

GOVERNANCE ASPECTS OF SUSTAINABLE BUILDING COUNCILS – RESULTS FROM A SURVEY

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Summary

The sustainable building sector is rapidly changing recently. Under the umbrella of the World Green Building Council (WGBC) many countries have already or are starting to set up regional councils which will be analyzed within this paper. For such an analysis the following questions will be addressed: What types of organizational structures and settings suit best? What kind of different stakeholder constellations can be found? What role does policy play? What role does industry play? What are the main purposes of these organizations? In order to answer these types of questions we will conduct an online questionnaire based survey focusing on the WGBC regional councils on a global scale (i.e. Europe, Asia Pacific, South, Central & Latin America, countries outside regional jurisdiction). The survey will help us to identify the differences of stakeholder constellations, organizational settings, partnership models, and the different roles of policy and industries within the different regional councils. Besides the international implications the survey allows us to conduct special analyses for Central Europe and to report on the current developments and progresses in this particular geographical area.

Keywords: green building councils, governance, institutions, stakeholder roles

1 Introduction

The green building efforts have gradually changed from energy efficiency in buildings to more complex sustainable building initiatives. Therefore the World Green Building Council (WGBC) follows the vision of “transforming the built environment towards sustainability and drives the global green building agenda by facilitating the development of new Green Building Councils” (WGBC 2009). Following these lines an analysis of the global institutional landscape seems to be extremely important in order to assess these institutions’ contribution to sustainable development. The main overall question within this context is therefore: What kinds of governance structures support sustainable development at different spatial scales? So the question of governance for sustainable development will be addressed. In order to find adequate answers to this rather broad question, institutional settings, steering mechanisms and cooperation and coordination efforts will be highlighted. The paper investigates the current situation of the existing institutional landscape of 59 Regional Green Building Council (RGBC) under the umbrella of the WGBC. These RGBCs are categorized by their organizational status (established, emerging, prospective and associated) within the WGBC. Since the legal status of these councils is pretended to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) we can assume comparable organizational structures. In terms of their activities we can anticipate a similar scope but definitely not standardized implementations. In order to analyze the organizational structures, the

institutional mechanisms and the coordination and cooperation mechanism we conducted a web-based survey which addressed the 59 existing RGBCs.

The paper is organized along three sections. After this introduction, section 2 provides a very short overview about the concept governance for sustainable development which forms the conceptual background of this paper. Section 3 deals with the web-based survey and provides an overview of the current status (at the time of writing this paper¹). The usual concluding section is dropped due to space constraints.

2 Governance for sustainable development

There are several definitions of governance used in social sciences but they are all similar: “Governance refers to self-organizing, interorganizational networks characterized by interdependence, resource-exchange, rules of the game, and significant autonomy from the state (Rhodes 1997, p. 15).” Kjær (2004) provides a detailed overview of the several coexisting definitions and comes to the following summary: “In sum, at this point we can say that governance refers to something broader than government, and it is about steering and the rules of the game (p.7)”. She argues that these definitions “grow out of a focus on institutions and institutional change (p.7)”, which underlines the importance of institutional aspects in general.

Within the sustainable development debate governance has become an important aspect since its implementation asks for new forms of partnerships between different institutional stakeholders. Governance networks are becoming more and more important since these networks operate in a multi-stakeholder environment and can be differentiated from hierarchies and markets in terms of their basis of relationships, their degree of dependence, their exchange mode, their means of conflict resolution and coordination and their main culture (see table 1).

Tab. 1 Networks, hierarchies and markets (Source: Kjaer 2004, p. 42, Wald/Jansen 2007, p. 97)

	Networks	Hierarchies	Markets
Basis of relationships	Resource exchange	Employment relationship	Contract and property rights
Degree of dependence	Interdependent	Dependent	Independent
Medium of exchange	Negotiation	Authority	Prices
Means of conflict resolution and coordination	Diplomacy	Rules and commands	Haggling and the courts
Culture	Reciprocity	Subordination	Competition

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The process related governance approach (e.g. Thierstein and Walser 1997; Hardy and Lloyd 1994; Schleicher-Tappeser et al. 1999; Dobson 2007; van Huijstee, Francken and Leroy 2007) focuses on such networks which support the key-drivers for sustainable development. Such key-drivers are participation and empowerment which embraces the governance debate. The here analyzed RGBCs are embedded in a global network and operate in a national network environment in their respective countries. The survey will focus on the individual organizational as well as the network specific aspects.

3 The survey

Since the survey is still (at the time of writing this paper) ongoing we cannot present the results as announced in the abstract within this written paper but this will be done during the presentation at the conference. Therefore we will concentrate on the structure of the survey and give an insight into the sample within this section.

The survey is the first empirical step within a more detailed analysis of the RGBCs. Within this first step we look at the organizational structure of the RGBCs at the global level. In a second step we will narrow down our focus to the geographical area of Central and Eastern Europe. This step will include in-depth interviews which will allow us to work out their governance role for sustainable development.

The web-based survey is built on a questionnaire which consists of six parts (A-F). The first three parts focus on three defined phases which indicate where RGBCs are in their development process. We have defined these phases as the initiation phase, the establishing phase and the consolidation phase.

1. The initiation phase covers a variety of different activities from coming up with the initial ideas, getting in touch with important contacts, starting to plan a council, registering an entity, finding a consensus, etc. Due to this fact the initiation phase consists of several steps with different objectives, involved actors, etc. The initiation phase does not cover the foundation of the regional council. Within this part the overall motivation aspects are in terms of their importance addressed.
2. The establishing phase describes the phase that comes after having founded the regional council officially and is dedicated to the first activities. The questions included here focus on organizational structures, member details, objectives etc.
3. The consolidation phase includes concrete operations and can be seen as running a business. Questions about the most important objectives as well as the most important cooperation partners are included here.

The fourth part is dedicated to the RGBCs activities which will give us an insight into their daily tasks. We have decided to ask the RGBCs in detail about their activities during the last and the up-coming six months. This will allow us to differentiate between activities of councils belonging to different development stages. With regard to this we can analyze the councils belonging to different organizational status (established, emerging, prospective and associated) within the WGBC and work out activity profiles.

The fifth part is focusing on the councils' mid-term goals. Here we are interested in their visions which can be operationalized by their future activities. Therefore we are also asking for their long-term objectives which will give us an overview about the different existing visionary goals. Finally, the last part includes questions concerning some personal

information and details about the councils. Here we ask the councils also for their willingness to participate in an interview for the next empirical step.

The sample of the survey consists of the 59 registered RGBCs in the “Green Building Councils Directory” of the World Green Building Council (WGBC). Before we invited the RGBCs to participate in the web-based survey we have contacted all the 59 councils personally per email. Within this email we have asked them whether they would be willing to participate in this survey or not. After a second reminder email, 38 councils responded to this email positively and only three councils responded negatively. Therefore we sent an invitation email with the link to the questionnaire, a user-number and a password to the 38 councils who announced that they would be willing to participate in the survey. From the geographical distribution 11 European, 10 North, Latin and South American, 15 Asian-Pacific and two African councils were willing to participate in the survey, which would result in a representative sample. Currently (at the time of writing this paper) 15 councils have already filled out the questionnaire. In order to increase the return rate we have already sent out a reminder email although the deadline is not expired so far.

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