

Trapped in another field

Mission-drift in a social venture engaged in a public partnership

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ABSTRACT (Max. 300 words):

“I’m going to give you a memory blank” says the tall and coloured young neighbour in a threatening tone. To my “tough, hey?” he answers, “do you think that I don’t beat women?” A few minutes later, that same young man, together with a few others from the gang, are throwing stones onto Frida Kahlo Mural Art Centre’s large windows, breaking one of them. It is a sunny day in the beginning of June 2012 and Förorten i Centrum (FiC), the social initiative running Frida Kahlo, has been trying to get established in Seved (Malmö, Sweden) for the previous three months.

Förorten i Centrum is a social entrepreneurial venture started in Stockholm in 2010. Through collective mural art processes, the organisation engages in community-building efforts in order to nuance the defamed prevalent image of the stigmatised suburbs and their residents. By visualising in major outdoor walls alternative stories of the suburbs, FiC aims to counter the territorial stigmatisation of some of our most vulnerable urban suburbs (Wacquant, 2007). Through the collective production of large murals in public spaces, residents are organised and given a platform to raise up their voices. From its origins in 2010 till that summer of 2012, the organisation had successfully carried eight community murals in the Swedish capital alone. Expansion to Sweden’s southern city of Malmö proved more difficult though. Initially hopeful by the adamant support from the City of Malmö’s Administration, FiC did not realise that it had been co-opted by the field of City Management into addressing a social problem for which it did not have the resources nor the knowledge and which was beyond its original mission.

Taking FiC’s efforts as the starting point, the essay paper the potential risky life of social initiatives expanding to different cities. It uses Bourdieu’s notion of ‘field’ to analyse the varied stakes and differing logics of the actors involved in Seved’s conflict. Mission-drift will thus be considered as the result of the co-optation of the non-profit organisation by the field of city management, a field whose actors’ stakes differ from those of the non-profit. The analysis shows that the structure of the collaborating fields is particular to each context (the city of Malmö in this case) and thus, FiC’s expansion to Malmö is a reminder of the importance of understanding contextual forces and interests for expanding social initiatives to new urban contexts, even when these are in the same country.

KEY WORDS

Social venture, city suburb, public partnership, mission-drift

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“I’m going to give you a memory blank” says the tall and coloured young neighbour in a threatening tone. To my “tough, hey?” he answers, “do you think that I don’t beat women?” A few minutes later, that same young man, together with a few others from the gang, are throwing stones onto Frida Kahlo Mural Art Centre’s large windows, breaking one of them. It is a sunny day in the beginning of June 2012 and Förorten i Centrum (FiC), the social entrepreneurial initiative running Frida Kahlo, has been trying to get established in Seved (Malmö, Sweden) for the previous three months.

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Indeed, the City of Malmö had rapidly agreed to support FiC economically and administratively and it had resolutely asked the organisation to open a community centre in what later showed up to be the city’s most dangerous street corner. From March 2012, when FiC opened the Mural Art Centre, the organisation shared the corner made by Rasmus Street and Sofia Lane with a gang of young men who engaged in drug-dealing in broad day light. Unsurprisingly, the gang did not like to share the street corner with the community arts non-profit. That is, the threats and violence the organisation’s employees were experiencing were more than simply sign of spiralling violence in Seved, the neighbourhood where FiC had decided to establish in Malmö. Direct violence was the immediate, most visible aspect of the more complex problem the organisation was confronted with. In its efforts to scale-up by expanding into a new city, the non-profit had drifted away from its original mission. Seemingly inconsequential, the difference in goals and priorities between the non-profit’s new external stakeholders (the City of Malmö Administration) and the non-profit’s management team put the organisation into a course which was not the one it had set out to work with.

Taking FiC’s efforts to expand into a new city as starting point, the essay discusses the potential risky life of social entrepreneurial initiatives engaging in partnerships with the public sector. It uses Bourdieu’s notion of ‘field’ to analyse the varied stakes and differing logics of the actors involved in Seved’s conflict as well as in the public-private partnership. Mission-drift will thus be considered as the result of the co-optation of the non-profit organisation by the field of city management, a field which actors pursue interests and have stakes other than those of the non-profit. The analysis shows that the structure of the collaborating fields is particular to each context (the city of Malmö in this case) and thus, FiC’s expansion to Malmö is a reminder of the importance of understanding contextual forces and interests for the establishment and work of social entrepreneurial initiatives.

THE STATE AND THE CIVIL SECTOR: A SHIFTING MARRIAGE?

In the midst of one of the worst financial, economic and social crises in post-war history an ideological disagreement has come to dominate the debate in the West. On the one hand, right wing inclined observers regard the State at best as an outdated way of meeting needs and generating demand; at worst as deterrent to business initiative, efficient service delivery and citizen action. On the other side of the spectrum, left wing inclined analysts consider the State to be a central actor in providing welfare services, supporting the business sector, developing citizen capacity and strengthening civil society. That is, the “Big Society debate” – as it has been dubbed in the UK – is largely an ideological debate on the role to be played by the State in our societies in general and in alleviating the current crisis in particular. It is, too, a debate on the consequent role to be played by civil society at large, and the non-profit sector in particular.

In this vein, non-profit organisation scholars offer theoretical elaborations and empirical descriptions of the challenges faced by the civil society sector due to the rise of a neo-liberal rationality (Lemke, 2007) and the retrenchment of the welfare state. These scholars highlight that the restructuring of the state has resulted in the growth of the voluntary sector, which is increasingly *taking over* the provision of social services. As such, the third sector is being referred to as the “shadow state” (Mitchell, 2001; Wolch, 1989). Accordingly, these analysts have increasingly focused on the relationship between service provider (the non-profit organisation or private initiative) and service commissioner (often, local government), the sector’s ability to consistently generate sufficient resources, its tendency to focus on particular population groups leading to gaps in service coverage and duplication of services, its traditionally non-professional approach to coping with social and welfare problems, and the consequences of the growing significance of voluntarism in the provision of welfare services.

Such studies shed light on the implications of shifting the burden of welfare service provision from the state to the non-profit sector (Hall and Reed, 1998). Decentralization and privatization of welfare service provision has led to the emergence of complex institutional arrangements in which the nonprofit sector has been enrolled in the government of pre-defined population groups. Within the increased neo-liberal trend, that is, the nonprofit sector contributes to expand power well beyond the State (Rose and Miller, 1992). Insightful as these studies are, they suffer, however, from their original interest on welfare service provision which leads them to overlook that much of the recent growth in the sector is driven by a distinct ambition to achieve social change. Studying non-profits’ provision of social services moves the focus away from the way in which these initiatives challenge (or reproduce) the very structures at the root of the social problem they serve.

Students and practitioners of social entrepreneurship, on the other hand, stress the belief that introducing market rationalities and modes of operation into the civil society sector will make that sector more effective thus bringing democracy, social progress and social change (Prahalad, 2005; Fowler, 2000). Telling of the entrenchment of this belief is the actual choice of term – “social entrepreneurship” – often reformulating traditional civil society initiatives – from women’s groups and ethnic minorities associations to initiatives for the homeless – into “the business of doing good.” Some have denounced the consequent increased marketization of the non-profit sector (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004) that results in foundations introducing market-based criteria – such as return on investment and the potential to scale up – to decide what initiative to fund, enforcing competition and closely supervising the organisation supported (John, 2006).

Distinct as they are, both lines of research share a common starting point. Both research strands subsume to the dualist logic structuring the right- vs. left-wing debate. Either the market is the silver bullet that is to solve the crisis of the welfare state, or it is a safe way to further marginalise social groups that are not profitable; either public-private/civil collaborations are a way to enrol the civic sector in the provision of welfare, or they effectively expand the reach of government; either vulnerable social groups are met with the care and empathy only possible from a bottom-up approach, or coverage is limited to social groups for which funding or a market exists.

Although both positions in the debate do have arguments worth considering when discussing the shifting public-private relationship, both ignore that the public sphere and the sphere of private and non-profit initiatives cannot be separated. The central question is not what role should one or the other play, but rather how do both actors relate to each other. What are the relations of force that structure their everyday practices in local communities? How do political struggles internal to one actor influence the terms of the relationship? How is the particular social issue framed differently by actors' diverging logics and how are such differences negotiated? That is, we need to look at the power dimensions organising interaction between state, private, and civil society actors.

This essay is an effort to nuance the debate. By looking at a particular collaboration between a local state actor, a private organisation and a non-profit initiative, the chapter sheds light on the tortuous and shifting nature of everyday interactions between local state actors and particular non-profit organisations in which welfare goals are ongoingly produced, interpreted and negotiated and through which non-profit organisations resist becoming part of an extended government apparatus.

FÖRORTEN I CENTRUM: A CASE STUDY AND A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Aware of the founding violence of the “immigrant” category and driven by a will to overcome the stigma befallen on the ethnic other, I started the non-profit organisation Förorten i Centrum in the spring of 2010. The organisation works with residents of all ethnic backgrounds, gender and age profiles. Using the process of collectively producing mural paintings in outdoor walls, Förorten i Centrum brings together established middle-class young Swedes living in the city center with the stigmatized youth of immigrant background from the suburbs. By this doing, we hope to contribute at countering the socio-economic split at the root of categorical dichotomies distinguishing and separating between the ‘have’ and ‘have-nots’, the ‘techie’ and the ‘non-techie’, the ‘Swede’ and the ‘non-Swede’, the ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Barinaga, 2010). For, as Loïc Wacquant argues, independently of the objective reality behind those categories, the prejudicial belief that such categories imply “suffices to set off socially noxious consequences” (Wacquant, 2007).

For the first two years, the organisation successfully carried over eight collective murals in Stockholm. As a result, Förorten i Centrum was granted funding to further expand to the Swedish southern city of Malmö in the spring of 2012. But Förorten i Centrum will in this paper be not only an empirical case from which to learn the various challenges faced by social entrepreneurial initiatives. Since the paper follows the community-engaged social entrepreneurial initiative that I founded and continue to chair, Förorten i Centrum will also be expression of a methodological approach: that of engaged scholarship.

Engaged scholarship is a practice that stresses the critical and transformational importance of co-constructed research involving both academics and the communities we work with. Finding fault in the current relation between the universe of the university and that of its surrounding community, Ernest L. Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation, urged us to “connect the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers and to our cities...” (Boyer, 1996). Particularly in North America, Boyer’s plea sparked a movement of scholarly efforts to engage with the most disenfranchised communities beyond university campuses.

Practically, engaged scholarship implies reciprocal, collaborative relations with the public that aim at the amelioration of communities, the co-production of knowledge, and the articulation of university practices embedded in the localities outside the campus. Through dialogue, community service, civic engagement, advocacy, mobilization or community building – that is, through participation in the organisation of civic forces –, scholars are part of progressive efforts to carve spaces for political engagement.

Epistemologically, efforts at involvement on equal terms have added nuance to discussions on representation. Acting simultaneously as activists and researchers, engaged scholars travel the “blurred boundary when Other becomes researcher, narrated becomes narrator, translated becomes translator, native becomes anthropologist” (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 166). Overcoming the objective, neutral observer of traditional ethnography, and moving beyond the individual, subjective selves of phenomenology and postmodern ethnography, activist researchers are forced to critically reflect on how one’s subjectivity continuously informs and is informed by one’s relation with and representation of the Other (Madison, 2004). In that reflection, these activist researchers use Haraway’s (1988) notion of positionality to move beyond understandings of objectivity and subjectivity. “A doctrine of embodied objectivity”, positionality in the communities she studies and participates in allows the activist researcher to engage in manufacturing situated knowledges – “partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology” (Haraway, 1988:584).

A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP: COLLABORATING ACROSS BOURDIEUIAN FIELDS

Seved is a district within Malmö’s Sofielund City Borough. Along with Herrgård in Rosengård, Holma and Lindängen, Seved is a priority in the city’s work to reduce street criminality, improve its social work and reach to the most socio-economic vulnerable families. Indeed, unemployment in Seved is well above the national average (47% had a job, cpr. to 64% for Malmö), social welfare dependency is among the highest in Sweden, and only 75% of the youth completed school. Less visible in the statistics though more important for city managers was that organised drug-dealing ruled street life in Seved, with some of the district’s teenagers being involved in it. Seved had in fact been central to the increasing defamation in the media of the City of Malmö based on its alleged inability to manage its population of immigrant background. Increasing the number of social workers active in the district, setting up a community centre open to all residents, strengthening youth houses as well as other associational life, initiating broad collaborations between the school, museums and other city institutions, and starting summer job programs for the youth, everyone with an administrative responsibility in the Sofielund City Borough had been given the mandate to see what they could do to

address poverty and vulnerability in Seved. Thus, Anders Malmquist's (at the time Director for Sofielund City Borough) eagerness to collaborate with FiC was not surprising.

In fact, the social enterprise's collaboration with the City Borough's Administration proved instrumental in getting access to paint legally in outdoor walls. During autumn 2011 I met city administrators and civil servants in Seved, among which, Hjalmar Falck. Hjalmar was "Seved's co-ordinator", the Borough's man in the field or, as they put it, "the spider in the net, that co-ordinates all activities, networks and actors in Seved" – from social workers, the school, and the police to private property owners, local non-profits and youth houses. Seeing the potential of having FiC in Seved, Hjalmar organised a meeting between five property owners, two social workers and me already in October 2011. That is, the field of City Management quickly mobilised its bureaucratic and social capital and offered it to FiC. As a result, before the organisation had even opened its doors in the city, and thanks to public officials' mediation, four property owners were offering their walls for the non-profit to paint on, a preliminary timeline had been discussed, and other actors to involve (such as the local school) were being invited to collaborate. It was the quick accessibility to walls and partnerships in Seved that decided the neighbourhood FiC was going to start working with. Yet, as Bourdieu reminds us, "decisions are merely choices among possibles, defined, in their limits, by the structure of the field" (Bourdieu, 2005, p.197). Far from being a decision taken by free well informed civil society agents with a wide spectrum of options, FiC (and I with it) chose to expand to Seved for that was the option the field of City Management, with which FiC was collaborating, prioritised.

Further, by March 2012, a deal was struck between FiC, a private property owner and the City of Malmö. Lars Andersson Properties, who owned several dwellings in Seved, formally agreed to let FiC both outdoors walls to paint on and premises where to open a mural centre. Lars Andersson had been unable to rent the premises for the previous couple of years and, as he put it when letting them to FiC, "it cannot get worse, it can only get better." The City of Malmö would pay the first six months of rent of the mural centre. In other words, an alliance between the public field of City administration, the private field of property owners and the civil society sector was building up in Seved. FiC naively engaged in the triadic partnership, ignorant that stakes and priorities to be satisfied with the collaboration were structured differently in each field:

City of Malmö as a Bourdieuan field – Often defamed for its organised criminality and high level of unemployment among its population of immigrant background, Herrgård in Rosengård, Holma and Lindängen, as well as Seved had become central in the City's struggle for recognition of its city management abilities. For those civil administrators working at Sofielund City Borough, Seved's development was pegged, to a certain extent, to their own legitimacy in the field of city management. This was particularly exacerbated by the discussions, going on at that moment, of re-organising the City's administrative boroughs from ten to five. Such a re-organisation would have very direct consequences on Anders Malmqvist's position as the borough he directed was to be merged with the neighbouring borough. His continuation as a borough director was thus at risk. As he would admit a few months later, on November 2012, "for us, it is a matter of doing things in Seved. I have a strong political pressure put on me." Collaborating with FiC was thus a means to calm down the situation in Seved, to answer to the political struggles within the City of Malmö, and to achieve recognition within the field of city management in Malmö.

Private property owners as a field – One of the consequences of street criminality had been the property owner’s inability to rent out the property located in the derided street corner. Governed by the economic logic that structures the field of property owners, Lars Andersson saw in FiC a partner in improving the atmosphere in the street and hopefully, at a later stage, rent out his premises.

Civil society sector as a field – Solving Seved’s street violence was far from the objectives of the non-profit organisations present in Seved (from FiC, to the allotment gardens association or the Somalian association). These organisations’ goals were focused in mobilising the community/residents (in general for FiC and the gardens association, residents with Somali background for the Somalian association). Guided by a community logic, FiC’s stakes were committed to raising the voices of the residents and thus representing (in both senses of the term, visualising and acting as spokes-agent) the community.

In sum, the actors involved in Seved did not play in the same field, the game in each field characterized by the field’s unique logic and specific stakes.

Field	Interest	Logic of the particular field
City Management	Pacify the street.	State/bureaucratic logic (top-down approach). Actors’ recognition lies in the way Seved is reported.
Local private business	Rent out their premises (for which pacification of street was necessary).	Economic logic.
Civil society (FiC in particular)	Re-frame Seved (change the general image of Seved through raising the voices of those silenced/stigmatized).	Community-engagement logic (bottom-up approach). Their legitimacy/recognition lies on the extent to which residents support, and are involved in, FiC’s community-based mural processes.

The problem FiC faced in Seved was thus not only a problem of neighbourhood violence. What at first sight seemed a problem of employees’ security due to increased community violence is, at a closer look, a more complex problem of conflict of logics between, on the one side, the field of City Management (Sofielund City Borough) and to a lesser extent Lars Andersson’s Properties and, on the other side, FiC and civil society organisations in general. Embedded in their own fields (city management and the local economic field), these actors had welcome FiC to serve their interests in the struggles in their own fields. Thus, City managers quickly embraced FiC for what it could contribute to manage and pacify a criminal area. Similarly, property owners appreciated FiC work to the extent it could ameliorate its economic prospects.

In the battle over the definition of the collaboration, its goals and its future, logics and ways of working need not be entirely exclusive, partial combinations of work methods are not to be left out. Yet, as we will see in the next section, the non-profit, being the smallest and weakest actor, risks being co-opted by the struggles of a field that is not its own, leading the organisation to drift away from its original mission.

MISSION-DRIFT: CO-OPTED BY THE FIELD OF CITY MANAGEMENT

Indeed, as FiC's team set out to renovate the run-down premises that were to become Frida Kahlo Mural Centre, the organisation became aware of the conflict of interests inherent to the triadic collaboration. In April 2012, FiC's Malmö team realised it was sharing the street corner with an organised drug-dealing gang. It was a core group of six to eight young men that ruled the street and some twenty other that saw up to them. Although most of them lived in Seved, a couple came from the neighbouring borough of Rosengård. Several of them had been detained and held under custody for aggressive behaviour, street vandalism, and violent threats, although none had served sentence yet.

It needs to be mentioned that they were the sons, brothers, cousins, friends and neighbours of those FiC wanted to work with, thus residents' ambiguous attitudes towards them. On the one hand, neighbours often complained of having their windows broken, not daring to walk past the street corner, and night's frequent racket and quarrels. Yet, on the other hand, residents in Seved readily defended "our kids for it is society that has never given them any chance." "It's jobs they need, yet nobody ever offers them one. All they do is to send the police to Seved." What's more, at times, residents expressed exasperation with established actors who they saw unwilling to truly solve Seved's conflict. "They would lose their jobs were they to solve Seved's problem."

In mid-May growing agitation started to become noticeable. In an effort to end drug-dealing in the open street, the police in collaboration with Hjalmar Falck had given Ziyad's Groceries two months notice to close down his business. The small grocery store was located some 50 meters from the infamous street corner and much of the drug dealing was carried in the little shop under the owner's blind eye. According to Hjalmar and the police, Ziyad's closure was connected to the young men's increased anxiety, which was expressed in more threats to neighbours, more stones thrown to residents' windows and more night brawls. A couple of neighbours even reported seeing them in the inner yards making Molotov cocktails. Attacking Frida Kahlo Mural Centre as well was only a matter of time.

To be sure, one of FiC's team members was verbally abused on May 18 and physically attacked on May 25 when she was closing Frida for the day. A few days later, on Monday, June 11, the FiC's Malmö team in its entirety was verbally attacked and physically threatened while they held a meeting inside Frida Kahlo Mural Centre. One of Frida's windows was, for the second time in the last three weeks, broken, fixed on the afternoon that same day, only to be broken again the day after.

Spiraling violence in Seved was not merely the capricious actions of a gang of men high on drugs. It emerges from the interactions, actions and reactions of actors in various fields, actors' whose approaches to Seved are given by the logic in their respective fields. Related to the conflict of field logics described in the previous section, we find those actors defined the problem in Seved differently, each definition corresponding to the way in which each field can address the problem so defined and thus achieve political gain in their own fields. Accordingly, city managers saw the problem as one of increased violence, residents as one of lack of jobs, FiC as one of lack of power.

Residents – On the one hand, neighbors often complained of having their windows broken, not daring to walk past the street corner, and night's frequent racket and quarrels. Yet, on the other hand, residents in Seved readily defended "our kids for it is society that has never given them any chance." "It's jobs they need, yet nobody ever offers them one. All they do is to send the police to Seved."

Residents moved Seved's problem from the individual level of the criminal activities of a few residents to the structural level of lack of jobs and (implicitly) ethnic bias/segregation.

FiC's original mission was receptive to the bias of the establishment implied in the comments from the residents. Indeed, the very reason to start FiC was to address residents' frustration and discontent with the prevalent image of their suburb and its dwellers of immigrant background. This, the biased public debate of those classified as "immigrants", the stigma befallen the areas where they lived, was the core of the problem the non-profit organisation had set out to address. This was in line with residents' structural definition of the problem. Thus, the solution FiC offered was raising a collective voice that could resist dominant discourse/stigma.

City managers – Theirs is an individualist definition of the problem, in which a group of young male residents intimidate all other residents in the neighborhood. Thus, the solutions they offered were all addressed to pacify the area by removing individual felons from the street and by closing down those places where they carried their criminal activities. It is in this light that one can understand why FiC was offered to open the Mural Centre in the most conflictive corner of the neighborhood. In a way, FiC was used as a human shield in a war that was not the one FiC had set out to fight. That is, FiC was co-opted for a conflict other than its own. While FiC's mission was to raise the voices of the stigmatised residents, the non-profit had been used as a tool to pacify the neighbourhood.

Further, the management of the incidents of June 2012 by the various actors also evidenced the police's stakes in the borough. For instance, the police filed two police reports when only I had made one. Concerned for their families' security, the rest of FiC's Malmö team had declined making any report when the police took testimony immediately after the aggressions. It took one of FiC's team members several phone calls and a couple of visits to the police station to take his report (supposedly the second one) down. In a further move, the police tipped Sydsvenskan, the biggest regional daily newspaper, on the happenings of June 11. FiC's Malmö-team suspected that what the police was after was to increase the number of reports and get media attention in order to increase the budget assigned to them for Seved.

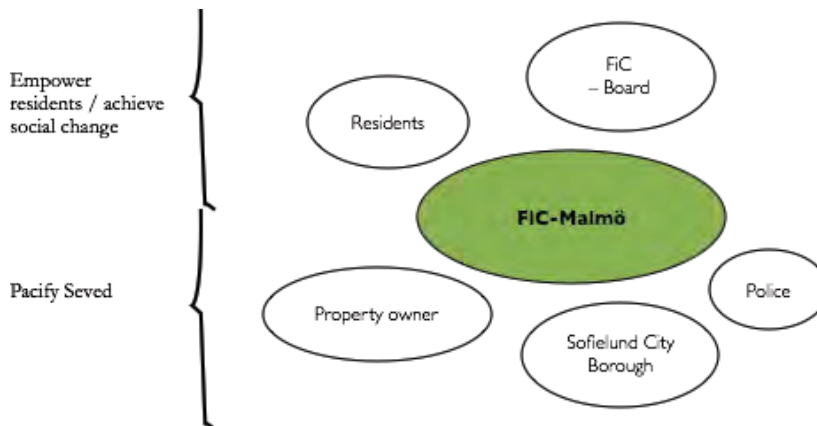


Diagram summarising the stakes actors had, not in Seved, but in FiC

While residents and FiC board's related to social change concerning participation of the suburbs in the public debate, the City of Malmö's, Sofielund City Borough's and the police's interests was to pacify

Seved. Attending to the later did not necessarily conduct to the interest of the former. Indeed, as the article in Sydsvenska is an example of, FiC was contributing to Seved being further derided in the public debate. The Malmö team of FiC that is, had been made captive to the interests of the apparatus within the autonomous field of city managers.

DISCUSSION

An important lesson from the case at hand is that agreeing on methods is not equivalent to agreeing on goals. Public agencies and small non-profit organisations struggle in different fields and have different stakes. The logic of the field of city administrators differs to that of the non-profit sector. Performance in each field is rewarded differently. Thus, although actors in each field may share target group and agree on working methods, their belonging to fields with different logics can easily result in different interpretations of what initially seemed a shared goal. The different institutional logics as well as the different power dynamics in each field resulted in disagreement concerning the ultimate goal of intervention. A small, still fragile, start-up collaborating with a established public agency may unawarely see its organisation being co-opted for the satisfaction of political interests other than those of the start-up. Further, its economic sustainability being dependent on collaborations with the public sector, may incline the non-for-profit organisation to accept the public agency's translation of its goal thus leading it to drift further away from its original mission.

That is, the pressure to expand (and build partnerships with new stakeholders immersed in different power/field struggles) may come at the cost of drifting away from the organisational mission. An analysis of the structure of the field of city agents (police, borough administrators – the new stakeholders) and the logic governing the struggles in that field is thus central to understand the extent to which the non-profit initiative had been co-opted by its new partners in the pursuit of their own political gain. Mission-drift can thus be considered as the result of the co-optation of the organisation by city officials pursuing other interests than those of the non-profit. This invites a discussion of a non-profit's selection of partners when scaling-up.

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