

THESIS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL PROCUREMENT:

An institutional perspective on working with employment  
requirements

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# Constructing Social Procurement: An Institutional Perspective on Working with Employment Requirements

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## Abstract

Private and public organisations are increasingly using their purchasing power to mitigate societal issues and create social value. This is called social procurement. Due to problems such as segregation, unemployment, and social exclusion, social procurement in Sweden has focused on employment requirements. This is a type of criterion within social procurement that is used to create employment opportunities for marginalised long-term unemployed people, such as immigrants, youths and/or people with disabilities. These target groups often live in segregated neighbourhoods in run-down housing. This situation has led organisations in the Swedish construction and real estate sector to implement employment requirements in the procurement of their building and refurbishment projects and also in the facilities maintenance of the buildings, often hiring their own tenants. By hiring unemployed people to work with refurbishing their run-down housing, and supplying more labour to the construction sector, employment requirements have the potential to create social value for individuals, organisations, and for society.

However, it is unclear how social procurement and employment requirements unfold in practice and what it means for the daily work of individual and organisational actors. Working with employment requirements can spur new ways of thinking and organising; create new roles, actors and responsibilities; create new practices, knowledge and coordination needs; and create new business opportunities. These new ways of thinking and organising, requires closer empirical, theoretical and conceptual examination. Therefore, this thesis aims *to analyse how individual and organisational actors work with social procurement and how this work brings about institutional change processes that affect the everyday work of these actors*. This thesis builds on a qualitative research design, mainly using interviews, where the practice-oriented theoretical perspectives of institutional work and institutional logics are applied to analyse how practices, roles, identities and norms change as a result of working with social procurement.

The findings in this thesis make several contributions to both theory and practice. *For social procurement research*, in the context of the construction and real estate sector, this thesis adds rich details about what employment requirements mean for individual actors, and their professional roles, identities and daily work practices. The research also provides details on what enablers, drivers and barriers there are for working with employment requirements, as well as a discussion on which type of actors that are affected by these enablers, drivers and barriers.

*For the theoretical perspectives of institutional logics and work*, this research adds insight and an empirical example of how a conflicting and disruptive institutional logic collide and mesh in a tightly regulated and institutionalised environment, and how a sustainable concept may become institutionalised despite considerable inertia, through the use of creative institutional work. Moreover, the research illustrates how actors differ in terms of the type of institutional work they conduct, and how these different kinds of ‘institutional workmanship’ interact. It also calls into question the role of intentionality in institutional work.

*For practitioners*, the findings highlight what works well and less well when actors work with employment requirements. The identified barriers constitute a concrete list of areas in which adjustments can be made to enable an effective and efficient creation and dissemination of employment requirements and associated practices. For those already working with employment requirements today, the findings acknowledge the struggles that individual actors face when working with employment requirements, which can help legitimise their roles and practices and, by extension, the use of employment requirements.

**Keywords:** social procurement; employment requirements; institutional logics; institutional work; organisation; practice; rhetoric; roles; work; qualitative study; interviews; construction and real estate sector, social value.



## List of appended papers

This thesis is based on the work contained in the following papers:

### Paper 1:

Troje, D. and Kadefors, A. (2018) Employment Requirements in Swedish Construction Procurement: Institutional Perspectives. *Journal of Facilities Management*, 16(3), 284–298.

This paper was written by Daniella Troje and Anna Kadefors. Troje was the lead author and collected the data.

The first version of this paper was peer-reviewed and published as a conference paper: Petersen, D. and Kadefors, A. (2016) Social Procurement and Employment Requirements in Construction. In: P W Chan and C J Neilson (Eds.) *Proceedings of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual ARCOM Conference*, 5–7 September 2016, Manchester, UK, Association of Researchers in Construction Management, Vol. 2, 1045–1054.

The paper was then invited to be developed for a special issue on value for money in housing in the *Journal of Facilities Management*. The developed paper was accepted in February 2017 and published in August 2018.

### Paper 2:

Troje, D. and Gluch, P. (2020) Populating the Social Realm: New Roles Arising from Social Procurement. *Construction Management and Economics*, 38(1), 55–70.

This paper was written by Daniella Troje and Pernilla Gluch. Troje was the lead author and collected the data.

The first version of this paper was peer-reviewed and published as a conference paper: Petersen, D. and Gluch, P. (2017) Examining New Professional Actors Related to Employment Requirements. *Presented as a working paper at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual ARCOM Conference*, 4–6 September 2017, Cambridge, UK, Association of Researchers in Construction Management.

The paper was then invited to be developed for *Construction Management and Economics*. The developed paper was accepted in March 2019 and was published in January 2020.

### Paper 3:

Troje, D (2018) Rhetorical Strategies to Diffuse Social Procurement in Construction *In: Gorse, C and Neilson, C J (Eds) Proceeding of the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual ARCOM Conference*, 3–5 September 2018, Belfast, UK, Association of Researchers in Construction Management, 505–514.

The paper was peer-reviewed and published as a conference paper. The paper also won the ARCOM 2018 Conference Prize for ‘Best Paper on Sustainability’.

#### **Paper 4:**

Troje, D. and Gluch, P. (2020) Beyond Policies and Social Washing: How Social Procurement Unfolds in Practice. *Sustainability*, 12(12), 4956.

This paper was written by Daniella Troje and Pernilla Gluch. Troje was the lead author and collected the data.

The first version of this paper was peer-reviewed and published as a conference paper: Troje, D. and Gluch, P. (2019) Social Procurement in the Real World: How Employment Requirements Unfold in Construction Projects *In: Gorse, C and Neilson, C J (Eds) Proceedings of the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual ARCOM Conference, 2–4 September 2019, Leeds, UK, Association of Researchers in Construction Management, 24–33.*

The paper also won the ARCOM 2019 Conference Prize for ‘Best Paper on Social Impact’.

The conference paper was then developed into a journal paper and sent to a special issue on ‘Encouraging Social and Environmental Sustainability through Public Procurement’ in *Sustainability*. The developed paper was accepted and published in June 2020.

#### **Paper 5:**

Troje, D. and Andersson, T. (2020) As above, not so below: Developing Social Procurement Practices on Strategic and Operative Levels. *Equality, diversity and inclusion: An international journal* (In press September 2020).

This paper was written by Daniella Troje and Thomas Andersson. Troje was the lead author and collected the data.

The first version of this paper was written by Daniella Troje. The paper was presented as a working paper at a conference: Petersen, D. (2017) Examining practices related to employment requirements in procurement. *The 24<sup>th</sup> annual NFF Conference, 23–25 August 2017, Bodö, Norway.*

New data was added subsequently, and Thomas Andersson was brought in as a co-author. The second version of the paper was rewritten and presented as a working paper at the *35<sup>th</sup> EGOS Colloquium, 4–6 July 2019, Edinburgh, UK.*

The conference paper was then developed into a journal paper. The paper was sent to *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal* and was accepted in July 2020.

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*I think it's great that we're doing this, that we give these people a chance. We can't succeed with finding everyone [a permanent job], but we should have the goal that everybody gets employment'*

- A housing officer working with facilities maintenance



# 1. Introduction

This chapter provides the background to the research. This is followed by the research interest and focus, and then the aim and research questions. After this follows a description of the empirical context. The chapter ends with an outline of the thesis.

## 1.1 Background and problem formulation

In recent years, mass migration and fiscal constraints have led to social issues such as inequality gaps and poverty being increasingly acknowledged as a problem in the Western world (Barraket et al. 2016; Alaraj et al. 2019). Private and public actors have tried to find new ways to handle these issues. One such way is for organisations to use their purchasing power and procurement process as a strategic tool to achieve social outcomes (McCrudden, 2004; Barraket and Weissman, 2009; Barraket et al. 2016; Grandia and Meehan, 2017). This is called social procurement and is being used increasingly as a way to mitigate societal problems, to provide new business opportunities, and to fulfil corporate social responsibility (CSR) agendas (Erridge 2007; Zuo et al. 2012; Sutherland et al. 2015; Barraket et al. 2016). Social procurement can be defined as *‘the acquisition of a range of assets and services, with the aim of intentionally creating social outcomes’* (Furneaux and Barraket, 2014:269). Social procurement aims to create social value and include procurement criteria covering a wide range of goals. Such goals include buying from women- and minority-owned businesses, buying from local small and medium enterprises (SMEs), ensuring health and safety, collective agreements and fair working conditions, and employing members of disadvantaged groups (Walker and Brammer, 2012; Zuo et al. 2012; Dean, 2013; Loosemore, 2016, Raiden et al. 2019). Thus, social value can be seen as values pertaining to good living environments, social inclusion, good health, equality, diversity, fair trade, and accessibility (Newman and Burkett, 2013, Raiden et al. 2019).

In Sweden, social procurement has focused particularly on posing criteria called employment requirements, which are used to mitigate issues of segregation, unemployment and social exclusion. Employment requirements aim to create internships or temporary employments for marginalised long-term unemployed people, such as immigrants, youths and people with disabilities (cf. Lind and Mjörnell, 2015; Enochsson and Andersson 2016) – groups that often suffer from social exclusion. Brännström (2004: 2516) defined social exclusion in a Swedish context as *‘a multidimensional disadvantage that can occur in many areas of life such as education, work, employment, housing and social participation’*, which means that social exclusion covers many non-monetary factors. The issues with social exclusion were further aggravated by the 2015 refugee crisis, which ignited widespread society-level debates about how to mitigate segregation and how to integrate refugees into Swedish society and the labour market (Alaraj et al. 2019; the National Agency for Public Procurement, 2019).

Furthermore, besides a general pressing need for more housing in Sweden, many cities are segregated and many neighbourhoods, often built during the 1960s and 1970s, are run-down and in need of refurbishment. The people who suffer most from social exclusion is often those who live in these disadvantaged and segregated neighbourhoods (Buser and Koch, 2014; Edling, 2015). The issue of run-down housing and segregation in these neighbourhoods, coupled with a need for increased integration caused by the national refugee crisis in 2015, has encouraged organisations in the construction and real estate sector, such as housing companies, to implement employment requirements in the procurements of new building and refurbishment projects and in the facilities maintenance of the buildings as means of hiring unemployed people, sometimes even their own tenants (Lind and Mjörnell, 2015). The construction and real estate sector, which includes organisations such as housing companies, commercial property owners, and contractors, has been targeted as one of the more suitable sectors for social procurement due to the sector's close ties with social exclusion issues in terms of segregation, run-down housing, and the people living in such neighbourhoods (Almahmoud and Doloi, 2015; Ruparathna and Hewage, 2015).

Moreover, the organisations in the sector, which would be performing the aforementioned refurbishments, have found it difficult to find enough workers to actually perform the work, and building investments have been hindered by a lack of labour capacity in the sector (Enochsson and Andersson, 2016; Bennewitz, 2017; Business Sweden, 2017). This means that employment requirements provide an opportunity to kill three birds with one stone: (1) socially excluded unemployed people gain employment, while (2) organisations in the sector gain workers and (3) that is thereby able to refurbish run-down neighbourhoods and build more housing for socially excluded people. However, how to actually work with social procurement in practice, and what it means for the actors who are doing the work, is unclear, which leads to the research interest and focus of this thesis.

## **1.2 Research interest and focus**

Employment requirements, as an operationalisation of social procurement, thus present an opportunity for organisations to create social value in the form of employment for marginalised people. However, as social procurement remains a novel type of practice in Sweden, actors in the sector are still experimenting with different approaches to work with employment requirements (Sävfenberg, 2017). This is not unique for Sweden, as practices are also diffuse in other geographical contexts (Barraket et al. 2016). Using employment requirements can spur new ways of thinking and organising; new roles, new actors and responsibilities; new practices, knowledge and coordination needs, as well as new business opportunities for organisations in the sector (cf. Lind and Mjörnell, 2015; Barraket et al. 2016; Loosemore et al. 2019a). These new ways of thinking and organising, and what that means for the daily work of actors in the sector, is the main interest and focus of the thesis.

Although social procurement is seen as strategically important in research, industry and among policymakers, there is still little empirical, theoretical or conceptual examination of how social procurement affects individual and organisational actors and their everyday work (Walker and Brammer, 2012; Amann et al. 2014; Barraket et al. 2016; Loosemore, 2016; Raiden et al. 2019). Previous research on social procurement has not thoroughly investigated how social procurement is practically organised on a day-to-day basis. Research on social procurement in a Swedish context is especially scarce, and because every country has its own unique cultural, historical and political characteristics, it is important to provide insights into social procurement specifically in Sweden. Moreover, there is a general lack of knowledge about and examination of social procurement in both practice and research. This is problematic, as future construction tendering will very likely use social procurement within construction projects, and social considerations like employment requirements are especially important due to the construction sector's vast employment expanse (Loosemore, 2016). Therefore, an examination of how actors organise and work with employment requirements is important for social procurement in general, and not just for Sweden.

In order to contribute with new knowledge about what it means to work with social procurement and employment requirements, the focus of this thesis is to analyse how the work with employment requirements affects individual and organisational actors in the construction and real estate sector, and vice versa. A practice perspective and institutional perspective is applied; specifically, the theoretical perspectives of institutional logics and institutional work. These theories enable an understanding of the institutional environment that actors are embedded in and what norms guide their behaviours (institutional logics), and how individual and collective actors try to enable or resist change in this institutional environment (institutional work). When applying theoretical perspectives such as institutional logics and institutional work, focus is directed towards understanding work practices and routines, professional roles and identities, logics and norms for how to manage an organisation, and how change is driven, enacted or disrupted (cf. Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008; Reay and Hinings, 2009).

The practice-based theoretical perspectives of institutional logics and institutional work focus on people and practices and enable an understanding of what actors do and how and why they do it, and how change is enabled in institutionalised environments. These theoretical perspectives are outlined more in detail in Chapter 3. Applying these theoretical perspectives also means that this thesis takes a micro-meso perspective, where the units of analysis are individual and collective organisational actors and their work. Such a perspective is useful because an understanding of what people do in organisations can help explain grander organisational matters (Nicolini, 2012). Therefore, while everyday work may be seen as trivial, it is also consequential and can have significant effects on institutions

(Bjerregaard and Jonasson, 2014). With these ideas in mind, this leads to the aim, scope and research questions of the thesis.

### 1.3 Aim, scope and research questions

Although the aim and research questions in this thesis are empirically derived, they are informed both by previous research on social procurement and the theoretical perspectives of institutional logics and institutional work. Based on this practice-oriented institutional perspective the aim of the research is:

***to analyse how individual and organisational actors work with social procurement and how this work brings about institutional change processes that affect the everyday work of these actors.***

The aim has a specific scope. Firstly, ‘actors’ refer to either individual persons or collective actors working together in organisations. Therefore, the focus is not on the field (macro) level, but instead on the micro- and meso-levels, analysing how individual and organisational actors in the construction and real estate sector work with social procurement and how this affects their everyday work.

Secondly, the actors studied in this thesis work in or in relation to the Swedish construction and real estate sector. This includes organisations that own, manage, build or maintain housing or commercial buildings, or organisations that collaborate with such actors, for example the Employment Agency. These actors are explained in more detail in Chapter 1.4.

Lastly, the aim relates and contributes to both the literature on social procurement and institutional theory. The empirical phenomenon under study in this thesis is employment requirements, which is one of many operationalisations of social procurement. Much previous research has used social procurement as an umbrella term, meaning that such research is sometimes vague about what specific aspects of social procurement that are being investigated. However, in this thesis, the reviewed literature on social procurement have been chosen specifically because it covers employment measures, to a greater or lesser extent. It should also be noted that social procurement, at least in terms of employment requirements in Sweden, is not always posed in actual procurements but as general requirements that are also posed to internal departments or subsidiary companies (as can be seen from the second interview study included in this thesis, see Chapter 4.3.2). In other words, social procurement has become an umbrella term that often refers to employment measures but not always in procurement. However, when formulating the research questions, I prefer to use the term *employment requirements*, as it is more precise and is closer to the empirical phenomenon of study. Nevertheless, as employment requirements are an expression of social procurement, studying employment requirements relates and contributes to social procurement research.

Like the aim, all of the research questions should be seen from a practice and institutional perspective where the environment is inert and institutionalised. In such an environment, employment requirements become a disruptive force that influences the way actors in the sector work. The first research question revolves around understanding this environment and the prerequisites for working with employment requirements, or, in other words, what are the enablers, drivers, and barriers to work with employment requirements. The first research question sets the scene for the rest of the research, and asks:

***RQ1: What are the enablers, drivers and barriers for working with employment requirements?***

After gaining an understanding of the environment in which actors work with employment requirements, the next step was to examine *how* actors work with employment requirements and how this affects their everyday work. People are carriers of institutional logics and practices (Zilber, 2002; Hargreaves, 2011; Lindberg, 2014), and practices are carriers of meaning (Schatzki, 2001; Zilber, 2002). This means that, from an institutional perspective, professional roles, identities and practices are important and interrelated features of actors' working lives. Bresnen (2013) argued that it is important to understand how professionals and organisations work in order to understand how new policy initiatives in the construction and real estate sector, like social procurement, may be successful. In line with this reasoning, the second research question asks:

***RQ2: How do employment requirements affect and are affected by the professional roles, identities, and practices of actors in the construction and real estate sector?***

By fulfilling the aim and answering the two research questions we can gain a more detailed insight into social procurement and employment requirements and what this means specifically for individual actors and organisations and their everyday work.

## **1.4 The context of the construction and real estate sector**

### *Actors in the construction and real estate sector*

How to organise for social procurement depends on the institutional context (cf. Barraket et al. 2016). In the European Union the construction sector (excluding real estate) is labour-intensive and employs 18 million people. Construction constitutes approximately 9 per cent of the EU's GDP and is growing. Ninety-five per cent of all construction sector companies in the EU are micro, small or medium-sized enterprises (EU Commission, 2020).

The construction and real estate sector is project-based, where multiple actors collaborate

together to build, for example, housing, commercial buildings, and infrastructure, to conduct landscaping, facilities management (maintenance of the buildings and green areas), renovation or waste management. Some of the main actors in the sector that have been studied in this thesis are construction clients who procure the buildings being built or maintained, and these could be public or private housing companies, commercial property owners, municipalities, government organisations or other private or non-profit organisations. Then there are contractors that are hired to conduct the work, and they in turn usually hire smaller, local sub-contractors, which are specialists in their respective crafts, to conduct parts of the work, to supply the materials needed, and to design the buildings and conduct engineering work. Finally, there are technical consultants like engineering experts or architects, and other suppliers (Gluch, 2005; Buckley et al. 2016; EU Commission, 2020). In the case of employment requirements, other support organisations working with recruitment, such as the Employment Agency, are also relevant organisations to consider.

#### *Characteristics of the construction and real estate sector*

The composition, rules and regulations of the construction and real estate sector can be seen as institutional logics that guide behaviour in the sector and affect how actors in the sector organises the work with employment requirements. The organisation of the sector is characterised by decentralisation of decision making, high standardisation, coordination difficulties, independence, dispersed responsibility allocation, conflicting goals and interests, independent specialised work tasks, and efficiency in time, cost and scope (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Gluch, 2005; Styhre, 2009; Urup, 2016). This means that there is high standardisation, but also high decentralisation. All of these different institutional logics, together with the institutional logics of social procurement, complicate the context, where actors in the sector must navigate between and potentially embed several institutional logics into the institutional context (Bertels and Lawrence, 2016).

Firstly, traditional construction procurement and social procurement differ in several ways.

- a) Traditional construction procurement emphasises efficiency and measurability and embeds the practice of using easily evaluated criteria like price (Sporrong, 2011; Loosemore, 2016), while social procurement embeds logics for creating social value, which is fuzzy and difficult to measure (Barraket et al. 2016; Loosemore et al. 2019a). These logics are not necessarily contradictory, as it is possible to procure using both price and social criteria. However, many practitioners feel it is difficult to combine social and monetary criteria in the same procurement.
- b) Using social criteria means deviating from traditional work practices to deliver social value, as it does not pertain directly to the object of procurement (the building) and lies outside of the contractor's area of expertise (employment) (cf. Erridge, 2007; Murphy and Eadie, 2019).

- c) Because social procurement is novel, it might require increased resources, time and money from the procuring entity, government, and supplier, and is thereby perceived to clash with the prevailing practice of more straightforward lowest-price procurements.
- d) There are clear, institutionalised regulative frameworks and normative expectations – that is, institutional logics – that support traditional construction procurement practices (Sporrong, 2011; Loosemore, 2016; Loosemore et al. 2019a), which are not shared by social procurement practice.

Secondly, the construction and real estate sector involves independent actors (clients, contractors, suppliers, local government, etc.) that are used to collaborating in projects while having specific areas of responsibility and sometimes conflicting interests and goals (Kadefors, 1995; Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Gluch, 2005; Styhre, 2009). With the implementation of employment requirements, clients are suddenly interfering with their contractors’ and suppliers’ personnel policies, dictating who they should hire and which employment form to use. This could be seen as controversial, as employment matters are usually up to the discretion of the employer. The different institutional logics of traditional construction procurement and social procurement can be seen in Table 1.

*Table 1: The institutional logics of traditional procurement vs. social procurement*

<b><i>Institutional logics of traditional procurement</i></b>	<b><i>Institutional logics of social procurement</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses on easily measured criteria like price</li> <li>• Driven by market values</li> <li>• Embeds institutionalised and shared practices within the contractor’s expertise</li> <li>• Criteria pertain directly to the object of procurement</li> <li>• Necessary resources are well-known</li> <li>• Loosely coupled actors making independent and decentralised decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on fuzzy criteria like social value</li> <li>• Driven by social values</li> <li>• Embed new and unestablished practices outside the contractor’s expertise</li> <li>• Criteria do not pertain to the object of procurement</li> <li>• May require more or new types of resources</li> <li>• Clients dictate what type of employees the contractor should hire</li> </ul>

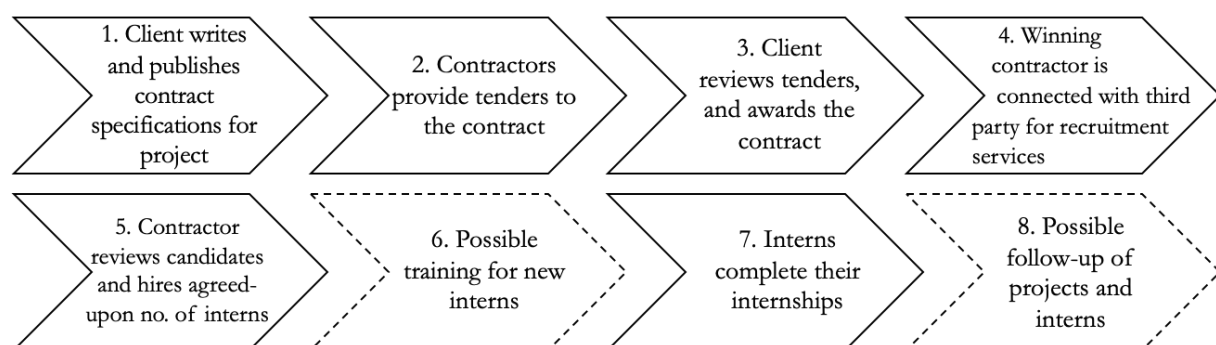
Thus, in the case of social procurement in the Swedish construction and real estate sector, actors are in a pluralistic institutional context where they must cope with and navigate between these different institutional logics simultaneously, in order to make their daily work life function.

### *Procurement in the construction and real estate sector*

When it comes to the procurement process, private clients have the option to contract their contractor of choice directly, which makes for quite a straightforward procurement process. For public clients that want to implement employment requirements, the Swedish Public Procurement Act stipulates the procurement process, including procedures for notification of the specifications and the selection and evaluation of tenders (cf. Amann et al. 2014). The institutionalised procurement norms and practices in the sector also influence procurement processes for both private and public organisations. For example, there is an emphasis on using criteria that are easy to measure and follow up, such as price-focused criteria or criteria on environmental systems (Sporrong, 2011; Loosemore, 2016). However, due to the high degree of subcontracting, there can be ambiguity in the sector regarding what each actor is responsible for, in terms of follow-up, health and safety, employment conditions, etc. (Buckley et al. 2016).

Both public and private organisations engage in social procurement, although, according to Walker and Brammer (2009, 2012), public authorities are more likely than private organisations to promote social sustainability. The procurement power of public organisations means that they may achieve such goals by demanding socially responsible services (ibid). Although social procurement has been mainly connected to the public sphere, private organisations, mostly within housing, have started to use social procurement as well, changing the boundaries of what has previously been within the public sphere (Barraket et al. 2016).

In Sweden, a generalised process for implementation of employment requirements, as an operationalisation of social procurement, is summarised in Figure 1 (cf. Swedish Transport Administration, 2019; the National Agency for Public Procurement, 2019).



*Figure 1: General process of implementing employment requirements in Swedish construction procurement.*

The steps in the process are as follows. (1) The client defines the specifications for the work they want done, meaning that they outline the specifications of the building and any other contract clauses they want fulfilled, like employment requirements. They then publish these tendering documents to invite tenders. The employment requirements may either be firmly

set by the clients or be open for negotiation through dialogue, where the number of people to be hired may be decided upon jointly with the contractor. The employment form used for employment requirements is usually either internships, apprenticeships, or temporary employment. As internships have been the most common employment form used in employment requirements in Sweden, the term *interns* is used in this thesis when discussing the ‘newly employed’. The contractor can be incentivised to take in more interns by, for example, attaching a bonus to the number of interns employed. (2) After specifications have been set and published, the contractors who are interested in conducting the work submit their tenders. (3) The client then reviews the tenders and awards the contract to the chosen contractor. (4) The successful contractor is then usually connected to a third party, like a social enterprise or the Employment Agency, which helps in the recruitment process of the targeted unemployed groups. (5) The third party selects a handful of candidates based on the contractor’s wishes, from where the contractor decides whom to hire. (6) If the unemployed need any training before starting their assignment, this is usually provided by either the contractor or the Employment Agency. (7) The person/s then start the internship, (8) and after the duration of the internship, the outcome for the project and intern is sometimes evaluated.

## **1.5 Outline of the thesis**

This thesis started by presenting the situation in Sweden that has led to the increased use of employment requirements, leading to the aim and research questions. This chapter has also included a deeper description of the context of the thesis. This introductory chapter is followed by a review of previous research on social procurement and employment requirements providing a frame of reference. After the frame of reference, the theoretical framework of institutional theory is introduced, which provides the theoretical lens through which the empirical data have been understood and analysed. This is followed by the research method, which describes the research design and how and why it was chosen. After the method, a summary of the included papers is provided. This is followed by the discussion where the answers to the research questions are discussed. Then, conclusions regarding implications for theory and practice are provided, along with suggestions for future research. Lastly, I reflect on how my data collection and findings mirror each other.



## **2. Previous research on social procurement**

Previous research is scarce in terms of details on how individual and organisational actors work with social procurement and how social procurement in turn affects their everyday work. The research that does exist is reviewed in the following chapter and covers the following topics: (1) social procurement in policy, (2) enablers, drivers and barriers for working with social procurement, and (3) international examples on how to organise for social procurement.

### **2.1 Social procurement in policy**

In his historical overview of how procurement have been used as a strategic tool to promote social policies, McCrudden (2004) described how government actors attempt to participate in and regulate the market through their purchasing power in order to achieve social policy outcomes. This is accomplished through means such as awarding contracts under certain conditions, qualifications of contractors, and contract award criteria. Thus, social procurement provides an opportunity to maximise the output of public spending on goods and services to also deliver social value. Procurement and social employment policy have been combined since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the construction sector has historically been one of the main target industries for such policies (McCrudden, 2004). Social procurement in terms of employment first revolved around stipulating work hours and fair wages, as well as fighting unemployment through public work financed by government contracting. Such social policies initially aimed to protect the typical male worker, while requirements to benefit disadvantaged people like minorities, disabled people and women were mainly introduced in countries like the United Kingdom after the First and Second World Wars, such as when employment opportunities were created for disabled veterans (McCrudden, 2004).

Currently, several policies and pieces of legislation aim to create employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups. In the United States, for example, social procurement was used in affirmative action policies already in the 1960s (McCrudden, 2004), and since 1978 there has been a law stating that contracts above a certain value must include a plan for how to hire a percentage of minority-owned businesses (Raiden et al. 2019). In 2012 the United Kingdom introduced the Social Value Act, which states how public contracts must acknowledge economic, environmental, and social well-being (British Government, 2016). Wright (2015) argued that the UK Social Value Act (2012) can be used to mitigate skewed gender representation, inequality, and wage gaps in the construction industry. Since 2014 there have also been the EU directives (2014/24/EU) (European Union, 2014), which open the way for social procurement practices to be used to a wider extent. As the Swedish Public Procurement Act is based on the European directives, the same can also be found in Sweden (Swedish Competition Authority, 2020). Australia and Canada currently have legislation aimed at benefiting indigenous populations (McCrudden, 2004; Loosemore,

2016), and in Belgium public contracts above a certain value must include social clauses in which at least one unemployed person is offered employment in the project (McCrudden, 2004).

Raiden et al. (2019) explained that while the UK Social Value Act from 2012 is quite flexible and open in terms of what initiatives can be taken to increase social value, countries like Canada, Australia and South Africa have taken more descriptive routes in their legislation. Australia dictates what percentage of public contracts must be awarded to aboriginal-owned businesses, South African legislation specifically targets micro-businesses, and since 1996 a portion of contracts in Canada have been reserved for indigenously owned businesses. Furthermore, a new standard for sustainable procurement (ISO 20400) was recently created to help guide organisations (ibid).

Legislation and policies such as those mentioned have likely led to social clauses becoming increasingly used by public clients. Montalbán-Domingo et al. (2018) studied 451 tender documents from 10 different countries to provide an international overview of which social sustainability criteria are used in public procurement of construction projects. They found that employment of vulnerable groups was the second most considered category of social criteria, after health and safety management plans (health and safety criteria were found in 94 per cent of the tender documents, while employment criteria were included in 48 per cent of the tender documents).

With the introduction of the new ISO 20400 standard, and legislation like the UK Social Value Act, European Directives, and the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic participation in Australia, social procurement is becoming more formalised in policy and is given more legitimacy in the process (Barraket et al. 2016). However, although new legislation promotes social procurement and employment requirements, there has been little insight into how construction and real estate clients and contractors can effectively engage with social procurement (Loosemore, 2016).

## **2.2 Enablers, drivers and barriers for social procurement**

### ***2.2.1 Enablers and drivers for social procurement***

Many different enablers and drivers can create incentives to work with and make it easier to work with social procurement. Studies have found that construction sector professionals are willing and positive towards making social considerations related to employment in their projects (Erridge, 2007; Zuo et al. 2012). For example, legislation for social considerations in procurement can be one driver for employment (Meehan and Bryde, 2011; Wright, 2015; Zuo et al. 2016; Raiden et al. 2019). By studying a project that aimed to hire women in the construction of the Olympic Park in London, Wright (2015) found that the UK Social Value Act from 2012 not only regulated that social considerations should be made, but also

spurred a more consistent approach from clients on social value requirements and monitoring.

Besides drivers like legislation and policy, public and private organisations both see business opportunities with social procurement (Barraket et al. 2016). For example, public and private organisations increasingly use social procurement to fulfil stakeholder demands and other organisational agendas such as CSR goals and ethnic diversity in the workplace, and to find innovative ways to identify and exploit new business opportunities, (cf. Erridge, 2007; Meehan and Bryde, 2011; Zuo et al. 2012; Sutherland et al. 2015; Wright, 2015; Barraket et al. 2016; Raiden et al. 2019).

Social procurement can also be seen as a new type of service offering for clients and communities. Kurdve and Goey (2017) examined a case in Sweden in which unemployed marginalised individuals were hired to assemble simple, standardised modular housing. This created simple jobs in the construction sector for immigrants lacking construction experience and also created more temporary housing and public spaces like school buildings. Kurdve and Goey (2017) concluded that employment of marginalised groups in this case functioned as a kind of service innovation for the municipality, which is often the customer of the temporary modular buildings anyway. Widening the service offering can serve as a competitive advantage.

Similarly, Murphy and Eadie (2019) argued that social procurement can be considered a service innovative as it entails a deviation from traditional work practices which delivers additional social value that lies outside of the contractor's area of expertise. However, in their study of 30 construction organisations in Northern Ireland, Murphy and Eadie (2019) found that, in practice, social procurement is largely driven by social legislation and is viewed by contractors as a contractual obligation rather than a tool for social innovation. Legislation can also be a barrier in terms of, for example, complex procurement bureaucracy and decreased flexibility in the procurement process (cf. Barraket et al. 2016; Loosemore, 2016).

Social procurement has also been found to improve collaboration and knowledge sharing throughout supply chains, although it is not always easy to achieve in practice. Erridge's (2007) study of a pilot project in Northern Ireland where employment requirements were used, and a literature review by Barraket et al. (2016), both showed that social procurement has spurred changes in governments, third-sectors, and private markets, where social procurement have led to deeper collaboration, trust and knowledge sharing between sectors and across organisational boundaries, throughout supply chains. Thus, better working relationships between collaborators can be a benefit and thereby an enabler for engaging in social procurement. Other benefits for organisations include increased productivity. Eadie and Rafferty (2014) found that contractors felt that social clauses in terms of employment

requirements led to lower absenteeism and improved productivity, improved work environment, reduced employee turnover, decreased community conflicts, and effectiveness in contributing to greater society. A desire to achieve such positive outcomes can be a driver for engaging in social procurement.

Furthermore, employment requirements are increasingly being used by clients and contractors who want to benefit local communities and disadvantaged groups. In Australia, for example, Zuo et al. (2012) found that local employment opportunities were important for contractors, who felt that they benefited the local community and also that local labour had valuable local knowledge that was useful in projects. These factors were felt to outweigh the fact that local labour may not have the right skills for the particular construction project (Zuo et al. 2012). Similarly, in Murphy and Eadie's (2019) study of 30 construction firms, a majority of the respondents considered employment creation to be the most important benefit of social procurement, but that employment requirements did not contribute any financial benefits.

Other drivers for engaging in social procurement are said to be that employment requirements are a good tool for meeting client demands, can provide an improved reputation, increase work orders, and present an opportunity to recruit new personnel and training them early on (Murphy and Eadie, 2019). Jobs created through social procurement also have the potential to be sustainable over time. In Erridge's (2007) study, the project led to people receiving sustained employment. Out of 51 people employed in the pilot project, 46 retained their employment after the project ended. Such sustained employment also benefits societies at large. In an evaluation report of a Swedish construction project where employment requirements were implemented, Nilsson and Nilsson-Lundmark (2016) found that a small investment in implementing employment requirements could produce considerably greater socio-economic financial benefits in terms of reduced welfare costs and increased tax incomes.

### ***2.2.2 Barriers for social procurement***

Despite many positive perceptions of social procurement in the construction and real estate sector, there is also uncertainty about the effects of social procurement. Previous research has identified a perception that social procurement leads to higher costs, and a lack of knowledge was found to be a major barrier for social procurement and employment requirements (Walker and Brammer, 2009; Zuo et al. 2012; Lindell, 2020). Eadie and Rafferty (2014) and Erridge (2007) found that contractors have many concerns regarding social procurement, which they often find difficult to justify cost-wise. Contractors often need additional financial incentives before they consider engaging in social procurement because they perceive that projects become more expensive. One fear is related to additional costs for training both the new people employed and existing personnel, which is thought to result in lower value for money. At the same time, providing further training

to existing personnel was deemed effective for increasing value for money (Erridge, 2007; Eadie and Rafferty, 2014).

In addition, in Eadie and Rafferty's (2014) study, contractors claimed that employment requirements did not benefit their brand or reputation to any considerable extent. There was also concern from the contractors that the requirements to hire unemployed people increased the administrative burden both for clients and contractors, or that it could potentially displace ordinary workers (Erridge, 2007; Barraket and Weissman, 2009; Sutherland et al. 2015). However, these concerns may be unfounded, as Erridge's (2007) study showed how the studied project did not result in higher costs in terms of drawing up an employment plan, bids were as competitive as usual, and no one was deterred from submitting bids. Only a minority of respondents felt like the project meant that workloads or costs increased significantly, and although many unemployed people were hired in the project, no ordinary workers were displaced.

With similar findings as the results of Erridge (2007) and Eadie and Rafferty (2014), a recent survey study by Murphy and Eadie (2019) of 30 contractors in Northern Ireland showed how social procurement is difficult to implement using traditional procurement practices and systems. 'Adverse financial implications', as well as the concern of long-term unemployed workers being unreliable and lacking training, were the biggest constraints to social procurement. For example, in order to be compliant with tender specifications, contractors must submit a plan for creating employment opportunities and their social policies; this was, contrary to Erridge's (2007) findings, said to strain their resources.

Another barrier facing social procurement is weak evaluation processes, both in supplier selection and follow-up of results. Firstly, employment requirements are complex and difficult to evaluate in terms of tenders, compliance, and effects (Barraket and Weissman, 2009; Harlock, 2013; Barraket et al. 2016; Raiden et al, 2019; Lindell, 2020). According to Harlock (2013), social value in general is difficult to assess and measure because, in comparison to for example economic factors, it is not objective, stable, fixed or widely agreed upon, and the effects are difficult to calculate or foresee, and often increase over time rather than decrease. Also, it can be difficult to evaluate whether contractors are really compliant with the social requirements (Erridge, 2007), there are insufficient metrics for assessing social criteria, and the contract size and country greatly influences how many different social criteria are implemented (Montalbán-Domingo et al. 2018).

In a study of the Swedish Transport Administration's civil engineering contracts and its follow-up of social requirements, Lindell (2020) found that although the follow-up process of social requirements are important, and although the Swedish Transport Administration has guidelines in place for how to do it, in practice there is limited knowledge of the guidelines and where to find them. Also, in a government report commissioned by the

Swedish Competition Authority, Anxo et al. (2017) concluded that follow-up and evaluation of projects using employment requirements in Sweden is rare, and that evaluation processes are often unspecified and non-existent. Anxo et al. (2017) suggested that in order to mitigate this problem, evaluation processes, purpose of implementing employment requirements, goal of implementing employment requirements, target groups, employment form, and ultimate goals of the project should be stated and anchored in the planning phase of the procurement. One possible reason why follow-up and evaluation are uncommon may be because social procurement is often seen as a philanthropic activity rather than core business objectives by public procurers, which leads to inconsistent outcomes (Frag et al. 2016).

Erridge (2007) argued that the possibility of achieving socio-economic goals (such as employment or social inclusion) through procurement is limited by an overemphasis on commercial goals, where social welfare and public value are trumped by economic and efficiency values, driven by a market logic. Erridge (2007) suggested that regulatory, commercial and socio-economic goals can often be conflicting, and that regulatory and commercial goals dominate procurement processes, which means that socio-economic goals have been somewhat neglected. On a similar note, Loosemore et al. (2019a) suggested that the different logics of private construction organisations and social or government organisations, misaligned incentives for the different types of organisations, and the project-based organisation of the sector, make it difficult to collaborate across different organisational boundaries to achieve social outcomes.

Furthermore, a survey by Loosemore et al. (2019b) investigated the main barriers for implementing employment requirement policies for specific disadvantaged groups (disengaged youth, women, disabled, indigenous, ex-convicts, and migrants and refugees) throughout construction supply chains. They found that the barriers varied across disadvantaged groups, which Loosemore et al. (2019b) argued implies a complex environment for policymakers to navigate. They found that the greatest barrier for engaging in employment requirement was a lack of governmental support structures, suggesting that the construction supply chain is neither experienced nor equipped to fulfil the employment policies. While it is unclear what type of support is needed, Loosemore et al. (2019b) suggested that monetary support to provide training will be the most effective solution, as disadvantaged groups are often seen as having lower productivity and in need of more supervision and training than ordinary workers. This also means that subcontractors see exceeding costs as a potential problem. Another barrier is that the disadvantaged groups have problems fitting into the traditional construction workforce, where especially disabled people are seen as a risk rather than an asset, and if they are given employment it is often in administrative tasks rather than construction work.

### 2.2.3 Summary of enablers, drivers and barriers for social procurement

All in all, previous research on social procurement shows that there are many enablers in terms of drivers and benefits for engaging in employment requirements. However, scepticism, negative perceptions, and institutionalised barriers also hinder organisations from engaging in in employment requirements. The enablers, drivers and barriers identified in previous research are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Overview of enablers, drivers and barriers identified in the literature

<b><i>Enablers and drivers</i></b>	<b><i>References</i></b>
Ethical considerations that benefit disadvantaged groups (minorities, locals)	McCrudden, 2004; Meehan and Bryde, 2011; Zuo, 2012; Wright, 2015; Montalbán-Domingo et al. 2018; Raiden et al. 2019; Murphy and Eadie, 2019
Collaboration and knowledge sharing throughout supply chains	Erridge, 2007; Scottish Government, 2014; Sutherland et al. 2015; Barraket et al. 2016
Legislation and policy	Meehan and Bryde, 2011; Wright, 2015; Zuo et al. 2016; Murphy and Eadie, 2019; Raiden et al. 2019
Stakeholder demands	Meehan and Bryde, 2011; Murphy and Eadie, 2019; Raiden et al. 2019
Competitive advantage in terms of offering a new service, increased work orders, and improved reputation	Kurdve and de Goey, 2017; Murphy and Eadie, 2019
Lower absenteeism, lower turnover, improved work environment	Meehan and Bryde, 2011; Eadie and Rafferty, 2014; Murphy and Eadie, 2019
Socio-economic benefits	Nilsson and Nilsson-Lundmark, 2016
<b><i>Barriers</i></b>	<b><i>References</i></b>
Perception of higher cost/less value for money/not benefiting brand enough	Erridge, 2007; Walker and Brammer, 2009; Zuo et al. 2012; Eadie and Rafferty, 2014; Loosemore, 2016; Loosemore et al. 2019b; Murphy and Eadie, 2019
Lack of knowledge and/or trust	Barraket and Weissman 2009; Walker and Brammer, 2009; Zuo et al. 2012; Loosemore, 2015; Lindell, 2020
Displacing ordinary workers	Erridge, 2007; Barraket and Weissman, 2009; Sutherland et al. 2015
Difficulty to evaluate, assess, and measure	Harlock, 2013; Barraket et al. 2016; Anxo et al. 2017; Montalbán-Domingo et al. 2018; Raiden et al. 2019; Lindell, 2020
Not seen as core business	Farag et al. 2016
Institutionalised cultures, norms, regulations and bureaucracy	Erridge, 2007; Barraket and Weissman, 2009; Barraket et al. 2016; Loosemore, 2016; Loosemore et al. 2019a; Loosemore et al. 2019b
Lack of (government) support and cross-sector collaboration difficulties	Loosemore et al. 2019a; Loosemore et al. 2019b

### **2.3 International examples of how to organise for social procurement and employment requirements**

Previous research has shown that social procurement has opened up new opportunities to achieve greater value for society, organisations and individuals, but it has also increased complexity and coordination difficulties among actors who must now, for example, collaborate in new, deeper ways across organisational and operational boundaries. Employment requirements, as an operationalisation of social procurement, requires new working practices, new means of measurement, and new competencies in order to successfully meet the rapid development of social procurement and the high stakeholder expectations that follow (Barraket et al. 2016). Loosemore and Phua (2011) suggested that to ensure a maximisation of social value from social initiatives, organisations should focus on a few strategic areas and ensure that these strategic areas:

- are prioritised by the relevant stakeholders
- align with the organisation's mission, values and core business
- can be sustained in the long-term
- are unique in comparison to other providers' offerings

One suggested way of implementing social procurement is through contracting social enterprises (Barraket and Weissman, 2009; Loosemore, 2015). Social enterprises are hybrid organisations that aim to fulfil both social purposes like employing marginalised groups, as well as financial purposes by distributing profits back to the community and other beneficiaries rather than to shareholders. In the UK and Australia, social enterprises are growing in numbers (Barraket and Weissman, 2009; Loosemore, 2015). However, although engaging with social enterprises may help contractors and clients to fulfil their CSR agenda, there is – much like with social procurement in general – a lack of trust and knowledge from procurers, contractors, and clients (Barraket and Weissman, 2009; Loosemore, 2015). In general, contractors and clients both prefer traditional subcontractors whose business models are more easily understood (Barraket and Weissman, 2009; Loosemore, 2015). In order to use social enterprises as a way of fulfilling employment requirements, Barraket and Weissman (2009) suggested educating procurers and social enterprises to design more strategic social enterprise objectives, to extend procurement opportunities, and to have closer dialogue between clients, government, suppliers and other parties.

Some organisations have taken specific measures to facilitate the implementation of social procurement, such as by creating new work roles and practices (Sutherland et al. 2015; Murphy and Eadie, 2019; Loosemore et al. 2019a). In Scotland, for example, the use of employment requirements (there called 'community benefit clauses') has become 'business as usual' for many organisations within the sector. Clients and contractors are both creating professional work roles dedicated exclusively to working with employment requirements,

and contractors are extending the scope of employment requirements by including their subcontractors and office functions (Scottish Government, 2014; Sutherland et al. 2015).

In their study of contractor perceptions of social procurement, Eadie and Rafferty (2014) concluded that contractors felt that one way of overcoming negative perceptions is to have an overarching framework for social procurement and to measure this performance through key performance indicators (KPIs) alongside industry KPIs in other areas. The contractors from the study suggested different KPIs relating to employment opportunities, apprentice numbers, and retention. Sixty per cent of the contractors said that specific rather than generic social clauses are more beneficial for the contract, and bespoke clauses to the local area where the project takes place are especially important (ibid). Similarly, Murphy and Eadie (2019) suggested that contractors need to adopt a more person-centric approach, where bespoke practices for each project and person are created in order to ensure that the 'right' social value is created. Furthermore, Erridge (2007) argued that contracts that include social criteria should be selected more carefully to maximise the effect of the contracts, as well as focus on areas with high unemployment rates in order to ensure more efficient job creation (Erridge, 2007).

To summarise, while some previous research has studied the work that goes into organising for social procurement, details remain scarce and this research often lacks theoretical grounding. This leads us to the theoretical framework of this thesis which apply institutional theory and specifically the theoretical perspectives of institutional logics and institutional work.



### **3. Theoretical framework**

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework, which provides a perspective through which to understand and analyse the empirical data. The chapter ends with a summary of theoretical key concepts that informs this thesis.

#### **3.1 Social procurement from an institutional perspective**

The construction sector is one of the world's largest industries in terms of number of employees and revenue, meaning that there is considerable opportunity for the construction and real estate sector to be a positive contributor to sustainable development (EU Commission, 2020), for example by using employment requirements as means for social sustainability. However, the construction sector has historically been slow to adopt social sustainability concepts (Whyte and Sexton, 2011; Loosemore, 2015; Ruparathna and Hewage, 2015), and obtuse bureaucracy in the procurement process and institutionalised cultures and norms have hindered further development of social procurement (Barraket et al. 2016). The construction and real estate sector is made up of operational procedures and scripts for action that the actors in the sector all know, take for granted, and re-practice every day through their daily work. This means that 'new domains of knowledge' (p. 159) can be perceived as threatening (Styhre, 2009). So, in order to analyse how individual and organisational actors work with social procurement and how this affects their everyday work, it is necessary to acknowledge the institutionalised norms and practices that create inertia to transition towards social sustainability.

Barraket et al. (2016) wrote about social procurement in relation to its institutional context and argued that social procurement, although not new, has become a 'distinct domain of practice' in some countries (p. 51). However, social procurement is informed by conflicting institutional logics (see overview in Chapter 1.4), so there may be values and beliefs associated with social procurement but still no well-defined practices or structures to enact those values and beliefs (Bertels and Lawrence, 2016). This has led to practices related to social procurement being quite diffuse. Because practices, rules and norms are diffuse and not fixed yet, resources and relationships between actors are especially important for legitimising social procurement (Barraket et al. 2016). Both tangible and intangible resources are important when constructing an emergent field like social procurement. In order for a wide set of actors to adopt new practices, the practices need to be objectified; that is, they must be tied to artefacts, resources and examples in order to be understood and be easy enough to implement. These artefacts must also be complemented by clear arguments for why the practices should be adopted. For example, by developing practice frameworks for creating social value through procurement, practices can become established despite the absence of institutional norms and rules (ibid).

Besides developing practice frameworks to create social value, social value creation in the

form of social procurement is a cross-sectional activity that involves a wide range of stakeholders, both private and public, with varying interests and priorities. It is difficult to navigate between these varying interests to achieve the best outcomes for communities (Raiden et al. 2019). For example, involving private sector organisations to deal with welfare-related provisions may be controversial. Some may see this as a way to dismantle the public welfare programs under the guise of innovation (Raiden et al. 2019). Nevertheless, the role of different actors in the implementation of social procurement is important. Individual actors play a vital role in the adoption of new practices and are, in turn, greatly affected by emergent institutions. Closer ties between individuals and organisation facilitates the dissemination of practices (ibid).

By adopting an institutional perspective on social procurement, I look at the microfoundations of institutions and of social procurement, which includes aspects such as practices, roles, identities, actions, norms, routines, resources, discourse and relationships that become important to study (cf. Zilber, 2020). In order to study these aspects in relation to social procurement, I have chosen institutional theory – and, more specifically – the analytical perspectives of institutional logics and institutional work as the theoretical framework for this thesis. Adopting an institutional perspective adds valuable input to construction management research, which this research is nascent to. Bresnen (2017) argued that although institutional theory is a prominent theory within organisational studies, institutional theory has rarely been applied to research pertaining to the construction and real estate sector. He suggested that researchers within the construction management field could be well-served by applying institutional theory, the analytical perspectives of institutional logics and institutional work, as well as looking into professional work and identity work. Therefore, adopting an institutional perspective when studying social procurement in the construction and real estate sector can also make contributions to construction management research in general.

### **3.2 Introduction to institutional theory and practice theory**

Institutional theory is a widespread theoretical perspective in organisation studies due to, among other reasons, its possibility to understand inter-organisational processes (Lawrence et al. 2011). An institution can be described as ‘*widely diffused practices, technologies, or rules that have become entrenched*’ in an institutional field (Lawrence et al. 2002: 282), such as the institutions of the state, democracy, family or capitalism (Friedland and Alford, 1991). An institutional field is a constructed system, like an industry (for example, the construction and real estate sector) or a market, with shared beliefs, values and norms (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Beckert, 2010). In an institutional field, social activities and prevailing long-lasting, taken-for-granted institutions are chronically reproduced, which in turn govern the actions and beliefs of organisations and individual actors in a rule-like manner (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Selznick, 1992; Czarniawska, 2005; Battilana and D’Aunno, 2009). This

constant reproduction of norms, behaviours, and practices creates stability and continuity in the field, which can also be called path dependency (Beckert, 2010). With path dependency, past choices continually influence emergent change initiatives by constraining the available choices at hand (Modell et al. 2007). Thus, institutions constrain actions through normative, social, and cultural forces, driven by aspirations of legitimacy, which is necessary in order to create long-lived organisations (Meyer and Rowan 1977). This also means that, in the struggle for legitimacy, legitimacy trumps efficiency (Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009).

In the institutional field that is the construction sector, Kadefors (1995) highlighted several institutional logics that govern behaviour and drive the homogenisation and institutionalisation of shared and prescriptive practices. For example, because the construction sector is highly regulated, and this regulation homogenise behaviour, regulation function as one institutional logic. The construction sector also encompasses several distinct and separate professional roles with strong values and norms attached to them, which dictates behaviour in prescriptive ways. Moreover, the procurement system homogenises behaviour and drives institutionalisation in the industry by providing a template for how to make and price tenders, often based on previous experience and price lists (Kadefors, 1995). In Urup's (2016) thesis about institutional processes to understand project coordination and performance in the construction sector she stated that collaboration, coordination, cost optimisation and reduction, and efficiency are dominant institutional logics in the construction sector.

An institutional perspective includes a multitude of different analytical perspectives that are 'nested' in each other and relate to and mutually reinforce each other (Goodrick and Reay, 2011). The aim of the thesis is to analyse how individual and organisational actors work with social procurement and how this work brings about institutional change processes where the everyday work of these actors is affected. So, in order to understand behaviours in the sector the social context must first be understood (Friedland and Alford, 1991), which leads to the analytical perspective of *institutional logics* that emphasise the social context (Goodrick and Reay, 2011). This perspective on social structures is complemented by the analytical perspectives of *institutional work*, which enables the study of the micro-dynamics of change and the practices individual actors engage in (Zilber, 2013).

The perspectives of institutional logics and institutional work, as well as the aim of this thesis, are practice-oriented. Practice theory has been used to inform and inspire theorising within the micro-dynamics of institutional change and stability (cf. Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Nicolini, 2012; Hampel et al. 2017; Smets et al. 2017). By adopting a practice perspective, the relationship between organisational structures and the actions people take can be understood; that is, 'how-questions' can be answered (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011), such as how professional roles, identities and practices affect and are

affected by employment requirements. Similarly, Geiger (2009) argued that practice-based research should study how and why practices are continually performed, either unconsciously or consciously, how practices are changed, and how this may lead to institutionalisation. Hargreaves (2011) explained that in a practice-based approach it is not only people or social structures that are in focus; instead, everyday routinised practices are the unit of analysis, where these lie on an analytical level between agency and structure. This means that individuals, through their day-to-day work, become carriers of social practice and can navigate between practices, and it is through these practices that people come to understand the world (Hargreaves, 2011; Smets et al. 2017).

Smets and Jarzabkowski (2013) argued that having a practice perspective makes it possible to situate institutional work in the practical work that it takes to handle contradictory institutional logics. As such, the connection among practical work, institutional work, and institutional logics is strong. Zilber (2013) argued for the fit between institutional logics and institutional work. Institutional work draws attention to actors and their role in institutionalisation, while the study of institutional logics tends to focus more on their context. Combining the perspective of studying actors who are carriers of institutions as well as their context can bridge the gap between agency and structure, as both theories focus on different parts of the institution: institutional logics focus more on the building blocks of institutions, while institutional work focuses on its micro-practices through the work of individual actors. Together they hold great explanatory power of social processes (Zilber, 2013). Thus, institutional logics and institutional work are the main theoretical perspectives used in this thesis and are outlined in the following sections.

Institutional theory has traditionally been used to explain stability, continuity and conformity on the field level. Newer institutional perspectives like institutional logics and work are able to explain change in inert institutional environments and have a micro perspective (cf. Powell and Colyvas, 2008; Bjerregaard and Jonasson, 2014). Therefore, while I focus more on *change* in relation to employment requirements, the stability and continuity of the institutional environment must be kept in mind, as it influences change.

### **3.3 Institutional logics**

Recent years have seen increased interest in the relationship between micro- and macro-phenomena and how individual actors and institutions influence each other. Studying institutional logics is one way of examining this mutual influence (McPherson and Sauder, 2013; Bévort and Suddaby, 2016). This means that institutional logics do not exist per se but come into being through actors' continuous construction, enactment and re-practicing of the logics (Lindberg, 2014). Institutional logics can be described as the result of '*shared beliefs and values in a community of individuals*' (Bévort and Suddaby, 2016: 33) that underpin practice (cf. Smets et al. 2017) and shape meanings, appropriateness and legitimacy,

influence continuity and change, determine what issues and problems are salient, and what solutions are worth pursuing (Thornton, 2002). In other words, institutional logics functions as scripts for how actors should act legitimately, thereby influencing what is perceived as rational behaviour and serve as a source of stability and legitimacy (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008; Reay and Hinings, 2009). By extension, institutional logics can help explain conformity and heterogeneity (Martin et al. 2017).

Institutional environments are characterised as stable and inert due to the constant reproduction of norms, behaviours, and practices. This creates path dependency, where past actions influence and constrain newer actions and efforts of change (Modell et al. 2007). This means that incumbent institutional logics and their associated practices can be a barrier to new institutional logics, which hinders change, or at least slows it down. Understanding path dependency created by incumbent institutional logics is central to understanding the difficulties of introducing new ideas and institutional logics in institutional environments. In other words, incumbent institutional logics, such as that of traditional construction procurement, may be difficult to change in favour of newer change initiatives, like the institutional logics of social procurement (cf. Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). When newer logics are introduced, they are most likely to overturn the path-dependent track of incumbent institutional logics when the institutional logics share features with the incumbent institutional logic already in place (Modell et al. 2007).

Besides being a source of stability, (conflicting or disruptive) institutional logics can also be a source of change. Several institutional logics may co-exist in parallel for a long time and should be seen as a part of the nature of everyday work, where change often originates in conflicts and contradictions between different institutional logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Jarzabkowski et al. 2009). Pluralistic institutional environments can both enable and constrain behaviour, where actors can use the ‘creative tension’ between different institutional logics to their advantage (Martin et al. 2017). Multiple institutional logics affect people and organisations differently, where groups within the same institutional context may adopt different institutional logics (Goodrick and Reay, 2011), where the relationship between conflicting institutional logics is *‘realized through the work of actors on the “ground”*’ (Martin et al. 2017:120). In a study of how actors manage pluralistic institutional environments, Dahlmann and Grosvold (2017) found that once a peripheral institutional logic become more disseminated throughout an organisation, actors become better enabled to handle conflicting institutional logics by embedding them into the organisation further.

Thornton et al. (2005) provided an example of institutional logics pertaining to the construction sector: the logics of the architect. They argued that architects embed two opposing logics in their professional role. First, there is the aesthetic logic, which is concerned with the architect’s role as an artist and the importance of design and beauty of the built environment. The second logic is the efficiency logic, which is concerned with the

importance of producing safe and useful buildings and solving building problems in a cost-effective manner. An architect must then handle both these logics simultaneously in his or her work (ibid). This is an example of how the construction of social identities and professional roles is closely connected to institutional logics, where some institutional logics are strongly related to specific professional roles and prescribe expectations, meaning, purpose and actions to that role (Lok, 2010; McPherson and Sauder, 2013; Blomgren and Waks, 2015; Bévort and Suddaby, 2016). This means that, to understand and analyse institutional logics, understanding and analysing professional roles and identities is useful, as institutional logics influence roles and identities and vice versa (ibid).

### **3.4 Roles and identities from an institutional perspective**

Institutional logics act as scripts for how actors having certain roles should behave, and roles and the expected behaviours and practices of those roles can become institutionalised and taken for granted in the institutional field (cf. McPherson and Sauder, 2013; Blomgren and Waks, 2015; Bévort and Suddaby, 2016). Recursively, actors become representations and carriers of institutional logics (Smets et al. 2017). Thus, the term ‘role’ is used to express a social behaviour that is expected from a particular social category and indicates status or positions in formal systems (Lynch, 2007; Kabiri et al. 2012). In other words, a person’s professional role impacts on that person’s actions and moral sentiments on how they should act, where there is a recursive relationship between professional roles and the creation of institutionalised behaviour (Styhre, 2009).

Connected to professional roles are identities, and Lok (2010: 1308) offered a definition of (social) identity that is useful for the thesis: *‘Institutional notions of who or what any social actor might or should be in a particular institutional context, and – by implication – how the actor should act’*. Thus, social identities are conditioned by the institutional environment and social categories as gender and social positions within the institutional environment (Lok, 2010). This social identity is also influenced by an individual actor’s self-identity of who they should and should not be in a particular role, where the construction of the self-identity can be processual, relational and situational. This means that an individual actor’s social relations, his or her social context, and self-awareness of his or her identity, influence identity construction (cf. Andersson, 2012).

In the construction sector, for example, contractors typically embed the identity of someone ‘who knows how to build’ (Löwstedt and Räisänen, 2014), and site managers have traditionally been described as ‘doers’ or ‘people of action’, rather than as reflective thinkers (Styhre, 2009). However, although certain roles and identities are typically associated with actors who work in the construction and real estate sector (Raiden et al. 2019), professional roles are a continuous and ongoing process and can change over time (Styhre, 2009). For example, through the interaction between actors and with the support of other actors, the

identities associated with a specific professional role can be changed by reinterpreting institutional logics (Reay et al. 2017). Also, the presence of conflicting logics can mean that traditional roles might become contested, negotiated or reified, where actors might have to navigate between conflicting roles, and new roles might be created, or new aspects are overlaid atop traditional roles (Barraket et al. 2016). Therefore, although pre-defined identities and roles often exist, individual actors also choose the extent to which they may take on, adopt or reject a specific identity or role (Simpson and Carroll, 2008; Reay and Hinings, 2009; Lok, 2010; McPherson and Sauder, 2013; Bévort and Suddaby, 2016; Currie and Spyridonidis, 2016; Abdelnour et al. 2017).

In order to achieve different goals actors can strategically use and enact institutional logics and identities that belong to professional roles other than the one someone formally holds. For example, actors can translate contradictory institutional logics into actions through their day-to-day work in order to handle institutional complexity, sometimes by ‘hijacking’ institutional logics that belong to another professional role (McPherson and Sauder, 2013). Similar to the hijacking of contradictory institutional logics, co-optation can be a more subtle way for individual actors to manage co-existing institutional logics (Andersson and Liff, 2018). Co-optation entails individual actors borrowing strategic elements from another logic but retaining the most prominent features of the ‘original’ logic currently in place. This can enable individual actors to pursue their own interests and garner influence for their cause. However, when co-optation is used and features from a conflicting or disruptive logic is embedded in the original logic, this can lead to a change in the original logic (ibid).

Sirris (2019) provided an interesting example in his study of how managers in institutional pluralistic context negotiated between two coexisting institutional logics (managerialism vs. professionalism) and how this influenced their role and identity. Most previous studies presuppose that someone’s work role and identity are coherent, but Sirris (2019) found that in institutional pluralistic contexts the role became hybridised, although managers prioritised one logic over the other. Despite identifying with one logic, many managers had to live out the other logic in their work role. However, this depended on how embedded the different logics had become in the different organisations: the more embedded the managerialism logic was in the organisation, the more difficult it was to prioritise the professionalism logic (ibid).

Historically, research on institutional change has tended to either ascribe power to field-level dynamics like external shocks such as new technology or legislation or tended to ascribe power to heroic actors that conduct transformative work to change institutional logics (Powell and Colyvas, 2008; Martin et al. 2017). Research into institutional change is becoming increasingly widened to consider more mundane, everyday actions of ordinary

individuals that, through their daily work, can affect institutional change (ibid). This is called institutional work and is presented next.

### 3.5 Institutional work

Institutional theory has been criticised for only focusing on field-level dynamics and forgetting the actors who are actually conducting institutional change (Lawrence et al. 2002; Smets et al. 2012). The perspective of institutional work anchors the experiences of individual and collective actors with institutions and takes a practice perspective (Battilana, 2006; Lawrence et al. 2011). It also acknowledges how actors affect institutions, while simultaneously being affected by the same institutions. Institutional work focuses more on processes and practices than outcomes, asking why- and how-questions, rather than what- and when-questions (Lawrence et al. 2011).

#### *Creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions*

Institutional work is defined as ‘*the purposive action of individuals and organisations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions*’ (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006: 215). This is achieved through individual actors’ mundane daily work, and this work constructs their relationships, roles and habits (ibid). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) defined three main types of institutional work: creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions. The present thesis focuses particularly on work resulting in the *creation* of new institutions and institutional logics, pertaining to organising for employment requirements. Actors can create institutions in three main ways:

- a) By conducting overtly political work to reconfigure rules and boundaries through the use of advocacy, by defining rules and boundaries, and by vesting different activities.
- b) By reconfiguring actors’ belief systems through constructing new identities, changing normative associations, and constructing new normative networks.
- c) By reconfiguring shared meaning systems (our understanding of the world and what constitutes our identities) through mimicry of other meaning systems and theorising and educating about the shared meaning system.

Maintaining and disruptive institutional work is often conducted in parallel to creative institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). When actors maintain institutions, they still conduct a considerable amount of institutional work that requires action rather than passivity. To maintain institutions, actors support, repair and recreate social mechanisms by:

- a) Enabling the continuance of current working practices by creating rules that support the institution, and by exercising policing measures to ensure compliance to those

rules, thereby deterring any alternate actions by creating coercive barriers against institutional change.

- b) Valorising and demonising the normative foundations of different institutions by presenting positive and negative examples. These normative understandings are preserved and ‘mythicised’ to then be embedded in the daily routines of actors in organisations.

Actors disrupt institutions when their needs are no longer met by the institution (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Disruptive institutional work means undermining mechanisms that make people reproduce current structures, which can be achieved through:

- a) Disconnecting sanctions and rewards connected to the institution being disrupted.
- b) Disassociating moral foundations by making institutionalised practices seem immoral.
- c) Undermining assumptions and beliefs; for example, through new innovations.

#### *Institutional work and intentionality*

Thus, the perspective of institutional work departs from the notion that it is the work of individual and collective actors that is important. The traditional view of institutional work means that it is the intentions and efforts of actors in their daily work, rather than the result of that work, that are important. If the focus is solely on intentions, the question then becomes whether purposive actions have any institutional effect at all (Lawrence et al. 2013). In the traditional view of institutional work, this is a non-issue because actions can be labelled as institutional work as long as they intentionally aim to create, maintain or disrupt institutions, even though the actions might not be successful in doing so, and because actions can have many unintended consequences anyway (Lawrence et al. 2011).

Smets and Jarzabkowski (2013) and Smets et al. (2017) argued that the definition of institutional work as *purposive* actions aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions is far too narrow and heavily implies planned change and projective agency (see Battilana and D’Aunno, 2009). Instead the continual reproduction of practices and subsequent maintenance of institutions can, in fact, often be unconscious, unintended and unreflexive (Geiger, 2009; Hampel et al. 2017). Furthermore, it is difficult to delineate intentions and consequences as actors might not be aware of their intentions or at least unable to report on them accurately (Zilber, 2013). The focus on purposive field-level action also detaches institutional work from individuals’ practical work. Most individuals do not have the ability to see the institutions around them, and they instead see the situation in front of them, and that is what they intuitively try to cope with and affect, not the institution. However, coping with the situation at hand can have effects on the institution, albeit unintended ones (Smets et al. 2017; Andersson and Gadolin, 2020). Andersson and Gadolin (2020), who studied institutional work through social interactions in the pluralistic and tightly institutionalised setting of healthcare organisations, argued that actors are likely

to be purposive in relation to their *practical* work, but not so much in relation to their *institutional* work. Rather, institutional work is a result of their ordinary practical work (that thereby have effects on the institutions). By having such a strong focus on intentionality, there is a risk that much of the institutional work that unfolds through daily work and daily interactions will be missed. In other words, intentionality is directed at accomplishing practical work, which may or may not have an effect on institutions. This means that, in contrast to the traditional view in institutional work, in institutional pluralistic environments, as in the case of social procurement, actors act and improvise to ‘get the job done’ rather than plan for the future (Smets et al. 2012; Smets et al. 2017; Andersson and Gadolin, 2020).

#### *Examples of institutional work*

As an example of institutional work in the construction sector, and similar to the research in this thesis, Gluch and Bosch-Sijtsema (2016) highlighted how environmental experts in the construction sector conduct considerable institutional work when trying to drive their respective organisations towards environmentally friendly practices. For example, environmental experts create new institutions related to green building by teaching their colleagues in the organisation about green sustainability and by using artefacts such as graphs and assessment methods to trigger change. They maintain institutions related to project management by displaying their role as less authoritative, and by taking on a ‘service’ role. They disrupt the taken-for-granted practice of only achieving minimum compliance of environmental regulations through insistent nagging to move beyond minimum compliance.

Similar to Gluch and Bosch-Sijtsema’s (2016) study, Dahlmann and Grosvold (2017) provided an example of how institutional work was used to manage contradicting institutional logics (environmental sustainability vs. market logic). Managers who identified with the environmental logic created narratives around a need to protect the environment or as having a duty and responsibility. The managers who identified with the market logic instead focused on the business benefits from working in a more environmentally friendly way. Thus, environmentally friendly business practices were either framed as having a purpose in itself, versus having a purpose for the business side of things (Dahlmann and Grosvold, 2017).

As another example, Liefink et al. (2019) studied an inter-organisational project in the Dutch construction industry to investigate how institutional work was used to mobilise stakeholders from two separate and loosely coupled subfields to institutionalise a new project delivery method. The actors who wanted to institutionalise the new practices used relational institutional work by ‘creating awareness’ of the new practice, engaging in ‘selective networking’ with stakeholders that were positive towards the new practices, and

'building coalitions' and active networks with stakeholder that were engaged in the new practice's application (Liefink et al. 2019).

### *The role of rhetoric and discourse*

These examples show how language, discourse and rhetoric are powerful tools that can be used to conduct institutional work (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005; Kraatz, 2009; Brown et al. 2012; Bertels and Lawrence, 2016), through such means as nagging (Gluch and Bosch-Sijtsema, 2016), creating awareness (Liefink et al. 2019), or created narratives around protecting the environment or emphasising business opportunities (Dahlmann and Grosvold, 2017). Using rhetoric can be especially useful for organising for social procurement. Barraket et al. (2016) claimed that for social procurement practices to become embedded in the construction and real estate sector, they must be backed up by clear arguments for why the practices should be adopted.

Organisations and institutions are continuously made and remade through discursive and material work (Nicolini, 2012), which means that persuasive discourse can be a way for actors to conduct institutional work to change embedded institutional logics (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005; Brown et al. 2012). Rhetorical analysis can be used to study the microfoundation of institutional processes, where '*...the mobilization of legitimacy is mainly a discursive process*' (Meyer, 2008: 531). When seeking legitimacy within an organisation – for example, for a conflicting institutional logic like that of social procurement – Kraatz (2009) explained how actors can use a specific rhetoric and vocabulary that aligns with and supports the values and beliefs of the organisation, thereby using rhetoric as a form of institutional work that can change incumbent institutional logics and create legitimacy for new logics. This type of work is constantly ongoing and is both strategic and institutional in its nature (Kraatz, 2009).

Bertels and Lawrence (2016) explained that when new institutional logics that lack well-defined practices emerge and create institutional complexity, as in the case of employment requirements, actors shape their responses to this complexity through rhetorical institutional work. For novel practices to be diffused and institutionalised, the arguments supporting the practice must first become taken-for-granted (Green, 2004). One way of studying rhetorical institutional work is to apply Aristotle's three main categories of persuasive rhetoric: ethos, logos and pathos (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005; Higgins and Walker, 2012). Ethos relates to the character and credibility of the speaker, for example in terms of their expertise. Logos relates to rationality and often entails using supportive evidence to strengthen the argument. Pathos relates to emotions and empathy connected with under-privilege and well-being (ibid). These categories can help explain the rhetorical institutional work that goes into organising the practical work with social procurement.

### *The creation of proto-institutions*

As institutions are inert in nature, institutional work may not have an immediate effect when creating institutions. During the time it takes for practices, rules and/or technologies to be fully disseminated and institutionalised, institutions are in-the-making, or so called ***proto-institutions*** (Lawrence et al. 2002). Gluch and Svensson (2018) found that when individual actors tried to create new practices aimed at steering public organisations towards more sustainable facilities management, they created proto-institutions made up of meeting routines, planning structures, and IT systems. By adopting different types of roles, such as being a stage-setter, reality-checker, expert, role-model or space-provider, these actors enabled co-creative collaboration processes to promote and support the practices embedded in the proto-institution.

Proto-institutions are thus created by different actors conducting parallel and/or joint streams of institutional work (Zietsma and McKnight, 2009). Through inter-organisational co-creation and collaboration, this parallel institutional work may converge into one fully institutionalised and coherent institution in the future (Lawrence et al. 2002; Zietsma and McKnight, 2009; Gómez and Atun, 2013; Wahga et al. 2018). However, if the institutional environment is tightly institutionalised with strong incumbent institutional logics making path dependency strong, proto-institutions may have less of a chance of becoming fully established institutions of their own (Modell et al. 2007; Gómez and Atun, 2013).

### **3.6 Agency in the institutional perspective**

Not all institutional environments are equally tightly institutionalised, and not all actors are equally constrained by institutions (Selznick 1992; Battilana, 2006; Lawrence and Suddaby 2006; Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009; Zietsma and McKnight 2009). Agency is a key feature of studies of institutional logics and work, as it explains how actors have the possibility to affect their institutional environment (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Agency comes from and is conditioned by culture, social structures and intra-personal characteristics, and agency is both constrained and enabled by the institutional environment (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009). This also means that actors can be aware and reflect on their own institutional embeddedness to a greater or lesser extent (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Garud and Karnøe, 2003).

According to Battilana and D'Aunno (2009), there are three types conditions that enable agency: field-level, organisation-level, and individual-level conditions. These three levels of conditions are interrelated, and agency requires a multidimensional perspective in order to fully understand institutional work and logics. Macro field-level conditions could be sudden events that diverge from institutional norms, such as regulatory changes, a crisis or technological innovations, and this is when new ideas can be more easily introduced (Powell and Colyvas, 2008; Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009). Meso organisational-level conditions

help explain why not all actors within the same institutional environment conduct the same institutional work (Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009). For example, Martin et al. (2017) argued that organisations can mediate the availability of institutional logics and the manner in which institutional logics become available for individual actors in the organisation, which in turn affects actor's autonomy to embed, navigate between or reject different institutional logics and conduct institutional work. Micro individual-level conditions can include personal characteristics like creative capacity. Individual agency can also be explained by having a relational perspective in which individuals are seen as embedded in an institutional context and responding to that context (Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009; Martin et al. 2017).

Along with different enabling conditions for agency, there are also different types of agency, or as Lawrence et al. (2011) put it, different levels of intentionality. Based on Emirbayer and Mische (1998), Battilana and D'Aunno (2009) described three types of individual agency: iterative, projective and practical-evaluative agency.

- *Iteration* is past-oriented, where actors are informed by past, habitual actions and reactivate certain patterns of actions and thoughts from the past. These types of actions require little self-conscious reflection.
- *Practical evaluation* is present-oriented and focuses on current problems and how to respond to emerging ambiguities and demands that are simultaneously evolving. This means contextualising past habits and patterns of actions with future projections to deal with current situations.
- *Projectivity* is future-oriented and encompasses imagined future trajectories of actions. Here actors' hopes, desires and fears of the future configure their current actions and thoughts. These types of actions require considerable reflexivity in order to foresee alternative future scenarios. Individuals who conduct this more sudden, transformative work that breaks with the practices and rules of the dominant institutional logic(s) can be characterised as *institutional entrepreneurs* (Battilana, 2006). Beckert (1999) proposed that institutional entrepreneurs play a powerful role in institutional change and view institutional entrepreneurs as strategically acting in an agentic, rational, and planned manner. However, although institutional entrepreneurs might act in a planned, strategic manner, this is not always the case. These entrepreneurs might not be willing to break with prevailing institutional logics, or even be aware that they are doing so, but if their work results in changing the institutional environment, they are still institutional entrepreneurs. Further, actors who attempt unsuccessfully to break with institutions can also be considered institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana, 2006). A difference between institutional entrepreneurship and institutional work is that in institutional entrepreneurship it is

the individual actor that is in focus, while in institutional work the focus is on the actions.

Agency is enabled by and conditioned upon the institutional environment, where institutions and their subsequent norms, rules and processes provide different levels of control and access to resources. This means that, depending on your social position in the institutional environment, you have more or less power to influence institutional change (Battilana, 2006; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). More peripheral, low-status actors and organisations are more likely to break with existing institutional norms and introduce new ideas than actors and organisations in the centre of the institutional environment. Actors and organisations with a lower social position have an incentive to try to better their situation and place in the institutional field, while actors and organisations with higher social positions have incentives to keep the status quo. However, lower-status actors and organisations may not have the resources to enact such a change (Battilana, 2006; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Actors' level of agency and propensity to enact change is not constant; it depends on the context they are in and can shift over time (Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009). As such, it is important to understand actors' social positions and associated level of agency in order to understand how they are enabled to conduct institutional work, despite institutionalised pressures (Battilana, 2006).

### **3.7 Key concepts of interests for the thesis based on the theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework covers many different concepts, so I will briefly outline what concepts that I find most important and how they relate to each other. I am interested in who people are and what they do; their rationale for why they do what they do; their thoughts, feelings, and motivations; how they construct and carry their roles and identities; who they think they are and should be; how people interact with each other; how they construct and manage their relationships; and how people collaborate, co-create and work together. As such, people and their practices, routines, actions, roles, identities, collaboration and norms are all interesting concepts to use for my study, and can be summarised as relating to the microfoundations of institutions and institutional change (Zilber, 2020).

The construction and real estate sector is comprised of a multitude of different actors who work together. Institutional work, for example to implement and work with social procurement, is often conducted in parallel streams of action. As such, implementing and working with employment requirements is a multiparty activity that concerns how actors act individually but also collaborate to 'make employment requirements happen' on a day-to-day basis, and how those relationships are built and managed. As the construction sector consists of a multitude of different actors, these actors can also differ in their social position

in the institutional environment, which mean that they conduct different types of institutional work that partly depend on what resources they have. Therefore, considering what resources actors have at hand to work with employment requirements is important. Reciprocally, this also entails looking at how employment requirements in themselves can be resources; for example, in terms of being tools for increased employment or social value.

To understand the work that goes into implementing and working with employment requirements in the construction and real estate sector, it is important to understand the institutional environment. This includes understanding what factors drives and enable actors to work with employment requirements, as well as what makes it difficult to work with employment requirements. These factors are likely conditioned upon the institutional logics that are embedded in the institutional environment.

Furthermore, the institutional environment encompasses practices and routines that are institutionalised and may be reshaped, as well as new practices and routines that are created, as a result of working with employment requirements. It also includes norms and expectations for actors' roles, identities and subsequent behaviours. Looking at roles and identities can also reveal the motivation for actors to engage in employment requirements. Working with employment requirements can have effects for already institutionalised practices and routines, norms and expectations, and actors' roles and identities, leading to change. These aspects, which are embedded in the institutional environment, can have effects on the work with employment requirements. In other words, I see a reciprocal relationship between employment requirements and the institutional change it might cause.

There are thus several concepts that are useful for analysing how individual and organisational actors work with social procurement and how this work brings about institutional change processes that affect the everyday work of these actors. These include:

- Practical work and institutional work
- Practices and routines
- Resources
- Norms and institutional logics
- Roles and identities
- Relationships, collaboration, and coordination

The choice to use these concepts for my study has implications for my method, which must then be able to explore individual actors' inner and working lives in relation to employment requirements. The method is presented in the next chapter.



## 4. Research method

This chapter provides a description of the method and research design. It also details the data collection and data analysis. The chapter closes with a discussion on research quality and a description of how the research questions and papers interrelate.

### 4.1 Research approach

Since employment requirements have been under-examined, both empirically and theoretically, an explorative approach is useful to avoid missing interesting areas of enquiry (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). Being practice-oriented and aiming to analyse how individual and organisational actors work with social procurement and how this affects their everyday work in terms of professional roles, identities and practices, a qualitative approach was chosen to capture actors' actions, perceptions and motivations (Silverman, 2013). Qualitative research is particularly relevant when studying social relations and trying to capture the intricacies of daily life, and to provide rich explanations of what actors do and how and why they do it (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Silverman, 2013; Flick, 2014). The research has been empirically driven while simultaneously trying to capture, identify and conceptualise empiricism to contribute knowledge (Schwarz and Stensaker, 2014).

Although this research is empirically driven, it is analysed using a particular theoretical framework, and although empiricism is the core of my research it is used in '*the service of theorising*' (Van Maanen et al. 2007: 1149). This means that the research design, the research questions, and analysis of the data are abductive by balancing the empirical outset with the theoretical framework (Van Maanen et al. 2007). My method and theory are thus interconnected and influence each other. I view theory not as an absolute truth that tangibly exists in the world. Theory is simply a construct that researchers can use to help them make sense of the world and explain their empirical results. I do not see theory as static but as constantly evolving, and I would describe my way of using theory as pragmatic; as Van Maanen et al. (2007) described it, the point of theorising is not to validate knowledge but to suggest new plausible connections and relationships (Van Maanen et al. 2007).

The theoretical perspectives of institutional logics and institutional work have a constructivist nature (Powell and Colyvas, 2008; Zilber, 2013). Thus, institutional logics and institutional work are not 'out there' in the world; these are just theoretical perspectives or constructs to help make sense of experiences, meanings and events (Zilber, 2013). So, with an institutional perspective on the world, actors create, maintain and disrupt institutions and they can be more or less aware about the presence and influence of these institutions that govern everyday life. Therefore, structures can be both tangible and intangible, be represented in laws and regulations, as well as in social codes. This means that actors create and shape the social world as it simultaneously shapes them (cf. Battilana, 2006). As such, the institutional perspective is based on the idea that the world is made up of intangible

names and labels, as well as tangible structures, and the theoretical perspectives of institutional logics and institutional work help to uncover these.

The qualitative approach for this research and the use of interviews as a main data collection method means that I am subjective and interpretative, as I try to understand actors and their behaviour, thoughts, motivations, and actions. Therefore, through interviews I can understand how actors construct the social world around them and how this affects their daily lives.

To summarise, in my view, the world exists ‘out there’, whether or not we are aware of it. It is our interpretations of the world that are of interest, because we can never know an exact truth, we can only interpret and reinterpret our reality, and these interpretations are constantly evolving when we get new concepts through which we can understand it. Social structures, like institutions, which can be both tangible and intangible, can guide, enable and constrain social actions, and individual and collective actors can mutually influence institutions. This point of view surely shapes my interpretation of these actors and their work, and therefore has implications for the final results of my research. Firstly, studying norms, values, practices, routines, roles and identities that are partly intangible provides a challenge in terms of how to illustrate these in a concrete way in my research. Secondly, ascribing governing power to institutions and to actors could mean that I either credit the power of institutions too much, or that I credit individual actors too much. However, it could also be that, without a perspective on the intangible and institutions, the intricacies of daily life and the complexities and implications of implementing employment requirements would not have been visible or understood in the first place.

## **4.2 Continuous literature and document review**

To obtain an overview of the current state of research on employment requirements, I have continuously studied previous literature and documents on the topic. This includes a literature review of previous academic research, industry press, websites and government reports. A systematic approach was initially challenging, as it was difficult to pinpoint search words to use in library and academic databases given that there were no widely accepted international terminologies for employment requirements. Accordingly, in the beginning of my research I used search words related to employment, procurement criteria, and social sustainability. These more generic words led me to useful sources, which I used for snowballing. I found other relevant articles by going through reference lists and material referred to in the articles and documents I had already collected (backwards snowballing) as well as looking at citations of those sources (forward snowballing) (Jalali and Wohlin, 2012; Flick, 2014; Bryman and Bell, 2015). This approach provided a comprehensive knowledge of the literature on employment requirements and helped to ensure that I have been up to date with the current state of research. The literature and document study have

contributed to all of the papers by providing background knowledge and a frame of reference.

I have also reviewed literature related to my theoretical framework. As I had used the perspective of institutional work in my master's thesis, I was somewhat familiar with institutional theory when I embarked on my research. When the time came to apply theory, I went back to the references I had used in my master's thesis and used both forward and backward snowballing to find additional literature (Jalali and Wohlin, 2012). Building the theoretical framework has been an abductive, messy, and iterative process, where I have tried to build a cohesive and comprehensive theoretical framework that I could use as a tool to understand my empirical results. This means that the framework has been dynamic, continuously updated, and shaped abductively alongside my empirical studies. In other words, the review of previous literature and documents on social procurement, the institutional theoretical framework and the empirical data collection have all moved together and mutually influenced each other.

### **4.3 Empirical studies**

The thesis includes three empirical studies: a document study of three Swedish 'example cases' where employment requirements had been implemented, and two interview studies. An overview of each study is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Overview of each study in the thesis

	<b>Study 1: Study of three Swedish ‘example cases’</b>	<b>Study 2a: Interview study phase 1</b>	<b>Study 2b: Interview study phase 2</b>	<b>Study 3: Interview study</b>
<b>Purpose of study</b>	To explore the use of employment requirements in Swedish construction procurement, to discern possible organisational implications, and to identify areas for future research.	To obtain first-hand data and to identify aggregated perspectives on employment requirements.	To obtain a detailed view of employment requirements and its effects for people and practices on a <i>strategic</i> organisational level.	To obtain a detailed view of employment requirements and its effects for people and practices on an <i>operative</i> organisational level.
<b>Data sources</b>	Documents on three Swedish ‘cases’ where employment requirements had been used.	Interviews with eight interviewees who work with employment requirements on a <i>strategic</i> level.	Interviews with 13 interviewees who work with employment requirements on a <i>strategic</i> level.	Interviews with 25 interviewees who work with employment requirements on an <i>operative</i> level.
<b>Time of study</b>	Dec 2015–June 2016	May 2016–Oct 2016	Nov 2016–Feb 2017	Dec 2018–May 2019
<b>Included in paper</b>	Paper 1	Paper 1 Paper 2 Paper 3 Paper 5	Paper 2 Paper 3 Paper 5	Paper 4 Paper 5

#### 4.3.1 Study of three Swedish cases

After reviewing previous international literature on social procurement I found that there are many perceptions about what works or not with employment requirements, but few details about what actually happens in and around organisations when employment requirements are used. Because of this lack of detail, I decided to collect second-hand data

on three Swedish ‘example cases’ where employment requirements had been implemented. This was a useful first step for starting off the research, as I had little knowledge about how to begin to approach the phenomenon, which was completely new to me. Therefore, my aim was to find areas for future research and suggestions for possible theories that could facilitate a deeper understanding of how actors in the construction and real estate sector work with social procurement and how this in turn affects their everyday work. The three ‘example cases’ chosen as study objects were two construction projects where employment requirements have been used, and one municipal policy concerning employment requirements. Data for this study were mainly compiled from a research anthology about social sustainability in Swedish housing refurbishment, edited by Lind and Mjörnell (2015), but also supplemented with information from a report about a socio-economic evaluation of the first case, as well as industry press articles.

The first ‘example case’ was a public housing company in a medium-sized Swedish town that did a four-year project to refurbish a run-down neighbourhood with a high unemployment rate. This project has attracted a great deal of attention in the sector for being one of the first and largest projects in Sweden in which employment requirements had been implemented. The second ‘example case’ was a private housing company in Sweden’s third-largest city that had employed its own tenants to refurbish a run-down neighbourhood. The third ‘example case’ was centred on a procurement policy formulated by a large municipality in Sweden. The policy mandates that 50 per cent of all public procurements must include social criteria. This is more than any other municipality in Sweden has stipulated, which meant that this municipality and its progressive view on employment requirements was interesting to study. A more detailed description of the ‘example cases’ can be found in Paper 1.

The ‘example case’ were chosen mainly because they were some of the very few large cases in which employment requirements had been used in Sweden at the time. Therefore, they were all well-known and pioneering cases in Sweden and had been discussed extensively in different industry forums and press. They also represent three different types of organisations that initiated employment requirements: one is a public housing company, one is a private housing company, and one is a municipality. They are also geographically distributed throughout Sweden. Therefore, although the available information on the three ‘example cases’ varied, they collectively provided a good overview of different implications from working with employment requirements in Sweden.

#### ***4.3.2 Interview studies***

The main data collection method in this thesis has been interviews. The purpose of the interview studies was to collect first-hand data and obtain detailed accounts of how actors experience and work with employment requirements. Collecting primary data through interviews provided an opportunity to thoroughly explore how individual and

organisational actors work with social procurement and how this affects their everyday work in terms of professional roles, identities and practices.

Semi-structured interviews also allowed for variations and follow-up questions when deemed necessary, and enabled interviewees to give their accounts freely (Kvale, 2007). This interview flexibility was especially important considering the lack of knowledge about employment requirements, so it helped avoid missing any important topics related to how actors work with employment requirements. The interviewees from the two interview studies represented both public and private organisations, such as clients (often housing companies), contractors, consultants and municipal functions like the Employment Agency. All interviews took place at the workplace of the interviewees.

*The first interview study* was divided into two phases and aimed to obtain a broad view of employment requirements in Sweden. The *first phase* of the interview study took place between May 2016 and October 2016, and had a highly explorative approach, which was deemed necessary due to the empirical novelty of employment requirements, scarce previous research at the time, as well as my own lack of knowledge about the phenomenon and context. Eight people were interviewed between May and October of 2016, and the interviews lasted between 1.5 and three hours. The semi-structured interviews covered topics such as drivers and barriers for working with employment requirements, perceptions on employment requirements by the interviewee and its organisation and stakeholders, roles and practices related to employment requirements, existence of social enterprises, collaboration between actors, knowledge transfer, and development of employment requirements. These interview topics were based on the early overview of previous literature as well as the study of the three Swedish ‘example cases’; however, to not miss important aspects of the phenomenon the interviewees were given great flexibility to talk about what they felt were important issues related to employment requirements. The findings indicated three main areas of organisational implications from employment requirements:

- Drivers and perceived value
- Organisations and roles
- Practices and competences

These three areas of implications provided an avenue forward into the second phase of the interviews.

The *second phase* narrowed down on the three areas of implications identified in the first interview phase. These interviews were somewhat more focused than those in the first interview phase, in order to obtain a more detailed view. Thirteen people were interviewed between November 2016 and February 2017, and the interviews lasted between 45 minutes

and two hours. Based on the document and literature study, the first interview phase, and theoretically informed by the institutional theory framework (see Chapter 3), the interviews in the second interview phase covered topics such as work experiences related to employment requirements, views on one's own role, relationships with other actors, values and characteristics prescribed to their role, future prospects for the role, daily work practices, practical difficulties, and the interviewees' view on the development of employment requirements and subsequent practices.

The interviewees in the first interview study worked with employment requirements on a strategic level. Although some interviewees also performed some operative tasks related to employment requirements, they provided an overview of employment requirements in the construction and real estate sector from a strategic perspective. The interviewees had diverse backgrounds in terms of education and previous work experiences. The majority had a degree in either engineering or business, while others were former teachers, construction workers, or legal counsellors. Together they held a multitude of different professional functions, but often worked in managerial positions.

Because the main purpose of the first interview study was to obtain an overview of the implications of employment requirements for actors in the Swedish construction and real estate sector, actors who work strategically with employment requirements were identified as suitable interviewees. The interviewees were chosen mainly due to their experience and interest in employment requirements, and because they wanted to participate in the study. As such, convenience and access were a factor in why these 21 specific people were interviewed. To start the sampling process, I compiled a list of all the people I could find that worked with social sustainability or social procurement in the Swedish construction and real estate sector. I did this by searching the internet and looking at companies connected to the 'Centrum för Management i Byggsektorn' ([www.cmb-chalmers.se](http://www.cmb-chalmers.se)), which enables connections between the Swedish construction and real estate sector and the University. From this list I started by contacting the people who had a clear social profile. The chosen interviewees were thereby experienced and knowledgeable of employment requirements in Sweden and had influential positions and could put employment requirements on the agenda. As the interview study progressed, more interviewees were identified through industry press, industry seminars and snowballing. Snowballing (see Noy, 2008) was useful because it enabled access to interviewees working 'deeper' in the organisations, who might not be easily found on a company website but still had considerable experience in working with employment requirements. As there is only a small group of people who work directly with employment requirements in Sweden, many of them knew each other and could recommend people to interview. Information about the interviewees from the second interview study is compiled in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4: Information on interviewees from the first interview study – phase 1

<i>Interviewee no.</i>	<i>Type of organisation</i>	<i>Professional role/Title</i>
<b>Interview study 1: First phase May–October 2016</b>		
1	Procurement company	Project leader (municipal officer)
2	Premises office	Procurement officer and former contractor
3	Contractor	National sustainability manager
4	Public housing company	Head of development for new building projects, former purchasing manager (development manager)
5	Public housing company	Procurement manager
6	Public housing company	Strategic procurement officer
7	Public housing company	Strategic procurement officer
8	Contractor	Development leader for social sustainability (development strategist)

Table 5: Information on interviewees from the first interview study – phase 2

<i>Interviewee no.</i>	<i>Type of organisation</i>	<i>Professional role/Title</i>
<b>Interview study 1: Second phase November 2016–February 2017</b>		
9	Corporate group for public housing companies	Process leader for employment requirements (process leader)
10	Public housing company	Procurement manager
11	Private commercial property management company	Sustainability manager
12	Contractor	Project manager in large refurbishment and new build project implementing employment requirements
13	Employment agency	Employment officer working on site in the large refurbishment and new build project implementing employment requirements
14	Architecture firm	Business developer
15	Public housing company	CSR manager
16	Public housing company	Development strategist for social issues (development strategist)
17	Private housing company	CEO
18	Employment agency	Employment officer and coordinator for the construction division
19	Contractor	Sustainability manager
20	Public commercial property management company	Sustainability manager
21	Public commercial property management company	Project manager

The purpose of *the second interview study* (Dec 2018–May 2019) was to capture the experiences of individuals who worked with employment requirements on an operative level, which then complemented the first interview study with people who work strategically with employment requirements. The interviewees either worked in projects with construction work, in subsidiary organisations with facilities maintenance, or with project management from the client's side. They had roles such as construction workers, site managers, project leaders and housing officers (working with maintenance of buildings and green areas). Therefore, the interviewees from the second interview study worked closely with employment requirements on a daily basis, and many of the operative level interviewees were supervisors for the interns on top of their normal work responsibilities.

I also interviewed a handful of the people who were hired via employment requirements; that is, interns. As mentioned in Chapter 1.4, posing employment requirements often mean taking in unemployed people on internships, which is why interns is used to refer to the newly employed in this thesis. The interns worked in the projects and subsidiary companies and not in the parent organisation (central 'head office'). The interns came from specific target groups that are particularly stigmatised in the labour market, they often have undocumented and/or inconsistent schooling, and they often lack education and work experience in construction or facilities maintenance work. In addition, many of them had undergone trauma (such as war refugees) or spoke very poor Swedish.

25 people were interviewed between December 2018 and May 2019, with the semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 2007) lasting for approximately one hour each. The interviews focused on topics related to the interviewees' daily work practices related to employment requirements and supervision of the interns, perceptions and experiences of employment requirements, positive and negative aspects of working with employment requirements, how employment requirements affect their daily work, and what changes they had to make in their practices to accommodate the interns, as well as the experiences by the interns themselves to be hired through employment requirements.

The study focused on three different study objects that had implemented employment requirements. The first study object was a construction project of apartment housing (AH) for a private housing company. The second study object was a construction project of a public pre-school (PS). Both of these construction projects were built by the same large Swedish construction company. The third study object was a specific model used by a corporate group of public housing companies (PHG) to create employment opportunities in the form of internships for unemployed immigrants in their subsidiary companies, mostly working with facilities maintenance. They thus functioned as a type on internal client. So, although it was not a specific demand from me, or that I planned on doing a comparative study, all study objects differed slightly in their characteristics.

The three study objects were chosen mainly due to convenience and accessibility reasons. The study objects were found through the help of interviewees from the first interview study. With the help of those contacts I “got a way in” to the projects and companies as they provided names and a first point of contact with actors who worked on an operative level in the projects and subsidiary companies.

In addition to the three study objects which was the main focus of the study, I also interviewed two people working in a contractor firm which was building new housing for a public housing company. These interviews were held as this project had been tasked with taking in an intern, but they had to let that intern go because the internship was not going very well. Therefore I interviewed them to get some insight into what happens when internships have to be ended prematurely. Information about the interviewees from the second interview study is compiled in Table 6.

*Table 6: Information on interviewees from the second interview study*

<i>Interviewee no.</i>	<i>Type of organisation</i>	<i>Professional role/Title</i>	<i>Project</i>
<b>Interview study 2: December 2018–May 2019</b>			
1	Contractor	District manager	Apartment housing
2	Contractor	Project manager	Apartment housing
3	Contractor	Site manager	Apartment housing
4	Contractor	Intern, interning as work leader	Apartment housing
5	Private housing company	Managing project leader	Apartment housing
6	Private housing company	Sustainability specialist	Apartment housing
7	Private housing company	Project leader	Apartment housing
8	Contractor	District manager	Public pre-school
9	Contractor	Project manager	Public pre-school
10	Contractor	Site manager	Public pre-school
11	Contractor	Work leader (construction worker)	Public pre-school
12	Contractor	Intern, interning as construction worker	Public pre-school
13	Municipality	Procurement officer	Public pre-school
14	Subsidiary public housing company	Housing officer + supervisor of intern	Public housing group
15	Subsidiary public housing company	Housing officer + supervisor of intern	Public housing group
16	Subsidiary public housing company	Housing officer + supervisor of intern	Public housing group
17	Subsidiary public housing company	Housing officer + supervisor intern	Public housing group

18	Subsidiary public housing company	Housing officer + supervisor of intern	Public housing group
19	Subsidiary public housing company	Coordinator	Public housing group
20	Subsidiary public housing company	Housing officer + supervisor of intern	Public housing group
21	Subsidiary public housing company	Intern interning as a housing officer	Public housing group
22	Subsidiary public housing company	Housing officer + supervisor of newly employed	Public housing group
23	Local college (Swedish language training)	Educator	Public housing group
24	Contractor	Site manager	Failed internship
25	Contractor	Work leader (construction worker)	Failed internship

#### 4.4 Data analysis

I used the same data analysis method for all my studies, which was the thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis is a core method of qualitative data analysis that is used for identifying, describing and organising detailed patterns in the data. It is a flexible method that is not tied to any specific epistemological paradigm and it has the potential to produce rich and detailed data accounts. It also has the potential to highlight differences and similarities in the data set, as well as generate unexpected insights, and it is therefore particularly useful in under-research areas (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The thematic analysis, as laid out by Braun and Clarke (2006), first involved (1) familiarizing myself with the data by transcribing the recorded interviews verbatim and noting down ideas that emerged during this process. I imported the entire data set (all the transcribed material) into the software program NVivo. Then I (2) systematically read through each data item (each piece of text) and coded (sorted) individual data extracts (sections of the text) into themes. Some data extracts covered multiple themes were therefore coded into several themes simultaneously. The number of themes grew as new themes were identified. After this initial coding round, I started to (3) look for themes in a more focused manner, where I then (4) reviewed and tried to refine the themes further. So, I went through the material again and again to (5) refine the codes to make them more defined and representative of data set. This refinement was aided by going back and forth between the themes and the theoretical framework. In this thematic analysis themes are made up of data extracts that have the same pattern. Each theme is made up of a different number of data extracts, but it is not the number of data extracts that makes a theme more or less important, but rather if it captures something interesting in relation to the research questions. Finally, I reached a stage when I felt that the themes could not be more refined, and that is when

the coding (sorting) part of the analysis was finished. The themes and the theoretical framework in unison then functioned as the base to (6) write the different papers.

Inspired by what Braun and Clarke (2006) call the inductive thematic analysis, I used the empirical data set as the starting point for my thematic analysis when coding the data items, and then started to move back and forth between the data set and the theoretical framework in an abductive manner, when refining the themes. This abductive approach (Van Maanen et al. 2007) allowed some flexibility in identifying the themes, where I did not try to make the data fit a specific preconceived model. Practically, the abductive approach meant that when I coded the data into themes, and tried to refine those themes, I moved to theory to try to conceptually explain what I had found. This was a type of ad hoc interpretation. Once I had come as far as I could in my conceptualisation, I moved back to my empirical data to substantiate that the themes held up conceptually given that I had a post hoc understanding. This process repeated itself throughout the studies to reach new levels of conceptualisation (Van Maanen et al. 2007). Therefore, I continuously moved between the empirical plane and the conceptual plane in my data analysis process.

Although I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) and Van Maanen's (2007) approach, the data analysis process became messy and different phases of the thematic analysis unfolded iteratively and simultaneously. The abductive back-and-forth movements between the empirical data and theory was also an intuitive, non-linear and iterative process, especially as, during my research process, I have continuously discovered new theoretical constructs to widen the conceptual plane.

#### **4.5 Limitations of research design**

When using a qualitative research design one of the main ideas is to reach a depth in the study, rather than breadth. This then means that limitations to the study have to be made. Nevertheless, using only a qualitative research design could be seen as a limitation of the thesis. I could have used mixed methods and added, for example, a questionnaire survey in order to obtain a broader overview of how employment requirements are seen by actors in the construction and real estate sector. However, my interest has always lied more in the daily, nitty-gritty work of individual actors. Therefore, considering my aim, research interests, and previous skills and background, I feel that a qualitative approach was the most suitable approach for my thesis.

I could have chosen to use other qualitative research methods, like observations or ethnography. In the beginning of the PhD project I had planned on doing observations but found very soon that it was difficult to be granted such deep access. For example, I was allowed to participate in a meeting between the site manager of a social procurement construction project and employees of the Employment Agency. However, as individual

interns and their performance was discussed, none of this could be used in my studies due to privacy issues. So, I came to the conclusion that it would be difficult to do observations, partly due to getting access, and partly due to privacy reasons.

Regarding my interviewees, I have only interviewed a handful of interns. Although the aim of my thesis is to study practices and the actors who perform them, and as such not to study the interns specifically, the interview sample may be perceived as unbalanced. There were a number of practical reasons for not including more interns in my interview studies. Firstly, in many instances the language barrier was vast, where many interns were very newly immigrated to Sweden. This would have made it difficult to extract high-quality information from such interviews and using an external translator could have diminished the accuracy of accounts and the interviewees' privacy. Secondly, it may have been unethical to interview interns about their work situation when their employment is so precarious. They may not feel comfortable speaking candidly in fear of jeopardising their potential future employment, which would place them in an unfair position. Therefore, in an attempt to be sensitive to their situation, I only interviewed interns who were forthcoming about being included in the study. Thirdly, usually in social procurement projects in Sweden, there are only one or two interns per project at a time, meaning it would have been difficult to interview more interns per project. Unfortunately, the timing of my data collection coincided with times where there were no interns in the projects or companies. Moreover, due to laws of personal protection, I was not allowed to contact previous interns, so there were a lot of bureaucratic red tape that further aggravated the problem. For example, in one of my study objects I needed to be granted permission to interview the interns from the Employment Agency, and despite multiple contact attempts they did not get back to me with an answer until after several weeks had passed by, by which time the interns in that project had finished their internships. Lastly, many of the organisations I studied seemed hesitant to let me interview their interns, although it is unclear why that was. The limitations of the methodological approach and of getting access to interviewees could impact on the research quality of the paper, which is discussed next.

## **4.6 Research quality**

### ***4.6.1 Trustworthiness***

In order to comment on the trustworthiness of my research and confidence in my research findings, I will discuss four criteria for evaluating qualitative research based on the writings of Thomas and Magilvy (2011), Bryman and Bell (2015), and Halldorson and Astrup (2003), whose articles are all developed from a book by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In order to establish a study's trustworthiness, it should have *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability*.

*Credibility* means ensuring that a study describes the human experiences in an accurate way that others may recognise in their own experience. One way of doing this is through triangulation of methods, data, and researchers. This thesis is compiled by a study of three ‘example cases’ based on secondary data and two interview studies, in addition to reviews of previous research and other documents such as industry press and websites. As such, there are different sources and methods for data collection. The different independent sources of data supported each other and reinforced the findings.

Triangulation can also be achieved through respondent validation/informant feedback. In an attempt to improve the research quality and to validate the results of my research, three sessions have been held with industry representatives, where preliminary results from the studies have been presented. Firstly, during the first interview study, a reference group session was conducted in November 2016 after approximately half of the interviews had been conducted. Representatives from different construction and real estate sector organisations, ranging from clients and contractors to consultants and support organisations, discussed the preliminary results of the research at that time and commented on the findings in order to provide more input on the issues and topics identified in the interviews. Secondly, after the first interview study the results were presented to a small group of people working at a large Swedish municipality in order to get their input on the results, which they felt represented their perspective well. Lastly, during the second interview study a meeting with a ‘social procurement manager’ took place in May 2019 after most of the interviews had been conducted, to ensure that the findings represented what they had experienced in the organisation. These sessions were valuable for ensuring findings were relevant and interpreted ‘correctly’. In addition, throughout the PhD process the findings have been presented to construction and procurement practitioners on several occasions in different popular science forums, which has enabled a discussion about the findings and their credibility.

In addition, earlier versions of the papers in this thesis were peer-reviewed, presented and published as conference papers, providing a forum from which to get input from other researchers in the field. Also, this PhD project is part of a national research network called ProcSIBE (Procurement for Sustainable Innovation in the Built Environment, see [www.procsibe.se](http://www.procsibe.se)). My participation in ProcSIBE has entailed regular meetings with other researchers in the network, who come from various academic backgrounds. This has continually enabled a regular forum for feedback on my work. Regarding triangulation of researchers, Papers 1, 2, 4 and 5 were written together with co-authors.

Qualitative research is often highly context-specific, which makes empirical generalisability difficult. However, *transferability* – that is, taking the findings and applying them to another context – is more achievable. Providing thick descriptions of the context makes it possible to deduce the line of reasoning in the analysis and enables others to judge the transferability

to ‘their’ contexts. Based on the in-depth interviews in both interview studies, I would argue that my data is thick enough to enable transferability. In addition, with the support of earlier research and the empirical findings, it is possible to achieve transferability based on the theoretical contributions. I believe my results are described well enough that the theoretical contributions to social procurement research and institutional theory are substantiated, which enables theoretical generalizability to other contexts and studies.

*Dependability* is enabled by carefully documenting and describing the research process and methods, including outlining the research approach, data collection, sample selection, and analysis. It can also be achieved by having multiple researchers conduct the analysis. The overall research process and method have been described in detail earlier in this chapter (and in each paper). Also, all of the interviews in this study were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Documents and other secondary data were collected and saved, and coding structures and key concepts or words for coding the data material are documented. In addition, in Papers 1, 2, 4 and 5, my co-authors have participated in the analysis, which has increased the analysis’ dependability.

*Confirmability* is achieved through openness about potential biases and acting in good faith. Researchers should be reflexive about their own personal values and biases, and how this may impact the research. I am definitely influenced by the underpinning notions of institutional theory in my understanding of employment requirements and its implications. However, being completely unfamiliar with social procurement and the construction and real estate sector when embarking on the research hopefully enabled me to have a ‘clean slate’ upon which to study and understand employment requirements. This also led to the studies being fairly open and explorative, hopefully minimising preconceptions and prejudices to some extent.

#### **4.6.2 Data saturation**

Fusch and Ness (2015) described how data saturation is achieved (1) when there is enough data to replicate the study, (2) when no new information is attained, and (3) when no further coding is feasible. One way of achieving saturation is by having both rich and thick data. Rich data is detailed, nuanced and in-depth (that is, of high quality), while thick data is plentiful (high quantity).

I consider the data in this thesis to be both rich and thick. Regarding richness, I have aimed to deeply explore the interviewees’ personal thoughts and experiences, and the interviews have been very in depth and lengthy. Also, the focus on the phenomenon has been ‘tight’ throughout my PhD process, meaning that I have not branched out to study other phenomena, which could have reduced the depth of my research. Regarding thickness, this thesis in itself is a long-term study, and many of the interviewees have been included in the research in one way or another since I started my PhD studies. In addition, during both

interview studies I felt like I reached a point at which little new information could be derived from the interviews, as the same topics emerged repeatedly. Also, in both interview studies the data was coded over several rounds to ensure the codes accurately reflected the data, thereby suggesting that no new coding was feasible. In the second interview study, the data collection and data coding happened simultaneously, which made it easy to see when new topics no longer surfaced.

All in all, I believe the research quality of this thesis is good, that my data is saturated, and I have acted in good faith while conducting this research.

#### ***4.6.3 Ethical considerations***

As I worked with interview data, I sought to handle the accounts and personal information of my interviewees with care. I kept private records of the interviewees' personal information, which has not been shared with anyone. I have not used any formal consent forms for the interviews, but I have made sure that I obtained either oral or written consent (via email) that the interviewees agreed to be interviewed and allowed me to use the material in my research. In some parts of some interviews, things were said to me 'off the record', which I have subsequently excluded from using in any paper or in the thesis in any capacity. I have also anonymised each quote that I have used in my papers and thesis.

I allowed each interviewee the opportunity to approve the quotes used in the papers and the thesis, although only three interviewees chose to do so. I have also given three respondent feedback sessions, which also provided an opportunity for the interviewees to raise any issues or concerns regarding my results. One of the major ethical problems I have dealt with, which I already discussed in Chapter 4.5, is interviewing the interns about their work situation, as many of them were hired under short-term or precarious contracts with no guarantee of a permanent job. To make the situation as comfortable as possible for the interns that I interviewed, I gave the interns the opportunity to have their supervisor in the room if they wanted to and let the interns guide the interview rather than posing probing questions. This enabled the interns to talk about their work in a way they felt comfortable with.

### **4.7 Interrelation among the aim, research questions and papers**

At the beginning of this research project I had no prior knowledge of social procurement and employment requirements, and the phenomenon itself was novel in Sweden. Therefore, I followed Merton's (1987) and Van de Ven's (2016) suggestions to first confirm the importance of the phenomenon I wanted to study. Merton (1987) and Van de Ven (2016) suggested that the first thing a researcher must do is to define the problem and the phenomenon before going out into the field, as it is not always certain that the phenomenon actually exists or is worth researching. Therefore, to fulfil my aim of analysing how

individual and organisational actors work with social procurement, I started my PhD project by having a very explorative approach, where I looked at what worked well and less well with employment requirements and what that meant for the actors involved. This was operationalised through the first research question and resulted in writing the first paper. Paper 1 helped define the problem and phenomenon, as well as to identify three specific areas that would be interesting for future studies (drivers and perceived value, organisations and roles, and practices and competences).

The outcome of the first paper thereby inspired the second research question, which was explored in Paper 2-5. As such, the aim has influenced all the studies and papers, where RQ1 is explicitly covered in paper 1, but implicitly covered in Paper 2-5. RQ2 is quite broad as it encompasses both roles and identities and practices. Each paper includes both the concepts of roles and identities and the concept of practices; however, some papers explicitly explore one over the other. The concepts of roles and identities was predominantly explored in Paper 2 and 4, and the concept of practices was predominantly explored in Paper 3, 4 and 5. The interrelation among the aim, research questions and papers is illustrated in Figure 2.

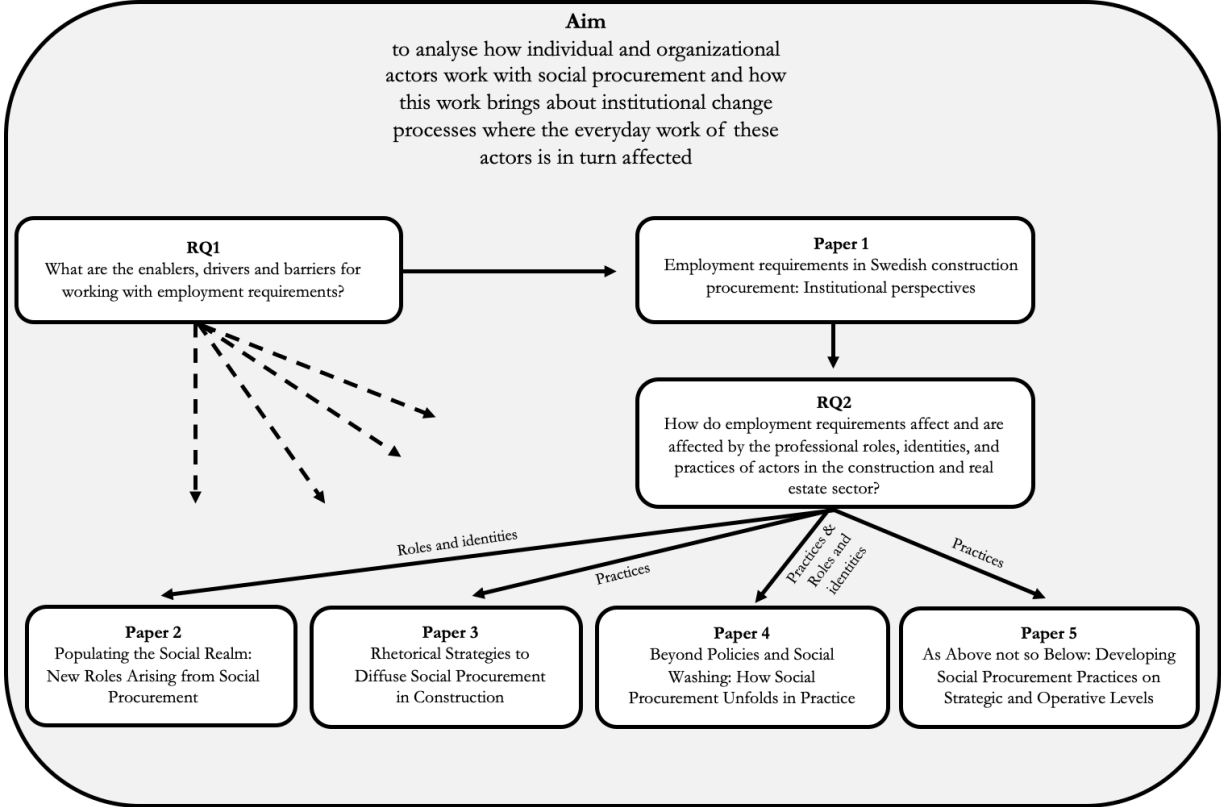


Figure 2: Interrelation among the aim, research questions and papers.



## 5. Summary of papers

This chapter summarises each of the five papers.

### 5.1 Paper 1: Employment Requirements in Swedish Construction Procurement: Institutional Perspectives

Paper 1 explores the use of employment requirements and its organisational implications in Sweden. The findings, which build on eight interviews and secondary data on three Swedish cases, show three types of organisational implications. The first implication is that a traditional procurement logic focusing on the price of the physical product (that is, the building) is increasingly co-existing and competing with a logic in which social value is the focus. This has created *new drivers and perceived value*. The findings indicate that housing companies perceive that employment requirements could help ensure rent incomes and raise property values; municipalities perceive that employment requirements could decrease welfare expenditures and increase tax incomes; and contractors and other suppliers perceive that employment requirements could function as a recruitment tool. The second implication is that *new organisations and roles* dedicated exclusively to employment requirements have emerged. The interviewees explained how existing roles within their respective organisations had been modified in order to cope with the complexities of employment requirements; they also described how new organisations were developing with the business idea of supplying unemployed people for construction projects that implement employment requirements. The third and final implication is that new procurement strategies and related business models have emerged, as well as a call for deeper collaboration between project members, resulting in *new practices and competences*. However, the interviewees explained that collaboration can be complicated and described a number of practical issues that need to be overcome due to a collective lack of knowledge and agreement on shared practices, such as preferred employment form for the newly employed, qualification criteria, and/or evaluation processes.

These three implications indicate that the construction sector may be experiencing the initial stages of an institutional change process due to the increased use of employment requirements, and that this process is shaped by industry actors and their ongoing institutional work. It is somewhat unclear who the important actors are in terms of driving this institutional change, but the study indicates that employment requirements should be a long-term initiative.

This paper takes a first step towards understanding the implications of implementing employment requirements, and towards theorising employment requirements in construction procurement. By applying an institutional perspective, changes and processes at both an individual and a collective level can be captured, which can help explicate and conceptualise the meanings and wider effects from these changes.

## 5.2 Paper 2: Populating the Social Realm: New Roles Related Arising from Social Procurement

Paper 2 investigates how a new type of actor in the construction and real estate sector – the ‘employment requirement professional’ (ERP) – emerged due to increased use of employment requirements. The paper explores how this actor populates a new professional space within construction and how this role is framed in terms of new role boundaries and responsibilities, professional identity, and work practices. Based on 21 interviews, the findings show that although the interviewees who work with social procurement have different professional roles, education, and work experience, they fit into three broad professional categories. Firstly, *the coordinators* work across boundaries to make employment requirements manageable while working administratively as their main responsibility. Secondly, *the sustainability experts* often work with other sustainability areas, such as environmental issues, and get social sustainability added onto their role. Thirdly, *the procurement experts* typically work with procurement in their daily jobs, where employment requirements become one aspect of this. Many of the interviewees have personally proposed the need for the role, and due to the lack of formal responsibilities attached to the role, they have to fill their role with substance in an iterative and ad hoc manner. At the same time, colleagues throughout their organisations demand operative support, making it difficult for the interviewees to have the time to fully fulfil their strategic responsibilities.

The interviewees expressed a personal driving force for working with employment requirements, and from this three different kinds of social identities were distinguished: *the idealists*, who want to be good builders of societies and want to act as role models; *the problem solvers*, who seek ways to make employment requirements both sustainable and commercially feasible; and *the pragmatists*, who are committed to employment requirements due to political or company policy. The interviewees also engaged in three types of activities – operational, educational and co-creational – which they often used metaphors to describe. Despite their strategic position within their organisation, the interviewees described how they must work operatively to make employment requirements manageable for others. The interviewees described how they engage extensively in promoting employment requirements within and outside their organisations. Finally, they described how they ‘plant seeds’ and ‘grow people’ and co-create collaborative space across organisational boundaries.

The findings indicate how the ERPs seem to be able to enact and wield their different identities, roles and practices in different combinations to cope with their complex work related to employment requirements. The ERPs often need to go beyond their formal responsibilities in order to solve problems and navigate between conflicting formal and informal responsibilities, thereby taking on a hybrid role with unclear boundaries and responsibilities. Moving forward, the ERPs have a proactive and projective take on the future development of the role and are in the process of creating a space for themselves and their role within their organisations.

The in-depth investigation of the ERP role and its new work practices provides novel insights into a new type of person in construction who ‘walks the line’ as an intermediate between contrasting interests; in our case the ‘hard’ construction procurement and the ‘soft’ social value. The findings provide a detailed account of who works with employment requirements at a strategic level and how and why they conduct their work, and how a new professional domain, new social identities, and new collaborative work practices are being established as an effect of employment requirements. For practitioners, this insight could create an understanding of what their future professional space might be and clarify collaboration paths across organisational boundaries. This could subsequently enable dissemination of practices and facilitate the establishment of a specific knowledge domain. However, organisations in the construction sector should ask themselves whether they are changing their practices enough to fully accommodate employment requirements, or if they are hiring a new type of professional, such as ERPs, as a quick fix and ‘social-washing’.

### **5.3 Paper 3: Rhetorical Strategies to Diffuse Social Procurement in Construction**

Paper 3 elaborates on the notion of changing institutional logics identified in Paper 1. Due to the limited dissemination of social procurement practices, actors who work with employment requirements spend considerable time and effort arguing for its benefits. Compared to traditional construction procurement, social procurement comes with a different set of institutional logics that has yet to be accepted in the Swedish construction and real estate sector. However, through the use of persuasive language, incumbent institutional logics can be changed, and new logics can be accepted. Therefore, Paper 3 investigates the arguments used by actors working on a strategic level, who try to disseminate and subsequently legitimise employment requirements. Based on 21 interviews, the connection between persuasive rhetoric and legitimacy of employment requirements is investigated by applying the three Aristotelian types of arguments: *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos*.

In the first category of persuasive rhetoric, *ethos* (which relates to the character of the speaker), the interviewees strengthen their character by emphasising their long-term and consistent commitment to social procurement. They also show humility by criticising themselves and their organisation. In the second category of persuasive rhetoric, *logos* (which relates to rationality), the interviewees explain how social procurement enables an efficient, and thereby logical, use of resources where unemployed people gain employment and the construction sector gains more workers. Thus, social procurement is presented as a win-win situation where both society and organisations gain socio-economic and commercial benefits. In the third category of persuasive rhetoric, *pathos* (which relates to emotions), the interviewees attempt to elicit emotive responses from their audience by personalising the unemployed and sharing stories of their family life. The interviewees also

emphasise the under-privileged nature of the unemployed and how employment requirements are a tool to mitigate this inequality. Thus, the interviewees were found to rely on all three of Aristotle's rhetorical strategies.

The findings show how proponents emphasise certain features of employment requirements, particularly the socio-economic and commercial business opportunities, rather than the socially sustainable aspect of employment requirements. These arguments tap into a discourse that is well-established in the construction and real estate sector, which has traditionally focused more on tangible profit-related criteria. These findings contribute to research on social procurement by identifying discourse related to employment requirements, and by showing how employment requirements can be rhetorically legitimised in the construction sector. For managers who aim to disseminate employment requirements throughout the construction and real estate sector, the findings provide an overview of different types of arguments that can be used and combined to promote employment requirements and its benefits.

#### **5.4 Paper 4: Beyond Policies and Social Washing: How Social Procurement Unfolds in Practice**

Paper 4 investigates the effects of employment requirements for actors working on an operative level with the requirements and the interns on a daily basis, and what this means for how they organise their daily work and their practices. The paper builds on 23 interviews and is analysed using a practice lens focusing on (1) everyday lived experiences of individual actors, (2) relational aspects of practices, (3) tension caused by imbalances in power, resources, and interests, and (4) individual actors' role as practice carriers. The findings highlight three specific areas related to the effects on operative level practices when employment requirements are implemented: (1) the daily project management practices and the practitioners, (2) the internships, and (3) projects and organisations.

When it comes to the practical effects for construction project management practice, many of the interviewees explained how they, as 'receivers' of the interns, felt pressured by a personal expectation to provide the interns with meaningful work and a 'high-quality internship' with fair working conditions. This often led to a high degree of personal engagement in the interns and in their private lives and entailed engaging in informal tasks such as helping them to read emails or pay bills. However, the interviewees were uncertain whether their efforts had any long-term positive effect on the interns as there is scant follow-up of what happens to interns after their internship has ended. Their drive for 'doing good' by the internships, good by their organisations, and good by themselves leads to self-reinforcing positive effects, such as becoming prouder of their employer, happier in their work role, and better-functioning in their work groups.

For the internships, the interns have to deal with demands from their supervisors as to how they should engage in their internship, while at the same time they often feel demotivated because their job situation is still precarious. In situations where interns performed well, they could become overexposed in advertisement purposes and asked to participate in seminars or radio programmes to talk about their experience of getting employed through employment requirements.

For projects and organisations, there are many barriers to the effective use of employment requirements, especially in terms of language barriers, safety issues and how projects are structured. However, although employment requirements are difficult to implement, ER interns add value to a larger system outside of the individual project and organisation, both in terms of increased team spirit among project members, and for adding value to the work life of individual supervisors.

This paper provides a bottom-up and micro-level perspective on how social procurement and employment requirements unfold in practice, and what effects this has on an operative level. For practitioners, the findings show some important aspects that need to be addressed to make the daily work with employment requirements and the interns easier. The paper illustrates the tension between new and old practices that individual actors must handle, and how individual actors must strike a balance between fulfilling their formal responsibilities and performing new practices on an ad hoc basis. This navigation between practices is not easy, due to an imbalance of resources. Acting as practice carriers for both traditional work tasks and new practices can lead to role ambiguity, but through a hybridization of the roles of individual practitioners this ambiguity can be mitigated. The paper adds to practice theory by suggesting an important relational aspect between what we call first-order, premeditated practices, and second-order, supportive and emergent practices, and how both types of practices are vital for ‘making employment requirements happen’.

### **5.5 Paper 5: As Above, not so Below: Developing Social Procurement Practices on Strategic and Operative Levels**

Paper 5 investigates how strategic-level and operative level-actors create and disseminate employment requirements practices in the Swedish construction and real estate sector. 46 interviews with actors working either at a strategic level or at an operative level were analysed using the theory of institutional work and a model for creating proto-institutions, meaning ‘institutions in the making’. Six main themes related to employment requirement practices emerged from the interviews:

*(1) Preparing for social procurement and ER interns:* Strategic-level interviewees spend a lot of time on preparatory work to design and legitimise employment requirement practices. However, operative-level interviewees rarely given an opportunity to internalise practices,

making employment requirements feel like a top-down initiative. (2) *Line of argumentation*: The interviewees explain how they promote their proposed practices by presenting positive facts and figures (cognitive promotion), talk about doing good (normative promotion), point to laws and regulations (regulatory promotion), and in detail describe the interns and their lives (emotional promotion). Through this line of argumentation, a sales-related discourse was combined with emotional appeals. (3) *Lack of resources*: For operative-level interviewees especially, a lack of resources, often in terms of time, hinder the development of social procurement practices. (4) *Incentives for interns*: The interns had few incentives to engage in and were sometimes poorly prepared for their internships. This suggests that it is institutions and long-held norms that create inertia, rather than other actors or organisations that disrupt the development of employment requirement practices. (5) *Knowledge sharing*: Knowledge sharing was described as important for practice development; co-creation and collaboration took place horizontally on the strategic level but was much weaker vertically between the strategic level and the operative level. (6) *Creating sustainable practices and routines*: To date, maintenance structures for upholding new practices over time have not been particularly systematised or plentiful, and the strategic level actors have failed to embed localized practices to enable collective learning.

The findings indicate how the two types of interviewees, strategic and operative, conduct institutional work simultaneously, but strategic level interviewees have a more projective entrepreneurial take on practice development, while the operative-level interviewees have a more problem-solving, practical-evaluative and reactive take. The two types of institutional work, which act in parallel to each other, indicate that practices are being created and institutionalised both from ‘the bottom’ and ‘the top’. However, the development of new practices does not appear to have converged into cohesive sector practices, limiting the institutionalisation of employment requirements. This is because incumbent institutional logics make institutional work to create and disseminate social procurement practices difficult.

The findings contribute to theory by detailing and widening the scope of how proto-institutions and new (employment requirement) practices may be developed and institutionalised. The findings also exemplify and contextualises social procurement development and efforts aimed at increasing equality, diversity, and inclusion. For practitioners, this paper suggests that employment requirement practices could be further developed by acknowledging and consulting operative-level actors who work closely with the interns, as well as the interns themselves.

## 6. Discussion

This chapter starts by discussing the first research question regarding enablers, drivers, and barriers for working with employment requirements. This sets the scene for discussing the findings related to the second research question, regarding how employment requirements reciprocally affect and are affected by professional roles, identities and practices of actors in the construction and real estate sector. Previous research on social procurement and the theoretical framework of institutional logics and institutional work is applied in the discussion in order to analyse how individual and organisational actors in the construction and real estate sector work with social procurement and how this, in turn, affects their everyday work.

### 6.1 Enablers, drivers and barriers for working with employment requirements

When analysing how actors work with social procurement, it is important to understand what enables, drives and hinders their work. Therefore, to answer the first research question – *What are the enablers, drivers and barriers for working with employment requirements?* – four main areas are discussed. The discussion also shows how strategic-level actors, operative-level actors and interns may not be equally affected by different enablers, drivers and barriers. The four areas relate to enablers, drivers and barriers on four different levels:

- 1) *Employment requirements as a tool for human resource management* relates to an aggregated strategic level of organisations, as it focuses on overarching personnel management and strategy.
- 2) *Collaboration and coordination* relate to several hierarchical levels, where the focus is on cooperation between actors and organisations.
- 3) *Resources and routines* relate to the practice level, where the focus is on local routines and the resources for performing those routines.
- 4) *Motivation and commitment* relate the individual level, where the focus is on drivers and barriers for individual actors to work with social procurement.

#### 6.1.1 *Employment requirements as a tool for human resource management*

Similar to previous research, I found that employment requirements may fulfil organisations' CSR agendas to become more diversified, especially in terms of gender and ethnic representation among staff members (Erridge 2007; Zuo et al. 2012; Sutherland et al. 2015; Barraket et al. 2016). In addition, employment requirements were often framed as a useful tool for accessing a pool of potential employees that was previously inaccessible for the organisations. This suggests a commercial market perspective on social procurement, with a focus on how employment requirements can benefit companies and possibly increase their financial revenues, rather than on creating social value. A reason for

this commercial focus may be due to the incumbent institutional logics of the construction and real estate sector, which tend to focus too much on the financial bottom line (cf. Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Erridge, 2007; Urup, 2016). This “reinterpretation” from the social value purpose of employment requirements can be seen as actors using the tension (Martin et al. 2017) between the traditional market-focused procurement logic and the social procurement logic to make employment requirements more legitimate. However, employment requirements as a recruitment tool was primarily proposed as a driver by the strategic-level actors, and not shared with all on the operative level that face the practical difficulties of finding interns with the right skills or educational background. As such, while using employment requirements as a recruitment tool seem like a good idea on a strategic level, it can actually become much less practical on an operative level.

Previous research has found that there is a concern that employment requirements may lead to a displacement of “ordinary workers” (Erridge, 2007; Barraket and Weissman, 2009; Sutherland et al. 2015). Despite the lack of labour capacity in the sector (Enochsson and Andersson, 2016; Bennewitz, 2017; Business Sweden, 2017), the same concern has been raised by actors in Sweden. However, this concern may be unfounded given that follow-up and evaluation are scarce, which makes it difficult to determine whether this is actually a problem. Nevertheless, the interviewees suggest that posing “dialogue requirements” rather than coercive requirements would solve this potential problem. This means that the client does not demand a specific number of interns to be hired, but instead that the contractor will have a dialogue about such initiatives where old social sustainability merits also count for future contracts. Such a strategy may diminish the threat and “strangeness” of social procurement practices and help embed such practices in the sector (cf. Modell et al. 2007; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008; Styhre, 2009; Dahlmann and Grosvold, 2017). In practice, however, it can also mean that some social procurement contracts result in zero internships for the unemployed target groups when the employment requirements are not mandatory.

### ***6.1.2 Collaboration and coordination***

Since working with employment requirements requires a multitude of different actors, such as clients, contractors, the Employment Agency, project organisations, subsidiary companies, and so on, it is clear that norms, routines and practices cannot be created in solitude and instead require collaboration and coordination between multiple parties and hierarchical levels. Therefore, collaboration and coordination are important aspects when working with employment requirements (Barraket et al. 2016; Raiden et al. 2019). Although working with employment requirements is said to lead to more collaboration (Scottish Government, 2014; Sutherland et al. 2015; Barraket et al. 2016), the actors in this thesis emphasise how collaboration and coordination, both across organisational boundaries but also between hierarchical levels, can be very difficult in practice, as Loosemore et al. (2019a) also found. Many strategic-level actors described how they felt isolated in their role and that knowledge sharing with other organisations was sometimes difficult to achieve (see Paper

2). Similarly, many operative-level actors described how they had limited contact both with the construction client and with their own parent organisation. They felt detached from the parent organisation, lacked a common space to share experiences with colleagues, and did not receive formalised support or guidelines from their parent organisation regarding how to work with the interns. As a result, they had little time to prepare for the interns and new associated work tasks and felt somewhat startled once the interns started their internships (see Paper 4 and 5). The detachment between the strategic and operative level is problematic, as close ties between individuals and organisations facilitate the dissemination of practices and are especially important with emerging institutional logics, such as that of social procurement (Barraket et al 2016).

However, the problems expressed by the operative-level interviewees could be mitigated, and the social procurement logic could be easier embedded in the institutional environment, if the actors in the sector, especially the parent companies and clients who allocates resources, used more relational institutional work, as suggested by Liefink et al. (2019). They suggested that actors who want to institutionalise new practices should ‘create awareness’ for the new practices, which could mean that the actors on the operative level were given time and resources to prepare for the interns’ arrival. Liefink et al. (2019) further suggested that actors should engage in ‘selective networking’, which could mean that strategic-level actors could connect better with operative-level actors, as well as enable a shared forum for the operative actors to network and share their experiences with each other. Lastly, Liefink et al. (2019) suggested that actors should ‘build coalitions’ and active networks with stakeholders that will be engaged in the new practice’s application, which means that the collaboration between the operative level (which is implementing and working with employment requirements on a daily basis) and the strategic level, as well as the collaboration between the project and subsidiary company with the client and parent company, should be more explicit and tighter with more knowledge sharing.

The difficulties in collaborating and coordinating across organisational and hierarchical boundaries likely stem from the traditional organisation of the sector, which is characterised by decentralisation of decision making, standardisation, dispersed responsibility allocation, coordination difficulties, independent specialised work tasks, conflicting goals and interests, and efficiency in time, cost and scope (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Gluch, 2005; Styhre, 2009; Urup, 2016). Thus, the path dependency created by these incumbent institutional logics, which in turn maintains the stability and inertia in the sector, could be a major barrier for embedding the institutional logic of social procurement (Modell et al. 2007).

### ***6.1.3 Resources and routines***

Similar to previous research (Eadie and Rafferty, 2014; Erridge, 2007; Loosemore, 2016; Walker and Brammer, 2009; Zuo et al. 2012; Murphy and Eadie, 2019; Loosemore et al. 2019), the actors in this thesis express concerns about increased costs and resources when

working with employment requirements. The findings (in Paper 2, 4 and 5, for example) indicate that working with employment requirements and taking in interns requires extra resources from individual actors, mostly in terms of time. This time pressure suggests that employment requirements and associated practices have not yet been tied to sufficient resources (see Barraket et al. 2016). Path dependency could help explain these insufficient resources and why it is difficult to create new and bespoke work tasks. Due to already institutionalised practices, these can constrain what new practices can be created, as well as shape notions for where to spend resources, thereby also constraining what amount of resources are available for working with employment requirements (Modell et al. 2007; Beckert, 2010). In the end, the lack of allocated resources could be seen as undermining social procurement practices and a form of institutional work where old practices are maintained and employment requirement practices are disrupted (cf. Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) by the lack of formal acknowledgement of employment requirements in budgetary structures.

Another barrier raised by the strategic-level interviewees was internal “squabbling” regarding the design of employment requirements (see Paper 1). For example, there is disagreement about what employment form should be used (internships vs. temporary employments), who should be responsible for following up on interns and the outcomes of employment requirements, and how follow-up, assessment and evaluation of the requirements should be made. Such internal tensions might lead to scattered rather than shared practices. Internal squabbling and scattered practices on a strategic level can, by extension, create confusion for operative-level actors working in projects. For example, if a work team in one project develops routines for how to work with interns, they may, in the next project with a new client, be forced to change those routines because the new client has other ideas about how to work with employment requirements. Therefore, a lack of shared routines and internal squabbling can potentially directly negatively affect operative-level actors as well, who will have difficulties creating sustainable and institutionalised practices that can span over several projects. All in all, these issues point to how employment requirements currently have few well-defined routines or resources tied to those routines, which can create a barrier to work with employment requirements, which makes institutionalisation of social procurement difficult (Barraket et al. 2016).

One way of creating more distinct practices and routines is by leaning on legislation and policies concerning social procurement. Wright (2015) found that the 2012 UK Social Value Act spurred more consistent practices. In this sense, legislation can potentially facilitate the creation of routines for working with employment requirements. Legislation could also legitimise employment requirements, and thereby become a support structure for actors who want to engage in social procurement. Previous research has highlighted how legislation and policy is a strong driver for engaging in employment requirements (Meehan and Bryde, 2011; Wright, 2015; Zuo et al. 2016; Murphy and Eadie, 2019; Raiden et al.

2019). In the present thesis, however, legislation or policy was seldom mentioned as a driving force for working with employment requirements, which could be seen as a missed opportunity for the Swedish sector to make social procurement more established. On the flip side, leaning more about legislation could simultaneously be a barrier towards working with social procurement, as more legislation could potentially decrease flexibility in procurement (Barraket et al. 2016; Loosemore, 2016).

#### ***6.1.4 Motivation and commitment***

In Papers 2, 3, 4 and 5, both strategic- and operative-level actors expressed how they felt motivated and happy to work with employment requirements and the interns, and how they feel prouder and more committed to their employer as a result. The positive feelings the actors associate with working with employment requirements and the interns suggest that employment has many desirable and legitimate features (Thornton, 2002; Smets et al. 2017). The increased commitment and motivation the actors feel could perhaps explain why working with social procurement can lead to lower absenteeism, less employee turnover and improved work environment, as has been found by previous research to be a positive result from social procurement (Meehan and Bryde, 2011; Eadie and Rafferty, 2014; Murphy and Eadie, 2019). Such psychosocial benefits could be a driver for individual actors to engage in social procurement, and the positive spill-over effects of less absenteeism and turnover will surely lower costs for organisations as well.

In relation to feeling happier and more motivated at work, previous research has also found that employment requirements can meet ethical considerations and benefit disadvantaged groups, and that this is a driver for engaging in social procurement (McCrudden, 2004; Meehan and Bryde, 2011; Zuo, 2012; Wright, 2015; Montalbán-Domingo et al. 2018; Raiden et al. 2019; Murphy and Eadie, 2019). This drive to do good was, for the actors, closely connected to the 2015 refugee crisis in Sweden (see Paper 4). The crisis could be seen as a sudden “shock”, which put refugees and their employment status high on the political agenda. This shock could be considered a field-level enabling condition for introducing a new idea (Powell and Colyvas, 2008; Battilana and D’Aunno, 2009) – namely, social procurement – into the institutional environment. Without such an external shock, the actors may have been less motivated to engage in social procurement, and it may have been more difficult to introduce a social procurement logic into the sector. Therefore, the external shock that was the refugee crisis and the subsequent urge to contribute was a strong driver for actors in Sweden.

One aspect that could potentially decrease motivation to engage in employment requirements among operative-level actors, especially those working as supervisors for the interns, is the lack of resources in general, and the lack of follow-up of individual interns in particular (see Paper 4). As shown in Paper 4 many operative-level actors explained that they rarely receive any information about what happened to their interns after the internship

ended. This made them feel uncertain about whether they did a good job that actually contributed to the intern's development. Barraket et al. (2016) claimed that both tangible and intangible resources are important for actors to be able to adopt new practices, and these practices need to be objectified and tied to resources and examples in order to be understood and accepted. Therefore, if resources for follow-up are not provided, this could lead to operative-level actors declining to take on supervisory roles in the future because it may feel like this only requires more of their time and causes stress without tangible long-term positive outcomes.

This thesis has also found that interns' motivation to accept and fulfil an internship is a major game-changer for employment requirements, as shown in Paper 4 and 5. The actors in this thesis, both the interns and those working as supervisors for the interns, experienced that the motivation often was low amongst interns, for several reasons. Firstly, many of the interns have participated in multiple internships before that have not led to permanent job positions, creating a sense of disillusionment. Secondly, unemployed people must often accept internships or jobs to keep their welfare support. This means that some unemployed might accept an internship via employment requirements due to pressure rather than genuine interest. Such policies might increase the participation in internships, but it might also fuel the disillusionment. Thirdly, instead of receiving a salary for their work, the interns often just kept their (considerably lower) welfare remuneration. The sector has clearly not created strong enough incentives for the interns, and the lack of incentives could lessen the legitimacy of employment requirements and make them seem unimportant, which by extension hinders the institutionalisation of employment requirements in the sector (cf. Thornton, 2002; Barraket et al. 2016). One way to mitigate the issue of unmotivated interns could be to create more distinct routines for how to choose and work with the interns, to ensure sure that the right intern is at the right place where he or she might feel motivated, committed and hopeful about the future.

Thus, there are many enablers, drivers and barriers facing social procurement and those who work with employment requirements, both on the organisational and individual levels. The discussion so far of the four areas of enablers, drivers and barriers depicts the "status quo" of the institutional environment. How individual and organisational actors work with social procurement and how this affects their everyday work in terms of professional roles, identities and practices, is discussed next.

## **6.2 Changed professional roles, identities and practices in relation to employment requirements**

This section discusses findings related to the second research question: *How do employment requirements affect and are affected by the professional roles, identities, and practices of actors in the construction and real estate sector?* The

findings add to previous research, which has found that both roles and practices are being created and reshaped in relation to employment requirements (Barraket and Weissman 2009; Scottish Government, 2014; Sutherland et al. 2015; Loosemore 2015; Barraket et al. 2016).

### ***6.2.1 Builders become social workers***

Social procurement is both a set of “empirical practices” and a set of ideas for value creation (Barraket et al. 2016). This duality creates some complexity for the actors in the construction and real estate sector. Many practitioners perceive that employment requirements, which are built upon a logic of social value, clash with the prevailing institutional logics of the construction and real estate sector, which often focus on price in procurements (Sporrong, 2011; Loosemore, 2016; Urup, 2016). In the presence of conflicting institutional logics, traditional roles might become contested, negotiated or reified, and actors must navigate between conflicting roles, where new roles might be created, or new aspects are overlaid traditional roles (Barraket et al. 2016). This means that when actors engage in employment requirements and the interns, this has implications for their own role and identity.

It should be noted that many individuals in the construction and real estate sector are experienced in taking in and supervising apprentices. However, the difference with interns coming in through employment requirements and traditional apprentices is that they come from specific target groups that are particularly stigmatised in the labour market; they often have undocumented and/or inconsistent schooling; and they often lack education and work experience in construction or facilities maintenance work. In addition, many of them have experienced traumas (like war refugees) or speak very poor Swedish. Therefore, these interns are unlike the interns or apprentices the interviewees have worked with before.

This thesis shows how roles and identities start to change when actors, both on a strategic and operative level, add a layer of new tasks and responsibilities to their work. For example, the interviewees explained how they go beyond their formal work descriptions to perform extra-curricular tasks, such as finding new sources of possible interns (see Paper 2), or when they help their interns in their personal life (see Paper 4). Professional roles and social identities are prescribed with values and norms (Lok, 2010; McPherson and Sauder, 2013), and in some ways the extra-curricular tasks and responsibilities that the actors add to their role mean that they also adopt many of the traits and tasks typically associated with social workers, whose main tasks include integrating marginalised people into society. In other words, the institutionalised norms and values of who they should be and how they should act change as a result of working with employment requirements and with interns (see Lok, 2010:1308). This means that individual actors in the construction and real estate sector enact and navigate between several different identities at once (Lok, 2010; Bévort and

Suddaby; 2016; Abdelnour et al. 2017), where they balance both the traditional procurement logic and the social procurement logic simultaneously (Sirris, 2019).

However, the construction, enactment, and navigation between these two identities is not necessarily easy. Adopting a role of not only working with construction or facilities maintenance but also working with integration of marginalised people can create role ambiguity of “who they should be” and for the scope of their responsibilities (Andersson, 2012). Sirris (2019) suggested that, in institutional pluralistic contexts, roles can become hybridised, where actors prioritise one logic over the other. This means that the actors in the sector may have to choose which identity and work tasks to prioritise: their traditional construction or facilities maintenance tasks, or tasks related to integrating the interns. The findings have emphasised how increased stress and time pressure is an effect of working with employment requirements, so this prioritisation may become urgent when more and more projects and organisations choose to implement employment requirements.

Another possible outcome of the institutional pluralism is if the prioritisation of logics will result in employment requirements being phased out and ending up as a fad soon forgotten. Although several institutional logics can co-exist in parallel for a long time, handling this pluralism is not necessarily easy (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Jarzabkowski et al. 2009). This complexity may be one source of the perceived resource constraints (see Paper 2 and 4). Dahlmann and Grosvold (2017) and Sirris (2019) suggested that it is first when a peripheral logic, in this case the logics of social procurement, become more embedded in an organisation that actors can fully handle the institutional pluralism. Therefore, it might take time and conscious effort until this pluralism can be resolved, if it is at all. One way this could happen is through co-optation, where the actors borrow strategic elements from the social procurement logic but still keep the most prominent features of the traditional procurement logic in place (Andersson and Liff, 2018).

Multiple logics affect people and organisations differently, where individual and collective actors within the same institutional context may adopt different logics (Goodrick and Reay, 2011). Many of the strategic-level actors have backgrounds in areas such as management or law, where they are used to working across hierarchical and organisational boundaries with different sustainability initiatives, and they might therefore find it easier than operative-level actors to adopt a logic based on social values.

Therefore, a question that arises is whether actors in the construction and real estate sector are ready or even able to adopt the social procurement logic into their formal roles and responsibilities. On one hand, actors in the sector are doing just that and are establishing new roles or adding responsibilities to existing roles in an attempt to deal with the employment requirements and the interns. On the other hand, actors at the strategic and operative levels emphasise how they lack resources, especially in terms of time, and that

this is a large problem. They do not have the time to fully integrate the interns into the organisations or the resources to follow-up on the outcomes of the employment requirements or the individual interns (see Paper 2 and 4). Bresnen (2013) highlighted how the construction sector struggle to accommodate sustainability issues. Thus, it is unclear whether the construction and real estate sector and its organisations are actually changing the way they think and work on a deeper level to genuinely accommodate both logics. Styhre (2009) claimed that there is a recursive relationship between professional roles and the creation of institutionalised behaviour (Styhre, 2009). This could mean that, if given time, the changed roles and identities have the opportunity to grow more permanent, and this can then recursively change institutionalised behaviour on a wider scale.

Building on this discussion, the following section discusses what individual actors are doing and what practices they are creating in order to conduct the work with employment requirements and to join both logics.

### ***6.2.2 Institutional work to create, reshape, and disseminate employment requirement practices***

This thesis finds that the Swedish construction and real estate sector seem to be undergoing an institutionalisation process as an effect of social procurement being increasingly used. Employment requirements have not yet become business as usual (Barraket et al. 2016), and this ongoing process might never be fully completed in terms of employment requirements becoming a taken-for-granted part of organisational life. Nevertheless, the findings in the thesis suggest that actors are conducting institutional work when trying to implement, work with, and embed employment requirements and related practices in the sector. These efforts can be better understood by applying Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) framework for how actors conduct creative institutional work. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) claimed that actors can create institutions in three main ways:

- (1) by *overtly reconfiguring rules and boundaries*
- (2) by *constructing identities and normative networks*
- (3) by *reconfiguring meaning systems*.

Firstly, actors in the construction and real estate sector overtly reconfigure institutionalised rules and boundaries by creating practices to at least make employment requirements work in the daily ongoing working lives of the individual actors. The findings of Paper 2 suggest how strategic-level actors go outside of their formal work role (for example, to find new interns) and that they have to juggle informal operative work tasks with their formal strategic responsibilities. Similarly, the findings in Paper 4 suggest that operative-level actors engage in their interns' personal lives by helping them read emails, pay bills, find new living arrangements, etc. Through the creation of these extra-curricular new practices and self-adopted responsibilities, the individual actors thereby *reconfigure the norms, rules, and boundaries* for their work and what tasks they should undertake.

Secondly, when engaging in these practices that go beyond what can be expected in their formal role, the actors, especially those working as supervisors, become an important friend for the interns, helping to socialise the interns into Swedish society. As suggested previously in the discussion, these practices add a layer onto the traditional roles, identities and responsibilities of construction actors, adding characteristics normally found within areas such as social work. Andersson (2012) argued that actors' institutional context influences their identity construction. Therefore, the actors in this thesis alter the institutionalised norms and values of who they should be and how they should act (Lok, 2010), thereby *constructing new identities* for who they are in this particular context with the interns. Andersson (2012) also wrote that actors' social relations influence identity construction. Thus, the social relations that the supervisors create with their interns when the supervisors become a friend to the interns and socialise them into wider society could also influence their identity construction. Through the social relations with the interns, *new normative networks* are created, such as when the supervisors reach out to acquaintances to find new living arrangements or permanent jobs for the interns.

Lastly, as illustrated in Paper 3, the strategic-level actors use rhetoric in order to promote employment requirements, both internally in their own organisation and externally to project partners or others in the sector. The need for these rhetorical strategies suggests that employment requirements are not a shared practice or in line with the institutional logics currently embedded in the sector (Bévort and Suddaby, 2016). The findings of the thesis show how (mainly) strategic-level actors actively used different types of Aristotelian persuasive rhetoric (see Suddaby and Greenwood 2005; Brown et al. 2012; Higgins and Walker, 2012) to work with the institutional logics they have at hand. They used the strength of their character (ethos) to show commitment to "the cause" that is social sustainability. They tapped into familiar lines of reasonings focused on commercial profits in a sales-focused manner, framing and packaging employment requirements as a profitable win-win type of initiative (logos). They also embraced the social value aspects of employment requirements to create empathy for the target groups and the marginalisation and inequality they struggle with (pathos). These rhetorical strategies can facilitate embedding the social procurement logic into the sector and can thereby be seen as an attempt to *reconfigure meaning systems*. By reframing employment requirements and its purpose and role in the sector, actors reshape the meaning of employment requirements to blend into the incumbent institutional logics and institutionalised practices already embedded in the sector (cf. Simpson and Carroll, 2008; Reay and Hinings, 2009; Lok, 2010; McPherson and Sauder, 2013; Bévort and Suddaby, 2016; Currie and Spyridonidis, 2016; Abdelnour et al. 2017).

Thus, the studies in this thesis point to specific activities that individual actors in the Swedish construction and real estate sector engage in to conduct creative institutional work.

Building on this discussion, the next section looks in more detail at who conducts this institutional work and in what way.

### ***6.2.3 Different types of institutional workmanship***

The discussion has so far suggested that actors create new roles and identities to be able to deal with employment requirements and the interns in their daily work, and that they conduct institutional work in order to practically work with employment. The question is then who conducts this institutional work and in what way. There are two main labels that can be used to categorise work from an institutional perspective and the actors who do it: *institutional entrepreneurs/entrepreneurship* and *institutional workers/work* (Battilana, 2006; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). They have different positions in the institutional context, different access to resources, and they perform different types of work (ibid). Despite focusing on different things (the perspective of institutional entrepreneurs focuses on individuals, while the perspective of institutional work focuses on actions), I suggest that these two perspectives can be combined into a single cohesive perspective that can be used to understand the work, actions, and practices that individual actors create and partake in when trying to enact or deal with institutional change related to employment requirements. Therefore, different types of “institutional workmanships” are now discussed in relation to the categories of actors interviewed in this thesis: strategic-level actors, operative-level actors, and interns.

#### *Institutional workmanship of strategic-level actors*

The strategic-level interviewees described how the organisations they work for created completely new roles or redesigned and assigned new areas of responsibility to existing roles related to employment requirements. This is not unusual, given that roles are an outcome of the institutional environment (Andersson, 2012); therefore, introducing a new, disruptive institutional logic like that of social procurement in the sector has an effect on roles in the sector (Styhre, 2009). These new responsibilities and roles, referred to in Paper 2 as “employment requirements professionals” (ERPs), were often proposed on the initiative of the role-holders themselves. The characteristics shown by these strategic-level interviewees (including passion, drive, and innovative thinking), coupled with their propensity to enact sudden change, suggest that they are good examples of institutional entrepreneurs (Beckert, 1999; Battilana, 2006).

In Paper 2, the strategic-level interviewees described a great deal of agency when creating space for their own role, and strategically “planted seeds” within management in order to establish their role within their respective organisations, in line with Beckert’s (1999) findings about how institutional entrepreneurs act strategically in a planned manner. Many of the strategic-level interviewees have a management position within their organisations; this central social position in the institutional environment, where they also work across organisational boundaries with many internal and external contacts, grants them a certain

level of resources to enact sudden change (Battilana, 2006). If they had less access to resources and inter-organisational contacts, their “seeds” might never have grown. Furthermore, they displayed a projective and future-oriented agency (Battilana and D’Aunno, 2009). They were reflexive when they influenced top management within their organisations, and they created top-down practices that they pushed down on the operative level of their organisations. They also had opportunity to prepare and reflect upon their work with employment requirements, such as when an interviewee visited over 50 municipalities to ask them about their view on employment requirements.

#### *Institutional workmanship of operative-level actors*

The operative-level interviewees worked either with construction, with facilities maintenance, or with day-to-day project leading from the client organisation. Papers 4 and 5 illustrate how they conduct their normal, operative work tasks related to construction or facilities maintenance work, but also how they work closely with or as supervisors of the interns. They often described how they the interns were “dropped onto their lap” and how they had to solve problems ad hoc just to make the internships and daily operations work. This suggests that the operative-level actors cannot be labelled as institutional entrepreneurs, but rather as institutional workers who perform more incremental institutional change. Thus, the operative-level actors’ work becomes more practical-evaluative (Battilana and D’Aunno, 2009).

Given the lack of institutionalised and/or formalised practices for working with employment requirements, they are present-oriented and focus on current problems and how to respond to emerging ambiguities and demands that are simultaneously evolving (Battilana and D’Aunno, 2009). Since they solve problems as these emerge, they do not have the same room for preparation and reflection as the strategic-level actors. It should be noted that institutional entrepreneurs can surely work on an operative level as well, but my studies indicate that the operative-level actors do not have the same opportunity to conduct sudden institutional change as the strategic-level actors can, and instead have more opportunities to conduct small daily actions of institutional work. These small incremental actions of institutional work are nevertheless very important, as small incremental changes can result in large transformations over time.

#### *Institutional workmanship of interns*

Finally, there are the interns themselves. In this thesis the perspective of the interns has been partly overlooked, as explained in Ch. 4.5 However, a handful of interns were interviewed, and their supervisors described both their work and state of mind. So although it is difficult to talk about the interns in as much detail as the strategic or operative-level actors, it is important to say something about the interns and their role in conducting institutional work. In previous research on institutional work, there has often been an assumption that it is professionals and actors associated with professions or actors at the

top of organisations who conduct institutional work, rather than marginalised actors (Lawrence et al. 2013). Although the interns are not professionals or at the top of organisations, I argue that the interns have an important role in conducting institutional work in relation to employment requirements.

As shown in Paper 5, the strategic-level actors admit that they have not made systematic efforts to consult interns when designing their employment requirements, even though they did so with many other stakeholders. This suggests an assumption that the interns would accept and engage in the internships offered through employment requirements. However, as discussed in Paper 4 and 5, some interns declined the internship, hesitantly accepted it for fear of losing welfare benefits, or quit the internship prematurely. The interviewees described that interns were sceptical, as the employment requirement internship is often just one more in a long string of internships, often leaving the interns just as far from permanent employment as they were before. The interns' non-participation in internships is, in many ways, rational, as it is based on their past negative experiences. The non-participation compared to the planned institutional change enacted by the strategic-level actors or the "problem fire-fighting" of the operative-level actors, is more internally focused: many interns feel disillusioned and simply turn down an internship (Smets and Jarzabkowski, 2013). This suggests that interns have an iterative type of agency informed by past experiences (Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009).

In many ways, the introduction of the interns to the institutional environment can function as a disruptive institutional action in itself. In doing so, this undermines the assumptions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) of what procurement in the construction and real estate sector should entail. In effect, employment requirements and the interns then become a form of social innovation that shocks the institutional environment. Having said that, the interns are brought into the institutional environment without any intentions on their part to change the institution, as they are unfamiliar with the institutional environment and its institutional logics, given that they have no previous construction or facilities maintenance experience. Thus, the interns can be said to be "institutionally blind", and in effect they do not conform to the institutionalised practices or scripts of how actors in the institutional environment should act simply because they are unaware of them. Thereby, they unintentionally resist and challenge the institution and, in the longer term, influence institutional change.

In other words, the interns' "strangeness" in the institutional environment, as well as their disengagement in or even decline of the internships, has effects for employment requirements and the dissemination of practices, as without the interns' participation, the very *raison d'être* of employment requirements becomes obsolete. Therefore, it can be argued that the interns do perform institutional work, and although this institutional work is not intentional and does not lead to the creation of new practices, it is likely to influence both

old practices and the new practices being created by the strategic-level actors and operative-level actors, who must rethink how they design employment requirements and their work with the interns. Thus, the interns' non-participation can be a form of disruptive institutional work of the traditional procurement logic and of the social procurement logic.

### *Three types of institutional workmanship*

The findings in this thesis emphasise the institutional work of three different types of actors. These actors differ in their institutional workmanship, yet at the same time contribute to the same institutional environment and the creation, use, and dissemination of employment requirements.

Despite the many differences in the work the strategic-level actors and operative-level actors perform, there are some commonalities. Firstly, both types of actors often described the same struggles: that they have to solve problems, that they lack resources, and that they lack knowledge. However, due to the difference in social position, problems can be handled differently. It could be argued that the operative-level actors show more ingenuity as they must solve problems with less resources and intellectual exchange with colleagues in other organisations, which is something the strategic-level actors have the opportunity to do. The strategic-level actors are also allowed to and are expected to prepare for their work with employment requirements, whereas the operative-level actors – who described having interns “dropped onto their lap” – do not have the same expectation, time, or space to prepare. Having said that, the strategic-level actors also experienced a lack of time to properly engage in employment requirements and must also conduct much more overtly political institutional work (see Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) where they use advocacy and vested interests to get management teams and industry partners to support the work with employment requirements. An example of this in Paper 2 is how the strategic-level interviewees proposed and emphasised the need for their role and work tasks to their management teams.

Secondly, the strategic-level actors explained how they are driven by personal engagement, but this seems to stem from an idealised aspiration for society. The operative-level actors are also driven by personal engagement, but this is described as being more in terms of helping a specific intern. This could mean that, for the strategic-level actors, the engagement is more abstract; it is more about the cause, the mission, the success story of the intern who improved their life, and the wider picture. For operative-level actors, it is more personal; it is about the specific person, their family life, and future in Sweden. Both types of actors strive to do good, but the perspective is more or less aggregated.

When it comes to the institutional workmanship of the interns, their role in conducting institutional work in relation to employment requirements shines a light on the role of intentionality in institutional work. The traditional view of institutional work perceives the

intentionality, rather than the result, of the institutional work as important, regardless of whether the institutional work has any actual effects on the institution at all (Battilana, 2006; Lawrence et al. 2013). I find that this view misses important and institutionally influential actions just because they lack intentionality. One example is the interns' institutional blindness and the unintentional institutional disruptiveness this caused. One could also argue that the operative-level actors also lacked intentionality, as they did not change their practices, roles and identities in order to change their working situation or to institutionalise employment requirements. Their changed practices, roles and identities were just an outcome of the operative-level actors coping with employment requirements. So, although they are familiar with the institutional environment and the scripts therein, I argue that the operative-level actors' intentionality was also quite weak, but that the result of their changed practices, roles, and identities had institutional effects anyway. Therefore, I support the criticism by Smets and Jarzabkowski (2013), Smets et al. (2017) and Andersson and Gadolin (2020) that the definition of institutional work as "*the purposive action of individuals and organisations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions*" (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006: 215) is too narrow and that institutional work can in fact be unaware, unintended and unreflexive (Hampel et al. 2017). From my perspective, institutional work can be seen more as mundane, everyday practical work that has grander effects on institutions, whether they are conscious or unconscious.

All in all, this thesis has shown that there are different types of institutional workmanship in relation to employment requirements that is being conducted by strategic-level actors, operative-level workers, and interns. It is likely that all types of institutional work, both top-down and bottom-up, planned or ad hoc or unintentional, are important for institutionalising employment requirements. In many ways, they complement each other by shaping and influencing the creation of new practices. This can be important for individual actors and organisations in the construction and real estate sector who want to work with employment requirements. If they can identify each type of actor and their role in creating, shaping and disseminating employment requirements, perhaps the organisation of employment requirements can become more well-informed, effective and efficient.



## 7. Conclusions

This chapter has provided a brief summary of the main findings and main points of the discussion. This is followed by an outline of the thesis' contributions. The chapter ends with some suggestions for future research.

### 7.1 Answering the RQs

With a practice-based and institutional perspective, and a focus on individual actors and their roles, identities and practices, this thesis has sought to *analyse how individual and organisational actors work with social procurement and how this work brings about institutional change processes that affect the everyday work of these actors.*

The first research question asked: *What are the enablers, drivers and barriers for working with employment requirements?* To answer this question, four different areas of enablers, drivers and barriers were discussed. It should be noted that not all enablers, drivers and barriers apply to the same actors, and can differ for organisations, strategic-level actors, operative-level actors, and interns, due to their different positions in the institutional environment.

The first area concerns *employment requirements as a tool for human resource management*, where employment requirements are used as a recruitment tool to find a new and diverse work force. This emphasis on how employment requirements can benefit organisations is in line with incumbent institutional logics focusing on commercial opportunities. However, using employment requirements as a recruitment tool often becomes complicated in practice, as interns often lack education and experience for the work they are expected to do. To avoid displacement of ordinary workers, and to diminish the scepticism towards employment requirements, the focus is on having a dialogue about job creation rather than demanding a set number of internships.

The second area concerns *collaboration and coordination*, where collaboration and coordination are necessary but difficult. Operative-level actors in particular feel detached from their parent and client organisation. One reason for this is the institutionalised organisation of the construction and real estate sector, which is characterised by decentralisation and independence. Conducting relational institutional work help mitigate this issue.

The third area concerns *resources and routines*. Actors both at the strategic and operative levels feel stressed about handling their formal tasks and responsibilities and, at the same time, work with employment requirements and the interns. Internal squabbling and scattered practices further aggravate the issue, causing confusion on both the strategic and operative levels. All in all, these issues point to how employment requirements currently have few well-defined routines or resources tied to those routines, where path-dependent behaviour

limits the amount of resources available. Leaning more on legislation is one way to make employment requirements more established and to create more distinct routines.

Lastly, the fourth area concerns *motivation and commitment*, where the work with employment requirements increases pride and motivation for individual actors, who have many positive feelings attached to working with employment requirements and the interns. By extension, the work with employment requirements is easy to adopt because it has many desirable and legitimate features. However, a lack of resources, especially in terms of follow-up, decrease motivation amongst actors. Also, motivation for interns to accept and fulfil and internships is also weak, and many interns feel like an internship offered through employment requirements will never lead to a permanent job.

The second research question asked: ***How do employment requirements affect and are affected by the professional roles, identities, and practices of actors in the construction and real estate sector?*** The construction and real estate sector is undergoing an institutionalisation process, where the increased implementation of employment requirements has created new drivers and logics, new roles and actors, and new practices and competence needs. Going deeper into this process, this thesis has outlined who is working with employment requirements on a strategic level and how they create substance and space for their role through wielding different social identities. It has also described how actors use different rhetorical strategies to promote and disseminate employment requirements and related practices. The thesis has further focused on the daily work of operative-level actors and how they have adopted employment requirements and work with the interns. Finally, the effects from the conflicting institutional logics of traditional procurement and social procurement highlight what strategic-level actors do when they try to create and disseminate employment requirements practices, and how operative-level actors in individual construction projects respond to this.

An institutional lens has enabled a discussion about different types of roles, identities, work, and actors in the construction and real estate sector and their role in creating and disseminating employment requirement practices. The roles and identities of actors in this sector change when employment requirements are used. For many actors who typically identify as someone who does construction or facilities maintenance work, they have now also adopted practices usually found within social work, such as integrating marginalised people into society. This dual identity is necessary for handling the clashing institutional logics of traditional construction procurement and social procurement, but also provides a feeling of resource restraints for the individual actors, where there is ambiguity for their role and for the scope of their responsibilities.

The actors in this thesis – strategic-level, operative-level, and interns – perform different types of “institutional workmanship”. *The strategic-level actors*, also called employment

requirement professionals (ERPs), share many characteristics with institutional entrepreneurs. The strategic-level actors set the agenda for employment requirements by having a projective and future-oriented outlook where they create and disseminate new practices from a top-down perspective. *The operative-level actors* can be described as institutional workers who, in their daily work, try to make employment requirements function and take care of the interns in a practical-evaluative manner. They solve problems on an ad hoc basis and struggle with a lack of resources, but through their engagement they create localised practices that help handle the daily operations of the project of facilities maintenance. *The interns'* role in employment requirements have been somewhat overlooked by both practitioners and in research, but their influence on the work with employment requirements is undeniable. As the interns are unfamiliar with the institutional environment of the construction and real estate sector, they are “institutionally blind”, and thereby lack intentionality to change institutions. Nevertheless, their “strangeness” in the institutional environment leads to a non-conformity to incumbent institutional logics and institutionalised practices. Coupled with their (sometimes) non-participation in internships, the interns have a disruptive effect on employment requirements and associated practices.

Discussions about what type of actor perform which type of institutional work emphasise how all types of institutional work – projective, practical-evaluative and unintentional – are necessary and complementary to create new, and hopefully sustainable, practices related to employment requirements. This insight is useful for practitioners, who can create more well-informed employment requirement practices by identifying each type of actor and their role in creating, shaping, and disseminating employment requirements.

## 7.2 Contributions

By answering the research questions and thereby fulfilling the aim, this thesis provides insights into a scarcely examined phenomenon. The practice and institutional perspective help to theorize and to add context, nuance, and depth to what it means to work with social procurement. This thesis makes several contributions:

**For social procurement research**, and also partly to construction management research, this thesis confirms much of the previous research that exists on social procurement, but extends social procurement knowledge by providing more details about what it really means for organisations, individual actors and their roles, identities and practices to work with employment requirements on a daily basis. The research extends current theorisation about social procurement by not only providing more details on enablers, drivers and barriers for employment requirements, but also a discussion on whom the enablers, drivers and barriers actually affect, as it is not necessarily the same for organisations, strategic-level actors, operative-level actors, and interns. This thesis also offers insights into how the institutional environment of the construction and real estate sector conditions how work is organised

to implement and work with employment requirements. By applying an institutional perspective alongside previous social procurement literature, the theoretical grounding of social procurement becomes stronger and more explicit, exemplified, and contextualised. Such insights are useful both for social procurement research and construction management research (Bresnen, 2017).

**For institutional theory**, this thesis offers insights into and exemplifies how a disruptive institutional logic collides and meshes with incumbent institutional logics in a tightly regulated and institutionalised environment. The thesis also explicates how a sustainable concept may become institutionalised despite considerable inertia through the use of creative institutional work. This insight is important considering how the construction sector is said to be slow to adopt sustainable concepts (Whyte and Sexton, 2011; Loosemore, 2015; Ruparathna and Hewage, 2015), like that of employment requirements and the social procurement logic. Moreover, the thesis illustrates different types of “institutional workmanships” and how these interact. The notion that the different actors involved in making employment requirements happen – that is, the strategic and operative-level actors and the interns themselves – perform different types of institutional workmanship adds valuable insight into what work actually goes into implementing employment requirements, and how this work impacts on professional roles, identities and practices (and vice versa). The thesis also adds to institutional theory by questioning the role of intentionality in conducting institutional work, in terms of what work should be considered institutional or not. This, in turn, points to how institutional work as a theoretical perspective need further development and clarification, as the notion of unintentional work having institutional effects points to unclear aspects of the perspective. Thus, the thesis opens the door to new discussions about the meaning of institutional work, and thereby creates an opportunity to extend current thinking about institutional work. Lastly, the thesis provides new empirical examples further explicating and contextualising institutional work and how different institutional logics can co-exist within a sector, within an organisation, and within an individual actor’s role and identity.

**For practitioners** working in the construction and real estate sector, this thesis highlights what works well and less well in the implementation of employment requirements. The identified barriers constitute a concrete list of areas where adjustments can be made to hopefully enable an effective and efficient creation and dissemination of employment requirements and associated practices. These areas include routines for recruiting interns, integrating interns into organisations and projects, handling the interns’ compensation, deciding the scope of responsibilities for the interns’ supervisors, and follow-up of projects and individual interns. Furthermore, issues with a lack of knowledge, resource restraints, and collaboration difficulties complicate the work with employment requirements. Therefore, it could be beneficial to have one dedicated person, in client organisations, contractor organisations, and in individual projects, who work extensively with

employment requirements, such as recruitment and follow-up of interns, guidance on drawing up contracts and tenders, managing the introduction to individual construction projects, etc. If organisations in the construction and real estate sector want to make employment requirements a taken-for-granted aspect of organisational life, then such investments may be necessary.

For those already working with employment requirements today, the people and practice-centric perspective of this thesis hopefully recognises the struggles that individual actors face when working with employment requirements. By acknowledging their strife and their daily work as important, their roles and practices could become legitimised. Actors within the construction and real estate sector who are interested working with employment requirements can also benefit from identifying institutional entrepreneurs within and outside their organisations who can enact sudden institutional change and help drive the creation, dissemination and integration of employment requirements forward. In addition, practitioners could be well-served by including operative-level actors and interns in the design process of employment requirements. Without their insights, it will become difficult to create sustainable employment requirement practices.

Finally, despite being long-term unemployed and socially excluded, the unemployed can be employable, and some interns do gain permanent employment and move from social exclusion to social inclusion. Having said that, it is still unclear whether the jobs created as an effect of employment requirements are sustainable over time, and how widespread those positive effects really are. Thus, the question remains as to whether the unemployed in general – that is, those without any construction background – have the necessary prerequisites to become employable and contributing members of the construction and real estate sector. If so, how can the sector itself open up to these people? Even if these questions are not answered in this thesis, the quote from a housing officer working with facilities maintenance from the second interview study provides a positive outlook: *“I think it’s great that we’re doing this, that we give these people a chance. We can’t succeed with finding everyone [a permanent job], but we should have the goal that everybody gets employment.”*

### **7.3 Suggestions for future research**

Although this thesis adds new insight and details about working with employment requirements, much remains to be investigated. One avenue for future research would be an international outlook of how social procurement affects individual and collective actors’ work, by investigating the research questions of this thesis in other geographical contexts.

Another area for future research relates to the procurement process. It is unclear how contractors and other suppliers see employment requirements in terms of tender prices, so it would be interesting to investigate whether they increase their prices when employment

requirements are used, or if they maintain their tender prices and instead see the interns as a resource. Such findings could then be compared to how clients interpret their own requirements, and how they perceive that they should be met in tender procedures. Such studies could lead to more efficient and effective procurement procedures and better designed employment requirements.

The findings show how collaboration and coordination is important for working with employment requirements, but that it is often complex. Barraket et al. (2016) claimed that relationships between actors are especially important for legitimising social procurement. Therefore, digging deeper into how operative-level actors working in individual construction projects and subsidiary companies perceive the relationship with their parent organisation and client in terms of support, information, and resources, can point to areas in employment requirement implementation which can be improved. Such research could also contribute insights into how collaboration can help embed new disruptive institutional logics into tightly institutionalised environments (Reay et al. 2017).

In this thesis, I follow other authors (Smets et al. 2012; Smets et al. 2017; Andersson and Gadolin, 2020) in criticising the traditional view within institutional work that, in order for actions to be labelled as institutional work, these must be purposive to create, maintain and disrupt institutions. By showing how “institutionally blind” actors (the interns) still have significant effects on institutions, I argue that the view that institutional work has to be purposive is too narrow and does not fully capture the mundane, daily work that have effects of institutions. Therefore, it would be interesting for future studies to develop the perspective of institutional work, and what it really means in practice.

Finally, future studies could have a longitudinal approach and follow individual interns over a longer period of time. Firstly, such an approach would also mitigate some of the limitations of this thesis, which have not fully captured the perspective of the interns. This could include interviewing those who have undergone an internship via employment requirements and went back into unemployment afterwards, those who have undergone an internship and received permanent employment afterwards, those who have quitted the internship prematurely, and those who have declined an offer of an internship. Secondly, this would mitigate the general problem of lack of follow-up (Harlock, 2013; Barraket et al. 2016; Anxo et al. 2017; Montalbán-Domingo et al. 2018; Lindell, 2020). Thirdly, by including the perspective of the interns, employment requirements can perhaps be improved so that more people are willing to accept and fulfil internships offered via employment requirements. Lastly, such studies could better grasp the intangible social value that social procurement can create beyond the one intern, as well as unveil the finer details of social value creation in practice and over time.

## **8. A final note: My data collection journey and findings as a mirror image**

As a final note, I would like to reflect on how the data collection mirrors the findings of this thesis in respect to resources and the engagement of different actors. In the first interview study, I interviewed people working at a strategic level who were very passionate about employment requirements. Many had proposed their own role and designed their own work practices and went above and beyond their formal work descriptions and responsibility to ‘make employment requirements happen’. They used their influential positions to get management on board and put employment requirements on the agenda (see Paper 2). It was easy getting interviews with these individuals, which is not surprising considering how they can be seen as the institutional entrepreneurs of employment requirements. Perhaps I also served as a way for them to legitimize their work with social procurement internally in their organisations. If research is being conducted on social procurement, this could be seen as a sign that social procurement is worth pursuing. They also served as a first contact point when setting up the second interview study, where they gave me access to projects where I could study the work with employment requirements on a more operative level.

The findings show how many of these operative-level actors care deeply about employment requirements and the interns. They spoke about how they had to go beyond their formal roles and engage in the interns’ personal lives in order to make the internships work, and how this work took away resources for their ordinary construction or facilities maintenance work tasks. Therefore, despite there being enthusiasm also on the operative level, the reality is that it was hard for them because they simply did not have the resources in terms of time (see Paper 4). This also included taking time out of their day to let me interview them. Although it was clear that the operative level interviewees had little time for me, in many cases I perceived that some of the interviewees saw the interview as a chance for them to vent about their job, as well as a tool for them to give feedback to their organisations which they had not been able to do before.

Apart from the three study objects included in the second interview study, I was supposed to include one additional project. I conducted a first round of interviews, before any interns had started in the project, to ask about the operative-level actors’ expectations. The agreement was then that I would come back after the interns had worked in the project for two months to follow-up to see if things turned out as expected. However, after two contact attempts in November 2019, I received a response that it would be difficult for the project to receive me before Christmas. Therefore, after Christmas I made contact again but did not receive any answer at all. Therefore, I chose to exclude the study from the thesis. This happened in other projects as well, where I was initially granted access to do interviews and then could not receive a reply when I tried to schedule the interviews.

I eventually realised that my data collection mirrored my findings: the projects and subsidiary companies, and especially the actors who worked as supervisors of the interns, had very little resources to fully integrate interns into the project and organisation, just like they had little resources to let me conduct interviews. There were of course some differences between operative actors and between projects, but in general I perceived it was easier to get access when speaking to the strategic level interviewees, rather than the operative level interviewees, although everyone was friendly to me. In other words, the enthusiasm and projective grasp of employment requirements among strategic-level actors in the client and parent organisations were mirrored in the generous access given by these actors for my studies. Likewise, the resource and time constraints of the operative-level actors to work with employment requirements and the interns was mirrored in the lack of responses and weaker access for my second interview study. Although this notion was frustrating for me as a researcher, it also, in some ways, helped to triangulate my results.

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## **Paper 1**

Troje, D. and Kadefors, A. (2018) Employment Requirements in Swedish Construction Procurement: Institutional Perspectives. *Journal of Facilities Management*, 16(3), 284–298.



# Employment requirements in Swedish construction procurement – institutional perspectives

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Today, social procurement and requirements to create employment for disadvantaged groups in particular, are increasingly used in the construction sector. The purpose of this paper is to explore the use of employment requirements and its organizational implications in Sweden, and to suggest a possible theoretical approach for studying this phenomenon in the future.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper is based on written sources describing influential Swedish cases where employment requirements have been used, as well as on interviews with central actors in industry and society.

**Findings** – Due to the increased use of employment requirements, the construction industry may currently be experiencing the initial stages of a process of institutional change. This implies that a traditional logic, where value is perceived as a function of the cost and quality of the physical product, is increasingly co-existing and competing with a logic where social value plays an important role.

**Practical implications** – An institutional perspective could enable a rich explication of processes, practices and roles, which might help individual practitioners and organizations to more purposefully work towards a more informed and effective use of employment requirements.

**Originality/value** – This study takes a first step towards increased theorization of the emergent practice of including employment requirements in construction procurement and its organizational implications. Thereby, research on this phenomenon may be more closely related to and informed by relevant developments in the wider academic community.

**Keyword** Construction

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The concept of social procurement is receiving increasing attention in the construction sector. Procurement criteria are no longer only focussing on the traditional goals of delivering a product based on price and quality, but increasingly also on delivering secondary environmental and social objectives (Ruparathna and Hewage, 2015). Social procurement, defined as “the use of purchasing power to create social value” (Barraket and Weissman, 2009, p. 3), encompasses a range of issues and goals relating to various



dimensions of delivering social value. Among these are health and safety, buying from local, small medium or women- or minority-owned businesses, and employment creation for disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities, the disabled or the long-term unemployed (Walker and Brammer, 2012; Zuo *et al.*, 2012; Loosemore, 2016).

In Sweden, social procurement has up to recently not been much used. In the past few years, however, the number of cases where procurement requirements have been used to create employment for disadvantaged groups has increased sharply. There are several reasons for this novel trend. First, Sweden is experiencing problems with social segregation, where immigrants have considerably higher unemployment rates than the domestic population. This segregation is further aggravated by the refugee crisis creating a large inflow of immigrants in 2015 (Bennewitz, 2016). At the same time, the 1960s residential buildings where most immigrants live are in need of refurbishment. Many municipalities and landlords now see opportunities to combine these construction programmes with requirements for suppliers<sup>[1]</sup> to offer employment for the inhabitants (Bennewitz, 2016; Sveriges Byggingustrier, 2016a; Åkerlund, 2016). Further, building in Sweden is expected to boom in the upcoming years, much due to political goals to meet a severe shortage of housing. However, the Swedish construction industry is already today experiencing a shortage of capacity, and a lack of construction workers in particular (Sveriges Byggingustrier, 2016b). The combination of unemployed immigrants, high inflow of new citizens and a high demand for construction work has generated a partly new set of drivers for including employment requirements in procurement. Today, various models for combining construction contracts with employment requirements are used throughout the country. This development, in Sweden as well as internationally, prompts a new set of research questions relating to the effects of these new practices on both industry and society.

In this paper, which is explorative in nature, the Swedish situation is described and discussed in relation to existing international research on employment requirements in construction procurement. In particular, the focus is on the effects of such requirements on organizations in the construction industry. Further, as noted by Walker and Brammer (2012), Amann *et al.* (2014) and Loosemore (2016), the literature on social procurement and employment requirements is mainly descriptive, and there has been little theoretical examination and conceptualization. Thus, another aim is to propose a theoretical framework for analysing and understanding this development more in depth. Institutional theory is examined for this purpose, and the perspectives of institutional logics and institutional work are suggested to be particularly useful. The paper is organized as follows: first, an overview of international literature on social procurement and employment requirements is provided, followed by a description of the methodology. In the next section, the Swedish development is described, based on written sources and interviews with central actors in industry and society. Thereafter follows a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the use of employment requirements in construction procurement, and conclusions.

## Overview of the international literature

### *New perceptions of value in construction procurement*

In an international context, social procurement is not new. McCrudden (2004) mapped linkages between procurement and social policy from the nineteenth century until today and found that social procurement has a long history, especially in the building sector, where employment for disadvantaged groups has been one of the main areas of consideration. Such tendering policies have been used in the USA for a long time, e.g. with affirmative action, and are now, with legislation such as the UK Social Value Act from 2012 and EU directives, increasingly being used throughout Europe (Furneaux and Barraket, 2014). In Australia as well, public construction projects frequently include employment opportunities

for Australian indigenous people (Loosemore, 2016). In general, construction is often perceived as one of the industries more suitable for implementing social procurement in the form of employment requirements (Almahmoud and Doloi, 2015; Sutherland *et al.*, 2015).

Actors in the construction industry seem to embrace the concept of employment requirements in construction procurement to a varying degree. In a combined interview and survey study, Sutherland *et al.* (2015) showed that procuring organizations that engaged in social procurement emphasized the potential to contribute to fulfilling organizational, local and national outcomes and goals, and to encourage innovation in service delivery or to build stronger relationships with contractors and local communities. Similarly, Wright (2015) found that social value can be a part of organizations' corporate social responsibility (CSR), and that many contractors expressed an ethos of helping people in the community.

Looking to the supplier side, Sutherland *et al.*'s (2015) results suggest that contractors are becoming increasingly positive towards social procurement and employment requirements. Accordingly, Zuo *et al.* (2012) interviewed industry professionals about social sustainability and found that contractors are willing to make social considerations in their projects. However, Eadie and Rafferty (2014) showed that construction contractors considered social considerations to be the least important pillar of the triple bottom line, even though the majority of them still perceived that social clauses were somewhat effective in contributing to greater society. The benefits in terms of value for money were however deemed low.

#### *Organizational implications for the construction sector*

Social procurement and employment requirements may potentially have important implications for competence, resources and culture of both procuring organizations and suppliers. On the procurer side, soft non-price criteria are often more complex to define and evaluate than traditional price-related criteria, and therefore raise competence requirements and collaboration needs within client organizations (Sporrong and Kadefors, 2014). A similar relationship between competence and procurement practice has been documented also for employment requirements. Sutherland *et al.* (2015) found that procuring organizations not using employment requirements reported insecurity as to how to manage the requirements, seeing them as too labour and resource intensive. They also experienced uncertainty regarding the legal application of employment requirements, generally lacked a procurer dedicated to employment requirements, and feared that such requirements would impact the price or quality of tendering contractors (Sutherland *et al.*, 2015). Procuring organizations that had used employment requirements were generally more positive and had developed their internal competence in the area. For example, more than half of them had a specific procurer being responsible for the employment requirements (Sutherland *et al.*, 2015). Further, Wright (2015) found that the UK Social Value Act from 2012 not only regulated that social considerations should be made but also spurred a more consistent approach from clients on social value requirements and monitoring.

As for the impact on processes and management systems on the supplier side, the study by Sutherland *et al.* (2015) showed that working with such requirements now has become "business as usual" for many contractors in Scotland, thus supporting Wright's (2015) findings of a more consistent approach to social procurement also for the supplier side. In fact, Sutherland *et al.* (2015) found that many contractors were anticipating and preparing for increased use of employment requirements by hiring dedicated social procurement coordinators, adopting employment requirements in relation with their subcontractors and by involving support office functions to also work with employment

creation and to collect data on requirement delivery and impact for future tenders. Eadie and Rafferty (2014) further found that contractors felt that social considerations had internal beneficial effects on personnel aspects, such as lower absenteeism and improved productivity.

Another effect of increased use of social procurement is the emergence of new types of firms. For example, one way to fulfil employment requirements is through contracting social enterprises, which are hybrid organizations that have dual goals of social and financial sustainability. In the UK and Australia, social enterprises are growing in numbers (Barraket and Weissman, 2009; Loosemore, 2015), and many of them offer services such as construction work, waste management or facilities management (Loosemore, 2015, 2016).

In sum, previous studies suggest that increased use of social procurement and employment requirements has led to new perceptions of value among actors in the construction industry, and that these initiatives have had organizational implications such as new roles, organizations, practices and relationships. However, the industry is generally perceived as lagging behind other sectors in their implementation and experimentation with socially responsible concepts (Whyte and Sexton, 2011; Loosemore, 2015), and construction clients are on the whole not considered strong in promoting sustainability (Ruparathna and Hewage, 2015). Opoku and Ahmed (2014) found that leaders in construction organizations feel that a main challenge for implementing sustainability measures is increased cost, and that clients still tend to emphasize lowest price rather than social considerations in their procurement. Still, the recent and ongoing developments towards an increased emphasis on social sustainability, and on employment requirements in particular, could indicate that there is a beginning shift in how the value and purpose of construction-related activities are perceived in the industry. Having said that, the literature review showed that research on the use and effects of employment requirements in construction is still quite scarce.

### Methodology

To give an overview of Swedish practices today and of how the development in the area of employment requirements in construction procurement is unfolding, a mixed method approach, comprising a desk-based case study and an explorative interview study, was chosen. Combining methods and data generally provides further reliability of results through triangulation (Jick, 1979). In this empirical field, where development is recent and data are scant, an exploratory study is justified as a starting point for further research. A combination of literature-based, secondary data and first-hand interview data allows for a wider range of the available data to be included in the analysis. The downside and limitation is that data quality control and systemization of data collection are compromised compared to a study based on first-hand data only.

Three Swedish cases where employment requirements have been used in construction projects were selected for a focussed desk-based literature study. All three cases are pilot examples and were chosen because of their importance in the Swedish context, which is related both to their geographic context (Cases 2 and 3 are located in large cities) and to the availability of secondary data such as reports and articles in industry magazines (especially Case 1). Further, both public and private sector clients are represented. Cases 1 and 2 were accounted for in an anthology about research in social sustainability in Swedish housing refurbishment edited by Lind and Mjörnell (2015). Case 1, a public housing company in a medium-size Swedish town, was described in the chapter by Ghadban *et al.* (2015) and Case 2, a private housing

company in Sweden's third largest city, was described in the chapters by [Hauksson et al. \(2015\)](#) and [Balkfors et al. \(2015\)](#). Other sources for the first case were an evaluation report focussing on the social value of the project ([Nilsson and Nilsson Lundmark, 2016](#)) and an article from industry press ([Bennewitz, 2016](#)). Case 3 was selected as it is a major initiative in the second largest city in Sweden and therefore will influence a large number of procurements, and also because it complements the two first cases in that it applies to all municipal procurement and not only to housing refurbishment. This third case is more recent and has been less studied. Thus, our main sources for the case description are municipal websites. As the models and available information vary between cases, the structure and contents of the descriptions vary, but all address the two themes of the international literature overview: "new perceptions of value" and "organizational implications".

The second part of the study is based on explorative interviews. Previous studies of the chosen cases have focussed mainly on socio-economic effects and benefits of social procurement and employment requirements, and not on organizational aspects. To capture a wide picture of the emerging practice of using employment requirements in Sweden today and to get a deeper understanding of organizational implications, an interview study was conducted in May-October 2016. The study consisted of six semi-structured interviews with eight respondents, representing actors from both the client and the supplier side ([Table I](#)). The respondents were chosen due to their experience in working with employment requirements and their central positions within their organizations and in industry. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 1.5 and 3 h. The interview data have been organized and analysed according to three themes, where the first corresponds to the first theme from the literature review, and the last two corresponds to the second theme from the literature review:

- drivers and perceived value;
- organizations and roles; and
- practices and competences.

### Three Swedish pilot cases of employment requirements

#### *Case 1: a public housing company*

A renovation project in Örebro, Sweden, is one of Sweden's most talked-about social procurement construction projects ([Bennewitz, 2016](#)). In 2013, the public housing company Örebrobostäder established a four-year strategic partnership with the contractor Skanska and the Employment Agency to renovate an underprivileged neighbourhood, which suffered from high unemployment. The housing company received funding from a national urban development organization to find new solutions and practices for ecological, social and economic sustainability. The aims of this project were to:

Organization	Role
Municipal procurement company	Municipal officer
Municipal premises office	Purchasing officer
Large Swedish public housing company No. 1	Purchasing manager
Large Swedish public housing company No. 2	Head of procurement and two strategic procurement officers
Large Swedish contractor No. 1	National sustainability manager
Large Swedish contractor No. 2	Development leader for social sustainability

**Table I.**  
Respondents in  
interview study

- provide unemployed tenants with work opportunities through internships and employment within either Skanska, the housing company, or some other project partner;
- to provide education and language training with the aid from the Employment Agency; and
- to gain knowledge about how to work with social sustainability and recruitment in future projects (Ghadban *et al.*, 2015).

The project was designed so that the Employment Agency helped recruit tenants and paid for the internship period, while Skanska demanded that each project member (including subcontractors and consultants) hired at least one intern, who could be offered employment after internships ended. In addition, training was organized for those responsible for supervising the interns. Skanska already has additional employment initiatives like leadership programmes for immigrant engineers, but according to the sustainability manager of Skanska, the main takeaway from the project was deeper learning about social sustainability and increased insight into how to recruit new employees (Ghadban *et al.*, 2015). Half-way through the project in 2015, Nilsson and Nilsson Lundmark (2016) conducted a study to calculate the socio-economic effects of the employment requirements. They found that 50 people had gained internships, where 18 had gained permanent employment. Even though the social investments, mainly comprising costs for wage subsidies, training and supervision, were estimated to 350,000 EUR, the long-term societal benefits were valued to approximately 11m EUR in future increased tax payments and decreased welfare costs.

#### *Case 2: a private housing company*

To promote the new economic, environmental and social sustainability agenda of the City of Malmö, the City has held workshops with major housing companies. In response, the private housing company Trianon decided to build new housing and renovate part of its housing stock in a disadvantaged neighbourhood using employment requirements. The neighbourhood struggled with low education levels, low income and high unemployment among tenants. The housing company collaborated with the consultancy firm WSP, who provided support for management of the employment requirements. The housing company, assisted by the Employment Agency, demanded that the main contractor, PEAB, would hire ten people per year for four years in the project. If they would fail to comply they would receive fines of approximately 10,000 EUR. Also, subcontractors were required to hire at least one to two people (Balkfors *et al.*, 2015; Hauksson *et al.*, 2015).

Moreover, the City of Malmö granted the housing company a 10-year discount on their ground leasing costs for as long as the company continues to contribute to employment creation. Thereby, the City of Malmö traded short-term profits in the form of leasing revenues for long-term tax revenues from the newly employed. In addition, the municipality helped the company to successfully apply for EU funds to decrease energy use in the housing stocks (Balkfors *et al.*, 2015). For the housing company, the City of Malmö's sustainability agenda was thus translated into a commercially driven initiative. Further, when tenants earn wages, education and experience through working in the project, rent payments are ensured. Also, now when the property's janitors are living in the neighbourhood, vandalism decreased, further raising the value of the housing stock (Hauksson *et al.*, 2015).

To launch this project, the new collaborations involving the housing company, the consultancy firm, different institutions within the City of Malmö and the Employment Agency were important. Furthermore, many organizations had to forgo their normal work practices to help the housing company realize the project. For example, the housing company had to approach construction procurement in new ways, the contractors had to accommodate

increased education needs for the newly employed, and different government organizations such as the Employment Agency and Social Services had to develop coordination practices between the different organizations (Balkfors *et al.*, 2015; Hauksson *et al.*, 2015).

### *Case 3: a municipality*

The City of Gothenburg has a social procurement policy emphasizing social integration, employment creation, fair work and fair employment contracts. Since 2014, the City has set the goal that 50 per cent of all publicly procured products and services should include social requirements in the form of employment requirements. However, such requirements have to date mostly been used for construction contracts (The City of Gothenburg, 2016a), and especially by public housing companies requiring that their tenants are employed in the projects (Svensson, 2015). Requirements should prioritize groups that are far from the labour market and collect welfare, like local immigrants, youths, and disabled (The City of Gothenburg, 2016a). These workers should preferably be hired on short-term employment contracts rather than internships (The City of Gothenburg, 2016a). Targeted projects should last for at least four months, and all eligible projects should recruit one prioritized person per ten employees (The City of Gothenburg, 2016b).

Based on the results and suggestions of a social procurement pilot study, conducted by the City of Gothenburg during 2013-2015 (The City of Gothenburg, 2016a), a municipal support function has been established to coordinate and support:

- the procuring client organization;
- the suppliers; and
- the unit responsible for recruitment, which consists of different labour market actors such as the Employment Agency.

The support function and these three units work together to forecast recruitment opportunities and needs, design employment requirements, find and educate possible recruits, follow-up on recruits, etc. However, as additional support the main contractors are required to have a dedicated HR professional responsible for employment requirements, and the municipal support function has hired new communicators to help educate clients and suppliers in social procurement (The City of Gothenburg, 2016b). The results and suggestions of the study are currently being evaluated (The City of Gothenburg, 2016a).

### **Interview data**

The interviews provided in-depth information and practitioner views about key areas of concern in the construction industry: new drivers and perceived value, new organizations and roles and new practices and competencies. These areas, and related problems, are described below.

#### *Drivers and perceived value*

All respondents stressed the huge societal cost of unemployment and the subsequent costs of criminality, and how society at large would benefit from an increased use of employment requirements. The representative from the Municipal Procurement Company stated that:

[. . .] everyone benefits from employment requirements. We (citizens) are all paying for it in one way or the other. Either we pay through company taxes, or through our individual wage taxes.

However, all respondents particularly emphasized the commercial benefits associated with employment requirements. First, the value of housing properties increases when tenants

gain employment and rent payments are ensured. The representative from the first public housing company explained how the children of these families often get better grades and are able to complete their high school education to a larger extent when their parents are employed. Employment rates and graduation rates positively impact the value of housing stocks. Second, hiring tenants as janitors has decreased vandalism, saving the housing companies money in facility management costs. However, most respondents experience a lack of tangible figures and statistics about the societal and commercial benefits of employment requirements. The representative from the first contractor, for example, claimed that *“there has to be key performance indicators, you have to be able to measure and follow up, but we’re not there yet, because this is so new”*. The respondents believe that such figures are necessary for proving how employment requirements can provide greater value for money than using traditional procurement criteria, which may convince those in the construction industry who are still sceptical about employment requirements.

Something that is increasingly discussed in industry is that the Swedish construction industry is facing a severe resource shortage. This lack of construction workers and tradesmen was by far the most emphasized driver among respondents, as both client and contractor representatives were explicitly worried about how to meet the expected increase in building volumes. The representative from the first housing company explained how they are not receiving tenders for all their projects, and the representative from the first contractor confirmed that they are often unable to provide tenders for public contracts due to lack of capacity, and lose potential income in the process. Therefore, some contractors find employment requirements to be a good way to access a new pool of potential employees. The representative from the first contractor said that *“we want to reflect how society looks at large, and employment requirements then create a good basis for recruitment”*. Still, most respondents acknowledge that the benefits for housing companies are more direct and easier to grasp, while drivers for many other actors, like suppliers and other construction clients, are weaker.

All respondents expressed that employment requirements are here to stay, and the representative from the first housing company said that:

If I go and ask our contractors and say that employment requirements benefit our property values [ . . . ] and ask if they 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.

As such, the respondents conclude that suppliers must be ready to embrace employment requirements, and the representative from the second contractor emphasize that being proactive in this respect could lead to competitive advantage in a procurement situation:

[ . . . ] to create commercial value is our main task as a private company, while others are talking about creating public value. But our goal is to find the overlap between the two.

### *Organizations and roles*

As shown in the cases, new private organizations are emerging in response to increased use of employment requirements. For example, new firms see potential business opportunities in offering recruitment services, by identifying and then supplying unemployed workers to construction projects. However, even though some respondents have used such organizations previously, they generally prefer working with the Employment Agency, whose legitimacy and long-term perspective is well established.

The respondents agree that some sort of support organization is necessary for implementing employment requirements in a successful way, even though there are differing views on what the role of this support organization should be in terms of scope, responsibilities and public or private affiliation. The representative from the Municipal Premises Office emphasized that the experience of working with employment requirements is still lacking on both the client and supplier side, and said that:

[...] in the long run a support function must be expanded, and be strengthened and further legitimized. Because if I would say to a contractor that we are using employment requirements, and there are ten Employment Agency offices in this city, and then you can call the different social welfare offices, which also have different administrators. Who would think this would work? The contractors would give up.

It is not only organizations that are being reshaped and created due to employment requirements but also individual roles within already established organizations. The respondents on both the client and contractor side describe how there have been several new positions responsible for social procurement and employment requirements created over the past couple of years in their respective organizations to accommodate the increased interest in social initiatives, and that existing roles have changed to include new responsibilities focussed on employment requirements. The representatives from both contractors explained how their respective organizations had created new positions and units dedicated exclusively to working strategically with social procurement and employment requirements. The representative from the second contractor explained that:

1.5 years ago we did not even know that we would have internal social criteria, and since then we have developed them, so my role has changed a lot. Since then we have developed our practices.

#### *Practices and competencies*

Besides the role changes described by the respondents, there are also changes in how organizations work. The respondents all emphasize how collaboration is important for successful implementation of employment requirements, and that actors in the construction industry have to collectively embrace the use of employment requirements. The representative from the second contractor stated that:

Work practices have to be further developed, and that takes time. That is why collaboration between several actors is needed, but it is not always so easy. We have a very good example with the Employment Agency in one city, where they have done exceptional work and helped us so much and ensured that the results are very successful. But I also have horror stories from another case where the project has gone through 15 contact persons at the Employment Agency within a year. You can understand the lack of continuity.

The respondents, who represent different organizations both on the supplier and client side, and are geographically dispersed throughout Sweden, work with employment requirements in very different ways. The representative from the second contractor explains that:

It is an obvious problem. The clients are not in agreement on work practices, because we are talking about 290 municipalities with multiple public organizations, counties, and private clients. So, there are no common guidelines on how we should benefit or how we should do it [...] This collaboration must work between different actors [...] So, there is much left to build and develop and frame.

Although the respondents agree on many aspects, there are different views on a number of practical issues, including the appropriate form of contract, the necessity of evaluation and follow-up, if support functions should be government organizations or private, whether

employment requirements should be formulated as qualification criteria or be subject to negotiation and whether it is unfair or beneficial that main contractors transfer the employment requirements to their subcontractors. The respondents suggest that these differing views on how to practically implement, evaluate and design employment requirements are due to a lack of collective knowledge about employment requirements. They all perceived competencies about how to best work with employment requirements to be lacking in their own and in their partners', peers' and competitors' organizations, leading to a diverse set of new practices throughout Sweden. The representative from the Municipal Premises Office concluded that:

[...] to succeed you must be pragmatic in your approach: how can we find new solutions together? But people have been sceptical, closed. So how do we meet in the middle?.

The representatives from the first housing company and second contractor both use the term "test arena" when referring to the multitude of approaches and experimentation charactering the current situation.

### Discussion

Previous research and the three Swedish cases showed that there are different drivers for using employment requirements. These drivers ranged from reducing unemployment, reducing welfare costs and learning about employment requirements, to lower maintenance costs, opportunities for recruitment and commercial profit (Balkfors *et al.*, 2015; Ghadban *et al.*, 2015; Hauksson *et al.*, 2015; Loosemore, 2015; Sutherland *et al.*, 2015; The City of Gothenburg, 2016a; Wright, 2015; Nilsson and Nilsson Lundmark, 2016). The interview data corroborated many of these drivers, but the Swedish cases and interviews, more strongly than the international studies, emphasize the opportunities for commercial benefits of employment requirements.

The international literature also indicated that new roles, relationships and practices are taking form. Sutherland *et al.* (2015) describe how Scottish contractors and suppliers are changing their business to accommodate the increasing use on employment requirements, a development that the Swedish cases and interview data also show. New positions and units have been created in client and supplier organizations, and existing consultancy firms and HR functions develop new services and competences. Moreover, previous literature described how social enterprises are changing the way businesses are usually managed and perceived, creating a new type of role and collaboration partner in the construction industry (Loosemore, 2015, 2016). Similar patterns can be found in the three Swedish cases and in the interview data, where existing actors, primarily municipalities, housing companies, the Employment Agency and suppliers, collaborate in new, closer ways, for example by developing new coordination practices, by approaching the procurement process in a different way and by accommodating increased education needs for the newly employed. Also, although social enterprises are still quite rare in Sweden, other types of new actors are established, such as recruitment agencies and other support functions.

All respondents in this study have all been favourable to employment requirements, but they also mention numerous practical difficulties, such as lack of evaluation practices, design of requirements, insufficient knowledge and differing views and practices in general, which can be seen in previous research as well (Eadie and Rafferty, 2014; Sutherland *et al.*, 2015). Such practical difficulties may partly explain why some practitioners might feel hesitation towards employment requirements.

In sum, the three Swedish pilot cases and interviews reflect findings on employment requirements from previous research, but also point at further developments and additional complexities in the field. The following section discusses how institutional theory could add to our understanding of how these new practices are being added to and merged with traditional construction procurement.

### Employment requirements as an institutionalization process

There are few in-depth studies on social procurement and employment requirements, and those that exist are mainly descriptive and not strongly orientated towards theoretical development. This does not only apply to construction but also to social procurement in general, where several authors have pointed at a general lack of conceptualization and limited theoretical examination (Walker and Brammer, 2012; Amann *et al.*, 2014; Loosemore, 2016). Also, even though social procurement has a high profile on the policy level, there is little knowledge of how social procurement policies in general are implemented and embedded in daily procurement practices among procurement professionals worldwide (McCrudden, 2004; Walker and Brammer, 2012).

Looking to potential theories that might help to understand and theorize employment requirements and its organizational implications, the institutional perspective is one of the most used approaches in organizational studies. One reason for its popularity is claimed to be its usefulness in understanding organizational and societal processes (Lawrence *et al.*, 2011). Two distinct areas within the institutional perspective that could be especially pertinent for theorizing employment requirements are institutional logics and institutional work.

In any organization or field there are institutional logics, or sets of “material practices and symbolic constructions” (Friedland and Alford, 1991) which shape meanings and legitimacy, determine issues and solutions, and impact on change (Thornton, 2002). Institutional logics have been studied in a vast range of empirical environments, and the theory presupposes that there is an institutional context that both constrains behaviour and provides agency, and that this environment can be used to understand individual, organizational, and industry behaviour (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). Several institutional logics may co-exist in parallel for a long time, and change often originates in conflicts and contradictions between such different institutional logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991).

The literature review, three Swedish cases and interview data show that employment requirements frequently lead to a development of new actors, roles, business models and relationships. There are already changes in competence profiles for various actors in the industry, both private and public, in Sweden as well as internationally. When construction projects are increasingly seen as a vehicle for achieving secondary objectives and change in wider society, this could be seen as a change in institutional logics, where the industry is potentially moving from a logic focussed on delivering physical buildings and construction services based on the lowest price, to incorporating additional objectives of delivering social value and services to communities. This view was clearly expressed by the representative from the second contractor, and central functions within both contractor companies are very aware of the business opportunities related to these new requirements and services. The situation is similar on the client side, where interviewed clients emphasize the need to convince others in their organizations about the profit of such requirements.

A process of experimentation and learning is currently taking place, and the term “test arena” was explicitly used by respondents. Different approaches to employment requirements are tested in different contexts and with various results. It is interesting to follow this development and see which models become more influential, and also whether these new practices will impact more profoundly on the culture of the industry, which has historically been struggling to fully embrace more sustainable concepts (Whyte and Sexton, 2011; Loosemore, 2015; Ruparathna and Hewage, 2015). An important issue is how knowledge created at central units of organizations, in projects, and in individual municipalities, is disseminated to affect attitudes and practices in the wider organizations and between regions. Today, learning processes in this field are scattered and often informal, as there is a lack of neutral resources and institutions to support systematic knowledge development.

In an institutional perspective, changes in institutional logics could be instigated by professionals performing work related to procurement and construction, who then could be seen as simultaneously conducting institutional work. The theory of institutional work is concerned with how actors work on a day-to-day basis and how they purposively and actively change, maintain, destroy or create institutional structures in which they work and live, and how this constructs their relationships, roles and habits (Lawrence *et al.*, 2011). An institutional work perspective could be useful when not only studying the process of implementing employment requirements on the level of individual projects and companies but also for understanding the role and actions of important actors on the industry level.

In effect, not all individuals and organizations are equally influential in creating, maintaining or disrupting institutions. According to Battilana (2006), institutions and their subsequent norms, rules and processes provide different levels of control and access to resources, which means that depending on actors' social stature in the institutional environment, they have more or less power and legitimacy, and are more or less willing or able to influence institutions (Battilana, 2006; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). In the case of employment requirements, it is still somewhat unclear which are the most important actors. However, there are indications that especially large housing companies have the leverage and ability to justify using employment requirements, as this is so obviously related to their business model. The representative from the first public housing company, for example, bluntly stated that they will continue to use employment requirements, and that contractors who want to work with public clients will have to accept this. The emphasis in Sweden on commercial drivers and benefits indicates that such arguments are perceived as stronger and more effective in instigating change than for example CSR agendas.

### Conclusions

This study, based on both desk-based literature data and explorative interview data, has showed how an increased use of employment requirements in Swedish construction procurement is related to new drivers and perceived values. Not only do municipalities decrease welfare costs, but there seems to be some kind of value for many actors in the organizations construction industry in using employment requirements. For housing companies, rent payments are ensured and property values increase when tenants are employed, and also their property maintenance costs are reduced when vandalism decreases. For suppliers, commercial benefits are primarily related to recruitment. Contractors who are able to access new groups of employees can increase production capacity and potential profit. Further, being proactive in embracing employment requirements may increase the competitive advantage of a contractor when such aspects are reflected in procurement criteria.

The results indicate that there is an ongoing process of institutional change, driven by a combination of public value and commercial interests. New organizations and roles dedicated exclusively to employment requirements have been created and existing roles are frequently modified. New procurement strategies and related business models have emerged, as well as new collaborative practices. This deinstitutionalization further implies that a traditional logic, where value is perceived as a function of the cost and quality of the physical product, is increasingly co-existing and competing with a logic where services and social value related to the construction process play important roles.

Looking through an institutional perspective, these changing institutional logics are shaped by industry actors and their ongoing institutional work. Jointly, the perspectives of institutional logics and institutional work capture changes and processes on both an individual and a collective level, and can help explicate and conceptualize the meanings and wider effect of these changes. By adopting an institutional perspective, studies of on this

phenomenon – which up to now have primarily been descriptive – may be more closely related to and informed by relevant developments in the wider academic community. Moreover, when something new and complex, like employment requirements, is introduced in a traditional and strongly institutionalized context such as the construction industry, this is bound to either affect existing institutional structures or to remain isolated initiatives with little or no wider impact. An institutional perspective can thus be useful for also understanding general mechanisms of institutional change and inertia in the industry.

Future studies with an institutional focus should more systematically map the development of new roles and practices over time, as well as difficulties and success factors. Possibly, certain models of employment requirements could be related to certain drivers and logics, as drivers, roles and practices are interdependent. This would lead to a better understanding of the nature of the new business models and relationships for different types of construction actors. In addition, it is important to study how the growing body of experiences from using employment requirements influences the wider policy arena, which in turn will impact future practice in the field. Important insights could be gained by looking into other industries, and by comparative studies of the use of employment requirements in various countries, differing in terms of legislation, procurement practices and social and cultural history.

This study has been explorative in nature and partly based on secondary data. Future research needs to address these limitations by performing more comprehensive and systematic empirical studies of projects and organizations. Thus, surveys should include a larger number of respondents representing a wider range of practitioners, also subcontractors and consultants, and deeper first-hand case studies of organizations and projects should be carried out.

As previously noted, research on employment requirements is scarce. Also, the use of employment requirements in construction projects is just beginning to make headway, and from a practice point of view, there is still much to learn regarding how to implement this concept. Today, a plethora of different models is used throughout Sweden, and the many opinions of what constitutes best practice create difficulties for efficiently implementing employment requirements. Research on employment requirements can contribute to construction industry practice by providing systematic analysis and evaluation of experiences gained by using different models, also enabling a richer explication of new processes, practices and roles. This would provide showcases for how to successfully and efficiently implement employment requirements, thereby assisting practitioners to more purposely and actively change their roles and practices towards more informed and effective practices. The findings can also contribute to policy by emphasizing the need for overview and guidelines for introducing employment requirements in construction procurement.

#### Note

1. Supplier = contractors, subcontractors and consultants operating in the construction industry.

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## Paper 2

Troje, D. and Gluch, P. (2020) Populating the Social Realm: New Roles Arising from Social Procurement. *Construction Management and Economics*, 38(1), 55–70.



## Populating the social realm: new roles arising from social procurement

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### ABSTRACT

Employment requirements, as part of social procurement, are increasingly used in construction procurement as a tool to mitigate issues of exclusion on the job market. To create a better understanding how employment requirements nurtures a new type of actor, here named the “employment requirement professional” (ERP), the aim of this paper is to study how this role is framed in terms of work practices and professional identity. Building on 21 semi-structured interviews in the Swedish construction sector, a detailed account of who works with employment requirements, how and why they conduct their work is provided. The findings show how ERPs mediate between contrasting interests when they create new social procurement roles and practices; how they enact different approaches to promote social sustainability, how their roles are formed by multiple and reciprocal lines of actions, and how they make sense of who they are and what type of work they engage in. The research contributes to a discussion on effects from social procurement in construction and the emergence of a new professional role, their identity and work practices.

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### Introduction

Like many other European countries, Sweden is struggling with social exclusion – “a multidimensional disadvantage that can occur in many areas of life such as education, work, employment, housing and social participation” (Brännström 2004, p. 2516) – where some urban areas are characterized by unemployed or low-income citizens, rundown housing in need of refurbishment (Olsson *et al.* 2015) and tenants that cannot afford rent increases due to extensive refurbishment investment (Jonsson *et al.* 2017, Olsson *et al.* 2015). There are groups of people having problems entering the job market, such as refugees (Lundborg 2013, Bratsberg *et al.* 2014, Åslund *et al.* 2017) and disabled individuals (OECD 2010). At the same time, there is an increasing lack of construction workers, making it difficult for contractors to submit tenders for the required refurbishment projects, as they have too few construction workers available (Bennewitz 2017). In an attempt to address issues related to these challenges, municipal and private organizations (such as housing companies) see possibilities to implement *employment requirements* in their procurement processes.

Employment requirements, as a representation of *social procurement*, are tender award criteria used as means to create employment opportunities for people that have difficulties to enter the job market through, for example, internships or (temporary) employment in construction projects (Lind and Mjörnell 2015). When it comes to social criteria, in a content analysis of 451 tender documents from 10 countries, Montalbán-Domingo *et al.* (2019) found that social criteria relating to the employment of vulnerable groups are the second most common social criteria used in public construction procurement after criteria relating to health and safety. They also found that globally, social criteria are increasingly used (Montalbán-Domingo *et al.* 2019).

Employment requirements are a new type of criteria in the sense that it focuses on something less related to the physical object of the procurement; thus employment issues rather than the building (Petersen 2018). Moreover, social procurement – which Barraket and Weissman (2009, p. iii) describe as: “*the use of purchasing power to create social value*” – is a social sustainability concept that involves measures

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related to health and safety, buying from women-owned and minority-owned businesses, and employment creation for disadvantaged groups. When procurement is used in a strategic manner as means to meet not only financial goals but also social goals, this has organizational effects for the sector and its actors, with changing roles and work practices as consequences (Barraket *et al.* 2016, Petersen 2018, Troje and Kadefors 2018).

Although social procurement as a concept is new in many countries, procurement has been used to reach social objectives and to influence employment relationships for a long time. Social procurement in relation to employment has covered everything from stipulating working hours and fair wages, offering employment to disabled World War I veterans in the UK, affirmative action for African Americans in the US in the 1960's, and the treatment of aboriginal populations in Canada (McCrudden 2004). Studies on social procurement related to employment have for example focused on benefitting local, small, or minority-owned businesses (Walker and Preuss 2008, Loader 2013, Loosemore and Denny-Smith 2016) and there are a number of studies that investigate social enterprises (Loosemore 2016). However, even though social procurement is emphasized as important in both business and politics and also in research, this field suffers from weak theorization, conceptualization and empirical investigation (Walker and Brammer 2012, Barraket *et al.* 2016, Loosemore 2016).

Very few studies focus on (professional) roles related to the development of employment requirements. One exception is Sutherland *et al.* (2015), who, based on a survey of individual public contracts, found that both construction clients and contractors in Scotland have begun to create new roles solely dedicated to working with employment requirements (community benefit clauses). Another example is Murphy and Eadie (2019) who approach social procurement as a social service innovation that enables creating social value in the form of employment opportunities. Social procurement deviates from traditional work practices as it delivers additional social value which lies outside of the contractor's area of expertise. As a consequence, they found that new roles, like community benefit managers, were increasingly hired to work with social procurement. In their research, they also saw that contractors adopted a person-centric approach, where practices were tailored for each project context in order to ensure that the "right" social value was created.

Employment requirements are thus for many a novel and complex type of criteria that need new competencies. To build competences related to employment requirements, construction clients have assigned the responsibility for employment requirements to specific procurers; contractors have established new employment requirement coordinators in their organizations and many existing professional roles now have extended responsibilities related to employment requirements (Sutherland *et al.* 2015). Moreover, discussing the current state of social procurement research and governance structures, Barraket *et al.* (2016, p. 51) claim that social procurement has become a "distinct domain of practice"; a domain likely to become an institutional field of its own. Built on empirical studies in several organizational settings the authors argue that when multiple actors work towards a common goal, such as creating social value through procurement, this collective work may become normative. This means that in a yet-to-be-fixed institutional field of social procurement, traditional roles might become contested, negotiated or reified, leading to new roles being created. Additionally, it leads to an establishment of new roles in the construction sector; that is, a new set of actors that populate the social realm of construction (Sutherland *et al.* 2015, Barraket *et al.* 2016, Troje and Kadefors 2018, Murphy and Eadie 2019). Moreover, by developing frameworks or templates for how to conduct social procurement, practices can become established despite the absence of institutional norms and rules within the field (Barraket *et al.* 2016). Being emergent rather than fully institutionalized, roles and relationships between actors become important elements in the process of legitimizing social procurement. Thus, studies of new social procurement roles and practices are important in order to investigate the ongoing development of social sustainability.

To use the construction sector as an empirical context when studying employment requirements is highly relevant, as the sector has been targeted as a suitable sector for implementing social procurement practices (Sutherland *et al.* 2015). Moreover, professionals often have a leading role in the creation of institutions (Scott, 2008), it is, therefore, reasonable to assume that social procurement professionals are important carriers of a social sustainability agenda in the sector. Studying identities is an established way understand and theorize processes of organizing and Brown (2019) suggests that identity studies should be more present within the sub-fields of organizational theory, like in the case of this paper, construction management research.

The aim of the study is to create a better understanding of how social procurement nurtures new types of actors and vice versa. In order to fulfil this aim, new professional roles created in relation to social procurement and employment requirements are studied. This includes studying how these “employment requirement professionals” (ERPs) define their role and make sense of who they are in relation to social sustainability and what type of work they engage in. The study contributes to a discussion on roles and identities in construction management, but mainly aims to add empirical and theoretical knowledge to the field of social procurement as well as to social sustainability in construction.

The paper is structured as follows: First, the introduction has presented a review of previous research on social procurement practices, which explains the phenomenon and establishes a context for the study. This is followed by the theoretical framework, defining the concepts of *professional identity*, *role* and *work practices* and also providing an overview of previous studies that theorize new professional roles in the construction sector. Together this provides the analytical lens through which the problem is understood. After this the method is outlined, followed by the findings. The paper closes with a discussion, conclusions and suggestions for future research.

## Theoretical framework

Drawing upon studies of changing roles in other fields and in connection to other phenomena help to illustrate the emergence of a wider social procurement practise. Creating an increased understanding of how new roles related to social procurement are shaped in practice, and vice versa, follows a vein of research in construction management that emphasizes the need for interpretive studies on professional identities and roles as means to deepen our understanding of processes and outcomes related to sustainable development and change in construction (Hughes and Hughes 2013, Brown and Phua 2011).

### Defining professional identity, role and work practices

In line with a generic definition of identity as the personal characteristics by which a person is recognized and known, Styhre (2012) describes *professional identity* as the:

totality of images of the self and norms and beliefs related to such images that guide and structure everyday practices and behaviours [at work], helping

the actor to cope with both demands and expectations articulated by others in a domain of professional practice. (Styhre 2012, p. 634)

Individuals actively strive to make sense of their work life, and by this, a double-sided impact is recognized (Gioia *et al.* 2010), where practice influences identity creation and vice versa. Here the construct of role has been suggested as a meaning-creating device and as an inherently incomplete and emergent intermediary in identity construction processes (Simpson and Carroll 2008). In this view, professional identities do not exist *per se*, they are social constructs shaped in practice through ongoing social processes of interactions between individuals, technology, artefacts and the institutional context in which they are embedded (Brown and Phua 2011, Styhre 2012). This approach challenges the traditional view that roles are presumed as relatively stable and settled in contractual agreements and/or dictated in cultural relations (Georg and Tryggestad 2009).

In a sociological sense, the term *role* is used to express a social behaviour that is expected from a particular social category and indicates status or positions in formal systems (Lynch 2007). In such a perspective, roles are associated with identified social positions where normative expectations generate roles, which may vary among individuals as they reflect formal demands and/or pressure from informal groups (*ibid.*). Expectations of a specific role may vary greatly and are continuously determined by its relation to other roles. Although pre-defined roles may exist, individuals also select to which extent they may take on, adopt or reject a specific role (Simpson and Carroll 2008).

Professionals are defined by their *work practices*, i.e. what they do (Pratt *et al.* 2006). In understanding the roles and identities of professionals, it is, therefore, important to investigate what they do in terms of their work tasks. Characteristics of professionals are strong emotional engagement in their work and a high sense of responsibility for taken decisions and behaviour (Mieg 2009). In literature, it is often suggested that professionals’ work practice includes knowledge-based problem-solving skills, high independence and judgement skills, conformance to codes of ethics and that they occupy a specific competence or expertise area (Styhre 2011). The discourse on competence includes formalized knowledge, various skills, attitudes and personal characteristics related to work performance. However, the work tasks of professionals are also in a continuous and iterative process that is simultaneously affected by the professionals themselves and/or formed through proxies such as various

educational programs aimed at specific professional groups or various professional institutions (Brown and Phua 2011). In Sweden, the self-identification among managers within the construction, regardless of their functions and responsibilities, is less bound towards educational programmes and instead often relates to an idealized role of someone that knows “how to build” (Styhre 2012, Löwstedt and Räisänen 2014).

### ***Studies on professional identities and roles in a construction context***

Actors can adopt several contradictory roles and social identities simultaneously, albeit with varying success (Bévort and Suddaby 2016, Abdelnour *et al.* 2017). For example, Abdelnour *et al.* (2017) talk about “modular individuals” to emphasize that individuals embrace different roles, abilities and social skills, where these different “modules” enable individuals to take part in many collective groups and environments. Georg and Tryggstad (2009), based on a case study of the prestigious Turning Torso skyscraper in Sweden, discuss the hybrid role of project management as an emergent and malleable outcome of the interaction not only between individuals but also between individuals and the devices they use. With evidence from three episodes from the construction project their paper illustrates how being placed between various formal roles, a hybrid role can both adapt to formal roles and negotiate and challenge them. However, Edwards (2010) regards this negotiation as problematic, as it might lead to trade-offs between priorities of another profession and the practices of the profession that have initially shaped the professional identity. This, in turn, may cause role ambiguity and conflicts. Conflicts and tensions between professions, along with ambiguity between formal and informal roles, have been in focus in previous research in construction, where it has been found that professionals develop alternative identities to adapt to different situations. In a series of studies with a focus on the development of environmental management practice in the Swedish construction industry, Gluch (2009) demonstrates how environmental professionals create formal roles in line with their job description and also take on multiple informal roles to adapt to different project practices. Gluch argues that project practices both frame and constrain the identity, work and legitimacy of roles. It is concluded that environmental professionals need a strong sense of integrity to oppose project practices that counteract environmental management practices.

Although there are many contradictory practices that may be tricky for professionals to navigate between, they may also have the opportunity to influence their situation considerably. Daudigeos’ (2013) case study on how staff professionals (occupational safety and health managers) gain the ability to promote a new set of safety practices in a large French construction company shows parallels to the situation of the ERPs and the new social procurement practices they promote. Based on in-depth qualitative data and informed by institutional work they found that staff professionals created unexpected coalitions with other organizational members to get access to more legitimate organizational processes; they also used various types of influence tactics depending on stakeholder, such as “adapting frames and conversation in real time; manipulating the organizational processes, programmes, and systems to convince an organizational member; and leveraging the market power of their company to influence clients, suppliers, and subcontractors” (Daudigeos 2013, p. 742). It is argued that the agency of a staff professional lies in their ability to use a set of the influence tactics mentioned above. An important skill for a staff professional is being able to adapt rhetorical arguments to the context in hand. Herein lies also the power from dominating an area of expertise so they can select evidence and create arguments that influence others’ actions (cf. Gluch and Svensson 2018).

To further the understanding of professionals’ role and agency in relation to construction practice, Gluch and Bosch-Sijtsema (2016) developed a model to display agency of environmental experts and to capture tensions between various forms of institutional work processes. Their article discusses tensions between practice, agency and institutions and concludes that contradictions between personal role expectations of being projective and future-oriented clashes with others role expectations which causes stress and a sense of not being able to do a “good job”. Similar to the ERP role, environmental experts are an example of a new type of role in construction that work in-between organizational belongings and across professions (Hughes and Hughes 2013). New roles of working in-between are the focus of a recent study by Karrbom Gustavsson (2018). Adopting a theoretical lens of liminality (transitory state of uncertainty and ambiguity) she discusses new boundary spanning roles in the construction industry (the partnering manager, the building logistics specialist, and the BIM (building information model) coordinator). Based on multiple case studies, Karrbom Gustavsson (2018) shows how

these individuals negotiate boundary interfaces between different communities of practice and also how they challenged industry norms. She found that they often conducted multi-liminal work on many levels, and never left the fluent state of liminality. A consequence of this is that the professional roles never become fully defined or fixed. Similar to the perspective that roles never become fully fixed, Chan (2016) argues that unlike the traditional view of expertise as something to be possessed and accumulated over time, expertise should be seen as something more open-ended, on-going and processual. In an ethnographic study of environmental expertise “in-the-making” in how an airport developed its infrastructure for increased capacity while balancing environmental concerns, Chan (2016) found that expertise was incidental and continuously shaped by intuition and in interaction with others.

Within the context of social procurement, there are few studies that focus on professional roles and that specifically address the construction sector. Of particular interest for the objective of our study is Barraket *et al.* (2016), who suggest that actors working with social procurement enable connections between different organizational parties, and thus take an intermediary translating role where they have to align to the practices of multiple professional groups. This can be compared with the liminal roles described by Karrbom Gustavsson (2018). In this role, they are expected to encourage collaboration across organizational boundaries and disseminate selected practices. Thus, similar to the staff professionals in Daudigeos (2013) study, they have a great opportunity to advocate and shape policies related to social procurement, and therein find a possibility to shape and legitimize social procurement and its included practices in a wider organizational context. Barraket *et al.* (2016) state that these actors may take an expert or a supportive role and deliver knowledge on best practice, as well as create interest, demand and capacity to deliver social value through the mean of social procurement. Subsequently, as intermediaries, they are important inscribers of norms and promoters of the diffusion of social procurement practices.

### Methodology and research approach

Previous studies find that increased use of employment requirements in the procurement process has given rise to a new role in the construction sector, here labelled the “employment requirement professional” (ERP). As the empirical findings will show, this

is not a well-defined professional role yet, but it does embed some distinct characteristics that will be further described in the paper. The research approach taken in this study suggests that it is important to frame the study in stories and narratives from the empirical reality as lived by ERPs to better understand the emergence of a wider social procurement practice.

To investigate social procurement and how this gives rise to a new type of actor, their work practices and roles, 17 interviews with 21 individuals working with employment requirements were conducted. The interviews were carried out by one of the authors of this paper between May 2016 and February 2017. The interviewees were chosen due to their experience from working with employment requirements, so they were able to provide insights into the ongoing development of employment requirement practices. To start with, interviewees were identified through industry press, websites and from open seminars. The interviewees were selected based on them being commonly regarded by the community of construction procurement in the Swedish construction sector as important players for the future development of social procurement and employment requirement practices. Using a snowballing sampling technique (Flick 2014), an additional set of interviewees were identified after being named as relevant in the interviews. Since employment requirements in procurement is a new organizational feature this technique to identify interviewees was useful because it enabled access to interviewees inside organizations.

The interviewees had diverse backgrounds in terms of education and previous work experiences. Most interviewees were either engineers or business administrators; others were social workers, or former construction workers, legal counsellors or teachers. The interviewees could be sorted into three key categories of organizational functions: (1) (project) coordinators, (2) sustainability specialists/managers and (3) procurement specialists/managers. The interviewees also represent different types of businesses, both public and private, including construction clients, contractors, architects, and the Employment Agency. Henceforth the interviewees will be referred to by their work title and personal code (see Table 1).

The interviews were semi-structured in order to create interview flexibility (Kvale 2007), opening for follow-up questions. The interview setting was characterized by informality and openness providing the interviewee, the narrator, great personal freedom and choice to choose which story to tell. This was deemed important given the to date scarce research

**Table 1.** Information on interviewees' roles and organizational functions.

Professional role	Organizational function	Individual codes
Coordinator (C)	Employment officer, CEO, business developer, project leader, project manager, head of development	C1–8
Sustainability expert/manager (S)	Sustainability manager, process leader for employment requirements, CSR manager, development strategist for social issues	S1–8
Procurement specialist/manager (P)	Procurement manager, head of procurement, strategic procurement officer, purchasing officer	P1–5

**Table 2.** Examples of interview questions for each interview theme.

Interview theme	Examples of interview questions
1. Personal work experiences related to employment requirements	What is your experience of employment requirements? When were you first introduced to the concept of employment requirements?
2. Perceptions on one's own role	How does a typical work day for you unfold in relation to employment requirements? What drives you to work with employment requirements?
3. Interrelations with other actors	Who are you closest colleagues that you can discuss and brainstorm about employment requirements with? What role do they have? Where do you find inspiration and guidance about employment requirements?
4. Values and characteristics prescribed to the role by the organization	How has your organization organized the work related to employment requirements? What formal policies are in place? Who drives the work with employment requirements?
5. Future prospects of the role	What are the challenges for you and your work related to employment requirements in the short-term and long-term? How do you think your role and work with employment requirements will develop in the future, both within your organization but also in the wider construction sector?

on employment requirements. Although open in character, the interview questions build on a literature review and document study on employment requirements (for a detailed account see Troje and Kadefors 2018), and a general aim to study organizational effects from these, such as new roles and practices. The interviews focused on new practices related to employment requirements and the interviewees' role to support these practices. The interviews covered the five main themes described in Table 2. Table 2 also shows key interview questions connected to each interview theme.

The interviews lasted between 45 min and 3 h, were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and then organized and coded in a software program for qualitative data, NVivo, to enable a systematic review of the data. The interviews provided detailed and contextual insights into the everyday work life situation of the interviewees.

The data collection followed an inductive research approach, while the analysis was more abductive, where the data in an iterative process were analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework reciprocally focusing on; (1) employment requirements as part of a wider social procurement practice, and (2) the emergence of new professional roles and work practices. Thus, the data analysis was informed by the theoretical framework, but the data collection was not. First, the data were organized according to the five interview themes listed above. After this initial inductive coding, which was useful for understanding a new

phenomenon (Edmondson and McManus 2007), empirical excerpts were thematically analyzed, guided by the theoretical framework on professional roles and identities to find interesting patterns in the data. The theoretical framework provided a structure allowing us to move between the particular and the shared common elements in the stories. This enabled a theoretical examination currently lacking in research on employment requirements. In order to increase the validity of the analysis, coding was conducted by both authors in a two-step process; first individually and then jointly, so as to synthesize interpretations of the data (Flick 2014).

To receive feedback on preliminary results and the direction of the research, a reference group session was conducted after the eighth interview, which helped to increase the reliability and secure the relevance of the research (Flick 2014). The reference group consisted of representatives from different construction sector organizations, including clients, contractors, building consultants, architects and governmental support organizations, e.g. the Employment Agency.

After a thematic, empirically driven and iterative analysis guided by the theoretical framework, three main areas emerged that relate to the new role within the construction sector working with employment requirements in procurement: the "employment requirement professionals (ERP)". These themes relate to (1) how these professionals define their role, (2) how they frame their professional identity in relation to a social sustainability and (3) which work practices

they have adopted. The focus on how ERPs frame their professional role and identity (how they perceive their professional self) and their work practices (what they do grounded in their conception of their professional self), help bridging between levels of analysis; individual, organizational and societal (Alvesson *et al.* 2008), and thus better understand complex and unfolding relationships between self, work and organization which is of relevance for the subject of this study.

Adopting an explorative qualitative research approach has enabled us to identify social relations between people working with employment requirements, to capture the intricacies of the interviewees' working life (Flick 2014) and to provide insight into beliefs and behaviours of actors (Silverman 2013) working with employment requirements. The approach is suggested as particularly useful when studying a scarcely researched phenomenon (Edmondson and McManus 2007) like employment requirements and social procurement.

This research is part of a wider national research program with a focus on procurement for sustainable innovation in the built environment. The authors' membership in this program, that holds a network of both researchers and industry representatives, provides an arena for continuously verifying the currency and relevance of the research. Moreover, this study is part of an ongoing research project where data is collected continuously. Insights from data collected in Autumn/Winter (2018/2019), although not analyzed using the theoretical framework of this paper, cohere with claims made in this paper. Thus, at this point, an additional analysis of ERP roles based on this new data would not bring further evidence to the discussion.

## Findings

To better understand the emergence of a wider social procurement practice and employment requirements, the empirical reality as lived by ERPs is framed through stories and narratives. The findings will show how the interviewed ERPs mediate between contrasting interests when they create new social procurement roles and practices; how they enact different approaches to promote social sustainability, how their roles are formed by multiple and reciprocal lines of actions, and how they make sense of who they are and what type of work they engage in (professional identity).

## *Walking the line to shape new social procurement roles and practices*

The number of people who work with employment requirements within the construction sector in Sweden is still quite low, and most of the ERPs work alone or as members of small internal networks. Although the interviewees have quite diverse backgrounds in terms of education and previous professional experiences, three different types of professional roles related to social procurement were identified. First, the coordinator, who creates space for and manages coordinating activities within and across organizational boundaries. The coordinators work with employment requirements either full-time or part-time, sharing this task with other duties like administrative tasks, business development or working with recruitment in general. Second, the internal sustainability expert/manager, who has been assigned to focus on employment requirements as part of an overall social sustainability frame, sometimes together with other sustainability areas such as ecological sustainability. Third, the procurement manager/specialist, who mainly works with procurement, but has been assigned responsibilities related to employment requirements as part of this area.

For the interviewees, many of their roles were new and often both instigated and shaped by themselves. Many had proposed the need for the role or were assigned the role as an extension of another, as a sustainability manager (S4) explained: "I have created this role as a sustainability manager, [the need for a role] was my suggestion and a seed I planted within the organization". The interviewees also described how they develop their own role as new responsibilities are continuously added; such as, mastering new management tools, establishing collaborative work processes, or drawing the outline of requirements for the people they would like to hire. In many ways, maintaining and developing the role has been an ad-hoc process, largely influenced by unexpected incidents that need immediate care, such as the large inflow of refugees to Sweden in 2015. This was an event termed "the refugee crisis", described by the interviewees as a trigger that put the limelight on employment requirements and created a sense of urgency to handle these issues, and thus the need for a professional role to manage it. Many of the interviewees also feel that they have to go beyond their formal role descriptions and to collaborate with people they usually do not collaborate within construction procurement processes in order to fulfil their responsibilities. An employment officer explains:

It's about finding other channels than the ones we might have, to provide opportunities for the contractors (...) to thereby establish new contacts which I can use (...) We take that extra responsibility when it comes to employment requirements so we can support the contractor as far as we can (...) just because it is employment requirements we want to help a bit more. (employment officer, C7).

This act of stepping outside the normal working routines also includes contacting local football clubs in order to find potential employees, spending off-duty hours reading about social procurement initiatives and initiating discussions with multiple stakeholders to exchange knowledge.

Because implementation of employment requirements is a multi-party practice, there is no unified view within the construction sector regarding where the responsibility of employment requirements should be placed. Currently, the responsibility lies either within a specific sustainability function, within each individual construction project, within the purchasing department or even externally at the Employment Agency. Unexpectedly and despite the fact that employment issues as well as corporate social responsibility (CSR) generally relate to human resource (HR) activities, none of the organizations the interviewees represent has placed responsibility for employment requirements within an HR function. Instead, some of the organizations have deliberately placed it within a business development function as a strategic move to make it integrated into the organization's core business. A development strategist describes:

It was a strategic choice not to label it [employment requirements] CSR. We have instead chosen to place it within a business development [frame] (...) because we [the Company] should offer sustainable solutions to all our clients, in every business deal. (development strategist, S2).

Similarly, a sustainability manager (S4) said that "it's not only about pulling your weight, it's also about business development. There is commercial value in this, that's why we do it". Further, one interviewed process leader for employment requirements (S3) emphasized the long-term perspective, saying: "this [employment requirement initiative] should just continue, and this is not a project, it is core business, because we see it as long term".

One contested responsibility concerns the follow-up of results from employment requirement measures in projects. Either the interviewees said that follow-up is less important at this stage, since activities of employment requirement implementation must be established first, or they claimed that this is someone else's

job. The notion that the follow-up is someone else's responsibility originates from disconnected strategic and operative practices, where employment requirements fall somewhere in-between, as stated by a development strategist (S2): "we try to find a balance, to find a suitable level for engagement, and then find other ways in which we can help the projects to realize what they want in practice". Since many of the interviewees primarily work on a strategic level with employment requirements while at the same time recognizing the operational and practical issues involved, several of them expressed a need for their organizations to complement with operative support to individual construction projects in addition to the strategic and educational work they are expected to perform within their formal job description. Although they become involved in operative tasks, they currently feel they lack time and resources to do both. A sustainability manager (S8) said that:

There has to be a competent person here [in the company] who actually asks the question "how do you (contractor) plan to solve this? What are your difficulties? Why aren't we meeting you (contractor) halfway? Can we help?"

Much like the diverse roles and background of the ERPs, and due to the ambiguous organizing of employment requirements, the knowledge domain connected to employment requirements is undeveloped. For instance, a clear national, government-sanctioned definition of what employment requirements should entail is missing, and many of the interviewees perceive a lack of national support, which makes their work problematic to legitimize within their own organization. A sustainability manager said: "it's impossible to understand that there is non-existent national support when the government says it's such a gigantic issue" (sustainability manager, S7). The interviewees explained how learning is often informal, ad hoc and difficult to transfer between projects: "every new procurement is like a new mountain to climb. Sometimes it's very difficult to learn from one project to another" (business developer, C5). In the absence of commonly shared practices and routines, one project manager (C3) referred to this type of learning as "walking in the moccasins to understand the process".

### ***Professional identity and the virtue of personal engagement to promote social sustainability***

Considering the diverse background of the interviewees and the sometimes lonely and unclear role they have within their own organizations, the need for a

personal driving force is frequently emphasized. Thus, the interviewees' personal commitments and engagements are often stated as crucially important for progression in their work. A process leader stated:

80% is about people who are personally committed and who believe in what you do, and then the strategic elements are 20%. Because if you don't have people who are passionate about [employment requirements] (...) then it won't work, we will not succeed. (process leader, S3).

Similarly, a sustainability manager expressed that:

Social sustainability is a lot about engagement, and you must never underestimate that. Joy, engagement and value-based initiatives, you must never kill that (...) So it's about supporting the organization towards a form of formal enthusiasm, a quality-assured engagement. (sustainability manager, S7).

Connected to their personal driving force working with employment requirements, based on how the interviewees describe themselves and their personal views, three different types of identities can be discerned. These identities emerged from the data analysis and were not something that was discussed with the interviewees.

First, there are what we name the *idealists*, who describe themselves as good and caring society builders, who contribute to a larger social system of public welfare, who drives to help individuals by offering meaningful employment opportunities so they can create a better life for themselves, which would also benefit society as a whole. Many interviewees give voice to a non-choice situation, saying that they feel driven and obliged to do their part of the work in helping those who are less fortunate in the job market, just because they have the power as large clients and/or contractors to do so. One project manager (C8) stated: "it's silly not to help, because we're in a fantastic situation where we have that power, (...) to change someone's life. It would be silly not to use that [power]"; similarly, a process leader (C6) said "... for the people we engage in, for them we create opportunities and they get some power over their own life (...)".

Second, there are the *problem solvers*, who are triggered by the complexity of and uncertainty involved in implementing employment requirements. They are driven by the idea of finding a "recipe" that makes employment requirements commercially profitable. The interviewees often talk about the root of their personal engagement in working with employment requirements; for example, that they are driven by their own personal interests of being a problem solver, as two sustainability managers put it: "we are problem

solvers, and that's good, because we are never afraid to get involved with things that are difficult" (sustainability manager, S7), and "I'm damn curious (...) I see myself as a problem solver and someone who drives development" (sustainability manager, S4). The interviewees also emphasized the extraordinary work tasks related to employment requirements as inspiring: "we are ordinary employment officials who thought it would be a fun thing to do something besides the [ordinary] work tasks we have in the office" (employment officer, C4); "it's a fantastic mission to try to find a model where those coming as refugees could join the labour market" (process leader, S3).

The third identified category is the *pragmatist*, who are the least represented among the interviewees. The *pragmatists* are committed to employment requirements due to political decisions and/or company policies. Being focused on reaching a goal and getting the job done in a practical, matter-of-fact manner there are few sentimental values in their work, which is dominated by a drive to perform the work in a good and rule-abiding manner, as expressed by a procurement manager (P5): "when it comes to employment requirements, those requirements come from the municipality, from a political level. Then it trickles down into the organizations, and then we simply have to deal with them".

When matching these identities with their professional roles, we can find the idealist among the sustainability experts/managers and the coordinators, while none of the procurement specialists describe themselves in the way that would place them in the idealist category. The problem solver identity can be found among all types of professional roles, while the bureaucrat is only found among the procurement specialists. There are also a few interviewees who seem to enact both the problem solver and the idealist identities, and who talk about their role and work tasks from both perspectives.

Besides the social identities, many of the interviewees emphasised the personal rewards of working with employment requirements, either from a sense of self-fulfilment in filling an important space within the own organization – as expressed by a development strategist (S2): "suddenly I am the only one among 11,000 employees who knows something about something" –, or in helping others:

When you see the people, who get the opportunity to do an internship, and succeed to go all the way into an employment, you get so much positive feedback. To see their joy when they gain employment (...) So for me it's enough to see their joy, and it's something I find amazingly fun to be able to help with. (project manager, C3).

### **Conjoining operational, educational and co-creational work into a practice**

The interviewees describe their daily work in a similar manner, even though they have different professional roles and backgrounds. They indicate a processual nature of their actual work tasks as they use many active verbs, which roughly fall under three interrelated categories: operational, educational and co-creating work.

Although the intention is that the ERPs should work mainly on a strategic level, they, due to an organizational immaturity around employment requirements, also become involved in *operational work*, where they directly solve problems and ensure that work flows smoothly to ensure that employment requirements can be practically implemented. As a project leader described (C1): “I’ve tried to make it as easy as possible, by coming with suggestions, and templates they can simply cut and paste [from]”.

The *educational work* mainly concerns agenda-setting and convincing people of the importance of employment requirements. One of the issues ERPs must deal with is to communicate information and share knowledge about employment requirements to employees in their organization and to external stakeholders. In doing so, they address the challenge of making employment requirements understandable and applicable for employees working in different hierarchical levels and/or within other professional roles. This is described by one of the interviewees as follows: “one task that is important for me is to make sustainability understandable and tangible, both externally for our stakeholders, and internally” (sustainability manager S7). The interviewees are thus extensively engaged in educating colleagues, management, construction workers, partner organizations and other external actors such as clients and suppliers. When the interviewees talk about their role as informants, they use words like “teacher” or “gardener” to emphasize their work mission. Teacher is used to describe themselves as messengers of top-down information, stating that they “are out [there] educating construction

workers (...) I meet so many people in the company because I teach so much, many, many thousands of people every year” (sustainability manager, S7).

The gardener metaphor is used to illustrate the third category of tasks, in which they engage people in a bottom-up and continuous learning process through *collaborative and co-creating work*. One sustainability manager (S7) stated that “you have to grow people, and it takes time to grow competence”; as another interviewee put it, “it’s so important that [employment requirements] are promoted in the right way, that a seed is planted” (sustainability manager, S4). In the co-creational work, collaborative space across organizational boundaries is created to develop competencies and new practices. Due to the ERPs being alone in their role and often having to split their attention with other administrative procurement or sustainability-related issues, many of the interviewees explain how they collaborate, and often co-create, with others in order to overcome some of the complexities created by employment requirements. One sustainability manager (S7) explained: “I believe in knowledge, to give people tools, because you own what you’ve been part of creating, and what you own you take responsibility for. You will never let go of what you feel responsible for”. Co-creation is thus highlighted as important daily work for the ERPs: “we do this together, we hold hands and we have done this [employment requirement initiative] together with ‘Organization X’ (...) and we do this jointly because together we can reach out” (development strategist, S6), and “if this is going to be social sustainability, meaning long term, then we must have everyone on the train and they must sit in the same carriage” (process leader, S3). The interviewees said they create bonds with other actors across organizational boundaries, often with people they have known from previous shared work experiences, or with clients or contractors. For example, one interviewee, a CEO (C6), referred to his personal “knowledge alliance” as a source for inspiration and knowledge. [Table 3](#) summarizes the work practices of the ERPs.

**Table 3.** ERP’s operational, educational and co-creating work.

Operational work	Educational work	Co-creational work
Solving targeted problems	Agenda-setting	Facilitating and orchestrating meetings between different actors and professional disciplines
Doing your due diligence	Fighting rhetorically against misunderstandings and fears	Talking with people
Ensuring that things get done	Convincing others of the value	Inspiring courage into others to try different things
Providing comprehensive solutions which are easily adopted	Selling the concept	Unfolding “hidden” organizational initiatives
Supporting	Educating	Planting seeds
Providing tools	Explaining	Growing people and competences
Coordinating	Introducing people to the concept	Breaking barriers
	Supervising	
	Concretizing the concept into practice	

## Discussion

To add empirical and theoretical knowledge to the field of social procurement as well as to social sustainability the aim of this paper has been to investigate how “employment requirement professionals” (ERPs) define and populate a role within construction management. This involves how they promote a *social sustainability* agenda, how their roles are formed, how they make sense of who they are and what type of work they engage in. Similar to what has been found in previous research (e.g. Sutherland *et al.* 2015, Murphy and Eadie 2019), the creation of a new professional role in relation to employment requirements and social procurement is seen also in the Swedish construction sector. In the case of employment requirements and social procurement, the role holders promoted the role to the company and filled it with substance. It was found that the roles and their included practices and tasks were developed in an iterative and ad hoc process shaped by emergent concerns, demands and incidents, like “the refugee crisis”, which corresponds to how Chan (2016) has described expertise as something incidentally created as new problems occur.

The in-depth investigation of the ERP role and its new work practices provide novel insight into a new type of role in construction that “walk the line” as intermediates between contrasting interests; in our case “hard” construction procurement and “soft” social sustainability. Although it was found that the role often was self-created and iteratively developed to align with both immediate and habitual needs, findings show – similar to what previous research has discovered (e.g. Barraket *et al.* 2016, Gluch 2009) – complexity and uncertainty in terms of role expectations and tasks with unclear boundaries and responsibilities. However, this complexity and uncertainty could hinder the establishment of a more distinct professional role. For the ERPs, the expectations on them had an in-built ambiguity where they had to juggle between personal expectations of proactive and strategic character and expectations from others that included acting as standby, emergency help to colleagues working in the various construction projects. Thus, the expectations reflected demands and pressure from others, which was particularly clear when the interviewed ERPs described how they had to navigate between conflicting formal and informal roles and responsibilities. As a consequence, they were on one hand torn between their long-term focus and strong personal engagement in “improving the world” and on the other giving time-consuming practical

advice to a vast amount of people, which led to undue pressure on them to fulfil their own expectations to perform strategic and future-oriented social sustainability work. Therefore, in absence of a formal ERP role, like the one implemented in Scotland (Sutherland *et al.* 2015) or North Ireland (Murphy and Eadie 2019), a hybrid role with unclear boundaries and responsibilities were formed. Ambiguity between formal and informal roles have been in focus in previous research, where it was found that professionals develop alternative identities to adapt to different situations (Gluch 2009), which could also be seen in the case of the ERPs. The existence of both formal and informal roles suggests that the ERPs, despite the freedom to define their own role, do not yet have exclusive control and power of their work (cf. Brown and Phua 2011, Styhre 2011). Without such control and power, it may be difficult for ERPs to create legitimacy for their role and for social procurement and employment requirements, i.e. the establishment of a social procurement practice is hampered.

Tensions caused by a mismatch of expectations has been discussed in previous research on environmental sustainability professional (Gluch and Bosch-Sijtsema 2016), however for the case of the ERPs there seems to be less stress than for other sustainability professionals, indicating that the ERPs might perceive a stronger self-identity and sense of freedom to pursue their (personal) missions than the environmental experts. A possible explanation might be that employment requirements, although complex to accomplish, in the end, have local and tangible results, i.e. of setting people into work, to compare with intangible global environmental impact.

The notion that self, identity, work tasks and results thereof mutually influence one another is not new. Scholars have suggested that professional practice is closely tied with identity (Gioia *et al.* 2010; Brown and Phua 2011). Regarding how the interviewees described what they do, some shared patterns were identified and three types of identities were discerned: the problem solver that fix things, the idealist and society builder that helps people, and the pragmatist that creates templates and guidelines to cope with reality. Referring to personal characteristics, such as liking to solve problems, helping others, having a high degree of ethical conduct, educating and communicating expertise knowledge, are all virtues of professionals as described in professionalization literature (Styhre 2011). By being a carrier of social values, ERPs role functions as a meaning-creating device (Simpson and

Carroll 2008) that encompass the complexity of social procurement and employment requirements.

Another aspect that influences the ERPs ability to manifest social procurement and employment requirements as an established practice is their organizational placement within the organizations. A majority of the interviewees was placed in a business development department with a strategic intention in mind, which suggests that the issue more easily can enter a strategic agenda. However, it also means that the ERPs were detached from HR functions in the organization and that they will not get the necessary feed-back so that social procurement practices can be improved and organizational learning can be accomplished. Because employment requirements are so complex to accomplish, input from different practice domains like HR or procurement is important for the future development and establishment of both the requirement and involved procurement practices. Thus, the detachment from HR functions limits the opportunity for expertise knowledge domain to be created (cf. Chan 2016).

Looking at the different formal roles the ERPs hold, you could imagine that certain roles would be more associated with certain professional identities due to the nature of tasks prescribed to the role (Lynch 2007, Styhre 2012). Consequently, you could easily think that coordinators would enact the identity of a problem solver, as coordinators often handle people and projects (cf. the project manager role described in Georg and Tryggestad 2009), to bring people together and create a space for collaboration across organizational boundaries (cf. the liminal role in Karrbom Gustavsson 2018), thereby engaging in co-creational and problem-solving tasks. It would also be reasonable to assume that sustainability experts would enact the identity of the idealist, as it is likely that people who work with sustainability are interested in improving the social environment, might have an activist agenda and engage in educational work tasks aimed at “spreading the good word” of sustainability. Moreover, it could be assumed that procurement specialists would enact the identity of the pragmatist, as procurement is a bureaucratic practice, at least within public organizations, and that procurement specialists work with paperwork, laws and regulations and contracts, and thereby mainly engage in hands-on administrative work tasks. However, even if the interviewed ERPs in this study might not be fully representative of all ERPs, there were only a few cases where their formal professional role, identity and work tasks corresponded to the suggested connections above. In fact,

all types of identities could be found among the interviewees, irrespectively of their organizational function. Regarding work tasks, for example, the interviewees engage in all types of work categories (operational, educational and co-creational) to various extents (Table 3).

Moreover, not only did the interviewees engage in several types of work, similar to what previous research suggests for other types of professions, for example, accountants (Bévort and Suddaby 2016), the ERPs integrated multiple identities into their professional role. The reason for this is likely due to the undeveloped knowledge domain, unclear division of responsibilities, ad-hoc learning processes and iterative role development, resulting in a need to avoid lock-in effects. This may be inevitable and also necessary until social procurement and related roles and practices become more institutionalized and defined. Thus, both flexibility and the embeddedness of a variety of identities in their role is vital for the ERPs who must find creative ways to cope with the new and yet to be developed work tasks as well as to convince other stakeholders that employment requirements should be a legitimized procurement practice. However, identity and role ambiguity may at the same time cause fragmentation around employment requirements and thus diminish the establishment of the new practices rather than clarifying them. In addition, for the ERPs themselves, such an “identity split” may create stress and confusion of sense of self, with the risk of them leaving the position before gaining necessary status in the organization, which might counteract a long-term establishment of social procurement practices.

Looking at the work tasks that the ERPs engage in, the interviewees in this study shares many characteristics to what Barraket *et al.* (2016) referred to as intermediary actors and Karrbom Gustavsson (2018) named liminal roles. They are the experts in their organization; they diffuse practices within and outside of their organizations, work across organizational boundaries and shape, advocate and legitimize employment requirements. Considering the metaphors used to describe themselves and their work, by talking about themselves as gardeners, teachers, problem-solvers, etc., the ERPs might be building a new identity circled around the complex competence needs of implementing employment requirements and social procurement. In their own role descriptions, they inspire courage for change; they plant seeds and “grow people”; they educate and convince others of the potential of employment requirements, actions that could be associated with the idealist. They also ensure things get done, and

operationalize employment requirements and break barriers, which could be associated with the problem-solver. They also serve and provide support and comprehensive solutions, which could be associated with the pragmatist. In this way, the interviewees resemble what Abdelnour *et al.* (2017) called modular individuals, as they are able to adapt and wield these roles, identities and work practices in a strategic manner in order to create their role and fill it with substance, as well as to cope with their complex work related to employment requirements. It may be so that without this modular ability, new and complex concepts such as employment requirements and social procurement cannot become fully legitimized.

Important abilities among ERPs is therefore that they are communicative and pedagogical and that they can adapt their social sustainability arguments to different contexts and engage different types of actors in the work. Besides showing catching enthusiasm they use of their knowledge advantage when selecting evidence and creating arguments to influence others' actions. The latter might be overcompensation for their lack of shared educational ground. In addition, they are not the typical built environment professional; that is, they cannot relate to the idealized role of "someone that knows how to build" as presented in the literature (Löwstedt and Räisänen 2014, Styhre 2012) but still have to fit into that environment. As such, the ERPs must possess multifaceted skills in order to perform their duties and tasks properly, where social procurement demands much from someone who often is alone in their workplace to deal with such complex issues.

## Conclusions

Increased use of employment requirements creates both opportunities and implications for the construction sector and its actors, their identities, roles and work practices. For the "employment requirement professionals" (ERPs), the complexity of social procurement and employment requirements poses demands on their self-identity. The reciprocal relation between identity and work practices is in the case of ERPs influenced by, and also over-dependent on, personal driving force and motivation for working with employment requirements. This is a very inconsistent and fragile base to build a social procurement profession and serves as a loose ground to build a coherent practice for social procurement. Considering the immature knowledge domain, missing competencies among the ERPs, ad-hoc learning and difficult

knowledge transfer between actors, it is reasonable to conclude that there is no current established profession nor a distinct knowledge domain that includes social procurement and employment requirements; thus lacking a distinct domain of practice (cf. Barraket *et al.* 2016).

Nevertheless, the ERPs do create a professional space for themselves and have also become a rather well-established function within their organizations, working with the operative, educational and co-creative tasks. Moreover, they describe the new professional role and identity of the ERP as gardener and teacher, metaphors that indicate a proactive and projective take on the future development of the role. Not being able to rely on an established knowledge domain, many of the ERPs enact several different identities to cope with the complexities of social procurement and employment requirements: the idealist, the problem-solver and the pragmatist. Relying on a self-made adjustable role and an identity based on personal engagement might be easier than relying on one's previous educational or professional background and affiliation, especially as the ERPs collaborate and co-create extensively across organizational boundaries and need to master various types of influence tactics similar to what the staff professionals in Daudigeos (2013) study used. This finding is interesting, as it provides novel details what happens when an actor is unable to connect to the existing and expected role within their context. The findings show how the ERPs build their own tripartite space between multiple identities, multiple work practices, and multiple (formal and informal) roles, in order to get power and resources to drive social procurement practices. The need for this space may be one reason for why certain formal roles correspond weakly with what would be expected to be the related identity and work practice.

For practitioners, this paper may create an understanding of what ERPs' future professional role might be, potentially making collaboration and co-creation across organizational boundaries clearer. This could subsequently enable dissemination of practices (Barraket *et al.* 2016) and facilitate a broad establishment of social procurement and employment requirements. The paper also provides insight into the nature of the ERPs and thus go deeper than just acknowledging that they can enact several professional identities, also pointing out which identities they enact. An important question remains for future studies: what does this reliance on social identities mean for practitioners in their everyday work?

Regarding theory, the paper contributes to a deeper insight into the rarely investigated concept of employment requirements and social procurement. The findings provide a detailed account of who works with employment requirements, how and why they conduct their work and thereby unfolds how professionalization might be hindered due to issues with knowledge domains, conflicting demands on responsibilities, and ad hoc, iterative development of roles and work practices. The findings also enable a better understanding of how the introduction of a novel concept, in this case, employment requirements, influence work practices for different actors in the construction sector, and how professional roles and identities are shaped through these changing practices.

Future research should investigate employment requirements and their organizational implications by studying emerging on-site construction practices related to the implementation of employment requirements. Here, a path for future studies could be on conflicts from role fragmentation, where the case of ERPs could be compared to other professionals who – similar to ERPs – perform work at practice boundaries, such as social workers (Edwards 2010), environmental specialists (Mieg 2009, Gluch and Bosch-Sijtsema 2016), partnering managers (Karrbom Gustavsson 2018) and BIM coordinators (ibid.). It would be of particular interest to study how ERPs redefine the boundaries of the field of construction procurement. For the future development of the role, it could also be interesting to further investigate the tension between formal and informal roles identified in the findings. For example, if the role becomes less ad-hoc and more prescribed would the ERPs feel more in control, or feel more constrained and be less agile to react to sudden events, like the refugee crisis? Future studies could also address some of the limitations of this study, by including actors that work on a more operative level, like the newly employed and the construction workers, unions, and other types of technical consultants. Such an extension would provide a more comprehensive picture of how employment requirements affect various actors in the construction sector.

When it comes to the future of social procurement, the ERP role may become even more inclusive and even more multifaceted considering the complexity of social procurement practices. To manage this, the ERPs may need additional support from their organizations and from the sector at large to help them define their role and to establish both sustainable procurement practices and roles. However, organizations in the construction sector should ask themselves whether

they are changing their practices enough to fully accommodate employment requirements, or if they are hiring a new type of professional, like the ERPs, as a quick fix and “social-washing”. Also, the wide-spread lack of understanding for and knowledge about social procurement between different actors could hinder effective collaboration in the sector – something which the multiparty-activity of social procurement needs. As long as there are practical uncertainties about how to best conduct social procurement and conflicting demands and expectations forcing actors to adopt new social identities they are unfamiliar with, social procurement might never be fully institutionalized.

Looking forward, because the ERP role is yet to be defined, distinct or prescriptive, it may not only be learning from project to project which is achieved by “walking in the moccasins”, to cite one of the interviewees (C3), but the entire development of the ERPs’ role as well as the employment requirements themselves and included practices should be created through a continuous “walk in the moccasins”.

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## Paper 3

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# 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 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 suggests 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 Doloï 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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## **Paper 4**

Troje, D. and Gluch, P. (2020) Beyond Policies and Social Washing: How Social Procurement Unfolds in Practice. *Sustainability*, 12(12), 4956.



Article

# Beyond Policies and Social Washing: How Social Procurement Unfolds in Practice

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**Abstract:** Social procurement is increasingly used by organizations to create social value. An important feature of social procurement used to mitigate issues with social exclusion is employment requirements, which aim to create internships for unemployed marginalized people. However, little is known of their effects on people working at an operative level. Through 23 semi-structured interviews with practitioners in the Swedish construction and real estate sector, this paper adopts a practice lens to analyse the effects of employment requirements (ER). Findings show that practitioners must handle the tension between old and new practices, and strike a balance between fulfilling formal responsibilities and performing new practices on an ad hoc basis, and finding the time and resources to do so. Practitioners act as practice carriers for both traditional work tasks and new employment requirement practices, which can lead to role ambiguity. The paper provides novel details for how employment requirements unfold in practice. It also adds to practice theory by suggesting an important relational aspect between first-order, premeditated practices, and second-order, emergent practices, and how both types of practices are vital for working with employment requirements.

**Keywords:** social procurement; employment requirements; interns; practice theory; social sustainability; social value; construction and real estate sector; Sweden

## 1. Introduction

When societies face challenges, such as mass migration, fiscal constraints, inequality gaps, and increasing poverty, private and public actors have tried to find new tools to help alleviate these issues. One such tool is for companies to use their purchasing power and procurement process to create social value. This is called social procurement and has, over the last decade, been increasingly used as a way to mitigate societal problems [1]. Social procurement encompasses a wide range of social criteria related to, for example, collective agreements and fair working conditions, health and safety, procuring from local, women's, or minority-owned enterprises, and employment creation for disadvantaged groups [2–7].

In Sweden, social procurement has mainly focused on formulating social criteria called employment requirements (ER). These aim to create job opportunities through internships for long-term unemployed, marginalized people, like immigrants, youths, or disabled people [8]. The focus on employment creation stems from issues with social exclusion, segregation, and unemployment [9]. Today many cities are segregated, and many of the buildings in these segregated neighbourhoods were built during the 1960s and 1970s, and are now run down and in need of refurbishment. The people who live in these neighbourhoods tend to be stigmatized in the labour market and often long-term unemployed [8–11]. In addition, in 2015, there was a large inflow of refugees who were subsequently unemployed, and often housed in the segregated neighbourhoods, which created an urgency for

social procurement aimed at increasing employment and thereby decreasing social exclusion among these target groups [12,13]. This situation, also shared by countries other than Sweden, has led many organizations in the construction and real estate sector, such as housing companies, to implement requirements to hire unemployed people, sometimes even their own tenants, in refurbishment projects and the maintenance of buildings and green areas in the neighbourhood (cf. [8]). This also means that the construction and real estate sector is especially suited for employment-focused social procurement, due to the sector's close ties with social exclusion issues [1,14,15]. In Sweden, employment requirements have mostly been operationalized by creating internships. Therefore, this paper will henceforth refer to internships, and the individuals who get an internship through employment requirements will be referred to as employment requirement interns, or ER interns for short.

Despite employment requirements being seen as strategically important, both in industry and among policymakers, and that employment requirements present an opportunity for organizations to create social value in the form of employment for marginalized people, research is scarce in regard to how employment requirements actually unfold in practice [16–19]. Furthermore, although the empirical setting for this paper is the Swedish construction sector, employment requirements are novel and practices are still diffuse in many different sectors and geographical contexts, so the issue with diffuse practices and lack of knowledge is an international problem (cf. [1,5,7,16,18,20]). Therefore, to fill this empirical and theoretical knowledge gap, this paper aims to analyse the effects on operative level practices when employment requirements are implemented. The operative level in this paper refers to the daily work that individual and collective actors engage in when working with employment requirements in construction projects and building maintenance. By conducting a qualitative interview study, the findings highlight three specific areas related to the effects of employment requirements at an operative level:

- (1) for the daily project management practices and the practitioners,
- (2) for the internship, and
- (3) for the companies and projects, in the context of the Swedish construction and real estate sector.

### *1.1. Social Procurement*

Social procurement has been used throughout the twentieth century to enact social policies, and has focused historically on issues like fair working hours and wages, the employment of disabled veterans in the UK, fair treatment of aboriginal populations in Canada, and fair treatment for African Americans in the United States [21]. Today, a new wave of social procurement initiatives, legislation, and policies are taking form, which aim to create employment opportunities for disadvantaged people. This includes the 2012 UK Social Value Act, which outlines how public contracts must acknowledge economic, environmental, and social well-being [22], and the EU directive (2014/24/EU) [23], which opens up the use of social procurement practices to a wider extent. In Australia and Canada, policies are mainly aimed at benefiting the indigenous populations [5,21].

These newer legislative acts and policies have spurred both public and private organizations to engage in social procurement [3,7,24,25], and in fact, social criteria relating to employment of vulnerable groups are today the second most used type of social criteria in public procurement in the construction sector [26]. In North Ireland and Scotland, new work roles which exclusively deal with social procurement are increasingly common, and in many ways, the work with social procurement has become business as usual [17,25]. This development, with the creation of new roles, is also seen in Sweden [19].

Previous studies have investigated common perceptions and experiences of social procurement in the construction sector. Many actors within the sector are in favour of social procurement, and studies have found that it is a useful tool to deepen the collaboration throughout the supply chain, to enable knowledge sharing, to fulfil client demands, to build competences, and to create

employment [1,16,17,25]. Furthermore, social procurement is found to have benefits such as improved work environment, less employee turnover, lower absenteeism and improved productivity [27].

In Northern Ireland, Erridge [16] studied a project which used multiple contracts that embedded employment requirements. This study provides an important insight into how employment requirements can influence construction practitioners and projects, and it was found that few actors working in the project perceived that employment requirements increased their administrative workload. Although training was lacking for the newly employed, who mostly had no construction background, the jobs created in the project turned out to be sustainable over time, as 46 out of 51 people maintained their job after the project ended. Similar results were found in a large Swedish social housing refurbishment project where employment requirements were used [28]. There, 18 out of 50 people who were taken in on internships were given permanent employment after the internship ended, suggesting that jobs can also be sustainable over time in Sweden. However, to ensure sustainable positive outcomes, Erridge [16] highlights how commercial goals should not be overemphasized, as this can subsequently undermine the achievement of socioeconomic goals.

Another perspective on employment requirements is to see it as a service innovation and a way for organizations to provide new business opportunities [1,3,16–18]. Kurdve and de Goey [29] conducted a case study of a project where unemployed people were given jobs to build standardized modular housing. This created more housing, and more importantly, it also created simple jobs in the construction sector for people who were lacking construction experience. The employment of marginalized people functioned as a service for the municipality, who is often the buyer of modular housing [28]. However, in contrast to these findings, Murphy and Eadie [25] found that contractors in the construction sector in North Ireland rather see social procurement as a contractual obligation driven by legislation than as a social innovation.

Previous research has found that, in the construction sector, there is a general lack of knowledge about social procurement [2,3,5,30,31], and the perceptions about the effects of social procurement vary. For example, some doubts persist about how social procurement might require more resources than traditional procurement [2,3,5,16,25,27,32], how it might displace “ordinary” workers [14,15,27], or that social value and employment requirements are difficult to evaluate (cf. [1,26,31,33–35]). Other concerns relate to whether, despite its potential business opportunities, engaging in social procurement benefits brand goodwill or not [27], and whether collaboration around social procurement is difficult [32].

To address these issues and to ensure that actors in the construction and real estate sector are willing and able to implement and engage in social procurement, it is suggested that social procurement practices need to be tied to artefacts, resources and best practice examples [1]. These artefacts must also be complemented by clear arguments as to why these practices should be adopted [1]. Furthermore, Murphy and Eadie [25] suggest that, to ensure that the “right” social value is created, a more person-centric approach should be adopted when implementing social procurement, where practices should be individually tailored and bespoke for each intern or newly employed person and match their needs and skills.

### *1.2. A Practice Perspective on Social Procurement*

Despite finding that social procurement has the potential to create social value, previous research has shown how social procurement can be difficult to work with in practice, due to many actors still being sceptical about it. Part of this attitude could be due to social procurement being underpinned by other institutional logics [36] than traditional construction procurement [37]. Firstly, rather than focusing on criteria that are easy to measure like price, social procurement instead embeds a social value logic rather than a market logic [37]. However, delivering social value typically lies outside the contractor’s area of expertise, and therefore social procurement deviates from traditional work practices when mainly aiming to deliver social value [25]. Secondly, social criteria do not pertain directly to the object of procurement (i.e., the building), but instead put focus on other goals. Third, the construction sector is characterized by decentralized actors who retain their independence and

individual decision-making, while simultaneously collaborating with other actors [38]. However, when employment requirements are implemented, clients are dictating what type of workers their contractors should hire, such as long-term unemployed people. This diminishes the autonomy of organizations that are used to collaborate, while maintaining a high degree of autonomy [37]. Thus, social procurement differs radically from traditional construction procurement, creating conflicting situations for those working with employment requirements.

In a study also looking at the introduction of a sustainability initiative in the construction sector, Hargreaves [39] used practice theory to study interventions to inspire pro-environmental behaviour change in a UK construction company. Here, it was found that it is important to study not only individual practices, but also their connections and conflicts with other practices. Building on this notion, in order to study the effects from employment requirements in practice, while simultaneously having the complex institutional context and the practical issues described in previous research in mind, this paper adopts the theoretical perspective of practice theory. A practice perspective is a theoretical construct that is particularly useful to study organizational phenomena that are complex, novel or dynamic, much like previous research has found social procurement to be. In addition, the practice perspective has a bottom-up approach and tries to understand practices and untangle the relationships between different practices and people [40–42]. This is in line with our aim to analyse the effects on an operative level when employment requirements are implemented.

Practices and routines are central to organizational life, development and outcome, and can be seen as the building blocks that make up the social reality of organizational life [40–42]. Practices are made up of multiple interdependent and interrelated activities [43]. Organizations can be better understood and studied through a practice perspective, through the examination of the ongoing, everyday life and experiences of people in organizations [40,42]. In order to understand grander organizational matters, an analysis of what people do in organizations is important [41]. Taking a practice approach to organizational research enables a closer description and understanding of what is involved in different phenomena—in our case, employment requirements—as they unfold and comes in closer to the “real” work that happens in organizations [42,44].

A practice perspective also emphasizes the relational aspects of practices and their performance, where practices are constituted socially, rather than individually, and where a shared understanding of practices constitutes how they are organized. Such relations are, however, not always equal, and practices can be arranged in bundles in different ways, which benefit some and not others. This means that power and politics are a large part of a practice perspective and that practices subsequently can be a source of conflict and are constantly in a state of tension caused by imbalances in power, resources, and interests [40–42]. Power and social relations thus strongly influence when and how practices are created, as well as maintained and can result in more or less room for different actors to manoeuvre changes [39]. Such features of a practice perspective may be especially pertinent when studying social procurement, which is a multiparty phenomenon with interorganizational collaborations and activities.

Practices can be spoken of as routines and seen as an interconnected assemblage of elements that together make up the practice, like bodily and mental activities, know-how, and emotional states [41,45]. A practice perspective enables an investigation of how and why practices are continually practised—unconsciously or consciously, how they may lead to institutionalization and norm-creation, and how they are changed [44,46]. This also means that, in practice theory, people are not seen as rational or as norm-following, but rather as practice carriers. Carrying practices means both creativity in terms of new inventions of practices and preservation in terms of iteration of old practices. This means that the experiences and identities of professionals influence how practices are reproduced and changed [39]. In other words, although people are constrained by the social system, they have the possibility to influence it through action [41].

Four interrelated concepts from a practice perspective shape the theoretical framework that informs the present study (Figure 1). Firstly, from a bottom-up practice perspective, it is the everyday,

lived experiences of individual actors that are of interest. Secondly, practices have relational aspects that impact their development and diffusion. Thirdly, tensions caused by imbalances in power, resources, and interests have an effect on vis-à-vis practices and how much room individual actors have to manoeuvre a change of practice in their everyday work. Lastly, individual actors are practice carriers, and the role they take impacts how they do this. These four concepts are used to guide the analysis of the empirical data, so as to be able to answer this question: What are the effects on an operative level when implementing employment requirements?

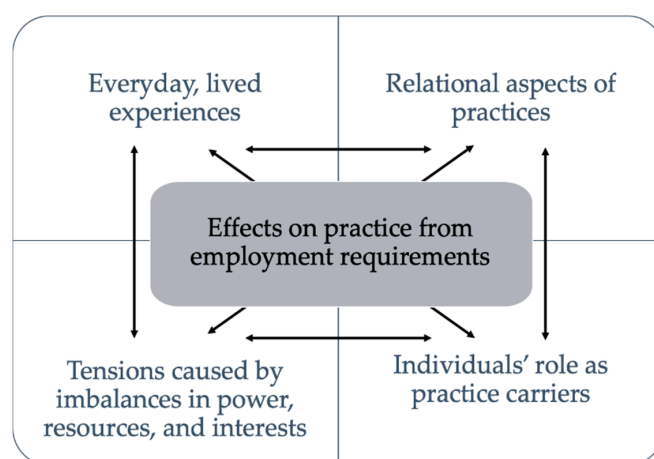


Figure 1. Conceptualization of the theoretical framework.

## 2. Methods

To study the effects from employment requirements on an operative level, a qualitative research approach was used, as it helps capture the actions, thoughts and beliefs of individual actors [47]. The research approach is empirically driven and abductive (cf. [48]), where we iteratively have moved between our empirical data and practice theory, in order to understand and conceptualize how employment requirements affect practices on an operative level. Following this approach, the design and focus of the study builds on previous findings from an explorative study, consisting of interviews with 23 people working strategically with employment requirements in the construction sector.

The study is based on three different cases where unemployed people were given internships through employment requirements (ER). The first case was a construction project ordered by a private housing company to build more apartment housing (AH). The second case was a construction project ordered by a municipality to build a pre-school (PS). Both of these construction projects were conducted by the same large Swedish contractor. The third case centred on a social procurement model developed by a corporate group of public housing companies (PHG), which demands that their subsidiaries take in unemployed people on internships to work with facilities maintenance, in other words, the public housing group posed employment requirements as an internal client.

We have chosen to refer to the interns working in the three cases as “ER interns”. The reason for calling them “ER interns” and not just “interns” is that they are unlike “regular” interns, as they come from disadvantaged backgrounds and are stigmatized in the labour market. Those who are recent immigrants may have poor Swedish skills, may come from traumatic backgrounds like the war in Syria, or have undocumented and inconsistent schooling. Those who have disabilities may have physical or mental obstacles to overcome in the workplace. Therefore, ER interns often have special prerequisites that must be considered.

The interviewees chosen for the study were identified with the help of managers employed by the Swedish contractor in cases 1 and 2, and by the public housing group in case 3. All in all, 23 people working operatively with employment requirements were interviewed in a semi-structured

manner [49]. Information about the interviewees included in the analysis of this paper are listed in Table 1 and have been given a personal anonymous code.

The interviewees from the AH and PS cases worked operatively, either with construction work on site or with project management from the construction client's side. Interviewees from the PHG case worked with maintenance of housing and green areas in the subsidiary housing companies in the public housing group. This means that all of the interviewees worked with implementing the employment requirements and/or with the ER interns on a daily basis, or worked as ER interns, and therefore, they had experienced effects from working with employment requirements.

The data were collected between December 2018 and May 2019. The interviews, which lasted for about an hour, focused on the interviewees' lived experience, positive or negative, of employment requirements, how employment requirements have influenced their daily work and role, and what changes of practices they had made to integrate the ER interns in the workplace. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and to enable a systematic review, the data were coded in NVivo software. To identify common themes, the empirical data were first inductively and thematically coded [50]. The inductive coding was important considering how social procurement is underexamined both academically and empirically, and this enabled unexpected patterns to emerge [51]. After this, all items were recoded to refine the coding structure and to ensure that the codes reflected the empirical material as accurately as possible. A respondent validation session (see [52]) with individuals working in the PHG case was also conducted after approx. 2/3 of the interviews had been held, to ensure that the preliminary results and codes were valid.

After these two coding rounds, 11 categories of codes emerged (see Figure 2), from which three overarching themes were identified. These three themes related to effects (i) for the daily project management practices and the practitioners in the individual projects, (ii) for the ER internships, and (iii) for the companies and projects. We had a practice theory perspective in mind when we collected and coded the data, but it was not until after the two inductive coding rounds that we analysed the empirical data in an abductive manner (cf. [48]), using the conceptualization of the theoretical framework.

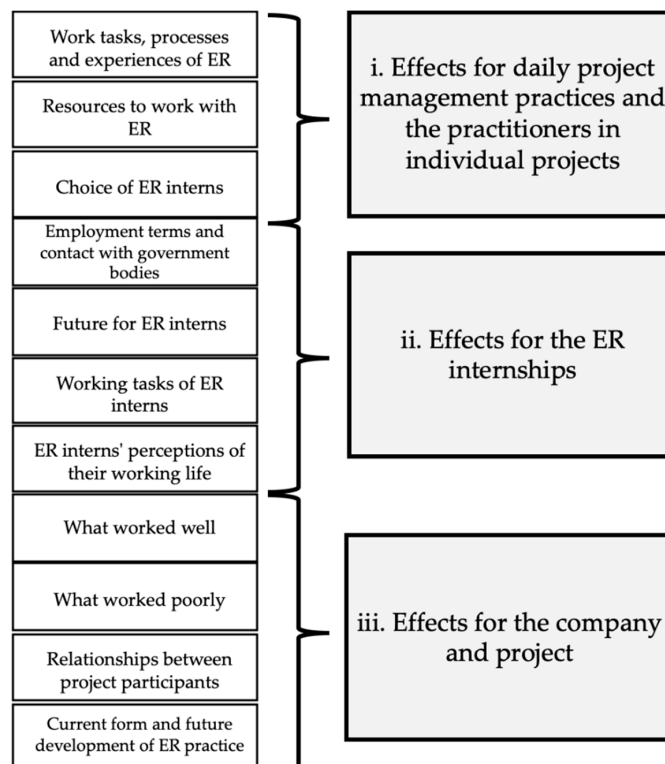


Figure 2. Diagram of coding structure.

**Table 1.** Information about the interviewees.

Project	Relationship with Client	Example of Roles	Individual Interviewee Codes
Apartment housing (AH)	Private for private	Area manager, project manager, site manager, ER intern	AH 1–7
Pre-school (PS)	Private for public	Area manager, project manager, site manager, work leader, ER intern, public procurement officer	PS 1–6
Public housing group (PHG)	Public for public (internal client)	Facilities maintainers of buildings and green areas, ER intern	PHG 1–10

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. Effects for Construction Project Management Practice and Practitioners in Individual Projects

In their position as “receivers” of the ER interns and driven by personal beliefs, many of the interviewees explained that they felt pressure to provide the ER interns with meaningful work, an achievement that, according to them, needed the right conditions in terms of targets, supporting organization, and the opportunity to create social relations between interns and supervisors:

Having targets [with employment requirements] is important, but other things are also important; however, the utmost goal is [to create] real jobs . . . You have to be able to set up the right conditions for things to work. It comes down to the people, the intern and the supervisor, but also the employer . . . It’s about creating opportunities for relationships and situations where people can grow. (PHG1)

Ensuring good conditions so the supervisors could support their ER interns was expressed as crucial to provide a ‘high-quality internship’ with fair working conditions. Issues that caused uncertainty and unwarranted stress on the interviewees were, for example, whether the ER interns received fair compensation for their work. In the pre-school project, this type of issue was repeatedly a concern for the supervisors and the project team. For example, they faced a situation where one ER intern went without pay for several weeks, and another only got paid approx. €3 per hour, as described by an interviewee:

When I found out that the intern only got paid €3 per hour, I just said to [the employer] that either we hire him or we let him go, because I cannot ask someone to work for €3 per hour, that is below my dignity. I cannot ask him to work hard when he has that compensation, no way! So we hired him instead [of having him on an internship]. (PS4)

The example above shows the importance of a perceived fairness in the job situation and how this also affects staff attitude to employment requirements. Nevertheless, with a short-term horizon and from a job-creation perspective, there were also voices among the interviewees that raised a need to accept this type of imperfect conditions, explained by one interviewee as follows:

I think that for those who come here, they should be able to count on us and feel that when they’ve gone through with this [internship], they have a chance to get a job. That has to be the most important thing. (PHG2)

Still, several interviewees struggled with doubts that their engagement might not actually have any long-term good effects for the ER interns. There was scant follow-up regarding what happened to ER interns after the internship ended, and how many of them actually got permanent employment. In a few cases, the interviewees knew only due to keeping personal contact with the ER interns after the internship, or accidentally by, for example, running into them outside of work:

With some [ER] interns, I don’t know what happened later. I think it’s a shame that we don’t get information on what happened with those who we’ve worked with for six months. But

one lives here in this neighbourhood, so I see him sometimes. It's great when he tells me how things are going. When you work with someone three days a week, you talk about life, problems, and you get engaged in their lives, perhaps more than you should. (PHG5)

The pressure to be a “good” supervisor made them personally engaged in the ER interns as people, and not only in their work. This was in contrast to the advice given from HR and employment officers, who promoted a strictly professional relationship with the ER interns, something that was found difficult to uphold in practice, since the ER interns asked for help with many private matters, for example, reading emails in Swedish, paying bills, writing CVs, and even helping them and their families find a new and better place to live:

They come with their bills and ask for help how to pay them. We were told [at the supervisor course] not to do that, but it's difficult not to help when they don't understand how to do it. To help write CVs and fill in applications, which I had no idea how to do. But I just had to learn. . . . You're not supposed to do that, but it depends on the person, how much you engage. It becomes emotional. (PHG5)

One of the supervisors has a young ER intern [now], and she helps him a lot, writing CVs, applying for jobs. Although she chooses to help, it takes her a lot of time; he needs so much support from her, in a way he needs a mentor. . . . But she feels a bit frustrated because she doesn't really have that time. (PHG6)

This additional support requires much from the interviewees, especially those working as supervisors. They become involved in many activities they have not engaged in before and spend quite a lot of time trying to find appropriate tasks for the ER interns that match their prerequisites and interests: “I usually think about ‘what is the most valuable thing for this particular intern, what will be most important for this individual person?’” (PHG1). One of the interviewees found out that one intern had previously worked as a painter in his home country, and therefore tried to find painting-related tasks, although some of them were not even needed, just so that the intern could do something he enjoyed.

However, despite the large amount of personal engagement needed, all the extra work and the creation of tasks suiting the interns' interests and previous experiences, the interviewees described how they felt that the work with the interns gave them a personal reward and a sense of contributing to an individual, as well as to wider society. As one interviewee (PHG2) said, “[The intern] told me that after he had got employment, he got his life back. I think that's big. It's very cool.” Another interviewee expressed his satisfaction by saying:

We don't live in a perfect world, but I think it's cool that [the employer] flexes their muscles and gives people internships and that they have the ambition to make these internships meaningful and lead to a permanent job. (PHG1)

According to the interviewees, supervising ER interns opened up for meeting the people “behind the news reports”, relating to the 2015 refugee crisis: “It's a big deal, it's rewarding to get a face-to-face perspective on events you have only seen on the TV news reports . . . to meet people who have been there” (PHG1). Thus, the stories of individual situations told by the interviewees demonstrate how employment requirements provided a space to meet people they would not normally meet. It caused them to reflect on differences and to care for people with another background. Being new in a cold country such as Sweden provided one such story:

He [an intern originally from a country in Africa] had so many clothes on but was still cold... And it's not like he was saying ‘I won't go out’, because he does what he's supposed to do. The other day, it was really cold, and we were down by the harbour. I needed to change a bulb in a light post. It's kind of tricky, and it takes some time with the light fixtures, so I put the heat on and let him stay in the car. (PHG3)

### 3.2. Effects for the Internship

To be able to offer high-quality internships, the interviewees claimed that demands had to be made on the ER interns:

It hasn't been easy; we've had interns we had to fire because it wasn't working out. We've had interns who stopped showing up to work, so we just had to terminate the internship and not waste any more time on them... We make our working place and resources available in order to help people. And if they don't want help, then I don't think it's our role to try and coax and nag them to come here. In those cases, we have simply ended [the internship]. (AH1)

Furthermore, several of the ER interns were said to have become disillusioned with the idea of internships, as for many, the internship offered through employment requirements may just be one internship in a long string of internships, which have not yet led to a permanent job: "People go from internship to internship, but never land a permanent job" (PHG1). Both the ER interns and their supervisors described how some ER interns felt hopelessness and frustration with the system and had a feeling of never getting a permanent job. One interviewee explained that this frustration often led to repeated discussions:

The interns are not always super motivated to learn Swedish or participate in the internship. They think things move too slowly since they just want a permanent job. They ask, 'Why should I be here [on an internship]? I just want to work'. That is the most common discussion I have with the interns, to try to convince them that they will get a proper job, but it will take some time. (PHG10)

A few of the ER intern supervisors felt that some ER interns accepted the internship only to keep their welfare support, which they may lose if not partaking in various internships or other labour market initiatives. This reason for accepting an internship influenced the supervisors' approach towards these individuals, especially when compared to, for example, traditional apprentices:

The [regular] interns I have had previously have done the internship as part of their education, so they have a much greater interest in the work and more prior knowledge, so that is a difference. The ER interns are not always so interested in facilities maintenance work. (PHG3)

The interviewees, especially those working as supervisors of the interns, found the lack of motivation and interest in the tasks problematic, since it often caused discussions with the interns about why they should participate in an internship and required much effort to keep spirits high among them. At the same time, the supervisors felt that the effort had to be mutual, so the ER interns were expected to be as committed to their work as other employees:

As a supervisor, I have some level of responsibility, but that is, of course, shared with the intern. You have a shared responsibility that the [internship] is a meaningful time because you don't get rich coming here. Instead, you hopefully gain experience and know more things when you leave. So that is a responsibility. Part of it is giving them work experience, but a large part of it is also to teach the language, and that is usually far outside my work description. ... [However] I try to provide opportunities for those who are ready to take them, to practice their abilities to hold a conversation in Swedish. That is a strength with this internship. (PHG1)

Below is an example given by an interviewee on how to learn Swedish by seizing all work as a learning opportunity, even when the ER intern, in this case attending meetings in a language foreign to them, cannot contribute much. The quote also illustrates the importance of making work meaningful by looking at it from an alternative viewpoint and with a broader perspective:

Instead of thinking that this is a meeting where the intern cannot understand all the conversations and saying that they should rake leaves instead, I give them a notepad and tell them to jot down 20 Swedish words to learn. So it's about finding a meaningful perspective for the intern in various situations . . . Instead of zoning out, don't mind that and grab some words off the PowerPoint! (PHG1)

In addition, the ER interns emphasized the problems caused by a language barrier. One interviewed ER intern (PS5), who had newly immigrated to Sweden, explained that he did not think he could ever get a (permanent) job because of his poor Swedish: "I can work well, but I cannot speak very much. The language is a big problem for me, so [my supervisor] has had to help me a lot".

An issue that appeared in cases where the internships were going well and where the ER intern had been successfully integrated into the organizations was that this occasionally led to an overexposure of the ER interns by, for example, using them for marketing purposes:

When we take someone in, I think they are just like anybody else. I can notice a tendency that some want to raise this all the time, and I don't like that. It bothers me because they are people, and I have taken them in because of who they are, but there are many who want to market [employment requirements], and that doesn't feel right to me. (PS4)

This means that some well-performing ER interns may be used as speakers at industry seminars, be featured in marketing materials, be posted on the company website, be interviewed in magazines or radio shows, etc. By doing so, they are labelled as something other than ordinary employees, which counteracts the intentions expressed by the supervisors of taking them in and 'treating them as any other employee'.

### 3.3. *Effects for the Project and Organization*

Many tasks of the supervisors, and by extension, the ER interns, include a fair amount of communication with sub-contractors, clients and tenants: "It's a lot of language in the role of working with facilities maintenance. It's about communication, both with tenants and contractors . . . many face-to-face meetings" (PHG1). Therefore, language issues were considered to be a major difficulty and barrier for employment requirements to be fully implemented:

It's been more demanding than I thought it would be. The most difficult thing with the interns [refugees] is the language, to make yourself understood, because they need to understand me, and I need to understand them. That's the difficult part. (PHG5)

Additionally, the ER interns often did not fully understand Swedish work culture, which led to unnecessary misunderstandings and some frustration within the team: "The interns did not know our social codes or how we act within the Swedish work culture and in our workgroups" (PHG9). Language and cultural barriers did not only hinder the socialization of ER interns into the workgroup, but also made supervision difficult. One of the major concerns was safety and a fear of accidents, since handling heavy equipment in both construction and facilities maintenance needs clear instructions. One interviewee explained:

Safety is very, very important. And that includes everything from how you lift things to how you handle equipment. For example, a handheld grass mower with rotor blades: to try to explain to someone who doesn't know that many Swedish words that you can absolutely never ever put your fingers under the rotor blades. Things like that are very important. (PHG3)

Another obstacle to broader implementation of employment requirements was the type of the projects themselves, where not all projects are suitable for employment requirements. An interviewee (PS2) raised issues regarding the size of the project, the nature of the work, and a lack of suitable candidates:

In a large-scale project, they can offer much more diverse tasks, so there I can imagine that you can employ people without a background in construction. . . . We explained to the municipality [the client] that we cannot take just anyone. If they are supposed to be a carpenter apprentice, they must know some basics, to use the tools. So we can't just take in a layman carpenter . . . In this contract we formulated that we would take in ten interns. But after a while, we realized that we will never reach ten interns, so the original idea wasn't well-thought through. (PS2)

The size and scope of the contract thus have an impact on the employment requirements, and vice versa, but there may well be a general shortage of suitable people to take in on an internship. Nevertheless, although there are many practical barriers related to employment requirements, as illustrated by the quote above, the interviewees emphasized that the ER interns are ordinary employees, and therefore are expected to do a job just like any other employee, as described by one interviewee (AH1): "I have chosen all of them because I think they add value to our group, not because of where they come from". Thus, they were expected to do real tasks on real terms:

There are no simple jobs. Some think [the interns] should only pick up trash. But they do the same job we do. . . . They shouldn't only do the boring tasks. . . . They must feel like they're here on the same terms as we are, because I wouldn't want to go to Iraq and only pick up trash. They need to be involved and be able to see that they can advance [in their career]. The more you learn, the more you can climb the ladder. . . . They should have all the possibilities. (PHG2)

Besides an ambition to perform work on conditions similar to any other employee, the ER interns and employment requirements were perceived to also create added value for the work team. According to the interviewees, when jointly engaging an ER intern at work, this shared responsibility tied the team closer together. Taking an ER intern aboard and socializing the person into the team requires joint efforts and an adjustment of work practices. If the team succeeds in doing this and puts up with the extra efforts needed, it was seen as confirmation that the team is functioning well:

There has to be an interest from everybody to engage, and here everybody did get very engaged. . . . The team felt like it has been great fun . . . and of course that creates team spirit. And everybody was adamant that [the intern] would do well. So, in such a situation, it brings the team closer together. . . . We support each other. (PS2)

For the supervisors, added value was also found on a more personal level: "I think [working with the interns] gives me some sort of added value in my own employment, that I work for an employer who is a genuine builder of society" (PHG1). Another interviewee said:

I feel all the time that I am happy to be able to help, to help a person who hopefully shall live and feel good here [in Sweden], to have a good life that works and that everybody benefits from. If people around us are feeling good, then we all feel good . . . It feels good to contribute in that way. (PHG3)

Many interviewees, especially those working for public organizations, expressed that working with employment requirements and taking in interns should be a natural element in the work of their organizations:

We have to give them a chance, absolutely. It has to be terrible not to have anything to do [when being unemployed]. It becomes a vicious circle where they don't get anywhere. It must lead to such a terrible frustration. So I think [employment requirements] are really important, it's our responsibility now. (PHG2)

However, in spite of a general favourable attitude towards employment requirements and their effects on the supervisors, the team, the organizations, and society, many of the interviewees also stressed that it is not a be-all and end-all solution:

I think it's great that we're doing this, we give these people a chance. But we have to ensure that we get results in the end. We can't succeed with everybody, but we should have the goal that everybody gets employment. (PHG2)

#### 4. Discussion

The aim of this paper is to analyse effects at an operative level when employment requirements are implemented. Applying a practice lens, the analysis will now be discussed in terms of the theoretical framework focusing on (1) everyday lived experiences of individual actors, (2) relational aspects of practices, (3) tension caused by imbalances in power, resources, and interests, and (4) an individual actor's role as a practice carrier. The section ends with a discussion of first and second order practices in environments characterized by competing institutional logics.

##### 4.1. *Everyday, Lived Experiences of Individual Actors*

The interviews in this study have focused on what individual practitioners do in their workday in relation to employment requirements and the ER interns. What became clear was that individual actors had to create many new types of practices as a result of employment requirements. The interviewees expressed a frustration that they did not have the time to carve out a space for dealing with the internships in the way they would like. Follow-up was scant, compensation bureaucracy complex, projects sometimes lacked necessary scope and scale for internships, the ER interns often lacked language skills and previous experience, and the employment requirements were imposed on them in a top-down manner and landed in the laps of individuals at the operative level without fully formalized support and necessary resources. This would suggest that established practices have not yet changed enough to fully accommodate new practices related to employment requirements (cf. [44,46]).

One thing that could help to firmly establish practices related to employment requirements is to make them more routinized and standardized. Creating routines could be a first step to more norm-creation when it comes to social procurement practice [44,46]. Firstly, routines relating to the administration of how to handle, for example, compensation for ER interns could be improved, starting with increasing the knowledge of different compensation schemes. This corroborates previous research on social procurement, which has found that there is a general lack of knowledge about how to practically implement and work with social procurement [1,3,5].

Secondly, routines for following-up individual internships would help resolve general uncertainties regarding the results from social procurement, which has also been highlighted by previous research as necessary for social procurement to be widely accepted (cf. [26,31,34,35]), and thus legitimize employment requirements in practice. Implementing follow-up routines would benefit supervisors of ER interns, as getting feedback on what happened to them after the internship could help assuring them that their engagement in the ER interns has had long-term effects. Perhaps Erridge's [16] finding that many people who get employed through social procurement actually maintain their employment after their internships end can indicate that ER interns in Sweden can also have the same outcome.

Despite the lack of standardized and routinized practices and that working with ER interns can lead to increased stress for the supervisors, who must engage in extracurricular tasks outside their normal work responsibilities, it is clear from the interviews that value is created for ER interns, for individual supervisors, for work teams, and for projects as a whole. Thus, social procurement has the potential to serve as a value-adding service in the construction and real estate sector in many ways (cf. [29]). This value creation, despite not being institutionalized [44,46], can be enabled through the relational and emotional aspects of working with employment requirements and ER interns.

#### 4.2. Relational Aspects of Practices

The findings show how practitioners are strongly driven by a wish to do good: do good by the internships, good by their organizations, and good by themselves. This “doing good” is reflected in their personal expectations to provide meaningful internships and fair compensation, by tailoring work tasks to fit the ER interns’ skills and interests, by personal engagement, and by doing extracurricular work tasks regarding the ER interns’ private lives. This is a good illustration of the relational and emotional aspects of practices, how engagement and caring for the ER interns can lead to the creation of new practices not previously practised in their everyday work life [41,45].

Practices related to employment requirements can also be seen as relational in terms of supervisors’ engagement becoming self-supporting and having a beneficial effect also for the companies. It is difficult to draw any firm conclusions based on three cases, but this study indicates that when a work team is well-functioning, team members are open-minded and everyone in the work team is equally engaged in the ER intern, it does seem that the internship goes better. Reciprocally, this may have a positive effect on the perceived quality of the ordinary workers’ employment. The drive for doing good adds an extra level to the supervisors’ working lives, in the sense that they become proud of their employer, satisfied with their work role, and part of developing a better functioning work group. This adds to the findings of Eadie and Rafferty [27] that social procurement can lead to an improved working environment and potentially increased productivity as well.

Previous research on practice theory has claimed that practices are socially constituted in relation to other people, rather than individually constituted, and thereby adding a relational aspect to practices [40–42]. In this study, the findings suggest that implementing employment requirements can impact favourably the relationship employees have with their employer and each other, for example, by creating a better team spirit. These relational aspects of employment requirement practices thus seem to have led to unexpected good outcomes in other respects besides employment for marginalized groups.

The importance of social relations is thus clear in the case of supervisors, the work teams in the projects, and the ER interns. When a work group is fully engaged and the ER intern receives support from more people than just the official supervisor, the interns are (1) socialized into the project more fully, (2) the possibility of learning more skills increases and (3) both practical skills and language skills are improved. These developments should lead to a better chance of finding permanent employment after the internships’ term expires, either in the same organization or elsewhere (cf. [16]). Therefore, there seems to be positive reinforcement, a cumulative effect and an added value to individual workers, to work teams, and the ER interns. In such an environment that becomes self-reinforcing, actors likely have more space, resources and power to manage conflicting practices and to take the initiative to create new sustainable practices. In other words, they have been able to influence their working environment and have managed to strike a balance between new and old practices, making them work more in harmony [41].

#### 4.3. Tensions Caused by Imbalances in Power, Resources, and Interests

Social relations between supervisors and interns also come at a cost, in terms of widening the supervisory role and responsibilities. The findings show that supervisors engage in extracurricular tasks like helping the ER interns read private emails, make phone calls on their behalf, write CVs, find new living arrangements, etc. These extracurricular tasks would suggest an increase in administrative burden and a need for more resources, especially in terms of time. This points to an imbalance between two competing practices, where the implementation of social procurement might lead to other established practices having to be cut down due to limited resources (cf. [41]). This finding, that working with employment requirements can require more resources and lead to increased administrative burdens, contradicts Erridge’s [16] findings that social procurement does not lead to more administrative duties. Nonetheless, increasing resources are likely to lead to increased costs, something which previous research has found is a concern for the sector [1–3,5,16,27]. Therefore,

what is best for individual ER interns is not necessarily what is best for construction and real estate organizations' bottom lines.

Another imbalance relating to ER interns concerns expectations regarding their work. The lack of construction experience among the ER interns is a problem at an operational level and for the supervisors, as the ER interns' inexperience leads to accommodations having to be made in daily work practices. For example, as the ER interns have language barriers and often no background in construction or facilities maintenance, some tasks they are expected to do become difficult (e.g., communicating with tenants), and some tasks even become dangerous (e.g., operating heavy equipment). That ER interns are (at least initially) expected to perform tasks they are ill-equipped to do creates a discrepancy between expectations and reality. This discovery also mirrors many of Erridge's [16] findings regarding a lack of training for ER interns.

Despite some ER interns being ill-equipped to perform certain tasks, the ER interns are said to be treated like the ordinary employees and perform the same work tasks as their colleagues and supervisors, as "there are no simple jobs". This means that there is a contradiction in the way the ER interns are viewed, where adjustment in daily work practices must be made (which is not easy to do), while at the same time the ER interns and their work are not to be acknowledged as any different. As such, it seems that the actors working with social procurement have not been able to fully influence old practices and make space for new practices, and a tension remains between what ER interns are expected to do and what they are able to do [39,41].

The question then becomes if this tension hinders the ER interns in their quest to find permanent employment and to learn Swedish. If the ER interns are not given enough support, they can miss important learning opportunities, because they have too much of a hill to climb. However, if the ER interns receive too much special treatment, they may feel cosseted and become incapacitated and less independent. This finding is in line with Murphy and Eadie's [25] conclusion that practices must be made bespoke in order to achieve maximum social value. However, how to actually create and establish these bespoke practices and how to achieve a balance between support and self-sufficiency for the ER interns is unclear. What is clear is that developing bespoke practices is time-consuming and adds more pressure on supervisors who express how they feel stressed to complete their non-intern-related work tasks in less time. As such, bespoke practices may increase social value for ER interns, but decrease value as well as increase stress for intern supervisors. Moving forward, organizations in the construction and real estate sector who want to engage in social procurement will have to balance different institutional logics (cf. [40–42]). One way for individual actors to handle this balancing act could be to change their ideas of what their role and identity should be in relation to employment requirements and their daily work.

#### 4.4. Individual Actors' Role as Practice Carriers

As was previously mentioned, the scope of supervisors' responsibilities unexpectedly changed when the supervisors started working with ER interns. Besides their normal construction work and facilities maintenance tasks, they also became involved in helping the ER interns with private matters. Supervisors often became a very important 'Swedish friend' for (newly immigrated) ER interns. Taking this into consideration, formal work tasks, and resources to perform those tasks, need to be widened, so that supervisors have the mandate to also include work and responsibilities in their role which differ from traditional construction or facilities maintenance work. This is already done in an ad hoc manner by the supervisors, who act as practice carriers when taking initiatives to create a space for the establishment of these new extracurricular work practices [41].

Many of the extra-curricular tasks undertaken by the supervisors have traditionally been performed by social workers or similar, which suggests a hybridization of their role [53]. Thus, the role of supervisors and practitioners in construction and real estate companies change when using employment requirements. When supervisors engage in social-worker-like tasks, while at the same time being

expected to perform their usual work tasks, they will need to prioritize which role they enact and navigate between different practices.

This means that carrying practices related to construction or facilities maintenance work, while at the same time carrying practices related to employment requirements, could create identity ambiguity and uncertainty about the scope of their responsibilities. A successful merger of the two identities may mitigate this ambiguity and facilitate creating sustainable practices (cf. [39]), while failing to do so may lead to the fragmentation of employment requirement-related tasks into daily work practices (cf. [53]). A hybridization of the role might mean that supervisors can carve out more space for their tasks than they previously have been able to [39]. This might enable the creation of new bundles of practices (cf. [40–42]), combining both traditional construction work and facilities maintenance tasks with more social worker-esque tasks. Such creative work (cf. [39]) could ultimately lead to the establishment and institutionalization of a new employment requirement practice (cf. [1]).

#### 4.5. First and Second-Order Practices

Looking at the discussion thus far, it is clear that many resources and new practices are created when employment requirements are implemented. Some of these practices are more or less expected and were intentionally designed when deciding to implement employment requirements. Other practices were unexpected and created on an ad hoc basis. Based on the findings presented in this paper, both types of practices are important and serve different purposes (cf. [44,46]).

Some practices are expected and necessary when implementing employment requirements, such as recruiting the ER interns, assigning supervisors, introducing the ER interns to their new workplace and work tasks, setting the ER interns to work, and monitoring their progress. We call these first-order practices, as these are fundamental when implementing employment requirements in the first place. However, these first-order practices are not enough to make employment requirements work in practice. They must be complemented with unexpected and unplanned extracurricular practices (cf. [44,46]), such as giving the ER interns impromptu Swedish work culture and language training (“grab some words from the PowerPoint”), helping them read emails and pay bills, ensuring they get fair compensation, finding new living arrangements for them, and giving them appropriate work tasks that they can perform in line with their previous experience, skills, and interests to keep them motivated. We call these practices second-order practices, and these second-order practices can be said to be supportive of the first-order, fundamental practices, and something which individual actors can manoeuvre (cf. [39]) into their workdays to make it all come together.

The second-order practices are not the main foci of the implementation of employment requirements and were unforeseen by the interviewees. However, they are nonetheless vital to making the first-order practices work at all and were created on an ad hoc basis so that the internships would not fail. In other words, just conducting practices to implement employment requirements is not enough to make them work; therefore, the second-order practices are vital. This notion of first- and second-order practices adds a valuable insight into how to make social procurement become a sustainable practice, as well as adding to the idea of the relational aspects of practices [40–42] where the organic emergent nature of practices becomes visible.

## 5. Conclusions

The findings in this paper provide novel, detailed insight into the effects from social procurement and employment requirements at an operative level, for actors working in the construction and real estate sector. Employment requirements entail new demands on the practitioners as receivers of ER interns, which in turn calls for a personal engagement with the ER interns and their private lives. The practitioners’ drive for “doing good” by the internship, good by their organization, and good by themselves leads to self-reinforcing effects like them becoming proud of their employer and satisfied at work. However, they often lack the time and resources to handle ER internships in a way that they would like. ER interns have to deal with demands from their supervisors as to how they should

engage in their internship, while at the same time, for various reasons, they often feel demotivated to fulfil what is required of their internships. In the daily operative work of the project or maintenance duties, the findings point to several obstacles to effective use of employment requirements, such as the language barrier, safety issues and non-alignment with how work is structured. However, despite the fact that employment requirements are difficult to implement and work with in practice, the ER interns add value to the individual construction project and the organizations, for example, in terms of improved work satisfaction and team spirit among organizational members.

For research, this paper firstly provides a bottom-up and micro-level perspective on practices and the daily working life of people on an operative level, which to date, has been lacking in studies of social procurement. Secondly, by having a practice lens, the tension between new and old practices that individual actors must handle is illustrated. The paper shows how individual actors must strike a balance between fulfilling their formal responsibilities and performing new practices on an ad hoc basis, to ensure that their daily life with the ER interns work. This navigation between practices is not easy, due to an imbalance of resources. Acting as practice carriers for both traditional work tasks and new employment requirement practices can lead to an ambiguity of what the scope of responsibilities and roles is. However, through a hybridization of the roles of individual practitioners, this ambiguity may be mitigated, and sustainable employment requirement practices can be established. Lastly, the paper suggests an important relation between what we call first-order, premeditated practices, and second-order, supportive and emergent practices, and how both types of practices are vital for making employment requirements work.

For practitioners who work with social procurement, this paper emphasizes the importance of widening the official responsibilities of supervisors of ER interns, as well as balancing bespoke, person-centric practices to individual ER interns and their individual abilities, with standardized and routinized practices. This could include issues regarding compensation and follow-up routines. Making such changes could enable a more effective use of employment requirements, and a positive cumulative effect for ER interns, their supervisors, and organizations.

Future research could investigate how expectations and plans for employment requirements differ between parent organizations and clients, in relation to what actually happens in practice in the projects, and how collaboration between projects, parent organizations and clients are organized. Moreover, the interviewees talked much about creating meaningful internships for the ER interns, and many ER interns are perceived as disillusioned by their previous internship experiences that never led to a permanent job. Future studies can therefore build on previous research on meaningful work, to examine what that implies for employment requirements, how it is achieved, and how the sense of meaningless work can be diminished.

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## Paper 5

Troje, D. and Andersson, T. (2020) As above, not so below: Developing Social Procurement Practices on Strategic and Operative Levels. *Equality, diversity and inclusion: An international journal* (In press September 2020).



# As above, not so below: Developing social procurement practices on strategic and operative levels

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Procurement is increasingly used as a strategic tool to mitigate societal issues such as social exclusion and unemployment of marginalized groups. By conducting social procurement and imposing so-called employment requirements, organizations can create job opportunities for marginalized people. Such practices are becoming increasingly popular in the construction sector, but remain scattered, which hinders the effective creation, use, and dissemination of cohesive and commonly shared social procurement practices. Accordingly, this paper analyzes the creation, use, and dissemination of social procurement practices in the Swedish construction sector.

**Design/Methodology/Approach** – The theory of proto-institutions, which refers to institutions under development, is applied to analyze 46 interviews with construction practitioners.

**Findings** – There is currently little convergence of social procurement practices, due to practices not being fully internalized across organizations and projects; interns hired through employment requirements not having strong enough incentives to engage with their internships; actors working strategically and operatively having different possibilities to create social procurement practices; and the development of maintenance mechanisms for the formalization of sustainable practices being weak.

**Originality/Value** – This paper contextualizes efforts to increase equality, diversity, and inclusion of marginalized groups in the construction sector. The adoption of an institutional perspective of practice development elucidates the institutional constellation of existing institutional logics that impact on this practice development. This paper also indicates how the work with social procurement can become more effective and efficient and maximize the social value output for marginalized people living in social exclusion. For institutional theory, it illustrates how proto-institutions can be driven by both top-down and bottom-up perspectives.

**Keywords** Construction, practices, employment requirements, institutional work, proto-institutions, social procurement, Sweden

**Paper type** Research paper

## **Introduction**

Private and public actors are increasingly using their purchasing power to mitigate societal issues such as fiscal constraints, mass migration, and segregation, and to create social value through their procurement process (cf. Edling, 2015; Barraket *et al.*, 2016). This process, known as social procurement, includes measures like health and safety, buying from local-, women-, or minority-owned enterprises, and creating employment for disadvantaged groups (Loosemore, 2016). In Sweden, social procurement has focused on employment requirements that offer internships for marginalized people such as unemployed immigrants, youths, and/or disabled people (see Lind and Mjörnell, 2015). Sweden's decision to engage in social procurement is largely due to increasing unemployment and social exclusion for marginalized groups. The social exclusion is a multidimensional problem relating to employment, education, and housing, and is especially prominent among immigrants. Sweden's problems with unemployment and social exclusion were further aggravated by the 2015 refugee crisis, which urgently thrust unemployment and social exclusion problems to the top of the political agenda (Edling, 2015, Alaraj *et al.*, 2019).

Adding to the problem in the nexus of work, employment, and housing is the fact that people in social exclusion often live in neighborhoods that need refurbishment, which ties the built environment closely to social exclusion issues. Consequently, the construction sector has been targeted as a suitable industry for social procurement initiatives (Almahmoud and Doloï, 2015). However, refurbishment of dilapidated housing is hindered by a shortage of construction workers. This situation has created an opportunity for social procurement that can kill three birds with one stone: (1) hiring unemployed people in (2) refurbishment projects of their dilapidated housing, thereby (3) bringing in a new workforce into the construction sector (cf. Lind and Mjörnell, 2015; Alaraj *et al.*, 2019).

Academics, policy makers, and practitioners have shown considerable interest in developing effective sustainability and diversity practices (cf. van den Brink, 2020), such as using social procurement to achieve a more equal, diverse, and inclusive society. However, social procurement requires further investigation and new analytical frameworks as it currently suffers from weak theorization, conceptualization, and empirical examination (Barraket *et al.*, 2016; Loosemore, 2016; Petersen, 2018). Many municipalities across Sweden and in other countries are currently implementing employment requirements, but their methods for doing so vary and no best practices exist, making it unclear how actors in the sector create and disseminate new practices (Petersen, 2018). This lack of clarity and a general lack of knowledge about and examination of social procurement in both practice and research is problematic, as social procurement is likely to be used increasingly in future construction projects, where the sector's tremendous employment magnitude makes social considerations like employment creation especially important (Loosemore, 2016). Therefore, it is important to examine how actors working with social procurement both on a strategic and operative level can create and disseminate new practices related to social procurement.

Previous studies have suggested that social procurement has pushed the construction sector into an institutionalization process, which can be seen, for example, in the development of new roles and practices that are underway in many countries (see, e.g., Barraket *et al.*, 2016; Troje and Kadefors, 2018; Troje and Gluch, 2019). However, this institutionalization process

takes place in a pluralistic institutional context, where different institutional logics serve as shared scripts of what is appropriate and legitimate behavior. In the construction sector, the institutional logics of social procurement conflict with the incumbent institutional logics of traditional procurement (Petersen, 2018), thereby triggering tensions that influence the creation and institutionalization of new practices (Friedland and Alford, 1991). One way to study the creation of new practices that are becoming institutionalized – as previous research has suggested is happening with social procurement – is to look at them as proto-institutions, meaning institutions-in-the-making (Zietsma and McKnight 2009). Applying the perspective of proto-institutions on the development of social procurement practices can help us understand the initial stages of this ongoing institutionalization process.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the creation, use, and dissemination of social procurement practices. As institutional work focuses on explaining change and how new institutions and practices are formed through individual actions, institutional work is used as a theoretical framework to understand how the proto-institution of social procurement is driven (Lawrence *et al.*, 2009). Studying how practices are created, used, and disseminated from an institutional perspective can add valuable knowledge to social sustainability research and to social procurement practice and indicate how work with social procurement can become more effective and efficient to maximize social value output for marginalized people.

### *Social procurement*

Although it has been used for a long time, social procurement is currently attracting increased attention in practice and in research. For example, social procurement was used in the United Kingdom to employ disabled World War I veterans, and in North America in affirmative action policies in the 1960s (McCrudden 2004). The current policy interest in social procurement is exemplified by the UK's Social Value Act from 2012, and the EU Directives on Sustainable Procurement from 2014. Similar legislation can be found also in Canada, Australia, and South Africa (Raiden *et al.*, 2019). According to Barraket *et al.* (2016), such legislation points to social procurement becoming more legitimate and formalized in policy. Although social procurement and the outcomes of social procurement initiatives is considered difficult to evaluate (cf. Barraket *et al.*, 2016; Troje and Kadefors, 2018), social procurement is increasingly seen as a way to fulfil corporate social responsibility (CSR) agendas and provide new business opportunities, as well as to lead to shared knowledge and trust and improved productivity (see Erridge, 2007; Barraket *et al.*, 2016; Eadie and Rafferty, 2014; Ponzoni *et al.*, 2017; Troje and Kadefors, 2018; Murphy and Eadie, 2019).

Despite increasing popularity and positive benefits for organizations, research on social procurement has been quite scarce (cf. Loosemore, 2016) and, by extension, knowledge about social procurement is lacking, both in research and in practice. There is a widespread perception among practitioners that working with social procurement is expensive and increases workloads (Erridge, 2007; Eadie and Rafferty, 2014; Troje and Kadefors, 2018). However, Erridge (2007) argued that the possibility of achieving socio-economic goals, such as increased employment for marginalized people, is limited by a traditional overemphasis on commercial goals rather than social value. This institutionalized cultural behavior and norms of focusing on cost and

commercial opportunities can prevent practices related to social procurement from becoming distinct (Barraket *et al.*, 2016).

To overcome the aforementioned challenges and negative perceptions of social procurement, previous research has suggested that organizations should develop new, person-centric, and bespoke practices, modes of collaboration, means of measurement, and competencies (Barraket *et al.*, 2016; Alaraj *et al.*, 2019; Murphy and Eadie, 2019). New practices must also be objectified in order to be adopted widely. Therefore, practices should be tied to artefacts, resources, and good examples to be perceived as easy and understandable; for example, by developing practical frameworks. Thus, practices can become established despite the fact that social procurement currently lacks favorable institutional norms and rules (Barraket *et al.*, 2016). Overall, few existing studies have covered the specific practices actors engage in when implementing social procurement. By adopting an institutional perspective on the creation, use, and dissemination of social procurement practices, these practices can be both identified and theorized.

#### *Social procurement from an institutional perspective*

New practices can be created and disseminated through the work of individual and collective actors. This is called institutional work and it revolves around how actors' can create, maintain, or disrupt long-lasting, taken-for-granted institutions through their daily mundane work (Lawrence *et al.*, 2009). Actors conduct institutional work and create new practices by wielding different types of agency: projective, iterative, and practical-evaluative agency (Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009). Projective agency focuses on actors' planned actions and projection of the future. Iterative agency involves reactivating previous actions and habits as a course for action. Practical-evaluative agency focuses on the present and how to respond to emerging ambiguities and demands (*ibid.*). Institutional work and the creation of new practices, like those related to social procurement, often includes all three types of agency.

Institutional work that creates new institutions and/or disrupts current ones is more likely to occur where different institutional logics compete and where the status quo held by incumbent institutional logics is challenged by new, disruptive institutional logics (Andersson and Gadolin, 2020). Social procurement conflicts with incumbent institutional logics of traditional construction procurement (Troje and Kadefors, 2018), where actors within this context operate within under-developed institutionalized structures, rules, and practices. This means that instability in the institutional environment (the construction sector) is partly due to the conflicting institutional logics of traditional construction procurement and social procurement (see Table 1). Firstly, in contrast to the logic of traditional procurement in the construction sector, social procurement does not focus on tangible criteria that are easy to measure, such as cost. Secondly, social procurement discards market logic for a social value logic (Petersen, 2018), where social procurement aims to deliver social value, which usually lies outside of the contractor's area of expertise and thereby means a deviation from traditional work practices (Murphy and Eadie, 2019). Thirdly, social procurement does not pertain directly to the object of procurement (employment, rather than the construction of a building) (Petersen, 2018). Finally, despite close relationships between organizations, the construction sector is characterized by loosely coupled actors who collaborate while maintaining some degree of

independence (Dubois and Gadde, 2002); in social procurement, however, clients can dictate the type of workers that contractors should hire, such as unemployed immigrants, which disrupts the independence that usually characterizes this sector (Petersen, 2018).

*Table 1: The Institutional logics of traditional procurement vs. social procurement*

<b>Institutional logics of traditional procurement</b>	<b>Institutional logics of social procurement</b>
1) Focuses on easily measured criteria like cost	1) Focuses on fuzzy criteria like social value
2) Driven by market values	2) Driven by social values
3) Embeds institutionalized and shared practices within the contractor’s expertise	3) Embeds new and unestablished practices outside the contractor’s expertise
4) Criteria pertains directly to the object of procurement	4) Criteria does not pertain to the object of procurement
5) Necessary resources are well-known	5) May require more or new types of resources
6) Loosely coupled actors making independent and decentralized decisions	6) Clients dictate what type of employees the contractor should hire

Social procurement has the potential to push the construction sector into a state of institutional instability. In such an unstable environment, Zietsma and McKnight (2009) described a process wherein actors can conduct parallel streams of institutional work that lead to the creation of new institutional arrangements that better fit their agenda; for example, social procurement. These “institutions-in-the-making” are called proto-institutions and can include new and hitherto weakly diffused practices that are created in collaborative relationships and have the potential to eventually become widely adopted and institutionalized (Lawrence *et al.*, 2002). Thus, applying a theoretical construct for institutions-in-the-making to study social procurement is useful to understand and analyze how practices are created and disseminated in the construction sector.

According to Zietsma and McKnight (2009), proto-institutions are developed through five non-linear but iteratively unfolding phases. In (1) *the initial development* of proto-institutions, actors identify and assess their own and other actors’ objectives in relation to the proto-institution; this is important in order to achieve internal and external legitimacy. Actors (2) *promote* the proto-institution through cognitive structures by leaning on long-held institutional logics inside and outside the field; normative structures by being a role model and “doing the right thing”; and regulative structures by ensuring compliance with regulatory systems and standards. Actors attempt to publicly discredit competing and incumbent institutional logics and associated practices to eventually (3) *disrupt* them to make room for the new proto-institution. As proto-institutions are developed, they embed multiple actors’ interests through (4) *co-creational* institutional work. Proto-institutions are continuously adapted according to conditional supporter demands, and also adapted to mimic accepted features of competing institutions in order to match the competitive environment. As such, there is a trade-off when actors seek support for the proto-institution. Finally, actors create (5) *maintenance mechanisms* for the proto-institution by reinforcing cognitive, normative, and regulative institutional structures. They do this by emphasizing the proto-institution’s connection to existing well-established institutional logics; by reinforcing normative networks, solidarity, and

shared meanings between networks; and by establishing coercive mechanisms that elicit desirable behavior. We will use the theoretical framework of institutional work and proto-institutions to understand and analyze the creation, use, and dissemination of social procurement practices and the initial stages of the ongoing institutionalization process brought about by social procurement.

## **Method**

As this paper aims to investigate the creation, use and dissemination of new practices, a qualitative approach was chosen to capture actions, beliefs, and motivations related to social procurement (cf. Silverman, 2013). Forty-six interviews were conducted, with the interviewees representing various actors in the Swedish construction sector, including clients, contractors, and consultants, and support staff such as those working at the Employment Agency. The interviews were conducted by one of the authors between May 2016 and May 2019 and each lasted between 45 minutes and three hours.

The interviewees were chosen for their experience of working with employment requirements, so they were able to provide insights into the ongoing development and dissemination of social procurement practices. The interviewees ranged from those holding strategic management positions within procurement, sustainability, or general management and administration, to operative construction workers, housing officers working with facilities maintenance (FM housing officer), and the interns hired via the employment requirements. First, *strategic-level* interviewees, who often worked managerially or administratively in the client, parent, or contractor organizations, rather than in projects or subsidiary organizations, were identified through industry press, websites, and from industry seminars. These interviewees were selected because they were commonly considered important influencers of social procurement practice by the Swedish construction community.

Second, with the help of the strategic-level interviewees, social procurement projects were chosen to study the perspectives of more *operative-level* actors and their experiences working with employment requirements and interns on a daily basis. This also included interviewing the interns who provided a third perspective as the target of employment requirements. These “employment requirement interns” are referred to in this paper as “ER interns”. The ER interns were not like “traditional” interns because they came from specific unemployed target groups (immigrants, youths, and the disabled), were hired through employment requirements, and were often stigmatized in the labor market. The ER interns had special challenges in the form of poor language skills, often suffered from previous war-related trauma, or had undocumented and/or inconsistent schooling (cf. Malik and Manroop, 2014; Ponzoni *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, because these interns are hired on fixed-term internships, without the guarantee of a permanent job, their work situation is highly precarious.

In this paper, the interviewees are divided into four categories: (1) the “implementers” of the employment requirements such as corporate housing groups posing employment requirements to their subsidiaries or clients posing requirements to their contractors; (2) those that “receive” employment requirements and ER interns from either a client or a parent company, who often worked as supervisors of the ER interns; (3) the ER interns themselves; and (4) support functions that neither pose nor receive the requirements, but help “make them

work”. The proportion of the interviewees on the strategic and operative levels is approximately 50/50 and can be found in all four interviewee categories (see Table 2).

*Table 2: Information on interviewees*

<b>Type of actor</b>	<b>Examples of organizations</b>	<b>Example of work roles/titles</b>	<b>Individual interviewee code</b>
“Implementer” of social procurement	Local premises office, public and private housing organization, public and private commercial property organization, public housing corporate group, municipality	Procurement officer, development manager, procurement manager, process leader, sustainability manager, CSR manager, development strategist, sustainability specialist, project leader, procurement officer	Implementer (I) 1–17
“Receivers” of social procurement and ER interns	Contractor, architecture firm, public housing organization	Sustainability manager, development strategist, project manager, business developer, district manager, site manager, work leader, carpenter, housing officer working with facilities maintenance (FM housing officer)	Receiver (R) 1–21
ER interns	Contactora, public housing organization	Carpenter, housing officer working with facilities maintenance (FM housing officer)	ER intern (ERI) 1–3
Support functions	Public procurement organization, Employment Agency, local college (Swedish language training organization), public housing organization	Project leader, employment officer, educator, coordinator	Support function (SF) 1–5

To examine the emerging practices related to social procurement, the interviews focused on topics such as the interviewees’ work experiences with employment requirements, their daily work practices, relationships with other actors, practical difficulties and best practices, and the future of employment requirements. The interviews were semi-structured to ensure interview flexibility (Kvale, 2007) and were recorded and transcribed verbatim and then coded using NVivo software to systematically sort the data. In the data analysis, a first, more inductively driven coding round was based on a thematic analysis of the transcripts (Braun and Clarke, 2006). An inductive approach is useful when attempting to understand novel phenomena and how processes unfold (Edmondson and McManus, 2007) such as the work with employment requirements. All codes were then re-coded to refine the coding structure and ensure that the codes reflected the material as accurately as possible. This initial inductive coding resulted in six main themes: (1) preparing for employment requirements and ER interns, (2) line of argumentation, (3) lack of resources, (4) incentives for ER interns, (5) knowledge sharing, and (6) creating sustainable practices and routines. These themes guided the structure of the results section.

In these initial, more inductive coding rounds, it became clear that some sort of early institutionalization process was unfolding. We turned to the institutional work framework (Lawrence *et al.*, 2009) that we deemed appropriate for analyzing our empirical material. Within institutional work, there is a theoretical framework of proto-institutions (Zietsma and

McKnight, 2009) that explains institutions-in-the-making, such as the social procurement processes in our empirical material. The analysis then turned more abductive (cf. van Maanen *et al.*, 2007) and the proto-institution framework was used to analyze the unfolding social procurement practices. By using an abductive data analysis approach, we let the empirical data and the theoretical framework of proto-institutions and institutional work iteratively inform each other. Although the six themes identified in the initial inductive coding of the empirical material share many similarities with the phases outlined in the proto-institutions theory, we chose to let the empirical data and the inductive themes we found therein guide the structure of the results chapter, as we did not have the theoretical framework in place when we collected the data. In the discussion we explicitly structured the chapter according to the phases outlined in the proto-institutions theory to enable an aggregated theoretical examination of the results. The Results and Discussion sections are integrated parts of the same analysis process.

### *Social procurement in the Swedish setting*

Although social procurement practices greatly vary in individual organizations, there is a general approach to implementing employment requirements in Sweden (see the National Agency for Public Procurement 2019). A client decides that it wants its contractors or subsidiary companies to hire interns from certain target groups, often unemployed immigrants, youths, or disabled people. The form of employment varies across Sweden. Either shorter internships are provided where the unemployed worker retains their welfare support during the internship, or paid temporary employment is provided. As internships are most common, this paper refers to the “newly employed” as interns.

The contractor or the subsidiary organization is then often connected to a third party such as the Employment Agency or private or public organizations that help match people from the target groups to the contractor or the subsidiary organization. Some clients, such as property owners, often target their own tenants for the projects. If the intern needs training before starting their assignment, this is usually provided through some sort of public education program. After the internship ends, the intern and the project outcomes are sometimes evaluated. Follow-ups with interns are rare and there is often uncertainty about who should conduct the follow-up. Consequently, there are no overarching statistics on how many people gain, or keep, employment as a result of social procurement in Sweden. Although there is a general approach to how organizations in Sweden organize social procurement practices, specific practices vary.

## **Results**

This section details what actors do in their daily working lives when dealing with employment requirements and ER interns. In the initial inductive coding of the data, six main themes emerged from the data analysis, as noted in the Method section. These are presented below.

### (1) Preparing for social procurement and the ER interns

Interviewees working at a strategic level admitted that they and their organizations lacked knowledge about how to best to implement employment requirements in their organizations. Consequently, they had held extensive discussions and workshops in their organizations and with contactors, subcontractors, clients, municipalities, industry organizations, and other

stakeholders. The aim of these discussions was to collect information on different experiences of social procurement, to learn what stakeholders perceive as most important, and to identify what competences are necessary moving forward. For example, one CSR manager (I9) visited approximately 50 Swedish municipalities to gather information and recounted, *“I was out and talking a lot, so we have been asking ‘what have you seen’, and ‘how do the municipalities see the lack of housing?’”*

The interviewees emphasized that this preparatory work was key for internal legitimacy to ensure that practices were well-designed, and to enable sustainable practices over time. It was also considered important to support practices throughout the entire organization: *“I am only one person, so for me it is about bringing in the entire organization as far as possible. If I can get some commitment to grow in the entire organization, out in the regions, out in the different business areas, then I will not be the one driving all of these initiatives. Instead, it will be the entire organization”* (sustainability manager I13).

However, although the strategic-level interviewees emphasized the importance of legitimizing social procurement throughout their organizations, operative-level interviewees did not have the same conditions to internalize practices created at the strategic level. Many of the operative interviewees felt that employment requirements and associated practices were delivered in a top-down manner, and felt that they had to constantly learn by doing: *“It has always been said that it is optional to [be a supervisor for the ER interns], but at the same time, it is just somebody ‘upstairs’ who decided we should do this”* (FM housing officer R17). Although some of the operative-level interviewees had taken a course on how to supervise interns suffering from traumatic experiences, they described how they were not able to prepare before the ER interns came. In many ways, the ER interns were just “dropped onto the laps” of the operative-level interviewees, giving them little opportunity to do preparatory work.

## (2) Line of argumentation

Strategic-level and operative-level interviewees spent considerable effort arguing in favor of social procurement, both during the interviews and in their daily work, to legitimate and disseminate social procurement practices in the construction sector. Arguments focused on (a) hard facts and figures, (b) doing the right thing, (c) laws and regulations, and (d) the ER interns and their personal lives.

*(a) Hard facts and figures:* Although employment requirements are based on social values, the strategic-level interviewees strongly emphasized the commercial and socio-economic benefits of social procurement in an effort to “sell” employment requirements, both internally and externally. This “packaging” taps into the incumbent institutional logic of emphasizing price in construction procurement. For example, municipalities can save on welfare costs and increase tax income when more people are employed, and housing companies can hire their own tenants and secure rent incomes and raise the standard of their neighborhoods *“The tenants are more caring towards their neighborhood because if it is your mom or dad who is picking up the trash in the area, you might not throw that much trash”* (procurement manager I7).

Contractors looking for more construction workers can use employment requirements as a recruitment tool to fulfil diversity agendas and ensure that in-house competences remains

high: “*There are organizations that have strategically decided to go for [employment requirements], that see it as a way of surviving, to hire competent people in the organization. They do not do this for social reasons; they do it because they need competency in the organization. It is all about business*” (employment officer SF3). Being proactive in social procurement can also be a competitive advantage in terms of offering a type of service innovation.

(b) *Doing the right thing*: Compared to relying on commercial arguments, the strategic-level interviewees also used a softer approach in which they described how they wanted to use their power for something good and be role models: “*We are one of Sweden’s largest property owners and we have such an opportunity to drive the sector forward on these issues. With such simple means, we can contribute so much to these individuals’ opportunities to join society*” (project manager I13). The operative-level interviewees expressed that they felt good when engaging with the ER interns. They said that the work added value to their working lives and that they were proud to work for organizations that went beyond the basic CSR requirements: “*I think [being a supervisor for ER interns] provides some sort of additional value to my employment ... I think it is kind of dope, to work for a company that has ambitions that go beyond the quarterly reports*” (FM housing officer R13). Here the interviewees relied on the positive values embedded in social procurement to promote social procurement practices.

(c) *Laws and regulations*: The interviewees did not make much reference to legislation, such as the Swedish Public Procurement Act, to promote the use of social procurement. Instead, several client organizations explained how they had monetary incentives in their contracts, which then served as a type of regulative coercive promotion. For example, a contractor may earn a bonus upon hiring a certain number of interns or may have to pay a fine for failing to hire the agreed-upon number of interns: “*Now we are testing an incentive model that we want to implement in all future projects, wherein an incentive is connected to the remuneration. For example, a percentage of the contract cost can be given to the contractor if they take in enough interns. In this project, it is more than €10,000 if they take in two interns*” (sustainability manager I8).

(d) *The ER interns and their lives*: Strategic and operative-level interviewees alike stressed the urgency and need for social procurement by talking about individual ER interns, particularly those who came to Sweden after the 2015 refugee crisis. For example, the interviewees emphasized the importance of spreading good examples and shared personal stories of the interns and how their lives had changed for the better after they had been given the opportunity to join the workforce through employment requirements. One procurement officer (I1) said: “*[Employment requirements] produce ripples in the water. Looking back at this one woman, the ripples on the water reached her relatives first. Her siblings saw that it was possible to get a job. This gave out a strong signal. When her nine-year old daughter went to school her classmates and teachers congratulated her for her mother’s successful employment. There were ripple effects there as well*”. These personal and emotional appeals were also used to promote social procurement.

### (3) Lack of resources

One of the greatest difficulties in implementing employment requirements and in taking in ER interns was resource constraints, mostly with respect to time: *“We do not want to hear that the interns are an extra pair of hands. We have heard that, but it takes a lot of time, because you have to do things far slower. Instead, it sometimes feels like we are understaffed”* (FM housing officer R18). The short-term nature of a project-based sector is also problematic, and associated norms and routines are often short-sighted as well: *“A major barrier for these projects is that the sector is so project-focused. Social value takes time, but things need to go fast in projects. The lack of long-term perspective is a weakness”* (sustainability manager R5).

Most ER interns have dedicated supervisors, many of whom explained how, in addition to their normal work, engage in time-consuming tasks such as helping ER interns with reading emails, paying bills, applying for benefits, and writing CVs. One reason for engaging in these time-consuming tasks is to support the ER interns, both at work and in their private lives, as the ER interns also suffer from a lack of resources: *“It takes two years to get established in Sweden. In this time, you are supposed to learn Swedish, get educated, undergo an internship, get a driver’s license, and then get a job. Do you think that is possible in two years?”* (ER intern ERI3).

### (4) Incentives for ER interns

Many of the supervisors and the ER interns themselves expressed that there was sometimes a lack of motivation among ER interns to participate and engage fully in their internships. Some ER interns were said to be resistant about accepting internships, with only a hope of getting permanently employed. One ER intern (ER intern ERI3) expressed a sense of hopelessness: *“It’s said that I have to take one training course and then another training course, but that is not real education. Do you think you can get a permanent job by just taking training courses? No, you can’t.”* The interviewees who worked as supervisors of the ER interns explained how they struggled to maintain high spirits among the ER interns: *“It becomes difficult to motivate [the ER interns]. They do not understand why they have to be here if they will not get a job later. So you have to explain that in Sweden you have to have references. It takes a lot of energy to have these discussions once a week”* (FM housing officer R17). Moreover, the ER interns were often expected to complete full-time internships while receiving only social welfare as payment, rather than an actual salary: *“In internships there is no salary, just welfare”* (ER intern ERI2).

Another challenge is the recruitment of the ER interns, who may not have any interest in the work assigned to them. Many supervisors were not included in the recruitment process, and therefore were not able to weed out those who were unsuitable for the work tasks: *“The supervisors are positive in the beginning, but they also do get frustrated, and say ‘Why were we not allowed to partake in the recruitment process? We could have told [the interns] about the nature of the job’”* (coordinator SF5).

### (5) Knowledge sharing

The strategic-level interviewees believed that increased collaboration and knowledge sharing could help overcome some of the obstacles to developing sustainable social procurement

practices. Knowledge sharing was largely seen as unproblematic: *“In my experience, you lose very little by being generous [with sharing your knowledge]. You can only win”* (sustainability manager R5). The interviewees also expressed that they were inspired by others: *“There are those who do their thing well already, so we do not have to reinvent the wheel. Instead, we need to learn from each other, and we need to share what we know with others as well”* (process leader I6). The interviewees further said that shared practices would be beneficial as they would make employment requirements easier to implement in different projects: *“I would like to find an approach that enables us to work with these issues in a similar manner across the country”* (sustainability manager I12). However, collaboration was described as difficult, both in terms of knowing who is responsible for what activities (such as follow-up) and in coordinating across organizational boundaries.

Operative-level interviewees, such as the interns’ supervisors, felt that they did not have a natural, reoccurring platform where they could exchange knowledge with others in the same position as them: *“I have said that I would like to meet all the supervisors, to exchange notes of our experiences. We have not had that chance yet”* (FM housing officer R16). In general, there is a lack of feedback loops between the projects and parent organizations. When asked if there was an opportunity to influence the current model to conduct social procurement, one FM housing officer (R18) said: *“No, I cannot. Everything just came from above, and then it was delegated downward, and then it came to me, the FM housing officer. That is just how it is”*. Many operative-level interviewees criticized the inflexible nature of the social procurement “model” that they were working under.

#### (6) Creating sustainable practices and routines

Maintenance structures to uphold new practices over time have not been particularly systematized or plentiful, perhaps because of the novelty of employment requirements. The interviewees suggested that regulative structures such as “social management systems” like ISOs could be used to create sustainable practices to achieve compliance.

The strategic-level interviewees emphasized how they had attempted to systematize practices within their organizations: *“Sustainability is also about building structure. It cannot only build upon passionate people. It must also be anchored in the organization”* (sustainability manager R5). However, according to the operative-level interviewees who worked closely with the ER interns, the amount of routines related to the ER interns that were formalized in policy documents varied greatly: *“We have a folder somewhere, but I don’t really know...”* (project manager R10). Most knowledge was informal, intangible, and people-centric, which meant that if key personnel left the company, it could result in a massive loss of knowledge.

## **Discussion**

Zietsma and McKnight’s (2009) theory of proto-institutions provides a useful systematic overview of how practices related to social procurement are created and disseminated through institutional work and it can help theorize the six empirical themes from the results on an aggregated level. The themes correspond well with the phases of Zietsma and McKnight’s (2009) theory, where each theme corresponds to each phase, and themes three and four (‘Lack of resources’ and ‘Incentives for ER interns’) correspond to the third phase of disruption. Each

phase and its relationship to the results of this study are discussed next. The process of institutional work was iterative and integrated rather than linear or sequential. However, the different stages are presented separately for clarity.

*Phase 1 – Initial development:* As we saw in the first theme, the (mostly strategic-level) interviewees started their work with social procurement by preparing for employment requirements and the ER interns. This preparatory work was often extensive, which indicates that social procurement practices are diffuse and unformed (cf. Barraket *et al.*, 2016) and require quite a lot of preparation, likely because social procurement can conflict with incumbent and dominant institutional logics of the sector (Petersen, 2018). This means that the interviewees had to engage in extensive preparatory work to be able to carve out a space for the disruptive institutional logics of social procurement amongst the already incumbent institutional logics of the sector. The findings also suggest that practices developed at the strategic level are not very legitimized or fully adopted by the operative-level interviewees, suggesting that additional legitimization of social procurement is necessary, both externally and internally.

*Phase 2 – Promotion:* The interviewees presented four different lines of argumentation, which are similar to and support Zietsma and McKnight's (2009) idea of cognitive, normative, and regulative promotion. The interviewees' market-centered arguments suggest that the traditional price-focused institutional logics of construction procurement have a significant influence on the development of new practices, and that this logic can be used as a powerful tool to appeal to the *cognitive* sensibilities of potential supporters. Despite employment requirements stemming from social values, the interviewees relied on a sales-related discourse, like how diversity can be a 'business case', as Ponzoni *et al.* (2017) also found. Consequently, different institutional logics can compete and complement each other simultaneously (Friedland and Alford, 1991). Proponents of social procurement can gather more supporters by borrowing a market-centered discourse based on institutionalized behavior, thus navigating the inertia in the sector in a creative way. This idea deviates from Erridge's (2007) conclusion that an overemphasis on commercial values can undermine the achievement of socio-economic goals, but it is in line with Zietsma and McKnight's (2009) proposition that leaning on old and established logics can be useful. These cognitive appeals are provided by strategic actors rather than those working in projects close to the ER interns. One reason for this may be that employment requirements are more tangible and personal for operative actors, whereas more strategic actors may find them abstract as they do not meet the ER interns on a daily basis or engage in their personal lives like the operative-level actors do. However, in Ponzoni's *et al.* (2017) study of how refugees can be integrated into the labor market, they found that mediators who worked to match refugees with employers often combined financial arguments with moral, normative appeals.

Several interviewees mentioned that their presence in civil society and high volume of business required them to make ethical considerations that lie outside their core business. This results in a suprajacent discourse where being "a good builder of societies" is a strong *normative* force (cf. Zietsma and McKnight, 2009). Using normative arguments of "leading with example" may be particularly effective in spreading social procurement practice because of the sector's close connections with social issues (Almahmoud and Doloi, 2015). Similarly, in their study of

an internship program at a university, Alaraj *et al.* (2019) found that there was often a moral and altruistic motive behind taking in interns, based on the desire “to do something” in response to the 2015 refugee crisis.

The interviewees also presented arguments pertaining to *regulative* mechanisms, which can be seen as a formalization of the norms and values embedded in the institutional logics of social procurement. This included referring to regulative institutions or contracts that can be used to promote specific practices. When it comes to institutionalizing employment requirements, monetary incentives, contracts, and regulative institutions may have an especially strong hold on actors working in the construction sector because the sector is heavily regulated (Petersen, 2018; Murphy and Eadie, 2019).

Complementing Zietsma and McKnight’s (2009) theory, a fourth type of promotional activity can be discerned – *emotional* promotion – which can be seen as more informal values and norms embedded in the institutional logics of social procurement. This is exemplified through the interviewees’ appeal to supporters’ empathetic nature, through a rich personalization of the unemployed, and by referring to the 2015 refugee crisis. This is a special kind of argumentative thread that is unlike cognitive, normative, and regulative promotions as identified by Zietsma and McKnight (2009). Unlike cognitive promotion, emotional promotion does not lean on long-held logics of the sector built on market-centered institutional logics. There are no regulatory structures requiring organizations in the sector to hire disadvantaged people. Emotional promotion differs from normative promotion because it acknowledges a stigmatized group as important, which is not dependent on a widely accepted coercive pressure. Therefore, it may be reasonable to add a fourth type of promotional activity that appeals to emotions and empathy. Considering the underlying values of social procurement, an addition of this sort may not be surprising. Cognitive, regulative, and normative promotion cannot entirely convey the message of social procurement, which is so rich with social values, thus leading to the development of another argumentative approach. Thus, emotional promotion may have been developed as a consequence of social procurement.

*Phase 3 – Disruption:* Institutionalized norms and routines, especially the lack of resources and the short-term focus of the construction sector, have a disruptive effect on social procurement practice creation. When operative-level actors do not feel like they have the resources to work with the ER interns properly, and when the sector is focused on time-limited projects with finite endings and concrete, measurable outcomes, the integration of social procurement with its social values, fuzzy outcomes and unclear time horizons becomes difficult, as it does not mesh well with incumbent institutional logics.

In addition, the lack of incentives for ER interns to accept and fulfil an internship thorough employment requirement can also be a disruption to social procurement practice development. If no interns are willing to accept an internship, either because they feel it will not lead to a permanent job or because they are not compensated enough financially, the *raison d’être* of social procurement becomes obsolete. Therefore, there seems to be inertia due to the incumbent institutional logics of the sector, which constrains the allotment of resources and, by extension, renders the development of new practices difficult, rather than disruptive actors actively working against social procurement.

*Phase 4 – Co-creation:* The (strategic-level) interviewees emphasized the importance of knowledge sharing and collaboration, which can be described as attempts at co-creation. However, unlike in Zietsma and McKnight's (2009) theory, this co-creation is achieved through mutual exchange and dialogue, rather than through negotiation and conditional demands. Furthermore, the interviewees did not describe any trade-offs in terms of adapting their practices and there was no reluctant adaptation to competing practices. However, the operative-level interviewees described how they had few opportunities to influence practices set at the strategic level. Co-creation and collaboration seem to take place horizontally internally and across organizational boundaries at the strategic level, but are far weaker vertically between the strategic and operative levels. Nevertheless, in terms of experience and knowledge sharing, co-creation can be a way to reinforce and legitimize the institutional logics of social procurement.

The lack of competitive negotiations could be due to the fact that the construction sector in particular relies on close relationships between clients and contractors, or could be due to contextual factors, such as Sweden's strong culture of consensus. These findings corroborate the conclusion drawn by Barraket *et al.* (2016) that collaboration and knowledge sharing across organizational boundaries are vital for the establishment of social procurement practices.

*Phase 5 – Maintenance mechanisms:* The interviewees described attempts to create sustainable practices and routines by objectifying and tying practices to artefacts and frameworks such as ISO management systems and contracts clauses, much like Barraket *et al.* (2016) suggested. However, the interviewees have also failed to put "local" practices and routines into place, in individual projects and organizations, and collective learning was insufficiently embedded on a collective level (cf. van den Brink, 2020). Many social procurement practices remain ad hoc, especially for the operative-level interviewees who get social procurement and the ER interns "in their lap", and, for example, do not have the opportunity to prepare for the interns' arrival or be part of their recruitment process. Similarly, Alaraj *et al.* (2019) found that resources were not allotted to supervisors of interns and much of the work with the interns was dependent on individual actors' altruistic motivations.

#### *Institutional work for social procurement practice development*

Our findings suggest that strategic-level actors push to institutionalize social procurement without covering their basics first, namely their own organizations and projects. Few maintenance mechanisms seem to have been built, and formalized practices and routines, plans for intangible knowledge retention, arenas for knowledge exchange, and opportunities for continuous feedback opportunities are still lacking. This is ironic considering how the interviewees stated that they see no discontinuance in social procurement: "*We will continue to drive social sustainability, and we see it as a recurring thing. So long as there are reasons to do it, we will continue*" (business developer R4). The lack of maintenance mechanisms may cause problems in terms of badly informed practice development and brain drain. This could create the risk that social procurement practices will never become fully institutionalized and knowledge will not be embedded in organizations on a collective level (cf. Alaraj *et al.*, 2019). Because actors are carriers of the norms and values of an institution, a mobility of actors in terms of brain drain, who subsequently "leave the institution", can eventually lead to change or

breakdown of the institution as there are too few actors upholding and reiterating social procurement practices.

As there were two types of interviewees – those working at the strategic level in the client, parent, or contractor organizations, and those working at the operative level in the projects and subsidiary companies – different types of institutional work were conducted simultaneously. The strategic-level interviewees have a more future-looking perspective and try to actively create the right conditions for social procurement through their preparatory work. They have resources to have a more planned and projective take on the development of social procurement practices. The operative-level interviewees have a more practical-evaluative agency (cf. Battilana and D’Aunno, 2009), where they are more in the present, reactively trying to solve problems in their everyday work (cf. Andersson and Gadolin, 2020). Their more limited agency is described by their experience of often getting ER interns “dropped in their lap”, having to make things up as they go along without sufficient resources, and having few opportunities to conduct preparatory work. The strategic-level actors are often over-emphasized in the creation of new institutions. However, our findings indicate that creative institutional work consists of both projective actions performed by strategic actors and practical-evaluative actions performed by operative actors to solve everyday problems. An example of how operative-level actions matter is the “extra-curricular” work undertaken with ER interns. When ER supervisors help their ER interns with private matters such as reading private emails or making phone calls, the supervisors socialize (cf. Malik and Manroop, 2014, Ponzoni *et al.*, 2017) the ER interns into Swedish society. This kind of institutional work, which is parallel to the work performed at a strategic level, indicates that practices are being created and institutionalized from the “bottom” as well.

All in all, these practical difficulties and weak convergence of practices suggest that social procurement is only in the initial stage of institutionalization. These practices may never develop beyond a proto-institution. Although the theoretical perspective of proto-institutions was not able to fully explain our findings, the initial stages of this institutionalization process could still be better understood by applying such a theoretical perspective. Perhaps a more detailed and extended theory of proto-institutions could help capture practices that are related to social procurement and its institutionalization. Zietsma and McKnight’s (2009) theory can be overly descriptive. Although they say that each “phase” unfolds iteratively, the theory becomes quite “processual” when applied, while institutional work unfolds more organically. In any case, Zietsma and McKnight’s (2009) theory for creating proto-institutions can serve as a prediction of things to come, which can be useful for those working with these issues moving forward. Despite its descriptive character, it can also be used normatively to direct attention to what is necessary for the institutionalization of social procurement to be successful.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has analyzed how new social procurement practices are being created in the Swedish construction sector by strategic-level and operative-level actors who are doing preparatory work to collect input on how to design social procurement practices; collaborating and co-creating with other actors; and using cognitive, normative, regulative, and emotional arguments to promote social procurement. However, and importantly for social procurement research, the

development of new practices does not seem to have converged into cohesive sector practices, so the institutionalization of social procurement has been limited at best. Applying the perspective of proto-institutions (Zietsma and McKnight, 2009), which help explain the initial stages of this institutionalization processes, can help us understand the ongoing development of social procurement practices. This is because incumbent institutional logics make institutional work to create and disseminate social procurement practices difficult. Also, practices have not been fully internalized across organizations and projects, interns hired through employment requirements do not have strong enough incentives to fully engage with their internships, actors working strategically and operatively have different possibilities to create social procurement practices, and the development of maintenance mechanisms for the formalization of sustainable practices is weak. Despite issues with scattered practices, there seem to be opportunities to use social procurement as a strategic tool to achieve commercial, socio-economic, ethical, and social goals, and increase equality, diversity and inclusion for marginalized people.

These empirical findings contribute to research on the theoretical field of social procurement by theorizing social procurement development and by providing empirical explications of such processes. In terms of research relating to equality, diversity, and inclusion, this paper makes an important contribution by contextualizing such efforts (cf. van den Brink, 2020). Reforms regarding this area do not take place in a vacuum, and results are highly dependent on existing institutional constellation of existing institutional logics, which this study highlights.

Our findings also contribute to institutional theory by widening the scope of how proto-institutions and new practices can be developed and institutionalized and provide more detail on the activities that actors may engage in while developing practices related to social procurement. The descriptive identification of these practices is an important finding in itself, considering the scarcity of research. This study also shows how strategic-level actors and operative-level actors have different conditions to conduct institutional work to develop social procurement practices, and that these conditions lead to parallel but different streams of institutional work. Strategic-level actors plan for their creative institutional work, while operative-level actors urgently respond to and solve problems in their daily work. Both types of parallel institutional work, from the bottom and from the top, form the proto-institution of social procurement. Moreover, for institutional theory the paper contributes insights into how co-creative institutional work is stronger horizontally and weaker vertically in organizations, where general practices are institutionalized before local practices.

Practitioners can develop social procurement practices further by acknowledging and consulting operative-level actors who work closely with ER interns, and also the interns themselves. This can facilitate better designed and more sustainable practices that may become fully developed, accepted, and institutionalized. By formalizing intangible knowledge and routines and by creating forums for feedback and reflection, the continued development and institutionalization of social procurement may be better informed, and ethical and sustainable practices may become integrated into the general organizational culture. On that note, future research could examine in more detail the practical work that goes into social procurement, in

terms of what actors practically do to integrate the ER interns into projects and organizations (cf. Malik and Manroop, 2014).

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