



Kent Academic Repository

Stadtler, Lea, Hernández-Melgar, Eduardo, Knight, Helena H., MacDonald, Adriane, Hustad, Oda and Seitanidi, M. May (2026) *Uncovering the Societal Harm of Cross-Sector Partnerships: An Intervention Perspective*. Business & Society . ISSN 0007-6503.

Downloaded from

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/115022/> The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

The version of record is available from

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00076503261468399>

This document version

Publisher pdf

DOI for this version

Licence for this version

CC BY (Attribution)

Additional information

Versions of research works

Versions of Record

If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

Author Accepted Manuscripts

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in **Title of Journal** , Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

Enquiries

If you have questions about this document contact ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our [Take Down policy](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies) (available from <https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies>).

Uncovering the Societal Harm of Cross-Sector Partnerships: An Intervention Perspective

Business & Society

1–41

© The Author(s) 2026



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/00076503261468399

journals.sagepub.com/home/bas

Lea Stadtler¹ , Eduardo Hernández-Melgar¹ ,
Helena H. Knight² , Adriane MacDonald³ ,
Oda Hustad⁴ , and M. May Seitanidi⁵ 

Abstract

Cross-sector partnerships (CSPs) are widely recognized as vehicles for addressing societal challenges. Yet, their potential to generate harm to communities, the environment, and broader societal systems remains underexamined. Evidence is fragmented and context-dependent, obscuring broader patterns. Moreover, attribution challenges hinder efforts to trace observed harms to CSPs, particularly in the absence of well-specified mechanisms. To address this gap, we adopt an intervention perspective that centers on CSPs' interactions with focal societal issues and conduct a qualitative meta-analysis of case-based evidence. This analysis identifies recurring patterns of societal harm, intervention flaws, and partnership-related antecedents. We integrate these insights into the HIDE framework (societal Harm, Intervention flaws, Design antecedents, and Evaluative challenges). The framework conceptualizes societal harm as multifaceted, helps identify pathways through which CSP design antecedents are

¹Grenoble Ecole de Management, France

²Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, UK

³Concordia University, Montreal, QC, Canada

⁴Independent Researcher, Denmark

⁵University of Kent, Canterbury, UK

Corresponding Author:

Helena H. Knight, Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, Aberconway Building, Colum Drive, Cardiff CF10 3EU, UK.

Email: knighth4@cardiff.ac.uk

associated with observed societal effects via intervention flaws, and provides a structured lens for reflecting on the assessment of societal harm.

Keywords

collaboration, cross-sector partnerships, dark side, harm, meta-analysis, societal challenges

Introduction

Complex societal challenges require change and innovative solutions that go beyond unilateral actions (George et al., 2016). A typical response has become to call for cross-sector partnerships (CSPs) and their potential to leverage the resources and expertise of public, business, and civil-society actors in joint projects (Clarke & Crane, 2018; Sadri et al., 2025; Stadler et al., 2024). While research acknowledges the benefits CSPs can generate (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; Dentoni et al., 2021), their potential dark side in the form of societal harm, whether intentional or unintentional, remains insufficiently understood. We define societal harm as negative (i.e., detrimental) social, environmental, or systemic effects experienced by people, the natural environment, and the social, economic, and political systems on which societies depend. Such effects are undesirable and may manifest directly or indirectly, and in both immediate and long-term ways.

This harm-related dimension remains an underrecognized component of CSPs' impact for two main reasons. First, existing evidence is fragmented and reported in diverse, context-dependent forms, which obscure the patterns behind a broader phenomenon. Respective findings are thereby often treated as incidental rather than as central observations that inform theoretical development. Second, CSPs' embeddedness in societal systems (Dentoni et al., 2021) gives rise to unresolved "attribution problems," namely the difficulty of isolating the effects of a specific partnership from other confounding influences (Van Tulder et al., 2016). In the absence of well-specified analytical mechanisms, it is difficult to determine whether and how CSPs contribute to observed harms, rather than whether these reflect preexisting conditions or parallel dynamics (Brinkerhoff, 2002).

Together, these challenges have constrained the cumulative development of knowledge about CSPs' societal harm. Greater attention to such effects matters because they contradict CSPs' stated aim of addressing societal challenges and contributing to societal welfare (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; Sadri et al., 2025). It may also reveal underexplored patterns in how CSPs

contribute to generating harm and help uncover the mechanisms linking these patterns to known partnership design shortcomings in governance and partner coordination (George et al., 2024), such as power imbalances (Gray et al., 2022) and representation challenges (Bäckstrand, 2006). To systematically examine CSPs' societal harm while acknowledging the attribution challenge, we propose focusing on CSPs' societal interventions (Kroeger & Weber, 2014; Stadtler et al., 2024), understood as the decisions and actions through which they engage with societal actors and systems. We pay particular attention to flaws in the design and implementation of these interventions. This lens helps identify whether and how observed societal harm can be linked to CSPs' actions and decisions, and how such effects may relate to specific facets of CSP design.

Applying this perspective, we conduct a qualitative meta-analysis (Combs et al., 2019; Hoon, 2013) to identify evidence of CSPs' societal harm, associated intervention flaws, and CSP-related antecedents. A qualitative meta-analysis enables us to reconsider and reinterpret qualitative empirical data from published case studies to generate new theoretical insights (Habersang & Reihlen, 2025; Hoon, 2013). We ask: *What evidence of CSPs' societal harm can be identified, and how and why do these effects occur? How can these insights guide future research?* Drawing on 47 case studies, we systematize evidence of societal harm across different societal and temporal levels and uncover recurring intervention flaws (i.e., lagging, under-scoped, and misaligned intervention) through which these harms arise. We identify associated CSP structural and actor-based antecedents and discuss recurring patterns in what occurs, how it occurs, and why.

We integrate these insights into an analytical framework termed HIDE. The framework helps systematize manifestations of societal harm (H) across contexts and address associative attribution challenges by helping identify intervention flaws (I) and linking them to CSP design antecedents (D). It also encourages scholars to reflect on the evaluative challenges of societal harm and its boundary conditions (E), highlighting additional attribution challenges and the need for context-sensitive approaches to complement the framework. Together, these elements provide foundational building blocks for theorizing the CSPs' societal harm and underscore that societal interventions can act as levers that amplify effects beyond organizational boundaries. In doing so, we contribute to CSP research by shifting attention from outcome-centric evaluations (Stadtler, 2016; Van Tulder et al., 2016) toward a mechanism-based understanding of how societal harm emerges and manifests, and by providing a structured framework for analyzing these dynamics across contexts. While developed for the study of CSPs (George et al., 2024; Sadri et al., 2025; Stadtler et al., 2024), the framework may also offer an

analytical lens for uncovering societal harm generated by organizational forms that similarly build on societal interventions, such as social enterprises or unilateral corporate initiatives.

Theoretical Background

To ground our analysis, we first review conceptual insights that help systematize CSP-related societal harm, draw on organizational dark-side literature to delineate its conceptual boundaries, and clarify our research motivation given the concept's distinctive features.

Systematizing CSP Effects to Conceptualize Societal Harm

We define CSPs as collaborative engagements among organizations from the business, public, and/or civil-society sectors in projects aimed at addressing social and/or environmental challenges through shared governance and implementation responsibilities (Selsky & Parker, 2005). Participation of at least two sectors distinguishes CSPs from same-sector alliances, while the principle of shared governance and implementation differentiates them from contracting-out arrangements and certification-based multi-stakeholder initiatives (Sadri et al., 2025; Stadtler et al., 2024). To conceptualize the societal harm associated with CSPs, extant literature has developed valuable frameworks that serve as a starting point. For example, scholars commonly cluster CSP effects across different levels: micro (affecting individuals and communities), meso (organizational effects), and macro (affecting institutional arrangements and capacities; Austin & Seitanidi, 2012). Effects may thus occur internally to CSP members or externally to society. Scholars also distinguish between direct and indirect effects, acknowledging ripple effects across stakeholders, institutions, and interconnected societal challenges (Stadtler, 2016; Vestergaard et al., 2020).

A temporal dimension further differentiates short, medium, and long-term effects (Innes & Booher, 1999; Stadtler, 2016), enabling scholars to separate immediate effects from indications of long-term, cumulative effects. A final distinction concerns benefits versus costs (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012). Costs may include financial or time investments (Stadtler, 2016) and organizational tradeoffs, such as accountability pressures, credibility risks, or implementation challenges (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012). In this sense, costs denote the negative inputs or tradeoffs that are typically required to implement or benefit from an intervention (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; Stadtler, 2016; Vestergaard et al., 2020).

On this basis, extant effect frameworks in the CSP literature help acknowledge that societal harm may occur directly or indirectly (where links are evident), with immediate or long-term manifestations across individual, community, organizational, and societal levels. They further help sharpen the focus on the incremental and often unchosen character of such harms for those affected. Specifically, unlike costs, societal harm reflects undesirable negative effects produced by the intervention itself, rather than necessary associated inputs. However, costs can at times become societally harmful, such as when those expected to “benefit” from an intervention experience suffering, injustice, or damage related to undesirable costs that occur, particularly when they are vulnerable or have limited agency. A focus on CSPs’ societal harm further differs from research on ineffectiveness, understood as underperformance or failure to achieve intended goals (Alonso & Andrews, 2019; Sadri et al., 2025). Ineffectiveness does not, in itself, constitute a societal effect. It becomes relevant only when underperformance produces additional societal harm, such as exacerbating suffering or diverting resources in ways that constrain organizations’ ability to fulfill societal roles. To further ground our understanding of societal harm, we turn to the broader “dark-side” literature, juxtapose insights with the societal perspective, and elaborate the emerging research puzzle.

Positioning Societal Harm in the Organizational Dark-Side Literature

In the broader management literature, the term “dark side” is commonly used to describe negative, harmful, unethical, or pathological aspects of organizations (Linstead et al., 2014), or more generally, damaging effects (Oliveira & Lumineau, 2019). We build on this literature to examine how societal harm may differ from other types of harm in its manifestations, as well as in its underlying mechanisms and antecedents. Specifically, with respect to manifestations, the dark-side literature conceptualizes organizational harm as effects that undermine an organization’s competitive advantage, profitability, or long-term success (Linstead et al., 2014). Such harm may also extend to individuals through negative employment-related experiences or diminished career opportunities (Linstead et al., 2014; Vaughan, 1999), or arise between organizations, manifesting in relational tensions (e.g., erosion of trust) and operational failures (e.g., mismanagement of shared resources) (Oliveira & Lumineau, 2019). Societal harm, however, extends beyond these individual and organizational manifestations. Although it may be experienced at the level of organizations or their members, it ultimately constrains their capacity

to fulfill societal roles and generates social, environmental, and systemic consequences (Stadtler et al., 2024; Wickert, 2021).

A working definition of CSP-related societal harm must therefore emphasize these dimensions; harm that is social, environmental, or systemic in nature, affecting people, the natural environment, and the social, economic, and political systems that society relies on. Such harm may include negative consequences experienced by individuals and communities, for example when CSPs intensify community conflicts or reinforce social exclusion (Gray et al., 2022). It also encompasses environmental degradation linked to CSP actions, such as declining water quality (Baudoin & Gittins, 2021), as well as undesirable damage to social, economic, or political systems (Crane, 2010), including erosion of institutional functioning or weakening of collective infrastructures. This societal orientation makes such harm difficult to capture and requires scholars to move beyond financial metrics.

The broader dark-side literature also identifies underlying mechanisms operating at multiple levels, including problematic individual and group-level actions such as cheating (Linstead et al., 2014), organizational practices such as greenwashing, manipulation, and forms of corporate colonialism (Devinney, 2009), and interorganizational behaviors such as conflict, opportunism, and unethical practices (Oliveira & Lumineau, 2019). These mechanisms primarily relate to interactions within and between organizations. In contrast, we focus on how CSPs interact with society through their societal interventions: the decisions and actions undertaken by partners to address complex societal challenges (Kroegeer & Weber, 2014; Stadtler et al., 2024). Such interventions may involve the development and provision of goods and services, knowledge dissemination, capacity building, financing mechanisms, technical assistance, and institutional support (OECD, 2023; Stadtler et al., 2024). These intervention types are also discussed in relation to CSP functions (Szulecki et al., 2011) and partnership solutions or foci (Stadtler & Karakulak, 2022).

We suggest that examining harm through this lens is particularly relevant, as societal interventions constitute the primary interface through which CSPs produce societal effects and where intervention flaws operate as mechanisms that can generate harm. These effects stand in contrast to CSPs' stated aim of addressing societal challenges. The cross-sector nature of their interventions can further amplify harm, for example, by granting companies entrusted access to public systems (Crane, 2010) or vulnerable communities (Olwig, 2021). Likewise, CSP interventions sometimes rely on actors who lack a societal mandate or public-interest expertise, such as companies or philanthropic donors (Thumler, 2011). This raises the risk that they overlook potential unintended harms.

Finally, the organizational dark-side literature identifies antecedents of harmful effects in the form of systemic and structural deficiencies, including power dynamics, domination, resistance, and ideology (Devinney, 2009; Linstead et al., 2014), as well as process-related shortcomings, such as insufficient control mechanisms in public innovation initiatives (Meijer & Thaens, 2021). This focus on actors and structural design aligns with CSP research, which has examined governance shortcomings (George et al., 2024; Sadri et al., 2025), power imbalances (Gray et al., 2022), accountability gaps (Bäckstrand, 2006), and decision-making structures (Awan et al., 2025; Ungureanu et al., 2019), though these have not been systematically linked to societal harm. Together, these insights underscore the importance of examining not only the harmful effects of CSPs but also the intervention mechanisms and partnership antecedents that give rise to them.

CSPs' Societal Harm: The Remaining Research Puzzle

Building on the CSP and broader organizational literatures helps delineate the specific nature of societal harm and the need to explore what it entails, and how and why it arises when CSPs address societal challenges. Such harm may manifest in diverse and context-dependent ways. However, in extant research, it often surfaces as an ancillary finding rather than as a central analytical focus, with insights dispersed across disciplines such as management (Vestergaard et al., 2020), public administration (Van Gestel & Grotenbreg, 2021), nonprofit studies (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012), sustainability (Begum et al., 2021), and development research (Olwig, 2021). The conceptual diversity and disciplinary fragmentation obscure recurring patterns and limit the cumulative development of knowledge, contributing to societal harm remaining a systematically underrecognized dimension of CSPs' overall impact.

Linking harm to mechanisms further requires clarifying who produced an effect and how it occurred. We draw on an interventionist understanding of mechanisms as observable elements that intervene between an antecedent and its outcome and help explain how effects arise (Cornelissen & Werner, 2026). Yet, societal harm poses attribution challenges because CSPs intervene in contexts already marked by societal problems and potential confounding influences (Brinkerhoff, 2002; Van Tulder et al., 2016). Attribution therefore requires focusing on the additional harm associated with CSPs, while acknowledging the interaction between their interventions and pre-existing conditions. Against this background, we aim to develop a more comprehensive understanding of CSPs' societal harm, one that captures its diverse manifestations, identifies patterns in respective interventions and the CSP-related antecedents, while accounting for attribution challenges.

Methods

Guided by this research aim, we conducted a qualitative meta-analysis, a method for reanalyzing and synthesizing primary qualitative data from case studies (Habersang & Reihlen, 2025). This method is well-suited when qualitative studies provide evidence on a phenomenon, though in a fragmented manner (Hoon, 2013). Indeed, current CSP literature predominantly relies on qualitative single or comparative case studies (Clarke & Crane, 2018), which offer partial insights into CSPs' societal harm but do not systematically uncover underlying patterns. Our focus on qualitative studies is further motivated by our interest in contextualized empirical evidence. Relevant conceptual studies informed our theoretical grounding and quantitative studies were used to complement our understanding of the topic, but were not included in the analysis. Specifically, our cross-check on quantitative research revealed few studies using societal-harm-related outcome variables. Those that did either measured degradation across CSPs rather than over time or lacked information on specific interventions (Baudoin & Gittins, 2021; Trencher et al., 2014), thereby limiting the ability to attribute observed harms to CSP interventions.

Finally, a qualitative meta-analysis serves our research aim by enabling the identification of within and cross-case patterns through the reanalysis of rich, contextualized primary accounts (Hoon, 2013). It allows researchers to categorize existing evidence while inductively generating new interpretations and theoretical insights (Albertsen, 2025; Habersang & Reihlen, 2025). In our study, this involved tracing how flaws in societal interventions acted as mechanisms generating specific forms of societal harm and connecting these patterns to CSP antecedents. Unlike quantitative meta-analysis, the objective is not empirical generalization but the integration of contextual depth with theoretical abstraction to develop a more nuanced understanding of the elements, relationships, and complexities underlying the observed patterns. We next outline how we applied the established steps of search, selection, analysis, and synthesis (Habersang & Reihlen, 2025; see also Supplemental Appendix A).

Search Criteria and Case Selection

To identify suitable case studies, we used five criteria: (a) study of a CSP, (b) qualitative research design, (c) evidence of CSPs' societal harm, and published (d) in a highly ranked management journal, (e) between 2000 and 2023 (including online first). Building on our earlier definition of CSPs, eligible qualitative studies had to provide evidence of their social, environmental, and/or system-related harm; that is, detrimental effects that negatively impact

society, including individuals, communities, natural ecosystems, and social, economic, and political systems (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012). Cases referring only to potential negative effects, without empirical demonstration, were excluded.

We focused on cases published in management studies, as our goal was not only to identify societal harm but also to understand intervention-related decisions, actions, and partnership antecedents, thus evidence most commonly examined in management research. As our societal lens simultaneously requires an interdisciplinary approach, we used the Academic Journal Guide, which includes management journals, as well as outlets intersecting with development, social, and environmental studies (Chartered Association of Business Schools, 2021). To ensure methodological rigor, we selected case studies from journals ranked 3, 4, and 4* (Hoon, 2013). Our search covered publications from 2000 to 2023, reflecting the global rise of CSP practices and scholarship after the millennium (Clarke & Crane, 2018). In systematically searching for cases meeting these criteria, we first built on the author team's broader CSP literature review (Stadtler et al., 2024), covering studies from 2000 to 2020, and narrowed this sample to cases with evidence of CSPs' societal harm (first round). We then updated the dataset to include studies from 2020 to 2023 (second round), employing identical criteria to the first round.

In both rounds, we conducted a title- and abstract-level keyword search in line with the quality and time criteria across Scopus, EBSCO Academic Source Complete, EBSCO Business Source Complete, ProQuest, and Web of Science. While we used a broad set of terms to identify CSPs (see Figure 1), we did not employ keyword searches for societal harm. A scoping exercise showed that some studies contained evidence of CSP-related societal harm without explicitly labeling these effects as negative. Using terms such as adverse, damage, harm, or exploit would therefore have omitted cases requiring contextual interpretation to recognize the reported effects as negative and undesirable.

For example, in their study of a refugee-integration CSP, Hesse et al. (2019, p. 695) quote an interviewee: "Integration courses, the subsidiary asylum decisions, job orientation, all this is chaotic. It did not become easier. Quite the contrary. First aid and arrival support were easier. [. . .] And there was more common sense and intention to help them." Although these insights point to negative effects on refugee-integration systems, the authors did not frame them as such. Consequently, we decided to first apply a keyword search targeting CSPs' societal outcomes more broadly (see Figure 1) and then screen these cases for evidence of societal harm with a full-text review

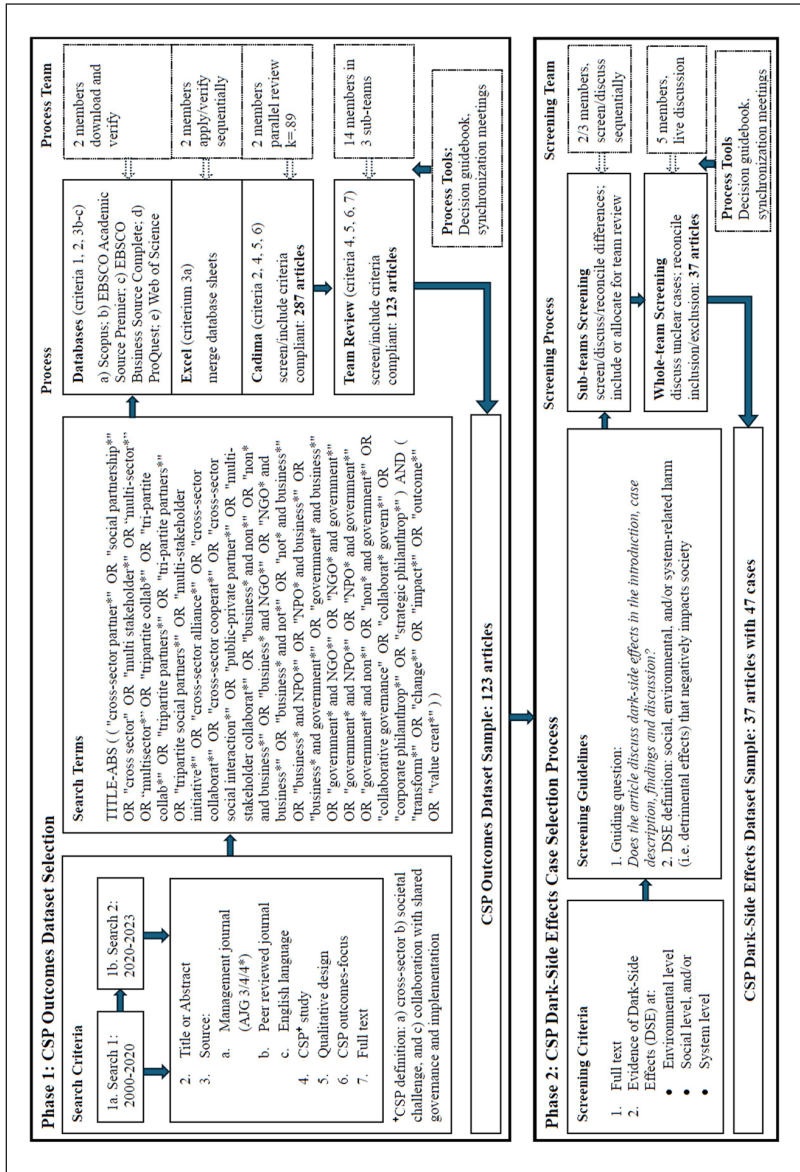


Figure 1. Case Selection Process.

(see above). We validated our CSP and societal-outcome keywords with a group of 14 CSP scholars.

We exported the article lists from each database into Excel, consolidated them, and removed duplicates. Using CADIMA¹ software, we screened titles and abstracts for a CSP focus, qualitative case design, and indication of social, environmental, or system-related effects, yielding 287 articles. Next, at least two authors independently conducted a full-text review of each article, with inclusion–exclusion decisions made in pairs and, when needed, in consultation with an additional author or the full team. This stage led to the exclusion of 164 articles: 91 articles (55%) analyzed a form of collaboration that did not meet our CSP definition, 36 (22%) were not qualitative, case-based, and 64 (39%) did not report any relevant societal effects.

Using the remaining 123 articles, we conducted a separate round of analysis to identify evidence of societal harm, which required a detailed understanding of each CSP's empirical setting. We excluded articles reporting only CSP ineffectiveness without showing negative social, environmental, or system-related consequences, as well as cases describing conflict or power imbalances without evidence of resulting societal harm, such as to beneficiaries or systems. Using the same article-author pair allocation, complemented by full team discussions, we excluded an additional 86 articles. We thus retained 37 articles that featured evidence of societal harm for 47 CSPs. Figure 1 illustrates the selection process. To ensure rigor and consistency, we developed a decision guide with criteria and examples, jointly reviewed three articles as a calibration exercise, had a third author double-check at least two decisions per pair, and discussed challenging cases in regular full-team meetings.

To describe our sample of 47 CSP cases (see Supplemental Appendix B for the complete list), we coded their contextual attributes, including partnership characteristics and publication details. Geographically, the case CSPs were primarily based in Africa (32%), Europe (21%), Asia (17%), and North America (13%). In terms of partner composition, nonprofit-business-government partnerships were the most frequent (26%), followed by nonprofit-business partnerships (21%). Overall, 83% of the CSPs involved nonprofit partners, 83% included business-sector partners, 79% featured public-sector partners, and 34% had citizen representation (e.g., community associations). Of the cases, 55% were published before 2020 and 45% since 2020, indicating a notable increase in CSPs' documented societal harm in recent years.

Analysis and Synthesis of Evidence

To analyze and synthesize case insights, we followed a four-step approach: extraction, coding, pattern analysis, and interpretation (see Figure 2) guided

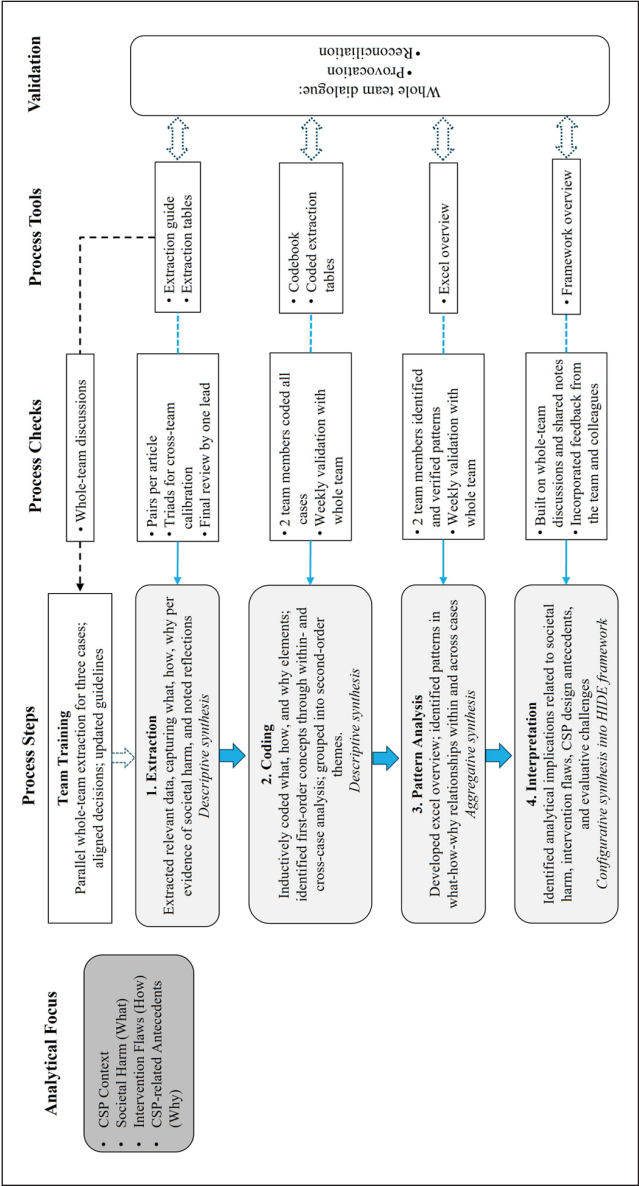


Figure 2. A Four-Step Approach to Analyzing Evidence of Societal Harm.

by complementary synthesis rationales (Habersang & Reihlen, 2025). Extraction and coding followed a descriptive rationale, identifying common concepts and themes across primary data using a grounded theory approach (Gioia et al., 2013). We then moved to an aggregative synthesis to examine how effects, mechanisms, and antecedents of societal harm were related within and across cases (Combs et al., 2019). In the final interpretive step, we applied a configurative logic to “mesh rather than merge” case findings into a broader theoretical perspective (Habersang & Reihlen, 2025).

Specifically, in Step 1, we extracted relevant information into data tables, capturing (a) contextual details about the CSP, (b) evidence indicating social, environmental, or system-related harm, and (c) insights into how and why these effects occurred. The “how” refers to the CSP’s interactions with its environment generating the harm (i.e., intervention flaws), and the “why” to CSP-internal conditions shaping these flaws (i.e., CSP-related antecedents). We extracted contextual elements to the data tables and organized each what–how–why pattern in a single row to capture the interconnected insights.

We also recorded interpretive notes in a separate column. For instance, in five cases, we identified negative societal effects not explicitly labeled as such by the authors. We extracted these passages, discussed our interpretations, and marked them as “own interpretation” where aligned with our definition of societal harm. Overall, we extracted only passages describing harm explicitly linked to a CSP and substantiated by evidence. We thereby considered both direct and indirect effects as relevant (Stadtler, 2016), provided they could be attributed to the CSP (e.g., evidence of how a CSP’s effect on a stakeholder group spurs community conflicts). Hence, “indirect” does not refer to unclear connections, but to reported ripple effects, where a CSP’s impact on one stakeholder or ecosystem affects another (Stadtler, 2016; Van Tulder et al., 2016). To ensure consistency in extraction, the team jointly coded three initial cases, then proceeded in pairs, with additional cross-checks, shared extraction guidelines, and systematic alternation between sub-team and full-team discussions.

In the second step, two authors inductively coded the extraction tables for the “what,” “how,” and “why” of societal harm, revisiting original articles for context when needed. We first classified the three interrelated elements in the context of each case, then compared across cases to identify first-order concepts (Gioia et al., 2013). A shared codebook with evolving definitions of these concepts to ensure consistency and probe our understanding supported this process. After consultation with the whole team, we explored the logical underpinning of these concepts. This led us to cluster the evidence of societal harm into effect types across three levels. We also grouped mechanisms into three intervention flaws and categorized CSP-related antecedents as actor- or

structure-centric. Figure 3 presents our coding structure, refined through multiple rounds of author discussion and iterative within and cross-case analysis.

In the third step, we shifted from descriptive to aggregative synthesis (Habersang & Reihlen, 2025) to identify recurring patterns in how effects, mechanisms, and antecedents related within cases. We created an Excel table linking each case's "what" codes with corresponding "how" and "why" codes. Cases could appear multiple times if they involved more than one effect of societal harm or if these effects related to multiple mechanisms or antecedents. Using this table, we analyzed cross-case patterns in the second-order themes and their relationships, iterating between steps two and three. On this basis, we developed Figures 4 and 5, which illustrate the why-how-what patterns. The numbers in Figure 5 indicate the number of cases that exhibited each why-how and how-what pattern.

In the fourth step, we integrated our findings into a broader theoretical whole (Omanović & Langley, 2021), focusing on the "so-what" of the analysis in light of our research motivation. Our discussions centered on recognizing the diversity of societal harm (H), unpacking attribution challenges (Intervention flaws), and identifying recurring antecedents in CSP design (D), as well as the patterns linking these elements. We integrated these insights into a structured framework for assessing CSPs' societal harm. Our interpretive notes and discussions also sensitized us to the complexity of evaluating such effects, which are often context-dependent and contested. We therefore added a fourth pillar on evaluative challenges to the framework (E), capturing boundary conditions and prompting reflection on how societal harm is evaluated. These insights, refined through iterative team and colleague discussions, culminated in the HIDE framework, which integrates our what-how-why analysis into a mechanism-based approach to analyzing CSPs' societal harm and informing future research and analysis.

Findings: Uncovering Patterns of CSPs' Societal Harm

We first present the evidence of societal harm and examine the mechanisms through which these effects unfold, highlighting specific intervention flaws. We then show how these flaws connect to partnership-related antecedents. Figure 4 gives an overview of these elements, Figure 5 of the main patterns, and Supplemental Appendix C provides definitions and examples.

The "What": Three Levels of Societal Harm

Evidence of CSPs' societal harm manifested across three societal levels: harm experienced by individuals and communities; harm affecting political,

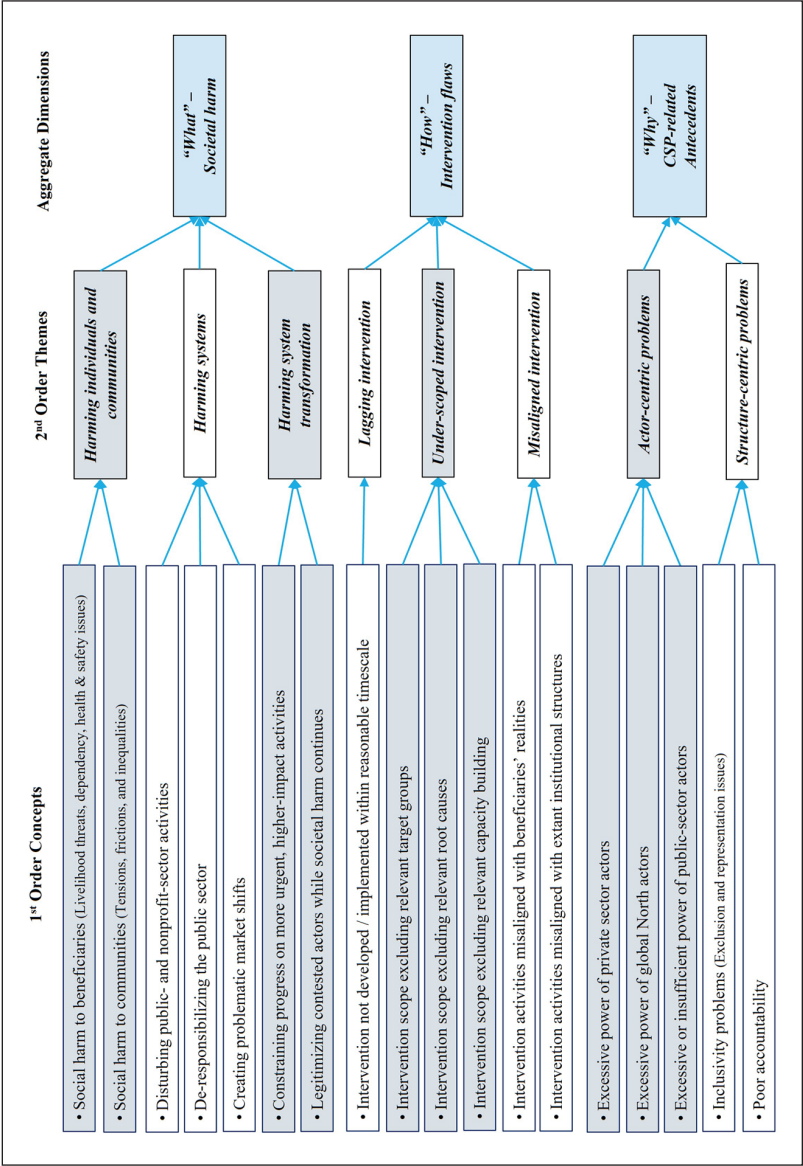


Figure 3. Coding Structure.

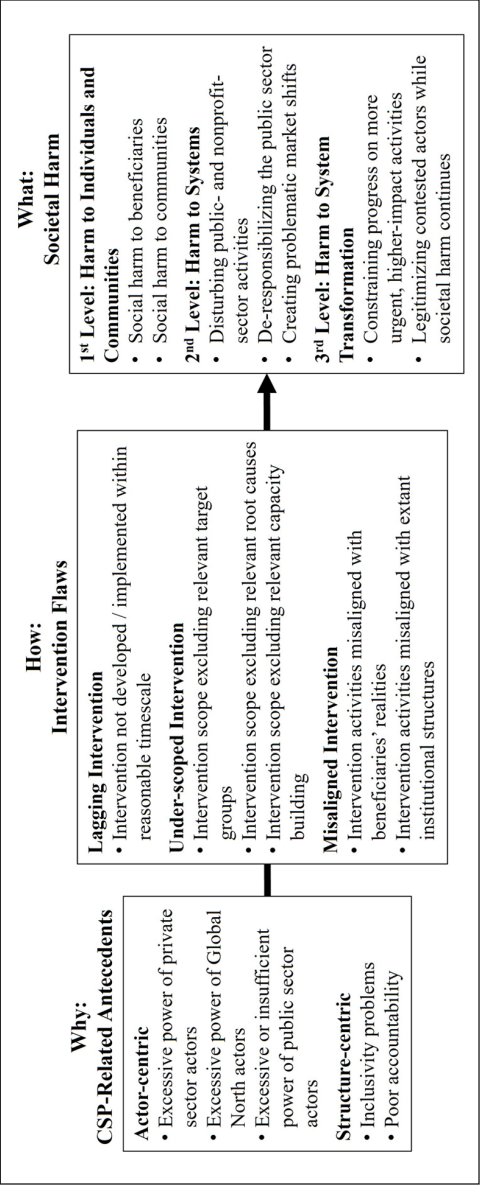


Figure 4. Explaining CSPs' Societal Harm.
Note. CSP = cross-sector partnership.

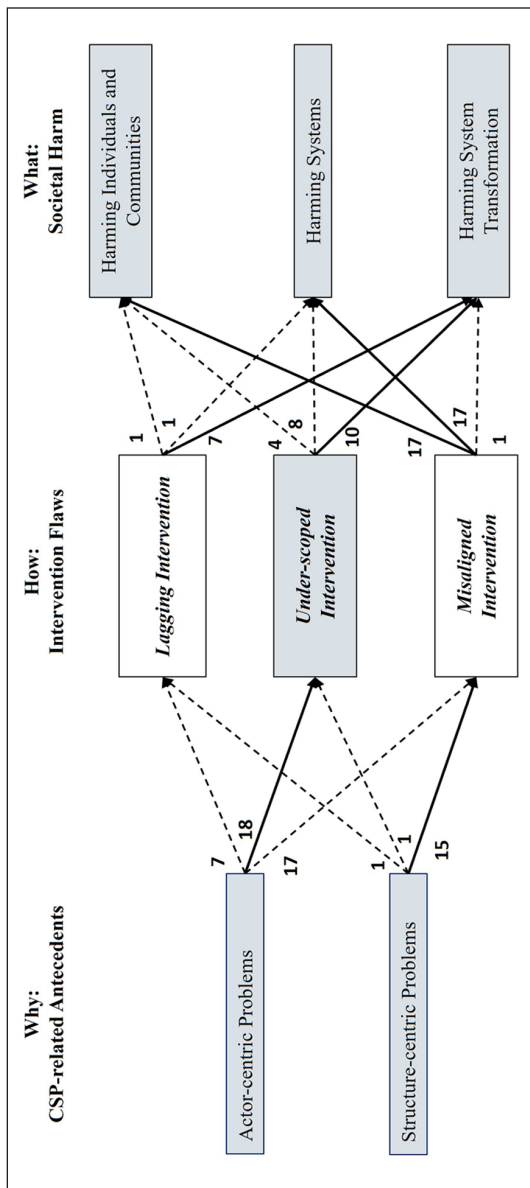


Figure 5. Linking the “Why,” “How,” and “What” of CSPs’ Societal Harm.
 Note. Numbers correspond to the number of cases in which each pattern occurred; solid lines indicate the most frequent patterns. CSP = cross-sector partnership.

social, and economic systems; and harm obstructing transformation toward more sustainable and equitable systems. Harm inflicted at these levels differed in both its temporal manifestation, ranging from immediate to long-term, and its scope, encompassing progressively broader components of society.

First Level: Harm to Individuals and Communities. Although intended to serve so-called beneficiaries, several partnerships in our sample showed evidence of harm affecting individuals through livelihood threats, dependency, and health and safety issues. For instance, livelihood threats and individual dependency arose in poverty-alleviation value chain partnerships, such as when farmers had “taken on substantial loans to invest in a new crop for which there [was] only one available buyer, and [were] expressing dissatisfaction with the arrangements” (Thorpe, 2018, p. 171) or experienced harmful delays in payment (Rodríguez et al., 2016). Similar effects appeared in conservation CSPs that reduced local income sources without offering viable alternatives (Begum et al., 2021; Powell et al., 2018; Rice, 2022). For example, Mustalahti and Rakotonarivo (2014, p. 206) stated in the context of a reforestation CSP in Tanzania that “local communities appeared to unknowingly [. . .] accept payments that undervalue the true opportunity costs of the land use foregone.” Harm also emerged in the form of health and safety concerns in CSPs that offered or facilitated employment. For instance, one CSP employed local women in bead production, which involved crushing glass and working with hot ovens, yet failed to provide health insurance (Vestergaard et al., 2020). Refugee-focused CSPs promoted jobs considered undesirable by local populations and associated with exploitation risks (Karakulak & Faul, 2024).

Several cases further showed how CSP activities intensified social tensions and inequalities, generating conflict, jealousy, or division within and between communities (Laeis & Lemke, 2016; Vestergaard et al., 2020). Conservation CSPs contributed to inter-village marginalization (Rice, 2022), and a CSP-linked self-help group became a tool for pre-election promotion, causing confusion and resentment (De Wit & Berner, 2009). Other studies cautioned that CSP interventions enhanced inequalities. For instance, a CSP to foster integrated science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in education eventually “reinforced existing social hierarchies” (Ben David & Rubel-Lifschitz, 2023, p. 2049) due to prerequisites and access conditions that underprivileged students could not fulfill.

Overall, harm at the individual and community level manifested primarily through heightened social and economic vulnerabilities, such as precarious income and employment, unreliable dependence on aid or intermediaries,

health and safety risks, and weakened social cohesion. To our surprise, we found no evidence of CSPs worsening local environmental indicators (e.g., water, soil, air, biodiversity), a point we return to in the discussion.

Second Level: Harm to Societal Systems. Our analysis also revealed harm affecting extant societal systems, primarily through disruptions to nonprofit and public-sector activities and through market distortions. Disruptions to public and nonprofit services were particularly evident in CSPs focused on health, education, and social integration, where business and philanthropic involvement undermined or displaced established service delivery mechanisms (Buse & Harmer, 2007; Gebre-Mariam & Bygstad, 2019; Henriksen, 2024; Thumler, 2011). For example, a refugee-focused CSP diverted humanitarian staff attention and time from field-defined priorities through unsolicited donations (Karakulak & Faul, 2024). Global health partnerships disturbed public-sector priorities in developing countries by “imposing those of donor partners” and “wasting resources through inadequate use of recipient country systems and poor harmonization” (Buse & Harmer, 2007, p. 263, 259).

Harm also emerged in the form of public-sector dependencies on business or nonprofit actors, undermining the reliable functioning of public systems and services. An e-health CSP in Ethiopia, for instance, relied on software updates by a nongovernment organization (NGO), resulting in delays and disruptions in public health operations (Gebre-Mariam & Bygstad, 2019). CSPs also undermined public-sector responsibilities (Begum et al., 2021; Ng et al., 2023; Szulecki et al., 2011). For example, they served as platforms to conceal or enable corruption, thereby undermining the enforcement of public regulations. Cases described cartel-like practices observed in a CSP in the oil industry (Szulecki et al., 2011), fraudulent land-claim legalization in a palm-oil CSP (Ng et al., 2023), and the intertwining of a CSP with governmental corruption as indicated in a forest management CSP (Begum et al., 2021). Other cases showed how CSPs allowed governments to bypass public deliberation (Harsman, 2024). For example, Chorianopoulos and Tselepi (2019) concluded their analysis of poverty alleviation CSPs in Greece by highlighting that these “serve[d] as a token of a de-politicized approach to austerity” (p. 93) and “inhibite[d] public deliberation [. . .], [as] evident in the absence of citizen activists from municipal collaborative arrangements” (p. 92).

A third form of systems-level harm involved market distortions, such as incentivizing increased consumption (Watson et al., 2020) or weakening local value chains (Hedberg & Lounsbury, 2021). For example, a CSP addressing malnutrition through food fortification intervened in local markets, inadvertently excluding “small and medium-sized domestic food

producers and companies that lack[ed] the fortification knowledge and technology” (Stadtler & Karakulak, 2022, p. 627).

Third Level: Harm to System Transformation. Our evidence also indicates that CSPs can hinder system transformation, primarily by constraining progress on urgent, higher-impact activities and by reducing pressure on contested actors to take action. One way this occurs is by diverting resources and attention from urgent, higher-impact activities toward interventions with limited issue-based value. For example, Szulecki et al. (2011) found that many energy CSPs pursued activities unrelated to their environmental core functions with resources missing for more urgent activities. In a similar vein, Bitzer et al. (2008, p. 277) noted that coffee-chain CSPs “obstruct approaching problems [. . .] [as] some of the most pressuring issues, such as overproduction and the imbalances in power, remain unaddressed.” A second facet of transformation-related harm involves the legitimization of contested private actors or industries despite limited progress on the societal issue (Powell et al., 2018; Thumler, 2011), thereby reducing external pressure for change. In some cases, CSPs even provided platforms for lobbying or shielding corporate interests. For instance, Idemudia (2017, p. 8) observed that a CSP addressing gas flaring and oil spills had “been able to calm other radical NGOs,” effectively insulating the oil company from activist scrutiny.

This overview highlights the diverse and layered nature of societal harm from observable social effects on individuals and communities to harder-to-measure system-level and future-oriented consequences affecting broader societal segments. The levels are interrelated (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012), and ripple effects may emerge over time. About one-quarter of the cases showed effects across levels, though few spanned all three. Recognizing this diversity is a first step; understanding how these harms occur leads us to examine related intervention flaws and how they act as mechanism linked to partnership antecedents.

Linking the “What” and the “How”: Intervention Flaws

Focusing on how CSPs produce societal harm, we identified flaws related to the pace, scope, and nature of their intervention activities.

Lagging intervention relates to the pace of intervention, referring to partners’ failure to develop and implement a solution within a reasonable time-frame. Such lagging or delayed engagement with the societal problem proved harmful, for example, in neighborhood CSPs, where lack of progress led residents with greater social capital to leave because they believed that “basics will not be adequately addressed in reasonable time scales,” thereby risking

“exacerbat[ing] the remaining level of deprivation” (Cornelius & Wallace, 2010, p. 77). A lagging intervention was evident in particular in environmental conservation CSPs, where extended negotiation and planning phases over 7 years or more preceded any concrete action. This prolonged process shielded or lent legitimacy to contested actors (Brisbois et al., 2019; Cooper & Wardropper, 2021; Idemudia, 2017; Lund-Thomsen, 2009; Szulecki et al., 2011), concealing the lack of progress behind numerous meetings and discussions. These insights revealed a key pattern linking this intervention flaw especially to the counteraction of system transformation efforts (third level).

Under-scoped intervention, the second type of flaw, reflects scope deficiency in interventions that proved too narrow by excluding certain target groups, root causes, or capacity-building needs. A common example involved prioritizing easier-to-reach groups while excluding more urgent or vulnerable ones, especially in CSPs that replaced formerly broad public services. Employment-focused CSPs, for instance, primarily supported well-equipped job seekers, helping employers fill vacancies but “[leaving] behind the job seekers who do not immediately fit vacancies” (Van Gestel & Grotenbreg, 2021, p. 259). Such narrowing of target groups often exacerbated social tensions and deepened existing inequalities.

Scope deficiency is also related to interventions that ignored critical root causes of the societal problem. In conservation CSPs, for example, partners excluded measures that could constrain industry growth, allowing pollution to continue at the expense of community rights (Brisbois et al., 2019). In coffee-chain CSPs, a narrow sustainability definition overlooked key problem components such as overproduction and power imbalances, ultimately legitimizing multinational enterprises rather than addressing structural problems (Bitzer et al., 2008). Similarly, fishing-industry interventions excluded tackling overfishing and instead focused on waste-based value creation and efficiency improvements (Pavlovich & Akoorie, 2010), legitimizing industry actors without meaningfully altering their harmful practices.

A third form of scope deficiency involved omitting necessary capacity-building efforts, such as developing infrastructure or empowerment mechanisms. This appeared, for example, in interventions that excluded IT capacity building in public health services, creating unreliable dependencies on business and nonprofit actors (Gebre-Mariam & Bygstad, 2019). In education CSPs, interventions were limited to symbolic, small-scale, and time-bound actions that enhanced the legitimacy of philanthropic partners while diverting school management’s attention away from long-term capacity development (Thumler, 2011). Among the cases of under-scoped intervention, omission of root causes and of capacity building were the most frequent, disrupting existing systems and hindering their transformation.

Misaligned intervention. This flaw stems from misalignment between the characteristics of the intervention activities and beneficiaries' geographical, economic, cultural, or systemic contexts, or with extant systems and initiatives. Such misfits can be economic, for example, when interventions rely on income-generation models that do not match local economic realities. Inappropriate payment structures or harvest-collection mechanisms were introduced that produced irregular or opaque compensation schemes (Begum et al., 2021; Mustalahti & Rakotonarivo, 2014; Rice, 2022; Rodríguez et al., 2016; Thorpe, 2018) and created livelihood threats and dependency. Misfit can also be cultural or place-sensitive. Examples include interventions that, by relocating production to centralized offices and excluding traditional craft methods, impeded community skill transfer and eroded traditional craft practices (Vestergaard et al., 2020). Likewise, establishing centers for rape survivors revealed a place-related design flaw that inadvertently reinforced stigmatization "while failing to address the protection needs of a vulnerable population" (Budabin & Hudson, 2021, p. 11).

Another form of misaligned intervention involved misalignment with extant social systems and initiatives. In several cases, interventions conflicted with the priorities and ongoing work of public or nonprofit actors. This flaw was particularly visible in humanitarian contexts (Buse & Harmer, 2007; Karakulak & Faul, 2024; Stadler & Karakulak, 2022), where interventions conflicted with local priorities and disrupted existing health or relief operations. Some interventions were insufficiently attuned to corrupt environments (Begum et al., 2021; De Wit & Berner, 2009; Ng et al., 2023; Szulecki et al., 2011), inadvertently concealing collusion and contributing to the erosion of public-sector accountability. Overall, misaligned interventions had two main effects: they undermined individuals' well-being when activities did not align with beneficiary needs, and they disrupted existing systems when they conflicted with local priorities and ongoing operations.

These flaws help explain how CSPs generate societal harm: lagging interventions often involved blocking factors or complexities that prevented intervention formation and implementation; under-scooped interventions reflected choices about which problem dimensions to address or omit; and misaligned interventions were defined by failures (whether through ignorance or oversight) to align activities with local contextual conditions. The same intervention may thereby exhibit different flaws, such as shown in 12 cases. To understand what gives rise to these flaws, we next examine the partnership-related antecedents.

Linking the "How" to the "Why": CSP Antecedents of Societal Harm

We identified two types of CSP-related antecedents: actor- and structure-centric.

Actor Centric Antecedents. Our analysis reveals problematic power constellations particularly where private-sector, Global North, and public-sector actors shaped CSP interventions according to their own preferences, resulting in design or implementation flaws that generated societal harm. As “power” is inherently relational (Emerson, 1962), an actor’s dominance reflects an imbalance vis-à-vis its partners. For example, private-sector dominance may thus indicate limited countervailing power among public or nonprofit partners. The insights discussed here therefore depend partly on the case-study authors’ analytical entry point, including whether they focus on one actor’s dominance or another’s lack of countervailing power.

Excessive private-sector power was typically linked to firms’ substantial financial resources, which enabled them to promote their own products or services within the CSP (Henriksen, 2024; Karakulak & Faul, 2024; Laeis & Lemke, 2016), resulting in misaligned interventions. Their influence was also pronounced when their business operations were themselves part of the social or environmental problem that the CSP sought to address (Brisbois et al., 2019; Hessevick, 2022; Idemudia, 2017; Pavlovich & Akoorie, 2010; Powell et al., 2018). In such cases, their dominant position, coupled with arguments about potential job losses or economic decline, led to lagging or under-scoped interventions that avoided confronting the root causes. For example, in a value-chain CSP addressing sustainability issues in Indonesia’s tin industry, the “aims were constrained from the outset by an overarching commitment to protecting rather than challenging prevailing models of resource extraction” (Diprose et al., 2022, p. 800). These dynamics tended to shield contested companies or industries from scrutiny and ultimately reinforced the status quo.

In international development CSPs across the Global South (e.g., Congo, Ghana, Madagascar, South Africa), Global North actors—including businesses, foundations, and development agencies—often exercised disproportionate influence, enabled by their substantial financial contributions and their role in initiating the partnerships. This positional advantage allowed them to steer intervention choices from the outset. Such Global-North-centric approaches frequently resulted in interventions misaligned with beneficiaries’ social realities (Budabin & Hudson, 2021) or with local contexts, for example by clashing with national health priorities (Buse & Harmer, 2007; Stadtler & Karakulak, 2022).

Other cases highlight the excessive or insufficient power of public-sector actors. For example, the latter used CSPs to obscure responsibilities or advance self-interests, such as election-related agendas, rather than serving the public good (Harsman, 2024; Hesse et al., 2019). Motivated by fears of losing influence or economic opportunities (Ng et al., 2023), or of attracting public scrutiny, they shaped partnerships to maintain control. For instance,

one CSP responding to a refugee crisis was deliberately constrained by public actors seeking to buy time, set the policy agenda, and bypass consensus-building (Harsman, 2024). As a result, the CSP merely “cushioned” (p. 29) the issue while shifting blame to migrant organizations portrayed as unprofessional.

In other instances, public-sector partners lacked the competencies and resources needed to act in the public interest (Chorianopoulos & Tselepi, 2019; Davies & White, 2012). These capacity constraints often led them to delegate core functions to partners who lacked the mandate or capability to safeguard societal welfare (Chorianopoulos & Tselepi, 2019; Van Gestel & Grotenbreg, 2021). Additionally, political disputes over cost-sharing and bureaucratic hurdles (Cornelius & Wallace, 2010; Lund-Thomsen, 2009) generated lagging intervention. Yet, cases linking societal harm to public-sector deficiencies most commonly featured under-scoped intervention, especially the neglect of capacity building, as well as misaligned intervention that disrupted existing systems. Overall, we observed actor-centric antecedents across all three types of intervention flaws, indicating that excessive or insufficient power can yield varied pathways to societal harm. In contrast, structure-centric antecedents had a more uniform impact on intervention design, and thus societal harm, as we explain next.

Structure-Centric Antecedents linked intervention flaws to CSP governance shortcomings, particularly limited inclusivity and weak accountability. These shortcomings typically produced misaligned interventions that conflicted with beneficiary needs or local context conditions. Inclusivity problems arose when Indigenous or local community members were excluded from decision-making, as in several conservation CSPs (Cooper & Wardropper, 2021; Powell et al., 2018). They also appeared through subtler forms of silencing, such as deprioritizing women’s voices in meetings (Begum et al., 2021) or using technical language that made discussions inaccessible to non-professional participants (Powell et al., 2018). In other cases, participants at the table were neither representative of nor accountable to the groups they claimed to represent (De Wit & Berner, 2009; Mustalahti & Rakotonarivo, 2014; Thorpe, 2018), leading them to overlook negative impacts on these constituencies (Lund-Thomsen, 2009; Rice, 2022). Sometimes local or farmer representatives were consulted only after key decisions had already been made (Thorpe, 2018). These patterns show that inclusivity concerns both the timing and extent of stakeholder engagement (Bäckstrand, 2006). It cannot be reduced to simply “having a seat at the table” (Larson et al., 2022); meaningful participation also requires appropriate influence, genuine representativeness, and the resources and skills needed to participate effectively.

Accountability problems, in turn, stemmed from CSPs creating hidden or opaque decision-making (Diprose et al., 2022). These arose especially in the absence of effective evaluation and control mechanisms (Idemudia, 2017; Lund-Thomsen, 2009; Szulecki et al., 2011) and in contexts shaped by favoritism (Begum et al., 2021; De Wit & Berner, 2009; Ng et al., 2023). These shortcomings often produced interventions poorly aligned with local conditions, disrupting existing systems and activities. Several studies in our sample explicitly theorized these antecedents, drawing on theories of power and institutional logics (actor-centric) as well as procedural and social justice and deliberative democracy (structure-centric). Our analysis directs attention to the implications of problematic CSP characteristics, showing that they contribute to societal harm by impacting the design and implementation of CSP interventions.

Uncovering Societal Harms Through an Intervention Perspective

Our qualitative meta-analysis systematizes how CSP-related harm manifests across societal levels and over time, and explains how these effects arise by identifying intervention flaws that link them to CSP antecedents. Misaligned intervention emerges as the most common flaw, typically generating harm for individuals, communities, and existing systems. In contrast, system transformation is primarily hindered by under-scoped and lagging interventions. These latter flaws largely tie to actor-centric antecedents, whereas misaligned intervention is associated with both actor- and structure-centric problems.

Drawing on 47 case studies, our qualitative analysis yields three key insights. First, manifestations of societal harm are diverse, yet follow recurring patterns. Second, focusing on intervention flaws helps clarify attribution challenges related to whether and how CSPs contribute to harm. Third, actor- and structure-centric design problems give rise to specific intervention flaws, suggesting that mitigating harm may require not only correcting these flaws but also addressing underlying CSP design shortcomings to prevent their recurrence. Linking intervention flaws to design shortcomings is critical for explaining why such mechanisms arise, strengthening attribution, and advancing more systematic approaches to harm mitigation. We next integrate our findings into an intervention framework to draw greater attention to the analytical and theoretical implications of our analysis. Based on four pillars (societal Harm, Intervention flaws, Design antecedents, and Evaluative challenges), this framework is designed to help scholars “unhide” societal harm and engage with the analytical complexities involved (see Table 1). It is

Table 1. Advancing an Intervention Perspective on Societal Harm: The HIDE Framework.

HIDE pillars		Societal harm	Intervention flaws	Design antecedents	Evaluative challenges
Analytical focus		Societal harm (i.e., social, environmental, and/or systemic, undesirable, direct or indirect, immediate or long-term in nature)	Intervention flaws generating societal harm	Antecedents in CSP design	Boundary conditions (e.g., ontological, normative, interpretative) that complicate the evaluation of societal harm
Guiding questions		Where and in what forms does societal harm occur? (e.g., social, environmental, or system-related harm to individuals, the natural environment, systems, and/or transformation efforts)	What mechanism produced the harm, and why is it problematic? (e.g., lagging, under-scope, and misaligned interventions)	What conditions related to the partners' shared governance and coordination (i.e., CSP design) led to the creation of intervention flaws? (e.g., actor- and structure-centric antecedents)	What constitutes societal harm, and from whose perspective? Who is responsible, and could it have been avoided? How should harm be evaluated relative to overall impact?
Research implications		Enhancing conceptual clarity: • Revealing the multifaceted, multilevel manifestations of societal harm. • Acknowledging their temporal and societal scope.	Addressing associative attribution challenges and advancing mechanism-based explanations: • Linking societal effects and partnership-centric antecedents by focusing on problematic actions and decisions manifest in societal interventions.	Unpacking CSP design effects: • Exploring how intervention flaws stem from CSP design, linking governance and coordination challenges to societal harm. • Distinguishing actor- and structure-centric design problems and their implications for intervention pace, scope, and alignment.	Addressing evaluative boundary conditions: • Moving beyond identifying and explaining societal harm to acknowledging its contested and situated nature. • Advancing reflexive and pluralistic theorizing.
Research avenues		Deepening understanding of societal harm: • How do CSPs generate environmental harm, and how does it relate to social and systemic effects? • What are the long-term and cumulative effects of societal harm across different levels? • How can interdisciplinary and locally anchored approaches improve the analysis of CSPs' societal harm?	Scrutinizing interventions: • How do intervention flaws interact? • What are the implications of differing intervention designs and decision-making processes? • What dynamics (e.g., escalating or improving) result from correcting intervention flaws? • What does comparative analysis reveal about context-sensitive intervention designs (incl. inherent trade-offs)?	Investigating CSP design implications: • How do variations in actor composition, power distributions, and coordination shape the emergence and mitigation of intervention flaws? • How do CSPs relate to corporate and cross-sector political activity, and when and how do they become spaces for bribery or favoritism and with what societal implications?	Exploring evaluative challenges: • How do partners engage with the contested and situated nature of societal harm, and with what effects? • When and how do actors use CSPs or alternative initiatives to disrupt entrenched power structures? • How are different evaluation approaches of CSPs' net outcomes applied in practice, and what are the implications?

Note. CSP = cross-sector partnership.

structured along the what, how, and why dimensions, starting with evidence of harm as the analytical entry point and concluding with evaluative challenges to provide boundary conditions for how such effects are interpreted and assessed.

Societal Harm (H)

Our analysis advances extant understanding of societal harm and helps delineate it from related concepts, such as costs and ineffectiveness. Building on CSP effect frameworks (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; Stadtler, 2016; Vestergaard et al., 2021), we conceptually outlined its social, environmental, and system-related, as well as multi-level nature. Our meta-analysis then helped systematize empirical evidence of societal harm across levels and over time (with the exception of additional environmental harm). The results reveal a multifaceted phenomenon, including social damage, disruptions to public and nonprofit activities, erosion of public-sector responsibility, problematic market shifts, constraints on more urgent or higher-impact activities, and the legitimization of contested actors despite ongoing harm. Societal harm may thereby also manifest at individual and organizational levels, yet its social, environmental, and systemic nature distinguishes it from other dark-side organizational outcomes (such as reduced profits or constrained career opportunities) focused primarily on economic dimensions (Linstead et al., 2014). Similarly, interorganizational effects such as unplanned CSP dissolution or damage to trust and relationships (Oliveira & Lumineau, 2019) do not qualify as societal harm unless they hamper organizations' ability to fulfill their societal roles or advance necessary system transformations.

Our analysis shows that societal harm spans acute and slow-burn effects and ranges from localized impacts to system-level disruptions. Recognizing this temporal and multilevel heterogeneity is theoretically important because many forms of harm, especially subtle, slow-moving, or systemic ones, are less tangible, but may nonetheless have far-reaching implications for system performance and transformation. Such effects may remain latent in early partnership stages or only become discernable over time, complicating their detection and attribution. Clarifying the multifaceted, multilevel nature of societal harm strengthens our ability to detect, explain, and theorize the full spectrum of negative CSP effects (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; Stadtler, 2016; Vestergaard et al., 2020).

In this respect, our analysis points to avenues for future research, such as examining patterns of CSP-related environmental harm to complement existing evidence on social and system-related effects and to explore their interplay. Likewise, the multilevel character of societal harm calls for research

that examines how it unfolds across levels and over time. This creates opportunities to study how localized harms accumulate to impede system transformation, and how system-level disruptions, in turn, cascade into social, environmental, or systemic harm at individual and organizational levels. Such inquiry requires longitudinal designs, including post-CSP analysis (Oliveira & Lumineau, 2019), and interdisciplinary perspectives that link social, environmental, and systems insights (George et al., 2016).

Intervention Flaws (I)

The second pillar of the HIDE framework highlights deficiencies in how CSP partners interact with society and outlines conceptual mechanisms that link evidence of societal harm to CSPs. Our analysis shifts attention from organizational (Linstead et al., 2014) and interorganizational (Oliveira & Lumineau, 2019) dark-side mechanisms to deficiencies in the pace, scope, and nature of societal interventions, such as flaws in service provision or capacity building. Societal harm thereby arises not only from misaligned interventions, denoting a misfit in the nature of intervention activities or “doing the wrong thing,” but also from lagging and under-scoped interventions, which draw attention to the pace and scope of CSP action. This distinction matters because these flaws appear to be associated with different forms of societal harm: lagging intervention primarily undermines system transformation; under-scoped intervention tends to affect existing systems and stall system transformation; and misaligned intervention generates harm for individuals and communities as well as for extant systems.

The identified concepts of misalignment, under-scoping, and delay resonate with established constructs in the partnership and collaborative governance literature (Grimm & Reinecke, 2024; Huxham & Vangen, 2004; Larson et al., 2022; Powell et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2026). However, while prior CSP research has largely examined these at the partnership level, focusing on interactions among partners, we show how they manifest in CSP–societal interactions. Our contribution thus lies less in identifying these concepts than in specifying how misalignment, under-scoping, and delay may manifest as different types of intervention flaws that lead to societal-level harm and in uncovering their underlying CSP design antecedents.

By identifying mechanisms linking societal harm to CSP design shortcomings, our framework helps address the attribution challenge of isolating a CSP’s influence from other contributing factors (Van Tulder et al., 2016). Focusing on evidence of intervention flaws and their implications helps scholars avoid over- or under-attributing harm to partnerships, especially compared to approaches that focus directly on partnership-level shortcomings. Without such empirical

links, analyses risk conflating correlation with contribution. For example, CSP scholars may be tempted to attribute observed harm directly to a CSP. However, such claim requires evidence that the partnership's actions or inaction generated the harm.

To illustrate, in a case involving tanneries, health and environmental problems persisted, but these effects reflected ongoing tannery activities rather than harm associated with lagging CSP intervention. Such cases point to issues of CSP ineffectiveness (Alonso & Andrews, 2019; Van Tulder et al., 2016), which are also problematic and warrant further scholarly attention. However, our focus on CSPs' (explicit and additional) societal harm differs, in this case, revealing how delayed and scope-limited interventions shielded responsible actors from pressure and allowed public actors to avoid accountability. While it would be overstated to claim that the CSP generated the underlying health and environmental problems, evidence of intervention flaws helps explain how the partnership contributed to de-responsibilization and systemic harm.

These insights open several avenues for future research. While our analysis builds on empirical evidence linking intervention flaws to societal harm, comparative studies are needed to assess whether such flaws inevitably lead to harm. Moreover, further work can advance a mechanism-based perspective by exploring how intervention flaws can be addressed. In particular, research may analyze the corrective actions partners take, the conditions under which they are effective, and how they interact with the dynamics of societal harm, whether coevolving, amplifying, or mitigating it. Research could also examine how specific practices help mitigate intervention flaws, such as conducting comprehensive analyses of societal challenges, adhering to established standards (e.g., humanitarian principles), and embedding learning mechanisms, including pilot initiatives, training programs, and post-action reviews incorporating stakeholder feedback (Stadtler & Van Wassenhove, 2016; Van Tulder & Keen, 2018). Another question relates to how responses differ across types of intervention flaws, for example, whether lagging interventions require stronger accountability mechanisms (George et al., 2024), while under-scoped interventions benefit from more inclusive problem-setting and capacity-building efforts (Gebre-Mariam & Bygstad, 2019; Vestergaard et al., 2020). Finally, comparative designs could examine how and under what conditions interventions are closely adapted to local contexts and beneficiary conditions, as well as the challenges and trade-offs involved in this process (Stadtler & Karakulak, 2022; Thorpe, 2018).

CSP Design Antecedents (D)

By taking intervention flaws as the analytical reference point, our analysis identifies CSP-related antecedents that cluster into actor- and structure-centric

design shortcomings. This yields two key theoretical implications. First, intervention flaws are not random but tend to be shaped by underlying CSP design features. This allows us to connect the emergence of societal harm to established insights into CSP governance and partner coordination challenges (George et al., 2024; Gray et al., 2022; Sadri et al., 2025), while introducing intervention flaws as the mechanisms linking design to effects. Second, actor- and structure-centric design issues tend to have distinct implications: the former shape flaws in the pace, scope, and nature of activities, whereas the latter are particularly associated with misaligned intervention (i.e., nature of activities).

With respect to actor-centric antecedents, CSPs are often assumed to leverage the complementary strengths of business, public, and nonprofit actors (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; George et al., 2016; Selsky & Parker, 2005) to enable innovative and appropriate interventions. However, our findings suggest that imbalances in actor influence (Gray et al., 2022), including the dominance of private-sector or Global North actors, or misaligned roles of public-sector actors, can give rise to intervention flaws. For example, some CSPs involved actors with limited experience of the societal challenge but significant resources (Buse & Harmer, 2007; Henriksen, 2024; Karakulak & Faul, 2024; Vestergaard et al., 2020). Their disproportionate influence translated into under-scoped and misaligned interventions. Although the societal harm typically appeared as “unintentional,” these cases suggest that respective actors underestimated the complexity of societal interventions and the associated duty of care. As Laeis and Lemke (2016, p. 15) observed in the context of an ecotourism CSP: “Had the Grootbos Foundation’s management been more aware of the negative perceptions regarding agricultural labor [. . .], they might have amended the [. . .] project or designed it differently from the outset.”

With respect to structure-centric design antecedents, our analysis connects to insights into shared governance arrangements (George et al., 2024; Sadri et al., 2025), suggesting that shortcomings in inclusivity and accountability can undermine the alignment of interventions with societal needs. In particular, limited stakeholder inclusion and weak accountability mechanisms may result in interventions that fail to reflect beneficiary realities, align with existing social system conditions, or coordinate with ongoing initiatives. These findings highlight that inclusivity and accountability are not merely normative ideals but critical design features that shape whether CSP interventions align with societal contexts or risk generating harm. Inclusivity, understood in terms of equality, empowerment, and justice (Larson et al., 2022), determines whose perspectives are incorporated into intervention design, whereas accountability within the partnership and toward external stakeholders

(Lund-Thomsen, 2009) tends to influence how interventions are justified and controlled.

These insights point to important directions for future research related to design antecedents, such as examining how variations in actor composition, power distributions, and accountability structures affect the emergence of intervention flaws, and under what conditions actors' expertise helps mitigate such risks. Moreover, addressing societal harm requires not only correcting intervention flaws *ex post* but also underlying design shortcomings, encouraging comparative research design to compare different scenarios. Our analysis further reveals opportunities to more closely connect CSP research with the literature on corporate and cross-sector political activity (Katic & Hillman, 2023). One approach for doing so could deepen understanding of when and how CSPs become spaces for bribery and favoritism (Begum et al., 2021; De Wit & Berner, 2009; Ng et al., 2023) and their broader societal implications.

Evaluative Challenges (E)

While the H, I, and D pillars enable more systematic identification and explanation of CSPs' societal harm, our analysis also sensitized us to a set of challenges that extend beyond associative attribution (Brinkerhoff, 2002; Van Tulder et al., 2016). We identified three interrelated boundary conditions that complicate the evaluation of societal harm: ontological, normative, and interpretative challenges.

First, ontological and epistemic challenges arise from the contested and context-dependent nature of societal harm. What constitutes harm is often subject to interpretation, as effects perceived as harmful by some actors may be viewed as beneficial by others. Moreover, empirical visibility depends on whose perspectives are captured. Studies centered on partner accounts frequently reported little or no harm (and, thus, were typically excluded from our sample), suggesting that certain adverse effects become visible only through engagement with beneficiaries or communities. This highlights that societal harm is not only difficult to observe but also shaped by differing perspectives, interests, and positionalities (Linstead et al., 2014). Accordingly, evaluations remain contingent on the considered evidence and the epistemic standpoint from which harm is assessed.

Second, normative challenges concern questions of responsibility, avoidability, and moral judgment. In about half of the analyzed cases, the evidence suggested that intervention flaws and their associated harms might have been avoided through greater anticipation and care by the partners. In other cases, however, CSPs were embedded in broader social, economic, political, and historical constraints that manifested in power asymmetries, public-sector

reforms, or corruption. In such contexts, intervention flaws that were theoretically correctable appeared considerably more difficult to address in practice.

For instance, CSPs shaped by government reforms often prioritized short-term projects and cost savings, resulting in fragmented or downgraded services through under-scoped or misaligned interventions (Chorianopoulos & Tselepi, 2019; Cornelius & Wallace, 2010). Although suggestions for improvement, such as building long-term relationships with employers or supporting individuals with low labor-market chances (Van Gestel & Grotenbreg, 2021, pp. 258–259) are valuable, they remain difficult to implement without broader changes in public resource allocation.

Similarly, interventions in contexts of weak governance and corruption (Begum et al., 2021; Ng et al., 2023) often led to social tensions and eroded public-sector accountability. As De Wit and Berner (2009, p. 927) note in the case of Indian slums, “municipal agencies, donors, and NGOs cannot easily escape the logic of patronage and often themselves become part of a system of vertical dependency relations.” In some cases, actors responsible for the societal challenge participated to gain undue benefits (e.g., business advantages, Cooper & Wardropper, 2021; Hedberg & Lounsbury, 2021; Idemudia, 2017; Pavlovich & Akoorie, 2010; Powell et al., 2018; Watson et al., 2020) or to maintain power (Harsman, 2024; Henriksen, 2024).

Under these conditions, CSPs may be ill-suited solutions as they may replicate the broader societal dilemmas. This opens avenues for future research into when and how actors might adopt alternative solutions, such as government enforcement or other ways to disrupt entrenched power structures. Meanwhile, exploring changes or reinforcing dynamics within these interdependencies presents a compelling research direction, thereby drawing on critical management literature, such as on dysfunctions of capitalism (Olwig, 2021; Schneider, 2020), imperialism and post-colonialism (Ergene et al., 2024; Ziai, 2017), and political opportunism (Hamann, 2019).

Third, interpretative challenges arise in assessing the net impact of CSPs (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; Van Tulder et al., 2016). Societal harm may coexist with a variety of benefits, making it difficult to determine whether interventions result in overall positive or negative outcomes. This raises questions about trade-offs and the temporal dynamics of impact, particularly where harms unfold gradually or become visible only over time. The E pillar thus highlights that understanding societal harm requires not only identifying and explaining it but also critically examining how it is defined, judged, and evaluated across contexts and actors. Acknowledging these boundary conditions invites complementary research into the contested and situated nature of

societal harm, including how different evaluative perspectives, temporal horizons, and contextual conditions shape assessments of CSPs' societal impact.

Conclusions

Drawing on a qualitative meta-analysis of patterns linking antecedents, mechanisms, and manifestations of CSPs' societal harm, we introduce an analytical framework that advances an intervention perspective to support researchers in identifying and explaining respective effects. This framework contributes to the broader discourse on CSPs and organizational responses to societal grand challenges in two ways. First, it integrates previously fragmented evidence into the multifaceted, multilevel, and temporal nature of societal harm, showing that while diverse in manifestation, there are recurring patterns. CSPs' societal harm thus warrants further scholarly attention. Notably, despite evidence of societal harm, some CSPs in our sample were still considered successful by their partners (Ben David & Rubel-Lifschitz, 2023; Cooper & Wardropper, 2021; Henriksen, 2024), and even promoted as "flagship" initiatives by national embassies and the OECD (Vestergaard et al., 2020, 2021). This underscores the relevance of the "dark side" metaphor to highlight issues traditionally overlooked or suppressed (Linstead et al., 2014), including CSPs' societal harm.

Second, this study offers a mechanism-based explanation of societal harm by focusing on intervention flaws as the critical mechanisms linking CSP design to societal outcomes. Empirically, analyzing intervention flaws helps address associative attribution challenges (Brinkerhoff, 2002; Van Tulder et al., 2016) by foregrounding CSP–societal interactions. Theoretically, it helps specify the often-abstract connections between societal outcomes and well-documented shortcomings in CSP governance and partner interactions (Awan et al., 2025; Bäckstrand, 2006; George et al., 2024; Gray et al., 2022; Sadri et al., 2025). On this basis, the framework offers a structured approach to examining CSP through their societal interventions and may also inform research on the societal impact of other organizational forms, such as social enterprises or unilateral corporate responsibility initiatives.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank handling editor Tobias Hahn, the three anonymous reviewers, as well as Marcus Gomes and Alex Christian for their valuable feedback on an earlier version of the manuscript.

ORCID iDs

Lea Stadler  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5152-980X>

Eduardo Hernández-Melgar  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1849-0197>

Helena H. Knight  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8537-214X>

Adriane MacDonald  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2027-7771>

Oda Hustad  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3206-6886>

M. May Seitanidi  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7190-7043>

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The engagement of Lea Stadler and Eduardo Hernández-Melgar was funded, in part, by l'Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR), project ANR-22-CE26-0009-01, and Adriane MacDonald was funded, in part, by Canada Research Chair (CRC-2021-00216). For the purpose of open access, the authors must apply a CC-BY public copyright license to any Author Accepted Manuscript version arising from this submission.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data Availability Statement

The dataset (i.e., list of sample cases) analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request*.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Note

1. CADIMA is a free, collaborative web tool facilitating the conduct and assuring for the documentation of systematic reviews (<https://www.cadima.info/>).

References

- Albertsen, R. R. (2025). Outcomes of paradox responses in corporate sustainability: A qualitative meta-analysis. *Business & Society*, 64(5), 889–932. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00076503241255498>
- Alonso, J. M., & Andrews, R. (2019). Governance by targets and the performance of cross-sector partnerships: Do partner diversity and partnership capabilities matter? *Strategic Management Journal*, 40(4), 556–579. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2959>

- Austin, J. E., & Seitanidi, M. M. (2012). Collaborative value creation: A review of partnering between nonprofits and businesses. Part 2: Partnership processes and outcomes. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 41(6), 929–968. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764012454685>
- Awan, A., Walrave, B., de Gooyert, V., Bombaerts, G., & Talmar, M. (2025). Fixes that fail in collaborative innovation: The dynamics of conflict, decision-making speed, and time pressure. *Organization Studies*, 46(10), Article 01708406251349320. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406251349320>
- Bäckstrand, K. (2006). Multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development: Rethinking legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness. *European Environment*, 16(5), 290–306. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.425>
- Baudoin, L., & Gittins, J. R. (2021). The ecological outcomes of collaborative governance in large river basins: Who is in the room and does it matter? *Journal of Environmental Management*, 281, Article 111836. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2020.111836>
- Begum, F., de Bruyn, L. L., Kristiansen, P., & Islam, M. A. (2021). Institutionalising co-management activities for conservation of forest resources: Evidence from the Sundarban mangrove forest management of Bangladesh. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 298, Article 113504. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2021.113504>
- Ben David, Y., & Rubel-Lifschitz, T. (2023). The right to success: Paradoxical tensions between contested logics in a multi-sectoral collaboration to promote scientific excellence in Israel. *Organization Studies*, 44(12), 2031–2055. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406231185976>
- Bitzer, V., Francken, M., & Glasbergen, P. (2008). Intersectoral partnerships for a sustainable coffee chain: Really addressing sustainability or just picking (coffee) cherries?. *Global Environmental Change*, 18(2), 271–284. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2008.01.002>
- Brinkerhoff, J. M. (2002). Assessing and improving partnership relationships and outcomes: a proposed framework. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 25(3), 215–231. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0149-7189\(02\)00017-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0149-7189(02)00017-4)
- Brisbois, M. C., Morris, M., & de Loë, R. (2019). Augmenting the IAD framework to reveal power in collaborative governance—An illustrative application to resource industry dominated processes. *World Development*, 120, 159–168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.02.017>
- Budabin, A. C., & Hudson, N. F. (2021). Sisterhood partnerships for conflict-related sexual violence. *World Development*, 140, Article 105255. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105255>
- Buse, K., & Harmer, A. M. (2007). Seven habits of highly effective global public–private health partnerships: Practice and potential. *Social Science & Medicine*, 64(2), 259–271. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2006.09.001>
- Chartered Association of Business Schools. (2021). *The purpose of the Academic Journal Guide*. <https://charteredabs.org/academic-journal-guide-2021/>

- Chorianopoulos, I., & Tselepi, N. (2019). Austerity urbanism: Rescaling and collaborative governance policies in Athens. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 26(1), 80–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/096977641773330>
- Clarke, A., & Crane, A. (2018). Cross-sector partnerships for systemic change: Systematized literature review and agenda for further research. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 150(2), 303–313. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3922-2>
- Combs, J. G., Crook, T. R., & Rauch, A. (2019). Meta-analytic research in management: Contemporary approaches, unresolved controversies, and rising standards. *Journal of Management Studies*, 56(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12427>
- Cooper, C. M., & Wardropper, C. B. (2021). Environmental, public health, and economic development perspectives at a Superfund site: AQ methodology approach. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 279, Article 111571. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2020.111571>
- Cornelissen, J. P., & Werner, M. (2026). What are mechanisms? Ways of conceptualizing and studying causal mechanisms. *Organizational Research Methods*, 29(2), 147–176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10944281251318727>
- Cornelius, N., & Wallace, J. (2010). Cross-sector partnerships: City regeneration and social justice. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 94, 71–84. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0780-6>
- Crane, A. (2010). From governance to Governance: On blurring boundaries. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 94, 17–19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0788-y>
- Davies, A. L., & White, R. M. (2012). Collaboration in natural resource governance: Reconciling stakeholder expectations in deer management in Scotland. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 112, 160–169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2012.07.032>
- Dentoni, D., Pinkse, J., & Lubberink, R. (2021). Linking sustainable business models to socio-ecological resilience through cross-sector partnerships: A complex adaptive systems view. *Business & Society*, 60(5), 1216–1252. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650320935015>
- Devinney, T. M. (2009). Is the socially responsible corporation a myth? The good, bad and ugly of corporate social responsibility. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(2), 44–56. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMP.2009.39985540>
- De Wit, J., & Berner, E. (2009). Progressive patronage? Municipalities, NGOs, CBOs and the limits to slum dwellers' empowerment. *Development and Change*, 40(5), 927–947. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2009.01589.x>
- Diprose, R., Kurniawan, N., Macdonald, K., & Winanti, P. (2022). Regulating sustainable minerals in electronics supply chains: local power struggles and the 'hidden costs' of global tin supply chain governance. *Review of International Political Economy*, 29(3), 792–817. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2020.1814844>
- Emerson, R. M. (1962). Power-dependence relations. *American Sociological Review*, 27, 31–41. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2089716>
- Ergene, S., Banerjee, S. B., & Ergene, E. (2024). Environmental racism and climate (in) justice in the anthropocene: Addressing the silences and erasures in manage-

- ment and organization studies. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 193, 785–800. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-024-05723-x>
- Gebre-Mariam, M., & Bygstad, B. (2019). Digitalization mechanisms of health management information systems in developing countries. *Information and Organization*, 29(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2018.12.002>
- George, G., Fewer, T. J., Lazzarini, S., McGahan, A. M., & Puranam, P. (2024). Partnering for grand challenges: A review of organizational design considerations in public–private collaborations. *Journal of Management*, 50(1), 10–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063221148992>
- George, G., Howard-Grenville, J., Joshi, A., & Tihanyi, L. (2016). Understanding and tackling societal grand challenges through management research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(6), 1880–1895. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.4007>
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia Methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428112452151>
- Gray, B., Purdy, J., & Ansari, S. (2022). Confronting power asymmetries in partnerships to address grand challenges. *Organization Theory*, 3(2), 26317877221098765. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877221098765>
- Grimm, J., & Reinecke, J. (2024). Collaborating on the edge of failure: Frame alignment across multiple interaction arenas in multi-stakeholder partnerships. *Academy of Management Journal*, 67(4), 956–990. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2021.0466>
- Habersang, S., & Reihlen, M. (2025). Advancing qualitative meta-studies (QMS): Current practices and reflective guidelines for synthesizing qualitative research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 28(2), 10944281241240180. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10944281241240180>
- Hamann, R. (2019). Dynamic de-responsibilization in business–government interactions. *Organization Studies*, 40(8), 1193–1215. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840618815927>
- Harsman, B. (2024). Institutional hegemony of a logic within a cross-sector partnership. *Business & Society*, 63(1), 108–144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00076503231167568>
- Hedberg, L. M., & Lounsbury, M. (2021). Not just small potatoes: Cultural entrepreneurship in the moralizing of markets. *Organization Science*, 32(2), 433–454. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2020.1395>
- Henriksen, S. E. (2024). Finding the “sweet spot”: The politics of alignment in cross-sector partnerships for refugees. *Business & Society*, 63(1), 145–184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00076503231191432>
- Hesse, A., Kreutzer, K., & Diehl, M. R. (2019). Dynamics of institutional logics in a cross-sector social partnership: The case of refugee integration in Germany. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 159, 679–704. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3775-0>
- Hessevik, A. (2022). Network-led advocacy for a green shipping transformation: A case study of governance networks in the Norwegian maritime sector. *Regulation & Governance*, 16(4), 1101–1118. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12386>

- Hoon, C. (2013). Meta-synthesis of qualitative case studies: An approach to theory building. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(4), 522–556. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428113484969>
- Huxham, C., & Vangen, S. (2004). Doing things collaboratively: Realizing the advantage or succumbing to inertia?. *Organizational Dynamics*, 33(2), 190–201. <https://doi.org/10.1109/EMR.2004.25132>
- Idemudia, U. (2017). Environmental business–NGO partnerships in Nigeria: Issues and prospects. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 26(2), 265–276. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1915>
- Innes, J. E., & Booher, D. E. (1999). Consensus building and complex adaptive systems: A framework for evaluating collaborative planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 65(4), 412–423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944369908976071>
- Karakulak, Ö., & Faul, M. V. (2024). Value creation for refugees by social partnerships: A frames perspective. *Business & Society*, 63(1), 18–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00076503231157715>
- Katic, I. V., & Hillman, A. (2023). Corporate political activity, reimagined: Revisiting the political marketplace. *Journal of Management*, 49(6), 1911–1938. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063221137069>
- Kroeger, A., & Weber, C. (2014). Developing a conceptual framework for comparing social value creation. *Academy of Management Review*, 39(4), 513–540. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2012.0344>
- Lacis, G. C. M., & Lemke, S. (2016). Social entrepreneurship in tourism: Applying sustainable livelihoods approaches. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 28(6), 1076–1093. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2012.0344>
- Larson, A. M., Barletti, J. P. S., & Vigil, N. H. (2022). A place at the table is not enough: Accountability for Indigenous Peoples and local communities in multi-stakeholder platforms. *World Development*, 155, Article 105907. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.105907>
- Linstead, S., Maréchal, G., & Griffin, R. W. (2014). Theorizing and researching the dark side of organization. *Organization Studies*, 35(2), 165–188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01708>
- Lund-Thomsen, P. (2009). Assessing the impact of public–private partnerships in the global south: The case of the Kasur Tanneries Pollution Control Project. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 90(1), 57–78. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-008-9914-x>
- Meijer, A., & Thaens, M. (2021). The dark side of public innovation. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 44(1), 136–154. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2020.1782954>
- Mustalahti, I., & Rakotonarivo, O. S. (2014). REDD+ and empowered deliberative democracy: Learning from Tanzania. *World Development*, 59, 199–211. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2014.01.022>
- Ng, J. S. C., Chervier, C., Roda, J.-M., Samdin, Z., & Carmenta, R. (2023). Understanding stakeholders' perspectives on the collaborative governance challenges in Sabah's (Malaysian Borneo) jurisdictional approach. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 59(11), 1699–1717. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2023.2222212>

- OECD. (2023). *Glossary of key terms in evaluation and results-based management for sustainable development* (2nd ed.). OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/632da462-en-fr-es>
- Oliveira, N., & Lumineau, F. (2019). The dark side of interorganizational relationships: An integrative review and research agenda. *Journal of Management*, 45(1), 231–261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318804027>
- Olwig, M. F. (2021). Introduction: Commodifying humanitarian sentiments? The black box of the for-profit and non-profit partnership. *World Development*, 145, Article 105536. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105536>
- Omanović, V., & Langley, A. (2021). Assimilation, integration or inclusion? A dialectical perspective on the organizational socialization of migrants. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 32(1), 76–97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10564926211063777>
- Pavlovich, K., & Akoorie, M. (2010). Innovation, sustainability and regional development: The Nelson/Marlborough seafood cluster, New Zealand. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 19(6), 377–386. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.688>
- Powell, E. E., Hamann, R., Bitzer, V., & Baker, T. (2018). Bringing the elephant into the room? Enacting conflict in collective prosocial organizing. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 33(5), 623–642. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2017.11.006>
- Rice, W. S. (2022). Exploring common dialectical tensions constraining collaborative communication required for post-2020 conservation. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 316, Article 115187. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2022.115187>
- Rodríguez, J. A., Giménez Thomsen, C., Arenas, D., & Pagell, M. (2016). NGOs’ initiatives to enhance social sustainability in the supply chain: poverty alleviation through supplier development programs. *Journal of Supply Chain Management*, 52(3), 83–108. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jscm.12104>
- Sadri, M., Aristidou, A., & Ravasi, D. (2025). Cross-sector partnership research at theoretical interstices: Integrating and advancing theory across phases. *Journal of Management Studies*, 62(1), 484–517. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.13046>
- Schneider, A. (2020). Bound to fail? Exploring the systemic pathologies of CSR and their implications for CSR research. *Business & Society*, 59(7), 1303–1338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650319856616>
- Selsky, J. W., & Parker, B. (2005). Cross-sector partnerships to address social issues: Challenges to theory and practice. *Journal of Management*, 31(6), 849–873. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206305279601>
- Stadtler, L. (2016). Scrutinizing public–private partnerships for development: Towards a broad evaluation conception. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 135, 71–86. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2730-1>
- Stadtler, L., & Karakulak, Ö. (2022). The targeted “solution” in the spotlight: How a product focus influences collective action within and beyond cross-sector partnerships. *Business & Society*, 61(3), 606–648. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00076503261445160>
- Stadtler, L., Seitani, M. M., Knight, H. H., Leigh, J., Clarke, A., Le Ber, M. J., Bogie, J., Brunese, P., Hustad, O., & Krasnikolakis, I. (2024). Cross-sector partnerships to address societal grand challenges: Systematizing differences in

- scholarly analysis. *Journal of Management Studies*, 61(7), 3327–3357. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.13053>
- Stadtler, L., & Van Wassenhove, L. N. (2016). Coopetition as a paradox: Integrative approaches in a multi-company, cross-sector partnership. *Organization Studies*, 37(5), 655–685. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840615622066>
- Szulecki, K., Pattberg, P., & Biermann, F. (2011). Explaining variation in the effectiveness of transnational energy partnerships. *Governance*, 24(4), 713–736. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0491.2011.01544.x>
- Thorpe, J. (2018). Procedural justice in value chains through public–private partnerships. *World Development*, 103, 162–175.
- Thumler, E. (2011). Foundations, schools and the state. *Public Management Review*, 13(8), 1095–1116. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.10.004>
- Trencher, G., Bai, X., Evans, J., McCormick, K., & Yarime, M. (2014). University partnerships for co-designing and co-producing urban sustainability. *Global Environmental Change*, 28, 153–165. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2014.06.009>
- Ungureanu, P., Bertolotti, F., Mattarelli, E., & Bellesia, F. (2019). Making matters worse by trying to make them better? Exploring vicious circles of decision in hybrid partnerships. *Organization Studies*, 40(9), 1331–1359. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840618765575>
- Van Gestel, N., & Grotenbreg, S. (2021). Collaborative governance and innovation in public services settings. *Policy & Politics*, 49(2), 249–265. <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557321X16123785900606>
- Van Tulder, R., & Keen, N. (2018). Capturing collaborative challenges: Designing complexity-sensitive theories of change for cross-sector partnerships. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 150(2), 315–332. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3857-7>
- Van Tulder, R., Seitanidi, M. M., Crane, A., & Brammer, S. (2016). Enhancing the impact of cross-sector partnerships: Four impact loops for channeling partnership studies. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 135, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3857-7>
- Vaughan, D. (1999). The dark side of organizations: Mistake, misconduct, and disaster. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 25, 271–305. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.25.1.271>
- Vestergaard, A., Langevang, T., Morsing, M., & Murphy, L. (2021). Partnerships for development. Assessing the impact potential of cross-sector partnerships. *World Development*, 143, Article 105447. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105447>
- Vestergaard, A., Murphy, L., Morsing, M., & Langevang, T. (2020). Cross-sector partnerships as capitalism's new development agents: Reconceiving impact as empowerment. *Business & Society*, 59(7), 1339–1376. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650319845327>
- Watson, R., Wilson, H. N., & Macdonald, E. K. (2020). Business-nonprofit engagement in sustainability-oriented innovation: What works for whom and why? *Journal of Business Research*, 119, 87–98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.11.023>
- Wickert, C. (2021). Corporate social responsibility research in the *Journal of Management Studies*: A shift from a business-centric to a society-centric

- focus. *Journal of Management Studies*, 58(8), E1–E17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12775>
- Williams, A., Parker, J. N., Kennedy, S., & Whiteman, G. (2026). A process study of evolving paradoxes and cross-sector goals: A partnership to accelerate global sustainability. *Journal of Management*, 52(2), 577–613. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063241278803>
- Ziai, A. (2017). Post-development 25 years after the development dictionary. *Third World Quarterly*, 38(12), 2547–2558. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1383853>

Author Biographies

Lea Stadttler is an associate professor of strategy and sustainability at Grenoble Ecole de Management, France and deputy editor at *Business & Society*. Her research focuses on sustainability and collaboration-related complexities, paradoxes, and strategic responses. She has published more than 20 articles in academic journals and has received international research awards for her work.

Eduardo Hernández-Melgar is a postdoctoral researcher in governance and sustainability at Concordia University, Canada. His interdisciplinary research focuses on political corporate social responsibility, community engagement, and the governance of energy transitions at global and local scales.

Helena H. Knight is a lecturer in marketing and strategy at Cardiff University Business School, UK. Her research focuses on inter-organizational collaboration in sustainability transitions, particularly cross-sector partnerships, coopetition, and sustainable food systems. She has published in such journals as *European Journal of Marketing*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, and *Journal of Management Studies*.

Adriane MacDonald is an associate professor of management and Canada Research Chair in governance and sustainability at Concordia University, Canada. Her research focuses on municipal climate action, multi-stakeholder partnerships and collaboration, and carbon governance. She has published several academic journal articles and practitioner reports.

Oda Hustad is a senior consultant and project manager. Her work focuses on advancing sustainability initiatives in the construction and real estate sectors through project management, knowledge sharing, and collaboration. She holds a PhD in sustainable partnerships from Roskilde University, Denmark.

M. May Seitani (SFHEA) is a reader in strategy at Kent Business School, University of Kent. Her work for over 30 years focused on cross-sector collaborations and how organizations and societies can pursue societal good collaboratively. Her areas of expertise include cross-sector social partnerships, societal solutions to complex social issues, complex collaborative processes, and co-creation of value. She has published in these areas in leading journals in *Management*, *Business Ethics* and *Social Responsibility*.