RHETORICAL STRATEGIES TO DIFFUSE SOCIAL PROCUREMENT IN CONSTRUCTION

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Social procurement - in particular employment requirements aimed to create employment opportunities for disadvantaged unemployed people like immigrants or the disabled - are increasingly implemented in Swedish construction procurement. Social procurement is novel in Sweden, and actors who work with implementing employment requirements try to spread these practices throughout the sector. Building on interviews with 21 actors working with social procurement, this paper investigates rhetorical strategies for diffusing a social procurement practice in the construction sector. Applying the Aristotelian types of arguments, ethos, logos and pathos, when investigating the rhetoric used by proponents of social procurement, the findings show that they use a wide range of rhetorical strategies that that emphasize the character of the proponents and their arguments, that explicate the rationality of social procurement, and that appeal to the emotions of potential supporters. The findings contribute to research on social procurement by identifying discourse related to social procurement, as well as rhetorical strategies proponents of social procurement use in attempts to diffuse social procurement practice throughout the Swedish construction sector. These rhetorical strategies may potentially increase legitimation of social procurement. For managers who aim to diffuse social procurement in the sector, the findings provide an overview of a number of different types of arguments that can be used in order to argue for social procurement and its benefits.

Keywords: employment requirements, rhetoric, social procurement, Sweden

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen developments such as mass migration and increasing poverty, inequality gaps, and fiscal constraints (Barraket *et al*., 2016). These challenges have led governments as well as public and private organizations to look at their procurement activities in a different light. Today, the procurement process is increasingly seen as a strategic tool for achieving social value in addition to the actual object of procurement, which can be referred to as social procurement (Barraket *et al*., 2016). In Sweden, social procurement has been directed towards creating employment opportunities for people living in social exclusion. These people are often unemployed, poorly educated, and live in segregated neighbourhoods in housing that may need refurbishment (c.f. Brännström 2004: 2516, Edling 2015). The idea is that unemployed people will receive employment, and the construction industry,

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which is facing a severe lack of workers, will have access to a new pool of possible workers (Enochsson and Andersson 2016; Bennewitz 2017).

Social procurement, and specifically the use of employment requirements (i.e. procurement criteria for creating employment opportunities for disadvantaged unemployed people like immigrants, youths, or the disabled) is novel in Sweden. Although there are many drivers for using social procurement considering the severe issues of social exclusion Sweden is facing, social procurement is not "business as usual" (see Sutherland *et al*., 2015) in the Swedish construction industry, and no cohesive industry-wide practice is yet in place (Sävfenberg 2017; Petersen and Kadefors 2018). There are high ambitions surrounding social procurement, but due to the limited diffusion, actors who work with employment requirements spend considerable time and effort arguing for the benefits of social procurement (Petersen 2018). Although the EU procurement directives and the Swedish Public Procurement Act allow for social procurement, these regulations do not require organizations to conduct social procurements. This suggest a need for other tools to spread social procurement practices, where rhetorical strategies may be one such tool. This paper aims to examine the arguments used by actors who wish to diffuse and subsequently legitimize social procurement practices. Such an examination would add valuable insight into a novel procurement practice that is scarcely examined both empirically and theoretically (Barraket *et al*., 2016; Loosemore 2016).

Social Procurement and Changing Institutional Logics

Although the construction sector has historically been slow to adopt new sustainable concepts (Ruparathna and Hewage 2015), the sector has been targeted as suitable for social procurement (Almahmoud and Doloi 2015; Sutherland *et al*., 2015). In Sweden, social procurement has not become a fully legitimized practice in the construction sector, while social procurement has become "business as usual" in the construction sector in other countries (Sutherland *et al*., 2015) and is becoming a distinct domain of practice (Barraket *et al*., 2016). When looking to international experiences of using social procurement and employment requirements, scholars have found that many actors within the construction sector are positive towards social procurement (Erridge 2007; Zuo *et al*., 2012). Previous studies have shown that social procurement inspires deeper collaboration, knowledge sharing and building competences throughout the supply chain, not least due to the complexity of social procurement (Sutherland *et al*., 2015; Barraket *et al*., 2016).

At the same time, one major perception (and possible misconception) among actors in the construction sector is that social procurement is expensive and yields less value for money than traditional procurement (Eadie and Rafferty 2014; Loosemore 2016; Walker and Brammer, 2009; Zuo *et al*., 2012). In the UK, in Erridge's (2007) interview and document study of a pilot project in Northern Ireland and in Eadie and Rafferty's (2014) survey study of construction contractors, the authors found that contractors see employment requirements as costly as they entail training for the unemployed, and that contractors required additional monetary incentives in order to accept the employment requirements. Erridge (2007) also found that contractors were concerned that the unemployed would displace ordinary workers. In general, there is a lack of knowledge about social procurement (Walker and Brammer 2009; Zuo *et al*., 2012), and the perception of social procurement and its pros and cons varies. For social procurement to become an established and legitimate practice in the construction sector, sceptical actors in the sector must be persuaded of its benefits.

Institutions and institutional fields, like the construction sector, are infused with various logics, which can be seen as "material practices and symbolic constructions" that influence actors, their behaviour, and their perceptions of the world (Friedland and Alford 1991: 248). Legitimacy for social procurement may be difficult to achieve, as it embeds different institutional logics than traditional procurement (Petersen, 2018). Firstly, social procurement, unlike traditional procurement, does not solely focus on features directly related to the object of the procurement, the building, but also focuses on something not directly connected to the object, employment opportunities. Secondly, traditional procurement focuses on price and quality, and easy-to measure price-related criteria, while social procurement focuses on creating social value rather than monetary value, through fuzzy, hard-to-pinpoint criteria. Thirdly, social procurement requires new competencies and cooperative practices with "new" organizations like employment agencies. Lastly, in social procurement the role and influence of the client is extended as clients can steer who their contractors should hire. Therefore, instead of the traditional loosely connected roles that characterize construction (Kadefors 1995; Dubois and Gadde 2002), contractors and other suppliers must now contend with clients having a say in their personnel politics. Social procurement thus comes with a new set of institutional logics that must be accepted in the institutional field of construction (Petersen 2018). Institutional arrangements and their degree of legitimacy change as an effect of shifts in institutional logics. Institutional logics may be changed through e.g. the emergence of new technology or legislation, as well as through "the strategic use of persuasive language" (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005:35; Brown *et al*., 2012). The following sections discuss the connection between persuasive rhetoric and legitimacy creation by applying the Aristotelian types of arguments of ethos, logos and pathos.

Persuasive Discourse

Considering the ambition in Sweden to increase the use of social procurement, the persuasive discourse used by actors trying to diffuse social procurement throughout the sector is important. Green (2004) argues that novel practices are diffused and later institutionalized when the arguments supporting the practice become taken-for-granted. Also, Suddaby (2010) and Brown *et al*., (2012) claimed that the study of language and rhetoric is a promising area of future studies, especially in terms of studying how language is purposively used to persuade others when promoting new practices or when attempting to change institutional logics. Therefore, by applying a perspective that focuses on language and discourse to better understand change and institutionalization processes, the practices for diffusing and subsequently legitimizing social procurement may be better understood. In a study by Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) they conducted a content analysis of the rhetoric in transcribed witness statements surrounding the merger of an accounting firm and legal firm. They showed how institutional entrepreneurs enacted change by manipulating institutional logics through the use of purposive rhetoric, by first exposing contradictions within institutional logics, and then by connecting certain features of these logics to wider, institutionalized cultural arrangements. To study the arguments for and against the change, the authors coded their data according to the main three types of persuasive rhetoric: ethos, logos and pathos. Higgins and Walker (2012) used the same three rhetorical types (also called Pisteis), which originally were formed by Aristotle, to analyse the rhetoric of social and environmental reports. Their interpretation and presentation of the three categories are used in this paper. Higgins and Walker (2012) describe ethos as related to the character, and thereby credibility of the speaker, who

through techniques such as similitude, deference, self-criticism, consistency, and expertise tries to persuade others. Logos is related to reason, or the appearance of rationality, where the speaker refers to logic, data, and evidence as a rhetorical technique. Lastly, pathos inspires emotive responses from the audience and is related to the identification with the audience or others, through referring to cultural references such as under-privilege, well-being, hopes and aspirations, and sympathy. This paper draws inspiration from Suddaby and Greenwood's (2005) and Higgins and Walker's (2012) approach in its theoretical examination.

METHOD

In order to examine the argumentative rhetoric used to spread and legitimize social procurement, 21 actors (in 17 interviews) involved in using and diffusing social procurement and employment requirements were interviewed between May 2016 and February 2017. The reasons for choosing these particular individuals are firstly that they are the actors who have any considerable experience with and knowledge of social procurement. These actors are prominent in the Swedish construction sector as the people who "set the agenda" of social procurement. Secondly, these individuals are the actors who show considerable interest in social procurement, and are those that have been proactive and diligent in using and spreading employment requirements. The interviewees are mostly based throughout the southern half of Sweden, and represent a multitude of different organizations in the construction sector: clients, contractors and architects, and support organisations that provides guidance and support in procurement or recruitment processes. There is an emphasis on interviewing clients as they choose the contractual criteria. However, as clients are not the only actors in the sector that are interested in spreading social procurement, additional types of actors were included in the interviewee sampling. The interviewees were identified through industry press, websites, and seminars. Snowballing (see Flick, 2014; Bryman and Bell, 2015) was also used, where new interviewees were often identified through referrals from previous interviewees, who know many actors in the sector who might be persons of interest for the study. The interviewees are presented in Table 1 and will henceforth be referred to with their work title and individual code.

Table 1: Overview of interviewees

Organisation	Types of organisations	Work titles/positions of interviewees	Individual codes
Client (C)	Public and private housing companies, public and private commercial property companies, local premises office	CEO, procurement manager, procurement officer, CSR manager, sustainability manager, process leader for employment requirements, head of development, development strategist for social issues	C1-13
Contractor/ Architect (CA)	Construction contractors, architecture firm	Sustainability manager, project leader, project manager, development strategist for social issues, business developer	CA1-5
Support Organisation (SO)	Public procurement company, Employment Agency	Project leader, employment officer	SO1-3

The semi-structured interviews (Kvale 2007) lasted between 45 minutes and 3 hours and allowed for elaboration from the interviewees in order to capture topics they found particularly pertinent to discuss. This interview flexibility was important considering the novelty and research scarcity of social procurement (Edmondson and McManus 2007). The interviews focused on topics such as the interviewees'

perspectives on and experiences with employment requirements, their daily work practices, and the pros and cons of employment requirements.

For the data analysis, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Excerpts that were promotional in nature, meaning that they can be characterized as persuasive and argumentative for the benefits of social procurement, were extracted. These excerpts were then coded according to the three types of arguments: ethos, logos and pathos. This allowed for seeing patterns in the interviewees' rhetoric. The three types of arguments may be simultaneously represented in the same excerpt. In those cases, the category that is most prominently emphasized labels the excerpt.

FINDINGS

The choice of using the types of argument of ethos, logos and pathos was because they are the basis for studies on rhetoric. With a focus on the role of language in institutionalization processes, and scarce knowledge about social procurement in general, using this well-established theoretical lens is judged to be a reasonable first step to investigate the role of language for diffusing and legitimizing social procurement in the construction sector.

Ethos

In the first category of rhetoric, the interviewees talk about their personal role and the role the organization they represent. These arguments are centred around (1) explicit consistency, (2) self-criticism, and (3) responsible use of power.

Firstly, the interviewees use consistency to strengthen their character and persuasive argumentation. It is difficult to say much about the interviewees' implicit consistency, in terms of them restating the same point of view over and over in different situations. However, what is clear is their explicit consistency, in terms of talking about their long-term approach to social procurement, that they do not see social procurement as a fad and will continue to work diligently with using and spreading social procurement. A business developer (CA4) said: "We will continue to drive social sustainability, and we see it as a recurring thing. So, for as long as there are reasons to do it we will continue". Similarly, development manager (C2) explained: "If I say that employment requirements benefit our property values… and ask if [our contractors] want in on the deal or not, they understand that we are not backing down. We show that this is something we will do this year, in ten years, in twenty years, and that message is important to get out there". This explicit consistency signals the seriousness of the speaker to potential supporters. Either in terms of making the arguments seem more believable, or in the sense that it is not worth working against this new procurement practice, as the organization is not backing down anyway.

Secondly, in an effort of self-reflection, the interviewees do criticize themselves, their organizations, and the sector at large for being part of the problem social procurement aims to solve. A CSR manager (C9) talks about walking the talk: "We need to take on many interns ourselves, because we can't place requirements on others, but we must also contribute and be a part of that". Others criticise the construction sector and the way the work is organized, especially in terms of the sector's project-focus and the short-term contracts in procurement: "Employment requirements are a very short-term solution (…) in the sense that they only last for the duration of the contract" (development manager C2), and " the lack of long-term perspectives is a weakness" (sustainability manager CA5)".

Lastly, the interviewees often refer to themselves and their role in society. This rhetoric has aspects of logos and pathos, as the rationale is that with great power comes great responsibility. In that sense it would be illogical (logos) and unfair (pathos) not to use that power to influence procurement practices and developments in wider society. A national sustainability manager (CA1) talked about the targeted neighbourhoods and explained that: "There is high unemployment, low level of education, low solvency, [and] low tax incomes. Shouldn't we ensure that we work with these people? […] That's the type of measure we need. We must look at the social exclusion issues and match that [with jobs]". A development manager (C2) agreed: "We are a public housing company, so we have [public values] in our mission. We have a social responsibility in the neighbourhoods where we have properties. So it's part of our mission to talk about social procurement internally, as well as externally". By continually referring to their mission, power, influence and stance in society and in the sector, their character may be strengthened as this emphasizes them as market leaders who drive change, and who make that change seem legitimate.

Logos

A logos-based rhetoric centres around making social procurement logical and the rational choice for how to organize the procurement process. The interviewees use a logos-based rhetoric focused on two different topics, where the interviewees argue for (1) the logical use of resources, and (2) the win-win situation. Many of the interviewees emphasize the untapped resource that is the unemployed, and that this is a pool of potential employees that should be explored. This is especially pertinent as there is a severe lack of capacity in the construction sector, both in terms of construction trade workers and engineers. A project manager (CA3) claimed that: "there is a possibility with employment requirements […] because there are many who come to Sweden who are well-educated. We've seen that […] they have knowledge we should take care of". A national sustainability manager (CA1) further explained: "[Social procurement] is not about us looking like we're nice, because [social procurement] is an absolute necessity. If we don't recruit a bunch of good people very soon we will have huge problems […]. We are implementing social procurement for selfish reasons, because we want to find skilled men and women that want to work for us […] We need good people long-term that mirror our society". This means that not only is it wasteful to let skilled people remain unemployed, but it can also be bad for business. There is thus an argumentation that points to social procurement being good for business, as it can create a more diverse workforce and access valuable competences among workers who previously would be difficult to identify. This leads into the second topic of logos-based arguments.

The interviewees, no matter if they represent clients or contractors or other suppliers, have a clear commercial agenda behind social procurement. Many expressed that unless they can make money out of this initiative, they will no longer pursue it. The interviewees emphasize the win/win situation of social procurement, where society and the unemployed benefit, as well as businesses. A CEO (C11) explained his perspective: "The truly good business deals are profitable, and manage to create value for the clients, and for society". A CSR manager (C9) explained that the commercial vs. social value combination is important also for public organizations: "We also have to make profits […] although that's not our main driver. But we can't make bad deals and let the property value decrease. Property values don't decrease just because people are unemployed, but [social exclusion, employment and property value] are interdependent". Also, for contractors, such combinations are becoming necessary in

order to meet stakeholder demands: "We have internal and external drivers, and our new business model is called 'profit with value', which means that the profit we make should create additional value in wider society. This is very high on the agenda, and that's because we genuinely believe that this is what we should and must do. Because we see that society wants it, the clients want it, and employees want it" (development manager CA2). The notion is that everybody wins with social procurement, and therefore social procurement is the most rational procurement practice.

Pathos

To use a pathos-based rhetoric could seem particularly appropriate considering the fact that social procurement aims to create social value and employment requirements aim to help people move from social exclusion to social inclusion. Many of the interviewees say that eliciting emotive responses in others and nurturing these feelings internally in the organization is vital, and they say that they themselves like their work because of their emotional engagement. A process leader (C6) explained it as: "When I say that this is about building societies, then I just can't back down, then I'm like a union for these people". The interviewees try to elicit emotive responses, by (1) personalizing the unemployed, and by (2) referring to their under-privilege, partly by referring specifically to the 2015 refugee crisis.

In one of Sweden's largest cities, one woman in particular has been made the face and living example of social procurement. The example of how her life, and the life of her family, had improved after she received employment through social procurement was retold from several interviewees working in that city (but in different organizations). There had been promotional articles written about her and pamphlets given out at various events. A project manager (SO1) told the story as: "We have [this woman]. She came to Sweden when she was 14 years old […] and she dreamed about being an accountant. So she went to college for three years in a city three hours away. So she commuted between [her home] and this city for three years, and had to leave her daughter at day-care really early, and then she took the train there and back every day. She was unemployed for a year and applied for 100 jobs but was never called for an interview. The year after it was the same story, she found nothing […]. But then she got a temporary job through social procurement […] and today she is permanently employed. Can you imagine that she used to be on welfare? […] When she got her permanent employment she even negotiated a higher salary. Can you believe it, what a journey!". These stories of individuals who have turned their life around thanks to social procurement not only focus on them as individuals, but often include anecdotes about their family, thereby personalizing the people social procurement has targeted.

The rhetoric also includes reference to the disadvantage and under-privilege of the unemployed. Often this is in terms of how social procurement presents an opportunity for these people to change their life, which they otherwise would have difficulty doing (due to their under-privilege): "We can show that for the people we engage in, for them we create opportunities and they get some power over their own life" (process leader C6). The internships and temporary employments disadvantaged people can receive through social procurement can thus provide them with work experience they would not have access to otherwise. The same process leader (C6) also explained his ambition to handle the large inflow of refugees: "We're going to introduce refugees to the Swedish society here, and then we're going to introduce them to the labour market. If we get those two parts to work together it will be the best refugee integration ever! We create somewhere for them to live, and then we create the

opportunities for their first real job here". Opportunity seems to be the operative word when emotively arguing for the unemployed, their under-privilege, and the role of social procurement, and the refugee crisis in particular is a rhetorical topic many throughout the sector use to legitimate the need for social procurement.

DISCUSSION

Looking to Aristotle's three rhetorical strategies for persuasion used by Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) and Higgins and Walker (2012), the findings indicate arguments falling under all of these three types. Firstly, the interviewees refer extensively to their role in the sector and in society, both in terms that it is their responsibility to promote social procurement and lead change, but also that they will continue to do so no matter what other stakeholders might think. This approach could seem overbearing, but the interviewees seem to balance this potentially obtrusive approach, by also being self-critical of their organizations and of the sector.

Secondly, the findings also corroborate Suddaby and Greenwood's (2005) notion of logos-based arguments' play on established institutional logics, in this case the rationality of profit maximization and goal-orientation. The interviewees might not have concrete figures backing up their claims, but the results are framed as so obvious and logical that there is proof of the benefit of social procurement. This is achieved when the interviewees emphasize both the socio-economic and commercial benefits of using social procurement, thereby framing social procurement as the rational development of procurement. The interviewees simultaneously used value-laden arguments, like the importance of helping those in need and because this is the right thing to do. Thereby, the findings adds to Suddaby and Greenwood's (2005) conclusion by indicating that the same proponents used tensions between values and commercialism to their advantage simultaneously, rather than proponents and opponents just using such tensions against each other.

Lastly, the interviewees' pathos-based arguments aim to create sympathy, not only for the individual unemployed or the refugees, but also for their families and community. They also connect to cultural references by talking about the under-privilege of the unemployed and the refugees, and how social procurement may provide the opportunity for them to achieve their aspirations, hopes and dreams. A national sustainability manager (CA1) concisely exemplified the argumentative rhetoric underlying social procurement by saying that: "[With social procurement] we would have more taxpayers and less depression". This quote represents two of the argumentative types simultaneously: the logic of having more taxpayers (logos) and the emotional appeals by referencing depression (pathos). As such, different types of arguments are used by the same proponents, and sometimes even at the same time.

When connecting the argumentative rhetoric with institutional logics, and taking Suddaby and Greenwood's (2005) claims into account, it is difficult to say if the proponents of social procurement are trying to expose contradictions within institutional logics to then connect certain features of these logics to wider, institutionalized cultural arrangements. However, the findings indicate that proponents emphasize certain features of social procurement, in particular the socio-economic and commercial business opportunities of social procurement. These arguments tap into a discourse that is well-established in the construction sector, which has traditionally focused more on tangible profit-related criteria. The findings cannot say when different arguments are used over others. It may however be so that

logos-based arguments pointing to evidence of e.g. the profit opportunities of social procurement might increase when these can be better calculated than today.

CONCLUSION

The findings illustrate how proponents of social procurement use a wide range of rhetorical strategies that emphasize the character of the proponents and thereby the legitimacy of their arguments, that explicate the rationality of social procurement, and that appeal to the emotions of potential supporters. These findings contribute to research on social procurement by identifying discourse related to social procurement, and how social procurement may be legitimized in the construction sector. The argumentative rhetoric underlying social procurement might be particularly important in Sweden. As there are no regulations that can coerce engagement in social procurement, actors in the construction sector must be discursively persuasive in order to enact this change. However, it is difficult to say if the rhetorical strategies have been effective in legitimizing social procurement, as social procurement is not institutionalized in the Swedish construction sector today, although this process seems to be underway (Petersen and Kadefors 2018). Rhetoric, and the actors using the rhetoric, is likely only one tool among many others, like legislation, for legitimizing social procurement and to battle social exclusion.

For managers who aim to diffuse social procurement throughout the Swedish construction sector, the findings provide an overview of different types of arguments that can be used and combined in order to argue for social procurement and its benefits, and thereby to persuade sceptics of social procurement. Future studies could delve deeper into the substance of and interaction between different sets of rhetoric of proponents and opponents of social procurement, or the rhetoric of proponents proposing different sub-practices within the wider social procurement practice (for example using internships vs. temporary employment contracts). This should then include interviewing a wider range of actors, such as union representatives, authorities, and engineering consultants, whose exclusion is a limitation of this paper.

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