

Disentangling the symbolic and material in institutional logics-The rise of new modes of evaluation in sustainable architecture

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INTRODUCTION

Recent research in institutional logics and category studies has highlighted the importance of empirically exploring phenomena related to the symbolic and material elements in logics (Jones et al. 2011). The seminal work of Friedland and Alford (1991) was one of the first to illustrate the value of examining the symbolic and material elements that shape logics. Jones, Maoret, Massa and Svejenova (2011) highlight the ways the material and symbolic elements underpinning the multiple institutional logics shape the content for a new category in architecture enabling the emergence of “modern architecture”. An institutional logics perspective recognizes that the interplay between the material and symbolic is key to the development of institutions and their underlying conventions, rules and scripts (Thornton and Ocasio 2008). The evaluative processes such as categorization and legitimation (Lamont 2012) that shape these conventions are a key mechanism by which institutional logics shape cognition. Within category studies the emphasis has been on the symbolic underpinnings revealing the ways shifting logics configure classification methods and create new categories (Rao et al. 2003; Zhao 2005); enable changes in meaning in existing categories (Lounsbury 2007) as well as shape the criteria critics mobilize (Glynn and Lounsbury 2005). Yet few studies have examined the ways actors select and combine elements of the symbolic and material in logics in other processes of evaluation such as the use of standards and criteria.

This paper explores the symbolic and material elements that shape the institutional logics of sustainability evaluation and the architectural profession building upon a historical study (1990-2012). It finds a convergence of the symbolic and material between two key logics: one that underpins the architectural profession and the other sustainability concerns. This convergence leads to the emergence of new criteria and the rise of a scientific technical mode of evaluation in sustainable architecture. The following section discusses the theoretical framing for the study followed by the research methods. The final section concludes the study with a discussion and concluding commentary.

THEORETICAL FRAMING

Evaluation processes including the use of criteria, categories and standards are viewed across social sciences as the underlying foundation to all social and intellectual activity (Douglas 1986). The

recent privileging of quantitative assessment approaches such as benchmarks and indicators as measures of performance has been of interest to diverse research streams including sociology, economy, psychology and organization studies (Lamont 2012). A number of scholars within organization theory argue that by examining institutional logics a better understanding can be provided on the issue of category and criteria emergence (Jones et al. 2011; Lounsbury 2007). Thornton et al (2005) argue that actors' activities specifically when enacting or assigning meanings to categories or criteria are shaped primarily by institutional logics. Logics are viewed as guiding principles (Friedland and Alford 1991) which provide social actors with cultural resources to transform organizational, individual and societal identities (Thornton et al. 2005).

Research has examined the role shifts in institutional logics played out in critics' reviews can have on the social structure of the wider field (Glynn and Lounsbury 2005) whilst Lounsbury and Rao (2004) emphasize the importance of institutional logics in generating organizational products. The role of institutional logics and its underlying symbolic practices has been examined by Jones, Maoret and Massa (2011) in a study on the emergence of a new category within the domain of architecture. Underlying institutional logics such as commerce, the state, religion and family associated with different clientele were found to be enacted by key architects enabling the emergence of a new category within architecture "Modern architecture". Jones, Maoret, Massa and Svejenova (2011) argue that institutional logics provide content to actors on new categories whose emergence is enabled through legitimacy criteria. This paper is drawing on this research approach enabling an extended analysis into the symbolic and material elements that shape the institutional logics involved.

METHODS

The study draws on archival research methods characterized as formal methods that treat archives as data to be collected, analysed and measured directly (Ventresca and Mohr 2002). The focus is on the changing building types and discourses that mention evaluation criteria for award winning sustainable architecture.

Data collection:

Data was collected from 90 published articles (out of 232) from one of the leading UK architectural journals the Architects Journal in the period (1990-2012). The Architects Journal was chosen as it offers coverage for a mainly architectural audience and reports on issues pertaining award winning buildings. The mid 1990's have been identified in the literature review as a defining period for the development of concepts relating to evaluation criteria used to assess sustainable architectural design. Our study began in 1990, ensuring that we fully captured the emergence and development of evaluation criteria within the context of high quality awarded architecture. Awarded buildings were selected by tracing the key sustainability awards in the period 1990-2012 in the UK.

Data analysis:

In order to understand how new criteria are configured research has focused on analysing two components by which actors interpret them: exemplars and rules (Jones et al. 2011). Exemplars represent award winning buildings recognised for their sustainability credentials and are analysed through material elements such as building typologies. Rules represent the underlying logics which are analysed through symbolic elements such as discourses. Two logics underlie this analysis: the professions logic and the sustainability logics. A profession's logics and practices are influenced

primarily by the development of professional knowledge (Lounsbury 2007). Jones, Maoret, Massa and Svejenova (2011) identify architectural profession's logics underpinned by actors' interpretation to clientele demands such as professional and commercial. Sustainability logics are enacted through concerns with the environment, ethics and the economy (Hoffman and Ventresca 2002).

DISCUSSION

The data suggest that understandings of evaluation of sustainability in architecture emerged over time, guided by multiple logics, advanced by certain actors and their activities. The analysis reveals that the underlying symbolic elements in the sustainability logics converged with the professions logic advanced by changes in material elements as well as participation of multiple actors and their actions. The material elements are manifested in the building typologies- the early 1990's were primarily the domain of unique design and domestic architecture. Toward the late 1990's there was an expansion of building typologies to commercial, residential and large scale public buildings. Over time a greater number of actors took part in the development and advancement of a scientific approach to evaluating sustainability in architecture. Whereas the early 1990's was the domain of fringe environmentalist architects, the turn of the century showed greater interests from multiple actors including awards judges, the professional association, journalists as well as key governmental agencies. More recently it is particular governmental spokespersons whose voices resonate within the discourses on value, financial benefits and increased focus on performance.

Overall, this study is intended to increase the understanding of evaluative processes mobilized in assessing sustainability in architecture by drawing attention to the importance of the symbolic and material in institutional logics. In addition, it highlights the importance of understanding the development of criteria as socially constructed processes, negotiated and developed over time.

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