

Business & Society
Special Issue Call for Papers

**“Cross-Sector Partnerships and Socio-Ecological Systems Change:
Navigating Tensions between Resilience and Transformation”**

Submission Deadline: 20 November 2022

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BACKGROUND

The business and society literature increasingly recognizes the importance of *socio-ecological systems (SES)*, highlighting how organizations need to take into account the interrelationships within and between market, social and ecological systems at multiple scales (Wasioleski et al., 2021). The SES perspective promises to help organizations and their stakeholders in assessing their impact on society and the natural environment by enabling them to consider how they support or hamper multi-scale processes of change (Williams et al., 2021; Dentoni et al., 2021). Despite the increasing awareness of the role of SES in assessing business contributions to sustainable impacts, we still have a limited understanding of when, why and how business organizations and their stakeholders orient – or fail to orient – to processes of SES change. Understanding how businesses collaboratively shape systems change, in either desirable or undesirable ways for different societal actors, is particularly relevant given the urgent, complex socio-ecological crises that we are experiencing (Otto et al., 2020; IPCC, 2021).

One of the main approaches for organizations to achieve sustainable impacts involves *cross-sector partnerships (CSPs)*, that is, partnerships between businesses, government and/or civil society actors (Selsky and Parker, 2005; Koschmann et al., 2012). While the literature on the role of CSPs in business and society has seen substantial development (Pedersen et al., 2021), we still know relatively little about how CSPs orient (or fail to orient) processes of SES change (Clarke and Crane 2018). In particular, we know very little about how and when companies, through CSPs, support or hamper processes of socio-ecological resilience and transformation at either local or global scales (Brammer et al. 2020; de Bakker et al. 2020). For instance, the literature has documented that substantial cross-sector collaborative efforts are needed to combat climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions (Wittneben et al., 2012). However, there are few theoretical and/or analytical frameworks to understand when and how CSPs contribute to field-level changes that enable mitigation or adaptation to climate change.

AIMS AND SCOPE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Therefore, this Special Issue proposes bridging two fundamental – and, so far, disconnected – conversations in the business and society literature: one on SES (Wasieleski et al., 2021), and the other on CSPs (Pedersen et al., 2021). We propose to connect these two conversations by inviting scholars to study the linkages that may take place, at multiple scales and in multiple directions, between the *organization of CSPs and processes of socio-ecological resilience and transformation*. Socio-ecological resilience generally refers to the processes through which SES cope with, rebound after and adapt to shocks and crises without collapsing (Folke et al., 2010; Linnenluecke, 2017). Examples include efforts to rebuild a village in the aftermath of a flood but in a way that strengthens natural flood protection barriers, or a local region engaging in Indigenous land management practices for the prevention of wildfires. Socio-ecological transformations entail fundamental, path-breaking changes in systems at multiple scales (Westley et al., 2013; Waddock, 2020). Examples of such transformations include cities developing plans to revolutionize urban mobility, the agricultural sector re-organizing according to principles of circularity and regeneration, or an international coalition of states enforcing plans towards carbon neutrality. While socio-ecological resilience and transformation all occur at different scales, they are fundamentally steered in CSPs; and, within these CSPs, the interactions between business organizations and their cross-sector partners shape their orientation.

Hence, in this Special Issue, we are particularly interested in the *dynamic tensions that organizations like CSPs face*, both in society and in science, *between the need for socio-ecological transformations and the striving for socio-ecological resilience*. These tensions are important yet poorly understood. The management and organization literature has sought to explain processes of organizational, institutional and societal maintenance and change (Slawinski et al., 2017; Etchanchu and Djelic, 2019). More recently, it has borrowed from interdisciplinary socio-ecological studies (Olsson et al. 2014; Hynes et al., 2020) to understand how organizations steer pathways of resilience and transformation (Hamann, 2020; Montgomery and Dacin, 2021). Yet, different partners in CSPs are likely to have different priorities in terms of what societal features should be maintained and thus made resilient, and which aspects require more fundamental transformation. Extant research on CSPs still has to grapple with such tensions.

TOPICS OF INTEREST

To enact together this research vision, we suggest encouraging scholars to address a wide set of questions at the nexus of CSPs and socio-ecological resilience and transformation including, among others:

CSPs as spaces to negotiate, deliberate and frame resilience and transformation:

- How do conflicts, negotiations and deliberation of values between resilience and transformation arise in CSPs addressing social-ecological challenges?

- How do CSPs recognize and strengthen the synergies (or fail to do so) between socio-ecological resilience and transformation, that is, between an ability to “bounce back” after a crisis and also to positively transform SES?
- How do CSPs respond to differences in power and values among partners and other stakeholders in grappling with tensions related to creating SES change?
- When, why and how do CSPs deliberate on the desirability of an envisioned socio-ecological resilience or transformation process? Which governance structures support (or hamper) this deliberation?
- When, why and how do CSPs assess or make sense of who/what wins, who/what loses, and who/what is left out from processes of socio-ecological resilience and/or transformation? Which indicators are used? At which level of analysis? Which systems?

Role of business in CSPs’ negotiations, deliberations and framing:

- How do companies in CSPs frame and communicate aspects of resilience and transformation as either “ethical” or “unethical”, and how do these frames and discourses evolve?
- How do companies in CSPs practices shape, or are shaped by, the (organizational, community, societal, and/or biophysical) scales of their collective visions of resilience and/or transformation efforts?
- How do companies’ size, sector, geographic location and culture influence their role in CSPs’ negotiations, deliberations and framing of socio-ecological systems change?
- How do companies intentionally or unintentionally hamper inclusive deliberation and framing of socio-ecological resilience and transformation in CSPs?
- From a normative perspective, how should companies in CSPs organize to support equitable resilience and/or transformation processes in socio-ecological systems?

CSPs and multi-scale processes of resilience and/or transformation:

- How are cross-sector partnering practices and processes that envision resilience and/or transformation shaped by micro-, meso-, and/or macro-level dynamics, or their interactions?
- When, why and how do CSPs support cultural, educational, organizational and personal changes *en route* towards socio-ecological resilience and/or transformation?
- How do CSPs account for the multi-level, multiple time horizons and multiple scales of SES when developing strategies for transformation and/or resilience?
- When, why and how do CSPs and/or their members unintentionally trigger undesirable socio-ecological transformation processes?
- When, why and how do CSPs engage with other actors in society – e.g., other partnerships, governments, for-profit, civil society, academic organizations or new ventures – to support broader or deeper processes of socio-ecological resilience and/or transformation?

We encourage management and organization scholars who draw from multiple scientific fields – including psychology, sociology, ecology, philosophy, public policy, environmental studies and various branches of socio-ecological studies (such as, among others, environmental ethics or environmental justice) – to submit papers that contribute to this debate. We particularly invite authors studying underexplored empirical contexts and/or proposing theoretical lenses and philosophies underrepresented in mainstream business and sustainable business journals to submit to this Special Issue.

EDITORIAL PROCESS AND DEADLINES

- The deadline for submissions is **November 20th, 2022**. All manuscripts must be uploaded to ScholarOne Manuscripts (<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bas>) between October 21st and November 20th, 2022.
- Be sure to specify in the cover letter that the manuscript is for the special issue on “Partnerships and Socio-Ecological Systems”.
- The *Business & Society* author guidelines (<https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/BAS>) must be followed.
- All submissions will be double-blind peer-reviewed by multiple reviewers.
- Online publication of the accepted articles will take place in Spring 2024.

We welcome informal enquiries relating to the Special Issue, proposed topics and potential fit with the Special Issue objectives. Enquiries should be directed to the Guest Editors:

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PAPER DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

On June 27th, 2022, the Guest Editors will host an online Special Issue *Paper Development Workshop (PDW)* integrated to the 8th Cross-Sector Social Interactions (CSSI2022) conference.

To develop ideas and receive feedback on working papers in preparation for submission to this Special Issue, authors can submit either **full papers** (according to Business & Society author guidelines) or **‘wild ideas’** (that is, innovative yet not fully fledged ideas presented in the format of a max. 1,000-word extended abstract).

For consideration to this Special Issue PDW, full papers or ‘wild ideas’ should be submitted via email to Domenico Dentoni (d.dentoni@montpellier-bs.com) by April 30th, 2022.

Participation in the workshop does not guarantee acceptance of the paper in the SI, and is not a prerequisite for publication.

ABOUT THE GUEST EDITORS

Domenico Dentoni is Professor of Business, Resilience and Transformation and Chairholder of the Communication and Organizing for Sustainability Transformation (COAST) chair at Montpellier Business School, France. Through his research, Domenico seeks to understand, explain and practice how organizations and other systems cope, adapt, and change in the face of grand socio-ecological challenges. His work has been recently published in *Journal of Business Venturing*, *Organization Studies*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Organization & Environment* and *Business & Society* and several other interdisciplinary journals.

Amelia Clarke is Associate Dean of Research and Associate Professor in the School of Environment, Enterprise and Development at the University of Waterloo, Canada. Her main research projects focus on helping implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals. She approaches her research on sustainable business, sustainable campuses and sustainable communities from a strategic management lens. She has published in many journals, including *Business & Society*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Organization & Environment*, *Journal of Cleaner Production* and *Public Administration Review*.

Helen Etchanchu is Associate Professor and Chairholder of the Communication and Organizing for Sustainability Transformation (COAST) chair at Montpellier Business School, France. Her research specifically explores the role of language, meaning, and legitimation dynamics in the sustainability transformation of our societies. She is co-founder of OS4future, an academic movement committed to climate action. Her research appeared in *Journal of Business Ethics* and *European Management Review*.

Ralph Hamann is professor at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business, South Africa. He works on business sustainability and social innovation and entrepreneurship. He has published in journals such as *Business & Society*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Business Venturing*, *Journal of Management Studies* and *Organization Studies*. He is executive editor of *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, and co-founder of the South African leg of the Embedding Project and the Southern Africa Food Lab.

Martina Linnenluecke is Professor of Environmental Finance and leads the Centre for Corporate Sustainability and Environmental Finance at Macquarie University, Australia. Martina's research focuses on the strategic and financial implications of corporate adaptation and resilience to climate change impacts. Martina is a contributing author to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report (AR6 WGII) and has extensively published in business, environmental and interdisciplinary journals. She serves as an editorial board member of several journals including *Business & Society*.

Frank de Bakker is Professor of Corporate Social Responsibility at IESEG School of Management in Lille, France. In his research, he combines insights from institutional theory,

social movement studies, and stakeholder theory to examine interactions between activist groups and business firms on issues of CSR and the role of CSR managers in firms. His research appeared in journals like *Academy of Management Review*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Business & Society* and *Organization Studies*. Frank is one of the co-editors of *Business & Society* and sits on several editorial boards.

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