

Chapter 8

The Art of Reconstructing a Shared Responsibility: Institutional Work of a Transnational Commons



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I am a victim, perhaps, of trained incompetence in a discipline that cultivates statistics and words as means to grasp the social. Sociologists could become more adept with maps, floor plans, photographic images, bricks and mortar, landscapes and cityscapes, so that interpreting a street or forest becomes as routine and as informative as computing a chi-square. That visualizing (I think) is the next step.

(Gieryn, 2000, pp. 483–484)

Among the greatest and most threatened shared assets and resources for life on earth are its oceans and seas. Over time, they have served not only as a source of food, livelihood, and inspiration but also as dumping grounds for industrial, municipal, and agricultural waste by nation-states, organizations, and individuals who may have been acting rationally from their own point of view, but not collectively. In his seminal work, Hardin (1968) called this collective damage the “tragedy of the commons.” As proposed by Hardin (and many others), the solution to this tragedy is either state ownership or privatization. This response rationalized and legitimated governments’ control over the commons and disempowered broader agency—suggesting, for instance, that individual citizens have no voice regarding the commons. The studies by political scientist and Nobel laureate Eleanor Ostrom (1990) questioned the existence of purely selfish and norm-free users of the commons and showed that individuals may create cooperative institutions, social norms, and moral sentiments to avoid the tragedy of the commons. The pioneering work by Ostrom established the notion of the commons as including both material-economic and sociosymbolic dimensions. From the perspective of the present book, what is interesting about the commons is that they have material dimensions (shared

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geographies) as well as strong symbolic ones (shared social norms and rules about their use and protection).

The desire to identify mechanisms for symbolically reconstructing a shared space for promoting social change brings the context of the commons to the intellectual terrain of scholars who study institutional work. The notion of institutional work as “the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215) builds on the sociology of practice, which stresses that any human activity is materially mediated by shared practical understandings. Whereas the mutually constitutive entanglement of the material and the social in everyday life, often called sociomaterial practices (Orlikowski, 2007), has a long tradition in the broad framework of organization theory (Leonardi, 2012), this interrelationship is less developed within the institutional-work approach (Monteiro & Nicolini, 2015; Raviola & Norbäck, 2013). Further research on how individuals work with both material and sociosymbolic spaces in their efforts to change institutions is important for enriching the understanding of the ways in which individuals interpret and work to change their contexts (Lawrence & Dover, 2015; Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary, & van Leeuwen, 2013; Powell & Colyvas, 2008). A context with a particularly strong symbolic, but also material, power is art—a context where artists critically examine and theorize the ills (and joys) of the world.

In this chapter I argue that the production of art is an important form of institutional work and legitimating rhetoric for institutional change (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). The theoretical question that guides this study is how art can be used as a form of sociomaterial institutional work. The empirical context for the study is the environmental condition of the Baltic Sea in northern Europe. Empirically, I aim to discover how art can be used to recreate a shared awareness of the tragedy of the commons as represented by pollution in the Baltic Sea. Paradoxically, the Baltic Sea is one of the most studied and protected, but also polluted, seas in the world (HELCOM, 2010). It is an ecologically unique ecosystem with shallow bays and is therefore highly sensitive to the environmental impacts of human activities. The Baltic Sea is a transnational commons, that is, a common resource shared and used by people and organizations residing in the different coastal states of the sea—a sea not controlled by any single nation-state.

Institutional Work in the Context of Transnational Commons

The notion of institutional work invites scholars to focus on the interaction between institutions and the “actors that populate them”, as formulated by Lawrence, Suddaby, and Leca (2011, p. 57). They conceived of institutions as “enduring elements of social life” (p. 53), as norms and rules that influence the thinking and behavior of individuals and collective actors by “providing templates for action, cognition, and emotion.” With respect to the commons, these norms and rules define “who has access to a resource; what can be harvested from, dumped into, or

engineered within a resource; and who participates in key decisions about these issues and about transferring rights and duties to others” (Ostrom, et al., 2002, p. 21).

In recent years a rising number of scholars have embraced the notion of institutional work and have studied the microlevel work in various contexts and aims, ranging from institutional maintenance (e.g., Currie, Lockett, Finn, Martin, & Waring, 2012; Zilber, 2009) to institutional creation (e.g., Hargadon & Douglas, 2001; Lawrence, Hardy, & Phillips, 2002). Studies have also incorporated specific spatial contexts such as a province (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), a regional cluster (Ritvala & Kleymann, 2012), and a university campus (Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010; Lok & de Rond, 2013). However, very little scholarly attention has been paid to how institutional workers mobilize and incentivize others to work for transnational commons (Wijen & Ansari, 2007).

Transnational commons are inherited gifts (Barnes, 2006). Ranging from the atmosphere to the deep ocean floor, they do not belong to any single nation, group, or individual. Two defining characteristics of the commons are that exclusion of beneficiaries is costly and that exploitation by one user reduces resource availability for others. These characteristics result in situations in which people, by maximizing their own short-term interests, produce damage for all users in the long term (Ostrom, Burger, Field, Norgaard, & Poucansky, 1999). I subscribe to a social-constructivist perspective on the commons, a standpoint from which the tragedy of the commons is not seen as materializing by itself but rather as having to be socially constructed (Hannigan, 1995). For instance, ocean pollution becomes a problem only after oceans are collectively constructed as shared assets and responsibilities on which to act. This view is aligned with institutional theory, according to which environmental problems are primarily behavioral and cultural in nature rather than technological or economic (Ansari, Wijen, & Gray, 2013; Hoffman & Jennings, 2015). Transnational commons contain geographic location, material form, as well as meaning and value through which they are constructed and remembered (Gieryn, 2000; Lawrence & Dover, 2015). Thus, a transnational commons such as a particular location in a sea is a unique and memorable physical place linked to identities, emotions, values, cultural interpretations, and human experiences—dimensions that are all influenced by material and symbolic means and experiences.

The value of concentrating on institutional work as a way of exploring the construction of meaning in transnational commons stems from its emphasis on the situated practices of reflective actors in relation to the surrounding institutions (Lawrence et al., 2011). As the notion of institutional “work” suggests, it is firmly rooted in the sociology of practice, where practices are seen as embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 218). This conceptualization makes it possible to study how material and sociosymbolic elements may help actors affect institutions. Curiously, and in accordance with the opening quotation, the study of institutional work has centered greatly on text, although discourse encompasses both verbal and visual material representations (Meyer et al., 2013).

Responding to calls to integrate multimodal data more thoroughly than has been the case, institutional scholars have recently begun to increase their attention to the role of visual and material artifacts in institutional processes (e.g., Hardy & Phillips, 1999; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004; Siebert, Wilson, & Hamilton, 2016). For instance, the study by Raviola and Norbäck (2013) showed how the introduction of new technology creates a need for institutional work by human actors. Jones and Massa (2013) and Gawer and Phillips (2013) suggested that the design of material artifacts is a form of institutional work that legitimates intended institutional projects. Another important study, by Monteiro and Nicolini (2015), pointed out the power that “silent” objects such as awards exert in institutional work. Their research showed how artifacts may inform the institutional work of education by, for instance, circulating information and extending human reach in time and space. In a study on creating housing for the hard-to-house, Lawrence and Dover (2015) inquired into how place, understood as a meaningful material and symbolic location, influences institutional work by containing, mediating, and complicating it. They suggested that one strategy to foster institutional change is to construct an issue as a local one that needs to be resolved through the inclusion of previously excluded people such as the homeless—thereby shifting the boundaries that separate actors.

Taken together, these studies suggest that places and artifacts offer material and symbolic resources and act as “interpretive filters” (Lawrence & Dover, 2015, p. 387) that help actors shape institutions. However, more research is needed to explore how the material and the symbolic in constant dialogue promote institutional work. As advocated by Orlikowski (2007), there is a need to go beyond a limiting duality that treats the material and the social as separate entities. In this chapter I also argue that researchers must go beyond the built realm and study how sociomateriality contributes to the construction of meaning where nature is concerned. Indeed, there is “a striking lack of attention to natural resource issues” (George, Schillebeeckx, & Liak, 2015, p. 1597) in the fields of organization and management.

When it comes to environmental issues, the use of powerful visuals is a common tactic in setting agendas and gaining attention. Photographs and other visual artifacts are often used to communicate complex ideas to broad audiences and to appeal to emotions (Meyer et al., 2013). For instance, the picture of a polar bear struggling to find ice in the Arctic Sea is often used as a warning sign for global warming and climate change. Mazur and Lee (1993) discussed how visuals are often simplified, streamlined, and even distorted to create a dramatic vision. For example, NASA satellite images of the Antarctic ozone depletion have occasionally been manipulated to convey the erroneous impression of a discrete hole in the atmosphere over the South Pole (p. 711). By contrast, other types of visual and material artifacts figure in the construction of meaning by feeding positive emotions and actions. The case study presented and discussed in this chapter aims to add to the understanding of how the production of art may serve as a material and symbolic resource in institutional work.

Methods

I adopted an interpretive single-case-study design because it is well-suited to comprehending sociomateriality in the construction of meaning embedded in a specific place and time. This choice is consistent with the body of institutional theory that contains interpretative accounts of institutional processes (e.g., Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Zilber, 2006).

Empirical Case

The Baltic Sea is unique and vulnerable and thus highly sensitive to the impacts of human activities. Because of the sea's shallowness and narrow passage to the Atlantic Ocean through the Danish straits, the water residence time is extremely long, around 30 years. Despite legal instruments, intergovernmental cooperation, and efforts by cities and NGOS (e.g., the World Wide Fund for Nature) since the 1960s, the condition of the Baltic Sea remains poor. For years, business organizations and wealthy individuals ignored the scientific, unwanted facts attesting to the degradation of coastal waters. It was only when the toxic algae blooms became widespread and readily observable in the late 1990s that action was taken, not only by government but also by private actors (Lyytimäki & Hildén, 2007). The case study in this chapter deals with the pioneering civil society initiative by the John Nurminen Foundation (hereafter referred to as the foundation).

The foundation has its roots in a family company, which originated as a trading house and shipping company in Rauma, Finland, in 1886. The foundation itself was established in 1992 with the aim of preserving the history of seafaring. In 2004 it inaugurated its environmental work because, according to its founder Mr. Juha Nurminen, "it didn't make sense to preserve the history of the Sea [the original mission of the foundation] when the whole sea was dying in front of our eyes" (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 2013, para 7¹). In 2005 the foundation commenced its first major project to remove phosphorus from the three biggest wastewater treatment plants in St. Petersburg, the largest city on the Baltic Sea coast.

In 2013 the foundation launched an art campaign called Horizon, the main subject of analysis in this chapter. Through the campaign, private individuals could make a €50 donation to Horizon artwork, which was to be built in Helsinki, the capital of Finland. The campaign is part of the Baltic Sea Challenge, a project by Helsinki and Turku, a city on the country's southwest coast, to improve the condition of the Baltic Sea. The design of the artwork was donated by designer, Professor Hannu Kähönen. Many companies participated in the campaign. For instance, a global provider of stainless steel donated the material for the artwork. The first part of the artwork was installed in the summer of 2013; the last part, in early 2016. The

¹ All English renditions of Finnish quotations in this chapter are my own unless noted otherwise.

artwork campaign raised €220,000, with the money going partly to finance a storage and dosing equipment for phosphorus coagulation chemicals at the wastewater treatment plant in the city of Gatchina in southwestern Russia.

Data and Analysis

As is typical of deep case studies, my study draws on several qualitative sources. Data was collected in two stages between 2009 and 2016 and consisted of interview and documentary material. In the first stage (2009 to 2014), I conducted 24 one-on-one semistructured interviews and a one-on-two semistructured interview, all in Finnish, as part of a research project on cross-sector partnerships to protect the Baltic Sea. The interviewees were employees of the foundation (4), managers of public and private organizations that have participated in the work of the foundation (20), and an environmental journalist from the leading local newspaper. The interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes and were all recorded and transcribed.

In the second stage (2015 to 2016), I returned to the field to study, partly in situ, how the Horizon artwork was designed and structured. At this point the interview with designer Kähönen and his colleague, together with their set of photographs and sketches, were critical sources of information. Elicitation through pictorial and other types of artifacts (e.g., insertion of a photograph into a research interview) is a widely accepted technique of qualitative inquiry (Banks, 2007). Visual images stir deeper elements of human consciousness than words do, producing a kind of information different from that gathered through strictly word-based interviews. This effect has a physical basis. The parts of the human brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than those that process verbal information (Harper, 2002). Interviews based solely on words thus engage less of the brain's capacity than do those that use both images and words. Moreover, images help people remember and have primacy over texts in the "memory industry" (Meusbürger et al., 2011, p. 4). Instead of the rather typical situation in which a researcher initiates photo elicitation, the respondents in my interviews introduced the photographs in the middle of our exchange. At that point I became more of a listener, and the interview became a source of cocreation and dialogue rather than a "one-way flow of information from subject to researcher" (Harper, 1998, p. 35). The photographs acted as a window onto the world of the respondents who were helping me understand how their life experiences, values, and emotions stimulated the creative process and influenced the shape and materials used in the artwork. The photographs also helped me comprehend how the materiality of the place and the artwork influenced the process and its material and symbolic outcome. In addition, the foundation furnished a set of photographs of the Horizon artwork. A third source of information, published by the foundation between 2013 and 2016, consisted of 14 press releases on the Horizon artwork and 15 web log entitled "Baltic Sea and Me." The goal of using this documentation was to expand the understanding of how the

artwork and, more broadly, the value of a clean Baltic Sea was presented to the stakeholders of that water body.

The data analysis was an iterative process that moved from examination of the interview transcripts and visual and textual documentation to a rather analytical level. As it progressed, I linked the emerging insights to the recent literature on institutional work that highlights the role of material and visual dimensions in institutional projects. The analysis enabled me to identify three mechanisms mediating the artistic form of institutional work for positive environmental change: creating emotional response, educating, and empowering.

Findings: The Production of Art as a Form of Institutional Work

In the summer of 1997, Juha Nurminen was to depart from Porvoo in Finland for boating with his 10-year-old son. As the boy prodded the stinking water with a stick and made faces, Juha said to him, “Nothing to worry about. Let’s go to the open water, the water is clear there” (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 2013, para 3). But it turned out that the sea was full of porridge-like toxic algae there as well. “It was an enormous shock. I realized the Baltic Sea was severely ill” (p. 3).

Suddenly, along with the news of the problem with visible and massive algae blooms, the issue of eutrophication (enrichment of water with nutrients) reached the local headlines. The extensive algae blooms sparked strong and abiding emotions among people—some interviewees stated how they were even embarrassed that they had not woken up to this environmental issue until they had been starkly confronted by these algae blooms. Hence, material and visual objects functioned as a kind of alarm that led individuals to critical self-reflection, as explained by a journalist during our interview on March 12, 2015:

In 1997 there was really bad algae in the Baltic Sea during the summer. The eastern Gulf of Finland had no oxygen at all and was full of algae porridge. In my own interest I started to wonder what on earth was going on. Could we just blame Russia and St. Petersburg, or could we do something ourselves?

The national newspaper subsequently introduced a series on the Baltic Sea. Twenty news stories on the algae situation were published within just two weeks during the summer of 1997. These stories cast eutrophication as an important policy issue and dramatized the subject symbolically and visually (Lyytimäki, 2007, Figure 8.1). In addition, the Finnish Environment Institute began to monitor the algal situation as people started to exhibit symptoms of poisoning while swimming. The accompanying photographic material had a central part in this collective awakening: “I believe that the key triggering factor for the action to save the Baltic Sea was blue-green algae during those summers. This photographic material still exists” (Mayor of Helsinki).

The outrageous visual images also caught the attention of designer Kähönen, an enthusiastic sailor himself:



Fig. 8.1 Blue-green algae in the eastern Gulf of Finland, summer 1997. Source: Finnish Environment Institute. Reprinted with permission

During the years, I have become increasingly worried about the dramatic loss of clarity in the water. Now, here and there, visibility is less than one metre [3' 4"], whereas only 20 years ago it was possible to see schools of fish glistening 10 metres [about 33'] deep. Anyone who visits the archipelago will by now be only too familiar with the continuous increase in the volumes of harmful blue-green algae. Around the world, I have seen places that have been irrevocably ruined, leaving me with a desolate impression of the greed and negligence of man. Water pollution changes our attitudes not only towards the sea, but also towards ourselves. We must hope the Baltic Sea will not become such a memorial.

(H. Kähönen, 2014)

Subjective experiences thus worked as triggers for various actors to engage in moral reflections and personal action. The fundamental aim of these subjective accounts, besides improving the environmental condition of the sea, was to change cognitive institutions (beliefs, assumptions, and frames that inform action) and norms that are rooted in collective moral understandings about appropriate behavior (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Rather than seeing the protection of the Baltic Sea as belonging to the highly institutionalized context of interstate cooperation and governmental funding, people came to feel that it was a collective responsibility of corporations, nonprofit organizations, and citizens.

Mechanisms of Institutional Work

In-depth study of the design and construction process of the Horizon artwork identified three vital mechanisms by which the production of the artwork, as both a material and sociosymbolic space, constitutes a form of institutional work. The three

mechanisms are called creating emotional response, educating, and empowering. I describe these findings in more detail below.

Creating Emotional Response

Emotions are at the heart of art (Silvia, 2006) and institutions (Voronov & Vince, 2012). Through artwork the designer wanted to convey his strong emotional attachment to the Baltic Sea (see also Figure 8.2).

For me, the Baltic Sea is an important source of relaxation, wellbeing, and spiritual balance. When you see and feel the waves, the wind, the salty seawater and the horizon gleaming in front of you, your nerves will rest and your mind become[s] cleansed. The sea is unlimited. It has taught me things about my own relationship with nature, and about the humility and care you need when you encounter changes at sea. The sea cannot be controlled: we must adjust to its movements. The sea is a powerful aesthetic experience for me, and one I want to re-experience every summer, sailing in the Archipelago Sea or the Åland archipelago. The clear blue reflection of the sky on the surface of the water and the clean fragrance of the sea are inbuilt allegories of beauty. (H. Kähönen, 2014)

A principal aim of the designer was to evoke positive emotions in the viewer:

Prompting the individual to act does not necessarily involve painting horror scenarios about the future. It is rather the question of how to breed enthusiasm so that one wants to change their own behavior. In a way, one should offer [clear water] as a sort of luxury, minimalist luxury. (H. Kähönen, 2014)



Fig. 8.2 Designer Professor Hannu Kähönen in the web log “Baltic Sea and Me,” September 16, 2014. Source: John Nurminen Foundation. Reprinted with permission

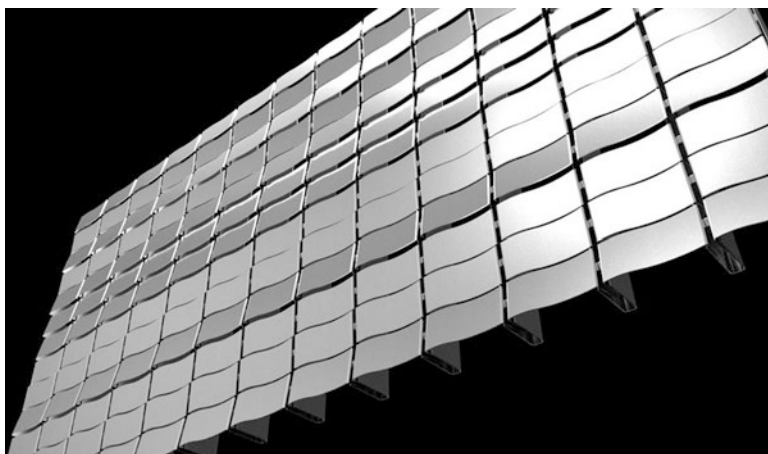


Fig. 8.3 Plate test by Creadesign Oy. Source: Creadesign Oy. Reprinted with permission

One of the major mechanisms for creating such an emotional response and identification with the sea is to breed collective memories, that is, particular memories commonly shared by a particular (mnemonic) community, such as the nation (Zerubavel, 1996). My interview data brims with expressions engendering nostalgia, such as “everybody of my generation remembers the childhood summers when the water was crystal clear [rather than ‘home to stinking algae’]” (Nonprofit director, personal communication, February 28, 2013), reflecting the fact that most adults identify the most significant places in childhood as being outdoors (Sebba, 1991). Such emotional response is considered important:

I believe that the message gets through if you can identify with [the story]. This goes for books and movies alike. If you can bring that out at a personal [and emotional] level, it has an impact so that you want to change your behavior [toward the Baltic Sea]. (H. Kähönen, personal communication, February 11, 2016)

The material and visual choices of the artwork were aimed to capture the movement and gleaming of the sea, the reflection of the sky, and the purity of water: “This picture of the horizon is what inspired me—the way [the water] glimmers . . . —optimal weather for sailing” (H. Kähönen, 2014). These visual artifacts, such as the movement and silvery gleaming of the sea, were caught by 4,225 gleams that move along with the wind, as modeled in 3D computer graphics (Figure 8.3).

The gleam of the metal sheet was tested with brushed and brushless stainless steel (Figure 8.4). These material and visual choices were ultimately intended “to resonate with the feeling of having clear water—the time when the water was transparent [down to the bottom]” (H. Kähönen, personal communication, February 11, 2016).

In addition, the physical and symbolic location of the artwork was important in the production of the desired image. Most crucially, the place had to be both windy



Fig. 8.4 Experimenting with the reflective surface by Creadesign Oy. Source: Creadesign Oy. Reprinted with permission



Fig. 8.5 Illustration of the place, by Creadesign Oy. Source: Creadesign Oy. Reprinted with permission

and sunny in order to produce the effect of the sea's gleaming. A site close to the sea was also symbolically important to have. The place that Helsinki designated for the artwork was initially situated along a pedestrian and bicycle route not far from the seaside. Later, in response to the wish of the designer, a place on the pier next to the ferries sailing between Helsinki and Tallinn was made available instead (Figure 8.5).

Yet the goal of these material and visual choices was not just to produce a visual image and emotional identification with the Baltic Sea but to convert them into a thirst for knowledge:

I tried to bring the vulnerability of the sea into this work so that people would understand this. From this follows the question of . . . the underlying facts explaining the vulnerability of the sea. This was what I was pondering—so that it would not remain just a visual experience but would spark an interest in understanding why the Baltic Sea is unique. (H. Kähönen, personal communication, February 11, 2016)

Educating

Educating means “educating of actors in skills and knowledge necessary to support the new institution.” It is thus an important and often necessary form of cognitive work to facilitate behavioral changes (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 227). The Horizon artwork performed educational work by creating new cognitive conceptions of the Baltic Sea. The artwork’s length of 54 meters [177'] corresponded with the average depth of the Baltic Sea. The designer wanted to highlight the vulnerability of the Baltic Sea concretely:

The Baltic Sea is a small basin of brackish water with an average depth—54 metres—that is considerably [less] than that of many other seas. The average depth of the Mediterranean, for example, is 1,500 metres [4,921'], and its salinity is of a completely different scale. Because of the low salinity levels and water volumes of our own Baltic Sea, its flora and fauna cannot withstand the increasing strain caused by the phosphorus discharged [in]to the water from agriculture and with wastewaters. (H. Kähönen, 2014)

In our interview he continued:

To ensure that the information imparted [by an artwork] comes across well in one go, one must avoid communicating too many things. We [carefully] considered the text in terms of what additional information we could add so that people would manage to read it. (H. Kähönen, personal communication, February 11, 2016)

Information plaques were an important part of the artwork. They gave key facts about the Baltic Sea, such as its average depth, its area, and the population of the region. A map of the Baltic Sea region illustrated the catchment area. The meaning and implications of the term *catchment area* were then explained to the reader: “The area from which surface and groundwater flow into the Baltic Sea. All human activity within the catchment area has an impact on the condition of the Baltic Sea” (see Figure 8.6).

This information was presented in five languages: Finnish, Swedish, English, Russian, and Polish. From an institutional perspective the Baltic Sea represents a high degree of institutional complexity (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011) involving 11 countries with diverse environmental standards and values. The artwork imbued a kind of boundary object (Star & Griesemer, 1989) with interpretive flexibility that allows people from diverse cultures and social worlds to work together without broad political consensus at the national level:



Fig. 8.6 Environmental information in a nutshell: the Horizon work of art. Photograph from the John Nurminen Foundation. Reprinted with permission

I believe that in a human mind, a white crest on top of a wave can never become an ugly experience. This symbol of purity is an important part of our collective consciousness, and I believe that regardless of any cultural issues, it is always and all over the world understood in the same way. (H. Kähönen, 2014)

In so doing, it also empowered actors typically considered marginal in environmental politics to act at the grassroots level.

Empowering

Empowering means giving marginalized actors (individual citizens) ability to act and collectively produce an effect (Nilsson, 2015, p. 386). The Horizon artwork invited each person to buy a gleam of the Horizon artwork and thereby make his or her name part of the history of Baltic Sea protection. A visually compelling fundraising video was used to heighten the impact of the campaign. The video first pictured an entirely yellow sea and a text reading “Phosphorous doesn’t belong in the sea. Removing phosphorous from the sea is the most efficient way to protect the sea.” The viewer was then invited to participate in the rescue efforts: “Through your donation of €50, your name will remain part of the history of Baltic Sea protection.” Simultaneously, the yellow sea started to turn blue, gleam by gleam.

The message of the campaign was that everyone’s input is needed and that everyone can contribute. “Actions are born of new attitudes” and of “doing deeds that may seem small,” as later put in a web log (Lehtinen, 2015). The Horizon artwork

thus provided a permanent material object through which distributed agency can come about (Raviola & Norbäck, 2013). The artwork functioned as a symbol for a cleaner Baltic Sea and served as a vehicle for mobilizing individual citizens—particularly the citizens of Helsinki, for whom “the Baltic Sea is the living room and landscape,” as expressed by Mayor Jussi Pajunen (“Horisontti,” 2013, para 5).

The designer also pursued a moral and normative purpose by creating “a reminder of the fragility of marine nature. . . . If we wish to leave something beautiful to our children, reminding them of ourselves and our culture, that something should be a clean Baltic Sea” (Kähönen, 2014). This message was well received. For instance, a local kindergarten celebrated Father’s Day by organizing a benefit walk on which fathers and children enjoyed the outdoors together. The money traditionally used for a breakfast and gifts to mark Father’s Day were donated to the Horizon campaign). Such initiatives were much appreciated by the designer: “Luckily, environmental awareness is growing continuously. I am particularly delighted by the earnestness with which the younger generation has embraced these matters” (“Horizon Is Ready,” 2016, para 2). Thus, there was a strong aspirational vision (Nilsson, 2015) for an attitudinal change meant to benefit the next generations.

Discussion

My objective in this chapter has been to understand theoretically how art can be used as a form of sociomaterial institutional work. To answer this question, I asked empirically how art can be used to recreate a shared awareness of the tragedy of the commons as represented by pollution in the Baltic Sea. I synthesize my findings in Figure 8.7.

The first element of the model is the institutional worker, the artist, who creates a context between the work of art and the viewer, a framework in which a common meaning system and a common institution are constructed. The institution, the focus of work that is conducted, is the norms pertaining to the commons represented by the Baltic Sea. Essentially, the artist’s intent is to convey “the commonality of the commons”²—the acceptance of the common responsibility for the Baltic Sea. The commons has both a bounded material component (the geographical space) and a powerful symbolic space (the set of sociomaterial practices in which people engage). The nature of the agency of artists then enables them to use their art to reconstruct the Baltic Sea socially as a common responsibility. In this vast undertaking they employ three broad mechanisms: creating emotional response, educating, and empowering.

Creating emotional response entails generating nostalgia over a lost common experience. The nostalgia relates to meaningful private physical places as well as to collective symbolic spaces that capture cultural memories and shared social histories of whole generations. Harnessing such mnemonic communities (Zerubavel,

²I thank Roy Suddaby for the notion of the commonality of the commons.

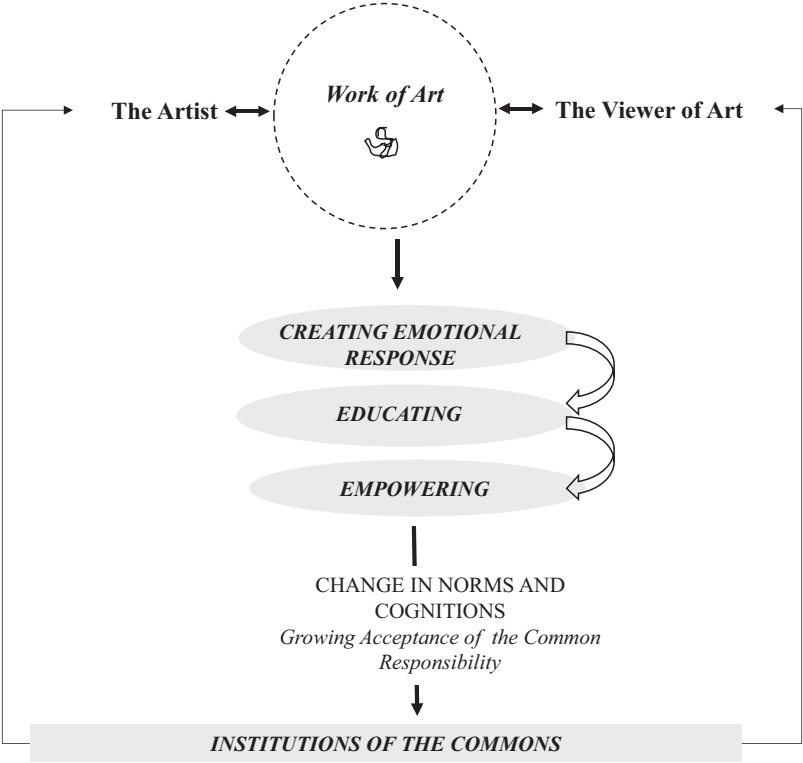


Fig. 8.7 The production of art as a form of institutional work. Source: Designed by author

1996) and imagined communities (Anderson, 1983/2006) to act for a common good instills art with great symbolic power. The belief in the mobilizing power of affirmative emotions such as nostalgia is in keeping with positive psychology, which suggests that positive emotions broaden people’s momentary repertoires of thought and action (Fredrickson, 2001). For instance, gratitude motivates moral action because grateful people feel a sense of duty to repay what is owed (Fredrickson, 2000). An integral part of harnessing nostalgia was the act of reproducing nature as closely as possible through visual and aesthetic means and material choices. Both art and the commons are thus as much a symbolic or mnemonic construction as a physical or material one.

The emotional response created by artwork supports cognitive responsiveness, piques curiosity, and triggers viewers’ search for knowledge about the issue. This quest leads to the second form of institutional work for which art may be used, educating. Educating is a form of boundary work (Gieryn, 1983) in which the commons become semiotically constructed as a bounded and shared space. By engaging in this boundary work, the artist constructs the commons as a shared category. Although a work of art is outwardly material, its core is highly symbolic and deeply embedded in history and emotions. The operation of art at the unconscious and aesthetic

levels also offers interpretive flexibility and opens them to a wide variety of interpretations across language and cultural barriers (Meusbürger et al., 2011). This outcome permits artworks to act as a boundary object and to promote the flow of transnational knowledge (Georg, 2015).

The third form of institutional work for which art may be used—empowering—invests marginalized actors with authority through new interpretations of how they affect the commons. In the studied case the work of art offered a means for people at the grassroots level to donate money and engrave their names into the history of Baltic Sea protection. This opportunity helped them “step out of their established roles, adopt a reflexive stance, and engage in the institutional work” (Lawrence et al., 2011, p. 56). In this emancipatory manner marginal actors may play a part—albeit a small one—in institutional work, illustrating the beautifulness of smallness (Schumacher, 1999).

If successful, these forms of sociomaterial institutional work will lead to the growing recognition of the Baltic Sea as a tragedy of the commons—that is, as a shared space (both material and symbolic) for which all of the surrounding actors (including corporations, nation-states, municipalities, and NGOs) share responsibility. Ultimately, agreement that responsibility for the well-being of the sea does not fall only to government but rather to each and every individual as well would signify a profound institutional change.

The identified qualities—the emphasis on subjectively lived experiences, emotions, cognitions, empowerment, and moral dimensions of institutions—are closely aligned with the concept of positive institutional work as recently proposed by Nilsson (2015). By building on the literature treating institutional work and on positive organizational scholarship, he defined positive institutional work as “the creation or maintenance of institutional patterns that express mutually constitutive experiential and social goods” (p. 373). He calls for current theorizing on institutional work to improve the incorporation of actors’ subjective experiences into evaluations of legitimacy, to recognize inquiry as a powerful form of institutional agency, and to explore how inclusion figures in the stabilization of positive institutions. My case study suggests that material and symbolic objects such as artworks may have a powerful function in such experiential and emancipatory processes. I now conclude by discussing avenues for future research.

Conclusion

Although it is often stressed that institutions are both material and symbolic, surprisingly few studies by organizational institutionalists primarily investigate the mutually constitutive relationship between material and symbolic elements affecting institutional processes (Lawrence & Dover, 2015; Monteiro & Nicolini, 2015). Indeed, the literature on institutional work is largely confined to the study of cognitions and social relations. Little attention goes to the interplay of the physical places and the emotions that these physical and symbolic spaces elicit (Siebert et al., 2016).

This chapter contributes to the literature on institutional work in that I specifically examine how art may be used as a form of sociomaterial institutional work. This endeavor is important, for adding these dimensions to research by institutional scholars may enhance the understanding of institutional microfoundations—how material and symbolic elements influence the manner in which individuals interpret their context, experience institutions, and exercise agency (Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Suddaby, 2010).

By analyzing the nuanced interplay between human agency and art, I believe this chapter extends scholarship on institutional work in important ways. The findings highlight the interaction between materiality, emotions, and sociosymbolic meanings in supporting institutional change. This study therefore responds to the calls for directing attention to emotional aspects of institutional work (Moisander, Hirsto, & Fahy, 2016; Scott, 2014; Voronov & Vince, 2012) and to subjective ways in which people experience institutionalized meanings, practices, and spaces (Nilsson, 2015; Siebert et al., 2016; Suddaby, 2010; Zilber, 2009). The study also suggests that artifacts with great material and symbolic power may be instrumental in the realization of the emancipatory potential of institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2011; Nilsson, 2015) because they include previously marginalized actors. The emancipatory potential of art may be especially significant because of its deep, almost universal appeal, which may help bridge cultural divides. Art also affords a common reference point (e.g., clean seascape), which may cultivate moral sensibility and encourage viewers to act in the common good. As pointed out by Nilsson (2015), the moral and aspirational orientation reflected in the idea of the common good has, with few exceptions (e.g., Kraatz, 2009, on leadership as institutional work) become increasingly rare in post-Selznick institutional theorizing. I believe there is great potential for future research that digs ever deeper—both conceptually and empirically—into how positive institutional work is facilitated by material and symbolic artifacts. Scandinavian institutionalism, with its focus on artifacts as active carriers of ideas (e.g., Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996), may prove useful in that effort.

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