Sustainability Cross-sector Partnerships: The Strategic Role of Organizational Structures

Eduardo Ordonez-Ponce (corresponding author)
Faculty of Business
Athabasca University
201, 13220 St Albert Trail, Edmonton, AB T5L 4W1, Canada
eduardo.ordonez@athabascau.ca
Phone number: 1-844-250-5021

Amelia C. Clarke
School of Environment, Enterprise and Development
Faculty of Environment
University of Waterloo

Acknowledgments: This research has been funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Mitacs, ICLEI Canada, and the University of Waterloo. ICLEI Canada had a role in some of the data collection, while the other funders had no role in any stages of the research.

Forthcoming in Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management
DOI:10.1002/csr.1952
April 2020

ABSTRACT

Researchers claim that organizations partner for strategic reasons and that sustainability is a strategic opportunity. Literature on strategy, partnerships and sustainability is sparse; and the strategic engagement of organizations in sustainability partnerships has been mostly assessed qualitatively. This research aims to determine if structures, a key component of strategy, are implemented within partner organizations, whether they have an effect on the achievement of strategic goals, and if highly structured organizations achieve highly valued outcomes in the context of community sustainability partnerships. Data from 224 organizations partnering in large cross-sector partnerships for the sustainability of four cities were collected finding that organizations implement structures when partnering for sustainability, i.e., sustainability partnerships are strategic for organizations. However, structures do not affect the relationships between goals and outcomes, and being highly structured is not imperative for achieving valuable outcomes, suggesting a key role for cross-sector sustainability partnerships in the achievement of partner outcomes.

Keywords: Strategic Management, Organizational Structures, Cross-sector Partnerships, Community Sustainability, Resource-based View, Contingency Theory

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a long history of organizations partnering across sectors with many researchers claiming that organizations partner for strategic reasons (e.g. Gray, 1989; Selsky & Parker, 2005), and that sustainability is a strategic opportunity for organizations (e.g. Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010; Fiksel, Bruins, Gatchett, Gilliland, & ten Brink, 2014). This research aims to confirm these claims by assessing organizational structures that are key in the achievement of strategic goals (Andrews, 1980; Mintzberg, 1978).

To fill in this gap, a deeper analysis of strategic partnering is necessary that would contribute to a thorough understanding of organizations joining sustainability partnerships from a strategic perspective. Since partnerships are considered strategic and sustainability is a strategic opportunity for organizations, cross-sector social partnerships for implementing community

sustainability plans have been selected as context. The research studies organizations from across sectors who are partnering for community sustainability through the quantitative analysis of organizational-level structures for the achievement of strategic goals in the context of implementing collaborative strategies and engagement in cross-sector partnerships.

Three questions are considered: (1) Do organizations implement structures when partnering for sustainability? (2) Are structures key to the achievement of strategic goals in the context of sustainability partnerships? and (3) Do highly structured organizations achieve highly valuable outcomes when partnering for sustainability? Question 1 attempts to provide some insight into the implementation of structures as a result of organizations joining partnerships as a proxy for partnering to be strategic (Brinkerhoff, 2002). Question 2 looks at the effect structures have between what drive organizations to join sustainability partnerships, and what they gain from partnering. And question 3 assesses whether highly structured organizations achieve highly valuable outcomes.

This paper starts with a theoretical background focusing on partnerships and strategic management, followed by research methods and results, leading to the discussion and conclusions sections.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Strategic Engagement in Partnerships

Researchers from various fields have suggested that partnering is a strategic decision (e.g. Eisenhardt & Schoonhoven, 1996; Gray, 1989; Selsky & Parker, 2005). Organizations partner when they need resources such as skills or financial capital, for legitimacy or market power (Ansell & Gash, 2008), to improve their strategic positions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), to attract others (Eisenhardt & Schoonhoven, 1996), or to respond to institutional pressures from the regulatory system, industry norms, and community constituents (Lin & Darnall, 2015). Organizations partner for strategic dependencies on resources or power, in order to control and cope with environmental uncertainty caused by competition, growing demands by stakeholders, globalization, and technological, social and ecological changes (Gray, 1989), and to obtain tangible and specific benefits beyond reputation or development of goodwill (Waddock, 1989).

Organizations also partner to acquire expertise and resources, which would provide them with a competitive advantage for addressing demands from stakeholders (Vurro, Dacin, & Perrini, 2010). They partner to face problems they are unable to solve alone (Gray, 1985), to address opportunities and neutralize environmental threats (Wassmer, Paquin, & Sharma, 2014), or to address sustainability challenges (Vurro et al., 2010). Organizations partner because they see potential to solve problems affecting them while expecting to gain more by partnering than being alone (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006).

2.2 Partnerships

Partnerships are a coordinating configuration of actors from two or more sectors of society, working collaboratively for the achievement of common goals (Waddock, 1988). Partnerships do not rely on market or hierarchical mechanisms for managing relations among participating organizations, depending instead on ongoing negotiations among stakeholders (Lotia & Hardy, 2008). They are mostly non-hierarchical and voluntary (Selsky & Parker, 2005), involving the commitment of resources from partners (Gray & Stites, 2013; Waddock, 1988). Partnerships are led by governments collaborating with businesses and civil society, by private stakeholders where public-private arrangements are more balanced, and are collaborations between businesses and NGOs, varying in their number of partners, geographic scope, time frame, functions, and access to funding (Glasbergen, 2007). Partnerships represent a "pluralistic approach", involving actors who contribute with their own strengths for addressing societal needs, emerging as a new form of collaborative arrangement (Crane & Seitanidi, 2014; Glasbergen, 2007, p. 1).

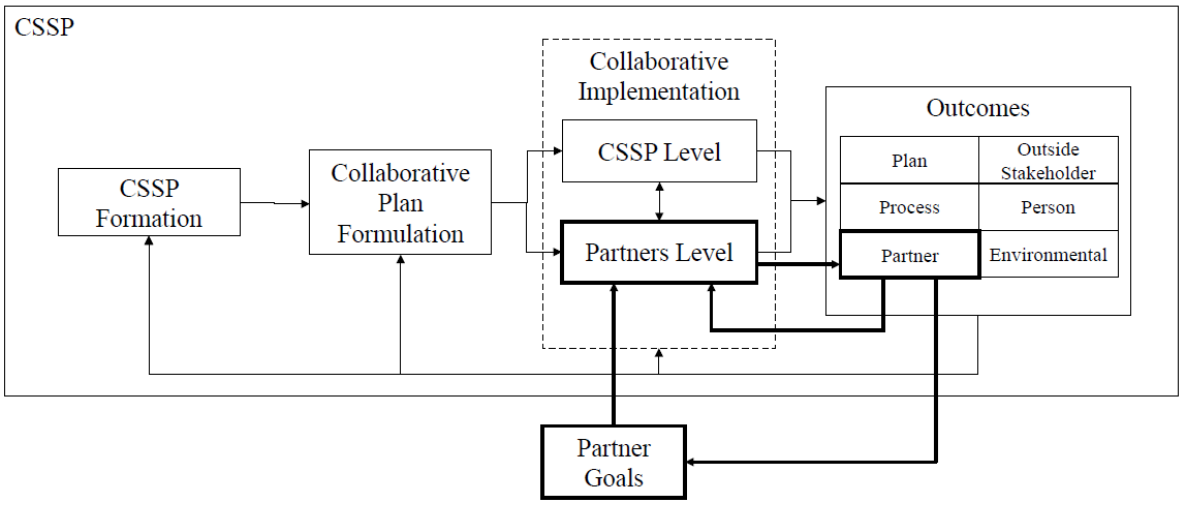
2.2.1 Cross-Sector Social Partnerships

As society becomes more complex, facing increasing turbulence, and with more powerful organizations, partnerships focusing on social, economic, and ecological issues have proliferated through the years (Clarke & MacDonald, 2019), recognising those with partners from across sectors as a way to address sustainability challenges (Crane & Seitanidi, 2014). These partnerships are called cross-sector social partnerships (CSSPs), among other names, which are becoming increasingly popular in addressing sustainability issues (Clarke & MacDonald, 2019; Gray & Stites, 2013) such as education, ecological diversity, transportation, economic

development, or climate change (Clarke & Ordonez-Ponce, 2017; Crane & Seitanidi, 2014; MacDonald, Clarke, Huang, Roseland, & Seitanidi, 2018).

CSSPs follow a collaborative strategic management process with the purpose of designing and implementing collaborative strategic plans (Huxham & Macdonald, 1992). This process starts with understanding the context and forming the partnership, including the identification of partners and resources needed – CSSP Formation, leading to the formulation of a strategic plan with partners establishing together a common vision and goals – Collaborative Plan Formulation. Then, the plan is implemented collectively and individually at the partners level, being monitored and evaluated by those leading the partnership – Collaborative Implementation, reaching different outcomes as a result of the partnership's and the partners' actions (Clarke & Fuller, 2010) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Collaborative Strategic Management Process *(Adapted from Clarke & Fuller, 2010)*



At the partner level, Figure 1 shows the connection of the partners' goals, understood as the drivers to join sustainability partnership (Brinkerhoff, 2002), with their structures for implementing the collaborative strategic plan at their level towards the achievement of outcomes.

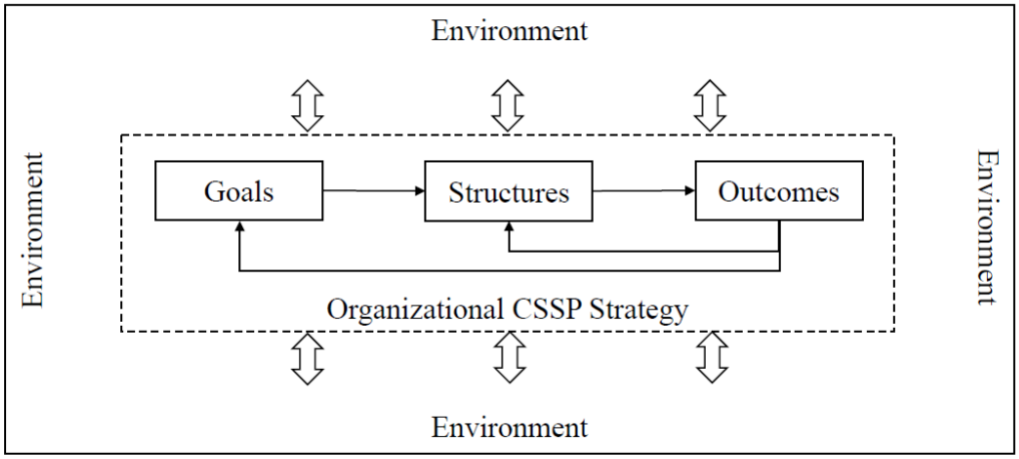
2.3 Organizational Structures

Structures are configurations of enduring activities that organizations need to be effective (Mintzberg, 1980), whose main characteristic is the regularity of roles and procedures, and of processes of interactions, including goals, roles, rules, processes, and norms regulating relationships (Bryson et al., 2006; Ranson, Hinings, & Greenwood, 1980). Strategic decisions generate adequate structural conditions and identify the necessary resources for the achievement of objectives, as well as defining the value to be created for the environment (Andrews, 1980).

Organizations consist of a hierarchical structure, administrative staff, and differential rewards, where formalized structures are vital for the achievement of goals – a rational view of organizations (Weber, 1964). Alternatively, the natural perspective contends that only by understanding what people do and their informal interactions, organizational structures can be understood (Scott, 2003). While some claim that these views coexist given that organizational structures describe the prescribed frameworks and the configuration of interactions (Ranson et al., 1980), others argue that organizations are part of an environment that supports, influences and shapes their structures (Scott, 2003), leading to the contingency argument that structural design depends on the environment (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). According to this view, organizations whose structures best match the demands of their environment will succeed (Scott, 2003), developing formalized structures to face certain contexts such as technical-economic or market environments, and responding with low degrees of structure to uncertain contexts (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967) such as the ones presented by sustainability challenges (George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihanyi, 2016).

From a strategic perspective, organizations determine their goals based on the opportunities and threats presented by the environment that conditions the achievement of outcomes. Then, outcomes as well as the environment create new conditions for structures to be modified or confirmed for the achievement of new outcomes, as well as potentially affecting the definition of new goals that lead to other structures and outcomes. This cycle represents the strategic perspective of organizations to address CSSPs as presented in Figure 1. Figure 2 shows the components of organizational strategy and the relationships among them according to how they interact with each other.

Figure 2: Components of Strategy



Structures are necessary for transforming strategic goals into outcomes, for which organizations interact with the environment through processes, actions, and plans (Andrews, 1980). Then, for partnering to be strategic, organizations must not only have goals but also be structured according to the demands of their environments. Accordingly, organizations must be formally structured to approach certain environments, or be less formalized when environments are less certain (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967).

This paper aims to test whether sustainability partnerships are strategic for organizations, and study the role of structures in the achievement of strategic goals through partnering for sustainability. Then, based on the literature, the following hypotheses are presented:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Organizations implement structures when engaged in sustainability partnerships.
Hypothesis 2 (H2): Organizations engaged in sustainability partnerships that implement structures achieve their strategic goals.
Hypothesis 3 (H3): Highly structured organizations achieve highly valuable outcomes when partnering for sustainability.

3. METHODS

This study surveyed 224 organizations from the private, public and civil society sectors partnering in large CSSPs for the sustainability of four cities (Table 1). These CSSPs were selected because (i) they have a minimum of approximately one hundred partners from across sectors actively engaged, i.e., committed to contribute to at least some of the sustainability goals of the partnership (Waddock, 1988, 1991); (ii) plan-time horizons of at least fifteen years; (iii) impacting communities of between one and two million people from developed countries. The rationale for selection was that (i) large CSSPs are still understudied (Branzei & Le Ber, 2014), have increased in numbers (Clarke & MacDonald, 2019) and are key for addressing sustainability (Worley & Mirvis, 2013); (ii) it allows to assess organizations partnering for a long time; and (iii) are the ones with the largest budgets for sustainability (Hawkins, Krause, Feiock, & Curley, 2016). These partnerships were identified from an initial group of 111 CSSPs from around the world that had declared to previous surveys this research is part of that they had more than 100 partner organizations from across sectors. However, although several of them had many partners, most of them did not engage them actively.

Table 1: Participating Partnerships based on the Selection Criterion

CSSP Name[†] (Community, Country)	Active partners	Working since	Time projection	Population[‡] (millions)	HDI[§]
Barcelona + Sustainable (Barcelona, Spain)	328	2002	2022	1.6[¶]	0.88
Bristol Green Capital Partnership (Bristol, UK)	291	2003	2020	1.1[††]	0.91
Gwangju Council for Sustainable Development (Gwangju, South Korea)	99	1995	2021	1.5[‡‡]	0.90
Sustainable Montreal (Montréal, Canada)	142	2005	2020	1.6[§§]	0.91

[†] Names translated into English

[‡] Population does not necessarily refer to the population of the city, but that of the partnerships' geographic impact area

[§] Human Development Index at country level (United Nations Development Programme, 2016)

[¶] (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2016)

[††] (West of England Local Enterprise Partnership, 2014)

[‡‡] (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2016)

[§§] (Statistics Canada, 2017)

3.1 Survey

A cross-sectional survey was designed in English and, according to the official languages of selected cities, translated into French, Spanish, and Korean using a source-to-target language approach to alleviate problems of translation bias (Smith, 2010). The survey contained four parts with a total of twelve main questions. Part A collected information about the organizations' characteristics and relationships to the partnerships; Part B asked them to value a list of 31 drivers for organizations to partner; Part C asked about the implementation of 14 structural features to address sustainability; and Part D examined how organizations value a list of 31 outcomes gained from partnering for sustainability. The lists of drivers, structural features, and outcomes were all based on the literature. The sections on drivers and outcomes were organized into human, organizational, financial, and physical capitals as resources that organizations seek to obtain when partnering as proposed by the resource-based view (RBV) (Barney, 1991, 1995), plus community resources, i.e., socio-environmental concerns for organizations from all the sectors of society (Darnall & Carmin, 2005; Koontz & Thomas, 2012; Porter & Kramer, 2011) following the natural RBV (Hart, 1995) and society-oriented resources (Gray & Stites, 2013). The section on structures was organized into formal and informal structural features as proposed by contingency theory (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). The former included having a department, positions, budget, machines, an office or infrastructure; and the latter referred to implementing cross-functional teams, partnering with others, and implementing policies, plans, reporting, and monitoring and controlling practices (Clarke & MacDonald, 2019; Gray & Stites, 2013; March & Simon, 1966; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Worley & Mirvis, 2013). Responses on drivers and outcomes were ordinal (5-point Likert scale), and those on structures were dichotomous (Yes/No).

The survey's validity was measured through content validity, being presented to two academic experts on the topic who had designed and implemented similar surveys previously on multicultural sustainability partnerships who approved it (Bohrnstedt, 2010). Wave analysis was used to determine response bias (Atif, Richards, & Bilgin, 2012), finding no response biases among early and late respondents, partnerships, nor types of organizations. Methods to reduce social desirability response bias such as eliminating the interviewer, offering anonymity (Krosnick & Presser, 2010), self-administration or a private interview setting (Tourangeau &

Yan, 2007) were used in this research. Internal consistency was adopted for determining the reliability of the survey. Cronbach´s α coefficients were calculated for every construct showing good reliability in all of them (greater than 70%) (Cronbach, 1951; Litwin, 1995).

3.2 Sampling

The population for each partnership was the total number of active partners (Table 1). Normal distribution was considered because it describes a large number of chance distributions in a useful manner (Loether & McTavish, 1980), it is the most commonly used distribution with many uses in descriptive and inferential statistics (Lomax, 2007), and it has been applied in social sciences many times (Kedar, 2004). Therefore, the following formula was used for determining the sample size for finite large populations:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \times p \times (1-p)}{e^2} \qquad [Eq.\,1]$$

where Z = 1.96 with 95% confidence interval, p = .8 representing homogeneity in the population with respect to the attributes of interests (Israel, 1992), and e = 5% as the margin of error (Cochran, 1977). Then, with a total population of active partners N = 860 organizations, n_0 = 246. However, since n_0 is greater than 5% of the population, Cochran's corrected formula (Eq. 2) was considered to determine the final sample size n_1 = 191, equal to 22.3% of the total number of active organizations.

$$n_1 = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{(n_0 - 1)}{N}} \qquad [Eq.\,2]$$

3.3 Data Collection

The units of analysis were organizations partnering in the selected CSSPs, and the targeted survey respondents were representatives from the organizations to the partnerships.

A total of 224 organizations were surveyed between June 2015 and June 2017, of which 83% responded online, mode justifiable since the selected cities' countries all have high access to the Internet[1] and with the potential of obtaining a probability sample of the full population while allowing for generalizations (Couper, 2000). The software used was FluidSurveys for the first cities, while the fourth was surveyed through SurveyMonkey, a platform whose owners acquired FluidSurveys during the survey process. The remaining surveys were collected in person in three of the four partnerships since Gwangju did not need an onsite process due to its online response rate (54%). The onsite surveyors were researchers trained to follow the same procedure with the purpose of reducing their potential influence on respondents (Smith, 2010). The final response rate was 26%, larger than the calculated rate (Eq. 2), rendering the findings generalizable.

4. RESULTS

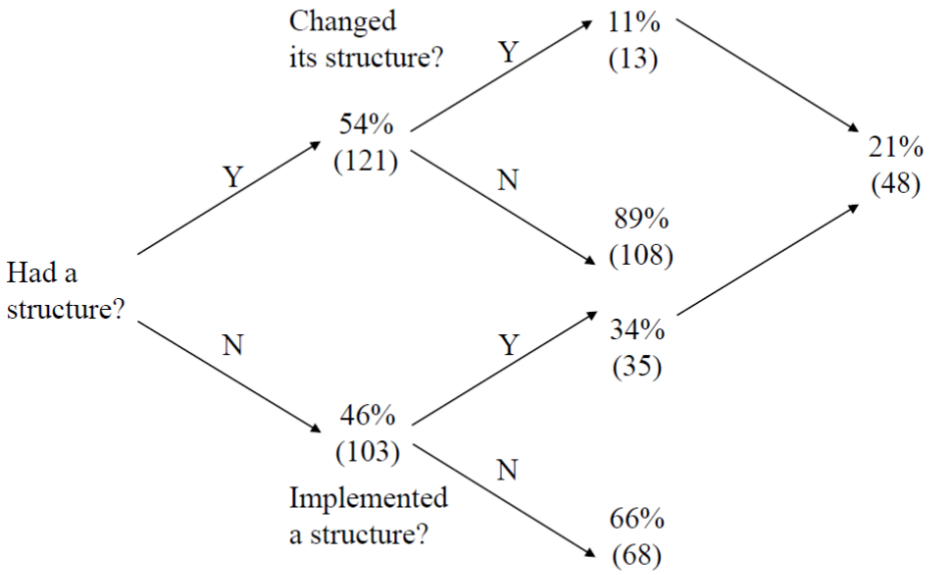
Three questions were asked to test H1. First, whether organizations had a structure for implementing sustainability before joining the partnership. If they answered yes, they were asked if their structure was changed due to joining the partnership; and if the response was no, they were asked if a structure was implemented upon joining the partnership.

As seen from Figure 3, 54% of the organizations declared having a structure for implementing sustainability measures before joining the partnership, out of which 11% made changes to their structure as they joined the partnership (6% of the total). Conversely, 46% of the organizations responded not having a structure before joining the partnership, of which 34% did implement a structure after joining (15% of the total). Considering that these two groups of organizations who had a structure before joining a partnership and those who implemented a structure after joining are independent, both figures can be added, reaching 88% of partner organizations with a structure implemented for addressing sustainability. Furthermore, while most organizations had a structure for addressing sustainability before joining the partnership (54%), one out of ten did change their structure after having joined the partnership. Similarly, out of those who did not have a structure before joining the partnership (46%), about one third implemented a structure after joining. These figures lead to 21% of the respondents having a

[1] Canada: 90%, Korea: 93%, Spain: 81%, UK: 95% (The World Bank Group, 2018).

structure due to joining a partnership, either because they changed the structure they previously had, or because they implemented a new structure. Out of the organizations responding with respect to their structures, 97% responded they were informally structured, in line with the contingency view of organizations address complex issues such as sustainability challenges.

Figure 3: Distributions of Responses from the Surveyed Organizations (H1)



Total surveyed organizations: 224

In order to understand whether organizations implement structures due to joining a partnership (H1), a Chi-squared test was used showing X^2 (1, N = 224) = 17.84, p = .00, significant at 5% (Table 2). Then, the null hypothesis that organizations change their structures independently of whether they had or not a structure before joining a partnership is rejected, i.e. structures are changed depending on the previous existence of structures, then it can be concluded that sustainability partnerships lead to the implementation of structures.

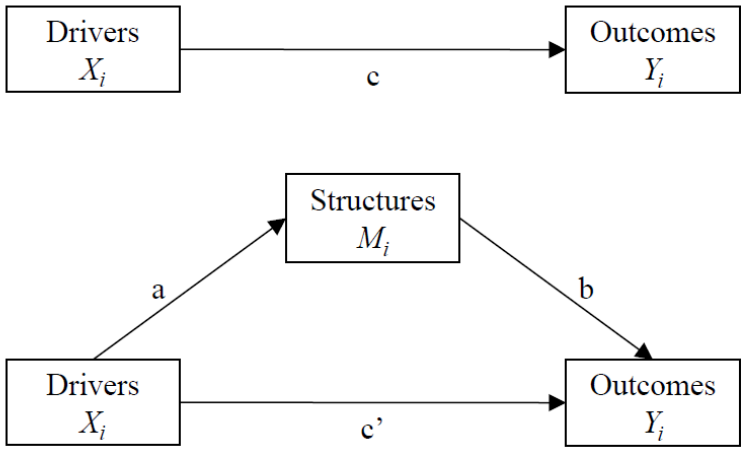
Table 2: Chi-squared Analysis of the Implementation of Structures

	Changed Structure	Did not change Structure	Total
With Structure	13 (25.93) [6.46]	108 (95.07) [1.76]	121
Without Structure	35 (22.07) [7.57]	68 (80.93) [2.07]	103
Total	48	176	224

Note: Table provides the following information: the observed cell totals, (the expected cell total) and [the chi-squared statistic for each cell]

To answer H2, a mediation model was adopted. Figure 4 shows the mediation model presenting structures that mediate the relationship between drivers as a proxy for goals, and outcomes, as key variables of strategy.

Figure 4: Mediation Model for Testing Hypothesis 2



c = ab + c'

c: total effect of X on Y

ab: indirect effect of X on Y

c': direct effect of X on Y controlling for M

X: Drivers (causal-independent variable)

Y: Outcomes (outcome-dependent variable)

M: Structures (mediator variable)

To test the mediation effect of structures between drivers and outcomes, Sobel tests were conducted in consideration to the mediator variable being dichotomous (Roberts, Haan, Dowd, & Aiello, 2010; Zhu, Cordeiro, & Sarkis, 2013). Results show that all Sobel statistics are smaller than the critical values, $|Z| < 1.96$, $p > .05$, failing to reject the null hypothesis, i.e., structures do

not mediate between drivers and outcomes, with a significance level set at .05 (Table 3). Sobel tests were conducted 31 times according to the numbers of drivers and outcomes reaching consistent results as a proof of the robustness of the results.

Table 3: Sobel Test Mediation Results

		Sobel	SE	*p*
Community Capital	X_1,M,Y_1	0.99	0.01	0.32
	X_2,M,Y_2	0.44	0.01	0.66
	X_3,M,Y_3	1.16	0.01	0.25
	X_4,M,Y_4	0.29	0.01	0.77
	X_5,M,Y_5	0.65	0.01	0.51
Human Capital	X_6,M,Y_6	0.75	0.01	0.46
	X_7,M,Y_7	0.78	0.00	0.43
	X_8,M,Y_8	1.31	0.01	0.19
	X_9,M,Y_9	0.22	0.01	0.82
Organizational Capital	X_{10},M,Y_{10}	0.25	0.01	0.80
	X_{11},M,Y_{11}	-0.22	0.01	0.83
	X_{12},M,Y_{12}	-0.44	0.01	0.66
	X_{13},M,Y_{13}	1.21	0.01	0.23
	X_{14},M,Y_{14}	0.71	0.01	0.48
	X_{15},M,Y_{15}	0.37	0.01	0.71
	X_{16},M,Y_{16}	-0.79	0.00	0.43
	X_{17},M,Y_{17}	-0.74	0.00	0.46
	X_{18},M,Y_{18}	0.25	0.00	0.80
	X_{19},M,Y_{19}	0.05	0.00	0.96
	X_{20},M,Y_{20}	0.60	0.01	0.55
	X_{21},M,Y_{21}	0.13	0.01	0.90
	X_{22},M,Y_{22}	0.86	0.01	0.39
Financial Capital	X_{23},M,Y_{23}	-0.19	0.00	0.85
	X_{24},M,Y_{24}	-0.68	0.00	0.50
	X_{25},M,Y_{25}	0.44	0.00	0.66
	X_{26},M,Y_{26}	-0.37	0.01	0.71
	X_{27},M,Y_{27}	-0.09	0.00	0.93
	X_{28},M,Y_{28}	-0.60	0.00	0.55
	X_{29},M,Y_{29}	-0.56	0.00	0.58
Physical Capital	X_{30},M,Y_{30}	-0.56	0.01	0.58
	X_{31},M,Y_{31}	-0.37	0.00	0.71

Note: X_i and Y_i represent the questions on drivers and outcomes, respectively (i: from the 1st to the 31st question), and *M* represents structures as mediator.

A Chi-squared test was considered to understand whether structures lead to outcomes (H3). For addressing this concern, the questions on structural features were grouped into a binary composite index that shows poorly and highly structured organizations. Poorly structured organizations are those with less than 50% of the considered structural features, and highly structured organizations have at least 50% of the structural features. Questions on outcomes were similarly clustered into two groups, those poorly valued outcomes and those highly valued outcomes. Considering that the 31 questions were addressed through Likert scales from 1 (very valuable) to 5 (no value), the threshold between poorly valued outcomes and highly valued outcomes is set at 93. Results shows X^2 (1, N = 131) = 1.66, p = .20, not significant at 5% (Table 4). Then, the test fails to reject the null hypothesis that outcomes are independent of structures, i.e., structures do not lead to outcomes. As a result, the hypothesis that highly structured organizations lead to highly valued outcomes cannot be confirmed.

Table 4: Relationships Between Structures and Outcomes

		Outcomes		
		Poor	High	
Structured	Poor	22 (19.45) [.33]	76 (78.55) [.08]	98
	High	4 (6.55) [.99]	29 (26.45) [.25]	33
		26	105	131

Note: Table provides the following information: the observed cell totals, (the expected cell total) and [the chi-squared statistic for each cell]

5. DISCUSSION

This research has three findings: organizations implement structures when partnering for sustainability, structures do not mediate between goals and outcomes, and it is not imperative for organizations to be highly structured to achieve highly valued outcomes. Since structures are key for organizational strategy (Mintzberg, 1978), their implementation in the context of sustainability partnerships confirms the view that partnerships are strategic for organizations

(Selsky & Parker, 2005; Wassmer et al., 2014), and that sustainability is a strategic opportunity (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010; Fiksel et al., 2014). However, findings do not confirm that structures are necessary for reaching strategic goals, as proposed by the literature. Furthermore, since highly and poorly structured organizations lead to the achievement of highly valued outcomes, it is not imperative to be highly structured to achieve desired outcomes.

Certainly, organizations understand the relevance of structures for the achievement of strategic goals (X^2 (1, N = 224) = 17.84, $p < .05$) in the context of sustainability partnerships as proposed by the literature. According to the results, sustainability partnerships do influence organizations in the creation and implementation of structures; therefore, it can be argued that organizations do consider sustainability partnerships to be strategic. Through quantitative analysis, this result supports statements from many scholars, contributing to the literature in this respect.

However, results also show that despite structures being implemented when partnering for sustainability, these do not mediate between drivers and outcomes ($|Z| < 1.96$, $p > .05$), not affecting the achievement of strategic goals, which was expected based on their strategic importance. Structures are necessary but not a sufficient condition for the achievement of strategic goals, which is consistent with viewing organizations as open systems interacting with their environmental context (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). This analysis can be expanded through the understanding of levels of structuration and contexts. It is not only a matter of having structures but of a certain kind according to contexts. As argued by contingency theory, structures can be formal or informal to face certain or uncertain environments (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967), such as those presented by sustainability challenges (George et al., 2016), respectively. While results show that organizations partnering for sustainability address this challenge through the implementation of informal structures in line with contingency theory, since these are not enough for organizations to achieve their goals, contexts seem to play a key and complementary role as well. These contexts are represented by partnerships that are large, across sectors, and focused on sustainability issues, hence their strategic importance. While sustainability challenges are addressed accordingly through informal structures, partnering with many organizations from across sectors would create constant, varied and recurrent interactions, which are a result of the power of large cross-sector sustainability partnerships, setting a

favourable context for the achievement of partner organizations' goals. While these findings confirm the importance of structures in the achievement of strategic goals, they also highlight the relevance of sustainability CSSPs towards that achievement.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper is to assess the implementation of structures when partnering, determine their mediating effect between strategic goals and outcomes, and assess whether organizations that are highly structured lead to highly valuable outcomes, testing statements that argue that organizations partner for strategic reasons and that sustainability is strategic for them..

Until now, researchers had mostly assessed the strategic engagement of organizations in sustainability partnerships through qualitative approaches. By quantitatively testing organizations from across sectors partnering for community sustainability, this research has found that organizations implement structures when partnering for sustainability, with sustainability CSSPs influencing the implementation of structures, hence their strategic importance; structures do not affect the relationships between goals and outcomes; and highly valued outcomes can be achieved independently of how structured organizations are. Furthermore, these findings highlight the power of large sustainability partnerships as a context that complements the implementation of appropriate structures in the achievement of organizational goals.

These findings are of importance to organizations thinking about or engaged in cross-sector partnerships highlighting the strategic importance of partnerships and how these could be approached through structures. Moreover, this research contributes to the strategy, partnerships, and sustainability literature positioning sustainability partnerships as strategic for organizations towards the achievement of strategic goals.

7. AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research is needed to see if this is also relevant to organizations partnering in other large partnerships focused on other social issues or at other scales, as well as for smaller CSSPs. Similarly, further research is needed to assess the power of large cross-sector

partnerships in the achievement of organizational outcomes, and to understand the isolated effect of structures in the achievement of goals. Similarly, further analysis is also suggested to uncover the relationship between highly or poorly structured organizations and outcomes, a result not found that leads to hypothesize again that partnerships are key in the achievement of outcomes, confirming its strategic consideration.

8. REFERENCES

Andrews, K. R. (1980). *The Concept of Corporate Strategy*. Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, Inc.

Ansell, C., & Gash, A. (2008). Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *18*(4), 543–571. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mum032

Atif, A., Richards, D., & Bilgin, A. (2012). Estimating Non-Response Bias in a Web-based Survey of Technology Acceptance: A Case Study of Unit Guide Information Systems. *Proceedings of the 23rd Australasian Conference on Information Systems*. Presented at the 23rd Australasian Conference on Information Systems, Geelong, Australia.

Barney, J. B. (1991). Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage. *Journal of Management*, *17*(1), 99–120.

Barney, J. B. (1995). Looking Inside for Competitive Advantage. *The Academy of Management Executive*, *9*(4), 49–61.

Baumgartner, R. J., & Ebner, D. (2010). Corporate Sustainability Strategies: Sustainability Profiles and Maturity Levels. *Sustainable Development*, *18*, 76–89. https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.447

Bohrnstedt, G. W. (2010). Measurement Models for Survey Research. In P. V. Marsden & J. D. Wright (Eds.), *Handbook of Survey Research* (2nd ed., pp. 347–404). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Branzei, O., & Le Ber, M. (2014). Theory-Method Interfaces in Cross-Sector Partnership Research. In M. M. Seitanidi & A. Crane (Eds.), *Social Partnerships and Responsible Business* (pp. 229–266). London, UK: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.

Brinkerhoff, J. M. (2002). Assessing and Improving Partnership Relationships and Outcomes: A Proposed Framework. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, *25*, 215–231.

Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C., & Stone, M. M. (2006). The Design and Implementation of Cross-Sector Collaborations: Propositions from the Literature. *Public Administration Review*, (Special Issue), 44–55. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00665.x

Clarke, A., & Fuller, M. (2010). Collaborative Strategic Management: Strategy Formulation and Implementation by Multi-Organizational Cross-Sector Social Partnerships. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *94*(1), 85–101. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0781-5

Clarke, A., & MacDonald, A. (2019). Outcomes to Partners in Multi-Stakeholder Cross-Sector Partnerships: A Resource-Based View. *Business & Society*, *58*(2), 298–332. https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650316660534

Clarke, A., & Ordonez-Ponce, E. (2017). City Scale: Cross-Sector Partnerships for Implementing Local Climate Mitigation Plans. Speak Your Mind Symposium on Climate Change and Public Administration. *Public Administration Review*, *2*(7). Retrieved from http://faculty.washington.edu/aseem/Public_Administration_Review_cliamte_change_symposium.pdf

Cochran, W. (1977). *Sampling Techniques* (3rd ed.). New York, USA: John Wiley & Sons.

Couper, M. P. (2000). Web Surveys. A Review of Issues and Approaches. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *64*, 464–494.

Crane, A., & Seitanidi, M. M. (2014). Social Partnerships and Responsible Business. What, Why and How? In M. M. Seitanidi & A. Crane (Eds.), *Social Partnerships and Responsible Business. A Research Handbook* (pp. 1–12). London, UK: Routledge: Taylor & Francis.

Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coefficient Alpha and the Internal Structure of Tests. *Psychometricka*, *6*(3), 297–334.

Darnall, N., & Carmin, J. (2005). Greener and Cleaner? The Signaling Accuracy of U.S. Voluntary Environmental Programs. *Policy Sciences*, *38*, 71–90.

DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields. *American Sociological Review*, *48*(2), 147–160.

Eisenhardt, K., & Schoonhoven, C. B. (1996). Resource-Based View of Strategic Alliance Formation: Strategic and Social Effects in Entrepreneurial Forms. *Organization Science*, *7*(2), 136–150.

Fiksel, J., Bruins, R., Gatchett, A., Gilliland, A., & ten Brink, M. (2014). The Triple Value Model: A Systems Approach to Sustainable Solutions. *Clean Technologies and Environmental Policy*, *16*, 691–702. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10098-013-0696-1

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.

Glasbergen, P. (2007). Setting the Scene: The Partnership Paradigm in the Making. In P. Glasbergen, F. Biermann, & A. P. J. Mol (Eds.), *Partnerships, Governance and*

Sustainable Development: Reflections on Theory and Practice (pp. 1–25). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Gray, B. (1985). Conditions Facilitating Interorganizational Collaboration. *Human Relations*, *38*(10), 911–936.

Gray, B. (1989). *Collaborating. Finding Common Ground for Multiparty Problems*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Gray, B., & Stites, J. P. (2013). *Sustainability Through Partnerships*. London, ON: Network for Business Sustainability.

Hart, S. L. (1995). A Natural-Resource-Based View of the Firm. *Academy of Management Review*, *20*(4), 986–1014.

Hawkins, C. V., Krause, R. M., Feiock, R. C., & Curley, C. (2016). Making Meaningful Commitments: Accounting for Variation in Cities' Investments of Staff and Fiscal Resources to Sustainability. *Urban Studies*, *53*(9), 1902–1924. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098015580898

Huxham, C., & Macdonald, D. (1992). Introducing Collaborative Advantage: Achieving Interorganizational Effectiveness Through Meta-Strategy. *Management Decision*, *30*(3), 50–56.

Instituto Nacional de Estadística. (2016). What is the Population of...? Retrieved from http://www.ine.es/en/welcome.shtml

Israel, G. D. (1992). *Determining Sample Size* (Florida Cooperative Extension Service No. PEOD-6). Gainesville, FL: Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences: University of Florida.

Kedar, O. (2004). Normal Distribution. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods* (pp. 744–747). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Koontz, T. M., & Thomas, C. W. (2012). Measuring the Performance of Public-Private Partnerships. *Public Performance & Management Review*, *35*(4), 769–786.

Krosnick, J. A., & Presser, S. (2010). Question and Questionnaire Design. In P. V. Marsden & J. D. Wright (Eds.), *Handbook of Survey Research* (2nd ed., pp. 263–313). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Lawrence, P. R., & Lorsch, J. W. (1967). Differentiation and Integration in Complex Organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *12*(1), 1–47.

Lin, H., & Darnall, N. (2015). Strategic Alliance Formation and Structural Configuration. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *127*(3), 549–564. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2053-7

Litwin, M. S. (1995). *How to Measure Survey Reliability and Validity*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Loether, H. J., & McTavish, D. G. (1980). *Descriptive and Inferential Statistics: An Introduction* (2nd ed.). Boston, USA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.

Lomax, R. G. (2007). *An Introduction to Statistical Concepts* (2nd ed.). New Jersey, USA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Lotia, N., & Hardy, C. (2008). Critical Perspectives on Collaboration. In S. Cropper, C. Huxham, M. Ebers, & P. S. Ring (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relations* (pp. 203–230). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

MacDonald, A., Clarke, A., Huang, L., Roseland, M., & Seitanidi, M. M. (2018). Cross-Sector Partnerships (SDG #17) as a Means of Achieving Sustainable Communities and Cities

(SDG #11). In W. Leal Filho (Ed.), *Handbook of Sustainability Science and Research*. New York, USA: Springer Publishing Company.

March, J. G., & Simon, H. A. (1966). *Organizations* (8th ed.). Cambridge, MA: John Wiley & Sons.

Mintzberg, H. (1978). Patterns in Strategy Formation. *Management Science*, *24*(9), 934–948.

Mintzberg, H. (1980). Structure in 5's: A Synthesis of the Research on Organization Design. *Management Science*, *26*(3), 322–341.

Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. R. (1978). *The External Control of Organizations. A Resource Dependence Perspective*. New York, USA: Harper & Row.

Porter, M. E., & Kramer, M. (2011). Creating Shared Value. *Harvard Business Review*, *89*(1/2), 62–77.

Ranson, S., Hinings, B., & Greenwood, R. (1980). The Structuring of Organizational Structures. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *25*(1), 1–17.

Roberts, E. T., Haan, M. N., Dowd, J. B., & Aiello, A. E. (2010). Cytomegalovirus Antibody Levels, Inflammation, and Mortality Among Elderly Latinos Over 9 Years of Follow-up. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, *172*(4), 363–371. https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwq177

Scott, W. R. (2003). *Organizations. Rational, Natural, and Open Systems* (5th ed.). New Jersey, USA: Prentice Hall.

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

Smith, T. W. (2010). Surveying Across Nations and Cultures. In P. V. Marsden & J. D. Wright (Eds.), *Handbook of Survey Research* (2nd ed., pp. 733–763). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Statistics Canada. (2017). Montréal, Ville [Census subdivision], Quebec and Montréal, Territoire équivalent [Census division], Quebec. Retrieved from Census Profile, 2016 Census website: http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=2466023&Geo2=CD&Code2=2466&Data=Count&SearchText=montreal&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&TABID=1

The World Bank Group. (2018). Individuals Using the Internet (% of Population). Retrieved from Data website: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS

Tourangeau, R., & Yan, T. (2007). Sensitive Questions in Surveys. *Psychological Bulletin, 133*(5), 859–883.

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2016). *The World's Cities in 2016 - Data Booklet* (No. ST/ESA/ SER.A/392). UNDESA.

United Nations Development Programme. (2016). *Human Development Report 2016*. New York, USA: United Nations Development Programme.

Vurro, C., Dacin, M. T., & Perrini, F. (2010). Institutional Antecedents of Partnering for Social Change: How Institutional Logics Shape Cross-Sector Partnerships. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *94*, 39–53. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0778-0

Waddock, S. A. (1988). Building Successful Social Partnerships. *Sloan Management Review, 29*(4), 17–23.

Waddock, S. A. (1989). Understanding Social Partnerships. An Evolutionary Model of Partnership Organizations. *Administration & Society*, *21*(1), 78–100. https://doi.org/10.1177/009539978902100105

Waddock, S. A. (1991). A Typology of Social Partnership Organizations. *Administration & Society*, *22*(4), 480–515. https://doi.org/10.1177/009539979102200405

Wassmer, U., Paquin, R., & Sharma, S. (2014). The Engagement of Firms in Environmental Collaborations: Existing Contributions and Future Directions. *Business & Society*, *53*(6), 754–786. https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650312439865

Weber, M. (1964). *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (T. Parsons, Ed.). New York, USA: Free Press.

West of England Local Enterprise Partnership. (2014). *West of England Strategic Economic Plan 2015-2030*. West of England Local Enterprise Partnership.

Worley, C. G., & Mirvis, P. H. (2013). Studying Networks and Partnerships for Sustainability: Lessons Learned. In C. G. Worley & P. H. Mirvis (Eds.), *Building Networks and Partnerships. Organizing for Sustainable Effectiveness* (Vol. 3, pp. 261–291). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Zhu, Q., Cordeiro, J., & Sarkis, J. (2013). Institutional Pressures, Dynamic Capabilities and Environmental Management Systems: Investigating the ISO 9000 - Environmental Management System Implementation Linkage. *Journal of Environmental Management*, *114*(15), 232–242. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2012.10.006