

Dominant logics for energy efficiency in the public housing sector. – What are the prospects for moving towards ecological modernization?

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Abstract

This paper provides insights into managerial approaches of public housing companies relating to urban energy efficiency investments in the Swedish Million Homes Program. The aim is to investigate the role of energy efficiency for the long-term orientation of public housing companies.

There is a large need to refurbish the Swedish Million Homes Program and political ambitions for energy efficiency in urban housing are high. By 2050, energy use in the existing building stock shall be reduced by 50% (SEA, 2010). This development should occur on commercial grounds (SFS 2010:879) without subsidies or mandatory legislation. Although public housing companies consider energy efficiency investments desirable, these are frequently postponed due to scant profitability, resulting in a ‘wait and see’ strategy.

This research identified some public housing companies that are determined to take a comprehensive approach to energy efficiency and ‘act now’. By way of case studies, these companies’ motives and characteristic features are contrasted with those of companies displaying a conservative approach. The comparison of companies conducting far-reaching energy efficiency investments and companies with modest investments shows differences in their motives and approaches to social responsibility. The former companies have an integrated view of the value of a residential area, embracing a triple bottom line perspective (Elkington, 1997), whereas the latter companies’ approach is fragmented and focuses on the economic performance of the company. Conclusions are drawn on the organizational consequences of the divergent managerial approaches, the prospects for improving urban energy efficiency and the societal implications of the different practices.

Keywords: energy efficiency, Million Homes Program, public housing companies, dominant logic, ecological modernization