural resources. The 1972 book "The Limits to Growth" (Meadows et al., 1972) predicts that the exponential growth of world population and world economy will result in overshooting the planet's capacity of natural resources. And although there is not one single way to define or measure mankind's ecological footprint (Toderoiu, 2010), it is estimated that we are now every year using up 1.5 to 1.6 times earth's annual biocapacity.

Our current usage of natural resources cannot be considered sustainable. Development towards a sustainable society therefore requires change. The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development already concluded that "In essence, sustainable development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). So change is required.

Project in its essence means plan and includes as temporary organization the element of change (Lundin and Söderholm, 1995). With a project we plan and "project" the future and bring change to company, a region a society its individuals. Projects as vehicles for change therefore play a crucial role in the sustainable development of organizations and society (Marcelino-Sádaba et al., 2015). We therefore argue that project management has a vital role in contributing to sustainable development of organizations and society.

Since some years, the relevance of sustainable development for project management and the explicit or implicit consideration of sustainable development principles in managing projects is being discussed in academia and practice (Gareis et al., 2013; Maltzman and Shirley, 2011; Silvius et al., 2012; Keeys and Huemann, 2017a). Several studies (for example Aarseth et al., 2017-in this issue; Marcelino-Sádaba et al., 2015; Silvius and Schipper, 2014) report a significant growth in relevant publications in the last 10 years. It may therefore be observed that an academic conversation debate on the relation between project management and sustainability or sustainable development is emerging.

With this special IJPM theme on 'Managing Projects & Sustainability', the editors aim to continue, stimulate and enrich this conversation.

2. The thrive for sustainable development as an opportunity in project management

The temporary nature of projects is not logically compatible with the concepts of sustainable development, with its focus on long term horizons (Silvius et al., 2012: 30). The relation is made by the notion that projects initiate investments and deliver products or services (Weninger and Huemann, 2013).

In fact, the relation between sustainability development and projects is often considered on the content side, related to the definition of the *product or deliverable* of the project. In addition there is the *process or delivery* of the project (Gareis et al., 2013). This dichotomy of sustainability by the project and sustainability of the project, is a recurring theme in studies on project management and sustainability (for example Silvius and Schipper, 2015).

Labuschagne and Brent (2005) suggest that as the deliverable of a project is also shaped by the delivery process, the process and deliverable interact. Considering sustainable development principles in project management therefore requires considering not only the project life cycle, but also the life cycle of the deliverable of the project, and the artefacts this asset makes. Based on these interacting life cycles, Silvius et al. (2017-in this issue) conclude that 'Sustainable Project Management' implies an "*enlarged scope*" of the project.

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Next to the scope that needs to be considered, integrating the concepts of sustainability into project management also changes the aspects to be considered. Sustainable development is frequently associated with the Triple Bottom Line concept of balance or harmony between economic, social and environmental interests (Elkington, 1997). The Triple Bottom Line concept captures the essence of sustainability (Savitz, 2006). Applying the Triple Bottom Line in project management implies including environmental and social criteria, next to economic ones, in the evaluation of the business case of the project (Weninger and Huemann, 2013), the specification of the deliverables (Silvius and Schipper, 2014), the recognition of stakeholders (Eskerod and Huemann, 2013) the assessment of risks (Huemann and Ringhofer, 2016), etc.

While the Triple Bottom Line concept elaborates the essence of sustainability, Gareis et al. (2013) conclude that content related definitions of sustainability may be adequate to assess the deliverable of projects, but that they may not be adequate to cover the integration of sustainability principles into the process and management of projects. They therefore suggest a set of guiding principles for the management of projects, based on ethical considerations and values that support sustainability, for instance fairness, transparency, inclusion. Following this approach, Eskerod and Huemann (2013) link sustainable development, projects and the role of stakeholders, and conclude that there is a need "*to incorporating stakeholders and their interests in more project management activities*" (Eskerod and Huemann, 2013: 45). This proactive stakeholder engagement and participation is also a recurring element in studies on sustainability in project management (Silvius and Schipper, 2014; Keeys and Huemann, 2017b-in this issue).

Despite the growing literature base and the shared elements described above, 'Sustainable Project Management' (Martens and Carvalho, 2016), still lacks a precise definition (Silvius and Schipper, 2014). Based on their review of publications, Silvius and Schipper (2014) suggest: "*Sustainable Project Management is the planning, monitoring and controlling of project delivery and support processes, with consideration of the environmental, economic and social aspects of the life-cycle of the project's resources, processes, deliverables and effects, aimed at realizing benefits for stakeholders, and performed in a transparent, fair and ethical way that includes proactive stakeholder participation.*" This definition seems to value completeness more than compactness, but by doing that, succeeds in capturing the main elements we discussed above.

3. Objectives of this special theme

The aim of the special theme is to provide a platform for discussing how the changes that relate to the concerns for sustainability are changing the profession of project management. Given the challenges that society faces, sound academic knowledge about the integration of the concepts of sustainability into the processes, methods and practices of project management is vital for the further development of project management as a field. However, we do not aim to limit the discussion to project management in a narrow sense, but also see the relevance for integrating of sustainability principles into as program management, portfolio management and all the dimensions of project-oriented companies (Huemann, 2015).

4. Structure of this special theme

In the structure of the special issue, the editors aimed to first present the studies that approach the topic from a somewhat wider perspective, exploring how sustainability considerations are integrated in general in projects and project management, before presenting the studies that focus on specific types of projects, industries or cases.

In the article "Project Sustainability Strategies: A systematic Literature Review", the authors, Wenche Aarseth, Tuomas Ahola, Kirsi Aaltonen, Andreas Økland and Bjørn Andersen, explore the practices of integrating sustainability into projects and project management found in literature from two distinct perspectives: the project organization and the host organization. They identify and describe eight distinct strategies used by either organization, or both, in order to support their sustainability goals.

In the following article "Key Factors of Sustainability in Project Management Context: A Survey Exploring the Project Managers' Perspective", Mauro Martens and Marly M. Carvalho study how project managers view sustainability in the context of projects. Based on a survey study among Brazilian project managers, the research pointed out that the project managers interpreted the Triple Bottom Line concept of sustainability in four factors: Environmental Policies and Resources Saving, Economic and Competitive Advantage, Stakeholders Management and Sustainable Innovation Business Model. The authors conclude that by taking these four factors into account, project managers can improve their results.

The article "Critical Success Factors (CSFs) for Integration of Sustainability into Construction Project Management Practices in Developing Countries" by Saeed Banihashemi, Reza Hosseini, Hamed Golizadeh and Shankar Sankaran, looks at the critical success factors affecting integration of sustainability into project management practices of construction projects in developing countries. The study uncovers the perceptions of project managers in developing countries with regard to the level of importance and associations of critical success factors for integration of sustainability into project management practices in delivery of construction projects. Findings of the study highlight the crucial role of the CSFs associated with role of clients, as major financial providers, in the integration of innovative ideas in the projects. Innovative ideas are typically analysed and evaluated with regard to their potential applicability and functionality against key criteria such as cost and long-term performance. Findings of the study also draw attention to the crucial role of knowledge, sharing of knowledge among team members and establishing constructive relationships among stakeholders with regard to sustainability practices. Another finding of the study points to the central role of having a strategic direction and incorporating health and safety protocols into project management practices. However, the most influential CSFs for sustainability in project management were found to be