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Title: Civil Society–Business Relations

M. MAY SEITANIDI*, ALNOOR EBRAHIM**, JAMES E. AUSTIN***
* Kent Business School, University of Kent (Corresponding Author)
**The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University
***Social Enterprise Initiative, Harvard Business School

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Definition
Relations between civil society organizations (CSOs) and business are positioned within the scholarly literature in the field of inter-organizational relations (IOR) (Galaskiewicz. J. 1985; Gray, 1985; Cropper et al. 2008). IOR are divided into same-sector and cross-sector relations, with civil society–business relations belonging to the latter. The range of civil society–business relations can be grouped into three general categories: complementary, adversarial, and collaborative. All the three types are introduced briefly in this entry, followed by a discussion focused on the collaborative category. Our use of the term CSO is broader than the terms nonprofit organization (NPO) or nongovernmental organization (NGO), as it includes a range of actors that are not necessarily formally organized (Salmon and Anheier, 1997), including communities and self-help groups. All three terms are, however, often used interchangeably in practice. We do not, however, examine hybrid organizations such as social enterprises that have characteristics of both business and civil society (Ebrahim et al., 2014), as these are discussed elsewhere in this Encyclopedia.

Introduction
Civil society organizations (CSOs) and businesses have a long and diverse history of relationships, ranging from confrontation to collaboration. Over the past decades, there has been growing attention among scholars and practitioners to understanding the challenges and dynamics of civil society–business relationships. This increased interest has been especially pronounced internationally on issues of societal or public concern, such as environment, poverty, human rights, and most starkly, global health pandemics such as covid-19, referred to as “Grand Challenges”.

As companies have gone global in their operations, so too have their engagements with CSOs (Kulik, 1999; Bendell and Kearins, 2005). At a global level, the United Nations adopted a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to galvanize action by governments, business, and civil society towards socially inclusive and sustainable development (George et al., 2016). Specifically, SDG#17 refers to the “Partnerships for the Goals” highlighting the urgent need for collaboration across the sectors to mobilize, redirect and unlock both capital and transformative action to deliver on sustainable development objectives at global, regional, national and local levels. Notably, the SDGs face an annual financing gap of approximately US$ 2.5 to 3 trillion that cannot be filled without substantial business commitment (UNCTAD, 2014).

Our discussion below focuses on civil society–business relations in an international context. Despite country-specific variations, interactions between the two sectors occur almost universally. While the frameworks discussed here appear to have considerable applicability across countries, research has shown that cultural and institutional differences affect the interaction dynamics (Austin et al., 2004; Sanborn and Portocarrero, 2005).

Key Issues

Types of Civil Society–Business Relations

Complementary relations involve separate coexistence among organizations in the private, nonprofit, and public sectors. This is a traditional framing of the sectors, with each sector serving a historically distinct function (Weisbrod, 1998), and in which businesses and civil society organizations (such as non-profit or nongovernmental organizations) are viewed as having little need to interact with one another. While each sector does have distinct functions in society, in practice, there is an increasing overlap and interdependence across the sectors, leading to growing interactions and in some cases the “blurring of sectorial boundaries” (Selsky and Parker, 2005).

Adversarial relations are characterized by civil society organizations operating as ‘‘watchdogs’’ or ‘‘activists’’ seeking to hold businesses accountable on issues such as trade and investment, human rights, labor conditions, environment and sustainable development. In adopting an adversarial or confrontational stance, CSOs aim to apply external pressure on companies to change existing harmful practices or to introduce new socially responsible ones, often by bringing media and public scrutiny to the activities of companies.

Collaborative relations arise where CSOs and companies work together around some shared goals or agenda, often to address a social problem. These interactions range from purely philanthropic, in which businesses provide financial support to the activities of nonprofit organizations, to activities involving a much deeper integration of mission, strategy, and operations. The complexity and magnitude of major social problems, such as those of climate change and poverty that transcend the capacity of sectors and actors to deal with them separately, has accelerated the interest in collaboration. Collaborative solutions across sectors are now seen as essential to addressing grand global challenges. The new frontier is *how* to deliver societal transformation through collaboration.

There is a considerable parallel literature on public–private partnerships (PPPs), which focuses on collaborations between governmental actors and businesses, with or without the involvement of nonprofits (Stadtler, 2016), and public–nonprofit partnerships for welfare service provision and contracting out the delivery of services for increased efficiency (Boris and Steurle, 2016; Brinkerhoff, 2002; Smith and Lipsky, 1993; Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002). Figure 1 represents the three dyadic types of partnerships across the three socio-economic sectors, with tripartite partnerships involving all three sectors and often multiple organizations.

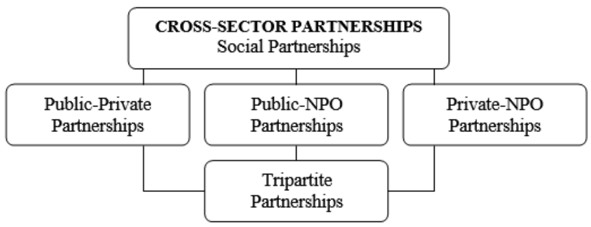

Fig. 1 The different types of Cross-Sector Social Partnerships (Seitanidi, 2010: 13; Seitanidi and Crane, 2009: 414)

Adversarial Relations
Adversarial or confrontational interactions among civil society organizations and businesses often arise from differing perspectives on what constitutes socially desirable behaviour. Examples include human rights, labor conditions, and climate change, among others.

Advocacy CSOs have used highly visible public pressure campaigns embracing a confrontational approach to force change in business. Two pivotal campaigns, both of which gained momentum in 1977, demonstrated the power of adversarial civil society advocacy. The first was a series of disinvestment campaigns targeting companies and governments doing business in South Africa during apartheid. Faith-based institutional investors played a central role in the US campaign, a key component of which was establishing conditions for the equal treatment of employees regardless of race. ''The Global Sullivan Principles,'' developed by Leon H. Sullivan, an African-American minister and civil rights activist who was also on the board of General Motors at the time, were adopted by over 125 US corporations doing business in South Africa.

A second highly visible campaign in 1977 focused on a boycott of Nestlé launched by several groups concerned about the company's aggressive marketing of infant formula in developing countries. The campaign centered on the adverse health impacts on children for promoting milk formula over breast milk, and it was instrumental to the adoption of an International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (The Code) by the World Health Assembly in 1981. A network of over 200 advocacy groups in more than 100 countries continues to monitor corporate marketing behaviour, pushing national governments to adopt legislation based on the code. More broadly, a variety of international NGOs have focused on the creation of standards and certifications, for example, on labor conditions, sustainable forestry, marine stewardship, and fair-trade commodities (Conroy, 2007) with the participation of businesses and at times public sector organizations, referred as multi-stakeholder initiatives (de Bakker et. al, 2019).

Advocacy campaigns often interfere with business operations, hindering profitability and posing a serious challenge to corporate reputation. The professionalization of nonprofits (Ebrahim et al., 2014), including advocacy CSOs propelled the mobilization of CSOs' networks and multiple platforms communicating campaign messages quickly and at a low cost. Relying on their public legitimacy and moral authority, CSOs aimed to force change, often functioning as ''civil regulators'' (Zadek, 2004: 30). Such confrontational interactions have resulted in changes in business practices and consumer preferences.

In other instances, civil society actors have lost their credibility due to the provision of inaccurate information putting their own legitimacy into question. For example, Greenpeace's own reputation suffered during a campaign against Shell UK's plans to dispose of an oil storage and loading facility, Brent Spar, by submerging it in deep water off the coast of Scotland. Greenpeace activists launched a global media campaign, which included occupying Brent Spar for over three weeks, only to find that their assessment of the oil remaining in Brent Spar's storage tanks had been grossly overestimated.

Such failures notwithstanding, intensified interactions between businesses and civil society organizations have led to a greater mutual understanding of their interdependence and to discovering the significant role of collaboration (Yaziji, 2004). The discussion below centers on the collaborative relations, which led to several innovations in civil society–business relations.

Collaborative Relations

Collaborative relationships have flourished over the years constituting different types of relationships, ranging from philanthropic, to transactional, and integrative (Austin, 2000; see Figure 2 below). ''Philanthropic'' relationships are benefactor–recipient interactions centered on the donation of funds or products from companies to nonprofit organizations (Seitanidi and Ryan, 2007). For example, corporate donations in the USA increased by 5.4% in 2018, totalling over $20 billion (Giving USA Foundation, 2019). Corporate giving in absolute inflation-adjusted terms has nearly tripled over the last 4 decades in the USA, amounting to about 1.1% of pre-tax profits.

In comparison, ''transactional'' relationships focus on specific activities and involve the exchange of a broader range of resources, with value flowing in both directions. Sometimes these interactions are more commercial in nature, such as cause-related marketing or event sponsorships, whereby the business associates its name with the nonprofit's name and cause (Seitanidi and Ryan, 2007). Often these relationships are financed from companies' marketing budgets rather than their philanthropic funds. In other instances, the relationship is purely commercial and involves contracting the provision of goods and services. Global sponsorship budgets have been rising steadily over the years indicating the continued vibrancy of transactional interactions. In 2015, the total amount of global sponsorship spending was US$ 57.5 billion rising to US$ 62.7 billion in 2017 and reaching US$ 65.8 billion in 2018 (IEG, 2019).

In the third category of collaborative relationships, referred to as ''integrative'', businesses and nonprofits become much more strategic and organizationally integrated in terms of mission, strategy, and operations (Austin, 2000). The relationship is more like an enduring joint venture than a transaction. Others have characterized these various relationship types as philanthropic, commercial, and strategic (Galaskiewicz and Colman, 2006).

More recently, a fourth category of collaborative relationships emerged, termed "transformational relationships", indicating a higher level of purposeful convergence of value creation between nonprofits and businesses aiming to deliver change at the societal level (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a; Austin and Seitanidi, 2012b; Austin and Seitanidi, 2014). The 2030 Agenda, and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is an international articulation of the fourth type of transformational collaborative relations providing a global framework and a call for change at multiple levels. Significant public and private investment will be required for the forthcoming "decade of transformational action" (2020 – 2030) "that could open up US$ 12 trillion of market opportunities and create 380 million new jobs, and that action on climate change would result in savings of about US$ 26 trillion by 2030" (UN, 2019: 2). Nowhere is the urgent need for such transformational relationships more apparent than in the haphazard global response to the covid-19 health pandemic.

Such collaborations require multi-organizational cross-sector social partnerships (Clarke and Fuller, 2010) that move beyond the dual collaboration domain of pursuing hybrid missions, as is the case with social enterprises (Ebrahim et. al, 2014) but across multiple organizations and sectors. In such multi-sectoral contexts, a key governance challenge in delivering transformational change lies in aligning or prioritizing among multiple and competing accountability demands of diverse stakeholders (Ebrahim 2019), as the case is with the UN 2030 Agenda.

The discussion below considers the motivations for and evolution of collaboration, as well as emerging knowledge on the steps involved in building and managing business–civil society collaborations.

Motivations

From a theoretical perspective, the motivations for cross-sector collaboration are often explained by: (1) resource dependency theory, where individual partner organizations aim to maintain stability and reduce uncertainty, minimizing dependence with other organizations, while acquiring resources and critical capabilities through collaboration (Gray and Wood, 1991; Selsky and Parker, 2005); (2) strategic management and stakeholder theories, which emphasize the management of risks, external stakeholder pressures and developing collaborative advantage across partners while addressing a shared social issue (Andrioff et al., 2002; Huxham, C., and Vangen, S. 2000; Selsky and Parker, 2005); or (3) institutional theory, whereby organizations collaborate to increase their own legitimacy within an institutional environment, reproducing institutional structures, as is the case with neo-institutional theory (Lawrence et al., 2002) and sometimes enhancing the legitimacy of new governance roles in addressing social issues (Gray and Wood, 1991; Selsky and Parker, 2005).

Empirical studies of cross-sector collaborations reveal that motivations of companies to engage with CSOs range from purely moral or legal reasons to business reasons referred as "enlightened self-interest" (Austin et al., 2004). This motivational spectrum can be conceptualized into four distinguishable, but sometimes interrelated categories: compliance, which is dictated by legal obligations, and expected or desired standards (Carroll, 1991); risk, which is driven by the need to manage external threats; values, which aim at fulfilling core organizational or individual beliefs; and, business opportunity, which seeks to capture economic value (Austin, 2007). Analogously, the motivations of CSOs fall into three often interrelated categories: funds mobilization, in which partnerships offer new sources of revenue; capabilities enhancement, whereby partnerships with corporations enable the development of better skills and organizational capacities; and mission attainment, stemming from congruency of goals and the capture of synergies that increase scale, scope, or quality of outcomes. The development of ''mutual value'' (London et al. 2010) or "shared value" (Porter and Kramer, 2011) underlines the significant long-term efforts of all partner organizations to achieve synergy, innovation and change.

Collaborative Value Creation and its Evolution

A central aim of collaborative relations is to develop value for the partner organizations and for society (Austin, 2000; Seitanidi, 2010). Examining the evolution of value across time allows organizations to determine the type of resources required, the level of interaction, and type of value created. We discuss the evolution and creation of value via the multidimensional lens of the Collaborative Value Creation (CVC) framework (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b, 2014) that transcends time scales along types of value that extend to transformational value creation.

The CVC framework fosters an evolutionary perspective across types and stages of collaborations between non-profit organizations and businesses while articulating an advanced stage of collaboration, namely, "transformational collaboration" (Moreno-Serna et al., 2019). Furthermore, the CVC framework accounts for multidimensional value creation and value costs within and outside the collaboration while embracing a stakeholder-orientation approach allowing for a broad conceptualization of value creation (Stadtler, 2016). The five components of the framework are explained below briefly.

The first component, the Value Spectrum, identifies the sources (resource directionality, resource complementarity; nature of resources, linked interests) and types (associational value, transfer-asset value, interaction value, synergistic) of value creation which comprise the building blocks in the analysis of collaborative value creation that aim to develop a value profile of what each partner organization can contribute to the relationship (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b, 2014).

The second component refers to the Collaboration Continuum that assesses the key relationship characteristics and positions the relationship within one of the four stages (philanthropic, transactional, integrative, transformational), each associated with a different level of interdependence in the delivery of collaborative value along fourteen dimensions indicating the nature of the relationship (level of engagement, importance to mission, magnitude of resources, types of resources, scope of activities, interaction level, trust, internal change, managerial complexity, strategic value, co-creation of value, synergistic, innovation, external system change).

As relationships are dynamic and undergo significant changes over time the retrospective analyses of enduring relationships reveal a "collaboration continuum" (CC) ranging across the above-mentioned philanthropic, transactional, integrative (Austin 2000a; 2000b) and transformational relationships (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b, 2014). The evolution along the CC is dynamic and can move in either direction, i.e., progress or regress depending on the decisions and actions taken by the collaborators that inform a number of factors as displayed in Figure 2 (e.g., level of engagement, importance to mission, and so forth). As the relationships evolve, each of these parameters might progress at different speeds, such that some characteristics might be more in the philanthropic stage, while others might be more transactional or even integrative, indicating that the stages in the CC are not discrete. The CC provides an extensive elaboration of the types and nature of relationships and a map for managing the collaboration portfolio.

Nature of Relationship	**Relationship Stage**			
	Philanthropic	Transactional	Integrative	Transformational
Importance to the mission	Peripheral			Central
Types of resources	Monetary			Core competences
Magnitude of resources	Small			Big
Scope of activities	Narrow			Broad
Level of engagement	Low			High
Interaction level	Infrequent			Intensive
Trust level	Modest			Deep
Managerial complexity	Simple			Complex
Internal level of change	Minimal			Great
Co-creation of value	Sole			Conjoined
Synergistic value	Occasional			Predominant
Innovation	Seldom			Frequent
External system change	Rare			Common
Strategic value	Minor			Major

Figure 2 The Collaboration Continuum, adapted by Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a: 736.

The third component, Collaborative Value Creation Processes, presents the four phases of partnership development (formation, selection, implementation, institutionalization) and the value creation sub-processes that multiply the creation of value. The final component refers to Collaboration Outcomes by employing a multilevel perspective for the creation of value, i.e., within and outside the collaboration and across the individual, organizational and societal levels of analysis (micro, meso, macro), while also accounting for the costs occurred in the process of the collaboration (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b, 2014). The CVC framework has been extended (Stadtler, 2016) and tested by researchers (Moreno-Serna et al., 2019; Murphy et al., 2015; Le Pennec et al., 2018 among others) for its validity, thus facilitating the collection of data in a systematic way allowing for comparisons across its multiple dimensions.

Managing the Collaboration Portfolio

The proliferation of partnerships and the recent mandate of the UN Agenda 2030 for transformational partnerships is likely to lead to the development of a large number of cross-sector relationships. The task then becomes one of managing the "collaboration portfolio" (Austin, 2003). The first step in portfolio management is to create a clear view of the contents of the collaboration inventory by mapping on the collaboration continuum discussed above, where different collaborations lie relative to philanthropic, transactional, integrative and transformational relationship types. The relationship mapping tracks the "developmental value" creation, the additional value created, and the efficiencies indicating the level of required commitment by the partners (Esteves and Barclay, 2011: 193). At the heart of portfolio management is achieving an optimum mix through balancing. Different collaborations can fulfill distinct functions. They also can impose varying levels of demand on managerial resources, hence requiring a balancing of capabilities and frames (Le Ber and Branzei 2010), against the requirements. There can also be different levels of risk exposure and reward gain. Wise risk management often seeks diversity of types and avoids overconcentration or dependence.

Partnership portfolios allow for effective monitoring and evaluation of the multiple partners' investments into the relationships aiming to develop a balanced and diverse portfolio to meet partners' priorities. Heterogenous partnership portfolios might be established at the exploration stage, as part of the market intelligence and local capability development efforts of a company (Gutierrez et al., 2016). Assessing the outputs, outcomes and impact of partnerships is a continuous challenge that requires clearly articulated goals, strategies, indicators and processes that will allow for consistent assessments (van Tulder, et. al., 2016). The available evidence of partnership monitoring and evaluation remains limited despite the increasing demands for objective third-party assessments (Esteves and Barclay, 2011).

A key problem in developing the evaluation and impact assessment of partnerships is the complexity, cost, and timeliness of data collection. A growing set of "feedback" methodologies show promise in reducing the cost and time required for gathering high-quality feedback from customers, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders, while ensuring relevance to managerial decision-making. Such methods include "lean data" and "constituent voice" approaches (Bonbright et al., 2009; Dichter et al., 2016; Twersky et al., 2013; Whittle 2013) that build on customer feedback methods from business and participatory appraisal methods from international development (Chambers, 1994). Such feedback approaches have not yet been widely applied in cross-sector partnerships, but they have the potential to close the gap between upward accountability (towards funders or capital providers) and downward accountability (towards communities, customers, and beneficiaries), hence increasing significantly the value of partnerships for society. Recent scholarship has also illustrated the critical link between impact measurement and organizational strategy, such that the most useful metrics and tools vary with the strategic objectives of the business or non-profit, as well as their collaborative goals (Ebrahim and Rangan, 2014; Ebrahim 2019).

International Perspectives

Decades of published research documents that collaborations between businesses and civil society organizations exist in almost all countries as well as across countries, but are they different? One of the most in-depth cross-country comparisons of these partnerships in Latin America by the Social Enterprise Knowledge Network revealed that "the collaboration processes…shared many more commonalities than differences" and "were quite similar in terms of the factors that created strong alliances" (Austin, Reficco et al 2004, p.331). Furthermore, when compared to cross-sector partnering in the United States, there were many similarities in partnering processes and principles but differences in motivations and barriers due to different contexts.

An examination of over 100 business–nonprofit collaborations from the United States, Europe, Asia, Latin America, Australia, New Zealand, the Middle East and multi-country engagements revealed core commonalities in the motivations and processes for creating collaborative value (Austin & Seitanidi 2014). Thus, while each partnership has its unique operating characteristics, the critical determinants of effective collaboration are broadly shared.

Future Directions

Civil society–business relations will continue to evolve in complexity and diversity. While the basic nature of adversarial and collaborative interactions described above can be expected to persist, there is a growing recognition by business and civic actors of the global and cross-sectoral nature of public problems.

Responding to these challenges will require innovations in governance, operations, and financing through new sets of relationships not only among civil society and business, but also with governments. For example, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria is a partnership among all three sectors and affected communities in order to finance international health. While responses to the COVID-19 pandemic included a surge in new cross-sectoral collaborations aimed at meeting the plethora of urgent needs, it is painfully apparent that we do not yet have sufficiently robust global collaborations to address effectively health pandemics and climate change, among other challenges. Global governance must continue to evolve.

The new challenges facing business and civil society thus lie at systemic rather than sectoral level. The new frontier for corporations may be in finding ways to integrate social value creation into their business models rather than separately as philanthropy. Movement toward this orientation is evident: the use of environmental, social, and governance criteria in investment analysis rose to US$ 12 trillion in 2018, a 38% increase since 2016 and constituting 26% of assets under management in the US (USSIF, 2018). And CSOs may be similarly dared to seek solutions that craft private enterprise for the public good. With growing interdependence and even convergence, businesses and CSOs will need to become much more adept at creating social partnerships that produce and capture cross-sector synergies.

Cross-References

▶ Accountability
Advocacy
Cause-related Marketing
Civil Society's Role in Meeting the Sustainable Development Goals
Corporate and Employer-supported Volunteering
Corporate Giving
Corporate Social Responsibility
Foundations, Corporate
Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
Greenpeace
Human Rights
Partnerships
Performance and Impact
Social Enterprise
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Stakeholders
Theories of the Nonprofit Sector, Economic
Theories of the Nonprofit Sector, Sociological

World Business Council for Sustainable Development

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