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Challenged Practice

Transformations of Swedish Governmental Building around 1970

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Swedish architectural modernism is intimately tied to the development of the welfare state, where the roles and work of architects largely followed governmental building policies. The political and economical crisis of the late 1960s and 1970s was particularly devastating for Swedish architecture as the shortcomings of the welfare state were partly blamed on the architecture profession. This paper is a study of the National Board of Public Building (KBS)—a Governmental agency in charge of providing office space for State institutions—and its ambition to rationalise its organisation and building construction. KBS' developments during the late 1960s and early 1970s redefined the role of the architect through questioning the organisation of the building industry, the process of design, and the role of the State in building. In 1967, a larger reorganisation of KBS was prompted by the Government's implementation of a new budgeting system called program budgeting, which besides being a financial steering mechanism also served as a planning system in which the strict cost-effectiveness of the agencies programs were measured. KBS's response to the enforced changes resulted in the launching of an official architectural theory in 1968, the so-called "KBS structure philosophy," that at large was a pragmatic structuralist approach to building. It was developed through rigorous investigations during the 1960s and subsequently realized, in assimilation with program budgeting, with great force and conviction. The analysis suggests that KBS, and its consultant architects, responded to the State's demand to rationalize the process of building which in turn led to significant changes of the role of the architect, and further restrained architecture's dependency on rational means-ends decision-making, favouring economic perspectives of building.



In the late 1960s the Swedish Government tested a new budget system called Program Budgeting in some of its agencies. The experimenting was initiated in order to review new ways to administer political control on state operations and to operate State services with higher efficiency at lower costs. The National Board of Public Building (KBS), a Governmental agency in charge of providing premises for the State, was one of the institutions chosen to try out the new system. KBS's subsequent development after the implementation of program budgeting in 1967 was intimately tied to the adoption of the new budgeting system. In 1968 KBS officially launched their own architecture theory, the so-called "KBS' structure philosophy" (*strukturfilosofi*), which at large was a structuralist approach to building, which merged KBS' recent architectural research findings with program budgeting, creating a tight-knit program for building production.

This paper is a study of KBS' employment of program budgeting and its reorganisation in response to the implementation. In the analysis, there is particular focus on what the changes of organisation meant for the process of building and the role of the architect. The study is set against the light of the growing critique of the State, of public building construction, and the critique of the architecture profession during the 1960s and 1970s. As such, the study is a contribution to the historical research of architecture's "crisis" in the 1970s with specific emphasis on public architecture and the building programming of the State. The implementation of program budgeting had great significance on architecture and the role of the architect, and the study of its effect on architecture would give new insights to the historical roots of the current state of architecture and its profession. My theoretical departure is based in a general philosophical discussion of means-ends rationality, where the concepts of means and ends are put in relation to architecture. This discussion is linked to Manfredo Tafuri's views of the crisis of the architecture profession in the beginning of the 1970s, and his contemporaneous critique of "programming."¹ KBS's responses to the Government's new directives led to substantial changes of the organisation and of the ways of working with building construction, which significantly altered the role of the architect. I argue that KBS's architecture philosophy was launched in direct response to program budgeting as an ideological principle much needed in order to make sense, professionally, of the imposed Governmental reform. Although announced through the concepts such as flexibility, adaptability, changeability and generality, the philosophy was chained to its own technocratic system and unable to liberate KBS's architecture from conforming to predestined sameness.

1. Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, trans. Luigia La Penta (1973, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), 170-82.

Administration takes Command: Program Budgeting in Sweden

2. Erik Amnå, *Planhushållning i den offentliga sektorn? Budgetdialogen mellan regering och förvaltning under efterkrigstiden* (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söner förlag, 1981); SOU 1967: 11-13, *Programbudgetering* (Stockholm: Statskontoret, 1967).

3. *Programbudgetering*. It has been argued that the new public management trends of the late 1960s and 1970s were not fully politically sanctioned in Sweden and they, in fact, were driven by administrative and economist experts with quite different views on the roles of budgets in public administration than the social democratic Government of the time (See Amnå, *Planhushållning i den offentliga sektorn?* 1981). Nevertheless, the political approval of the implementations, first through experiments, posed radical changes to the organisation of individual Governmental agencies, which in turn led to alterations of their working procedures and processes.

4. Amnå, *Planhushållning i den offentliga sektorn?* 125.

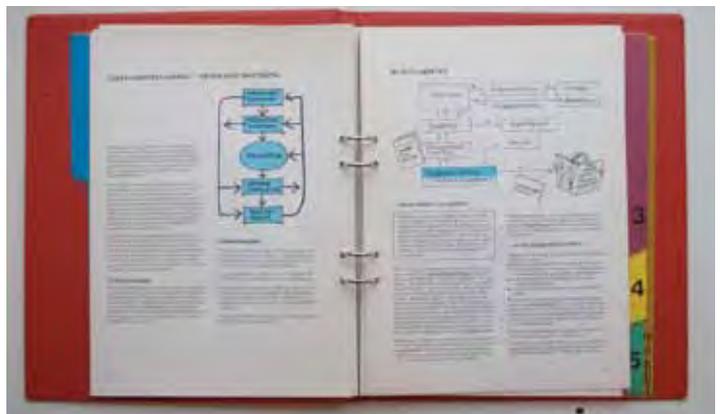
5. Amnå, *Planhushållning i den offentliga sektorn?* 126-27. The 1967 investigation proclaimed that it had not analysed how the aims of different Governmental agencies would be weighted against each other in the federal budget as this were political questions of responsibility and decision-making. Instead, the investigation had its starting point in the belief that a reform of the budgeting structure and its procedures was possible within the framework of its present form. Similarly, the question of how agencies efficiency should be measured and judged in relation to the efficiency of the society—often measured through cost-benefits analysis and a key issue for polices in a welfares state like Sweden—was not discussed in the report. The question of how to balance cost-effectiveness and cost-benefits seems to have been lost both in the investigation as well as in the following political and public debate. See SOU 1967: 11-13 and Amnå, *Planhushållning i den offentliga sektorn?*

6. Ingemund Hägg, "Effektivare resursstyrning," *Ekonomisk debatt* 2, no. 2 (1974), 125-27.

During the 1950s and 1960s the Swedish social democratic Government had actively been trying to find ways of making public work more cost and time efficient, and more forcefully achieving desired results. While keeping most of the welfare programs intact, the Government endorsed quite radical changes of the public sector as its administrative structure was transformed towards models of the private sector. In the mid 1960s the Swedish State did experiments with new administrative and budgeting models that sought to give the Government more control over its agencies while simultaneously allowing the individual agencies to identify goals and make decisions independently.² Particularly interesting in this regard was the experimentation with the new budgeting model Program budgeting (*Programbudgetering*), which was adopted from the American model called Planning-Programming-Budgeting System, and in the Swedish Government tested in some 30 agencies from the late 1960s.³ One of the agencies was the National Board of Public Building, KBS, which implemented it in 1967.

Program budgeting was a system for creating an efficient "administrative instrument for economic planning, steering and control of the Governmental agencies' activities."⁴ It would aid the evaluation of how financial resources' effectively contributed to the aims of an agency, and determine through what means the goals would be reached most efficiently. In short, it should secure the cost-effectiveness of the programs.⁵ The system demanded a budget based on programs and performance, and not simply with expenditure items reflecting the organisation. Besides costs, it was directed towards results and performance.⁶ An organisation's activity should be divided into programs with clearly defined goals, which then were

Figure 1. Information folder (1978) for employees at KBS, with two page spread showing facts about Program Budgeting. Photograph of folder by the author.



related to the general aims of the organisation. In relation to each program goal, requirements of performance were defined in ways to maximize the benefit of granted resources.⁷ Ultimately, a program budget system should help determine through what means the goals would be reached most efficiently, and additionally aid the evaluation of how the financial resources effectually contributed to the aims of an agency.

7. Anders Anell, *Från central planering till lokalt ansvar. Budgeteringens roll i landstingskommunal sjukvård* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1990), 94.

As program budgeting was initiated at KBS the perspective of the organisation's work clearly changed. It is this shift of (value) perspective that I would like to further investigate here. KBS's director general Sixten Larsson confirmed this shift in perspective when he at the onset of the organisation's implementation of program budgeting predicted that KBS would become a "commercial agency" within five years—commercial public enterprise operating as a business, and "that buys, produces, rents, and sublet premises of all kinds."⁸ Larsson was right about the direction of KBS's future development but it was not until 1993, 25 years later, that KBS was fully commercialised and reorganised into four separate entities.⁹ In this view, program budgeting emerged at the beginning of a broader new public management trend within the public sector—a development that today has reach into all parts of the welfare structure and that gives priority to financial perspectives over others.

8. KBS, *Byggnadsstyrelsen*, offprint from *Arkitektur* 9 (1968).

9. Today, the former National Board of Public Building (*Byggnadsstyrelsen*) is divided into National Property Board (*Statens fastighetsverk*), Vasakronan, and Akademiska hus. See <http://www.sfv.se/cms/english.html> for more information.

A Philosophy of Building

In 1968, one year after the implementation of program budgeting, KBS decided to launch an official theory of architecture, "KBS's structure philosophy." It was first presented in an exhibition called *Architecture-Structure* and then subsequently discussed in various publications. Architecturally, the idea had its starting point in the re-evaluation of functionalist architecture practice in Sweden, and in particular, a critique of the overshadowing focus on functional analysis.¹⁰ The core of the problem, according KBS, was the modernist (functionalist) notion that the function of a building could be "finitely determined" and that each room of a building was designed to "fulfil a specific purpose."¹¹

10. KBS, *Architecture-Structure: An Illustrated Account of Swedish Public Works, 1618-1968* (Stockholm: Byggnadsstyrelsen and Sveriges arkitekturmuseum, 1969).

11. KBS, *Architecture-Structure*.

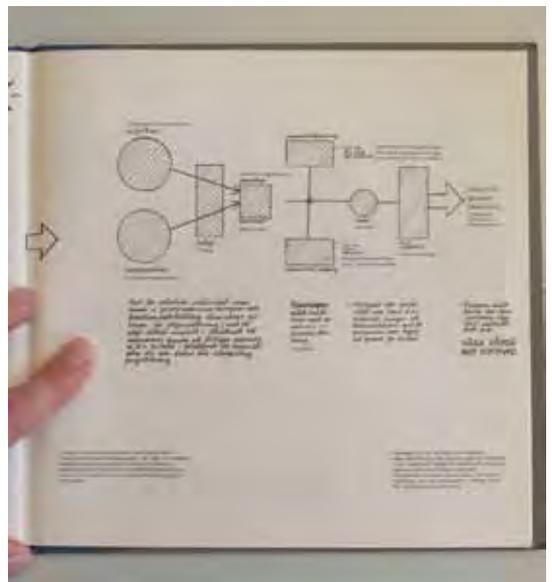
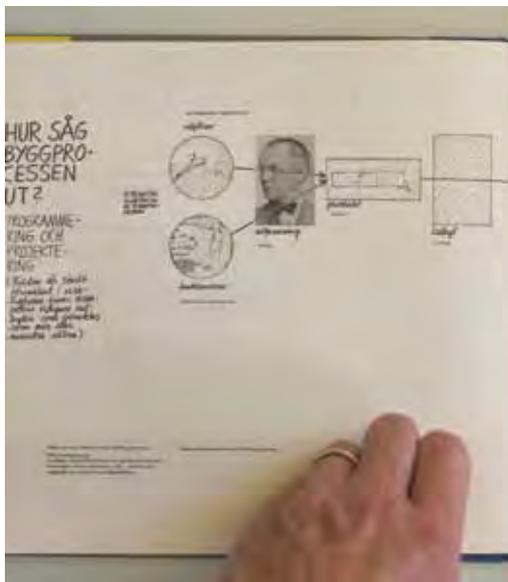
The traditional phases of building planning, where the environmental and functional requirements are deciding factors for design, from which a cost estimate would determine the anticipated cost. The anticipated cost provides basis for a decision on whether

to go ahead with the project or not. KBS's critique of the prevailing building process was that it was irrational and that planning thus ran the risks of being misguided ("excessive demands in relation to resources"). Instead, it was suggested that the design phase should take place at the end of the process, after a decision to build.

The "new" process should, as previously, be based on environmental and functional requirements. But instead of using the requirements for design they should now be used to make a cost estimate; where after resource requirements and annual cost should be estimated. Then, "assessment of proposed budget" and "administrative planning" forms the basis for a decision. After the decision is made, "controlled design" starts followed by production. With controlled design, KBS's meant "consciously guided to conform to the forecasts on which the decision was based." With the design phase placed towards the end of the planning process, the architect's traditional way of leading the work through design was eliminated. The design work was instead more or less predetermined through technical specifications and budget. The new ideas about the concept of function permeated the whole structure philosophy. In line with contemporary international ideas, KBS promoted their theory with catchwords such as flexibility, adaptability, changeability, and generality. Also in line with the program budgeting's demands for a division of the organisation's activities into programs, KBS separated building construction into what they called *environment-related parts*, *building-related*

Figure 2. (L) The Swedish functionalist building process 1930-1968, according to KBS. Catalogue spread from *Architecture-Structure* exhibition catalogue (KBS, 1969). Photograph of catalogue by the author.

Figure 3. (R) KBS' proposed building process. Catalogue spread from *Architecture-Structure* exhibition catalogue (KBS, 1969). Photograph of catalogue by the author.



parts, and *activity-related* parts. As structure philosophy and program budgeting guided the work of KBS, the goal of its operations became obvious: cost-effectiveness. Social questions traditionally important in welfare state policies, or for that matter, issues of more architectural concern seemed to have been suppressed or lost. What were the mechanisms behind this shift of focus? Could it be explained by something besides an increasing public austerity?

Means over Ends, and the Banality of Formal Rational Action

In the beginning of the last century Max Weber pessimistically predicted that what lies in front of us is “a polar night of icy darkness” as modern capitalist societies lead to increasing rationalization and bureaucracy that imprisons humanity in an “iron cage” of capitalist relations.¹² For Weber the increasing rationalization was irreversible and took the form of meaninglessness and the dominance of means over ends. He asserted this was because *formal rationality*, where decision-making is based on “norms of efficiency and practical costs,” is favoured over *substantive rationality*, decision-making based on the consideration of “social justice, ethical standards and a concern for social equity.”¹³ Whereas rationalization in Weber’s definition is “the overall historical process,” rationality is “the capacity of social action,” which is dependent on the “methodical orientation to reality.”¹⁴

It is exactly in this capacity of action that we could address architecture’s potential to work towards social needs and political goals. Hannah Arendt has reminded us about the central role of action in society and of our confusion regarding the differences between meaning and ends, and between ends and means. She asserted that the core of the problem is that meaning is confused with end although meaning can never be a goal of action, but only a result or effect of action.¹⁵ Similarly, Arendt thought the difference between ends and means are not properly understood, as people are “blind to the fundamental distinction between ‘for the sake of ...’ and ‘in order to ...’”

She stated: “[As] meanings are degraded into ends, it follows that ends themselves are no longer safe because the distinction between means and ends is no longer understood, so finally all ends turn and are degraded to means.”¹⁶

12. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner, 1952); and “Politics as a Vocation” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth & C Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958); Robert J. Holton and Bryan S. Turner, *Max Weber on Economy and Society* (London: Routledge, 2011).

13. Ken Morisson, *Marx, Durkheim, Weber: Formations of modern social thought* (London: Sage 1995), 287.

14. Morisson, *Marx, Durkheim, Weber*, 285.

15. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (London: Faber, 1961), 78-79.

16. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 78-79.

Perhaps the above reasoning by Arendt is the essence of the degradation of means-ends rationality to favour means, and in this way, this confusion favour modes of production that has no political or ideological aims or purposes but being improved through measures of efficiency. It is in this way that architecture as a making discipline is degraded to exercises in modes of production, and not primarily valued by its correlation to ends, neither firstly assessed through professional knowledge, standards or experiences, but measured in relation to cost and efficiency. As observed by Weber and Arendt, the domination of means over ends is indeed a general trend in bureaucratic societies, and arguably acutely present also today. If we return to the concerns of this paper, the question of the effect of the Swedish Government's implementation of program budgeting at the KBS, it is certainly clear that program budgeting was a refined system for means-ends rationality, and that the construct of it rested in a formal rational approach of decision-making.

The Forms of Withdrawal and the Shortfall of Ideology

Like Arendt, Herbert Marcuse sought to define the reasons for the increasing rationalization of society and how the social aspects of society become more and more determined by formal rational arguments. In the illusionary objectivity created by this rationality, Marcuse thought even individual's social position and relation to others "appear as calculable manifestations of (scientific) rationality" and the "world tends to become stuff of total administration."¹⁷ If we read Marcuse's words as also the life of individuals are affected by the rationalization of reason, what are then the "scientific" activities (like architecture) directly conducted under the programming of the state? In Marcuse's words: "The web of domination has become the web of Reason itself, and this society is fatally entangled in it. And the transcending modes of thought seem to transcend Reason itself. Under these conditions, scientific thought [...] outside the physical sciences assumes the form of a pure and self-contained formalism (symbolism) on the one hand, and a total empiricism on the other."¹⁸

17. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 169.

18. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 169.

In relation to Marcuse's reasoning we could consider architects' responses to the crisis and critique of around 1970s as being divided exactly into this "self-contained formalism" and/or "total empiricism." In fact, for the Swedish context of the 1970s it is hard to imagine any other form than these two, individually or

combined. What is clear, in our case, is that KBS' building activities during the 1970s was dominated by a steady reliance on empirical investigations from behavioural studies to technical testing of whole building systems, in which building design could be seen as a formalist exercise of technical sophistication. And although more critical and relational practices were implemented into KBS' building processes quite early on in the 1970s, it was a bad fit with the prevailing technocracy. One of KBS most significant and largest buildings is the Garnisonen office complex in Stockholm, 1964-1972. Built to host Governmental agencies and institutions it rapidly became a symbol of excessive bureaucracy, where the building itself manifested a sort of "self-contained formalism." In the spring of 1971 there was a large conflict in the collective bargaining between the State and groups within two unions of Governmental officers (SACO and SR) and Garnisonen became the image of the conflict as it symbolized widespread unfavourable views of both the government and the officers.¹⁹ Architect Ragnar Uppman remembers the role the building played in media's coverage of the conflict:

A photographer only had to walk across the street from the TV-building to make a sweeping shot of the 347 meter long façade of Garnisonen to portray how an army of privileged bureaucrats reinforced themselves to demand higher salaries. I had from the beginning perceived the large building

19. Union groups belonging to Sveriges Akademikers Centralorganisation, SACO, and Statstjänstemännens Riksförbund, SR, were brought out in strike. See Anders Björnsson, *I kungskapens intresse: SACO:s första sex decennier* (Stockholm: Carlsson, 2007).



Figure 4. Garnisonen office building showing main façade along Karlavägen, Stockholm. Photograph by the author.

20. Ragnar Uppman, *I arkitektens öga. En yrkesmemoar* (Stockholm: Carlsson bokförlag, 2006), 76. Author's translation from the Swedish. Ragnar Uppman was one of the principals of the architectural office A4 who designed Garnisonen with Tage Hertzell as main architect.

21. K. Michael Hays, "The Opposition of Autonomy and History" in *Oppositions Reader*, ed. K. Michael Hays (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), xii

22. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, ix.

23. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 178.

as an expression of democratic welfare. Naively, I thought of governmental officers being the servants of the people. A large building filled with civil servants meant that Sweden was prosperous enough to serve many. Instead, in the public consciousness the long façade turned out to illustrate the bureaucracy that risen above our heads.²⁰

Architectural historian and theorist K. Michael Hays is proposing a similar inward-looking tendency as Marcuse, writing (as he conjectures on Manfredo Tafuri's account of the state of architecture in the beginning of the 1970s) that "the contemporary struggle of architecture to return to itself through autonomous formal operations alerts us not to architecture's success, but to its coming to grief against a historical moment, one that shuts down certain social functions that architecture had previously performed."²¹ Tafuri put it more bluntly as he framed the 1970s "drama" of architecture being "architecture obliged to return to *pure architecture*, to form without utopia; in the best cases, to sublime uselessness."²² Tafuri would dismiss the sincerity of architects' attempts as misunderstandings of the historical development of modernism, saying: "Architects, after having ideologically anticipated the iron-clad law of the plan, are now incapable of understanding historically the road travelled; and thus they rebel at the extreme consequences of the processes they helped set in motion."²³ Within Hays and Tafuri's interpretation of architecture's struggle there is the perception that the avoidance of dealing with the real issues of the problem would result in "formal operations." What is important here is that what is lost in the "return" to architecture, is the ability to justify and legitimize social (collective) needs of society in architecture, or perhaps more important, "any illusion" that it would be possible.

In the last chapter of his *Architecture in Utopia* Tafuri reveals his interest in the political-economic "programming" of the State and his direct research and experience of contemporary economic-administrative systems, and in particular, the experiments of the Italian centre-left Government of the late 1960s. Tafuri was concerned with architecture and capitalism's intertwined development. In discussing the reasons for 1970's crisis of the architecture profession Tafuri stated that capitalism was immune to architectural ideology and politicians were uninterested in including previous architectural ideologies in their contemporary "programming." The political-economic unwillingness to carry out the rationalization ideologies of modernist architecture was

understandable. The efforts were instead put on finding flexible structures, not only of architecture, but also of decision-making. In their search for alternatives many Governments' looked at the private sector and approved new decisional models that rationalized (everything) according to economic factors.²⁴

24. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, vii-xi; 170-82.

In reference to design theorist Horst Rittel, Tafuri speculated on the future strategies of architects, and, for that matter, the critique of ideology in changing the society. Circumscribed in an "atmosphere of anxiety [...] the decline of the architects' 'professional' status and his introduction into programs where the ideological role of architecture is minimal."²⁵ And further suggested that "[f]rom the criticism of ideology it is necessary to pass on to the analysis of the techniques of programming and of the ways in which these techniques actually affect the vital relationships of production."²⁶ It was precisely the risk of being latched into large programs that Swedish architects critiqued in regards to working with KBS and other public institutions. And naturally, those architects that agreed to work with KBS tried to see the possibilities of the new conditions, especially concerning the capacity for architects to influence the work with building construction. The Swedish case of KBS clearly shows that Governmental "techniques of programming" have significant implications on the "relationships of production," whether in the Marxist sense of economic structure or in a more literal sense as processes of production.

25. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 176-78.

26. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, xi.

Conclusion

We can only speculate on the strategic steps of KBS in launching its architecture theory, but it is not far fetched to think that KBS's intention was to legitimize the "new" KBS. And in hindsight we could argue that their strategies assisted KBS's institutional continuity and stability through the troubled 1970s. The structure philosophy could be seen as a branding effort and marketing campaign for what the new KBS would be able to achieve. Without here going into the details of KBS somewhat troubled past, it is necessary to acknowledge that KBS had been commanded to try to stay within budgets and keep down costs after some overspending scandals. KBS needed to gain credibility both within its organization and toward the Government, and with the launching of the structure philosophy, KBS was able to present a new legitimate business and action plan.

The implementation of program budgeting had great significance on KBS' architecture and on the role of the architect. As a result of the implementation, KBS made substantial re-organisations and adapted its way of working in accordance with the new requirements. Program budgeting differed from the Government's earlier budget systems as budgeting changed from a legal and controlling function to organisational steering and socio-economic oriented planning. The shift could be viewed as a mere change in administration perspective, as a new trend within public management, but a closer look reveals that the system was directed at securing the cost-effectiveness of the Governmental agencies' activities, which at best were aimed at finding balance between cost-effectiveness and cost-benefits, but more often steered decisions towards the most cost-effective alternative. And perhaps more importantly in relation to this paper, program budgeting made the economic perspective the dominant perspective in the interpretation of results and performance, as evaluations of the programs focused on the measurable.

The new public management reforms of the 1960s and 1970s were in many ways well-needed changes of obsolete administrative structures that lacked systematic control and evaluation of the spending of public funds. And as the reforms' focus was on getting control of money spent it comes as no surprise that the ways of monitoring this was through new financial analyses and budget systems. The development of these administrative structures since the time of their implementation, have primarily been in evaluation of performance and result, which have led to what we today might call an "evaluation society," where the administrative costs and duties have escalated to the unreasonable. What is interesting is that KBS managed to merge program budgeting with the structure philosophy into, tight-knit building program, a cohesive whole in which the organisation was promoted as a conscious welfare provider and an updated responsive employer. In this study, the restructuring conceal both marketization and domination agendas as the Government and KBS wanted to rationalise its operations and make changes that made the agency's work more time and cost efficient by sacrificing professional knowledge and expertise that was costly or that could not be easily measured or quantified in monetary terms.