

Exploring the Discourse on Sustainability in Public Procurement

A Q Methodology Study in Development Cooperation Programmes

Alberto Asquer

Department of Financial and Management Studies, University of London, London, England

Igor Marcialis

Ghana Private Sector Development Facility, Embassy of Italy in Accra, Ghana

During last decades, the function of public procurement has been increasingly affected by the ecological and ethical principle of 'sustainability'. Yet, relatively little we know about how public officers think about sustainability in public procurement. This Q methodology study provides some evidence of the variety of views held on what sustainable procurement is, what are the effects of sustainable procurement on organisational practices, and how sustainability principles should be implemented.

Keywords: Sustainable procurement, development cooperation programmes, Q methodology

1 Introduction

Concern with the sustainability of public procurement (or 'sustainable procurement') plays an increasingly important role within the contemporary policy and corporate agenda. Generally defined as a kind of procurement that 'integrates requirements, specifications and criteria that are compatible and in favour of the protection of the environment, of social progress and in support of economic development, namely by seeking resource efficiency, improving the quality of products and services and ultimately optimizing costs' (UN Global Marketplace, 2010), sustainable procurement attracts lot of attention from both the academia, the governments, and the industrial sector (Walker et al., 2012; Brammer and Walker, 2011; Preuss, 2009; Walker and Brammer, 2009; Walker and Phillips, 2009; Thomson and Jackson, 2007). Relatively few studies have been done, however, on what sustainable procurement means for practitioners, how they assess its effects onto procurement systems and practices, and what they think that should be done about it in the future.

Researching individuals' understanding of sustainable procurement seems important in various respects. Sustainable procurement is a multi-faceted construct, that includes references to issues related to the safeguard of the environment, protection of human rights, preservation of diversity and minority groups, safety in the workplace, integrity, professionalization, and philanthropy. How do

practitioners think that sustainable procurement should be adopted in organisational settings? What do they think the main purpose of sustainable procurement is? How do cultural factors influence – if they do – their understanding of the role of sustainability principles applied to the function of procurement in public sector organisations? These issues are important because practitioners contribute implementing sustainable procurement principles into concrete organisational practices. If we aim to understand whether sustainable procurement affects the way procurement is administered, then it is relevant to gain insights into how practitioners perceive it because their beliefs and opinions may relate to the inclination and attitude to execute sustainability principles and criteria.

More generally, researching the application of the principle of sustainability in public procurement is relevant to scholars and practitioners in public administration for various reasons. Within the theoretical realm, issues arise about how public policy concerns with the sustainable use of natural resources is compatible with the normative principles of efficiency and rationality that drive the conduct of corporate actors and inform much of contemporary public management principles. Within the practical sphere, issues arise about how public managers should take sustainability principles into account in the design and execution of public programmes and in leading change within their respective organisations. Rather than conceiving sustainability as a source of additional requirements to comply with legislation and regulations, in fact, public managers may conveniently champion the implementation of sustainability policies as a way to instil rationales for questioning existing organisational practices. A full-rounded understanding of the principles of sustainability as applied to public procurement, therefore, may provide public managers with the basis for developing rhetorical strategies to align public organisations to public concerns with environmental preservation, social progress, and economic development on the one hand, and to stimulate the desired organisational change process on the other one.

Assessing the beliefs and opinions of practitioners is a challenging task. Common qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and surveys may not really 'reach' the inner worlds of individuals, especially because they may not capture the variety of views around the topic under consideration and the relationships between different beliefs and opinions. An alternative route is offered by Q methodology, that is a technique that is intended to identify the patterns of subjective perspectives held by a group of individuals. The technique, which was originally developed within the field of psychology (Stephenson, 1953), has been applied to various fields so far, including the governance of public networks (Jeffares and Skelcher, 2011) and public service co-production (Steen and van Eijk, 2012). Here, Q methodology is applied to answer the question of what are the beliefs and opinions of practitioners of development cooperation programmes towards sustainable procurement in public administration practices.

The paper provides, first, an outline of the research design of the study and an illustration of the principles and technique of Q methodology. The approach followed here is consistent with the one implemented in other scholarly works (Durning and Osuna, 1994; Jeffares and Skelcher, 2011) that aimed to identify typologies of individuals in relation to their subjective viewpoints. Section three will illustrate the results from the analysis. Section four will discuss the results of the analysis and provide some tentative identification of subjectivities of practitioners of development cooperation programmes towards sustainable procurement. Finally, the conclusions will discuss the contribution of the study to research on sustainable procurement.

2 Sustainable Procurement: Principles and Practices

Public procurement is a function of governmental and quasi-governmental organisations that relates to the purchase of goods, services and works that are instrumental to the execution of the organisation's statutory mandate and programmatic activities. Aside from providing public organisations with outside contributions to their operations, however, public procurement has been often employed as a means to attain social goals. McCrudden (2004), for example, documented how government contracting was largely used as a tool for social regulation in Europe and North America since the 19th century, particularly in the areas of labour standards and unemployment. More recently, public procurement has been especially related to the implementation of sustainable development policies, that is, the organising principle that posits the consideration for the need to preserve the capacity to reproduce biological systems in policy decisions. Since Club of Rome's landmark publication «Limits to Growth» (Meadows et al., 1972), sustainability grew in the attention of the public, policy-makers and public sector organisations in both industrialised and developing countries (Grindle and Hilderbrad, 1995). Nowadays, consideration for sustainability comes into play in various policy domains, including for example energy (Costantini and Crespi, 2013), mining (Pokhrel and Dubey, 2013), forestry (Vogelpohl and Aggestam, 2012), and corporate social responsibility (Steurer et al., 2012).

In public procurement, the principle of sustainability has gained large attention at both the national and super-national levels (Walker et al., 2012). In the UK, for example, the policy initiative «Greening Government Commitments» set environmental targets that are to be reached, among other actions, through the purchase of more sustainable and efficient products¹. In Switzerland, sustainable development (that was explicitly stated as a public policy goal in the national constitution since 1999) informs procurement practices by taking into account both environmental and social considerations (Steiner, 2013). In the US,

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/greening-government-commitments-targets>.

commitment to sustainability principles in public procurement was included in the programmatic lines of the General Services Administration for reducing the environmental impact of the country's federal government. In the EU, consideration for 'green public procurement' became evident in publications, such as the «Buying Green Handbook»², that provided operators with guidelines for including environmental considerations in any stage of the procurement process.

Despite widespread consideration, however, the very concept of sustainable procurement and related phrases still lack a shared understanding and standards for operationalization. Definitions of what sustainable procurement is vary across jurisdictions, e.g., in the UK, DEFRA proposed a definition of sustainable procurement as «a process whereby organisations meet their needs for goods, services, works and utilities in a way that achieves value for money on a whole life basis in terms of generating benefits not only to the organisation, but also to society and the economy, whilst minimising damage to the environment» (DEFRA, 2006) while in the EU the Commission defined green procurement as «a process whereby public authorities seek to procure goods, services and works with a reduced environmental impact throughout their life cycle when compared to goods, services and works with the same primary function that would otherwise be procured» (EU, 2008). While sustainable procurement can be generally understood as «the pursuit of sustainable development objectives through the purchasing and supply process» (Walker et al., 2012), nevertheless a more detailed formulation of how sustainability principles are incorporated into procurement practices is needed in order to better assess the impact and assist the design of sustainable public procurement processes.

Evidence of practices of public procurement, moreover, is still relatively thin and scattered. Some works, that focused on the diffusion, traits, and effects of sustainable public procurement among local governments in the UK (Preuss, 2007, 2009), highlighted the importance of supporting factors, like transparency, organisational culture and strategy, in assisting the adoption of sustainability principles in public procurement practices. Other works related the importance of sustainable public procurement to supporting local and small suppliers (Walker and Bremmer, 2009; Walker and Preuss, 2008) and protecting the environment (Bolton, 2008). By and large, however, research tends to show that sustainable public procurement practices tend to considerably vary across countries (Brammer and Walker, 2011; Steurer et al., 2007). Additional work is needed, therefore, to help framing how sustainable public procurement is understood in practice and how it matters for the attainment of public policy goals.

² http://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/buying_handbook_en.htm.

3 Research Design

This study aims to help clarifying the present discourse on sustainable procurement, with particular attention to development cooperation programmes, by investigating the subjectivities of practitioners of the particular policy domain. The study broadly follows an 'interpretive' approach to researching social phenomena, where primacy is granted to detecting and understanding individuals' beliefs and opinions as drivers for action rather than to focusing on the institutional and organisational factors that characterise the domain under consideration. Understanding the present discourse on sustainable procurement in public administration calls for this kind of approach. Practitioners play an important role in the implementation of sustainable procurement policies, because they interpret and exercise some amount of discretion in the application of sustainable procurement regulations and criteria. Gaining some insights onto their subjectivities seems important, therefore, in order to better understand how they frame sustainable procurement, how they assess the role of sustainability in public administration practices, and what are their views (and, relatedly, inclinations and attitudes) towards sustainable procurement principles.

Q methodology (Stephenson, 1953; Brown, 1980, 2004) provides a technique for identifying subjectivities through a survey instrument that generates both quantitative and qualitative data on individuals' views on the topic under consideration. The technique provides that each participant of a population sample (P sample) sorts a series of statements (Q sample) that are considered as representative of the variety of claims around the topic (the *concourse*) into a distribution of preferences (Q sorts). Statistical analysis, then, allows deriving significant factors that are subjected to interpretation of the researchers. Unlike other forms of quantitative analysis, the technique is not intended to test hypothesised causal relationships and the results of the analysis are subjected to the interpretive skills of the analysts. In addition, Q methodology also differs from qualitative methods insofar as it provides the analysts with a statistical basis for inferring associations between claims. The research methodology, then, provides a way to make interpretive research approaches relatively transparent and systematic (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006).

Q methodology is generally implemented through five different stages. First, the researchers construct the so-called *concourse*, i.e., the breadth of the debate around a particular topic. This task can be accomplished in various means, such as interviews with highly informed participants (Steelman and Maguire, 1955), focus groups (Dryzek and Holmes, 2002), analysis of textual and other media resources (Dryzek and Berejikian, 1993), or a combination of these. Second, the *concourse* is expressed as a series of statements, which contain claims about the topic under consideration. Third, these statements are condensed into a manageable size to form the Q sample. Various techniques may help in this task, especially inclu-

ding the use of matrix tables to identify features of the statements and discard duplicates. Fourth, a sample of individuals is purposively selected among the population of participants to the discourse about the topic under consideration. The participants are asked to sort the statements into three piles, depending on whether they agree, disagree, or are neutral with the claims. Then, they refine the sort by placing the statements into a forced standard normal distribution, that typically is represented as an inverted pyramid made of 'slots' arranged along a scale (i.e., from -4 to +4 or from -5 to +5). The grid forces the participants to make hard choices to rank the order of statements relative to each other, rather than purely expressing the extent to which they agree or not (i.e., as it would be normally done in a questionnaire survey). Finally, the responses (Q sorts) are analysed through a by-person factor analysis (Stephenson, 1953), i.e., correlations are sought between individuals' views rather than between variables across a sample of individuals. In this way, the analysis results in a limited number of factors that can be understood as averaged viewpoints between the surveyed individuals. If every individual had her or his personal viewpoint that does not correlate with the one of anyone else, then the analysis would result in no factors. Generally, however, individuals may share some limited agreement on what they like or dislike. The Q methodology analysis precisely returns factors that consist of distribution of sentences that, to some extent, some individuals may find themselves in agreement with. The researcher, finally, interprets the meaning of the synthesised factors on the basis of the correlated statements.

This study focuses on the subjectivities of practitioners working in the domain of development cooperation. Development cooperation is an important area of economic and foreign policy that can potentially exert a profound influence on host countries' administrative systems and practices, including procurement. The research begun with the development of a concourse about sustainable procurement in development cooperation on the basis of policy sources (e.g., UN Global Marketplace, UK Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, EU GD Environment) and one of the authors' work experience with the policy domain under consideration. The Q sample was formed with the assistance of an analytic framework that was constructed on the basis of culture theory (Lodge and Wegrich, 2012; Hood, 1998; Douglas, 1982) and Toulmin's (1958) classification of argumentative claims (Brockriede and Ehninger, 1960; Steen and van Eijk, 2012). Culture theory provides that individuals' viewpoints can be classified along grid and group dimensions (i.e., questions about the identity of individuals and their sense of belongingness to a group, and about the normative principles that orient their behaviour) resulting in four 'polar' types, namely a hierarchical, individualistic, egalitarian and fatalistic view. Toulmin's theory of argument provides that claims can be classified according to whether they describe, evaluate, or advocate policy actions. The resulting Q sample, formed of 22 statements, is shown in Table 1.

Dimensions of the concept of Sustainable Procurement							
	Environment	Human rights	Philanthropy	Diversity	Safety	Civic	Capacity
Designative claims	Sustainable Procurement aims to safeguard the environment and natural resources (statement 1)	Sustainable Procurement aims to protect human rights in the workplace (statement 2)	Sustainable Procurement aims to diffuse well-ness among populations (statement 3)	Sustainable Procurement aims to protect the diversity of populations and minority groups (statement 4)	Sustainable Procurement aims to guarantee safety in the workplace (statement 5)	Sustainable Procurement aims to fight crime and frauds (statement 6)	Sustainable Procurement aims to help developing professional skills and capabilities (statement 7)

Dimensions of the discourse around Sustainable Procurement					
	Individualistic (values of efficiency, market, competition)	Hierarchist (values of control, rule of law, top-down regulation)	Egalitarian - I (values of fairness and pluralism)	Egalitarian - II (values of equality and inclusion)	Fatalist (values of skepticism, cynicism, nihilism)
Evaluative claims	Sustainable Procurement has positive effects on efficiency of firms and on competition (statement 8)	Sustainable Procurement helps to control the conduct of firms on such issues as safety, compliance with laws, and environmental protection (statement 9)	Sustainable Procurement helps to put all supplier firms on an equal footing (statement 10)	Sustainable Procurement helps to put all the owners of production factors (e.g., workers, farmers) on an equal footing (statement 11)	Sustainable Procurement only has the effect to enforce laws and regulations for the benefit of a few (statement 12)
Advocative claims	Sustainable Procurement must be primarily based on evaluations made by officers rather than on rules of the contracting entity (statement 13) Sustainable Procurement must be adopted voluntarily by firms (statement 18)	Sustainable Procurement must be instituted by law in order to make it more widespread (statement 14) Sustainable Procurement must be codified in rules and procedures that organizations should strictly comply with (statement 19)	Sustainable Procurement must promote the sustainability of production processes by encouraging dialogue between the supplier firms and the contracting entities (statement 15) Sustainable Procurement must be agreed on between firms, workers, and public authorities (statement 20)	Sustainable Procurement must promote development by encouraging dialogue between the owners of production factors (e.g., workers, farmers) and the contracting entities (statement 16) Sustainable Procurement must be adopted to contain the excessive exploitation of natural resources (statement 21)	Sustainable Procurement must be adopted only when it is really useful for the supply needs of the contracting entities (statement 17) Sustainable Procurement must be belittled to avoid making alterations to organizational processes and to the working of the market (statement 22)

Table 1: The Q sample

The P sample was composed of 22 practitioners of sustainable procurement in development cooperation who worked in either public sector administrations (e.g., consulates) or NGOs. An invitation to participate to the Q methodology survey was sent in April and May 2013. The P sample was selected on the basis of the job position and expertise among practitioners that were acquainted with one of the authors. As such, the sample does not constitute a representation of the population of practitioners. Rather, in Q methodology the sample is typically constructed on purposive, naturalistic, or demographic criteria (Jeffares and Skelcher, 2011). The aim of the method, in fact, is not to draw generalisations to the population of individuals but to extract average viewpoints that are shared among a group of actors in a systematic and transparent way (Robbins and Krueger, 2000). The participants were instructed to bear in mind the requirements that are commonly attached to sustainable procurement practices, namely environmental-related requirements (e.g., atmospheric emissions, hydrogeological impact, respect of biodiversity, water consumption, waste, noise pollution, etc., related to the items to be purchased or to the suppliers' manufacturing process), good-conduct requirements (e.g., past conduct of the supplier and of its officers, such as pending verdicts, past charges for fiscal frauds, criminal activities, or other violations), ethical requirements (e.g., past conduct of the supplier in respecting labour-workers and human rights, cultural diversity, and minority groups), and moral-economy requirements (e.g., past conduct of the supplier in restraining from jeopardizing local economic development in ways such as seeking resource efficiency and improving the quality of local products and services). Sorting was performed online through a web application, named FlashQ (Hackert and Braehler, 2007). Responded were primarily of male gender (16), aged 45.7 on average (median 42, maximum 72, minimum 26) and held work experience in development cooperation for 15.4 years (median 10, maximum 40, minimum 1). The Q sort had the shape of a normal distribution with values ranging from -4 to +4.

4 Results from the Analysis

The analysis of data was conducted with a centroid factor analysis and a varimax rotation using PQ method (Schmolck, 2012). Some judgemental rotation was also performed in order to account for as many of the sorts as possible in as few factors as possible (Stricklin and Almeida, 1999). The analysis resulted in three factors, which were selected according to the criterion of having two or more people loading significantly on each factor (Watts and Stenner, 2005). At the end of the analysis, we obtained the factor matrix with defining sorts (Table 2). The factor matrix illustrates which of the Q sorts are similar to or different from one another, i.e., for each Q sort performed by surveyed individuals, the analysis shows the correlation between the Q sort and each of the three factors. 'Defining sorts' means that the analysis results in the identification of those Q sorts that

most closely correlate with any of the three factors. We also notice that 5 out of 22 Q sorts do not significantly correlate with any of the three factors. These Q sorts relate to individuals whose viewpoints strongly diverge from the average viewpoints expressed by the three factors.

The interpretation of the meaning of the three factors that resulted from the analysis called for consideration of both the factor Q sort values for each statement (Table 3) and comments to the sorting exercise provided by the respondents during the online sorting. The factor Q sort values for each statement consist of the ranking scores for each sentence of the Q sample that would be given by individuals who hold any of the three viewpoints (factors) resulting from the analysis. In other words, the values in Table 3 show the 'ideal' Q sorts that would be made by individuals who hold any of the three viewpoints. Also taking into account comments by the respondents, these three factors have been labelled, for the sake of conveniently expressing general traits of each viewpoint, «Idealist», «Cautious» and «Pragmatist» views on the topic under consideration.

Q Sorts	Factors		
	Idealist	Cautious	Pragmatist
1	- 0.1704	0.1045	0.9129 X
2	0.7476 X	- 0.4142	- 0.2419
3	0.8369X	- 0.0620	0.2761
4	0.3642	- 0.3056	- 0.3973
5	0.6441 X	0.4122	0.4262
6	0.4341	- 0.3624	0.1112
7	0.4341	- 0.3624	0.1112
8	0.3712	- 0.7053 X	- 0.0282
9	0.8561 X	0.0576	- 0.0086
10	0.6758 X	- 0.3010	0.0942
11	0.7517 X	- 0.1824	- 0.0140
12	0.7014 X	- 0.2086	0.2363
13	0.8825 X	- 0.1669	- 0.1139
14	0.8914 X	- 0.0935	- 0.2504
15	0.8469 X	- 0.1720	0.0085
16	0.4871	- 0.6096 X	- 0.0395
17	0.1073	- 0.7396	0.5317 X
18	0.6915 X	- 0.1100	0.0259
19	0.4422	- 0.5272	- 0.1858
20	0.8527 X	0.1609	- 0.0079
21	0.4337	- 0.5684 X	0.1191
22	- 0.2299	- 0.3656	0.0310
% explained variance	40	14	8

Table 2: Factor matrix with defining sorts (indicated by X)

	Statements	Factors		
		Idealist	Cautious	Pragmatist
1	Sustainable Procurement aims to safeguard the environment and natural resources.	3	-3	-4
2	Sustainable Procurement aims to protect human rights in the workplace.	2	2	-2
3	Sustainable Procurement aims to diffuse wellness among populations.	0	0	1
4	Sustainable Procurement aims to protect the diversity of populations and minority groups.	2	0	0
5	Sustainable Procurement aims to guarantee safety in the workplace.	1	2	0
6	Sustainable Procurement aims to fight crime and frauds.	1	0	-1
7	Sustainable Procurement aims to help developing professional skills and capabilities.	-1	-1	0
8	Sustainable Procurement has positive effects on efficiency of firms and on competition.	1	-1	4
9	Sustainable Procurement helps to control the conduct of firms on such issues as safety, compliance with laws, and environmental protection.	4	-2	2
10	Sustainable Procurement helps to put all supplier firms on an equal footing.	-2	1	2
11	Sustainable Procurement helps to put all the owners of production factors (e.g., workers, farmers) on an equal footing.	0	1	-1
12	Sustainable Procurement only has the effect to enforce laws and regulations for the benefit of a few.	-3	3	1
13	Sustainable Procurement must be primarily based on evaluations made by officers rather than on rules of the contracting entity.	-2	2	1
14	Sustainable Procurement must be instituted by law in order to make it more widespread.	2	0	-3
15	Sustainable Procurement must promote the sustainability of production processes by encouraging dialogue between the supplier firms and the contracting entities.	-1	-2	3
16	Sustainable Procurement must promote development by encouraging dialogue between the owners of production factors (e.g., workers, farmers) and the contracting entities.	0	-1	2
17	Sustainable Procurement must be adopted only when it is really useful for the supply needs of the contracting entities.	-4	3	-3
18	Sustainable Procurement must be adopted voluntarily by firms.	-2	-2	-2
19	Sustainable Procurement must be codified in rules and procedures that organizations should strictly comply with.	0	1	0
20	Sustainable Procurement must be agreed on between firms, workers, and public authorities.	-1	-4	-1
21	Sustainable Procurement must be adopted to contain the excessive exploitation of natural resources.	3	-3	-2
22	Sustainable Procurement must be belittled to avoid making alterations to organizational processes and to the working of the market.	-3	4	3

Table 3: Factor Q sort values for each statement

The first of the viewpoints on sustainable procurement relates to what we called an «Idealist» perspective. An idealist perspective of sustainable procurement tends to agree with statements that relate the adoption of sustainability principles in procurement to controlling the conduct of firms on safety, compliance with laws, and environmental protection (statement 9); to safeguard the environment and natural resources (statement 1) and to containing the excessive exploitation of natural resources (statement 21); to protecting human rights in the workplace (statement 2); and to protecting the diversity of populations and minority groups (statement 4). The Idealists also tend to agree that sustainable procurement must be instituted by law in order to become more widespread (statement 14).

The second viewpoint relates to what we called a «Cautious» perspective of sustainable procurement. Followers of this perspective tend to acknowledge that sustainable procurement aims to guarantee safety (statement 9) and protect human rights in the workplace (statement 2). In addition, they tend to agree that sustainable procurement must be belittled to avoid making alterations to organizational processes and to the working of the market (statement 22), that it must be adopted only when it is really useful for the supply needs of the contracting entities (statement 17), and that it must be primarily based on evaluations made by officers rather than on rules of the contracting entity (statement 13). Their view also includes an agreement with the belief that sustainable procurement only has the effect to enforce laws and regulations for the benefit of the few (statement 12).

The third viewpoint on sustainable procurement relates to what we called a «Pragmatist» perspective. A pragmatist perspective tends to agree that sustainable procurement has positive effects on efficiency of firms and on competition (statement 8), that it helps to control the conduct of firms on such issues as safety, compliance with laws, and environmental protection (statement 9), and that it helps to put all suppliers on an equal footing (statement 10). The Pragmatists also tend to agree that sustainable procurement must promote the sustainability of production processes by encouraging dialogue between the supplier firms and the contracting entities (statement 15) and that it must promote development by sustaining the exchange between the owners of production factors (e.g., workers, farmers) and the contracting entities (statement 16). Followers of this perspective would also argue, however, that sustainable procurement must be belittled to avoid making alterations to organizational processes and to the working of the market (statement 22).

It is interesting to note how the three viewpoints relate to different dimensions of the multi-faceted construct of sustainable procurement, especially in relation to the environment, human rights, protection of diversity, and safety in the workplace. In addition, the three viewpoints exhibit different cultural perspective when it comes to analyse the extent to which they agree with evaluative and advocative claims, where the Idealists tend to adopt a mixed hierarchical and egalitarian set of values, the Cautious tend to align with a blended fatalist and individualist perspective, while the Pragmatists seem generally informed by an

egalitarian perspective. The three viewpoints also seem statistically distinguishable from each other, provided that there is no strong positive correlation between the factors (Table 4) and that there were no significant consensus statements at $p > .01$. At $p > 0.5$, consensus statements comprised «Sustainable Procurement aims to diffuse wellness among populations» (statement 3) and «Sustainable Procurement aims to guarantee safety in the workplace» (statement 5). A consensus statement is also found in the shared disagreement with «Sustainable Procurement must be codified in rules and procedures that organizations should strictly comply with» (statement 19).

	Idealist	Cautious	Pragmatist
Idealist	1.000	- 0.5381	- 0.1583
Cautious	- 0.5381	1.000	0.1206
Pragmatist	- 0.1583	0.1206	1.000

Table 4: Correlation between factors

5 Conclusions

This study provides an analysis of the subjectivities of practitioners of development cooperation programmes about the role of sustainable procurement. The application of Q methodology shows that there are three distinctive viewpoints held by development cooperation practitioners towards the meaning of sustainable procurement, what the effects of sustainable procurement are, and what should be done with it. The Idealists call for the adoption and diffusion of sustainable procurement through formal legislation as a way of safeguarding the environment, providing safety and protection of human rights of workers, and protecting diversity and minority groups. Cautious individuals hold a sceptical view of sustainable procurement, and rather favour the containment of its adoption to selected cases only. Finally, the Pragmatists see some benefits of sustainable procurement, but they also locate its role within negotiations between owners of production factors, suppliers, and contracting entities.

The results from the analysis suggest some ways in which practitioners can consider the implementation of sustainability principles in the public procurement process. Individuals whose viewpoint is close to the Idealist approach may enthusiastically embrace the principles of sustainability and creatively search for ways to make sustainable procurement bear effects on target populations, e.g., small local suppliers or minority groups. On the other hand, Idealists may be warned that counterparts who hold different viewpoints may approach sustainable procurement with a more sceptical view or may only partially follow sustainability principles depending on circumstances and practical advantages. Individuals

who hold a Cautious viewpoint may limit the adoption of sustainable principles to minimal compliance with legislation and regulations, although they may overlook the supportive role of championing sustainable procurement for stimulating organisational change. Finally, individuals who hold a Pragmatic viewpoint may welcome sustainability principles on the basis of utilitarian or opportunistic considerations. On the other hand, they may find them at odds with others who are either moved by idealistic motives or by cautionary concerns.

The findings of this study also bear some relevance for the design and implementation of policies that are intended to stimulate the adoption of sustainable procurement, especially within development cooperation programs. Advocates of this policy should bear in mind the variety of attitudes towards sustainable procurement and devise communication strategies and tactics of negotiation that better suit the values, beliefs, and interests of idealist, cautious, and pragmatic counterparts. Different dimensions of the multi-faceted construct of sustainable procurement are more likely to «ring true» to the ears of individuals holding one or another of the viewpoints that have been identified in the analysis. Different kinds of argument may sound more or less persuasive to «unlock» the barriers of disbelief held by the Idealists, the Cautious, and the Pragmatists. A circumscribed set of consensus statements, more-over, can potentially appeal to a broader audience on the basis of shared agreement on the relationship between sustainable procurement and the diffusion of wellness, safety in the workplace, and the development of professional skills and capabilities. Policy-makers and public managers, therefore, should be attentive to stress the features of the discourse on sustainable procurement that better serve the purpose of establishing a common ground for debating and winning acceptance for sustainable procurement policy.

Finally, findings from this study also indicate some way forward for future research. First, additional research could refine our understanding of practitioners' viewpoints on sustainable procurement by exploring subjectivities in more detail. The present study showed, for example, that five individuals' viewpoints were not significantly correlated to any of the three factors that resulted from the analysis. Future works, then, could help identifying additional viewpoints but the Idealist, Cautious, and Pragmatist perspectives that have been identified here. Second, additional research could extend the inquiry into other public domains but development cooperation. Future works, for example, could investigate the subjectivities of public managers who carry out the procurement function in central and local governments. Lastly, additional research could address the issue of how holding alternative viewpoints matters for the design and execution of the public procurement function. Future works, therefore, could explore whether individual subjectivities play any role in the organisation of sustainable public procurement practices.

Zusammenfassung

In den letzten Jahrzehnten wurde das öffentliche Beschaffungswesen vermehrt durch das ökologische und ethische Prinzip der Nachhaltigkeit beeinflusst. Es ist jedoch wenig über die Einstellung der öffentlichen Entscheidungsträger bezüglich einer nachhaltigen öffentlichen Beschaffung bekannt. Diese Q-Methodik-Studie gibt Aufschluss über die unterschiedlichen Sichtweisen bezüglich der Auslegung der nachhaltigen Beschaffung, den Wirkungen auf die organisationalen Praktiken und der Implementierung von nachhaltigen Prinzipien.

Schlagwort: Nachhaltige Beschaffung, Entwicklungskooperationsprogramme, Q-Methodik

Résumé

Les dernières décennies ont vu grandir l'influence du principe écologique et éthique de développement durable sur les marchés publics. Toutefois, on en sait encore relativement peu sur la position des fonctionnaires publics en matière de marchés publics durables. La présente étude, basée sur la méthodologie Q, présente différents points de vue sur trois questions : la définition-même d'un marché durable, ses effets potentiels sur les pratiques organisationnelles et enfin la manière dont le principe de développement durable devrait être appliqué.

Mots-Clé: Marchés durables, programmes de coopération au développement, méthodologie Q

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