ACEDE 2027 BILBAO
36th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
XXXVI Congreso Internacional Nazioarteko Kongresua

From Vulnerability to Autonomy: Organisational Capabilities and Sustainability Transitions in Local Economies across Emerging and Developed Contexts

Thematic Area: Business & Society, Strategic Management or Entrepreneurship, Business Start-ups

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Summary:

Research on business sustainability has largely been built on large corporations in developed economies, assuming strong institutions, formal markets, access to green finance and demanding regulatory frameworks. These assumptions do not describe much of the world's economic activity: MSMEs, cooperatives, community and ejido enterprises, social enterprises and informal economic units operating with limited resources, capabilities and bargaining power, both in emerging economies of Latin America, Africa and Asia and in rural, depopulated or peripheral territories of developed economies.

This Special Track addresses a central question: which organisational capabilities, governance mechanisms and incentives make it possible to reduce vulnerabilities and critical dependencies, strengthen decision-making autonomy and enable transitions towards sustainable practices, and to what extent do they depend on the institutional context?

Its added value is twofold. First, it studies sustainability as a progressive organisational process: it distinguishes legal compliance from the voluntary adoption of standards and treats formalisation and growth as possible trajectories, not universal requirements. Second, it contrasts emerging and developed contexts to examine whether classic management theories apply equally or require new analytical categories, such as vulnerability and autonomy, and to identify lessons that travel in both directions.

We welcome theoretical and empirical contributions from any country, sector and method, including cross-regional comparative studies, on: (1) capabilities and sustainable business models in MSMEs and rural enterprises; (2) cooperatives, ejidos, community enterprises and the social and solidarity economy; (3) formalisation, finance and regulatory compliance in the informal economy; (4) training, organisational learning and incentives to adopt standards; and (5) territorial governance, resilience and autonomy in asymmetric economic relationships, including global value chains.

Keywords:

organisational capabilities; business sustainability; MSMEs; organisational autonomy; social and solidarity economy; emerging and developed economies.