Triple Bottom Line Evaluation of Energy Retrofit Spending in Social Housing: Shovel Ready or Shovel Worthy?

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Speaker:
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Abstract

This paper outlines findings from field research investigating the distribution of government-sourced stimulus funding to energy retrofitting capital projects in the social housing sector. The research provides an opportunity to observe how a municipal government department responsible for social housing, a chronically underfunded part of the public sector, responded to the availability of unexpected funding from a large stimulus funding program. This study extends a prior pilot study that applied a ‘triple bottom line’ perspective to evaluate the energy retrofitting investment in a small social housing property. The current study expands our investigation to the municipal government level, looking at the department that administers and funds a portfolio of social housing provider organizations. This department was responsible for allocating the stimulus funding to selected social housing provider properties in its portfolio, and developed a variety of new processes and reporting models to implement this relatively large spend. Our research is designed as an exploratory study, collecting and analyzing interviews, documents and reports from the field site. The first phase of the research, reported here, involves applying the triple bottom line concepts of economic, environmental, and social sustainability to the actions and events obtained from interviewing the key actors. Our main research goal is to assess the implications of these events in terms of sustainability. We also glean some preliminary insights about how the sustainability concepts may map into broader theoretical perspectives from the sociology of worth literature. The second phase of the research is still in the data collection stage, and will involve analysis of quantitative data from the field study. The paper is co-authored with Kathryn Bewley, Ryerson University

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