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NAVIGATING "PERMANENT" TEMPORALITY: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN PROJECT-ORIENTED NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS – A CONCEPTUAL ADAPTATION

ABSTRACT

This study explores the concept of permanent temporality within the project management frameworks of non-profit organizations dedicated to addressing Society 5.0 challenges through recurring project cycles. By analyzing survey data from the Polish non-profit sector, the research identifies a high degree of projectification and highlights unique tensions arising from the triple constraint of time, budget, and scope.

The paper utilizes a theoretical framework grounded in paradox theory, proposing permanent temporality as a specific contextual adaptation of existing temporality paradoxes. This approach allows for a nuanced distinction between project-oriented and non-project-oriented entities, revealing how managers must navigate the contradiction between short-term funding cycles and the long-term, sustainable implementation of an organization's mission.

The study concludes that permanent temporality is a pervasive phenomenon where transient project forms are multiplied into a permanent mode of activity. To manage these paradoxes, the author proposes corrective strategies such as mission-alignment audits, diversification of funding, and the implementation of project exit strategies. Future research should focus on international comparative analyses and exploring deprojectification as a conscious organizational choice.

KEYWORDS: *projectification, non-profit, permanent temporality, paradox, project management, financing, organization 5.0*

INTRODUCTION

The grand challenges of the contemporary era, alongside the evolution of Society 5.0, significantly influence how non-profit organizations execute their missions, provide aid, and pursue developmental goals. These organizations have become pivotal in addressing critical social and development issues by managing projects within defined temporal, budgetary, and structural constraints. Consequently, third-sector entities are increasingly serving as primary drivers of social initiatives, with projects becoming the most widely adopted mode of implementation. This widespread adoption has led to progressive projectification, which functions as a distinct organizational and management paradigm where projects often take precedence alongside the core mission. Recent research on the Polish non-profit sector highlights the expanding role of projectification within both operational and strategic domains (Małecka-Dobrogowska, 2025).

Projectification facilitates inter-organizational and cross-sectoral collaboration. However, scholarly interest in this phenomenon also reveals complex consequences across various organizational levels (Aguilar Velasco & Wald, 2022). While some researchers argue that projectification is an inevitable trend (Huemann, 2022; Nieto-Rodriguez, 2021), others observe emerging patterns of deprojectification (Jacobsson & Jałocha, 2025). This landscape is characterized by inherent organizational tensions and contradictions, positioning paradoxes as an unavoidable aspect of organizational life (Carmin & De Marchi, 2023). Therefore, the paradox lens offers a robust theoretical foundation for investigating specific dimensions of projectification (Ika & Munro, 2022; Jarzabkowski et al., 2019).

Non-profit organizations engaged in project-oriented activities often navigate dilemmas between prioritizing immediate project objectives and fulfilling their long-term mission. Furthermore, the transient character of project-based financing often conflicts with the pursuit of sustainable development (MałECKa-Dobrogowska, 2025). This is especially evident in organizations where projectification serves as the primary strategic pathway for securing external funding. The objective of this study is to apply paradox theory within the specific context of non-profit projectification. By doing so, this research formulates recommendations for identifying paradoxical tensions in mission-driven settings and suggests ways to mitigate them. Rather than proposing a fundamentally new category of paradox, this study introduces the concept of *permanent temporality* as a contextual adaptation and a supplementary approach to the established paradox of temporality identified in the literature.

This research addresses the following question:

1. To what extent do the contradictions observed in the accounts of non-profit sector representatives align with the established paradox of temporality, and how does the integration of *permanence* with temporal tensions offers a novel contextual perspective on this paradox?

These considerations aim to bridge the current gap in the literature regarding projectification and its accompanying paradoxes by analyzing the perspectives and evaluations provided by representatives of Polish non-profit organizations.

FROM TEMPORALITY TO "PERMANENT TEMPORALITY": A CONTEXTUAL ADAPTATION OF THEORETICAL APPROACH

The following section discusses the concept of paradox and organizational tensions that accompany managed projects. In management science, a paradox is defined as a persistent contradiction between interdependent elements that define its boundaries. As Lewis originally noted, a paradox points to elements that are contradictory but coexisting, which seem rational in isolation but absurd when they occur together (Lewis, 2000, s. 760). Tensions that take on the character of a paradox become a binary choice between alternatives for management (Schad et al., 2016, p. 6). The application of the concept of paradox in project management assumes that a paradox is defined by two characteristics. First, it manifests itself as *contradictory but interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time* (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 382). Second, it is characterized by *a persistent contradiction between interdependent elements* (Schad & Bansal, 2018, p. 10). The utilization of the paradox perspective facilitates a unified approach to research discourse, thus fostering a symbiotic relationship between the analysis and application of organizational and interorganizational phenomena (Wiewiora & Desouza, 2022). As indicated in the existing literature, the process of *unpacking* paradoxes, i.e., identifying tensions and contradictions, as well as resolving organizational management constraints within projects, is intended to provide long-term support for achieving project and organizational goals (Naderpajouh et al., 2023, s. 1). The need to analyze paradoxes in project research and methods for *unpacking* them are related to effective organizational action for the resilient, sustainable development of the organization. At the same time, analyzing and resolving internal and interorganizational paradoxes may be necessary for the successful implementation of project goals (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2010) and for the optimal functioning of the entire organization (Wiewiora & Desouza, 2022). The identification and analysis of paradoxes in complex interorganizational contexts may reveal *hidden* paradoxes — those that become dormant, overlooked, or ignored in certain parts of the system (Smith & Lewis, 2011). A review of the literature on project management in the context of the concept of paradox (Wiewiora & Desouza, 2022, p. 247), the paradox and tensions associated with

projectification (Fortes et al., 2023) and deprojectification (Jacobsson & Jałocha, 2025) point primarily to the nonlinear, often absurd nature of the paradox. A detailed examination of the nature of projectification and its financing, using the example of the non-profit sector, reveals a clear dichotomy between financial constraints and social value that relates to the broader context of non-profit project management (Buonomo et al., 2020). The tensions arise from the clash of two distinct but interrelated project needs: the need to meet the specific requirements of the project within a given time frame, scope, and budget, while at the same time prioritizing projects and projectification (Fortes et al., 2023; Jakobsen, 2022; Trocki, 2012), and, on the other hand, the accompanying need for organizational autonomy and sustainable, long-term development. Organizational behaviors defined in the paradox of temporality concerning mega-projects are identified by Wiewiora and Desouza (2022, pp. 242, 248) as focusing project financing cycles on short-term results (in line with project assumptions), preventing the sustainable and balanced implementation of the organization's long-term mission goals. There is a need for new observations in this area, justifying the research gap in the study of such behaviors and organizational tensions (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Wiewiora & Desouza, 2022). This study attempts to identify the paradox in the results of empirical research conducted in Poland, using a larger sample and a mixed-methods approach, and to emphasize the validity of the gap identified at the outset of these considerations. To address this gap, the concept of *permanent temporality* is proposed. Rather than introducing a new ontological category of paradox, this concept is defined as a contextual adaptation of the paradox of temporality (Smith & Lewis, 2011), specifically tailored to the NGO sector. While traditional temporality paradoxes in project management often focus on the *short-term vs. long-term* horizon within a single project, *permanent temporality* captures a meta-level tension: the organizational state where the ephemeral nature of project-based work becomes a constant, structural feature of the entity. This creates a specific *tension of persistence*, requiring the organization to continuously reinvent its temporary foundations to achieve permanent social goals. By clarifying this distinction, the paper contributes to the theory of projectification by illustrating how the intensification of project-based funding impacts the organization's permanent pillars, rendering them permanently temporary.

PROJECTIFICATION OF NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Projectification, as a contemporary concept in the development and management of organizations, has become a common element in the activities of entities, including the non-profit sector. As a concept that enhances the management of non-profit organizations, it presents the non-profit sector in an innovative way, from the perspective of projects implemented by organizations and the typology of identified attributes of projectification at the personal, organizational, and social levels of a projectized entity (Małecka-Dobrogowska, 2025). Non-profit organizations, including foundations and associations, carry out their mission while maintaining a non-commercial, non-profit nature. They raise funds, establish cross-sector partnerships, allocate resources, and operate on a project basis (Löfström, 2025). The evolution of public policy, both that promoted by the European Union and by regional or local entities, has led to a paradigm shift in which projects are no longer the exception, and their management has become a mechanism for implementing the statutory and mission-related activities of the non-profit sector. A significant number of organizations, including non-profit entities, especially in the European Union, operate under a project-based funding model (Jacobsson & Jałocha, 2025; Jakobsen, 2022; Löfström, 2025; Małecka-Dobrogowska, 2025). In contemporary society, projects have become a common method of achieving these goals. Increasingly, all aspects of life and society are viewed through a project-oriented lens. This phenomenon is observed in the daily activities of individuals (Berglund et al., 2020), organizations, and entire societies, known as the *projectification of everything* (Jensen et al., 2016). The concept of projectification as the dominant strategy for managing non-profit organizations is invoked in the context of discourses on the project society or global trends in the impact of projectification on economic and social development, as manifested in the ever-increasing share of project work (Schooper et al., 2018; Wald et al., 2025). A review of the existing literature reveals a growing number of studies on economies, societies, and specific organizations that demonstrate the social and economic dimensions of this phenomenon (Voros Fregolente et al., 2022). The above theoretical considerations on the nature of paradox and projectification are treated as a framework for assessing the paradoxical tensions identified in the study of non-profit organizations in

Poland (Małecka-Dobrogowska, 2026). This study is part of a broader research initiative that assesses the scale of projectification and its impact from the perspective of future research (Małecka-Dobrogowska, 2025). The results of this task were analyzed here using the perspective of the paradox of temporality.

RESEARCH METHODS

The general research was conducted as a computer assisted web interview, between 2021 and 2022, with the sample of 385 Polish non-profit organizations. The primary objective was to determine the scope and characteristics of projectification within the non-profit sector. To quantify this phenomenon, a projectification indicator, defined as the percentage of time dedicated to projects in relation to total working time (Schoper et al., 2018; Wald et al., 2025) was utilized. To capture the qualitative differences between project-oriented entities and organizations that do not implement projects, in the survey questionnaire, open-ended question was included. The high level of engagement among the respondents, all of whom had practical experience in project implementation, aligns with the assumptions of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2012). The open-ended and anonymous nature of the question allowed for the collection of nuanced information that traditional direct survey methods might have overlooked. Before analysis, the qualitative data underwent a rigorous filtering process to remove missing statements, duplicates, and non-substantive responses (e.g., *don't know*). This resulted in a final dataset of 287 valid qualitative responses, which were then analyzed thematically using NVivo software. The general research material was then organized according to selected key phrases by assigning them to expert-formulated semantic clusters that formed content centers. These clusters were then analyzed in relation to existing paradoxical paradigms in the literature. Using a systematic multi-stage coding procedure in NVivo, four paradox-related clusters were identified (Małecka-Dobrogowska, 2026), with one specifically serving as the conceptual foundation for the 'permanent temporality' framework – treated in this study as a contextual adaptation of the established paradox of temporality. To ensure the reliability of the analysis, the qualitative findings were

triangulated through expert content analysis and participatory observation within author's own organization. This validation procedure was essential to minimize researcher bias and to ensure that the semantic clusters accurately represented the diversity of experiences within the Polish non-profit sector.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative data identifies several critical tensions and conflicting assessments raised by representatives of Polish non-profit organizations. By applying the lens of paradox theory, I examined how these organizations perceive the structural and operational differences between project-oriented entities and those that do not implement projects. As suggested by Carmine and De Marchi (2023), paradoxes are a tangible and inevitable experience for every organization, and this study confirms that projectification in the third sector is a primary source of such contradictions.

A fundamental tension identified in the study concerns the perceived continuity generated by inherently transient activities. While organizations operating without projects are described as acting *on an ad hoc basis*, project-oriented entities reported a sense of *continuity of support and funding*. This presents a striking paradox: although projects are by definition limited by the *triple constraint* (time, budget, and scope), they are perceived as the primary mechanism for ensuring organizational permanence. As respondents observed, project-based organizations often guarantee:

Continuity and stability of operation... versus action-orientation, lack of permanence, and funding in organizations operating without projects.

In this context, the *temporary nature* of the project is paradoxically transformed into a foundation for stability. This finding aligns with the theoretical basis for studying projectification through the concept of paradox, as established by Jarzabkowski et al. (2019), where contradictory elements are shown to coexist and persist over time (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

It is worth to highlight a tension regarding resource acquisition and human resource management in the context of *permanent temporality*. Respondents

emphasized that for many non-profits, the primary difference lies in the *ability to hire staff* and *revenue generation*. Projectification allows these entities to maintain a *permanent team* and a *fixed budget*, even though the funding for these positions is strictly tied to short-term project cycles.

The following statements underscore this duality:

A project-based non-profit organization creates a permanent team, accompanied by a stable budget, which further increases the stability of the organization. Projects can employ staff for whom there is no funding outside the project.

This leads to what was identified in this study as apparent stability. While the team appears permanent, its existence is dependent on the continuous multiplication of short-term project forms. This reflects a deeper contradiction: the security of employment is inextricably linked to the very transience of the funding source. Furthermore, respondents noted that this work is often *more demanding and stressful* due to the *very detailed control* inherent in project implementation.

The synthesis of these empirical findings leads to the conceptualization of the paradox of *permanent* temporality. To clarify the theoretical contribution, this concept is not a fundamentally new category, but a specific contextual adaptation of the established paradox of temporality discussed in the literature in the project context (e.g. megaprojects by Wiewiora & Desouza, 2022). This adaptation captures the ongoing tension between an organization's focus on short-term or immediate goals (covering costs, hiring staff) and its commitment to long-term results and preparations for the future (mission, sustainability). The data indicates that *permanent* temporality can manifest as a *departure from the mission and autonomy* when short-term project goals override long-term strategic visions. By systematically linking these respondents' assessments with paradox literature, this study demonstrates how the Polish non-profit sector navigates the complex intersection of organizational survival and the relentless cycles of projectification.

CONCLUSIONS

The intensification of project-based work in the Polish non-profit sector, particularly since Poland's accession to the European Union, has fundamentally redefined management practices and the execution of organizational missions. This study demonstrates that projectification is not merely a technical management tool for resource acquisition but a profound social and cultural phenomenon that redefines how missions are carried out, affects the structure of employment, and influences relationships with both internal and external stakeholders. The primary contribution of this research is the conceptualization of the paradox of *permanent* temporality, which I explicitly propose not as a fundamentally new category of paradox but as a specific contextual adaptation of the established paradox of temporality discussed in the literature. This adaptation captures the inherent contradiction revealed in the accounts of non-profit representatives, specifically the use of time-limited and budget-constrained project cycles to construct a sense of organizational permanence and mission continuity.

The findings of this study, grounded in the systematic thematic analysis of elicited texts, confirm that projectification in the third sector creates a state of apparent stability. While projects are strictly defined by the triple constraint of time, budget, and scope, they paradoxically serve as the primary mechanism for maintaining a permanent team and a fixed budget. As the empirical data indicates, project-oriented organizations are distinguished by their ability to raise money and hire staff for whom funding would not exist otherwise, yet this stability is transient and dependent on the relentless multiplication of short-term project forms into a permanent activity. This state of permanent temporality leads to significant organizational strain where the pressure to achieve immediate goals such as covering administrative costs can lead to a departure from the mission and autonomy. Furthermore, the results show that the triple constraint functions as a source of stress and detailed control, making work in project-oriented entities significantly more demanding than in traditional organizations.

In response to these identified tensions and following the need for more operational guidelines, I propose several corrective strategies designed to

manage these paradoxes. First, organizations should implement formal mission-alignment audits during the project selection phase to ensure that potential projects contribute to long-term statutory goals rather than just financial feasibility. Furthermore, to mitigate the precariousness of permanent temporality, non-profit organizations must actively integrate project-based funding with other revenue streams like social enterprise activities and sustainable fundraising to reduce dependency on single grant cycles. Managers should also strive to build stable employment structures around a core team by creating internal cross-project talent pools that allow employees to transition between projects, providing a sense of continuity and reducing the stress associated with transient positions. Finally, it is essential to operationalize project exit strategies by formally allocating resources for the space between projects, which allows for institutional reflection and financial strengthening.

This study, while methodologically rigorous, has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The conclusions are grounded in the subjective assessments of non-profit representatives, reflecting their personal perceptions of organizational reality. Additionally, the participants were primarily from organizations already active in project implementation, which may have influenced the perception of projectification as an inevitable necessity and limited the representation of those who avoid the project-based model. The geographical focus on the Polish non-profit sector also means that the specific legal and financial frameworks of the country may limit the immediate generalizability of these findings to other international settings. Moreover, the study lacks long-term longitudinal data that could track the evolution of *permanent* temporality over multiple organizational and project life cycles.

Regarding future research directions, it is essential to conduct international and cross-cultural comparisons to enhance the generalizability of the permanent temporality concept and reveal how different institutional environments influence the management of temporal tensions. Future studies should also shift the focus toward the long-term impact on beneficiaries and local communities to assess how project cycles affect the sustainability of social impact. There is also a critical need to explore deprojectification as a conscious organizational choice, identifying the conditions under which projectification ceases to be an effective concept for development.

Finally, future research could develop quantitative scales to measure the intensity of paradoxical tensions across the entire non-profit sector, providing a broader statistical analysis of these multidimensional challenges.

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