

Convenience renovation and non-transition - contractor SMEs operating in the detached housing market.

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Abstract:

Single houses built in Sweden before 1980 are in need of renovation to meet the 2020 standards for energy performance as a large majority is still warmed with electricity, insufficiently insulated and exhibit poor energy efficiency. Such small scale renovations have traditionally been the market of small and medium sized contractors (SME's) interacting directly with the house owners.

The main purposes of this contribution are therefore to investigate how renovation of single family houses occurs when in interaction with craftsman SMEs and secondly to envisage activities in small craftsman organisations under transformation towards delivering sustainable buildings.

A selective literature review of activities in SMEs facing sustainable housing transition is carried out. Case studies of small craftsman companies; including carpenters, electricians, and plumbers and their customer relations are ongoing. This paper presents a study of three craftsmen contractors and their interaction with potential customers, owners of single family houses. Through interviewing, participant observation, and shadowing the sales processes and negotiations are followed. Theoretically the study draws on Goffman's concepts of performance, staging and encounters.

The result shows that occasions for sustainable renovation are staged and "inter-acted" into convenience renovation, renovation of selected elements of the house and in support of aesthetic and or functional needs of the house owner. Main activities envisaged for transitional activities are strategizing, networking, exercising politics and doing marketing. Transition can for example be exercised from the network of the SMEs.

Keywords: SME, detached houses, renovation

Introduction

Currently we witness uneven transition processes where some nations, sectors and areas of the economy are leaders and other laggards. This is also the case for the construction industry and its relations to customers. Some areas and companies are positioning themselves as leading (like for example Austria and its stock of passive houses (Rohracher and Ornetzeder 2013) and others as lagging behind (the existing building stock in Denmark, (SBI 2012) and Sweden (Boverket 2009). We focus here on the existing housing in Sweden and its poor energy and environmental performance and the related actions among players active in this market. More specifically the project behind is carried out in the region of Gothenburg.

About 750.000 single houses were built in Sweden between 1950-1975 (Boverket 2005, SCB 2010). These houses are now in need of renovation to meet the new European energy standards regarding isolation and heating systems as a large majority is still warmed with electricity and exhibit poor energy efficiency (Boverket 2005). Small scale renovations have traditionally been the market of small and medium sized contractors (SME's) interacting directly with the house owners (SME defined as EU, 2005). Contractors with less than 10 employees represent more than 80% of Swedish construction enterprises measured in number and 31% measured in turnover (SCB 2010). The SMEs with under 250 employees are responsible for a large part of the renovation market. Recent researches suggest that when it comes to sustainability and the related possibilities of green business development, the construction SMEs have barriers to overcome (Thuesen et al 2011, Horne et al 2014). A majority would even prefer to preserve existing business and technology areas and thereby avoid developing new green solutions (Thuesen et al 2011). Recent research points at an uneven development in Sweden, where the region of the capital of Stockholm takes a clear leading role when it comes to renovate single housing, (Filipsson et al. 2013). There is thus a substantial need for commencing transition processes in order to create sustainable buildings in other areas. Sustainable renovation should develop further than the actual focus on renovation for convenience, i.e.comfort, aesthetic and urgent reparation and maintenance. And move on to energy renovation and introduce a broader sustainability concept involving economic, social and environmental aspects.

The present Swedish regulatory frame is only recommending owners to engage in sustainable renovation and leaves the arena open to more voluntary types of renovations. Studies show that house owners doing such renovations are prone to contact and use their local SME craftsman (Doona and Jarlbro 2009, Risholt and Berker 2013). The interactions between house owner and craftsman come to impede the degree and quality of the energy renovation referring to costs, unstable and/or ineffective technologies, lack of understanding of subsidies and financial options and even general insecurity about all these elements (Risholt and Berker 2013).

This paper reports a study of craftsmen contractors and their interaction with house owners as potential customers. Through interviewing, participant observations and shadowing, the sales processes and negotiations are followed. Theoretically the study draws on Goffman's concepts of presentation of self in everyday life, performance, staging and encounters.

The aims of the article are therefore threefold:

First to create a qualitative status of construction SMEs, single family house owners and their joint renovation activities. The status makes use of a selective literature review (Hart 2009) then contributing to a framework of understanding of this type of transition activities using a Goffmanian staging concept. The second aim is to carry out an analysis of the interaction between the craftsman and house owners to inquire into the processes of creating convenience renovation rather than sustainability. The third aim is to envisage and identify strategic future activities in small craftsman organisations under transformation towards delivering sustainable buildings.

The approach taken to transition activities in sustainability building is multidisciplinary. It adopts a focus on micro-processes of performing encounters on renovation. We argue that insights into the reluctant sustainable renovation processes of the single family housing area can be gained through studying the occasion of interaction between house owners and craftsmen when the house owners ask the SME for assistance to do renovation.

The article is structured in the following way. First the method section describes the theoretical and empirical approach to the study, then a framework of understanding is developed including the context of sustainable renovation of single family houses, and the craftsman- house-owners interaction and the sustainable transition activities. This is followed by a single case, an excerpt from our research on the craftsman-house-owners interaction which feeds the vision for sustainable transition. Next is the discussion followed by the conclusion.

Method

The article adopts a multidisciplinary approach with interpretive sociology as core (Bryman and Bell 2007). The framework of understanding is developed drawing on sustainable transition theory (Geels 2013, Loorbach and Rotmans, 2010, Schot and Geels, 2008), SME literature (Hardi 2010), and cleantech contributions (Pernick and Wilder 2008), as well as studies of single family houses energy renovation (Berker 2013, Doona and Jarlbro 2009, Gram-Hanssen 2014, Horne et al 2014, Jones et al 2013, Nair et al 2010, 2012, Risholt and Berker 2013, Shove and Walker 2010, Vlasova and Gram-Hanssen 2014). The data material has been collected mostly as part of an ongoing project on “innovative business models for energy renovation” in which the authors take part. The final aim of this project based on action research is to support these SMEs in developing new business models focussing on sustainable solutions. The reflection presented here should be seen as an initial and preliminary result of the study.

The material for the present paper has been selected as follows: 90 construction SMEs in the region of Western Sweden were screened on the basis of their webpage. This has provided valuable insights into their Internet-marketing strategy involving elements such as the representation of their own identity, their services profile broad or specialised, the importance given or not to sustainability, (Buser and Carlsson 2014). These companies were all contacted by e-mail.

After a second round of contacts, 22 contractors companies responded positively and were visited for 1½ hours interview about their present status. During the spring five workshops were carried out with these companies in three groups commencing developing new approaches to single family housing renovation. Besides three companies already engaged in providing renewable sustainable technology for the renovation of single family houses were also interviewed. Finally a dialogue with a large company doing a network program with small companies in the area of “smart houses” was carried out.

In three exemplary cases, the shadowing was carried out (Czarniawska 2007) of the sales interactions between a craftsman representing an SME and potential house owner clients. One case is selected for further analysis here. The visits at three potential clients were followed, giving information on the relationship marketing and sales strategy of the company. The two cases not discussed here appear in Carlsson and Koch (2014). Further cases are forthcoming.

The visioning developed in final part of the paper draw together the framework of understanding, the qualitative status of studies of house-owners and craftsmen’s interaction, the shadowing of three selling occasions and our impression from the workshops done in the spring of 2014 with the companies. It should be seen as our preparation for the future collaboration with the SMEs.

The choice of a regional Swedish market is mostly made for pragmatic reason as the researchers operates in this country and region. The contractors and producers visited operated in remote areas outside Gothenburg. Similar studies could be carried in another of the Scandinavian countries facing the same challenges on the single housing building stock but within different legal frames for obtaining the near Zero Carbon goal (EU 2010). Seen in this light Sweden is a more challenging field for transition as there is less explicit legal goals for housing renovation.

The limitations of the study are related to the qualitative approach adopted and the preliminary stage of the study. This among other things also implies that customers have not yet been interviewed alone apart from the three shadowing cases. Moreover it has not been studied in what manner a ‘do it yourself’ approach is considered a relevant alternative for house owners (re. Hyysalo et al 2013, Vlasova and Gram-Hanssen 2014), neither have the harvest of studies of household practices been taken on board here (re. Berker 2013, Gram-Hanssen 2014, Shove and Walker 2010).

Framework of understanding

The following draws together contributions on sustainable renovations of single family houses, on Goffman perspective on the interaction situation between craftsman and house owners and possible elements of a vision for sustainable transition in and between SME’s.

Sustainable renovations of single family houses

There is a growing body of studies looking at energy renovation of single family houses (Gram-Hanssen 2014, Nair et al 2010). One important strand adopts a focus on how renovation fits into the practices of the house owners (Berker 2013, Gram- Hanssen 2014,

Shove and Walker 2010). Here however we are interesting to understand sustainable renovation as an interaction between house-owners and craftsmen and identify enablers and barriers for the renovation process to include features of sustainable solutions.

Risholt and Berker (2013) study both successful and unsuccessful energy renovations of a sample of 11 single family houses in Norway. The successful homeowners were those who were “conscious consumers” and distrusted expert advice or had special knowledge due to their professions. They obtained energy efficiency in doing renovation (Risholt and Berker (2013). The unsuccessful house owners suffered from lack of knowledge, bad advice from craftsmen or made a priority doing what they could handle themselves. That prevented them from implementing energy efficiency solutions (not to speak of sustainability).

In a similar vein, Horne et al (2014) find that the “intra-industry” network is crucial to the kinds of offers the craftsman SME would give to house owners. Broader national networks or trade associations are rarely involved. Also the craftsmen are characterised as “doers” that don’t enlarge the jobs as they are requested to do by the house owners. The authors (Horne et al 2014) show that industry representative and house owners tend to push the “green” issue back and forth between them. Vlasova and Gram-Hanssen (2014) study a case where a retrofit is used as showcase for the company implying at the time that the house owner gets a substantial renovation for a very fair price, yet –interestingly s/he is out-manoeuvred when it comes to design issues in the renovation process.

Doona and Jarlbro (2009) in their study of house owner’s investment in district heating similarly find that general information and campaigns are perceived by house owners as “noise”. When house owners seek support for their decision making they therefore prefer to turn to neighbours rather than to the range of available public, semi-public and private consultants and counselling.

Nair et al (2010, 2012) take a somewhat different approach using questionnaires. Their findings show that the local knowledge of the house-owners regarding sustainable or energy efficient component such as windows or insulation is limited and that the house owners therefore become dependent of the installer or even the product’s manufacturers.

Jones et al (2013) take a more distanced approach, but claim to be able to identify key financial barriers in a UK and Wales context of “deep renovation”, whereas elemental renovation appear to pay off.

Studies with a broader sustainability focus for renovation on single houses are rarer, with notable exceptions such as Marres (2008).

Staging and Performing a renovation occasion

‘Staging’ is here understood as a construction of a physical arena and occasion for an act (Goffman, 1959; Clausen and Ushinaka, 2007). This emerges through interaction and would involve “one to one” occasions as well as “one to many” (Goffman 1959) but can also involve team performance (Van Praet, 2009). Staging of renovation arenas is conceptualised as a performative becoming of a collaborative sociomaterial agency (Clausen and Ushinaka,

2007). Importantly, as noted by Pinch (2010), staging involves the construction of performers (on stage) and audience, spectators to the events on stage. The performative dramaturgical repertoire encompasses using language, narratives, gestures, bodily movements, clothing (Van Praet 2009) as well as artefacts and materiality (Pinch 2010). It involves processes of initial definitional work, encounters (Goffman 1959, 1969) and might lead to mutual social obligation, i.e. that the parties feel committed to do the trade, if not disrupted (Darr and Pinch 2013). It also involves agent tactics of performing front stage as well as back stage, and finally, but importantly, sociomateriality is part and parcel of these staging processes.

Artefacts and materiality can enable these practices directly by, for example, acting as separators between front and back stage, by acting as properties, stage requisites, but it may also constrain the performance of agency (Pinch, 2010).

Framework for a vision for sustainable transition of building SMEs

Here, two main components are incorporated in the conceptualisation of transition action. These are: *vision* (to create a meaning and a path for people) (Bryman et al., 2011, Kotter, 1996) and *networking* (the ability to establish a network around you) including *interesement*, the process of getting people interested in a promoting alliance as well as encouraging them to participate in it (Akrich et al 2002, Callon, 1987), something Koch (2001) describes as *creating a coalition*.

When it comes to SMEs contributing to sustainability, four elements are particularly important when drawing on the experiences of SMEs in sustainable transition: Strategising, networking, political activities and marketing (Koch et al 2012). These are discussed in the following:

Strategising: The strategy as practice perspective (SAP) is suitable for SMEs (Achtenhagen et al 2013). The three elements are strategy practitioner, praxis and practice (Whittington 2006). Strategy practitioners in SME include both those directly involved in making strategy (the CEO and other managers and in exceptional cases consultants) and those with indirect influence – suppliers and customers or others closely related to the small company. “Strategizing comprises the actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices they draw upon in accomplishing that activity” (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007: 7-8); situated activity is conceptualised as praxis and comprises the interaction between the macro and micro contexts in which activity is constructed (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). In SMEs academic-based strategy methods and consulting tools (Porter analysis, hypothesis testing etc.) plays a relatively distant, small role, whereas daily praxis exhibit adopting and / or developing direction and visioning.

Networking: The ability to network is very important to niche companies involved in sustainable transition (Schot and Geels 2008). Many small and new companies will find themselves acting in an immature business, in an immature market without any standards and with very few established networks. To create a coalition and acquire knowledge, niche companies must seek out and engage in networking opportunities.

Another important target for networking would be non-government organisations (NGO). NGOs work in areas related to the products and services of the company. As opposed to other companies, sustainable building companies do not have to fight the NGOs because their company activities are polluting or harming nature. As a future perspective sustainable building companies would actually be able to collaborate with the NGOs (Porter and Kramer 2011) and gain positive influence by tapping into the social hype about green buildings.

Also the company representatives, along with everybody else, can tap into more socially oriented networks and relations, including participating in social media discussion groups and interacting with families and friends (Horne et al 2014), with a message about sustainable buildings that would have wider appeal.

Political aspects: Decisions and involvement with government of several types have a great impact on the sustainability business, and can be said to be involved in the business and its development in many different respects. This interaction can be understood as three levels: the SME operation in niches, the government level and an overarching international level (EU) (Schot and Geels, 2008). The SME s would interact rarely directly with local government units, but the political aspect can influence the sustainability business in many ways, for instance: government programmes of technology push, market pull (carrot-or-stick approach), set-up of networks and functions to help development and innovation and assistance for creating standards, and more local municipality and regional based support programmes and initiatives. The main aspect niche companies wish to get help for is financing for their development, i.e., technology push programmes.

Marketing: Branding of companies active in sustainable housing does not differ from that of companies in other business areas. Such companies have to go beyond one of the product's main attributes – the green factor – to actually sell it. Pernick and Wilder have suggested five steps important to have in mind when dealing with sustainable products (Pernick and Wilder, 2008):

- It's all about the costs: If you want to move your product from niche to mainstream, you cannot be thought of as a premium item.
- Do not use the environment as a selling point: Financial savings are good selling points, saving the planet is unfortunately not according to Pernick and Wilder (2008). Guilt and altruism do not sell – superior products, among other tangible benefits, do.
- Framing and naming are critical: It is vital that users identify the name and context of your solution to understand your value proposition correctly. (Pernick and Wilder 2008)
- It has to be easy, accessible and convenient: As a customer, why should you settle for second best, change behaviour or live in fear of breakdowns? Convenience, affordability and reliability come before sustainability. (Pernick and Wilder 2008)
- Remember the cool factor: Successful marketing should always create a buzz and people should be proud of using your products, services or solutions. (Pernick and Wilder 2008)

These five steps are generic and cover mostly the consumer market, which is also the most relevant here.

Summary of framework

The framework draw together contributions on sustainable renovations of single family houses, with a Goffman perspective on the interaction situation between craftsman and house owner and possible elements of a vision for sustainable transition carried by SME's. The contributions on sustainable renovation point to barriers and enablers of the process, one aspect being issues about the craftsman- house-owner interaction. We suggest using a Goffmanian staging as concept for focusing in on these interactions, viewing the processes of arrival at sustainable, energy or convenience renovation as a performative process. The framework finally encompasses elements of envisaging a sustainable transition, the main activities being strategizing, networking, exercising politics and doing marketing.

Case: occasions of renovation encounters

The case presented here relates a visit to an older house, where the owner has contacted the SME for a specific job, one of the craftsmen has been sent to make the first assessment of the work. The entire visit lasted three quarters of an hour. The craftsman is called Stefan below (a pseudonym).

Stefan got the request directly as he previously had been involved in repairing an insurance damage on the premises. This previous contact was established via the insurance company, but this contact came directly from the house owner, who referred to his satisfaction regarding the previous job. The owner wants a series of renovations to be carried in his house. Stefan tells me about two new windows and a new room before we arrive at the house. When arranging the visit Stefan has also told the owner that a researcher will be coming along. All the members of the family are at home when we arrive. It is the family father who invites us in, here called Bosse. Bosse addresses his daughter, and Stefan and him refers to the making of pancakes.

Led by Bosse, we go upstairs. There we go directly into one room and Bosse explains that he wants the end wall moved towards west, giving free access from this room to the next and also to gable space.

Stefan approaches the wall and knocks on it asking: "*it is made in wood?*", and answers "*no*" himself; "*rather laminated tree*". He does the same thing in the small corridor between the two rooms. Stefan makes a face indicating that the wall does not seem solid. Bosse leads us into the big room next to the gable and shows with his arms where he would like to have a separating wall (right through the middle of the room. He then points at the gable and says: "*and then there should be two windows here*" Stefan: "*how big do you imaging them to be ... 60, 80 cm?*" indicating the height with his hands. He measures with his yardstick. Bosse does not provide a clear answer

Stefan: "*Should they be painted?*" Bosse nods. "*Should they have aluminium edge outside?*" Bosse looks affirmative, Stefan: "*It is so that around 90-99% of the customers buy that, it is*

easier to maintain”. Bosse nods. Stefan makes a drawing of the rooms and notes concurringly. Stefan makes a series of inspections and for example knocks at the roof, one can hear the sawdust and addressed to Bosse “*Is it cold in the winter?*”, Bosse confirms.

Stefan and Bosse go through the plumbing and electricity aspects of the new rooms. They then come to discuss an offer. Stefan looks insisting and bends forward at Bosse and says “*I can make an offer, but we prefer running hours, it can be expensive for you with a comprehensive offer*”. Bosse nods and accepts “*running hours*”.

After having said good bye the owner re-exits the house addressing Stefan anew. He ask about the about gable and an outdoor wall in need of reparation. While talking about the wall a plumbers van arrive and the owner confirms also having a project with the plumber.

Arriving just outside the garden gate Stefan looks the researcher in the eyes and points out that some customers think about a lot of projects. They ask about way too much and do not know what it costs. It does not make sense to elaborate offers on a lot on that basis, when the customer cannot pay. He is not aware of that it cost 100.000 extra here and there. Here Stefan probably refers to the wall and the just arrived plumber.

Stefan ends the dialogue with the researcher pointing out that he should prioritize many other jobs.

Discussion

The case is showing how an occasion of renovation is performed into convenience renovation, focusing much narrower of functional wishes of the house owner.

There appears to be a good mutual contact between Stefan and Bosse. It seems that they have confidence in each other. They do not know each other well but the dialogue runs smoothly. There is no sign of scepticism during the dialogue. The exception occurs through Stefan post visit remark, discretely put after passing the garden fence, which does seem to indicate that Stefan mobilised politeness inside and that he don't fully trust the potential customer. This remark might have been triggered by the events in the latter part of the visit where the exchange of the entire upper part of the external gable, the reparation of a wall and a third party plumbers enters the situation.

It is important to note the craftsmen staging these sales situations with their clients appear to prefer to stage themselves as woodworking professionals (the carpenter), or other types of professionals (plumbers, ventilation experts etc.) and not as sales people. They appear to be far from Goffmans (1959)'s characterisation of cynical manipulators when it comes to staging the interaction into convenience renovation. When promoting the aluminium frame however the craftsman does act in a selling mode, he shifts from listening and collecting information into actively providing arguments in favour for aluminium frame windows (i.e 99% of the customers buy that...). These shifts into selling mode also occurred during the other visits shadowed.

The most important sales pitch occurring is actually a gesture, when the craftsman bends towards the house owner in an attempt to convince him that aluminium windows are best.

We also saw how the staging of one the house owners as having extensive renovation plans backfired as the craftsman's remarks afterwards was that some customers cannot pay for all their plans.

In the excerpt presented above there is an occasion to bring in extra isolation of the roof. The craftsman does not take up this opportunity; the renovation therefore takes shape as meeting the house owner's convenience demands to improve the facilities for his children's use.

The results show a complex interactive pattern. Limited local knowledge both by the craftsman and at the house owner (i.e. the craftsman's knowledge about the actual roof isolation and the house owner's limited knowledge of alternatives to aluminium windows) does play a major role, as does trust, but subtle assumptions about cost and economic capacity is far more important. As Horne et al (2014) exemplifies some customers actually do not have financial limitations of importance for the scope of energy renovation. Thus rather than placing the responsibility for conservative convenience renovation actions on either the craftsmen or the house owners, it is more precise to observe that the two parties are acting in a routinized play they cannot easily escape and that they together outperform the possibility of initiating a sustainable renovation.

Elements of a vision for sustainable transition of contractor SMEs

Drawing on the framework of understanding and the qualitative status for the contractors SMEs and the analysis above of the selling occasion, the vision for sustainable transition activities is developed below. First each element, strategising, networking, political activities and marketing is discussed separately, followed by a section attempting to integrate them.

Strategising for sustainability

Taking steps in new directions would and should take direct departure of the everyday practices in the SMEs (Achtenhagen et al 2013, Thuesen et al 2010). New steps and initiatives, such as moving from convenience renovation to energy efficient renovation, would rely on an evaluative and reflective practice of the SME organisational members. Even if at present the renovation market of single family houses are not hypercompetitive in any sense, some of the typical market features would be that competitive advantage would only be temporary as norms and regulations are on the move. Not only potential competitors, but also new possible alliance partners enter the area. Timing and know how are important for the same reason; knowledge on energy renovation and sustainability are only temporary leading edge (Koch and Buser 2014). As SME resources for strategy are limited and the market volatile it is less meaningful to formulate written strategies, but involves the entire enterprise in developing direction is likely to give good results in terms of commitment and contributions (Nordquist 2012).

Networking in sustainability

In the construction sector a large amount of common projects every year allows the SME contractors to interact and it is also common as we saw above to nurture recurrent relationships with companies with complementary competences, for most inside traditional profiles and for some with renewable energy suppliers.

Also collaboration with large contractors, architects and consulting engineers (Rahman and Alhassan 2012) when doing larger renovation projects might constitute an opportunity of networking, depending on amongst other things the commitment and trust in the project collaboration (Antich 2005, Hardi 2010).

Elements of sustainable solutions in renovation will require that the SME commence collaborating with new partners. SME building contractors will here find themselves in a tension between nurturing existing networks of traditional construction industry players and entering new and immature markets together with new potential future strategic alliance partners. Especially suppliers of renewable energy solution would be attractive to network with.

However other networking partners would also be suppliers, institutional players (public knowledge suppliers such as applied science units and educational institutions as well as research institutions).

A well-established network is a very strong base for exercising leadership and giving direction to a joint enterprise. As Callon (1987) points out mobilised network would operate as a platform for spokespersons for the joint sustainability vision (see also Akrich et al 2002).

The SME can establish various links of more social relation type to civic society players. Collaborating with NGO is a manner to, at a time, gain legitimacy and relations to possible customers. NGOs engaging in certifying sustainable product can become very important in promoting a product. As shown the Swedish association of house owners is playing a role for contractor SMEs. Also as Hyysalo et al (2013) is documenting, social media on the net can provide access to communities of users and potential customers.

Political activities in sustainability

The political aspect is an integrated part of the scenery which can as mentioned be understood as three levels: the SME operation in niches, the public level (government units, regions and municipalities) and an overarching international level (EU) (Schot and Geels, 2008). First and foremost, sustainable transition activities would be about impacting on a series of political issues relate to the multiple roles of the public. Within sustainable buildings, governments, regions and municipalities act as client, subvention provider, regulator, strategist, R&D funder and even, to a certain extent, organiser and participant in public debate. Below, the focus is first on R&D support, then on subvention through feed-in tariffs and finally on taxation and regulation.

The governmental R&D support systems are a multitude of different programmes with different scopes, including early commercialisation. In a Swedish context there are substantial public energy development programmes. When government is trying to support demand for clean technologies by creating a *market pull*, the government can launch financial incentive schemes encouraging the companies to change their behaviour to a more green and environmental one. The government can also punish the companies not moving towards acting cleaner and environmentally friendly. Another government role is that of providing subventions. In Sweden, the feed-in tariff would secure micro generation of power locally.

Governmental taxation and regulation are represented by different kinds of green taxes, energy charges, transportation charges, environmental taxes, etc. Environmental taxes are taxes levied on environmentally harmful products included in consumption or production, on emissions of pollutants or on scarce natural resources. The aim of green taxes is to induce businesses and consumers to take environmental concerns into account. Ideally, the green tax corresponds to the environmental costs associated with producing and consuming goods.

Political involvement is, as described above, very important for companies engaging in sustainability. So how do the company representatives act to get the most out of this support? The majority of the companies need external financial support. There is a need to set up a network around them to acquire competences both within the technology field and within the business field. Why some successful innovations and their creators are able to find footholds is explained by the ability to create interessement (Callon 1987). This ability could, therefore, ease the financial issues, entailing that the active would not have to work extra hard for years before being able to fund the product themselves. Early orders in the single housing market not only secure financing for further development, but also function as tests and showcases increasing the possibility of future orders. Thus, it could be important to secure financing at an early stage; especially for an immature technology requiring improvements before it is financially sustainable – which is the case with many sustainable products.

However, it is also important to note that sustainable building companies actually participate in creating understanding and support for new government programmes and subventions. Here, company representatives would need to meet with members of parliament, of the local city council, be active in industrial associations and perform various other types of civic leadership (Sun and Anderson, 2011).

Marketing in sustainability

When discussing marketing of sustainable products, the focus is on the attributes of the individual products, one of the main attributes being the product's greenness or sustainability. When talking about branding a company as green or environmentally friendly, the focus is possibly more on aspects such as reducing the company's pollution and on corporate social responsibility – and not on selling an individual product. Branding companies as green is not exclusive to companies, but encompasses other sectors as well. When niche development starts moving from niche towards dominant regime, you have to go mainstream, excluding the possibility of having a high-end product. As argued earlier, marketing is about focusing on the customer and co-creating their needs.

An often used approach in *new built* low energy housing has been demonstration project and parks, where prospective future house owners can visit examples of houses often realised by SME contractors (Holm et al 2013). A similar approach has been exercised in Australia and UK targeting the renovation market in so-called ‘Eco open home’ events. Based on a longitudinal dataset and eight cases, Berry et al (2014) are able to show that this type of event has positive impact on prospective future renovators. One further strength of these types of events is their local embeddedness.

The argument listed above, drawing on Pernick and Wilder (2008) that you cannot sell your product just on the green factor, is not unambiguous and it relates to specific market segments. Sustainable companies, therefore, have to acknowledge that fact, think beyond the green factor and focus on the customer to meet both social and technical demands and to set prices and quality accordingly. Building on our shadowing analysis it appears that the SMEs at present are capturing the customer’s social and technical demands but fail to enlarge these integrating energy renovation and sustainable offerings.

Where new built houses exhibit clear contemporary style and fashion, there is less “cool” factor in most of the housing renovation market at present. However targeting housing and indoor design magazines, indoor designers and architects and introducing the sustainability here would be a possible channel for getting at some house owners, with more financial resources.

Hyysalo et al (2013) provide an important adding to this focusing on post implementation innovation at the single family users. Along with Kiss et al (2013), they make likely that we will witness a shift in the future towards substitution of old heat pumps, continual development, maintenance and service of heat pumps rather than just initial sales and implementation. It is an option for the SMEs to lever this service and innovation potential and even engage in social media activities on the internet as Hyysalo et al (2013) reports it.

The integrated perspective

Above it was argued that strategising, networking, political aspects and marketing constitute an important set of activities in creating sustainable transition in SME’s in the building industry. Based on our analysis of the strategic challenges inherent in single family housing renovation and the situation for construction SME, this set of activities seem to constitute what is needed.

As underlined in transition theory (Schot and Geels 2008) it is important to think of transition in a processual perspective, where emergence plays a key role. The implication for an integrated perspective is that the emphasis of activities will change over time and space. In other words one cannot assume a balance between strategising, networking, political aspects and marketing. Rather it is likely the emergence of customer relations, collaborative relations, context development etc. will demand a change in leadership emphasis.

Conclusion

This article set out to, first to create a qualitative status of construction SMEs, single family house owners and their joint renovation activities. The status make use of a selective literature review (Hart 2009) then contributing to a framework of understanding of this type of transition activities using a Goffmanian staging concept. The second aim was to carry out an analysis of the interaction between the craftsman and house owner to inquire into the processes of creating convenience renovation rather than sustainability.

The third aim is to envisage activities in small craftsman organisations under transformation towards delivering sustainable buildings.

The framework of understanding proposes to focus on occasions of renovation, where craftsmen and house owners meet using a Goffmanian approach. The interaction processes are understood as performative and concrete elements thus are important for whether the process arrive at sustainable, energy or convenience renovation. For the vision four elements of sustainable transition activities were outlined strategising, networking, political activities and marketing.

The results show a complex interactive pattern where limited local knowledge does play a major role but subtle assumptions about cost and economic capacity is far more important. Thus rather than placing the responsibility for conservative convenience renovation actions on either the craftsmen or the house owners, it is claimed here that the two parties are acting in a routinized play they cannot easily escape.

As for the vision for sustainable transition, strategising appears at present to be less visible in the SMEs and more in particular most companies in our screening did not go beyond an energy renovation perspective meaning sustainability in a broader sense did not even receive ambivalent attention as Parker (2010) suggests. However examples were found underlining its practice character. Networking was found to be very important and providing a broader base for transition. More social relations oriented networking seemed underdeveloped from both SME and possible NGOs. Political activities did occasionally enter the activities of the SME, yet they predominantly saw it as a possible distant helper in sharpening the regulation. Marketing are mostly carried out in a relational manner directly interacting with possible customers, but could be a future important lever through using web sites of the companies.

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