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# UNDERSTANDING THE MARKETING DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN THE SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL VENTURES OF CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES

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Construction companies are commonly portrayed as project-based organisations that respond to client requirements and deliver standardised works and services determined by the traditional construction trades. However, modern construction companies are also partaking an increasingly important role in delivering sustainable solutions to social and environmental problems. The objective of the study is to provide insights into the efforts of a Danish construction company in delivering sustainable solutions by devising social and environmental ventures. In this regard, we have a special interest in understanding the role of the marketing department. The empirical material of the study is based on observations and conversations with employees in the marketing department gathered between 2018-2022. In the analysis, we examine two distinct ventures devised by the marketing department through an institutional work framework. On this basis, the study concludes that the marketing department plays a critical role in devising new social and environmental ventures that affect regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive prescriptions in construction.

Keywords: institutional; social procurement; sustainability; waste management

## INTRODUCTION

Building and construction sectors worldwide are increasingly confronted with demands to deliver sustainable solutions to social and environmental problems (Bal *et al.*, 2013; Buser and Carlsson, 2020; Leiringer *et al.*, 2022). These demands have been foregrounded in recent years through the gradual implementation of transnational as well as national regulation aiming to promote notions of sustainability in sectors and markets. At the transnational level, the European Union requires member states' companies with more than 500 employees to disclose information regarding their non-financial activities and report on their social and environmental impact (European Commission, 2021a). At the national level, in Denmark, the Ministry of the Interior and Housing (2021) has launched the 'Voluntary Sustainability Standard'. The

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standard has been proclaimed to support conversion and maturation of sustainability and is expected to be fully integrated in the Danish building code by 2023.

The efforts to promote sustainability in the European building and construction sectors by implementing transnational and national regulation have a dual effect on construction companies. On the one hand, the regulation stipulates specific measures and tasks that companies must endorse to ensure statutory and regulatory compliance (Brooks *et al.*, 2021; Gottlieb and Frederiksen, 2020). On the other hand, the regulation also stimulates a sense of awareness among companies implying that they must actively devise new social and environmental ventures to be at the forefront of the sustainable development (Leiringer, 2020).

Where the former primarily seeks to control the behaviour of companies (Edelman and Suchman, 1997), the latter alternatively draws attention to the agency of companies to purposefully affect and potentially change the institutional field endogenously (Dorado, 2005). The efforts of companies to devise new social and environmental ventures that diverge from otherwise institutionalised patterns of legitimate behaviour, however, are traditionally considered to be a complex and risky endeavour (Fisher, 2020; Frederiksen, 2021). This is also the case in construction, where companies are commonly portrayed as deeply ingrained in project-based organisations that respond to the requirements of the client and deliver standardised works and services determined by the construction trades (Hughes and Hughes, 2013).

The objective of the study is to provide insights into the efforts of a Danish construction company in delivering sustainable solutions by devising new social and environmental ventures. In this regard, we have a special interest in understanding the role of the marketing department. The marketing department under scrutiny has undergone a major development in recent years, which is striking as marketing research frequently reports on decreased influence of marketing departments at the level of corporate strategy (Verhoef and Leeflang, 2009). Marketing research also highlights that marketing departments often struggle to justify their relevance in the 'language of finance' that permeates most modern companies (e.g., Key *et al.*, 2020). In contrast to other departments' internal focus on production activities, the marketing department has a strong external focus on sector development and new market trends. Moreover, the marketing department is responsible for devising new ventures that bridge the company's commercial interests and emerging societal demands on sustainability in construction. Previous inquiries have demonstrated that such mediating efforts involve extensive institutional work (e.g., Rao *et al.*, 2000; Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010) by individuals or groups aiming to purposefully affect or change institutionalised patterns of legitimate behaviour in the field. We thus mobilise the concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) as analytical framework to explain the reflexive interplay between the examined ventures and the bolstering or undermining of institutions. The empirical basis of the study consists of observations and conversations gathered in the marketing department between 2018-2022.

#### *Institutional work*

Whereas an institution represents social structures composed of regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that have attained a high degree of resilience and produces meaning and stability to social life (Scott, 2014), institutional work represents purposeful action aimed at creating, disrupting, or maintaining institutions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Institutional work thus introduces an agentic and practice-oriented approach to examine how individuals or groups become drivers of

institutional change or institutional status quo by advocating for and experimenting with new ideas and practices in the field (Hwang and Colyvas, 2011; Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010). These new ideas and practices often imply relatively invisible and mundane micro-processes aiming at affecting or changing regulative, normative and/or cultural-cognitive elements of institutions in pursuit of self-interest (Lawrence *et al.*, 2011; Perkmann and Spicer, 2008). Performing institutional work moreover requires certain skills of the 'institutional innovators' (Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010) such as the ability to exert authority, set new agendas, frame arguments, and establish legitimacy (Fisher, 2020; Perkmann and Spicer, 2008). As such, studying empirical phenomena through an institutional work framework does not per se involve successful institutional change. Instead, it involves examination and understanding of the reflexive interplay between the actions of individuals or groups and the bolstering or undermining of institutions (Lawrence *et al.*, 2011).

Institutional work has experienced a growing popularity in organisation and management research since the concept was introduced more than 15 years ago (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). In recent years, the concept has also made its entry into construction management research along with other institutional concepts mainly to explain processes of change and innovation. For example, construction management scholars have applied institutional work to understand challenges regarding implementation of new waste management practices (Andersson *et al.*, 2019), the agency of environmental experts (Gluch and Bosch-Sijtsema, 2016) and the role of objects in change processes (Svensson and Gluch, 2022).

Scant attention has, however, been devoted to individual or groups operating in 'peripheral positions' (Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010; Rao *et al.*, 2000), such as marketing departments, despite their responsibility to translate exogeneous demands into field-level changes. In his contribution to the debate on the future trajectory of construction management theory and research, Bresnen (2017) also stresses that institutional work may enable construction management scholars to contribute to more profound organisation and management debates and thereby provide a wider impact. Mobilising the concept of institutional work thus allows us to capture and explain how the marketing department's efforts to deliver sustainable solutions involve institutional work that challenges institutionalised patterns of behaviour in context of Danish construction.

## **METHOD**

Enemærke and Petersen is a Danish construction company founded in 1975. The company uses the slogan 'People who build for people - The construction industry's social contractor', which reflects the company's self-perception and declared approach to the market. The company employs more than 700 persons distributed on distinct production departments as well as cross-cutting departments such as accounting, administration, human resources and marketing. A prevailing understanding in the company is that persons affiliated the cross-cutting departments must be financed by and thereby contribute to strengthening the company's production activities. The Chief Financial Officer manifested this perception during a presentation of the company's balance sheet in 2019 where he stressed that "all salaried employees in the cross-cutting departments are resources that must be covered by our production activities".

The marketing department is led by the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) and comprises an additional 14 persons who handle tasks and functions on branding,

business development, communication, prequalification, public relations, sales support and most recently R&D. The department has undergone a major development in the past years due to ever-increasing demands from customers and governmental authorities to promote and deliver sustainable solutions in construction. For instance, the department has established a Head of Sustainability position, expanded its repertoire of activities within the social and environmental agendas and commenced industrial PhD projects to qualify the company's advancement within these areas.

The marketing department, for example, has intensified the company's involvement in waste management in the venture 'Next shed' and in social procurement in the venture 'Social employment'. In brief, Next shed introduced new practices of selective demolition in roof renovations as well as reuse and recycling of building materials that would conventionally end up as waste. Analogously, Social employment introduced principles for inclusion of unemployed residents in socially marginalised housing areas into the labour market. The two ventures are described further in the analysis.

Two researchers conducted empirical material in the marketing department between 2018-2022 through observations in the department (approx. one day a week) and conversations with the employees associated with the department. These methods were chosen as they could give us different empirical insights (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998) at the level of the department and the individual employee, respectively. During our observations in the department, an explorative approach was mobilised to obtain an understanding of how the marketing department sought to stimulate internal awareness and coordinate its activities with the other departments when devising new social and environmental ventures.

Analogously, the conversations with employees were conducted informally (Spradley, 1979) as we mingled with employees in the department. During the conversations, we asked the employees to elaborate on the activities, developments, discussions, and challenges experienced in the department in relation to the new ventures. Our observations and the conversations with employees were not documented formally in written format but used in a reflexive manner (Klitgaard *et al.*, 2021) to reconstruct descriptions about the two examined ventures and obtain an understanding of the institutional work performed. More specifically, we analysed the empirical material by linking these to the literature on institutional work to identify how the marketing department engaged in actions aimed at disrupting, creating, or maintaining institutions.

## ANALYSIS

At the global level, the building and construction sectors account for approximately 40% of the waste produced by volume (World Resources Institute, 2016) and forecasts by OECD estimate an increase towards 2060 due to the growth of the global economy (OECD, 2018). In addition, the Danish Government has in recent years published reports stressing the need to develop solutions that can contribute to waste reduction and prevention in context of Danish construction (e.g., Danish Government, 2015; Ministry of the Interior and Housing, 2021). The reports, however, largely articulate the need for construction sector companies to take a proactive role in finding and propagating solutions that redirect waste into new resources by challenging prevailing ways of planning, collaborating and communicating in construction.

With ambitions to address the waste problem in context of Danish construction, in 2018 the philanthropic association Realdania launched the competition 'Circular

construction challenge - Rethink waste'. The competition invited companies from the construction sector to present new innovative proposals for recycling and upcycling of waste. As reward, the three winning proposals would be granted: (1) assistance to form the "right team", (2) expert guidance to refine the proposal and (3) up to €130,000 to develop a prototype.

Next shed was one of the winning proposals prepared by the architectural firm Krydsrum and Enemærke and Petersen's marketing department. The idea behind Next shed was to develop a construction concept for selective demolition of building materials in roof renovations that could subsequently be reused and recycled in the construction of new sheds. The proposal's stated interest in sheds was twofold. The first was that the documentation requirements in the Danish building code for secondary buildings (e.g., carports, garages, and sheds) are less strict compared to those for primary buildings (e.g., residential properties). This provides more favourable opportunities for reuse and recycling of building materials in secondary buildings. The second was that about a half million square meters of sheds are built in Denmark every year, which means that a construction concept for reuse and recycling of building materials in the construction of sheds could contribute to waste reduction.

In the Next shed venture, the architectural firm Krydsrum was responsible for preparing the architectural shed design. The design was based on the most common types of demolition waste from roof renovations such as insulation, rain gutters, roof tiles and wood. Analogously, Enemærke and Petersen's marketing department was responsible for orchestrating processes in relation to demolition, reuse, and recycling of the identified building materials, and for formulating the construction concept based on prefabrication. The building concept prescribed, among other things, how the identified building materials for reuse and recycling should be disassembled and transported to Enemærke and Petersen's construction factory for subsequent processing and assembly in prefabricated elements. Once the prefabricated elements were built, they were returned to the construction site and assembled. The process from disassembly of building materials to finished shed lasted for two weeks, of which the final assembly work took half a day.

In the venture, the marketing department introduced alternative practices in the company on selective demolition as well as reuse and recycling of building materials. This was, on the one hand, an attempt to comply with societal demands regarding waste reduction and prevention in construction and, on the other hand, an approach to stimulating awareness and promoting new practices on waste management internally in the company.

In the venture, the marketing department performed institutional work aimed at affecting or changing regulative, normative as well as cultural-cognitive prescriptions that are institutionalised in construction and thereby specify legitimate behaviour. The department engaged in actions to disrupt institutions by demonstrating that existing building code requirements on residential properties counteract reuse and recycling of building materials and thus constitutes a barrier to the wider propagation of waste management practices in construction (regulative). In addition, the department sought to create institutions by framing new practices on waste management as an approach to address societal demands on waste reduction and prevention (normative) and stimulating awareness on waste management in the company's production activities (cultural-cognitive).

A reform proposal published by the Danish Government expresses the importance to increase the workforce at large to promote a richer, greener and more talented Danish society (Regeringen, 2021). Among other things, the report presents visions for how a more inclusive labour market can contribute to increasing the workforce by creating jobs for people who are capable to work but are excluded from the labour market. An analysis prepared by the largest business and employers' organisation in Denmark, the Confederation of Danish Industry, also highlights the need of expanding the workforce in the construction sector. The analysis reveals that almost half of the companies in construction experience limited production due to labour shortage (DI Analysis, 2021). In line with this, the European Construction Sector Observatory stresses that the Danish construction sector must tackle the challenge of labour shortage to ensure economic growth in coming years (European Commission, 2021b).

According to the Danish Government (Regeringen, 2018, 2021), one way to increase the workforce is to include residents in socially marginalised housing areas in the labour market. Such an area, as per the Danish Government's definition (Regeringen, 2018), is a neighbourhood where: (1) more than half of the residents are first or second-generation migrants, (2) more than 2.7% of the residents are convicted and (3) more than 40% between the ages of 18-64 are unemployed. Hence, a more inclusive labour market has been touted as a pivotal means of addressing labour shortage and a way to increase integration of residents in socially marginalised housing areas and thereby combat parallel societies (Regeringen, 2021).

Towards 2030, major renovations of the socially marginalised housing areas in Denmark have been announced. With this in mind, a group of ten organisations (including industry associations, NGOs, social housing organisations, a pension company and a municipality) led by Enemærke and Petersen's marketing department formulated the Social employment venture. The main purpose of the venture was to develop guidelines that could inform construction companies and client organisations on how to create social value in socially marginalised housing areas by creating jobs for residents that were excluded from the labour market. As expressed by Enemærke and Petersen's Head of Sustainability during a conversation: "the socially marginalised housing areas are of particular interest because there's a shortage of labour in construction while there's a surplus of potential workforce in these areas in the sense that many of the residents are without job and education".

In the Social employment venture, Enemærke and Petersen's previous experiences from a renovation of 27 apartment blocks in a socially marginalised housing area in Aarhus, Denmark, were used as a starting point for the preparation of the guidelines. The experiences showed that a renovation project with an estimated value of €50M had the potential to create 3-5 apprenticeships, 5-10 full time jobs and 3-5 part-time jobs for residents in the local area. Examples hereof are: (1) apprenticeships in masonry and carpentry, (2) site workers who handle incidental tasks and clean up on the construction site, (3) service workers who make coffee, lunch and clean up construction trailers and (4) communications officers who, in the local language, inform the local community about the progress and purpose of the renovation project.

According to Enemærke and Petersen's CMO, inclusion of residents in the renovation of apartment blocks in socially marginalised housing areas is associated with several positive outcomes. Examples hereof are social value creation in the local community, recruitment of talented workforce, prevention of vandalism on the construction site and a strengthened corporate social responsibility profile (CSR). In addition, Green

Building Council Denmark had designated the Social employment venture as a particularly interesting case, which could potentially set a precedent for new evaluation criteria for social sustainability in the Danish version of the DGNB sustainability certification scheme.

In the venture, the marketing department developed guidelines informing construction companies and client organisation on how to create social value in socially marginalised housing areas by creating jobs for residents that are excluded from the labour market. This was, on the one hand, an attempt to comply with societal demands on increasing the workforce by promoting a more inclusive labour market and, on the other hand, an attempt to recruit talented workforce and strengthen the company's CSR-profile. The venture also involved institutional work aimed at affecting or changing regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive prescriptions of legitimate behaviour in construction. The department engaged in actions towards institutional creation by lobbying for evaluation criteria on social sustainability in the Danish version of the DGNB sustainability certification scheme (regulative). Furthermore, the department framed the developed principles for inclusion of unemployed residents in socially marginalised housing areas in the labour market as an approach to address societal demands on increasing the workforce and creation of social value in socially marginalised housing areas (normative). Finally, the department advocated for the value of social procurement internally in the company to recruit talented workforce and strengthen the company's CSR-profile (cultural-cognitive).

## **FINDINGS**

In the analysis, we have provided insights into how the marketing department devises new social and environmental ventures aiming to bridge the commercial interests of the company and emerging demands on sustainability in context of construction. In this section, we first discuss challenges related to mediating commercial and sustainability interests at the same time. Subsequently, we categorise activities performed by the marketing department to create, disrupt, and maintain institutions.

### *Mediating commercial interests and societal demands on sustainability*

Efforts to meet commercial interests and societal demands on sustainability at the same time is a tricky endeavour for a company. If the company manages to meet commercial interests but fails to deliver the promised sustainability results, the company may be confronted with accusations of greenwashing or CSR-washing (e.g., Delmas and Burbano, 2011). Alternatively, if the company manages to deliver the promised sustainability results but neglect the commercial interests it may jeopardise the company's growth and survival (Fisher, 2021). Thus, an important task for the company is to strike a balance between commercial interests and societal demands on sustainability. In the analysis, we have showed how Enemærke and Petersen's marketing department, by devising social and environmental ventures, endeavoured to mediate the company's commercial interests and emerging demands on sustainability in construction. In this regard, we have also demonstrated that the marketing department, in collaboration with other field level constituents, performs institutional work by challenging institutionalised patterns of legitimate behaviour in construction.

### *Institutional work performed by marketing department in the ventures*

In the two ventures, the marketing department engaged in actions aiming at creating, disrupting, and maintaining institutions. Actions towards institutional creation entailed the promotion of new ideas and practices on waste management and social



procurement in the form of a building concept for reuse and recycling of building materials, evaluation criteria for social sustainability and guidelines for job creation in socially marginalised housing areas. Moreover, the marketing department attempted to generate social support thereby legitimising the new practices (Fisher, 2020) by framing the ventures as solutions to problems in construction regarding waste production and social exclusion. Actions towards institutional disruption entailed delegitimising existing institutionalised patterns of behaviour (Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010) in construction by framing them as counteracting the fulfilment of societal demands regarding waste reduction and increasing the workforce. More specifically, the marketing department framed the building code requirements as a barrier to the wider propagation of waste management practices and the labour structures as inadequate in terms of creating jobs for people who are excluded from the labour market. Finally, actions towards institutional maintenance entailed the reproduction of ideas and practices (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) on waste management and social procurement. In this pursuit, the marketing department internally advocated for the ventures by linking these with the achievement of commercial benefits as well as compliance with societal demands on sustainability.

The study contributes to existing literature on institutional change and innovation in construction with an understanding of how a marketing department performs institutional work to promote notions of sustainability in construction. Marketing departments are rarely the subject of analysis in construction management research, which is likely due to the supporting and peripheral position (Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010) of such departments in project-based construction companies. However, as shown in this study, marketing departments fulfil a critical role in the social and environmental ventures of construction companies, and we therefore suggest that actors operating in such peripheral positions are devoted greater scholarly attention.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our interest in the study was to obtain an understanding of the marketing department's role in the social and environmental ventures of construction companies. In the study, we showed that the marketing department under scrutiny, besides conventional marketing disciplines such as branding, communication, public relations, and sales support, also strived to promote sustainable solutions in construction by devising new social and environmental ventures. We also argued that the two examined ventures, Next shed and Social employment, illustrated the efforts of the marketing department to bridge the company's commercial interests and emerging societal demands on sustainability in construction. In this regard, the marketing department performed institutional work in the ventures to mediate at thereby strike a balance between the company's commercial interests and societal demands on sustainability. The institutional work performed involved both regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive work aimed at creating, disrupting and maintaining institutions. On this basis, we conclude that the marketing department plays a critical role in the social and environmental ventures of construction companies. First by devising the venture. Second by framing the venture as a solution to social and environmental problems. Third and finally by promoting new practices and beliefs in the company that support the stated aim of the venture. In addition, we conclude that the institutional work performed by the marketing department to establish new venture legitimacy (Fisher, 2020) is crucial to bridge the company's commercial interests and emerging societal demands on sustainability in construction.

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