Development Policy Review

Civil society organizations and managerialism: On the depoliticization of the adaptive management agenda

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Summary

Motivation: In the last decade, a movement formed around making aid delivery more adaptive, relying on principles such as context-sensitivity, flexibility and ownership. The approaches seem promising for civil society organizations (CSOs) to fulfil their mission of fostering social transformation. While several donor agencies have started engaging with such approaches, the authors hardly see their political implications in practice.

Purpose: The article aims to provide evidence on an adaptive project and demonstrate how the social transformative and political nature of adaptive development management is rendered technical and is depoliticized in practice.

Methods and approach: We use a case study of a development programme based on a social transformative policy framework that is implemented through CSOs in Uganda and Vietnam. Data was collected by means of interviews, participant observation and document analysis.

Findings: We find that, in practice, the social transformative policy framework is competing with managerial logics. We compare this process with the depoliticization of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, finding striking similarities. By using practice theory, we show how managerialism remains the dominant paradigm in the civil society aid sector, fuelling the 'anti-politics machine'.

Policy implications: The article shows that policy frameworks do not always work as intended. Donors should therefore not only change policy frameworks, but also start addressing institutional and operational requirements.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Civil society organizations (CSOs) working in the aid sector have been heavily criticized for failing to contribute to social transformative change through the empowerment of civil society. The pressure to professionalize is said to have led to an overemphasis on donor accountability at the expense of local rootedness and legitimacy (Banks et al., 2015, p. 709). CSOs are, therefore, among the proponents of adaptive management approaches in order to counter increasing managerialism in the sector (O'Donnell, 2016). CSOs see their role as a political one, empowering citizens to claim their rights, rather than following a managerialist vision that considers CSOs as implementers of pre-planned interventions and emphasizes service delivery (Elbers et al., 2014, p. 4). The adaptive management agenda was introduced as a corrective to the overemphasis on accountability and technocracy of prevailing results-based management approaches and thus indirectly to managerialism (Brinkerhoff et al., 2018; O'Donnell, 2016, p. 10). To date, however, there is little evidence on the use of adaptive management approaches in practice, which makes it difficult to evaluate their potential transformative effects (Gutheil, 2020a). In order to contribute to closing this gap, this article presents a case study based on a development programme which aimed to introduce substantive adaptive and social transformative innovations.

Our case study examines practices in two development projects in Uganda and Vietnam that are funded through the "Strategic Partnerships for Dialogue and Dissent" Programme by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Based on interviews and participant observation, we examine how this—in principle—social transformative policy framework translates into practice, showing that the integration of adaptive practices is happening only partially, if at all. Both donors and CSOs are embedded in a system that draws them towards managerialism and prevents deeper political reforms. We argue that the broad principles proposed in the adaptive management agenda are policy ideas that can be read and interpreted both as an agenda for shifting the power (political reform of aid) and as an agenda for changing aid administration (managerial reform of aid). We find that these competing logics result in the adaptive management agenda running the risk of being depoliticized, thereby losing its transformational potential.

The analysis of our case study and additional material finds striking similarities to the decline of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which was aptly traced in a recent article by Stephen Brown (Brown, 2020), among others. The Paris Declaration started off as an agenda for putting aid-recipient governments in the driving seat, but then diverted its focus to aid delivery, avoiding underlying power issues, until finally compliance with it ceased. We argue that domestic scepticism regarding international aid and increased competition from emerging donors put pressure on stakeholders, contributing to shifting the focus on managerialist and results-based aid delivery, avoiding questions of politics and power. Due to the continuing dominance of managerialism, the adaptive management agenda thus runs the risk of being absorbed in the 'anti-politics machine'; that is, of being rendered technical

(Ferguson, 2009). Our data demonstrates that development management[1] not only has political repercussions due to its structuring effect on implementation but also that the translation process from policy into practice is infused with politics.

Following this introduction, section 2 introduces the adaptive management agenda and discusses how it can fit both into a managerial as well as a social transformative vision of development. The research approach including theory and methods is described in Section 3, including an introduction to the case study. Next, the findings of the case study analysis are presented in section 4, followed by a discussion of how these findings relate to the depoliticization of the adaptive management agenda, the decline of the Paris Declaration, and the persistence of managerialism in section 5. The article closes with some concluding remarks on the future of adaptive management and its meaning for CSOs in section 6.

2 ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT: POLITICAL AND/OR TECHNOCRATIC AGENDA?

Although the notion of rendering development management more adaptive has gained traction in the aid industry in the last decade, there is no common definition of adaptive management or a common underlying management framework (Gutheil, 2020, p. 2). There are a number of loosely coupled initiatives, such as Doing Development Differently, Thinking and Working Politically (TWP), and Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA), that all emerged from a critique of the way aid is delivered. These different initiatives/approaches rely on a number of shared principles, suggesting that aid management and delivery benefit from adaptation to changing circumstances, reliance on short feedback cycles based on learning, and local conveners and politically legitimized interventions (for a genealogy and comparison of the different approaches, see Gutheil, 2020). Although it would require more research to clearly dissect how political each of the different approaches were in the beginning, they were at least clearly positioned as an antidote to the rigidity and accountability focus of prevailing results-based management approaches and thus indirectly to managerialism (Brinkerhoff et al., 2018; O'Donnell, 2016, p. 10). We define managerialism in line with Pollitt (1990, p. 1) as a "set of beliefs and practices, at the core of which burns the seldom-tested assumption that better management will prove an effective solvent for a wide range of economic and social ills".

The approaches cited above all consider power and politics in their frameworks and do not (solely) rely on new tools to reform development management (Pett 2020, p. 14). Political does not refer to partisan politics in this case, but rather to an awareness concerning the power of decision-making, agenda-setting and the distribution of resources. It also means that interventions apply politically savvy approaches to programming, based on the realization that they themselves are political actors (Pett 2020, p. 13). Political components are to be found, for instance, in PDIA, which stresses the importance of authorizing political environments for institutional change (Andrews et al., 2017, p. 194). This element is also reflected in the Doing Development Differently Manifesto, which speaks of the lack of power in vulnerable populations as well as political barriers and recommends the legitimization of interventions at all levels (Doing Development Differently Manifesto Community, 2014). A working paper edited by the UK civil society network Bond summarized the potential of

[1] In line with Thomas, we use the term development management in the sense of "management of development efforts" (Thomas, 1996, p. 99). We define development management as "to attempt deliberately to influence the course of social change'' (Thomas, 1996, p. 101).

adaptive management for CSOs, stating that "better tools alone are not the answer" (O'Donnell, 2016, p. 10) and recommending a politically-smart or power-sensitive approach towards programming (O'Donnell, 2016, p. 7). On top of that, the Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice is obviously committed to rendering a technocratic development agenda political (TWP Community of Practice, 2015).

Looking at other actors, for instance, the United Kingdom's Department of International Development (DFID) (now the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, FCDO), the picture looks less clear: although a working paper explaining what Doing Development Differently means for DFID mentions that development is about "achieving change in *complex* economic, social and political systems," the focus is largely on how to improve programming and implementation (Wild et al., 2017, p. 9). However, the paper also stresses that domestic political support is needed to realize adaptive ways of working (Wild et al., 2017, p. 8). In addition, the example of Global Learning for Adaptive Management (GLAM) shows that adaptive management can easily fit into a managerial agenda, putting the emphasis on tools rather than on political change. GLAM was funded by DFID and USAID and implemented from August 2018 to September 2020[2] by a consortium led by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and which included as core partners the Institute of Development Studies of the University of Sussex (IDS), Oxfam, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Oxford Policy Management (OPM), and Social Impact and ThoughtWorks (Wild & Ramalingam, 2018, p. 7). GLAM is based on the assumption that "processes, methods and tools employed by DFID and USAID and their partners need to be enhanced, to ensure staff are able to effectively use evidence, information and data in adaptive programming approaches" (Wild & Ramalingam, 2018, p. 7). While the need for an authorizing political environment is still acknowledged (Wild & Ramalingam, 2018, p. 14), the focus is on enhancing effectiveness, outcomes, and value for money by knowing how to choose the right tools that facilitate evidence-based decision-making (Wild & Ramalingam, 2018, p. 9). Instead of talking about shifting the power to local actors, it emphasizes changing "leadership, culture and incentives" (Wild & Ramalingam, 2018, p. 16). Also the final briefing papers that were published in September 2020 all deal with reflections on how to better integrate monitoring, evaluation, and learning into implementation and specific tools, such as, contribution analysis and outcome mapping (Apgar et al., 2020; Buell et al., 2020; Ziegler, 2020). While our assessment arguably relies only on project documents and does not examine GLAM's or any other actors' activities in practice, it still shows that at the discursive level, adaptive management can be connected to managerialist ideals. In its publications, GLAM does not ideologically link with the social transformative vision of development which is proposed by most CSOs that define development as a political process of changing structural inequalities (Elbers et al., 2014, p. 5).

2.1 Competing logics

The review of different initiatives dealing with adaptive management illustrates that adaptive management can fit both into a political and a technocratic vision of how change comes about. The broad principles on which adaptive management relies are policy ideas that can

[2] In an email communication in the '#AdaptDev" Mailing List on October 20, 2020, GLAM announced that it would stop two years earlier than the original programme closure due to budget cuts related to the pandemic.

be interpreted both as an agenda for shifting the power (social transformation) and as an agenda for changing aid administration (managerialism). Reckwitz points towards the relationality of practices due to their bundling in "loosely coupled complexes" (Reckwitz, 2003, p. 295). Both the managerialist and the social transformative paradigm are such complexes that are constituted by an array of related project practices, such as collaborating with partners, designing of interventions, measuring results, etc. (Elbers et al., 2014, p. 4). While actors internalize the boundaries of these complexes, the coupling of practices might result in contradictory expectations and meanings, as specific practices are often associated with more than one bundle of practices (Reckwitz, 2003, p. 295). This is the case with adaptive management, which can fit into both a social transformative paradigm and a managerialist one. This interpretive ambiguity is a potential source of "agonality"; that is, a competition for domination of differing social logics (Reckwitz, 2003, p. 295). Based on these ideas derived from the literature, we will identify in the empirical section project practices that cater towards social transformation and managerialism. The analysis takes these competing logics as a starting point in order to examine the process of how one or the other becomes dominant in everyday project implementation.

3 RESEARCH APPROACH

3.1 Theory

We use practice theory as the theoretical backbone of the study in order to go beyond formal written policy and project documents. Practice theories (there is not one practice theory but rather a family of related theories) engage with actors' everyday practices (Reckwitz, 2016, p. 244) and deal with the dialectical constitution of social life. This is what Giddens (1984) defines as the duality of structure: "the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction" (Giddens, 1984, p. 19). Policies in this sense are neither simply enacted by individuals (agency) nor solely determined by organizational constraints (structure). Policies are mutually constituted in practice through the engagement of individuals with structures; they are emerging social processes (Hilhorst, 2003; Long, 2001; Shore et al., 2011). Practices do not occur in isolation. They are part of a temporal chain of actions and they relate to other practices in "loosely coupled complexes" (Reckwitz, 2003, p. 295). In this article, we trace how the practice complex of adaptive management transforms and stabilizes and how it relates to other complexes. In line with Shove et al. (2012, p. 14), we argue that to inquire into processes of transformation and stability, we have to identify how connections between different elements of practices are made, maintained, or suspended. Elements include knowledge and skills, meanings, and technologies that are attached to practices.

3.2 Case study: Strategic Partnerships for Dialogue and Dissent (SP) Programme

The article relies on research conducted between May 2018 and July 2020 in the Strategic Partnerships for Dialogue and Dissent (SP) Programme. This five-year programme (2016–2020) is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and is aimed at supporting CSOs' lobbying and advocacy capacities, with a budget of around 1 billion Euros (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2017, p. 11). Our aim was to analyse how the Ministry's policy framework "Dialogue and Dissent Theory of Change" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of

the Netherlands, 2015; 2017) translates into everyday project management practices, thereby contributing to a better understanding of the policy process, specifically "what happens in the gap between policy formulation and policy outcomes" (McCourt & Gulrajani, 2010, p. 87). The research especially examined to what extent the more adaptive or social transformative elements of the policy affected project management practices.

The SP was selected as a research site as it is quite a special case that a Ministry makes advocacy the sole focus of a policy framework and devotes several large funding instruments to strengthening CSOs (van Wessel et al., 2020, p. 730). In addition, the policy framework makes its social transformative underpinning explicit, stating that it represents "a shift in focus from aid aimed directly at combating poverty through service delivery to aid aimed at tackling the root causes of poverty and inequality through lobby and advocacy" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2017, p. 2). CSOs are seen as vital actors in their own right and therefore the "strategic partnership is more far-reaching than the relationship between grant provider and grant recipient" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2015, p. 5). The conceptualization of development as a diffuse and non-linear process implies a renunciation of managerialist principles on a methodological level and a turn toward a more flexible and context-sensitive approach that ensures local ownership and autonomy. For instance, the SP encourages the use of flexible Theories of Change (ToCs) and advocacy strategies as well as the use of customized Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (PMEL) systems (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2017, p. 9). While it is not labelled explicitly as an instance of "adaptive management", we classify it as such due to these methodological innovations conjointly with the social transformative vision. The programme is thus very well suited for a study on how CSOs turn an adaptive policy into practice and explore its transformative potentials.

The Ministry funded 25 consortia in the SP of which three accepted to be interviewed. After these initial pilot interviews, the consortium led by Oxfam Novib and SOMO agreed to facilitate an in-depth case study. The research was conducted in a multi-sited manner: we first started interviewing actors in the Netherlands and then interviewed partners of the consortium led by Oxfam Novib and SOMO. Among 17 partner countries, Uganda and Vietnam were chosen. The selection was based on geographical variety as well as comparability in terms of thematic components and administrative structures. The research thus covered the lead partner Oxfam Novib, the country offices in Uganda and Vietnam as well as project partners at the national and subnational level. Both country offices implemented two thematic components under the SP, that is the "Right to Food" and the "Financing for Development". The research approach can best be described by Reinhold's concept of "studying through" (Reinhold, 1994). Studying through describes a strategy in which a policy is followed across different locations through to those affected by the policy (Wedel et al., 2005, p. 10; Wright & Reinhold, 2011, p. 87). Instead of only relying on one specific organization or set of actors, the focus of the analysis lies on project management practices within the boundaries of the two projects. Due to the small number of participating organizations, the case study neither depicts the variety of practices in the overall programme led by Oxfam Novib and SOMO nor in the entire SP, and does therefore not claim to be generalizable. It does, however, identify a number of mechanisms occurring within projects that point beyond the case study, as other projects operate under similar

dynamics and contexts. We use the insights of the so-called "Assumptions Research Programme" [3] in the discussion section to put our findings into perspective.

3.3 Methods and data

We relied on semi-structured interviews and participant observation in order to identify practitioners' day to day practices and their elements. Each country was visited twice in order to track changes over time. Data in Uganda was collected in December 2018 and September 2019 and Vietnam was visited in May 2019 and February 2020. Data at the subnational level in Vietnam was collected in collaboration with a Vietnamese research assistant, due to language barriers and accessibility issues. In addition, project documents, such as guidelines, project reports, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and outcome harvesting forms, were reviewed to compare written statements with practices. Interview partners were project managers responsible for the SP, the heads of the participating organizations and if applicable also monitoring and evaluation (M&E) or financing officers. Additional group interviews were conducted with community groups. The interviews inquired into project management practices during design and implementation. Findings were shared with the interview partners and interviewees were confronted with other stakeholder statements in order to crosscheck their views and detect inconsistencies. In total, we spoke to 50 individuals and held eight group discussions (see Table 1 for a detailed overview of collected data). Document analysis was used to prepare the interviews and field visits and to triangulate our findings. All interviews were subsequently transcribed and coded with the help of MaxQDA software. In line with practice theory, data was coded by relying on (inductively identified) practices. Subsequently, each major practice was summarized into a code summary supplemented by insights gained through participant observation and document analysis. Code summaries were then used in a comparative manner in order to identify mechanisms and in order to match those with theoretical concepts from the literature.

Table 1.

Overview of collected data

Country	**Type of organization interviewed**	**Number of people**
Netherlands	Ministry of Foreign Affairs 3 CSOs (lead partner)	1 4
Uganda	Dutch embassy Steering committee of another CSO project Oxfam country office 7 national CSOs 3 subnational organizations Government officials 2 community groups	1 2 4 13 5 2 Group discussions
Vietnam	Oxfam country office 5 national CSOs	8 5

[3] The extensive research programme investigating the assumptions underlying the D&D is formally called "New Roles of Civil Society Organizations for Inclusive Development". More information can be found here: https://includeplatform.net/theme/new-roles-for-csos-for-inclusive-development

	3 subnational organizations 1 research institute 1 private sector actor 6 community groups	3 1 1 Group discussions

Source: Authors' own depiction

4 FINDINGS

Results which relate to the implementation of the policy framework are structured along the three major sets of actors involved in project management in the project:

1. Lead partners
2. National CSO partners
3. Subnational CSO partners

4.1 Lead partners

Selecting lobbying and advocacy as the thematic backbone of the programme was recognized by all interviewees as special. According to the participating lead partners, donors often avoid such an openly political approach which is in line with a social transformation logic in order to maintain neutrality. The policy idea of working in partnership characterized by "equality and reciprocity" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2015, p. 6) was supposed to be reflected in the selection process of applicants. Instead of asking for a detailed proposal, the Ministry required the organizations' track records and one or more Theories of Change (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2015, p. 6). CSOs were encouraged to apply as consortia to foster complementarity and the interviewed lead partners mentioned that after their organizations had been selected the programme design took place in close consultation with the Ministry. At the same time, the tendering procedure as such was rather opposed to the social transformative ideal that CSOs are "political actors in their own right" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2017, p. iii). In addition, "the selection procedure favoured professionalism over 'legitimacy' as there were no criteria related to CSOs' relationships with constituencies in LLMICs and their involvement in shaping the programme" (Kamstra 2020, p. 766). One interviewee also bemoaned that the narrow focus on lobbying and advocacy meant that some of their partners were no longer eligible for funding. Overall, interviewees agreed that the commitment to Strategic Partnerships led to improved relations between lead partners and the Ministry and, in some cases, more co-ordination between Dutch embassies and national CSO partners. However, collaboration practices still depended on personal contacts and was not necessarily happening in a structured way (see also Gutheil, 2020b). Collaboration worked best in cases when agendas were aligned and there were sufficient capacities at embassies.

Instead of just being in contact with the Civil Society Division, lead partners were also matched with thematic counterparts in the respective departments of the Ministry. This was welcomed by interviewees as an opportunity in cases of policy complementarity, but not all departments were equally committed to the social transformative approach. The Ministry is not a coherent actor in itself and some departments stressed their donor role more than their role as a partner (Elbers et al., 2020, p. 7; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands 2019a; van Wessel et al. 2020, p. 739;). One interviewee also pointed towards the

importance of being matched with the right liaison person. Their programme was targeting women and they were therefore matched with the Gender Division, however,

> "we feel that our audience should be the ministry of economic affairs or infrastructure or agriculture and not so much development corporation, because if you really want to change something you have to convince the other departments of trade or whatever; these are the ones having the most impact on what's happening to women in the South" (Interview July 9, 2018).

In a similar manner research by van Wessel et al. (2020, p. 737) found that conflicting policy objectives by the different departments sometimes inhibited partnerships.

This can also be exemplified by reporting practices: While the Ministry initially only asked for a short report focusing on results, shortly before the mid-term reporting was due they proposed reporting against six key indicators. Partners were still allowed to use their own monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) frameworks, but they were asked to report on how their own indicators contributed to the key indicators. As all consortia use different MEL frameworks and the key indicators are formulated in a very generic manner, their explanatory value is highly questionable. In addition, more prescriptive guidelines with regard to detailed quantitative reporting in the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) were shared when the project had already started, suggesting a turn back to managerialism (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2019b). While the Ministry thus initially boldly committed to the social transformative approach and signed partnership agreements with all consortia, one interviewee concluded that at the same time relations were still transactional in the sense that reporting and also the money flow were just one-way. A true partnership would also require the Ministry to assume responsibility for the results of interventions. However, this is not always possible or desirable: CSOs can be much more vocal about governments' failures as opposed to a Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in certain cases stressing the connection to a foreign government can damage CSOs' legitimacy.

4.2 National CSO partners

The Ministry's conceptualization of CSOs as autonomous actors possessing the ability to set the agenda materialized for the lead partner (within the overall theme of lobbying and advocacy), but less so for the country offices and CSO partners. CSO partners could develop their own programmes within the ToCs developed for "Right to Food" and "Financing for Development", but they were not involved in choosing the overall thematic focus. For the majority of partners this was not problematic, as the project was a continuation of previous collaboration and matched perfectly within the organizations' expertise:

> "… it didn't come out of the blue for us, because we had that track record of working with Oxfam because we had the programme [name] in which we worked with Oxfam previously, so when they thought of this new programme we were called" (Interview December 12, 2018).

The majority of partners thus welcomed being able to jump right into the design phase without having to write a weighty proposal first.

In light of the social transformative character of the programme, the Ministry allowed partners to make use of their own MEL frameworks and emphasized again in a communication in 2019 that:

> "Partners are encouraged to keep results frameworks as light as possible to minimize administrative burden. […] This avoids the PMEL framework becoming a straightjacket" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands 2019b, p. 1).

However, due to the fact that there were 17 country offices with over a hundred partners involved in the programme, it would have been very difficult to manage the streamlining of the different systems of each organization at the level of the lead partner and also the country offices. For this reason, outcome areas and indicators from which country offices could choose were provided by the lead partner. These corporate outcome indicators are also used for Oxfam Novib's overall organizational reporting. The social transformation logic was thus trumped in implementation by a more managerial approach, because of internal organizational constraints. CSOs have to balance accountability demands from multiple donors and constituents, which leads to them streamlining new requirements into their existing working modes. In a similar manner, freedoms that were granted at the lead partner level were not always harnessed by national CSO partners. Even though it had been recommended that country offices conclude longer-term contracts with partners to enhance predictability and reduce administrative hurdles, some project managers still adhered to the practice of concluding one-year contracts. In another instance it had been communicated that country offices were supposed to simplify reporting templates for partners, which was practised differently by the country office in Uganda. Routinized organizational practices shape interfaces between organizations, which can lead to actors personally curtailing flexibility and not making use of the room provided. It is not surprising that professional organizations have internalized these processes since donors have pushed CSOs for years to adhere to even stricter accountability requirements.

Interestingly, even though the different organizations were working under the same directives and received the same templates, responsibilities for collecting results, conducting evaluations, or writing reports were not distributed in the same manner across the national, subnational, and country office levels. In Uganda, the largest reporting burden was on CSO partners, while in Vietnam, the country office assumed the major part. This "shifting" of responsibilities can also be found in a literature review on adaptive management, which concluded that adaptive practices are often layered on top of existing practices and that administrative requirements do not disappear but rather shift to other actors (Gutheil, 2020, p. 15).

This did not mean that the project was organized in a top-down manner, but rather that the requirements were subject to negotiation and change at every interface between organizations, sometimes changing their original meanings (Long, 2001, p. 72). They were planted into existing collaboration patterns and organizational processes. Hence, for the participating organizations, the programme was framed in terms of continuity as it followed up on previous project work and emerged out of previous organizational relationships; it was interpreted less as the implementation of a new policy framework.

4.3 Subnational partners

While the subnational organizations contracted by Oxfam's country offices were invited to take part in co-creation sessions to develop the project contents, some organizations that were contracted by national CSOs were not represented. Overall, subnational organizations could not, just as the national organizations and country offices, go beyond the scope of the

determined theories of change for the projects. As not only the country offices contracted subnational organizations, but also national CSOs, the overall project architecture was inherently complex. One of the subnational organizations in Uganda was initially only hired on a fee-for-service basis by one of the national CSOs. This means that they were only paid for each activity and did not receive any overheads. Due to the fact that the organization had no other project funding at the time, it was struggling to cover its running costs and had to rely on private loans to survive. This shows that in the length of the contracting chain the social transformation logic and the idea of partnership can get lost which results at the end of the chain in hiring organizations in a manner as contractors.

Many of the community-level organizations in our case study relied on just one or few grants to survive, which we attribute to the lack of experience in proposal writing and grant-management processes. The Oxfam country office in Uganda showed its commitment towards capacity building by promoting one of the subnational organizations to a coordinating and subgranting partner, even though this meant going through an extensive risk assessment procedure. To make sure that the new coordinator hired in this organization was well-versed with report writing, the country office participated in the job interviews. This example shows that managerial requirements, such as report-writing, have structuring effects in the sense that they trump other requirements, such as local embeddedness and knowledge.

While the interviewed organizations did not face any interference with regard to the implementation of their activities, they were monitored closely on whether they complied with the work plan and financial procedures. A project manager in the country office in Uganda reminded the subnational organizations during a meeting that “you must only spend on what is planned. Be aware that the project is monitored by so many parties […] People will come to borrow your money, pretend that they are your friends, but you must resist the temptation” (Interview September 21, 2019). Country offices and national CSOs that contract subnational organizations that in turn often subcontract smaller, informal organizations are made fully liable for losses and need to make sure that these organizations comply with basic administrative requirements. While the SP encouraged the participation of informal organizations, the Ministry’s funding requirements did not match that vision. The contracting party finds itself squeezed between managerial risks and the social transformative vision of capacity building and partnership.

While subnational organizations were valued for their contributions and also treated with respect, inequalities that can be attributed to the rural-urban divide and class differences became also visible in the project system. For instance, subnational organizations’ per diem policies were less favorable than those of their national counterparts, which in one instance, led to national and subnational partners having to stay at different hotels at workshops. Overall, we conclude that the subnational organizations benefited the least from the flexibility built into the policy framework, as they were less capable than their national counterparts to negotiate for their own interests and to carve out space for implementation. They did benefit from collectively receiving the lion’s share of the budget, but they were not the major agenda-setters of the intervention as the adaptive management agenda would suggest. This shows that adaptive management requires first and foremost a certain level of organizational maturity. It also resonates with the findings of a practitioner workshop held in Kenya which

stated that the adaptive management agenda currently lacks crucial input from Southern organizations (Yanguas, 2018, p. 4).

5 DISCUSSION: WHY MANAGERIALISM REMAINS DOMINANT

Proposing a Strategic Partnership with CSOs in their Theory of Change, the Ministry tried to openly address the political question of power imbalance by addressing a social transformative vision of development (political reform of aid). However, internal inconsistencies within the Ministry and conflicting policy objectives hampered joint action. The majority of CSOs in the Strategic Partnerships acted in line with the Ministry's agenda, whereas the space for Dissent was used less (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2019a, p. 17). It remains an open question whether CSOs would have acted more controversially if they had not been in a Strategic Partnership with the Ministry. At the same time, the freedoms the Ministry granted were not necessarily taken up by lead partners. The case study shows that implementation is structured along the managerial lines of the aid system that were not tackled by the Ministry. The policy proposed certain freedoms, however, the Ministry's requirements in terms of accountability and liability remained in place. While all interviewees emphasized that this project granted a lot of freedom in comparison to other donor-funded interventions, the particularities of the policy framework did not necessarily reach all partners. Policy ideas were only selectively integrated into operational frameworks, such as thematic or country-level theories of change, reporting templates, and M&E schemes, which means that some of the ideas got lost in translation and never reached the partner organizations. In addition, partners themselves did not necessarily take up the freedoms provided. This was not only due to the institutional exigencies of the many different organizations depicted, but also due to the logic of practice: new practices do not happen in a vacuum; they are planted into existing collaboration patterns and organizational processes, connecting past experience and future expectations (Reckwitz, 2003, p. 291). As other donors adhere to managerialist practices, organizations need to streamline processes to a certain extent. The case study also shows that the policy idea of shifting the power to local organizations in reality meets with a complex set of funding relations within project countries. The donor-CSO interface receives a lot of research attention, whereas funding relations within project countries are often neglected. While the policy framework explicitly asked for including more informal organizations and Oxfam Novib took up this cue by including a large share of subnational partners in their projects, it is still a rocky road to achieve more equal partnerships with rural actors if donors' contractual requirements remain the same.

In summary, operational freedoms cannot be separated from the surrounding conditions and power relations inherent in the aid architecture. While the Strategic Partnerships were overall perceived as relatively flexible, interviewees made clear that the move of the Dutch government toward greater policy complementarity, increased competition among CSOs, and less (core) funding overall ran counter to the social transformative efforts of the Strategic Partnership Programme. We argue in the following paragraphs that the negligible effects of adaptive management on practice are also due to the managerial paradigm that still dominates the sector. We draw on additional literature to describe the depoliticization of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, as the Paris Declaration relied—just as the adaptive management agenda—on the policy idea of shifting the power and advocated for

reducing the administrative burden of partners. By tracing the downfall of the Paris Declaration's initial ideals, we explain how the results-based agenda persists and is likely to influence the uptake of adaptive management beyond the SP programme as well.

5.1 The decline of the Paris Declaration

Initially, the Paris Declaration emerged from a commitment not only to make aid more effective, but also to "balance commitments between development partners" (Michalopoulos, 2020, p. 196). The five pillars of the Paris Declaration, namely *ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results,* and *accountability* (OECD, 2008), implicitly recognized that donors and recipient countries were jointly responsible for the ineffectiveness of aid (Brown, 2020, p. 1231). Much emphasis was placed on the fact that recipient countries create their own development plans and are put in the driver's seat for implementing these plans. At the same time, donors were supposed to align their agendas and reduce the administrative burden on recipient countries through better co-ordination and the use of recipient government systems for carrying out programmes (Michalopoulos, 2020, p. 197).

However, as Brown aptly traces in his paper titled "The Rise and Fall of the Aid Effectiveness Agenda," the agenda did not persist (Brown, 2020). Several authors have found that the Paris Declaration lacked an engagement with the political dimension which became manifest in underlying power issues, conflicting goals, and trade-offs between the pillars, thereby obstructing implementation (Dijkstra & Komives, 2011; Hyden, 2008; Mawdsley et al., 2014, p. 29). Expressed in Nilima Gulrajani's (2011) words:

> "The Declaration presents the challenge of aid effectiveness as a matter of techno-administrative implementation rather than a problem deriving from the power and politics within which all aid relations are situated. […] the prescriptions for better delivery and management of foreign aid are divorced from political dynamics and relations that impinge, for better or worse, on aid." (Gulrajani, 2011, p. 209)

An independent evaluation of the progress of the implementation of the Paris Principles in 2011 came to the same conclusion, that is, that the perception of the Declaration as a technical and bureaucratic process should be replaced by political commitment (Wood et al., 2011, p. 10); see also (Swedlund, 2017). Yet the Busan High Level forum in 2011 did not revive the initial political commitments but became the turning point for the final fall of the Paris Declaration (Atwood, 2012); (Brown, 2020); (Mawdsley et al., 2014).

Interestingly, even though the Paris Declaration has failed politically to shift the power more toward recipient governments and better harmonization of aid interventions, its pillar "managing for results" has survived (Lundsgaard & Engberg-Pedersen, 2019, p. 26). Michalopoulos (2020) went as far as to state that another reason for the decline of the Paris Principles was the "revival of projectized lending and what is called the results-based agenda" (Michalopoulos, 2020, p. 214). While "managing for results" referred primarily to country-based results frameworks that were to be used for aligning agendas and assessing outcomes in the Paris Declaration, the current results agenda is rather donor-centred and refers to results-based management approaches (Lundsgaard & Engberg-Pedersen, 2019, p. 48). This is due to the fact that if results frameworks are to be aligned with the priorities of partner countries as demanded by the Paris Declaration, this inevitably leads to a number of

accountability tensions (Sjöstedt, 2013, p. 153)). It is inherently political if a donor sacrifices its own domestic priorities in order to align its agenda with an aid-recipient country, and harmonization might lead to less visibility and create attribution problems. By focusing on results-based management processes, the more political question of agenda-setting is avoided.

The Aid Effectiveness Agenda has thus been rendered technical in that it assumes that it is the better delivery of aid that can provide more effectiveness. This managerialist thinking lies also at the heart of results-based management. The same processes that led to the decline of the Paris Declaration also contributed to reinforcing results-based management: the financial crisis led to tighter aid budgets for Western donors in conjunction with a discourse of national interest, while emerging donors exacerbated that process by openly pursuing self-interest and rejecting the Paris Principles (Brown, 2020, p. 1243). Development needed to prove value-for-money and demonstrate results. This explains the persistence of the managerialist results-based management agenda, which we found to have structuring effects on project implementation in our case study. Based on our findings we argue that managerialism is likely to absorb the political content of the adaptive management agenda.

5.2 How managerialism wins the upper hand

Policy ideas rely on shared elements and connections to other practices to gain traction (Shove et al., 2012, p. 36). Managerialism shares elements with positivism, such as rationality (meaning), objective measurement (technologies), and universal applicability (ideas). It is thus coupled with the practice complex of science, conveying characteristics such as certainty and objectivity (Gulrajani, 2011, p. 206). Its roots in the corporate world and the New Public Management Agenda also connect it to the notion of efficiency (Mowles, 2010, p. 152). Most importantly, managerialism assumes that management processes are neutral and beyond political or social biases (Gulrajani, 2011, p. 208). There is a supposed clear separation of labour: governments and donors decide upon the content (policies), whereas development managers are solely responsible for implementing decisions. Management processes are hence presented as being separate from politics (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2010, p. 111). By resorting to a focus on processes and tools, political action can be legitimized, as its political content is concealed under a cloak of neutrality, efficiency, and universality. Managerialism thus works as an “anti-politics machine” in Ferguson’s (2009/1994) terms, depoliticizing aid interventions while at the same time enforcing and legitimizing political interests. While in Ferguson’s work in Lesotho, it is bureaucratic state power that is simultaneously expanded in our case domestic political interests both in the global South and North are advanced. Not only do Northern donors benefit through the advancement of their domestic agendas, Southern governments also gain because they do not run the risk of estranging domestic constituencies by making hard choices (Brown, 2020, p. 1242).

5.3 The political dimensions of project implementation

The political dimension of the social transformative paradigm can be described as twofold: on the one hand, CSOs are expected to be political change agents, challenging power inequalities in their localities, while on the other hand, this is facilitated through a political reform of management practices that puts local actors in the driving seat (as proposed in the

adaptive management agenda) and relies on politically smart programming. This is based on an adequate understanding and analysis of the political context, which also includes the realization that the intervention itself is part of that very context (Pett 2020, p. 13). Hence, "political" does not necessarily mean "partisan", but is rather referring to power relations in terms of decision-making and distribution of resources. Management practices are not mere tools, as claimed by the politics–administration dichotomy, but have political implications for project implementation (AbouAssi, 2010; McCourt & Gulrajani, 2010; Mosse, 2004). We specifically find two manifestations of the political nature of development management in our study; the first referring to content and the second referring to tools.

First, the translation process from policy into action is highly political. The politics–administration dichotomy rests on the assumption that policies provide a clear guide for action. However, our case shows that policy ideas in the D&D policy, such as partnership, flexibility, and autonomy, are broad ideas which do not result in uniform practices in complex aid settings with multiple stakeholders. For instance, the flexibility with regard to reporting was, first of all, not "passed on" to partner organizations by Oxfam Novib, and at the same time, flexibility with regard to contracting given by Oxfam Novib was not used by all country offices to the same extent. Our data shows that it is not only prior practice, but also organizational interests that mediate implementation and that policies at times also work as legitimizing devices or claims in that process. In addition, policies are not always coherent and can have conflicting demands or trade-offs: The Ministry conceptualizes CSOs as actors in their own right, but at the same time restricts activities to lobbying and advocacy.

Second, management processes and tools are political because they have structuring effects. As discussed in the findings section, the theory of change approach was used for a co-creation process of developing country-specific theories of change with all partners, but at the same time, the more programmatic approach (overall theory of change) was developed at the lead partner level. Processes determine who participates at what stage, which has a structuring effect on project contents and outcomes. Existing internal management processes also structure implementation as, for example, slow and bureaucratic approval processes obstruct implementation.

6 CONCLUSION

This article has demonstrated how policy ideas such as adaptive management can easily be turned from a political to a managerial agenda. Only a selective integration of new practices on the ground was found as a result of the examination of a case study of a development programme underpinned by a social transformative vision of development. Not only the donor's lack of willingness to shift power but also the way CSOs operate contributed to the prevention of deeper reforms. Embedded in an aid system which operates according to managerialist principles, there are powerful incentives to maintain the status quo. In addition, the rhetoric of the GLAM initiative points toward an increasing alignment of the adaptive agenda with technocratic and managerial processes. A comparison of this process of depoliticization with the decline of the political content of the Paris Declaration shows how the development sector operates as an anti-politics machine fuelled by the financial crisis and increasing competition due to the rise of non-traditional donors, leading to a persistence of managerialism.

Using practice theory to trace the continuing authority of the managerialist paradigm, it becomes clear that practices need repetition to become dominant and that power is not the effect of one singular practice in a specific moment in time but of multiple repetitions across time and space which perpetuate links between different elements of practice (Watson, 2017, p. 181). As we have shown in our article, managerialism is connected both to notions of rational science as well as corporate best practice. Whereas the former carries the meaning of objectivity, the latter is associated with efficiency. These values are privileged in the current aid system (Gulrajani, 2011, p. 208), reinforced through tight budgets and general aid scepticism. The connection between these elements is not only reinforced in development but also in many other societal realms (Parker, 2002).

Our case study demonstrates that managerialism is powerful in the sense of having structuring effects on the entire aid system of actors; it orchestrates and aligns other practices (Watson, 2017, p. 177). Other researchers have traced these processes of diffusion, showing how managerial knowledge and practices flow though CSO networks and constitute links between organizations (Roberts et al., 2005). Lewis goes as far as calling transnational CSOs transmission belts for managerialism (Lewis, 2008, p. 50). While practice theory has been criticized for not sufficiently dealing with power, such a reading of power as effects of ordering through practices provides avenues for integrating power into praxeological analysis, without resorting to an (analytically unhelpful) understanding of power as ubiquitous (Watson, 2017, p. 181).

Returning to the GLAM initiative one could argue that its discursive turn towards managerialism does not mean that adaptive management has been captured by managerialism in its entirety. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs also came to recognize the tension inherent in the idea of a strategic partnership oscillating between social transformative and managerialist ideals: on the one hand, Partnership Agreements were concluded detailing shared goals, while on the other hand, contracts stipulating financial and reporting requirements were also signed (Kamstra, 2020, p. 767). This tension has not been solved in the follow-up programme called “Power of Voices” either. While the new policy framework restricts the thematic focus of the interventions even more, they also require lead consortia to at least partner with one organization in the global South (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2020). How this will play out in practice remains to be seen. As has been shown in this article, the links between policy and practice are not straightforward or linear; even if managerial elements are part of a policy, this does not necessarily mean that they reach the contracted organizations—policy ideas are just one contributing factor. However, if we look at more systemic change than just providing more space for implementers in specific development interventions, it is doubtful whether this will happen by riding the adaptive wave in a boat that is using managerialism as its fuel. Taking into account the current situation of CSOs and the criticism they face in terms of professionalization, depoliticization, donor dependency, and the lack of a membership base (Gutheil, 2020, p. 3), it is unlikely that these problems will disappear by simply replacing management tools. Critical voices have rightly remarked that the adaptive management agenda is entirely driven by Northern and anglophone actors (Yanguas, 2018). Adaptive management can only be useful to CSOs if it questions the aid effectiveness debate altogether and starts addressing values, political interests, and power relationships and starts a meaningful discussion about adaptive management with implementing CSOs. As this is a process in which many actors

have to let go of control and face complicated questions of accountability and competing interests, there is little incentive to proceed on this path. Not only donors but also CSOs which act as donors to other CSOs need to improve harmonization, alignment of agendas, predictability of money flows, and reduction of administrative burdens (for an elaboration of these issues, see Koch, 2008).

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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