

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

International Business Research Incubator - 2022

On The Effectiveness of Green Alliances Sustainability as a Primary Motive for International Strategic Alliances

Free University of Bozen–Bolzano, Italy
June 13-14, 2022

Submission Deadline: April 15, 2022

Relevance and Thematic Focus

Firms are facing increased pressure from different stakeholders to reduce their ecological footprint, to become more sustainable, and/or to align to the UN SDGs. Resulting challenges are manifold, ranging from managing the different stakeholder expectations, developing the necessary knowledge which is not (yet) part of the organizational competencies, adapting business processes and policies, or providing necessary resources (Oliver, Montgomery, & Barda, 2020; Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011; Shevchenko, Lévesque, & Pagell, 2016). While large corporations may find it easier to escape these pressures it might become a question of survival for small and medium-sized companies as they often lack the resources, knowledge, and capabilities to adapt to a changing business environment. A way of dealing with this problem could be offered by Strategic alliances offer an alternative to mitigate these issues by enabling companies to jointly counter the pressure - which in some cases may be unjustified or excessive - or by ensuring access to the necessary knowledge and resources. Such reasoning could be seen as a reactive justification for "green" alliances.

On the other hand, however, firms may choose strategic alliances (pro-)actively as organizational means to foster the transition process towards increased sustainability. Environmental regulations enacted by national or transnational governments and legislatures (e.g., CO2 taxes or CO2 emissions trading schemes) can trigger voluntary alliances of companies that share experiences and knowledge with each other (Yang, Chen, Du, Lin, & Lu, 2021). Supranational governments such as the United Nations, for example, are actively promoting a coalition of leading net-zero initiatives that covers more than 100 countries as part of its Race To Zero campaign (<https://unfccc.int/climate-action/race-to-zero-campaign>). Additionally, non-profit organizations like the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP; www.cdp.net/en) or a growing number of providers of green certificates (e.g., Climate Neutral Group, www.climateneutralgroup.com/en) may be interpreted as strategic alliances of companies which want or need to prove their willingness to reduce their environmental impact.

It can be further assumed that, in the course of the growing environmental awareness of the next management generations, proactive behaviors and initiatives will also emanate from companies that –with or without external pressure– want to live up to their responsibility (Buysse & Verbeke, 2003). Taken this perspective, strategic linkages within global supply chains can be viewed as strategic alliances in which companies at different stages of the value chain support each other in achieving ever

higher environmental standards. Although we should not overrate the extent of ethical behavior by consumers (e.g., Devinney, Auger, & Eckhardt, 2010) firms may form strategic alliances to establish a market standard or to develop green technologies to gain competitive advantages vis-à-vis their international competitors (e.g., Hartman & Stafford, 1997; Melander 2017; 2018).

These examples, which are certainly not exhaustive (for further suggestions see for example: Crane, 1998; Hartman & Stafford, 1997; Lin, 2012; Stadtler & Lin, 2016; Wassmer, Paquin, & Sharma, 2014), are intended to stimulate reflection on the levels at which strategic alliances are conceivable that directly or indirectly serve the goal of transforming the economy towards greater sustainability.

Due to the overuse of the adjective 'strategic', it is important to base research initiatives on a clear definition of what constitutes a strategic alliance particularly in the field of sustainability. Otherwise, everything is labeled a strategic green alliance, resulting in a mishmash of outcomes that are not comparable and unlikely to lead to new insights. One might start with the proposal by Crane (1998: 560), who defines a green alliance as *"... any formal or informal collaboration between two or more organizations which is aimed at developing common solutions to the collaborators' environmental problems. Hence a green alliance might be forged between any combination of commercial organizations, government organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)."* Yet, there is the need to clarify what turns a general green alliance into a strategic one. In the context of the developmental conference described and advertised here, alliances should only be considered strategic if they are based on formal rules and contracts, require significant obligations and resource commitments for the organization, and are rather difficult to terminate. This may include equity investments, joint ventures, licensing, or other forms of long-term contracts. Finally, while the conference does not rule out purely national strategic alliances for sustainability, research addressing cross-border, international alliances are especially welcome.

Outline of possible research perspectives and questions

Based on the brief description of strategic alliances to promote sustainability and environmental improvements in particular, a wide range of research opportunities and questions emerge. In the light of several interesting studies and publications in various scientific disciplines and journals, our conference aims at developing further understanding of a wide range of areas, which consequently offer manifold opportunities for future inquiry, particularly at the crossroads of international business, international management, strategic management, and sustainability. Important research questions that may be explored and presented are, for example, the following:

- Under which conditions and with which objectives do large firms (e.g., industry incumbents), establish strategic alliances with SMEs and especially start-ups which focus on sustainable technologies and/or products?
- Under which conditions and with which objectives do SMEs join forces, either to respond to stricter environmental regulations or to jointly develop and market 'green' unique selling propositions?
- What types and forms of strategic alliances can be distinguished in the field of sustainability?
- For what reasons are such alliances established?
- To what extent and how can large multinational companies, for instance from the consumer goods industry, influence their international suppliers to reduce their environmental footprint?

- Are there examples of “anti-green alliances”, i.e., international strategic alliances that have been formed to mitigate the pressure to adapt (e.g., Seidman, 2019) and have they been researched?
- What are the success factors of green alliances between governments, universities, and private firms (e.g., Smart Cities initiatives) at the national and international levels and how do they differ from success factors of strategic alliances at large?
- To what extent are efforts by national and international administrations to establish green alliances successful measured against their promises (e.g., Mission Innovation or Breakthrough Energy Coalition established during COP 21)?
- How can different alliances be governed effectively and efficiently?

Please note that these are suggestions which are of course not exclusive. In case of doubt regarding the eligibility of your research please get in touch with us.

Whom we target?

We invite international scholars including senior PhDs and Post-Docs interested in the research focus and theme of the developmental conference to submit their related research and work-in-progress to our highly interactive conference. As interdisciplinary research is repeatedly called for recently, we explicitly invite researchers from different (sub)disciplines such as organizational behavior, human resource management, entrepreneurship, marketing, innovation management, sociology, psychology, economics as well as accounting to share their approaches and insights with participants.

We are particularly interested in empirical and conceptual papers that advance existing knowledge about international strategic alliances as outlined above and their role in supporting a transition of firms, industries, and economies into ‘greener’, more sustainable ones. Although we encourage to submit work-in-progress deriving from current research projects as well as controversial and provocative essays that addresses innovative research questions, we need to emphasize that submissions must comply to scientific standards and must be of high-quality regarding application of theories, appropriate methods, comprehensive analyses, as well as formal requirements to be accepted for the conference.

How to apply and submit your work?

At first stage, we ask for submitting brief summaries (extended abstracts) that should be close to but not exceed 1,500 words (excluding reference lists) of mid-stage research studies that have not been published and which address a topic along the wider lines of conference theme. All submission will undergo a review process. Those authors whose papers are accepted will be invited and expected to present their research at the conference in June 2022 in person if the ongoing Covid pandemic and respective national and university regulations allow for conferences in presence. In the case it becomes foreseeable that a conference in presence is not feasible, we reserve the right to change to a virtual conference format or to postpone the conference.

Timeline

Submission of extended abstracts: **April 15, 2022**

Acceptance Notifications: April 30, 2022

Preliminary Program published: May 21, 2022

Note: If applicable, the conference can be ideally combined with the SMS Special Conference at Bocconi in Milano (June 15-18, 2022). Travel time to/from Bozen-Bolzano is at best three hours by train or car.

Program Committee

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Conference Organizers

<i>Michael Nippa</i>	Professor of Strategic Leadership and International Management (Free University of Bozen-Bolzano) michael.nippa@unibz.it
<i>Caterina Moschieri</i>	Associate Professor at IE Business School (Madrid) in Corporate and Competitive Strategy caterina.moschieri@ie.edu

Interested scholars may contact Michael Nippa or Caterina Moschieri for any kind of request and may already attach a draft of their research idea.

Additional information will be soon available on our website: <https://ibri.events.unibz.it>

We are looking forward to your submission and participation!

About IBRI (international business research incubator)

This year the IBRI-Developmental Conference is organized with the primary goal of bringing together international scholars who are researching or planning to research at the interface of international strategic alliances and sustainability, preferably environmental protection, and who want to present their research ideas to an interested group of junior and senior IB scholars and develop them further.

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