

Material Vitalism's Potential Role in Informing EU Construction and Demolition Waste Policy

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Abstract : Emissions, produced by landfill waste from demolished obsolete buildings, have a damaging effect on both the Earth's climate and human health. The philosophical theory of material vitalism - the potential for materials to react and emit harmful pollutants - therefore defines this construction and demolition waste (CDW) as having vitality. The European Union's 'Circular Economic Action Plan' (CEAP) aims to mitigate the effects of CDW by prioritising the circularity of building materials. This dissertation examines how the philosophical theory of material vitalism can make an environmentally responsible contribution to CDW policy. The CEAP and Silvertown Quays development are used as case studies for the application of vitalism to policy revision. The study concludes that vitalism has a positive role to play in informing CDW policy, although its contribution is stronger in some areas. This is established by first appraising the aspects that relate to the obsolescence of buildings outlined in the EU's existing CDW policies. Next, these policy directives are compared with the CE principles employed in the Silvertown Quays development. Subsequently, a keyword analysis model is used to categorise the language used in the CEAP, demonstrating how socio-political approaches to the CE and strategies to address resource scarcity could be strengthened to represent the EU's policy aspirations more effectively. Recommendations are then made on how material vitalism could be utilised to strengthen legislation, arguing that a notable contribution can be made in most policy areas. Finally, theoretical testing of the impact of these revisions to policy on the case study development identified some practicalities for consideration in improving waste management outcomes.

Keywords : vitalism, construction waste, obsolescence, political ecology, exceptionalism

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