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## "Linking Business and Society beyond Corporate Responsibility: Culture, Social Development, and Corporate Sustainability"

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**EDITORIAL****Linking Business and Society beyond Corporate Responsibility: Culture, Social Development, and Corporate Sustainability****Manfred M. Bergman***University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland*

On the way to my office, I pass the exhibition center in Basel, recently renovated by star architects Herzog and de Meuron, which is currently buzzing with Baselworld, the foremost annual exhibition for watches and jewelry. 150 000 visitors and 4 000 journalists are expected to attend this year. Bentleys, Maseratis, and Ferraris, alongside their German counterparts are on display, as are their elegantly dressed owners, leasees, or borrowers from all corners of the globe, laden with colorful bags of product catalogues of the newest designs in the watch and jewelry industry. Toward the river Rhine, beyond the international hotels catering mostly to the exhibition center, a few run-down Swiss restaurants and remaining low-rent apartment buildings, some of them boarded up months ago, are about to make way for new high-rise office and commercial buildings. Further still, where the street is accessible only to ecological means of transportation – trams, bicycles, and pedestrians, I pass an Indian corner shop that opens early and closes late, an exclusive bicycle shop that opens late and closes early (it specializes in hand-crafted bicycles for a price that would buy a new car in India), a large Asian market and two Thai restaurants, multiple discount clothing shops, where the permanent sales racks clutter the sidewalk with shirts and trousers for about five to ten dollars, and dresses and shoes for about twenty, mostly made in Asia and especially China.

There are a McDonalds and a handful of Turkish kebab shops, long established as some of the only eateries in the vicinity that are open on Sundays. Next to McDonalds and just before Starbucks across the square, a Dunkin' Donuts opened two weeks ago. Since its opening, there are queues out the store and onto the sidewalk of customers who wait patiently for a taste of an authentic American donut. Boutique stores of the main mobile phone providers are nearby, as are banks, jewelry stores, street musicians, and the homeless and drunks, young and old, women and men, who seem immune to the winter cold as they gather during opening hours near a kiosk that sells them cheap beer and cigarettes. One block from here stands the old orphanage, founded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in buildings dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup>. They once housed monks before the orphans but have long since been converted into a modern meeting and conference center. A few steps further is the Salvation Army, catering to a new kind of orphan in modern Basel.

From this square, I could reach by tram or bus in less than half an hour residential and shopping centers in Germany or France, where shopping and living is much cheaper than here in Basel, something that thousands of enterprising Swiss, French, and Germans do every day to the benefit or detriment of business in Basel, depending on what line of business you're in or how you look at it. Striking also in this part of town is the mix of nationalities and ethnic groups – Basel is the home of approximately 35 percent of resident foreigners, but the proportion in this part of town is much higher. Finally, along this street, less than one kilometer from the buzz of Baselworld, I come to the historic Middle Bridge, first built in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, which crosses the Rhine, artery of international trade, manufacture, and prosperity for the entire region, even today. Downriver, past the growing structure that will become the 73-meter tall life science building, cornerstone of the emergent life

science campus of the University of Basel, is clearly visible the Novartis campus and headquarters, a pharmaceutical business, administration, and research cluster with complex relations to the university, the canton, and beyond. Just barely visible from this bridge are the new buildings on the Novartis campus, by some of the most famous architects alive today. This will be one of the most important architectural in the future. Upriver, equally visible, is the new and all-dominant Roche tower, with 178 meters the tallest building in Switzerland. It will soon to be joined by an even taller Roche tower just next to this one, expected reach 205 meters. I wonder what it does to corporate culture at Roche and Novartis if, from the top floors, management can clearly see its competitor at all times. And what will it do to this ancient city, where, just anywhere you are, you can see these new corporate churches (without exception dwarfing the ancient preaching a new faith and promising progress and success?)



*Figure 1. Basel in the morning*

Some of what can be experienced in this kilometer of city street could be experienced in many other cities in the world. Globalization has created an interesting mix between the old and the new, insiders and outsiders, winners and losers, and, most of all, the negotiation between the boundaries of these dichotomies. Other things experienced here are locked in a specific place and time. How long exclusive bicycle or book stores can hold on when online or cross-border shopping opportunities are replacing places of trade and business established generations ago is difficult to estimate. At the time of writing, the Swiss citizenry, not unlike elsewhere in the West, tends to flirt with populist positions on the left and right of the political spectrum, yearning and aiming to vote for a time and space that has long gone.

What we see in different ways on a short walk is directly connected to what Klaus Leisinger covers in his article, more generally on the intricately intertwined relations between business and society, and particularly on the complications introduced by globalization and the thus emergent conflicts and confusions between cultures' material content and procedural norms. In this text is presented a "corridor" of transculturally legitimate actions and responsible modes of behavior", bounded on one side by universal values and international norms, ostensibly shared by all and thus guide to all business practices, such as honesty, justice, and respect, and, on the other side, by cultural features unique to a time and place that have no relevant impact on business practice or inter-societal coexistence, and that should therefore not be subject to negotiation. It is the middle, between the universal and the particularistic, where Leisinger proposes debates and negotiations in order to identify satisfactory solutions among all stakeholders involved.

Global ethics are also the topic of Eberhard Stilz's article. In focus here are the work by Hans Küng on a globally shared set of ethics, the relations between ethics, the economy, and national law, and how lessons learned in different national contexts on ethics and law pertaining to business are subject to an exchange partnership between courts in Stuttgart, Germany, and Henan, China.

Building on normative and ethics-based debates on societal and business practices, the next two contributions focus on social and environmental responsibilities in a larger sense – Jeff Sachs on sustainability, particularly the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), and Yuxuan Chen, Li Li, and Dong Chen on elderly care and wellbeing in rural China, which can be obliquely considered a case study of the scope and applicability of the UN SDGs.

Between 25 and 27 September 2015, the United Nations unanimously adopted 17 goals and 169 targets as part of the post-2015 agenda, also referred to as Agenda 2030<sup>1</sup>. The 17 UN SDGs are:

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

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<sup>1</sup> UN Sustainable Development Goals, <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

Based on his keynote<sup>2</sup> at the World Sustainability Forum 2015 in Basel, Sachs covers in this article the developmental pathway to the adoption of the UN SDGs, some of the concerns and opportunities associated with them, and the important differences between Agenda 2030 and the Millennium Development Goals, which were replaced by the UN SDGs. Important here are the arguments raised on why and how to take the goals very seriously, as ambitious as they may seem and whether they relate to individuals, enterprises, NGOs/NPOs, governments, nations, or universities, and how they are different from and vastly more important than most other international initiatives that came before.

Yuxuan Chen, Li Li, and Dong Chen present a paper on the high and still growing suicide rates among the elderly in rural Shandong, China. Without explicitly stating this, much of what they discuss and empirically study is in some ways associated with UN SDGs 1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, and 16. In essence, they conclude that those with a low income, living alone, and not participating substantially in a social network are prone to conditions that lead elderly people in rural China to commit suicide. These effects are associated, even exacerbated by land flight of young poor farmers into the city and by empty nesters. Such emerging phenomena directly conflict with traditional norms in China – including “raise children to provide for old age.” The authors conclude, among other things, with an appeal to provide cultural and social activities, and to organize volunteers to interact with at-risk seniors.

And this, finally, connects to Baocheng Liu’s article on the growth and change of civic China through the blossoming of volunteerism and NGOs, their fragile and emergent status, and the government’s tentative trust in their activities as a foundation of a new civic China. A careful reading of this text reveals subtle hues of a growth in civic society in ways that is not tracing its developmental path along Western paths. Instead, modern(izing) China is bent on a distinctly Chinese development path, and this article illustrates the subtleties in its management and expectations.

On the way to my colleague’s office in Beijing, my place of work last year for a few weeks, I walk past rows upon rows of concrete high-rises built between the middle and the end of the past century. It took me nearly half a day to find my colleague’s office on the first day – my English was useless with taxi drivers and pedestrians, as were the directions written in Mandarin, until I thought of the obvious: asking young people. Nearly all of them have smartphones with excellent speech recognition and translation apps, and while many do not speak English, within minutes, technology and ingenuity of the young generation put me in the right direction. In the mornings, many of the squares surrounded by the residential buildings are filled with music and movement of the young and old, exercising more or less vigorously to Chinese pop or traditional music that blares through cheap boom boxes.

The participants seem to know each other, and they seem to combine socializing with exercise. In these residential areas, traffic is mostly made up of pedestrians, bicycles, electric tricycles, mopeds, and a few small, beat-up cars. Further down the road, I cross a square, in which vendors sell their wares – anything from fruits and vegetables laid out on mats, mobile phones and accessories, children’s toys, and clothes from the back of cars can be bought for a fraction of the price they would cost across the bridge in the two-story shopping center. Much of the produce is brought in from the suburbs, where vendors, many of them seniors, grow them with great care in their small but well-kept gardens. Apparently, you can take folks out of the country but you cannot take the country out of these folks. And consequently, the produce available on the sidewalk is usually far superior to the produce available in the commercial centers in the “better” part of town across the bridge. In

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<sup>2</sup> Partial transcription and editing by Lena Berger, Zinette Bergman, and Xiaosong Li.

the evening, this square will be filled with vendors preparing all kinds of food, some delicious to my Western palate, and some very strange. The residential squares will be filled again with the social dancers, and with old men playing board games and cards. On both sides of the bridge are bus stops, where seemingly hundreds of busses stop every day to transport the masses to their work, homes, friends, relatives, and to wherever else they need to go. In the middle of the bridge can be seen the extent of the spread of this part of Beijing – dozens upon dozens of blocks up and down this main artery, itself filled with old and new cars and busses, bicycles, and electric tricycles (I have not seen so much electrified transport anywhere else in the world). German cars, particularly Audis and VWs, an occasional Bentley, but mostly older Chinese cars dominate.

Most striking here is how busy everyone is, from the impatient official frantically phoning the office for being late for yet another important meeting because of the traffic jam, to the delivery drivers, the business woman accessorized with stylish Gucci sunglasses and a new BMW coupé, the old man piling old, crushed cardboard boxes headhigh on top of the groaning load space of his ratty tricycle, the street cleaners with their bright security vests and their large and dilapidated brooms, and everyone else who fills this cityscape. I am wearing my surgeon's mask made of paper again today because of the air pollution.

On the first three days of my stay, I laughed at my Chinese colleagues for their weakness – until I developed what they call the Beijing Cough. Since I wear the mask outdoors during the most polluted hours of the day, the burning of my lungs and sinuses, and the Beijing Cough have subsided somewhat. On my 40-minute walk to my colleague's office, I pass many large construction sites, and even if I cannot see them, they can be heard from just about everywhere I am. On these hot days, I treat myself to a cold bottle of water in one of the many corner stores – they say that the tap water is undrinkable. Later, just before I reach my colleague's office – I have a workspace there in a small office with very well-used furniture that I am sharing with four other researchers, I treat myself to an excellent coffee at a bakery where grandmothers take their grandchildren for treats, paying with a barcode displayed on their Chinese smartphones by holding them against the bakery's scanner.



*Figure 2.* Beijing just before Rush Hour

We are living in exciting times. Although traditionalists – those who want things to stay the same or, worse, those who want to fashion the future according to an imagined past – are likely to suffer the most from

where we are going, as individuals, members of groups, societies, and the world community. But this is also a time when access to food, medicine, education, and social and economic development more generally is within reach for many millions more than just a few decades ago. If the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals are anything to go by, many more will benefit from their extension, the UN SDGs.

The next few decades will see many changes around the globe: tremendous science, technology, and communication advances will change the way we interact with each other, our employers, or state institutions; we will experience the end of cheap, where it will become increasingly difficult to buy two pairs of shoes made in low-wage countries for one hour of work at minimum wage in high-wage countries; we will see migration streams that make the current ones, voluntary high-skilled labor and involuntary refugees, look like a trickle – highly educated Indians will be welcomed in markets around the world where they are badly needed, and desperate families in many African nations will escape the increasingly barren lands of their parents and grandparents; conflicts will arise between those who want to keep the geopolitical order and those who are rapidly gaining power; we will experience more unilateral and bilateral actions, and we will experience a much greater willingness and need to compromise on a multilateral level.

These changes will play out differently in Basel or Beijing, or Berlin, Delhi, Sao Paulo, Sydney, and New York, in their wealthy and poor suburbs, and in countrysides around the world. Everyone will have to adapt, learn, cooperate, and learn to cooperate – and fast – because, in this new world, the negotiations of a new balance between economic, social, and environmental issues will be crucial for all.