CALL FOR PAPERS FOR NEW VOLUME OF *"RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONS"*

Volume Title: Addressing Grand Challenges: A Transnational Social Space perspective on the role and contribution of MNEs

The last decade has seen an increasing number of publications in business and management studies that focus on Grand Challenges (GC) in society, both conceptually and empirically (Seelos et al. 2022). GCs are defined as complex international, interdisciplinary, multilevel and multistakeholder problems that hinder sustainable global development. When it comes to the question which role multinational enterprises (MNEs) might play in this context, leading scholars in the field of International Business (IB) have now joined the bandwagon and called for more systematic and in-depth research (see e.g., Buckley et al. 2019). For example, a recent *Call for Papers* in a leading IB journal highlighted that "MNEs are uniquely positioned to effectively address Grand Challenges given their size, global reach, and market and nonmarket power" (Cuervo-Cazurra et al., 2023). In short, MNE are described here as critical organizational actors, that actively provide public goods and protect global commons. Hence, they are very much seen as indispensable parts of the "solution".

We appreciate these calls of IB scholars, especially, because they provide the intellectual space to imagine alternative ways of theorizing and diverge from the dominant rationalistic performance approach of studying MNEs, which is deeply engrained in the field. However, to date, such efforts have typically been thwarted in practice in terms of conceptual breadth in theory-building and empirical focus beyond the MNE as the unit of analysis (Dörrenbächer and Geppert 2017). Perhaps provocatively, we can contend that, in general, theme and theory-borrowing by IB scholars are piecemeal at best (Bozkurt and Geppert 2021). A good example is borrowing from cross-national institutionalism. Despite an overall praise of the increased "interdisciplinary nature" of IB research, which has to some extent "embraced institutionalism" in the last decade, mainstream scholars have failed to systematically recognize major contributions of comparative institutionalism. This also extends to the recognition of the idea of transnational social spaces (Rana and Morgan 2019), that in our view, provide an excellent theoretical framework to deal with grand challenges and the role of MNEs, not only as part of the solution but also as part of the problem (Dörrenbächer et al. 2022).

Compared to mainstream IB, research in Organization Studies (OS) has developed a more robust interdisciplinary orientation and offered a far more critical understanding of contemporary MNEs in the wider society. They are seen as crucial organizations when highlighting the socio-economic constitution and socio-political dynamics in transnational social spaces (Geppert and Dörrenbächer 2014). OS research on contemporary MNEs has - besides institutional theory - also drawn on critical management studies approaches such as discursive theory, convention theory, organizational power and politics theory, social movement theory and social constructivism (e. g. Brandl and Schneider 2017; De Bakker et al. 2013; Delmestri and Brumana 2017; Levy and Reiche 2018; Whittle et al. 2016). Unlike mainstream IB, which has long focused on the MNE's focal organization, its inner workings, strategies, structures and the specifics of headquarters-subsidiary relations, OS always theorized the strategizing of key actors in a less MNE-centric way, embedding it within the wider societal context. This genuine interdisciplinary stance has triggered the development of the 'transnational social spaces' approach (Morgan et al., 2001).

Transnational social space has become an established concept in comparative institutionalist studies on MNEs in the last 20 years. It is a concept that deconstructs social reality in a particular field into a more open-ended set of cross-border social relationships. Moreover, it suggests that such cross-border social relationships may form transnational communities, defined as "cross-border connections between multiple nods in which forms of interactions become more than simply the sum of interactions between 'national' units..." (Morgan 2001: 115). Moreover, the political role of

key actors, such as MNEs, play was central in theorizing and questioning "how the boundaries of these transnational communities are structured, managed, redefined, and negotiated …" (Morgan et al. 2001: 11). In short, transnational social spaces have been presented as politically contested terrains, both at the micro-level of political game-playing within MNEs and at the macro-political level.

Our *RSO-volume* aims to reinvigorate and leverage the transnational social space approach to develop it further to address GC. *First*, this approach is helpful for this endeavour because it has been developed in an interdisciplinary manner over time by drawing on ideas outside of mainstream OS such as social geography, migration studies, political economy, economic sociology, and IB. It makes it an ideal approach for further developments in a multi-disciplinary manner.

Second, the transnational social space approach is grounded in actor-centred institutionalism, comparative IB, corporate governance research and migration studies. Based on these theoretical foundations the central focus of the approach was on the emergence and development of transnational communities in the context of international business and management. In particular, the impact of financialization on managing and organizing in diverse national and transnational social spaces, including the MNE, was studied. The challenge for future research in this tradition is to address 'wicked problems' (see e.g., Marti, 2018) like 'climate change', 'poverty', 'health' and 'inequality', that are seen as the four most central GC in many conceptual and empirical articles by management scholars (Seelos et al. 2022).

More specifically, we propose applying the transnational social space idea as an 'envelop framework' (Zettinig and Nummela 2021), amenable for bringing in alternative and new conceptual ideas. This combination of a core approach with built-in flexibility can then address urgent, novel GC, like the increasing geo-political insecurity endangered by the Russian war in Ukraine. We, therefore, seek contributions that may broaden the scope of theorizing from various theoretical angles and disciplines and enlarge the empirical scope also to fields where the MNE is not automatically the central unit of study. However, attention shall still be paid to the question of whether and how MNEs can shape and in some cases to distort transnational social spaces as powerful players. Along this line, we encourage contributions that, more generally, investigate when, why and how MNEs can be seen as part of the problem and/or part of GCs.

For our *RSO-volume* we call for interdisciplinary works that can be conceptually, empirically, and methodologically oriented. Foremost, we invite submissions from OS and IB researchers but also from scholars in neighbouring disciplines who explore how societal GC where MNEs are implicated can be better explored and understood from a transnational social space perspective.

We are especially interested in contributions that conceptually and/or empirically refer to the following United Nations SDGs (2015): (8) on decent work and economic growth, (7) on affordable and clean energy, (13) on climate change and action, (12) on responsible consumption and production; and as an overarching theme (17) on global partnerships. Our call asks for submissions that touch on the following indicative rather than a comprehensive list of themes and topics:

•   Theories and methods for interdisciplinary work on GC which contribute conceptually to broadening and further developing the 'envelop' framework of transnational social spaces.

•   The role of geopolitics and de-globalization in the constitution of transnational social spaces and its effects on dealing with GC.

•   Challenges of recent nationalistic movements for the constitution of transnational social spaces and its effects on dealing with GC.

•   Challenges of increased digitalization and algorithmic management on the constitution of transnational social spaces and its effects on dealing with GC.

•   Migration, mobility, and displacement of peoples in transnational social spaces with various forms of MNE involvement.

•   The legal and practical ways in which a green transition is helping to shape and is shaped through transnational social spaces where MNEs also exert power and influence.

•   Contexts where MNEs still play powerful roles in the constitution of transnational social spaces when solving 'wicked problems, including approaches that might enhance existing problems and/or create novel dilemmas.

To discuss any ideas for contributions, we welcome queries to the editors at the following email addresses.

o   Mike Geppert, mike.geppert@uni-jena.de

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Proposal of timetable

Deadline for the draft of short papers by the end of October 2023

PDW in Jena/Berlin with contributors – November/December 2023

Deadline for 1st full drafts – end of June 2024

Deadline for 1st peer-review of first full drafts – end of September 2024

Deadline for 2nd full drafts – end of December 2024

Editing and finishing introduction – end of March 2025

Literature

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