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# “We Need to Build Carbon-Neutral Houses” – Discourses of Responsible Expertise in Finnish Professional Media

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## ABSTRACT

In this study, we explore how expertise and responsibility are discursively intertwined in professional media. Based on quotations from building and real-estate industry professionals in news texts concerning sustainable building and housing, we identified three responsibility-related discourses: responsibility as a strategic professional vision, responsibility as techno-material expertise, and responsibility as a communal and societal orientation. These discourses of responsible expertise are important for voicing professional perspectives and emphasizing corporate social responsibility (CSR). In the sustainability transition, industry professionals are balancing between organizational and industry-level motives, between utility perspectives for “us” and “others,” and between managing impressions of doing good for the industry and for citizens or society at large. Through and with journalism, these professionals disseminate both individual and organizational expertise to the public in order to “make the industry and the whole society better and more sustainable.”

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## Introduction

An expert in a specific field has characteristics, skills and knowledge that enable superior performance in representative tasks in a domain (Ericsson, 2018). Therefore, experts face high societal expectations concerning their behavior and use of knowledge. In other words, experts are expected to be responsible and act in responsible ways (e.g. Peters, 2021). They have a duty to consider what is best for society and are held accountable for their actions. In the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR, Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021; Zappettini & Unerman, 2016), this means that they must consider economic, environmental and social attributes in everything they say or do. This also concerns the quality of information, opinions and assessments experts offer when they contribute to news stories (cf. Carvalho, 2007; Peters, 2021; Williams, 2015), even though they cannot control how the media uses this information.

Previous studies on the relationship between the media and experts have focused mostly on journalists' viewpoints. For instance, the following topics have been studied: journalists' processes in selecting “appropriate” sources, use of various expert groups to make news stories as informative and approachable as possible (e.g. Albæk, 2011; Laursen & Trapp, 2021; Peters, 2021; Williams, 2015), and framing the news from sustainability, climate change or ecological perspectives (e.g. Guenther et al., 2022; Ong & Diong, 2023). To a lesser extent, scholars have paid attention to issues of responsibility, i.e. how the responsibility of people and their actions is presented in media contexts (e.g. Guenther et al., 2022; also, e.g. Crumley et al., 2022; Lövenmark et al., 2023).

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For example, CSR studies have been more organization-based, i.e. based on organizations' communication channels, than grounded on media discussions of specific fields or issues (cf. e.g. Kangas et al., 2018). Researchers have also explored CSR as a "greenwashing" activity, illustrating how organizational actors exaggerate the sustainability of their organization, actions, and affiliations (e.g. Bowen & Aragon-Correa, 2014; Wu et al., 2020). However, this type of "irresponsibility" has not been explicitly connected to field-specific expertise.

Despite the variety of perspectives covered, there is a gap in earlier research concerning how experts' voices are used in news stories to promote both their individual responsibility and the responsibility of their entire industry (however, see, e.g. Kim, 2014; Kim, 2015). Thus, we argue that journalistic quotations not only provide additional perspectives for news stories (cf. Haapanen & Perrin, 2017; Johansson, 2019; also see Guo et al., 2023), but also show how experts' quotations construct an image of responsible individuals and the responsible companies they represent (see Crumley et al., 2022). However, there may be tensions between individual and organizational needs when constructing an image of responsibility. For example, a balancing act might be needed in promoting one's own ideas (self-motivation) or the organization's projects, i.e. know-how (community- or society-motivation) (on dual motives in CSR research, see Kim, 2014).

In addition, the journalists' decisions when selecting citations produce yet another kind of tension (see, e.g. Guo et al., 2023; Haapanen, 2017). The active participation of experts can be interpreted as discursive shaping (cf. Fairclough, 2003), which is both enabled and restricted by media institutions, channels and professionals (cf. e.g. Cherry et al., 2015). By discursive shaping we refer to how actors, such as experts and journalists, strategically influence the framing of the topics discussed in journalistic texts. Together they raise awareness, share information and pose arguments concerning issues such as sustainability and responsibility (e.g. Boyce, 2006; Cotter, 2010).

To address these underlying tensions around the construction of responsible expertise in journalistic media texts, the current study examines articles published in the Finnish trade journal *Rakennuslehti* (*Construction Magazine*). The journal serves as an example of a journalistic media where the readers are mostly professionals within a professional field, in this case, the building and real estate industry. This enables studying how experts' voices are used to discursively shape the discussion of sustainability in the sector (see Crumley et al., 2022; also Koteyko, 2012; Yacoumis, 2018). The selected trade journal showcases how the building and real estate industry as part of the national system participates in seeking solutions to the (field-specific) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as proposed by the UN (see United Nations Environment Programme, 2022; also Iyer-Raniga et al., 2021) – especially in the Finnish context, Finland (and the other Nordic countries) being a relatively rich Western country.

The context of the current study is *sustainable housing*, which enables exploring the industry's relationships with and coverage in the media (Carroll, 2011). By sustainable housing, we refer to complex housing-related practices and solutions that take environmental and climate change aspects in our everyday lives into account (e.g. Cherry et al., 2015; Lovell, 2004). In Pickvance's (2009, p. 330) words, sustainable housing means "housing that has a reduced impact on environment" and "relates to wider concepts such as sustainable building." The sustainability discussion in and around the building and real-estate industry is in full swing (cf. Berg, 2020; Scrucca et al., 2023); because the sector's high carbon emissions pose a both global and national problem (e.g. Iyer-Raniga et al., 2021), different kinds of experts are invited to make public statements on how to tackle this challenge (see, e.g. Druckman & Jackson, 2016; Koteyko, 2012). Therefore, in this context, sustainability and responsible expertise are cross-cutting themes in media discussions.

In the present qualitatively-oriented study, we aim to explore how responsible expertise is discursively constructed through journalistic quotations. We pose two research questions:

- 1) Which discursive features are used to create an image of responsible expertise?
- 2) How does the discursive construction of responsible expertise involve the tensions between experts' individual and organizational or industry-level expertise?

In this way, the paper contributes to the extant discussion on multifaceted representation of experts' voices in the media. We provide two fresh perspectives by using the discourse analytical approach (see Fairclough, 2003, 2013; also Carvalho, 2007): (1) by focusing on quotations in media texts as crossing points of discourses, we are able to echo not only the individual experts' knowledge and actions but also more widely the sustainable development visions of industry organizations and communities, and (2) by exploring the expert quotations chosen by journalists, we may illuminate the tension in the relationship between experts and journalists underlying discursive construction of responsible expertise (cf. Cramer, 2018 on the discursive construction of relationships between multinational companies and nation states in news discourse). Furthermore, in the analysis, the quotations serve as pathways to different discourses through which the industry communicates with its stakeholders and influences the discussion of the topic.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we introduce previous research on experts' voices in media discussion. We continue by describing our data and method more precisely. After that, we present the findings with illustrative text extracts, and end our paper with discussion and conclusions.

## **A discursive approach to experts' voices in the media**

From a discourse analytical perspective, phenomena such as responsible expertise manifest themselves and are produced in language use through diverse means of meaning-making depending on who is talking and how, from what position, about what, and in what context (see Fairclough, 2003). This notion is at the center of our theoretical framework. Yet, more generally, expertise may be understood as an ability to participate in (media) discussion based on the expert's connection to the topic. Expertise may be acquired through education, experience, available materials or long-lasting interest (see, e.g. Albæk, 2011; Peters, 2021; Williams, 2015; see also Coen et al., 2021), or through one's status as a public servant, journalist or (citizen) influencer (e.g. Guo et al., 2023; Laursen & Trapp, 2021).

In a similar vein, expertise may be gained through a position or role in an organization, i.e. through practical everyday activity. Responsible expertise may then be seen as a phenomenon emerging between forms of expertise and organizational activities in stakeholder communication and external CSR (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021, p. 2). On the other hand, Laursen and Trapp (2021) have observed that the difference between experts and advocates is fading, as many experts can be seen more as spokespeople for their causes rather than as actual trained industry professionals. Coen et al. (2021) have also shown how news story commentators present themselves as experts by using category entitlements and constructing their arguments as factual, based on, e.g. technical knowledge or common sense. In their words, "expertise is a fluid concept, constructed in diverse ways" (p. 1).

Media discussions on specific topics, such as sustainability, climate change or green transition, emerge from the joint work of different kinds of experts and non-experts. Journalists set agendas and interview sources or borrow source materials from others (e.g. Huan, 2016; Kim, 2015), and modify experts' talk (Haapanen, 2017). Experts, then, share their thoughts and initiate actions for sustainable solutions (e.g. Carvalho, 2007; also Peters, 2021), and non-experts bring their own views to the discussion by, e.g. challenging information delivered by the experts (see, e.g. Cherry et al., 2015; Coen et al., 2021). As these different actors have different interests, the ways expertise emerges in media involves professionals' ability to bring multifaceted knowledge into discussions, their competence in seeing the topic at hand from multiple perspectives, and the art of influencing topical discourses (see, e.g. Grundmann, 2022). Expertise thus appears in the ways they cultivate discourses, such as through providing scientific knowledge to satisfy citizens' information needs, offering tools for supporting and solving issues, contributing more generally to understandings of societal topics, and through new forms of expertise and situational know-how (e.g. Boykoff, 2009; Carvalho, 2007; Kanjanabutra & Corbitt, 2016). This in turn is connected to power aspects: Media coverage enables these professionals to have an impact, but only to the extent empowered by journalists (Guo et al., 2023; Laursen & Trapp, 2021; Ong & Diong, 2023).

Experts may have dual roles or motives, both as concerned citizens and as representatives of a specific field (see, e.g. Peters, 2021). Professionals are driven by both a self-serving motive and a society-serving motive when engaging their audience in sustainability discussion (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021, p. 3; see also Kim, 2014); they may simultaneously show and feel responsibility for issues such as saving energy, and spread their knowledge and use their skills on behalf of these issues, such as by creating energy-saving household devices (cf. Cherry et al., 2015 on different strategies). However, experts do not always solely represent their own knowledge and views, but often speak and act on behalf of different affiliations (Carroll, 2011; Laursen & Trapp, 2021). In doing so, they both expand the expertise discourse at hand and minimize their own responsibility reflected in the discourse (cf. Zappettini & Unerman, 2016 on bending and mixing discourses). This is reminiscent of the concepts of “knowledgeable we” introduced by Lövenmark et al. (2023) and inclusive language observed in Crumley et al. (2022), as both concepts position experts as a *we-group*. For example, in media interviews, inclusive language regarding sustainability consisted of collective focus terms (e.g. *everyone, citizens, community*), collective personal pronouns (e.g. *we, generic you*), and metaphors (Crumley et al., 2022, p. 151).

The ways these we-talks emerge in media texts are most visibly apparent in quotations. Quotations can be seen as ways of bringing in the mediated views of interviewees and other sources, and their contributions to the discourse (Johansson, 2019). Through quotations, journalists can address specific perspectives on a topic to balance the presence of diverse sources, and ultimately manage the discourse in question (see, e.g. Boyce, 2006; Cramer, 2018; Haapanen & Perrin, 2017; Huan, 2016). Accordingly, we regard quotations as talk that enables industry experts to participate in creating and shaping discourses. Simultaneously, quotations illustrate how experts engage in stakeholder communication with the media and industry communities – in a mediated manner provided by journalists’ work on modifying interviewees’ talk (e.g. references to sourcing categories, and quoting verbs, see Haapanen, 2017; Haapanen & Perrin, 2017).

Quotation practices in journalism are a so-called black box; they are summarized outcomes of the complex cooperation between journalists and their sources (Haapanen, 2017). This work is affected by both the cultural contexts and practices of journalism and the media target groups (see, e.g. Haapanen & Perrin, 2017; Peters, 1995). Therefore, it makes sense to understand quotations as a channel for professionals to share their knowledge and contribute to the discourses brought up not only by journalists but also by other professionals in the continuum of media texts on the topic. For example, media interviews studied by Crumley et al. (2022) in relation to strategic external communication were treated as a channel to manifest organizational sustainability activities and discursively legitimize them. Guo et al. (2023), on the other hand, observed that quotations – especially by state officials – are used to legitimize authoritarian governance in Chinese news media coverage of climate change.

In conclusion, the quotations contribute to enacting discourses in the media (e.g. Johansson, 2019). Discourse itself is seen as a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities (Hajer, 1996, p. 44). Physical and social realities are those that industry actors “make” as experts in their daily lives, e.g. create technologies to build energy-efficient multi-story houses, and promote responsible solutions in planning and implementing projects. These responsible actions come into being in media texts utilizing expert sources. At the same time, they categorize expert-based actions and construct a potentially heterogeneous responsibility discourse (see Fairclough, 2003; cf. Lövenmark et al., 2023).

## Data and method

We focus on the representation of responsible expertise in journalistic texts. This representation may become visible through different textual elements, such as the overall narrative, stylistic choices or quotations and their uses (see Fairclough, 2003; also Cotter, 2010). Our data stems from

*Rakennuslehti* (“*Construction Magazine*”), a major Finnish trade journal; it is published weekly in print and online ([rakennuslehti.fi](http://rakennuslehti.fi)) editions and it reaches almost 70,000 readers weekly. Its target group consists of industry professionals and decision-makers, e.g. architects, master builders, contractors and CEOs, and real-estate investors as well as interested and practicalized laypeople – it gives voices to different types of experts that tend to be treated as trusted and influential representatives of the field in the issue at hand (see, e.g. Boyce, 2006; Peters, 1995).

This kind of trade journal acts as an appropriate channel for discourses reflecting the present attitudes and activities towards reaching the national SDG targets in the industry, and it mirrors policies and processes shared with other high-income western countries in the EU in particular (see United Nations Environment Programme, 2022). As our approach is entwined in discourse analysis, we regard the functionality of expert quotations pivotal in the context of sustainable housing as they participate in constructing what is regarded as meaningful, proper, and right actions and thereby influence the actions taken in the construction field (cf. Cramer, 2018; Koteyko, 2012; Yacoumis, 2018), such as what kind of products are offered for consumers. In this way, these expert statements play a role in reaching the SDG targets.

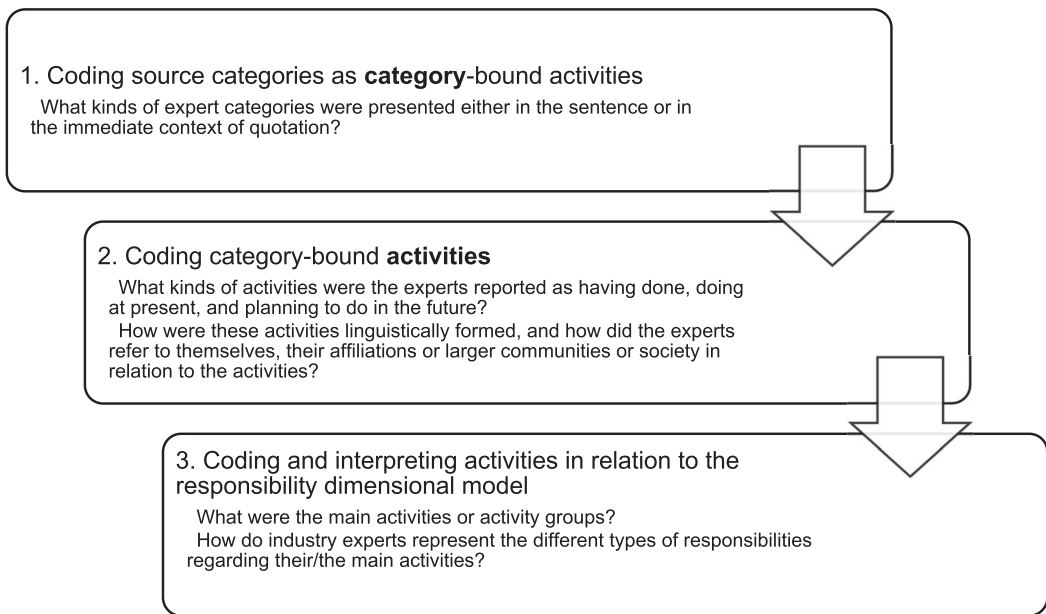
Initially, we collected all the texts (153) published in the online edition from 2010 to 2020 that concerned climate change, sustainability and housing. The search words and their combinations (translated from Finnish) included *climate-wise/sustainable housing or renovating, carbon footprint, emissions, energy efficiency, and low-carbon heating and technologies*. The texts typically covered descriptions of different construction projects and experiments with planning and material issues along with political and societal information about industry transformation during the data-gathering period (e.g. growth in wood construction, energy-efficiency principles).

For this study, the dataset of journalistic texts included news texts and lengthier articles (but excluded opinion pieces by industry professionals), 99 in total. The average text length is 2–3 web pages including picture(s) and other types of visualizations, like graphics. They are also tagged with keywords, such as affiliations and subject terms (e.g. *energy efficiency, wood construction*). In those 99 texts, we identified explicit source quotations yielding almost 400 quotations with an average length of two sentences. Half of the quotations (ca. 200) were from the building and real estate professionals which we focused on in this study.

Quotations are typically characterized by two types of categorizations: persons saying something and activities representing what was said (see Potter, 1996; also see Fairclough, 2013; Johansson, 2019). Our analysis of the quotations as discursive-linguistic realizations of category-bound activities was adapted from the study by Coen et al. (2021) on how news comment section discussants construct common expertise.

The analysis was carried out by the first author of the paper; however, all authors participated in discussing the data excerpts and their interpretations in various phases during iterative analysis. Furthermore, the analytical steps were developed in the analytical rounds as the joint interpretation and focus of the study became clearer during the process. Using the qualitative research software Atlas.ti, we then conducted the analysis in three steps (see Figure 1).

**First**, we categorized expert sources and their affiliations (e.g. construction, real estate, municipality; e.g. affiliations of organizations, associations, cities, ministries) by examining the immediate context of quotation structures because sources in news texts are often identified in the surrounding text. **Second**, adhering to the idea of category-bound activity (Coen et al., 2021), we focused on the information and activities presented in the quotations. We analyzed what the professionals were reported as having done, doing at present, and planning to do in the future (e.g. as features and strategies of emerging discourses in the social context, see Fairclough, 2013, p. 19), for both themselves and their possible affiliations. In this step, we paid attention to the linguistic means (words and sentences) characterizing the abovementioned activities (e.g. *hoping, visioning, tested*) but also specific experts’ recurring talk around their affiliation contexts (i.e. *we [as in the company X], our company, together with Y, for the society*, etc.) (cf. e.g. Carvalho, 2007; Fairclough, 2003).



**Figure 1.** Analysis codebook.

**In the third step**, we coded and summarized the activities and referred person categories accordingly into four categories recognized as main “activities”: strategic organizational activities, economic organizational activities, activities related to material and technological perspectives, as well as socially and societally relevant activities. These were coded according to our adaptation of the dimensional model of responsibility (economic, environmental and social dimensions, e.g. Crumley et al., 2022). Our adaptation is centered around the environmental dimension and the other two dimensions are filtered against/through the frames of environmentality (and overall sustainability). Furthermore, the two dimensions were organized into three categorizations: (1) organizational responsibility with economic and strategic subgroups, (2) material responsibility, including e.g. technologies, construction and working materials, equipment, and (3) social responsibility at several levels from the organization to the communities of the industry, cities, ministries and society.

In other words, we fitted this responsibility dimensional model to the industry and its professionals, i.e. paying attention to their take on the different types of responsibilities (e.g. *environmentally-focused comparison of building materials*) based on the quotations.

This being a qualitative study, most of the quotations were coded to multiple categorizations, but in the findings, they are introduced according to the primary identification – which, in turn, is based on our interpretations of the quotation’s overall meaning in the bigger picture of the news text (see also Haapanen, 2017). For example, the word “we” was interpreted to refer to company and industry stakeholders when the text was about the company’s project and the future residents were not explicitly addressed.

Finally, we observed that information and activities were often attached to affiliation-based strategies and visions, materials and technologies, and social interactions, especially at the communal and industrial levels, but also at the societal level. These findings were summarized into three somewhat overlapping responsibility discourses, which are discussed in detail below.

### **Findings: three responsibility discourses**

Building and real-estate industry professionals’ talk on responsibility and related activities manifests itself in the media through three discourses emphasizing different kinds of expertise and

overlapping with each other (see Table 1): responsibility (1) as strategic vision-making and information sharing, (2) as a multifaceted techno-material resource, and (3) as an orientation toward the industry's social networks, both inside (communities) and outside (society) of the field. The experts involved include both affiliated/organization-based CEOs, project managers, and property managers, and (unaffiliated) architects, designers and building supervisors.

Table 1 outlines the main characteristics associated with each of the observed discourses. We will discuss them in more detail below and illustrate the findings with representative samples from the data (original extracts are in Online Appendix 1).

### **Responsibility as strategic professional vision**

In this discourse, professionals state that they act responsibly and talk about sustainability actions specifically as an organizational activity. Contexts for such talk are the companies and communities that the professionals are affiliated with and positioned in. Professionals, for example, make promises that their affiliations will strengthen their sustainability practices or commitments to different agendas and that they are keeping an eye on the process. This type of talk illustrates the professionals' ability to reflect on past and current actions and use these reflections for future-oriented forthcoming actions, keeping in mind the industry's transition toward sustainability. Such reflective future-orientation shares features with CSR communication, particularly aspirational strategy talk to stakeholders (Crumley et al., 2022). Moreover, it may be seen as carrying features of a decoupling behavior characteristic of greenwashing (e.g. Wu et al., 2020).

In the examples below, corporate/organization actors express responsible expertise through strategy talk: talk about their visions, promises and aspirations for acting on behalf of sustainable development.

(1) "Ecology is present in people's lives and homes – and it is an ever-more **integral part of our values**. For this reason, from day one in our design work, **we decided to truly commit** to utilizing ecological solutions and minimizing the carbon footprint," says Lundstedt -. (RL\_19092019)

(2) "**We're always looking for new ways of reducing our energy consumption** – one appealing solution is to employ more ecological construction methods, such as wood construction," says Lindholm. (RL\_03012018)

In the examples, the professionals use "we" talk that both emphasizes an affiliation-based responsibility and indicates affiliation-based and field-specific know-how (*knowledgeable we*, see Lövenmark et al., 2023). "We" is a typical way to describe an organizational activity and communal activity on a macro level. Strategy talk may also be focused on smaller subcategories, such as

**Table 1.** Responsible expertise discourses and their main characteristics.

Discourse	Characterizing talk	Characterizing discursive elements
Responsibility as strategic professional vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategy talk, visionary mood               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ with and without economic talk</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future-orientation: promising, committing, looking forward</li> <li>• Evaluating (projects, etc.)</li> </ul>
Responsibility as techno-material expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Material talk, solution talk               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ with and without economic and technology talk</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usefulness and practicality: technical details, numerical language, comparisons and measurements</li> </ul>
Responsibility as communal and societal orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social talk, community-focused talk               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ with the focus on the idea of a social network</li> <li>○ overlaps to some extent with strategy and material talk</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impression-managing: helping and developing the industry and society</li> <li>• valuating utility</li> </ul>

(innovation) projects, processes or target groups: e.g. in example 1, a process (“*from day one in our design work*”), and in example 2, practices (“*new ways of reducing*”).

Strategy talk is also combined with economic talk, which is a way to represent responsible expertise in our data. In this type of talk, the implicitly and explicitly expressed economic activity is connected with the environmental perspective in different ways, such as matching carbon-neutrality, materiality or life-cycle cost with profitability.

(3) “**We’re taking certain steps forward. I believe that carbon-neutrality is also profitable business.**” (RL\_01102019)

(4) One of the **key design objectives** has been to implement the project with minimal lifecycle costs. “The investment is around **10 percent more expensive**, but this enables **us to recoup the costs**,” says Veikko Simunaniemi, CEO –. (RL\_24102013)

In example 3, the head of service at a construction firm refers implicitly to both strategy and economic thinking. He talks about *certain steps* and *carbon-neutrality as profitable business* instead of using expressions related to money – profitability is, however, connected to the business activity and it is logical to interpret profitability in terms of money and costs. The word choice “*I believe*” from this professional source is interesting; it can be interpreted more than literally (as “hoping”), as his vision is based on wide-ranging know-how, which we can assume he gained in his work, and not necessarily through education (see Kanjanabootra & Corbitt, 2016). This kind of expertise and type of talk may also be interpreted as advocating a specific issue (cf. Laursen & Trapp, 2021).

Economic talk is more explicit in example 4, where the CEO of a council housing company comments on how much focusing on low life-cycle costs can save on investments. In our data, life-cycle costs are referred to as a significant factor in sustainable housing and construction, and as the example illustrates, companies consider them in their strategic actions, from planning to implementing construction projects.

Economic activity and related talk are also present without a clear connection to strategy talk (see example 5). Yet, responsibility is still related to the sustainability projects of companies, and to the ability of professionals to consider and calculate the input-output ratio from the company perspective.

(5) “**We’re not making the lessees pay for this – we’re spending the money.** That said, we’re the ones who will **benefit from the lower costs**. In other words, this is an investment for us – we expect a return from it. The best buildings **should yield a profit** of ten percent,” says Lindfors. (RL\_07022020)

In example 5, a property manager introduces a company project involving low-carbon building from a cost perspective, and states that the expenses and the money invested in these kinds of buildings are beneficial in the long run. The manager uses expressions describing investment (“*spending the money*”), profit expectations (“*a return – should yield a profit*”), and utility (“*benefit*”). When talking about profitability, the professional changes his point of view from anticipation (i.e. having an expertise-based opinion) to speculation about potential future profits. Nevertheless, economic talk is constructed in the other two discourses as well, for instance in relation to different construction materials, which we will address next.

### **Responsibility as techno-material expertise**

In the second discourse, responsible expertise is reflected in the data when the professionals discuss raw materials, finished products, techniques or technologies, such as heat pumps. In this context, responsibility is connected with the environmental perspective of the industry and sustainable development overall. However, the economic perspective tends to permeate this type of talk as well. The professionals highlight how the industry as a whole is committed to developing sustainable materials and thus responding to the need to transform society (cf. Hajer, 1996; Kangas et al., 2018). This seems to form a relevant macro-level context for displaying expertise in news stories.

In the following examples, the talk about construction materials concerns comparisons, calculations and measurements, for which the media often use expert sources (cf. e.g. Carvalho, 2007). In example 6, the CEO of a construction company states matter-of-factly that a concrete high-rise is cheaper than a wooden high-rise, although no project cost comparisons exist. This type of company talk can be interpreted as a use of discursive power, that is, as a way for the professional to argue from the economic perspective for a material that is not considered to be low-carbon or consistent with sustainable development principles. Wood and concrete are also compared in example 7, where a CEO states that there are *good conditions* in the current project to make comparisons as the houses and floor plans are identical.

(6) Cost analysis of the Kuninkaantammi project has only just been initiated, so the final results cannot be disclosed yet. “However, we can state that the cost comparisons indicate that **concrete apartment buildings are cheaper than wooden ones**,” says Airaksela. (RL\_18112016)

(7) “The buildings have identical floor plans and apartment sizes. In addition, they are located on the same plot, so the conditions are the same – there are **good conditions** to compare them,” says Antti Lundstedt, CEO of Mangrove. (RL\_14102020)

Talk about materials commonly concerns individual materials and products and their different features that are either directly or indirectly linked to environmental sustainability (cf. Kangas et al., 2018). For instance, example 8 addresses the economic potential of the optimal location and size of *energy-efficient windows*, and how this may help to make buildings more sustainable. The statement could be interpreted as an argument for the competence and trustworthiness of the company: Optimal materials and products maximize the energy efficiency of buildings.

(8) “The window locations and sizes have been optimized for **energy-efficiency**. In addition, we’re also focusing on structural tightness so that heat won’t escape through the walls. This is an airtight **energy class A building**.” (RL\_19092019)

(9) “In our material choices and product comparisons, **we’ve sought to assess** the shares accounted for by **recycled raw materials**. We’ve also aimed to plan where the different **materials will end up** if the building is eventually demolished,” says Kuittinen. (RL\_26062020)

In example 9, the environmental perspective is implicitly present as professor and planner Kuittinen mentions the share of recycled raw materials and plans for the reuse of materials – thereby referring to circular economy. Unlike in the previous example, the speaker uses “we-talk” that includes only certain actors in the industry (cf. Crumley et al., 2022 *inclusive we*).

Talking about materials is partly associated with economic activities (see examples 10–11). Materials are not considered only from the environmental perspective: Professionals use their multifaceted expertise to show which materials or technologies are economically profitable along with their other features, like longevity or adaptability. This implies that economic talk about materials is harnessed to display the different kinds of expertise needed to implement construction projects smoothly and professionally, and to enhance material development from the perspectives of sustainable development and profitable business.

(10) “The idea is to review the whole building and its technology to identify what aspects would **cost-effectively decrease energy bills and the carbon footprint**, while improving living comfort,” says Tomi Mäkipelto, CEO of Leasegreen. (RL\_10092018)

(11) “**We’ve invested** heavily in wooden apartment buildings and learned a great deal from this project. That said, this has already been a profitable and wholly successful **project for us**,” Nieminen tells *Rakennuslehti*. (RL\_08092017)

In these examples, two CEOs talk about their current projects from two perspectives. The first CEO explains how you can act both profitably and sustainably (“*cost-effectively decrease*”). The second CEO states through we-talk (*we have, for us*) that they have learned a lot from constructing a

wooden apartment building while still making profit, which makes the project successful. The economic yet environment-friendly arguments could be interpreted as greenwashing but, in these cases, sustainable and responsible actions have already taken place. Thus, the message is not only for the stakeholders to imagine the good deeds, but for arguing that efficient solutions have been made and will be made in the future as well (cf. Bowen & Aragon-Correa, 2014).

The media quotes professionals about heating technologies and energy solutions; they discuss sustainable and responsible issues not only concerning the actual materials and technologies but also their use and maintenance (see examples 12 and 13).

(12) “This new project serves as a reference project for **low-energy buildings**. It enables us to assess how **energy costs vary** in buildings that have almost identical structural solutions, but different heating systems,” says Eero Lukkarinen, Real-Estate Director -. (RL\_21052012)

(13) Valtari says that energy-efficiency is a major tangible issue in both existing and new buildings. “**We can already design carbon-neutral buildings – technology makes this possible.**” (RL\_01102019)

In example 12, a real-estate director talks about comparing the energy costs of two virtually identical new high-rises with different heating systems. As in this example, the techno-material talk in our data is focused mostly on projects and experiments in which actors seek solutions and new means to make buildings more sustainable by continuous testing and research. Technology is also presented as a solution in example 13, where a professional representing a construction firm displays responsible expertise by talking confidently about low-carbon construction or at least its design (“*design carbon-neutral buildings*”). Aligning with public discussions on climate change and sustainable development, this professional addresses claims that technology is a key to a more sustainable society (cf. Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2007).

### **Responsibility as communal and societal orientation**

Responsible expertise is – in addition to the previously introduced discourses – represented as discursively constructed social responsibility. It is crystallized as an orienting activity focused on industry-level communities, raising awareness of the industry’s importance for developing cities and residential areas, and paying attention to citizens’ views. In other words, the professionals act and share information responsibly in complex social networks that cover companies, the whole industry, and the local and national communities – seeing “the organization and audience as allies” (Crumley et al., 2022, p. 161). Expertise, then, primarily involves the ability to discuss industry practices, materials, their significance and the future also from the point of view of actors other than industry insiders.

Community orientation within the industry is present in examples 14–16 in which the communities comprise contractors, architects and building investigators. In example 14, a building investigator speculates about the profitability of renovating old terraced houses and argues that diverse in-groups’ know-how or lack of it affects the issue. The example also shows that professionals do not talk only about good things but also share critical aspects in the major discourses of the industry, such as whether a building is worth repairing.

(14) “Many of the terraced houses of the 1970s and 1980s are in such a shape that it might not be worth repairing them. Furthermore, **repairs are often carried out incorrectly**, because **repair designers lack expertise** in building physics and repair design. And structural designers and developers do not take the reports of structural inspectors seriously enough,” says Pertti Heikkinen -. (RL\_18082017)

(15) “This isn’t rocket science. Anyone can go to the store to buy sugar and yeast. But, like the greatest bakers, **we’re truly driven to do our best – we expect the same from our partners.**” (RL\_17122020)

(16) “If we seek to develop alternatives to concrete construction, we must develop more than just wood construction – or **we’ll end up causing the next ecocatastrophe** due to excessive logging,” she said. (RL\_15112019)

In example 15, different collaborators and partners in construction projects are included in the idea of community. They contribute to enabling good (and sustainable) building and hence support the implementation of the strategies and visions of the firms (“*we’re truly driven ... the same from our partners*”). Industry as the network of developing actors and as the community orienting to society can also be seen in example 16. An architect speculates through we-talk on the importance of using different construction alternatives. Alongside the industry community, she also speculates about how society could be impacted: using too much wood in construction may lead to the next ecocatastrophe (*inclusive language*, see Crumley et al., 2022). The example addresses the discourse of comparison between building materials, which is an important way for professionals to indicate the industry’s environmental responsibility and sustainable transition in general.

Social talk, furthermore, is associated with the professionals’ goal of highlighting industry’s important role in developing cities and suburbs. In the following two examples, the target group and context for the social talk is the whole nation, Finland.

(17) “The construction of wooden apartment buildings really **scares Finns**. They **don’t dare build** any.” (RL\_08092017)

(18) “In Finland, construction and the use of buildings **generates 40 percent of the carbon footprint**. For this reason, **we need to make carbon-neutral buildings**,” says Jaakko Parkkonen. (RL\_08072015)

The CEO quoted in example 17 presents the whole industry and its stakeholders in a rather negative light from the perspective of wooden construction. He argues that Finns do not dare *to build wooden high-rises*. Yet, when reflecting this type of talk against the discursive and sociocultural contexts, i.e. media discussion on the sustainable transition of the industry, the CEO’s words could be interpreted as challenging the industry to transform itself. In example 18, an architect uses statistical reasoning (“*40 percent*”) to argue why low-carbon buildings are necessary. Our data suggest that wooden construction could be one means to this end. He shows responsibility targeted towards both the industry and society: decreasing the industry’s share of Finland’s carbon footprint.

Professionals also talk with residents and citizens in mind and show that responsibility covers more than just the industry. However, the mentioned out-groups are usually addressed only implicitly in our data, i.e. they need to be interpreted through the use of specific words (cf. example 10: *living comfort*) or the use of a particular exclusive *we* (cf. example 16). When the social is present and target out-groups mentioned, talk focuses on practical issues.

(19) “Residents understand the carbon footprint through **the figures in the energy bill**. They feel that apartments or properties should be designed to be energy-misers to minimize energy bills.” (RL\_01102014)

In example 19, a CEO speculates that residents understand the carbon footprint through their energy bills. So, responsible expertise is occasionally produced through popularization, that is, by making difficult concepts easier to understand by connecting them to familiar, concrete things, such as economic talk and energy bills. Implicitly, this relates to environmental sustainability because the price of energy and energy efficiency are ways of promoting low-carbon buildings in the major discourses of the industry.

In conclusion, social talk is constructed through a variety of perspectives, but the main group affecting and representing the professionals’ actions comprises their own affiliations: Different kinds of experts develop the field based on their know-how, purposes and strategies. However, they seek to acknowledge their role in society, which may be understood as a kind of impression management through responsibility discourse (cf. e.g. Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021; Yacoumis, 2018).

## Discussion and conclusions

Our study confirms and emphasizes the notion that building and real-estate industry professionals participate in sustainability discussions and communicate their responsibilities in various ways via media text quotations (cf. e.g. Carroll, 2011; Kim, 2014). Thereby, they discursively take sustainable

actions (Berg, 2020) and participate in discursive shaping with journalists according to what is generally expected and valued in the Western world. Yet, our findings illustrate that responsible expertise is a discursive construction involving diverse tensions. These tensions arise from the viewpoint of the expert and his/her relation to the organization and industry as a whole, and also from the relationship between the expert and the journalist.

First, there are tensions in relation to the ways in which the experts present themselves as part of a restricted we-group (i.e. an organization or a company), as part of a wider community (such as the industry), or as individual experts without specific affiliations (cf. e.g. Crumley et al., 2022; Kim, 2014). Responsibility discourses reveal that the professionals' talk could be seen to range from affiliated-individual expertise to community-sense development and more general societal impression-making and awareness-raising. Related to this, there are differences in the ways experts position themselves in relation to sustainable and responsible actions, for example, as initiators, innovators or implementors (cf. Wu et al., 2020 on greenwashing).

Second, there are tensions in relation to their views on the usefulness of different (technological) solutions, innovations, and projects. This is entwined with differences in the knowledge that expertise is based on. Expertise may be derived from academic or experienced knowledge, but also knowledge acquired in advocating specific issues (see also Laursen & Trapp, 2021). Innovations and solutions may be presented as useful from different points of view, depending on the target group. For instance, a company may prioritize economic benefit or "market-driven sustainability" (see Koteyko, 2012). Simultaneously, from a societal perspective, technological solutions are offered as answers to grand challenges in society, as shown earlier in studies of eco-modernist discourses (see Hajer, 1996; also Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2007).

Third, the tensions are present in the various ways the professionals "manage impressions" of the virtuousness of their actions. Our findings reveal that the professionals present themselves as good and responsible on behalf of their field (enhancing the sustainable transition) or society (helping citizens) (cf. Kim, 2014). Sometimes these perspectives coincide; for example, engaging in responsible business while respecting people and the environment (cf. e.g. Koteyko, 2012) or seeing sustainable housing and building as phenomena with a versatile impact on everyday life (Cherry et al., 2015). Thereby, the environment, which "our" actions are reflected against (e.g. Boykoff, 2009), increasingly serves as a driver for the CSR activities of companies and experts – for instance, in terms of creating sustainable solutions for consumers to adopt.

From another perspective, tensions emerge between experts and journalists. We have shown that responsible expertise in media discussion is a representation of the complex relationship and work between journalists and experts (cf. e.g. Cramer, 2018). This means that the observed responsibility discourses and eventually the responsibility expertise are dual constructions: they are built from both journalists' know-how in framing and wording (cf. Haapanen, 2017) and industry professionals' know-how in content and impression-making (cf. Zappettini & Unerman, 2016) when sharing stories on sustainability.

Accordingly, our study emphasizes how the discursive shaping of sustainability in the context of one trade magazine is the work of a small circle of different kinds of experts, journalists included. These experts have, then, discursive power to shape facts and truths about the industry's sustainable development (cf. Zappettini & Unerman, 2016). Furthermore, this discursive shaping contributes to decisions on what kinds of building materials and solutions will be developed, adopted and eventually provided to citizens and consumers (cf. Lovell, 2004; see also Cramer, 2018). Discourses of responsible expertise thus have actual meaning for/in sustainable housing – whether they are "greenwashed" or not (see also Wu et al., 2020), and whether they are overlapping or not (see Zappettini & Unerman, 2016).

The study provides fresh insights on the relationship between responsibility and expertise in the professional media context, but it is not without limitations. The focus on media text quotations as ways to present discursive shaping by journalists and other actors could have been made more explicit throughout the analysis (cf. Haapanen & Perrin, 2017; also Albæk, 2011), i.e.

problematizing the quotations as dual constructions. Further, the findings may have been richer if we had paid attention to all the different kinds of expert sources in the data (such as politicians, public servants and scientists) or studied in more detail the greenwashing patterns in the professionals' talk. Both could be topics for future research.

The generalizability of our findings is limited, as we have explored the Finnish building and real-estate industry's sustainability discussion from a narrow perspective and with a small trade journal sample; we acknowledge and stress the importance of studying this discussion more broadly, for example using a diverse set of media outlets. Yet, it is possible to make theoretical generalizations of our findings showing how the experts' quotations carry diverse meanings in media texts, rather than merely playing a functional role. They carry shared and intertwined responsibility discourses between the experts, communities of the industry, and the journalists (cf. Lovell, 2004) – and possibly even shared values and ideologies (cf. Carvalho, 2007). This coincides with the general idea that experts and professions tend to be supranational regarding their core characteristics. Altogether, this study highlights that research on experts' voices in public discussions on societal hot topics is still needed, especially concerning the transformation of what we think of as expertise, who we think of as experts and how these are discursively constructed.

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