



**Citation:** Mosca, F., Lazzarini, G., & Lucia, M.G. (2024) “Rethinking business, society, and territories for the ecological transition”. *Journal of Emerging Perspectives* 1: 3-5. doi: 10.36253/jep-16893

**Published:** December 16, 2024

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Introduction to the Special Issue

## “Rethinking business, society, and territories for the ecological transition”

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The pursuit of unlimited growth, the subsequent intensive exploitation and use of fossil fuels and mineral resources, intensive agriculture, and livestock farming, as well as unsustainable consumption patterns, have become “geological forces” (Crutzen, 2002) that produce transformative and dramatic impacts on the planet’s ecosystem. Global warming serves as an example, representing the devastating consequences of the Anthropocene (Steffen et al., 2007; Kopnina et al., 2018), marked by uncontrolled human activities, widening global inequities, and cultural homogenization within communities. These trends have also led to widespread human rights violations and basic needs. In response to these challenges, institutional bodies, academics, and eco-social movements have embraced “ecological transition” – a multifaceted approach towards fostering a more harmonious and balanced relationship between humanity and nature (Dimitrova et al., 2013). First coined by Bennet (1979) and later emphasized by Robin Hopkins in 2008, this term has gained traction within global policy frameworks, including the COP Agreements and the European Green Deal, which aims for a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and climate neutrality by 2050 (EC, 2024).

Since its formal recognition, research on ecological transition has flourished. Initially focused on urban responses to climate change and peak oil, studies on ecological transition have expanded to encompass a vast array of economic and social issues, including energy transformations, food sovereignty, circular economy principles, and technological advancements for environmental protection (Ghelfi & Papadopolous, 2021). They also explore strategies to inform consumer choices and raise awareness of the environmental impact of consumption. Consumers, conscious of their role as social actors, are striving to align personal needs with broader societal imperatives. This is evidenced by the growing interest in product provenance, supply chain transparency, and ethical labour practices, with consumers willing to look beyond price.

That is why, the need for adopting a stakeholder approach that revolves around human beings’ interactions and relationships represents the core of the debate about sustainable impacts (Jabbour et al., 2019; Scheepens et al., 2016).

Stakeholders, as groups of individuals, can take on various roles depending on their social, cultural, and geographical contexts and can have diverse perceptions of value, which will ultimately affect their level of engagement in solving social and environmental issues. A stakeholder approach to ecologi-

cal and sustainable transition entails stakeholders' participation in a broad range of activities, from co-creating and sharing knowledge for implementing the circular economy to fostering innovation within the closed-loop ecosystem, enhancing business frameworks, and changing business models, promoting best practices within communities, forming alliances to accelerate the transition through empowerment projects, collaborating in a cross-cultural logic to foster moral and creative imagination. (Beaurain et al., 2023; Clube & Tennant, 2023)

In this logic, scholars in the field of sustainability management, geography, and sociology, point out that the cultural and social dimensions of sustainability are too often disregarded and overlooked, in the literature as well as in practice (Beaurain et al., 2023; Korhonen et al., 2018).

We aim to cover this lacuna through this Special Issue, with contributions that investigate the role, interactions, relationships, and actions among and of stakeholders to create the human prerequisite for sustainable outcomes, in their three dimensions simultaneously: social, environmental and economic (Elkington, 1994; 2018).

Given that human beings' actions and interactions are complex (Freeman et al., 2010) and that the impact of sustainable transition varies across countries, companies, and societies (Coenen et al., 2012) we propose an interdisciplinary approach that explores ecological transition through the lens of business, society, and territories (Hansen & Coenen, 2015) and that allows for creative knowledge domains to disentangle and solve ecosystemic problems starting with the reconceptualization of humans interlinked to their ecosystems, with a focus on the effects driven by the ecological transition on industries and the risks of fast disruption of business activities. That is why, in line with the focus of the Journal of Emerging Perspectives, this Special Issue titled Rethinking business, society, and territories for the Ecological Transition challenges scholars in the fields of management, sociology and geography to come together and contribute to the call for papers by employing a multi-disciplinary lens on how a social and cultural approach to sustainability can foster positive impacts on the ecological transition.

This is the first Issue of the Journal of Emerging Perspectives, the goal of the Editorial Committee is to create an interdisciplinary journal that brings together the three disciplines of business management, sociology, and geography, analysing complex problems with an interdisciplinary approach. The journal aims to acquire the status of a scientific journal and welcomes contributions from academics without specific distinctions in the academic roles.

It intends to manage with methodological rigor, ethics, and openness to different schools of thought while also being an opportunity for publication for younger resources who can experiment with collaborations with more experienced academics. Each monographic issue of the journal will examine a specific theme – an Emerging Perspective – that represents a particularly relevant scientific topic. Each thematic issue will be organized into three sessions. The first session will welcome papers with a predominantly academic focus, thus scientific papers; the second session will accept research that has a more quantitative approach or vertical analysis on a specific topic related to the monographic issue; and the third session will include case studies that are naturally connected to the subject matter under investigation. In particular, in the third session, it will be possible to welcome mixed contributions from academics and managers or contributions from different disciplines beyond those strictly belonging to business management, sociology, or territory.

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