

Fair building practices: do architectural firms act in a socially responsible way?

Clarissa Reikersdorfer, Dipl. Ing.

University of Liechtenstein

clarissa.reikersdorfer@uni.li

Introduction and Research Question

Globalization and urbanization are interrelated phenomena that have a tremendous impact on the twenty-first century and a substantial affect on the profession of architects and planners. Today, architects and planners have to consider increasing environmental, economic and social planning challenges in their practice. Particularly, architectural firms have a significant role in the growing global construction market; simultaneously, some firms have shown a lack of understanding as to what social responsible building practices really do encompass (e.g. the FIFA World Cup 2022 unveilings in Qatar). As architects and planners are an integral part of the construction process, their decisions or actions directly or indirectly affect the construction process. Therefore, this paper raises the following research questions: How should architectural firms be governed and what responsibility should architects have attributed to them in the construction process?

This study analyses the role of architectural firms and their ability to act in a socially responsible manner in an international, multi-cultural working context. The aim of this investigation is to close the gap between the normative ethical discourse and the descriptive daily practice and their action oriented application of ethics within the field of planning and construction. Furthermore, it may prove significant in contributing to the unexplored area of research related to an international understanding of socially sustainable and responsible building processes.

Theoretical Approach

In this research, a theoretical foundation is built upon two different strands of research: 1) Sustainability; and 2) Governance Ethics and Stakeholder Theory.

1) On the widely discussed topic of sustainable development, social responsibility is an integral part of the debate. The concept of Sustainability is a broadly applied term used to describe social as well as ecological and economic consequences of the actions of individuals, organizations, corporations, and societies. Here, Sustainability is understood in its entirety and serves as a theoretical framework of an integrated model.

2) In Governance Ethics Research and Stakeholder Theory, architectural firms are understood as “as social cooperation projects of the owners of resources for the purpose of mutual individual benefit and the generation of social welfare” (Wieland 2015, p. ix). Furthermore, construction projects are a temporary nexus of stakeholders during the dynamic planning and building process. As various stakeholders are involved in construction, and different perspectives and interest are given, the complex system of interaction that ensues focuses on the framework conditions for social responsibility of the collective actors, who oscillate between dependence and interdependence. Therefore, the main significance of this study lies in exploring in detail social interactions during construction processes, and consequently, gaining knowledge and understanding of the perspectives of various stakeholders is crucial.

Empirical Approach and Outlook

This study will proceed through a qualitative research in two phases to gather an in-depth understanding of stakeholder behaviour (Creswell 2007). In the first phase, based on a review of existing literature on stakeholder theory, the identification and prioritization of stakeholders and their role of responsibility within construction is conducted. In the second phase, the primary focus is placed on architectural firms. Interviews will be conducted of relevant experts, examining how pertinent social responsibility is in their daily practice.

This qualitative approach will provide preliminary insights into the complex interdependencies of various stakeholders involved in the construction processes. In addition, the findings of this paper may be relevant at various levels: (a) to improve the social dimension of construction processes considering the needs of all stakeholders, and (b) to educate future architects and planners.

Source

Creswell, John W. 2007. *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Gibson, Owen. 2014. "Doha forced to break silence on Qatar's migrant worker deaths: Up to now, information on how many of Qatar's migrant workers are dying has been limited to the Nepalese. But Qatar's campaign to host the 2022 World Cup has made it a focal point." *The Guardian*, February 18, last accessed on 04.05.2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/18/doha-forced-break-silence-qatar-migrant-worker-deaths>.

Wieland, Josef. 2014. *Governance Ethics: Global value creation, economic organization and normativity*. In *Ethical economy. Studies in economic ethics and philosophy*. Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London: Springer