

Call for Papers for a Special Issue of Business and Society

**Corporate Sustainability – Off to Pastures New or Back to the Roots?  
Exploring New Perspectives, Theories and Research Methods in Corporate  
Sustainability Research**

Guest editors

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Deadline for submissions: 30 September 2012

Research on corporate sustainability has gained considerable momentum and recognition over the last two decades. Fostered by milestone publications like the special issues of the Academy of Management Review in 1995 and the Academy of Management Journal in 2000, environmental and sustainability issues have developed from niche topics into widely accepted research topics in the field of management and organization research. At the same time, this mainstreaming of corporate sustainability research has somewhat narrowed the methodological and theoretical approaches chosen by corporate sustainability scholars. While approaches such as the resource based view or institutional theory have greatly contributed to gain a better understanding of organizational responses to sustainable development, we believe that the time is ripe for exploring a wider range of perspectives. In order to promote methodological and paradigmatic heterogeneity and innovation in the production of rigorous research on corporate sustainability, this special issue seeks papers that adopt new perspectives, theories and research methods to guide academic corporate sustainability research into the next decades.

In this context, we believe that two avenues appear particularly promising: On the one hand, a return to some of the fundamental notions of sustainable development offers the potential to address sustainability-related issues that have been neglected in current corporate sustainability research. On the other hand, the adoption of theories, methodologies and perspectives that have not yet been taken up to investigate corporate sustainability promises insights that go beyond our current understanding of corporate responses to sustainability challenges.

For this special issue we thus particularly encourage submissions that (a) look into corporate responses to sustainability aspects that have so far only received scant attention or (b) that take on theoretical and/or methodological perspectives that have not yet been widely used to analyze corporate responses to sustainable development. The following sections provide more detailed guidance on this topical focus of the special issue.

The very definition of sustainable development comprises numerous aspects that have not yet received widespread attention by corporate sustainability scholars. This holds for the fundamental definitional core of sustainability as well as for specific sustainability issues and different types of strategic responses. For instance, with regard to its definitional foundations and despite the fact that sustainable development adopts a long-term perspective and stresses intergenerational equity, the construct of time has only sparsely been at the focus of research on corporate sustainability. Topic wise, a wide array of issues and challenges are being discussed in the context of sustainability. Not all of them have received the same attention by management and strategy scholars. For instance corporate responses and strategies in the context of climate change have been treated extensively in the sustainability-related management and organization theory literature. In contrast, the role and strategies of firms with regard to other sustainability challenges such as the loss of biodiversity or environmental justice are a lot less researched. Some of the fundamental strategies proposed in the sustainable development literature, for instance based on sufficiency considerations, have been adopted in other fields of business studies such as marketing and consumer behavior but much less so by management and strategy scholars. Submissions that seek to develop and exploit these or other fundamental aspects of sustainable development for research on corporate sustainability at the organizational level are particularly encouraged.

Today, institutional theory and the resource based view seem to represent the dominant theoretical perspectives of management research into corporate sustainability. These approaches have considerably helped to further our understanding of corporate responses to sustainability issues, for instance when it comes to corporate climate strategies. However, there are still phenomena, such as why companies voluntarily contribute to sustainability or how and which corporate sustainability emerge and dominate in organizations, that are not understood well enough. This special issue encourages submissions that adopt alternative theoretical and/or methodological perspectives to gain a better understanding of phenomena in corporate sustainability. Because sustainable development is an overarching normative concept with implications at and across levels and addressing many different functional areas of the firm and its wider environment, theoretical and methodological cross-fertilization within the field of management and organization studies but also from other fields and disciplines appear most promising. Sustainability-related research based on institutional theory oftentimes focuses on the legitimizing effect of norms and rules and associated corporate strategies. In contrast, theories of institutional work or structuration have received much less attention to explain the behavior of firms vis-à-vis sustainability-related norms and rules. Likewise, the literature on corporate sustainability strategies predominantly adopts a top-down perspective of planned strategies in contrast to bottom-up approaches that perceive strategies of emergent patterns shaped by action rather than strategic planning. A better understanding of corporate responses to sustainability issues might also be gained through experimental methods as oftentimes used in psychology and behavioral economics. While clearly not limited to the above examples, this special issue seeks submissions that venture for new

theoretical or methodological pastures in the quest for a better understanding of corporate responses to sustainability.

With this special issue we thus encourage innovative and rigorous research that contributes to a better understanding of organizational responses, strategies, business models and policies with regard to sustainability challenges. We explicitly welcome conceptual as well as empirical submissions. While the focus of this special issue will be to encourage innovative, novel, and even unorthodox approaches in corporate sustainability research the call is very open and inclusive with regard to a wide range of corporate sustainability related topics such as sustainable business models and entrepreneurship, environmental strategy and policy, innovation and green products, green consumerism and shareholder activism, environmental accounting and performance, the role of firms in natural protection, stakeholder and community management, governance for sustainability, as well as management tools and approaches for corporate sustainability. However, in their submission letter authors should provide a paragraph that explains the fit of their submission with this special issue: Authors should thus either explain which so far under-researched sustainability aspect with regard to the fundamental notion of sustainable development they address in their research (“back to the roots”) or need to show how and in what respect their theoretical or methodological perspective offers novel insights that go beyond the currently dominant approaches (“off to pastures new”).

The topic of this special issue is closely related to the GRONEN Research Conference 2012 that is held in southern France on 26-29 June 2012. For more details please visit [www.gronen2012.org](http://www.gronen2012.org). Interested authors in this call for papers are invited to submit their work also to the GRONEN conference to discuss their drafts with guest editors, reviewers, and other colleagues at the conference. However, participation in the conference is NOT a requirement for submissions to this special issue.

Submissions to the special issue should be sent by email to [specialissue.bas@gmail.com](mailto:specialissue.bas@gmail.com) and should be prepared in accordance with the submission guidelines of Business and Society (for details see [here](#)). The deadline for submissions is **30 September 2012**.

Any questions regarding the special issue can be addressed to the guest editors:

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