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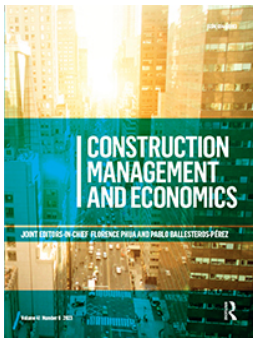
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The influence of multiple logics on the work of sustainability professionals

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ABSTRACT

Organizational aspects, rather than technological ones, often represent the greatest barrier in the transition toward sustainable construction. However, despite sustainability professionals' recognized role in sustainable development, few studies have focused on such professionals' work. To understand the intrinsic influence of multiple institutional logics on the work and agency of sustainability professionals, we conducted 31 semi-structured interviews with sustainability professionals in Sweden's construction industry. Building on the theoretical framework of institutional logics, the findings show how sustainability professionals' everyday work, depending on the work conditions, is a blend of thankless, rewarding collaborative, and visionary work. In the organizational context of sustainable construction, characterized by dynamism and ambiguity, different institutional logics are combined in different ways to respond to shifting demands and problems. To maintain agency, sustainability professionals need to shift and balance their work depending on which logics are temporarily central. Showcasing how professionals cope with institutional contexts defined by multiple logics, the paper highlights the complexity involved in managing the vastness and ambiguity of sustainability and how it requires individuals to be both flexible and sensitive to the existence of multiple logics in their immediate context.

Introduction

That sustainability is an imperative for today's construction industry is undisputed, and sustainability measures stipulated by clients and other stakeholders are frequent in construction projects (Montes *et al.* 2021). Sustainable construction builds on multiple logics stemming from a high level of complexity that requires interdisciplinary collaboration across several fields and organizational levels (Goh *et al.* 2020).

At the center of sustainable construction is a growing group of actors: *sustainability professionals* (Opoku *et al.* 2015, Gluch and Månsson 2021, Dahlmann and Grosvold 2017). However, because introducing, developing, and practicing sustainability work is often a time-consuming, complicated task, with many in-built tensions regarding the balance of time, scope, and power (Chan and Cooper 2010, Gluch and Räisänen 2012, Månsson 2021), sustainability professionals often experience limitations in their agency. Gluch (2009), for instance, observed that construction project management both framed and constrained the work of sustainability professionals by requiring them to adapt,

which limited their scope of work and negatively affected their job motivation. In the same vein, Murtagh *et al.* (2018) found that building control surveyors tasked with performing environmental audits experienced limited agency given their role's close association with building regulation compliance. This left them with a sense of a lack of influence on the projects' direction towards environmental sustainability. In another study on key practitioners' involvement in projects for sustainable regeneration in the United Kingdom, Akotia and Opoku (2018) discovered that the involvement of practitioners with sustainability-oriented tasks assigned to their roles—for example, sustainability managers—was consistently low at all stages of the delivery processes of those projects (i.e. design, construction and post-construction). The reason proposed was that sustainability issues were not prioritized by other key practitioners involved (e.g. the client representative and construction project manager) and, in turn, went largely overlooked in relation to the outcomes of the projects and thus limited the agency of the sustainability actors.

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Along similar lines, in Gluch and Bosch-Sijtsema's (2016) study, environmental experts explained how their work was judged according to the imperative of being knowledgeable about on-site construction work. As a result, instead of developing and/or disrupting old unsustainable practices, they were found to maintain and thus reinforce the practices that they were supposed to change. The same tendency also emerged in a study on sustainable entrepreneurs, who, while endeavoring to promote sustainability and adapt it to a commercial logic, instead reproduced the logic that they had sought to transform (Arenas *et al.* 2020). Moreover, in a longitudinal study of 55 firms in the United Kingdom, Dahlmann and Grosvold (2017) observed how environmental managers were prone to embed the logic of sustainability into an existing market (i.e. corporate business) logic. Their findings additionally showed that this involved managing competing logics and that the managers continually redefined the institutional basis on which their professional roles and work rest. Consequently, despite following a similar approach to implementing sustainability, their work generated a wide range of outcomes. For some firms, environmental sustainability was fully incorporated into managerial practices with new behaviors as a result, whereas in others the effect was the reverse, with existing patterns of behaviors only further reinforced.

The above examples demonstrate how the work of sustainability professionals, and the sustainability performance of firms are affected by multiple logics. That dynamic underscores the need to increase current understandings of how organizations can manage hybrid organizational settings, which are far from stable, characterized by dynamism and ambiguity and, over time, can be combined in different ways to respond to shifting demands and problems (Gottlieb *et al.* 2020). Therefore, assuming that multiple institutional logics can coexist, and that this coexistence affects the work and agency of sustainability professionals, our research aims to deepen the understanding of the work and agency of sustainability professionals in an organizational context defined by multiple logics. Thus, the objective of our study is not to define a certain institutional logic but to understand the intrinsic influence of multiple institutional logics on their work.

We have applied the theoretical lens of institutional logics, a perspective proposed to be useful for explaining how professional work is conducted (Blomgren and Waks 2015). Thornton and Ocasio (2008, p. 101) define *institutional logics* as "socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, and beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality". That definition proposes a link between individual agency and institutional structures as well as emphasizes situated practices in which institutional logics are embedded in a social and institutional context that both regulates and provides opportunities for change. In that context, *agency* refers to the capacity to act within a socially prescribed role (e.g. sustainability manager) that directs focus to the work of individuals within a structure, not on the structure itself (Hitlin and Elder 2007). Adopting a practice perspective means that professionals are defined by what they do (Pratt *et al.* 2006). By extension, the term *sustainability professionals* in this paper describes any professionals who work with and are responsible for sustainability as a primary component of their jobs—for example, environmental and sustainability experts, managers, auditors, coordinators, consultants, and strategists. In construction, sustainability professionals typically have a background in engineering or environmental sciences, are perceived as experts on environmental sustainability and professionally engaged in the field of sustainable construction (Månsson 2021).

In the remainder of this paper, Section "Frame of reference: institutional logics" presents key concepts related to institutional logics, after which Section "Methods" describes the research process and methods used to gather and analyze the empirical data. Following an abductive logic of discovery, logics were identified from the literature on sustainable construction. These are described in Chapter 4 leading to an analytical model showing the characteristics of four logics present in sustainable construction: sustainability logic, project logic, corporate business logic and governance logic. Section "Three narratives describing the work of sustainability professionals" presents key findings from our study in three examples describing work that sustainability professionals adopt to cope with different types of conditions in which multiple logics coexist. Thereafter, Section "Analysis and discussion" maps our analytical model with our empirical observations, discussing implications for sustainability work. Last, the paper closes by articulating our conclusions and suggestions for future research.

Frame of reference: institutional logics

Institutional theory offers a powerful perspective for studying processes that take place in complex organizations in various institutional fields (Greenwood *et al.*

2008). According to Scott (1995), an *institutional field* is a community that "partakes of a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with actors outside the field" (p. 56). In our study, the institutional field was sustainable construction. Therein, we assumed that sustainability professionals work in observance of principles aligned with sustainable construction. In assuming the broad acceptance of those principles, we also assume that all construction projects regulated by demands of sustainability belong to the institutional field of sustainable construction.

For practitioners to recognize shared principles, professional work need to be institutionalized, a process that occurs based on how work is performed by practitioners (Gherardi 2009). A central concept is the *paradox of embedded agency*, which refers to how individuals' actions are not only influenced by but also able to influence the institutions that otherwise regulate the institutional field in which they operate (Battilana and D'Aunno 2009). In that sense, *institutions* have been defined as cultural prescriptions and norms and as enduring elements that strongly influence organizational and individual behavior (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006).

Friedland and Alford (1991) first conceived the notion of institutional logics to explore the interrelationships between individuals, organizations, and society. As a meta-theory, institutional logics take strength from the capacity to facilitate the development of theory and research across multiple levels of analysis (Thornton and Ocasio 2008). An institutional logics approach bridges the macro and micro levels of analysis in the sense that situated practices are linked with beliefs, values and rules in wider institutional environments (Thornton *et al.* 2012). In their view, institutions are patterns of activities rooted in practice that give individuals and organizations motivation, a sense of identity and principles for how to act. Guiding what is perceived as the accepted way of doing things, institutional logics are the underlying actions of institutions that affect cognitive patterns, values and the ways in which regulations are formed (Thornton and Ocasio 2008). In turn, the interrelationships between different levels (e.g. individual, organizational and societal) are viewed as an interinstitutional system and as a mechanism for institutional change. For example, Bévort and Suddaby (2016), in their ethnographical study on how managers in professional service firms make sense of contradictory logics, found that the successful integration of a new logic was an important element in the process of change.

When institutional logics have been applied to study the implications of logic multiplicity, scholars have found that multiple logics can indeed coexist at the organizational level (Besharov and Smith 2014). Different professional groups, for instance, act upon different professional logics (cf. Dunn and Jones 2010)—that is, interpret realities differently due to being trained in different ways of thinking. Scholars have also found that professionals can be influenced by multiple logics (Jones and Livne-Tarandach 2008) and can learn how to mediate between them (Currie and Spyridonidis 2016). Research has additionally revealed that professionals not only mediate between logics but can also hijack a logic not belonging to their professional background and use it as a tool in for example negotiation (McPherson and Sauder 2013). Although individuals can influence institutional logics, because the means and ends of their ambitions and agency are embedded in the institutional setting, both are therefore enabled as well as constrained by institutional logics (Thornton and Ocasio 2008). Thus, individuals shape responses to institutional logics by either strengthening or weakening the embeddedness of a peripheral logic (Lawrence *et al.* 2013). Research on professional roles in contexts defined by a high degree of institutional complexity have acknowledged how some roles, as response to conflicting logics, become hybrid (Blomgren and Waks 2015, Adams 2020). This hybridity occurs when professionals blend elements from conflicting logics (Noordegraaf 2007). Adams (2020) conclude, based on a study on engineers becoming managers, that the hybridization may undermine professional unity leading to intra-professional division and conflict.

In summary, applying the theoretical lens of institutional logics allows us to explain how professional work is conducted (Blomgren and Waks 2015). Offering a link between individual agency and institutional structures together with its emphasis on situated practices in which institutional logics are embedded (Thornton and Ocasio 2008) make it a suitable lens to study the work and agency of sustainability professionals in an organizational context defined by multiple logics.

Methods

Qualitative methods and data have been recommended for capturing logics because logics are inevitably expressed in language and practices and manifested in symbols and materials (Reay and Jones 2016). Thus, in our research, studying logics and their

influence on sustainability professionals' work required grounding insights and abstractions within the context being studied by using quotations and thick descriptions. To investigate sustainability professionals' work and agency, we conducted in-depth interviews from March 2019 to February 2020, which provided an opportunity to capture rich, explanatory data suitable for understanding the professionals' real-life experiences, what they do and the meaning that they invest in their work.

Interview study

Interviewees were selected given their professional experience in environmental sustainability. The selection followed purposive sampling for qualitative research, in which participants are chosen based on their ability to provide insights into a studied phenomenon (Silverman 2001). The interviewees were identified from construction- and sustainability-oriented magazines and websites and from a list of companies represented at an annual industry conference on sustainable construction. Unlike companies' websites, which often indicate only the sustainability manager, the magazines and the list of companies at the conference allowed identifying individuals deep within organizations who are otherwise invisible to outsiders. Such individuals were chosen and contacted based on their years of work experience, job titles and representation of different types of business: architecture and/or building engineering consulting ($n = 13$), contractors ($n = 10$) and construction clients ($n = 8$). The sampling strategy yielded a mix of sustainability professionals, and 31 individuals working in 24 Swedish firms were interviewed (see Table 1), all of whom were working as environmental and/or sustainability experts, managers, and coordinators, at the time of data collection. Their education was in civil engineering, architecture, natural sciences or environmental science, and the length of their experience working with sustainability issues ranged from 1 to 35 years.

The sustainability professionals interviewed were responsible for sustainability work at the corporate or project level, if not both. Part of their work was to coordinate various sustainability tasks ranging from documentation and waste management to life cycle management and long-term strategic work. All interviewees perceived themselves as being experts in environmental sustainability but also as being tasked with managing tasks related to social sustainability, safety and/or quality assurance. In supporting construction projects with expertise, they established and followed up on environmental management routines and/or certification schemes or provided documents and guidelines to meet the clients' requirements for sustainability. Beyond that, they advised top management in formulating sustainability goals.

During the interviews, considerations were made regarding the sensitivity of the method selected, among which semi-structured interviews (Kvale 2007) have been suggested as being appropriate for collecting the experiences of individuals and understanding patterns of action from a micro-level institutional perspective (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006, Thornton and Ocasio 2008).

Twenty-seven interviews were conducted face-to-face, along with four via Skype, and each lasted between 45 min and 2.5 h. The interviewees were informed that the purpose of study was to examine sustainability professionals' role and work and that no preparation was needed in advance. All interviewees provided informed consent to participate, and they were informed that their identities would be protected from disclosure. In the interviews, performed in an open manner (Kvale 2007), the sustainability professionals were asked to elaborate upon how they perceive their role and how their role has developed over time. They were also asked to describe their own day-to-day work, in terms of both typical and more challenging conditions. They were additionally asked to provide detailed examples so that the different nuances in their work could be captured, especially regarding situations in which they confronted multiple interests and what actions they performed to cope with them. Other questions addressed power and agency with particular focus on their ability to influence the

Table 1. Overview of the interviewees by job title and type of firm.

Job title	Type of firm	n
Sustainability manager	Contractor	7
	Construction client	8
	Architecture and building engineering consultancy	1
QEH&S manager	Contractor	3
Environmental coordinator	Contractor	3
	Architecture and building engineering consultancy	4
Sustainability expert	Architecture and building engineering consultancy	8

organizations' business. Interviewees were encouraged to freely elaborate on the different topics, which gave us rich information about the sustainability professionals' everyday work. All interviews were conducted in Swedish, as the language used by the interviewees at work, and thus captured not only what they said but also nuances in expression and speech. We audio-recorded all interviews, transcribed them verbatim with the permission of the interviewees, coded the transcripts to ensure anonymity, and translated quotations into English. The interview data were stored according to the General Data Protection Regulation, and in reporting quotations in the findings, we have eliminated all information that can be traced to specific individuals. Referring to the Swedish law on ethics in research on human beings the research conducted was not object for an ethical review.

Analysis

Analysis followed an abductive logic of discovery (Edwards *et al.* 2014) in three steps. First, our thematic analysis of the empirical data focused on how the sustainability professionals perceived their work under different conditions and how they responded to those conditions. In that step, we sorted initial themes as draft conceptualizations based on patterns that we identified while transcribing the interviews. Those conceptualizations served as a coat hanger, so to speak, to hang and re-hang our analysis on. In that process, we focused on identifying representative situations describing the work of the professionals.

Second, we applied Thornton and Ocasio's (2008) analytical framework of *ideal types of institutional logics*, which they suggest using as a method of "interpretive analysis to understand the meaning that actors invest their actions with" (p. 110). In providing the meanings of actions, ideal types can be used as a formal analytical approach to explain empirical observations of interrelationships between the individual, organizational and societal levels. For that reason, ideal types should be developed at least in pairs. Based on a review of literature on sustainable construction, four field-level logics were identified—project logic, sustainability logic, corporate business logic and governance logic—as detailed in Section 4. Those logics should not be viewed as all-inclusive, for both complementary and overlapping logics could have been used in our analysis. However, the aim of our study was not to define a certain institutional logic but to understand the intrinsic influence of multiple institutional logics on the work and agency of sustainability professionals, and the four logics chosen were deemed to serve that purpose. Structuring the logics identified in the literature in accordance with the *ideal types of institutional logics* resulted in an analytical model that describes the multiple-logic context of sustainable construction. To describe the different elements of the four logics, we were inspired by the characteristics of logics as presented by Thornton and Ocasio (2008), which are neither exclusive nor inclusive but serve as guidelines for mapping a logic. Of Thornton and Ocasio's 12 original key characteristics, we used six judged to be useful for illustrating the multiple-logic context of sustainable construction: source of identity, source of legitimacy and source of authority, along with basis of mission, basis of attention and basis of strategy.

Third, after mapping the empirical observations with the analytical model, we were able to investigate how different coexisting institutional logics influence the work and agency of sustainability professionals in construction. To that end, the work of the sustainability professionals was recoded in an iterative process, which yielded three narratives describing how the professionals cope with different types of conditions in which multiple logics coexist. Employing narrative analysis allowed rich descriptions of the lived experiences of the interviewees and illuminated the contextual meanings of the stories told (Wang and Geale 2015).

The institutional field of sustainable construction

In this section, we describe the basic characteristics of the four primary institutional logics present in the institutional field of sustainable construction identified in the literature. Each logic also represents an ideal type of logic according to Thornton and Ocasio's (2008) analytical framework, and, together, the logics give structure to an analytical model describing the multiple-logic context of sustainable construction.

Sustainability logic

Sustainability logic rests on three pillars of sustainability: environmental sustainability, social sustainability and economic sustainability. Environmental sustainability continues to dominate in construction, whereas social sustainability receives less attention in both research and practice (Troje 2020, Udomsap and Hallinger 2020). A particularly prominent area within sustainable construction relates to developing conceptual frameworks and assessment methods, which tend

to reduce sustainability to environmental considerations (Berardi 2013, Lima *et al.* 2021). Sustainability logic is further subject to instrumental approaches with a mindset oriented toward processes involving materials, waste, management systems, energy measures and the use of natural resources (Silva and Figueiredo 2017, Udomsap and Hallinger 2020).

A central element in sustainability logic is life cycle thinking, which supports a holistic long-term approach toward sustainable development (Goh *et al.* 2020). Capturing the embedded dimensions of sustainability requires an integrative mindset (Kurucz *et al.* 2017), one that enables reflecting on and understanding the connections and consequences of underlying assumptions. That view stresses scientific research, expertise and education as important elements of sustainability logic (cf. O'Connor *et al.* 2021), from which a source of identity can follow (Månsson 2021). Strategies for work range from creating visions to implementing tools and methods to performing consolidative work by spreading knowledge via networking, communication and training (cf. Mazutis and Abolina 2019). The identity narrative also builds on the idea of the hyperagency of heroic individuals as change agents who can single-handedly solve environmental challenges (Heizmann and Liu 2018).

Project logic

Construction projects are typically initiated by a client, and different firms participate in a sort of competitive collaboration to achieve the project's goals while also remaining competitors on the market (Winch 2010). To increase the predictability and coordination of tasks, the various roles and practices involved in the project are institutionalized (Kadefors 1995), meaning that construction professionals collaborate in relatively stable role structures with a shared understanding of who does what (Bos-de Vos *et al.* 2019). Various techniques of project management, including schedules, milestones and meetings, are used to coordinate and reconcile conflicting temporalities. Often, the routines of project management follow processes formalized by bodies such as the Project Management Institute (Lundin *et al.* 2015). With a shared project mission and institutionalized roles and standardized practices, membership in a project becomes a strong source of professional identity (Styhre 2012). As a result, career development is based on mobility across sequential projects instead of vertical movement in the permanent organization (McKevitt *et al.* 2017). Thus, legitimacy as well as authority are practice-based and tied to

personal experiences gained in construction projects (Chan and Cooper 2010, Löwstedt *et al.* 2021).

The institutional logic of construction projects is captured in the concept of the iron triangle, meaning the typical project goals of time, cost and quality (Ogunlana 2010). The overarching imperative of any project is to solve complex problems for the client— that is, to fulfill a client's needs as stipulated in contractual agreements between firms involved in the project (Winch 2010). At the same time, the processes involved in projects are linear, transitory, sequential and often governed by formal stage–gates. Therein, the occurrence of iterations, especially between stages, is preferably minimized, and the norm is immediate, decentralized decision-making (cf. Dubois and Gadde 2002), which nurtures short-term decision-making. Research has also shown that project members tend to settle for processes that are good enough when handling new organizing needs (Eriksson and Kadefors 2017)—for example, ones related to achieving sustainability. However, the strong orientation to tasks and the project's schedule can be difficult to reconcile with long-term but slower, organization-level learning (Eriksson 2013, van Berkel *et al.* 2016), which may decelerate sustainable development.

Corporate business logic

The decentralized nature of projects implies a decoupling of temporary projects and the permanent organization (Dubois and Gadde 2002), the latter of which follows a corporate business logic. Although large projects may have specific sustainability staff on-site, most sustainability professionals belong to centrally located sustainability functions in the permanent organization (Gluch *et al.* 2014). The economic system of the firms (permanent organization) builds on managerial capitalism (Thornton and Ocasio 2008), wherein the economic imperative dominates and profit-making motives guide decision-making (Chan and Cooper 2010). Management provides a source of identity and representation on the corporate board that is important from the perspective of power and for symbolic reasons. With its primary operations manifested in construction projects, corporate business logic in construction relates to the given project's logic in term of a focus on efficiency and profitability. However, at the corporate level, competitiveness is a more immediate concern (Chang *et al.* 2017). To make their sustainability work visible, establish credibility and win new tenders, many firms have opted for certification methods (Montes *et al.* 2021). Top-down goal-setting and

strategic work are two means used to develop a sustainable business, in which different key performance indicators are established to follow up and measure stated goals (Chan and Cooper 2010). Integrated management systems, including environmental management systems and audits, serve as a structural backbone for work geared toward environmental sustainability (Gluch *et al*. 2014).

Governance logic

The construction industry faces numerous challenges related to sustainability that affect society at large (Leiringer 2020). For example, the industry consumes an estimated 40% of all raw materials worldwide (World Economic Forum 2016), and nearly 11% of the world's energy and process-related CO_2 emissions derive from construction (Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction 2019). The industry is also involved in both the restoration and adaption of the built environment to cope with the consequences of climate change, including damages caused by flooding, hurricanes and other natural hazards (World Economic Forum 2016, Mazutis and Abolina 2019). Representing approximately 50% of the capital invested in assets annually, construction is an important way for societies to create new value (Winch 2010). The large environmental, societal and financial impact of construction and the industry's highly regulated work imply that sustainable construction embodies a logic of governance. Because the sector's sustainability transition can be expected to tremendously effect sustainable development, it is a governmental interest governed by law and other policy instruments, including the Sustainable Development Goals issued by the United Nations. Governments thus have broad powers of control over construction work, which is regulated by extensive statutory systems aiming to protect societal and environmental interests (Hughes *et al*. 2015). Here, audits serve as important instrument to assess firms' compliance with those regulations giving sustainability professionals a source of identity (Murtagh *et al*. 2018). Beyond that, different construction associations provide templates and professional standards that regulate work (Ashworth and Perera 2018). Last, an important source of legitimacy in sustainability is accountability in reaching targets and goals (Bowen *et al*. 2017). Demonstrating such accountability in sustainable construction is often governed by voluntary normative instruments, including various assessment methods, with LEED and the BREAM being among the earliest, most widely applied tools (Brown *et al*. 2016).

Analytical model

The four primary institutional logics described in the previous section coexist in sustainable construction, and sustainability professionals have to relate to all of them in their work. In a field with multiple logics, logics may be contradictory, paradoxical, competing or conflicting and usually contribute to institutional complexity at one time or another (Greenwood *et al*. 2011). For example, sustainability logic would have a long-term perspective by default, whereas project logic tends to have an embedded short-term perspective, according to which benefits should be immediate and tangible. Added to that, personal experience gives someone authority in project logic, whereas corporate business logic values managerial mandates, which may cause role conflicts for sustainability professionals. Different logics can also amplify each other. For example, resolutions of environmental challenges may boost a project's success, while forecasting methods based on sustainability logic may go hand in hand with corporate strategic work. Along similar lines, the use of building certification schemes, which are based on governance logic, may align well with methods in project management but may also clash if based on disparate principles regarding cost allocation.

Table 2 present elements of different characteristics related to each ideal type of institutional logic in sustainable construction. The schematic overview serves as an analytical lens to gain a deeper understanding of how those institutional logics play out in the everyday work of sustainability professionals and how it affects their agency. Attempts to alter a set of established practices add to that complexity, which puts pressure on the various actors involved to prioritize their focus when operating in the field. Such nonconformity is what sustainability professionals typically face when pushing for a sustainability agenda in construction.

Three narratives describing the work of sustainability professionals

The findings are presented in three narratives, each of which describes how sustainability professionals cope with different conditions in which multiple logics coexist.

Thankless work: constantly swimming against the current

> The most boring thing? Well, the most boring, or rather difficult, thing is when you feel that you're

Table 2. Analytical model of field-level logics in sustainable construction, based on Thornton and Ocasio's (2008) framework of ideal types of institutional logics.

Characteristics	Sustainability logic	Project logic	Corporate business logic	Governance logic
Source of identity	Change agent	Project member	Management member	Auditor
Source of legitimacy	Expertise	Experience	Credibility	Accountability
Source of authority	Science Formal education Expertise knowledge	Personal experience Contractual agreements	Managerial mandate	Regulatory frameworks (e.g. laws, norms and standards)
Basis of mission	Long-term sustainable development	Fulfilment of client's needs Problem-solving Efficiency	Competitive business Profitability	Sustainability compliance
Basis of attention	Resolving environmental challenges	Completing successful projects	Developing profitable businesses	Meeting environmental and societal goals
Basis of strategy (action)	Forecasting, measurement of environmental impact Networking Communication and training	Project management practices and methods	Goal-setting Key performance indicators Management systems Strategic work	Standardization Building certification schemes

constantly swimming against the current. Like when you just think "Yeesh, does this even make a difference? Here I am, working hard, and no one cares". (Environmental coordinator)

The interviewees described how even when sustainability was elevated as important in client demands or corporate policy documents, the status quo of the business seldom change. For instance, the environmental coordinator reported encountering managers, site managers and subcontractors who were unconsciously or even deliberately working against environmental requirements. That tendency typically characterizes situations in which sustainability professionals perform work without receiving any response to or assessment of their work, or what we call "thankless work". One of the interviewees, an environmental coordinator who has long worked with environmental certification schemes, ranked such unresponsiveness as the worst thing about their work:

You know that something won't turn out well … and you can fight tooth and nail and not even get a response on certain issues that you raise flags about. (Environmental coordinator)

Owing to that lack of oversight, one sustainability manager reflected on how easy it is to bypass environmental considerations in construction projects:

There are a lot of concerns that easily fall into the category of "out of sight, out of mind" if people go around thinking that someone else handles them. Especially if there's a sustainability manager or someone similar, then they might think that a lot more falls under their scope of responsibility than actually does. (Sustainability manager)

In the same vein, an environmental coordinator described the stress of speculating whether sustainability had been considered when they were not invited to engage on a project:

I think that's the most difficult aspect: understanding what questions will come and when. Because it isn't like you're always invited; you have to step up and take initiative yourself. A lot of work is that way … thinking that, you know, "Oh, now I have to be here and in this and that or gather this together". (Environmental coordinator)

Consequently, many of the interviewees described resorting to nagging, or as one of the interviewees explained it:

Now I've been nagging about this [a sustainability issue] so many times, and still nothing has happened. And it's frustrating. I mean, don't you want to feel that you're making a *real* difference? (Sustainability expert)

A sustainability expert similarly described how lonely and demoralizing it can be to perform a job that no one seems to need:

The scariest thing, I think, is when you invest time and energy into something, and then you get no response to it, no engagement, and what happens then is that you lose that engagement from and within yourself. (Sustainability expert)

When communication failed, many of the interviewees described having to remind other project members about the client's demands or resorting to using higher-order certification schemes and corporate sustainability goals to provide a source of authority and advocate for the engagement of project members in sustainability-focused work:

If it goes against the certification scheme, then you can use it. Or if it goes against a higher goal in the company, then you can use that. Otherwise, it's hard to do anything. (Environmental coordinator)

With limited resources and no authority to enforce sustainability practices, the sustainability professionals reporting often opting to adapt their work to

construction project management. Doing so involves a process of continually negotiating and creating meaning of their mission in order to make sustainability issues tangible for project members. At the same time, the interviewees claimed that making the mission more approachable also diluted both their role and mission and reduced sustainability work to requiring only the bare minimum in terms of scope and effort. Furthermore, given the ambiguity surrounding the concept of sustainability and the lack of knowledge in organizations about what sustainability work really entails, the sustainability professionals also found themselves dragged down by tasks beyond the immediate scope of their work:

> [There are] things that you might think you shouldn't have to take responsibility for. Even if the term *sustainability* is very broadly defined and understood, sometimes [*laughs*] things fall under it that maybe shouldn't. (Sustainability manager)

One of the sustainability managers also described how adding social sustainability to the already broad scope of environmental management has diminished overall attention to sustainability in their organizations. As another interviewee put it, assigning tasks that clearly involve social science to individuals with a background in natural science signaled that sustainability is not especially important. The interviewee reported having to spend time to learn about social sustainability and manage it as best as possible, which had precluded opportunities to stay updated about issues related to environmental sustainability due to various trade-offs made to balance the workload. In the end, the interviewee stated that neither social nor environmental sustainability has benefited from the combination. In the same vein, a sustainability manager from a construction client reflected on their previous role as an environmental coordinator in construction projects, which "became somewhat of a miscellaneous bin" of various tasks. That meant that the manager had to do what no one else in the project wanted or had the time to do. Accordingly, the work was bound not only by a tight time frame stipulated by the delivery of the construction project but also by how other tasks were distributed across the project team. Thus, due to traditional, highly institutional roles in construction projects, the vague definition of the role of sustainability manager and the vastness of the concept of sustainability, other members of the organizations came to consider the sustainability professionals as extra resources for projects, not as experts with their own professional domain.

Rewarding collaborative work: being invited and influential

> When it [sustainability] is not a side activity but part of what's important—to be invited and influence the projects and be able to answer, "Okay, how could we improve this, you who know sustainability?"—that's a boost. (Sustainability expert)

Contrary to doing thankless work, and illustrated in the quotation above, the sustainability professionals also described situations when their competence was needed and/or when they felt that sustainability work was considered to be essential to the delivery of a construction project. Under those circumstances, even if their mandate was the same as in other projects, the interviewees described experiencing increased inclusion in all parts of the projects, more invitations to meetings and greater authority and influence over the projects' outcomes. In those situations, they perceived being able to contribute to the success of projects by providing expertise and, in turn, doing rewarding collaborative work.

As part of joint decision-making processes, they also perceived that they could take advantage of the situation and influence decisions so that the sustainability ambition and the result of the project would exceed the client's demands:

> Driving those issues through a process is the most fun part of the work: to go from goals to creating something, to break down and concretize. (Sustainability expert)

Common in those situations was that the professionals had found at least one counterpart, from another organization or unit, who shared their view on what sustainable construction entails. In light of such mutual sustainability-oriented ambitions, the need for more collaboration with sustainability professionals was evident given their knowledge, which had become a highly valued resource. In that position, the sustainability professionals could act as both full-scale project members and as the sustainability experts that they were trained to be.

With shared problems to handle, the sustainability professionals and the counterpart developed collaborative agency. One of the interviewees explained it as a game-changing experience:

> When you meet such a person, you realize it very quickly because you'll notice how easy it [your work] has become and how smoothly it's gone. You talk about sustainability, and you make decisions, and you feel that you're not alone. (Sustainability expert)

That example illustrates that sustainability work can be done without becoming thankless work when

sustainability knowledge is valued. In that light, sustainability professionals can act by not only setting goals but also by breaking down holistic environmental and societal goals (e.g. Sustainable Development Goals) and making them tangible and applicable in the context at hand:

> My role is to identify how to make the project go slightly further than by just following the usual routines. That's when the global goals come in handy. They're a way to make it [sustainability] tangible: what we should do and how we should do it, to communicate that we're doing in relation to the global goals. (Environmental coordinator)

By engaging in solving complex problems—a virtue on projects—and contributing to sustainable business, which is important for a firm's credibility, sustainability professionals felt that they could contribute to a sustainable future and a better society through their work.

Even so, a challenge that the sustainability professionals reported facing in their work was the feeling of not sufficiently enough being able to manage the vastness of sustainability and its disparate environmental, social and economic dimensions with respect to different scientific disciplines. The social dimension was perceived as being especially cumbersome because most sustainability professionals lack experience and training in it:

> I did have some critiques about social aspects. … That's an entirely different science. That's social science; that's behavior. … The environment is natural science. My background is in natural laws and science, so I think it's became a mishmash. (Sustainability manager)

The interviewees further described how the focus of their work was in constant flux due to, for example, new governmental regulations, environmental incidents, clients' shifting demands and/or altered corporate business strategies. Moreover, the open definition of *sustainability* has amplified the ambiguity and vastness of the work of sustainability professionals, who confront various interpretations of sustainability and tackle sometimes unreasonable expectations of what can be expected of their expertise and included in their assignments. However, even if sustainability has broadened in scope, such broadening has seldom been reflected in how sustainability is organized, and, as several interviewees explained, new responsibilities imposed on them had not resulted in more resources. In response, to meet expectations of knowing the entire field of sustainability and simultaneously furnish expertise perceived as being relevant for multiple construction projects, sustainability professionals had

to alternate between being a specialist and a generalist. That work involved managing different temporal perspectives to make it relevant to multiple actors, which entailed reflecting on the past, conforming to the present and predicting subsequent moves to prepare for future visionary work.

Visionary work: looking out to find keys to accelerate transition

> I think that we've changed our business model slightly, but it's not transformed. So that's something that I think about. What are the keys to accelerate that transition? (Sustainability expert)

Several of the interviewees reflected on how to initiate the transition toward sustainability, as the above quotation represents. To accelerate that transition, the sustainability professionals described the importance of continually challenging current project management and/or business practices. With the ambition to capture the overall picture and challenges related to sustainability, they engaged in visionary work, and several professionals described their role as being to always drive the sustainability agenda forward. That ambition relates to their perception that they should constantly aim for change and that their role and tasks are intrinsic factors of such change.

For cases in point, the interviewees described situations of sustainability work in which they had supported top management with setting sustainability goals and thereafter being tasked to ensure that the goals were acted on:

> We don't want sustainability-related questions and aspects to be separate; we want them to be a part of everything that we do. We say that it's supposed to be a normal part of our everyday life. It's not supposed to be separate. … [I make sure] that our management doesn't say a bunch of things that aren't implemented throughout the organization. … It's my job to minimize that gap but also to support and help. (Sustainability expert)

To improve the sustainability performance of construction projects and firms, the professionals proposed fulfilling global sustainability goals as a means to boost a company's credibility and reputation. In turn, they pursued those goals to push the ambitions of projects beyond the clients' needs. In their effort to make business models more sustainable, they sought to set goals and corporate strategies aligned with sustainability goals, or as one sustainability manager explained:

> Sustainability could play a defining role in how we should shape our [future] business models or how we

organize ourselves to get synergistic effects. Sustainability, as I see it, can be a clear and excellent driving force. However, I don't think that companies are fully aware of how we can contribute. Or that's what it feels like anyway. (Sustainability manager)

Another strategy for improving a project's performance was to advocate for new ways to solve the industry's sustainability-related challenges, as one sustainability manager stated:

It's easy to fall back on the explanation that "This is how it is". We [sustainability professionals] don't have that luxury because we have to think outside the box if we are to overcome our [the industry's sustainability] challenges. … I often say, "We haven't fixed any of our problems by doing it this way, so we have to do something else". (Sustainability manager)

Even if the interviewees recognized the need to think "outside the box" and act proactively, much of their work concerns, as one of the interviewees expressed it, "Keeping one's head above the surface" and staying ahead of the organization by keeping abreast of the latest scientific advice and news regarding sustainability, both nationally and internationally. Or, as another of the interviewees said:

An important part of my work is trying to find ways to always stay a couple steps ahead of the organization on certain questions: forecasting the future, figuring out what aspects will come up next. Because, in a way, it [sustainability work] never ends. You'll never be finished with it. There are always new things and challenges to face. (Sustainability manager)

When involved in visionary work, the professionals identified primarily as experts. By building their agency on expertise in sustainability, they could stay ahead of the game. In their visionary work, they stated that they paid close attention in order to identify future challenges in sustainable construction and predict the next move. In parallel, to maintain credibility, they had to continually develop their competence in various areas of knowledge and follow up-to-date scientific advice. With a sustainable future in sight, they defined their agenda in line with their personal idea of that future, as stated by one sustainability manager:

It often ends up that I'm writing my own agenda in a way. And there are tons to do, so the agenda becomes quite full. (Sustainability manager)

In turn, that dynamic nurtured the idea of sustainability professionals as change agents able to define the sustainability agenda and single-handedly make people follow it, which they perceived as negatively affecting their work in terms of stress and lack of time. Nevertheless, the broad scope of sustainable construction has also meant that they have had to continuously make knowledge about sustainability relevant for corporate business and ensure that it follows governing regulations and guidelines. Moreover, tasks perceived as being fuzzy or unclear by other built environment professionals have often been assigned to sustainability professionals. As a result, and similar to when they do thankless work, the interviewees described how sustainability professionals could easily become so-called fuzzy subject professionals and the role a catch-all for miscellaneous tasks.

The different aspects captured under the umbrella of sustainability have also increased over time. Coping with a mishmash of disparate areas in their work, whether social aspects or issues of quality and/or safety, was a struggle shared among the interviewees. For a remedy, the interviewees emphasized the importance of taking ownership of both the issue and their own role in the organization, including defining both the agenda and goals for their and the organizations' sustainability work. Adopting the discourse of project management, an environmental coordinator described their role as "being the project leader of sustainability". Taking ownership of sustainability, according to the interviewees, sustained the relevance of their work and role and was reported to grant them agency. However, on the flip side, as expressed by a sustainability expert, "free frames" and undefined boundaries provide the freedom to define the tasks involved but also create role ambiguity and the perception that one's work is not enough and never will be:

There's ambiguity in what I'm supposed to deliver and the time frame in which I'm supposed to do it. I have free frames but also a very limited amount of time. (Sustainability expert)

Analysis and discussion

The aim of our research was to investigate the intrinsic influence of multiple institutional logics on the work and agency of sustainability professionals. In our findings, their efforts were captured in three sorts of work that they adopt to cope with different conditions in which multiple institutional logics coexist. The primary elements of that work are summarized in Table 3.

What we have labeled as thankless work in our study seems to coincide with work that aligns closely with the construction project's logic. The primary mission of that sort of work is to inform and control. The primary logics that play out are project and

Table 3. Sustainability professionals' mission, work tasks and agency in sustainable construction.

	Thankless work	Rewarding collaborative work	Visionary work
Primary logics	Project and Governance	Project and Sustainability	Corporate and Sustainability
Mission	Inform and control	Communicate and collaborate	Set agenda and justify future action
Work tasks	Attend to immediate needs	Identify counterparts	Increase relevance of sustainability issues
	Detect ignorance and compensate for lack of compliance	Facilitate collaboration	Support transitions to long-term sustainability
	Align sustainability work with situated project management	Manage different temporal perspectives and topics in flux	Solve industrial challenges
	Remind and nag	Interweave sustainability and project practices	Search for keys to transition
	Handle a "miscellaneous bin" of tasks	Participate in decision-making processes	Set the agenda for sustainability
		Set shared sub-goals	Constantly aim for change
		Solve problems	Set and implement goals
		Make sustainability relevant for multiple actors	Be proactive
			Forecast
Maintain agency by:	Playing symbolic roles as proxies for sustainability work	Collaborating on shared problems	Ensuring that environmental sustainability is always topical
	Channeling authority via regulations, certification schemes and/or clients' demands	Pursuing joint ambitions to resolve challenges beyond clients' demands	Taking ownership of sustainability and acting as the "project leader of sustainability"
	Adapting sustainability work to a project logic to make it tangible	Enhancing project performance and achieving project success	Using various sources of accountability and credibility to sustain legitimacy
	Negotiating and creating the meaning of missions	Gaining legitimacy based on highly valued expertise	Capturing the overall picture and challenges related to sustainability as a driver for creating business value
		Influencing decisions	
		Alternating between generalist and expertise roles	

governance logics. Sustainability professionals need to adapt to a project logic focusing on short-term problem-solving and efficiency (Gluch 2009). That focus requires being attentive to organizational and/or project members' immediate needs but also detecting ignorance and compensating for noncompliance with sustainability issues. They channel authority through the means of governing instruments such as regulation, certification schemes and clients' demands, which typically aligns with governance logic. Altogether, such work is described as a continuous fight. Similar to what Murtagh et al. (2018) observed in their study on building control surveyors assigned to perform environmental audits, our findings highlight the struggle of sustainability professionals to make their roles as well as missions relevant to a project logic by continuously seeking for invitations to situations where they sense that they can make a difference. However, as observed by Akotia and Opoku (2018), such involvement is difficult to achieve if sustainability is not prioritized and professionals assigned sustainability-focused tasks are excluded from project meetings. Consequently, the advocacy for sustainability either becomes unrecognized or fails to spur engagement from others, thus leaving the professionals to perceive that their agency is more symbolic than operative. In turn, a rather lonely role is created, one designed to execute work that nobody seems to appreciate. Subordinating sustainability work under a project logic increases attention to sustainability issues but also

risks limiting the depth of the work; at the same time, it gives it an even broader scope that makes the work a miscellaneous bin of tasks. As a result, not only do competing logics risk limiting work on sustainability in an effort to appeal to project management (Gluch and Bosch-Sijtsema 2016), but others in organizations might also neglect sustainability due to a false sense of security that it is being fully handled by sustainability professionals. To avoid being captured on a symbolic level and used as proxy for not doing sustainability work, much of the sustainability professionals' thankless work entailed negotiating and creating meaning of their mission—for example, through various types of client-stipulated documents and governing schemes. In that way, our findings elaborate what Murtagh et al. (2018) found by clarifying why sustainability professionals perceive that their power to promote practices of sustainability is limited to assuring compliance with building regulations.

Contrary to thankless work, rewarding collaborative work is based on both project and sustainability logics, such that the two logics seem to coexist (Besharov and Smith 2014, Gottlieb et al. 2020) in a way that sustainability work can blossom. On occasion, sustainability professionals have met counterparts, often in construction projects, with whom they can create joint goals for sustainability (and construction) work. The mission of the professionals in such work is to communicate and collaborate the means to handle the complexity and vastness of sustainable construction by developing the

work beyond the clients' demands in individual projects. When involved in collaborative work, the professionals had to balance their actions to the different logics to various extents depending on the context. Although not specifically covered by Dahlmann and Grosvold's (2017), that ability to handle dynamic contexts may explain why some of the environmental managers in their study succeeded in incorporating sustainability into their firm's managerial practices better than others. However, a challenge for sustainability professionals in doing rewarding collaborative work is that they continuously have to move between a specialist and a generalist role causing role fragmentation and a sense of being overwhelmed by the role expectations. In collaborative work, the professionals felt they were invited as a natural part of the project team, which allowed them to mingle sustainability work with project management on an equal footing. As such, they could not only remain attentive to regulatory demands but also influence decisions leading to the development of business models and the success of projects. Perceiving that their expertise was valued, the professionals understood that their supportive work can be rewarding as long as collaborative agency is fostered. Thus, our findings underscore how the role of sustainability professionals depends on the situation and the people with whom they interact.

The preceding example shows how sustainability work may become visionary work when sustainability professionals get enough space to act proactively. Agency supporting visionary work builds on sustainability professionals' being perceived by others as knowledgeable, credible and open to a multiple-logic view so that their work remains highly relevant to multiple groups over time and thus achieves continuity. Key missions in their visionary work include setting the agenda and justifying future actions by pushing the sustainability agenda forward and contributing to the development of a sustainable future. In such visionary work, authority is based on a combination of policy instruments and sustainability expertise. The professionals' agency is thus formed by their acting as project leaders of sustainability and positioning themselves as being credible. Their expertise and challenge-focused drive provide a shared basis of attention to transitioning toward sustainability, ways of making business models more sustainable and ways of contributing to business success by setting and implementing goals, forecasting future scenarios and solving industry challenges. Their visionary work shows elements of corporate business logics combined with sustainability logics. In that way, they not only mediate between logics but also hijack a logic outside their professional background (McPherson and Sauder 2013) and use a corporate business logic and deliberately advocating for the creation of business value.

However, similar to previous studies (Dahlmann and Grosvold 2017, Arenas et al. 2020) on coping with multiple logics, our study revealed that visionary work can also have the opposite effect: that instead of integrating sustainability and transforming other logics, it risks developing a peripheral logic and reinforcing prevailing logics. That dynamic manifested in the example of sustainability professionals' becoming the "fuzzy subject professionals" made to be responsible for all kinds of tasks not categorized within the framework of traditional project management. The vastness and ambiguity of both the tasks and objective (i.e. sustainability) complicated our interviewees' ability to maintain agency. Another risk is that the direction of sustainability work, due to limited resources and an unreasonable scope, is limited to primarily following the personal preferences of the few sustainability professionals involved.

Because our study focused on sustainability professionals, we cannot answer whether our findings are unique to their work or indicate a widespread dynamic among other professional groups in the construction industry. Most likely, other individuals with roles based on expertise may perform, for example, thankless work because they either support other professionals or encounter organizational actors who are unconsciously or deliberately opportunistic. However, in managing a continuously shifting subject instead of people (e.g. construction workers) or a rather stable knowledge domain (e.g. building physics), what seems to be unique is the broad variety of stakeholders and the vastness of the area they are responsible for, which forces them to constantly shift perspectives— for example, from the project to the firm to governance—and time frame, from the short to long term and between the past, present and future.

Conclusions and directions for future research

This paper contributes to an emerging field of research on sustainability work in the construction industry, first by showing how professionals cope with institutional contexts defined by multiple logics, herein exemplified by sustainable construction. Describing the role of sustainability professionals as navigators of multiple institutional logics, we have elaborated past findings about such professionals in the construction

industry (cf. Gluch 2009, Troje 2020) by showcasing how they have to reconcile conflicting practices. Our findings show how the professionals not only negotiate but also continuously combine logics in order to satisfy multiple institutional logics. That observation confirms the dynamic view on how multiple logics coexist in construction suggested by Gottlieb *et al.* (2020) and Gluch and Bosch-Sijtsema (2016). Supported primarily by a governance logic, sustainability professionals define the means and ends of sustainability as well as create new sustainability practices largely defined by the logic of sustainability. They further adapt those practices to contribute to the successful delivery of projects and comply with overall corporate business models, with those following a project or corporate business logic. Our research adds to current knowledge suggesting that professionals create hybrid logics (Blomgren and Waks 2015, Adams 2020) and learn how to mediate between them (Currie and Spyridonidis 2016) by showing how sustainability professionals, depending on the work conditions, learn how to shift and balance their work depending on which logics are central to their work at the moment. In our study, multiple logics simultaneously existed on an equal basis—for example, in performing rewarding collaborative work—which contrasts previous findings showing the dominance of one logic in certain phases of a change process (cf. Blomgren and Waks 2015). Findings from other contexts have additionally shown that professionals often operate according to two competing logics or else blend them into a new hybrid logic (Currie and Spyridonidis 2016, Dahlmann and Grosvold 2017). In our study, by comparison, the examples of collaborative and visionary work stage how sustainability professionals strike such balances in their everyday work.

Second, by extending current knowledge with rich empirical examples of the everyday work of sustainability professionals, the paper highlights the complexity involved in managing the vastness and ambiguity of sustainability and how it requires individuals to be both flexible and sensitive to the existence of multiple logics in their immediate context. The findings show how sustainability professionals' everyday work is a blend of thankless, rewarding collaborative and visionary work that they need to master and shift between in order to maintain agency in transitions toward sustainability. In that dynamic, they are pressured to deliver time and cost-efficient construction projects while at once ensuring that environmental sustainability is not bypassed. To those ends, they need to become specialist–generalists who constantly work for

change in contexts that may call for their support with sustainability in some instances but disregard and/or undermine their work in others. Sustainability professionals thus create situated hybrid logics that are flexible and dynamic enough to adapt to different situations, whether they call for hands-on project support or long-term corporate strategic work. They also have to learn how to shift between different logics on a continual basis instead of transitionally. For example, we found that when sustainability logic did not work as a strategic basis, the professionals temporarily adopted the logic of governance for support. However, the frustration by sustainability professionals stating that others see them as "fuzzy subject professionals" handling a "miscellaneous bin of tasks" tell us that the hybridization of their role undermines their professionality and professional unity (Adams 2020), which firms need to consider when organizing sustainability work.

Third, to support our analysis, we developed a schematic overview of the primary characteristics of four institutional logics that coexist in sustainable construction and that sustainability professionals have to relate to: sustainability logic, project logic, corporate business logic and governance logic. Although the overview is indeed a contribution of our research, a more systematic review might allow a comprehensive picture of the institutional field of sustainable construction.

Agency involves dimensions of power that we merely touched upon in our study by describing sustainability professionals' authority and legitimacy to act. An interesting continuation of our study would be to examine the implications of power structures and individual agency at the institutional level. However, doing so would necessitate including actors in the analysis that sustainability professionals interact with. A related question concerns how the role of sustainability professional adheres to or possibly conflicts with other roles, which raises another question about who is included in the sustainability profession and who is not. Because sustainability professionals depend on interactions with other professionals, future research should also investigate what happens at the boundaries between professional groups. That dynamic also relates to the question of how professions become hybrid (e.g. Blomgren and Waks 2015, Adams 2020), a topic that remains underexamined in construction.

Moreover, the corporate business logic, at least as described by our interviewees, did not reveal any commercial side of sustainable construction, despite its emphasis in studies in other industrial fields when

addressing contrasting logics in sustainability (Arenas *et al.* 2020). That dynamic could add a fifth logic to the institutional field and thus further increase the complexity of sustainable construction. However, it might also indicate that sustainability professionals are either excluded from that discussion in their companies or that sustainable construction in its current form lacks a commercial dimension. The latter could mean that sustainability is not embedded in current business models and thus potentially presents an untapped opportunity for the construction industry. What also does not seem to fit into sustainable construction is logic of social sustainability. Neither literature not the interviewees capture social sustainability as part of sustainable construction, contrary our interviewees perceive social sustainability as problematic and describes it as a struggle. If social sustainability should truly be included in sustainable construction, it needs a totally different organizational approach than what we have seen so far in both industry and research, since current trend only limits the agency and work of sustainability professionals leading to a slower transition toward sustainability.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, PG. The data are not publicly available due to their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

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