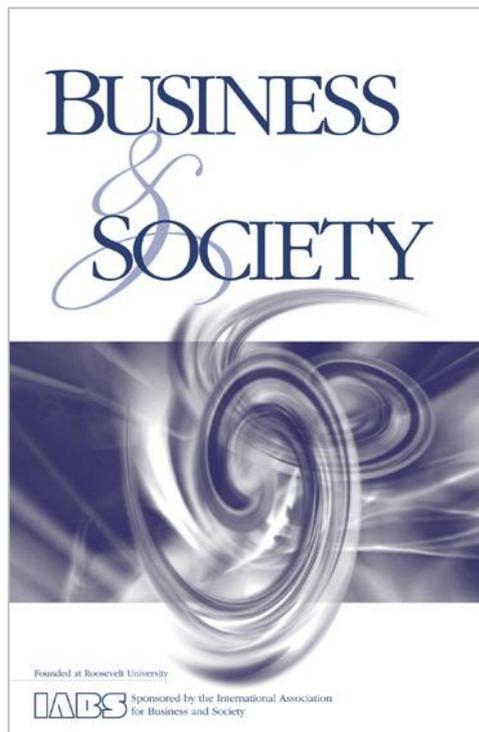


Call for Papers: Special Issue of *Business & Society*  
**Corporations, Capitalism and Society:**  
**Systemic Constraints in the Business and Society Relationship**



**Guest Editors:**

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The global role of business in society has attracted a great deal of research, focusing on themes such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability, social entrepreneurship, multi-stakeholder initiatives and business ethics. CSR as a modern management practice post WWII emerged very much in the United States as a strategic response to the New Deal and its wide reaching

impact on the *laissez faire* approach to capitalism which had previously led to the economic crisis of the late 1920s (Kaplan, 2014). As such, CSR in particular was conceived as a voluntary strategic approach by business to forestall and prevent further regulation of ‘free’ markets and curtailments of the extent of private property rights – hence in its essence an idea to ‘save’ American capitalism. Similar debates in the aftermath of the financial crisis of the late 2000s have reframed CSR and related ideas as an integral part of capitalism (Porter & Kramer, 2011; Barton 2011).

Recent broader societal and political developments and their impact on organizational practices raise the question of whether the dominant neoliberal capitalist system poses important constraints on corporate actions that make negative social, environmental and ethical externalities of business conduct unavoidable, or might even systematically encourage them. In fact, even the “low-hanging fruits” of CSR where a positive business case can be relatively easily established, including classic issues such as workplace safety, emissions reductions, or diversity, still remain subject to contestation and show strong variation across different contexts (Hartmann & Uhlenbruck, 2015; Wickert et al., 2016). Despite a myriad of studies that try to link CSR to financial performance (Busch et al., 2016; Orlitzky et al., 2003; Wang et al., 2016), reoccurring scandals, environmental exploitation, modern forms of slavery, fraud and corruption, massive tax evasion and new forms of corporate social irresponsibility cast doubt on whether those issues are solvable within our current economic system (Crane et al., 2014), even though there seems to be a growing influence of social movement organizations on firms (de Bakker et al., 2013). Some even argue that the business case for CSR is dead (Fleming & Jones, 2013), or has never existed at all.

Although this broad stream of research has delivered many important contributions, in this special issue we strive to clarify the bigger picture and place these developments into a wider socio-

economic context. We invite contributions that explore business and society themes from the perspective of the contemporary political economy and the predominant neoliberal economic paradigm. We need better to understand the role of corporations in a capitalist society and to examine what the systemic constraints are, how they are interpreted by societal actors, and how they influence the relationships between stakeholders, and between business and society more generally.

In this special issue, we therefore encourage contributions that stretch the boundaries of what has previously been investigated under the umbrella of CSR and call for research that reconsiders the links between corporations, capitalism and society from a business and society perspective. Decades of CSR research and practice that remained within the current systemic constraints (de Bakker et al., 2005; Griffin & Mahon, 1997) have had debatable impact on our ability to advance humanity within planetary boundaries (Whiteman et al., 2013). This calls for questioning larger systemic issues and socio-political ‘deep structures’ that appear to impose important constraints on business sustainability. Contributions would also go beyond extant research that has for instance argued that business firms might address the symptoms of these constraints by introducing some hybrid or paradoxical forms of organizing in order to cope with heterogeneous stakeholder demands and related internal tensions (Dacin et al., 2011; Hahn et al., 2014) or to consider alternative forms of organizing (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011; Rasche et al., 2013).

To move the debate on the relationship between business and society forward, it is important to understand the nature of the systemic constraints and their influence on organizational practices. We need to stretch the levels of analysis of current CSR research, and in particular investigate how the level of the broader political economy influences behavior at lower levels of analysis. This can help to understand the nature of key social and environmental problems and the reluctance of corporations to engage in “true” sustainability (Shevchenko et al., 2016). Better knowledge of the systemic constraints also helps to formulate alternatives that are not so easily dismissed as naïve or utopian by mainstream actors in the field, even though the problems faced are complex and “wicked” (Reinecke & Ansari, 2016).

We therefore encourage contributions that address some of the following questions, but are not limited to this selection:

- How are different systemic constraints perceived and interpreted by business firms and how do they manifest in organizational practice?
- How do systemic constraints influence the relationship between business and society, the perceived responsibility of various stakeholders to contribute to the common good, and how CSR is practiced?
- How are systemic constraints identified, constructed, managed, avoided, mitigated, etc.?
- How do systemic constraints influence the development of alternative forms of organizing, such as social enterprises and other hybrid forms of organization, and how might this limit them to a “niche existence”/not becoming mainstream?
- What are the limits of the current economic system that might accelerate or prohibit business firms to become sustainable? (i.e. to reduce their social and ecological impact)
- How do current models and approaches (or even theories) of CSR either internalize, ignore, or mitigate systemic constraints?

- How do constraints at the system level feed into organizational practice and behavior of individuals within them? How are they experienced by actors (e.g. stakeholders)?
- How do ideologies of actors, for instance their belief in the fairness of the current economic system, influence their perception of systemic constraints and related issues such as justice, freedom and equality?
- What is the systemic nature of constraints that limit current forms of CSR to produce meaningful socioeconomic and environmental improvements?
- To what extent does the current rise of authoritarian regimes and an alleged democratic recession impose new challenges and potential constraints on business sustainability and CSR?

### **Types of submission:**

For this special issue, we are open to all forms of ontological and epistemological approaches. We particularly encourage problem-driven research with a strong link to theory, rather than theory-driven research based on illustrative but interchangeable cases. While any form of empirical approach is suitable, in particular interpretive studies could make valuable contributions that help us to understand how actors make sense of systemic constraints and how this affects their strategies, day-to-day behavior, interactions and relationships. In addition, we equally encourage experimental studies that might for instance examine actors' ideologies about forms of neoliberal capitalism and how this influences their stance towards the role of business in society. Also conceptual studies could make important contributions by theorizing the interplay between systemic constraints (e.g., profit-maximization), organizational responses (e.g., rolling out a particular approach to CSR), and individual action (e.g., resistance or support for CSR).

### **Submission process and schedule:**

- Authors should submit their manuscripts through ScholarOne Manuscripts by **December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017** using the following link: <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bas>.
- Be sure to specify in the cover letter document that the manuscript is for the special issue on "Corporations, Capitalism and Society."
- Manuscripts should be prepared following the *Business & Society* author guidelines: <http://www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal200878/manuscriptSubmission>.
- All articles will be double-blind peer reviewed by at least three anonymous referees.
- The editors welcome informal enquiries related to the proposed topics.

### **About the journal**

Business & Society is one of the leading journals at the intersection of business and issues of social responsibility, ethics and governance. It is published by SAGE and its current two-year Citation Impact Factor is 2.135 (2015). It was ranked 39 out of 120 journals in the Business category of the 2016 Thomson Reuters Journals Citation Report (ISI). For further details see <http://bas.sagepub.com>.

## About the guest editors

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