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N° Implementing community sustainability strategies through cross-sector partnerships

Value Creation for and by Businesses

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Introduction

Local sustainable development is too complex for any one organization to address alone (Clarke, 2014; Glasbergen, 2007). Like many other complex issues, sustainability can more effectively be tackled through cross-sector partnerships (Selsky & Parker, 2005). Cross-sector partnerships are voluntary collaborations between organizations from different sectors (business, public, and civil society) that address a mutually prioritized social issue (Babiak & Thibault, 2009; Waddock, 1991). In response to local sustainable development challenges and to internationally led sustainability programs initiated by the United Nations, local governments around the world have been partnering with businesses and other local stakeholders to formulate and implement community sustainability plans (Clarke, 2014), also known as Local Agenda 21s (Rok & Kuhn, 2012). This chapter explores: the benefits experienced by businesses as a result of their involvement in implementing community sustainability plans through cross-sector partnerships; the roles businesses play; and the value of business engagement in local sustainable development for the environment and the community.

Community sustainability plans consider integrated ecological, social and economic topics all in one strategic plan, and are long-term in their vision (anywhere from five years to 100 years) (Clarke, 2014). The plans typically include up to sixteen different sustainability topics: transportation, water, waste, air, energy, climate change, land use, ecological diversity, food security, civic engagement, social infrastructure, housing, safety, local economy, employment, and financial security (MacDonald, Clarke, Huang, Roseland, & Seitanidi, 2017). Some of the topics which are managed have direct impacts on the local ecosystems (e.g., water, air, ecological diversity, land use, etc.), while others have indirect impacts (e.g., food choices, transportation choices, energy choices, etc.).

The value of a community sustainability plan is that it allows for many topics to be managed at an appropriate ecological and social scale, so that collective impacts can be measured (Clarke, 2014). Local governments have jurisdiction over a number of environmental topics (Gibbs, Longhurst, & Braithwaite, 1996), and through a partnership approach (Clarke & Erfan, 2007), even more can be achieved.

Businesses are involved, not just in the formulation of the plans, but also in helping with the implementation (MacDonald, Clarke, Huang, & Seitanidi, working paper). Being involved enables businesses to align their sustainability strategies with the community's collaborative sustainability strategy (Clarke & Fuller, 2010), thus helping address with the needs of the community in which they operate. The reasons that businesses and other stakeholders engage in these community-level partnerships for implementing community sustainability plans go beyond the desire to help the community achieve local sustainability goals. They are motivated by the desire: to learn, to network, to improve their reputation and legitimacy, to increase positive relations with the community, to market their products and services, and to improve their financial performance (Clarke & MacDonald, 2016).

This chapter provides background on community sustainability plans; introduces cross-sector partnerships as a means of enabling community-wide actions; and details the roles businesses are playing in helping achieve the community-wide sustainability vision. The main contribution offered through this chapter is identifying the value of businesses engaging in community sustainability strategies (for the environment and for the business itself). This chapter builds on research done as part of a larger project on implementing community sustainability plans to discuss the examples of collective actions that have been effective in mitigating environmental impacts (University of Waterloo, n.d.). In addition, this chapter includes the findings from a study that was conducted in Canada regarding why businesses engage in these partnerships.

Literature Review

Sustainability

In Our Common Future, sustainable development is defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), 1987). However, sustainable development is not an exact science and its common definition is still uncertain to many who do not understand clearly what it means and what can be done. Sustainable development includes social development beyond economics and the environment, with the participation of diverse stakeholders to achieve multiple sustainability challenges (Kates, Parris, & Leiserowitz, 2005). Ideally, sustainable development requires ecological sustainability and protection of biodiversity "to guide the use of resources, maintenance of economic vitality with social inclusiveness in opportunities and benefits, social equity within and across social groups and generations, and the capacity for governance to bring all this about" (Francis, 2002). Sustainable development "remains the most tenable principle of collective action for resolving the twin crises of environment and development" (Sneddon, Howarth, & Norgaard, 2006).

The ideas underpinning sustainable development from the Stockholm conference (1972) and Our Common Future (1987) heavily influenced the agenda for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) (Mebratu, 1998). It was at this 1992 conference in Rio de Janeiro that the influential Agenda 21 outcome document was created (United Nations, 1992) as a global program for action on sustainable development (Yates, 2012). Agenda 21 is a call for a global partnership for integrating environmental and development concerns for the fulfilment of basic needs, improving living standards, and protecting and managing ecosystems for a safer and prosperous future (United Nations, 1992), highlighting the urgency of global environmental and social disparities that underpin the world's environmental and development challenges. To make Agenda 21 meaningful, a local approach that addresses the specific needs of individual local authorities was recommended (Bond, Mortimer, & Cherry, 1998).

Based on the guiding principles laid out in Chapter 28 of Agenda 21, local governments were tasked with developing their own Local Agenda 21 (LA21) (Bond et al., 1998) due to their proximity to people and their ability to adjust organizations according to new contexts and social demands (Barrutia, Aguado, & Echebarria, 2007), playing a "vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote sustainable development" (United Nations, 1992). This chapter argues that another value of the community scale is that some ecological limits are local and can therefore be measured and managed.

LA21s were supported by ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability[*] (Devuyst & Hens, 2000), which defined an LA21 as "a participatory, multi-sectoral process to achieve the goals of Agenda 21 at the local level through the preparation and implementation of a long-term, strategic action plan that addresses priority local sustainable development concerns" (Rok & Kuhn, 2012). LA21 promotes the partnership model for the development, implementation, and oversight of a community sustainability plan (Clarke, 2014; Rok & Kuhn, 2012). Community sustainable development continues to be of global importance, and was identified as the focus of one of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 (United Nations Development Programme, 2015).

[*] ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (formally called International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives) is a non-governmental organization with a worldwide reach, and a membership of approximately 1200 local governments from 70 countries, representing 570 million people.

Community Sustainability Plans

Local governments have understood the complexity for addressing sustainability challenges and currently there are about 10,000 LA21 initiatives implementing sustainability plans addressing economic, social and environmental challenges around the world (Rok & Kuhn, 2012). Sustainability initiatives have been addressed under a varied list of names which are used depending on the scholar and the place of research. As mentioned, LA21 is a participatory multi-stakeholder process and plan at city or local level that was originally initiated through the United Nations´ Agenda 21 (United Nations, 1992). However, not all 10,000 LA21 initiatives are implemented through a multi-stakeholder partnership. In this chapter, we use community sustainability plans (CSPs) as a generic name for the sustainability plans created via a public consultation process for determining environmental, social and economic goals and targets for a community, in partnership with local organizations (Clarke, 2012). Finally, the term Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (ICSP) has been used in Canada in the context of the gas tax agreements defining them as "long-term plan[s] developed in consultation with the community to achieve sustainability objectives" (Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure of Ontario, 2012). Regardless of the name, these are all essentially the same type of plan.

Cross-Sector Partnerships

Cross-sector partnerships are formed when at least two organizations from public, private, or civil society sectors agree to work together to achieve mutual goals or to address a shared problem (Parmigiani & Rivera-Santos, 2011). Cross-sector partnerships specifically focused on social issues (including ecological and economic) are termed cross-sector social partnerships (or social partnerships); in these partnerships the actors collaborate to tackle a social problem of mutual interest (Selsky & Parker, 2005). A type of social partnership with more than one member from each of the three sectors that have a stake in the social problem is a multi-stakeholder partnership (Babiak & Thibault, 2009). Multi-stakeholder partnerships tend to have a large number of stakeholders involved as partners. See Table 1 for an overview of the types of organizational partners involved in the multi-stakeholder partnerships for formulating and implementing the community sustainability plans discussed in this chapter.

Table 1: Example of partners in Local Agenda 21 multi-stakeholder partnerships

Civil Society	Private	Public
Neighborhood associations	Chamber of commerce	Local authorities
Community groups	Industry associations	Health authorities/hospitals
Non-profit organizations	Local businesses	Energy utilities
Local environmental groups	Board of trade	Training and enterprise councils
Volunteer support organizations	International business with local operations	Schools/colleges/universities
Housing associations		Development agencies

Adapted from (Freeman, Littlewood, & Whitney, 1996)

Any business engaged in a cross-sector partnership is considered a partner. Past research has found that structurally there are two levels of implementation in multi-stakeholder partnerships: the partner level (Huxham, 1993) and the partnership level (Brinkerhoff, 1999). At the partner level, partners reallocate resources inside their organizations to make internal changes, such as hiring a sustainability coordinator or implementing a waste reduction policy to support partnerships' goals. The partnership level is where collaborative actions occur, such as reporting, or joint initiatives. Actions at both the partner and partnership levels help to achieve the collaborative goals outlined in the community sustainability plan; goals such as regional reductions in GHG emissions or improvements on the regional air quality (Clarke, 2011). Activity at the partner level will be expanded on in the following section, The Value of Businesses Engaging in Community Sustainability Plans.

Based on the Canadian experience, there are five key components at the partnership level needed for implementation of community sustainability plans (Clarke, 2012):

1. Oversight: plans must have an overseeing body, including a secretariat in charge of coordinating the process, a decision-making body, and the involvement of members of the city council.

2. Partner engagement: engaging the right quantity and quality of partners is a key for addressing sustainability challenges which partner organizations are responsible for.

3. Community-wide action: partners need to take relevant action in their own organizations with the purpose of assuring that progress is not limited to the jurisdiction of the local governments, but also to partner organizations.

4. Communications: it is important to keep partners engaged and motivated, thus peer-learning opportunities are needed and progress must be celebrated and publicly recognised.

5. Monitoring & Measurement: a community sustainability plan must have a system which allows monitoring progress so needed adjustments can be designed and implemented in due time.

Given the two levels of implementation, in practice, the structures vary in degree and intensity of collaboration (Clarke, 2014). By and large this chapter focuses on the how and why businesses become partners in these partnerships.

The Canadian Landscape

From 2005 to 2010, the federal government department of Infrastructure Canada ran a program called the New Deal for Cities, whereby municipalities could gain access to federal gas tax revenues through their respective provincial government for infrastructure projects (Infrastructure Canada, 2005). Over the five years, the New Deal initiative distributed $5 billion among Canadian municipalities (Infrastructure Canada, 2005). A prerequisite for receiving gas tax money was that the municipality needed to develop an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP) (Infrastructure Canada, 2005). This led to an influx of ICSPs in Canadian municipalities.

According to the Canadian Sustainability Plan Inventory developed by the University of Alberta, there are 1,242 sustainability plans and affiliated documents in Canadian municipalities across the country (University of Alberta, 2017), most of which have been developed collaboratively with stakeholders in the community and some of which are being implemented through multi-stakeholder partnerships (Clarke, 2014).

Recent research finds that most of the community sustainability plans in Canada include environmental, social and economic sustainability, although socio-environmental topics remain the most frequent, following a global trend (MacDonald et al., 2017). In Canada almost all of the assessed plans included transportation and water, and about nine out of ten considered waste, air, energy and land use as matters to be addressed. Around 80% of the plans included climate change, food security and local economy. Three quarters of the plans approached ecological diversity and civic engagement. 71% incorporated social infrastructure, 65% housing, 57% employment and safety/crime, and only 41% considered financial security/poverty alleviation as one of their topics (MacDonald et al., 2017). One of the pending matters still to be resolved in Canada is a deeper involvement of partners in the implementation processes (Clarke, 2014).

The Value of Businesses Engaging in Community Sustainability Plans

Businesses have contributed in valuable ways to community sustainability activities. Since 1992, businesses have increasingly partnered with governments, international organizations, and NGOs to contribute to sustainable development initiatives (LaFrance & Lehmann, 2005). Businesses have become "an increasingly dominant social institution", being involved not only on economic matters, but also in social, environmental and political affairs (Crane & Seitanidi, 2014). For example, in the case of the sustainability plan for Barcelona in Spain, businesses represent 50% of the 421 partners[†], while the second largest group are NGOs reaching 45% (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2003). Similarly, in Bristol (UK), the private sector represents 61% of the 848 partners, followed by civil society (35%) (BGCP CIC, n.d.). Moreover, at an organizational level businesses' commitment to the United Nations Global Compact indicates their desire to contribute to sustainable development as they change their operations to implement responsible practices and develop innovative solutions to sustainability challenges, including actions for poverty alleviation and pollution prevention (United Nations Global Compact, 2016).

The involvement of businesses in cross-sector partnerships for community sustainability initiatives starts by understanding their relationship with the community, which is determined by assessing the context and forming of the partnership. This is the first stage in a collaborative strategic plan formulation and implementation process (Clarke & Fuller, 2010). Then, businesses work together with other partners in establishing a common vision and objectives to be reflected in a collaborative strategic plan – the second stage of the process (Clarke & Fuller, 2010). In the third stage, the implementation of the plan is conducted internally by partner organizations focusing on their specific sustainability actions, as well as collectively with the other partners focusing on community-wide sustainability actions (Clarke & Fuller, 2010). Finally, outcomes of the implementation process are achieved by the partnership as well as by the partners, including outcomes for business partners (Clarke & Fuller, 2010). A collaborative strategic process such as the one defined here is not linear as each phase interacts with the other in forward and backward loops, as well as receiving external influence which can modify the defined process (Clarke & Fuller, 2010).

Businesses, as with any other partner organizations, implement sustainability actions at two levels: partner and partnership level. At the partner level, partners reallocate resources inside their organizations to form new structures that help them implement their own sustainability plans and/or goals (Kale, Dyer, & Singh, 2002; Schreiner, Kale, & Corsten, 2009; Seitanidi, 2010; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009). Partner level structure can include creating: new processes that green business operations such as eco-efficiency programs, or the implementation of environmental management systems (Rotheroe, Keenlyside, & Coates, 2003); a new department dedicated to implement a company sustainability strategy (MacDonald, Clarke, Huang, & Seitanidi, 2014); or reporting under frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (Rotheroe et al., 2003). It can also include green procurement initiatives that help other local businesses

[†] Excluding educational centres

(Kemp & Clarke, 2012). A study based on partner perceptions found that partners that participate in implementing the community sustainability plan through partner level activities experience more benefits from the partnership (MacDonald et al., 2014). At the partnership level, business partners get involved in various committees. For example, in Montreal's Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development by being part of the Partners' Committee, businesses (along with partners from the other sectors) have engaged to share best practices, discuss challenges and propose adjustments to the plan (Clarke, 2011, 2012).

While businesses have an important role to play in community sustainability they also stand to benefit from engaging in the implementation of a community sustainability plan. A study done on partner perceptions in the Canadian communities of Hamilton, Montreal, Vancouver, and Whistler found that partners associated several organizational resources as outcomes of their involvement (Clarke & MacDonald, 2016). Table 2 provides a summary of the positive outcomes reported by these partners. The resources identified by partners and summarized in Table 2, informed the nine outcomes tested in the partner level survey discussed in Part B of the findings in this chapter.

Table 2: Resources gained from case studies in Hamilton, Montreal, Vancouver, and Whistler

Identified Resources	Outcomes Terminology
Increased capacity due to new engagement mechanisms / Built relationships	Networking
Improved reputation	Reputation
Gained knowledge	Learning
Built relationships and social capital	Positive relationships with the community
Gained influence	Legitimacy
Increased impact on community sustainability / Added new external processes, programs and/or entities	Community sustainability
Increased impact on community sustainability / Added new internal processes, programs and/or entities	Organization's sustainability
Accessed marking opportunities	Marketing opportunities
Cost savings / Accessed new business opportunities	Financial performance

Adapted from (Clarke & MacDonald, 2016)

Positive outcomes such as improved reputation, accessed new marketing opportunities, accessed new business opportunities, and cost savings all contribute to the business case to engage in a community sustainability partnership.

Methodology

Broad findings discussed in this chapter are based on a summary of results from a research project that has been active for approximately ten years. The research project is called Implementing Sustainable

Community Plans and includes findings from numerous case studies and surveys. The overarching goal of this multi-year and multi-study research project is to "help local governments around the world more effectively implement Local Agenda 21s (LA21s), community sustainability plans, and community climate action plans" (University of Waterloo, n.d.). Relevant Canadian stories from the project are summarized in Part A of the findings to provide evidence for the argument that value is created both for and by businesses when they engage in implementing community sustainability strategies.

A specific study elaborated on in this chapter employed an online survey method to collect data about the resources that partners value most. The results from this partner level survey are presented in Part B of the findings. Survey respondents were asked to rate the value of nine partner outcomes to their organization on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 was equal to no value and 5 as very valuable. As previously mentioned, the nine partner outcomes tested in the survey built on past case study research of partners in LA21 multi-stakeholder partnerships (see Table 2) (Clarke & MacDonald, 2016).

The survey targeted partners involved with implementing community sustainability plans, and was promoted and administered to all of the French and English speaking local authorities in ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability Canada's (ICLEI Canada) membership. ICLEI Canada was a valuable collaborator in this research as they are connected to local governments implementing community sustainability plans across Canada and have significant experience administering surveys with academic institutions (Carmin, Nadkarni, & Rhin, 2012).

ICLEI Canada sent personalized emails to their contacts in local governments who host the secretariats for partnerships implementing community sustainability plans. There is limited publicly available information about partners so this study relied on municipal staff to forward the link to the online survey to their partners. The online survey was sent to three hundred and twenty-eight partners involved in municipal sustainability focused social partnerships from 15 Canadian communities. These efforts generated 42 responses or a response rate of 12.8%. This response rate is comparable to response rates typical of surveys completed in non-traditional contexts (Kriauciunas, Parmigiani, & Rivera-Santos, 2011). Non-traditional contexts include studies on new organizational forms (Kriauciunas et al., 2011), such as multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Findings

Part A: Stories of Collaborative Action and Direct Environmental Impacts

In some multi-stakeholder partnerships for implementing community sustainability plans, two progress reports were produced. One captured the actions taken by the partners on each of the collaborative goals, and the other captured progress made on sustainability indicators. For example, for Montreal's partnership, "…annual progress reports on action implementation were created; and bi-annual 'state of the environment' indicator reports were produced" (Clarke & Fuller, 2010, p. 94). These 'state of the environment' reports were possible because some direct environment and social impacts were measured at the community scale.

An example of a collaborative goal in Montreal's community sustainability plan (initially called Montreal's First Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development) is related to greenhouse gas emissions (Clarke, 2011). In terms of partner engagement, numerous actions could be taken to help achieve the collaborative goal; "For example, Action 1.3 (anti-idling) related to a wide diversity of partners, while Action 1.9 (buying eco-efficient vehicles) was only relevant for some larger organizations" (Clarke & Fuller, 2010, p. 95). While the trend in Montreal for region-wide emissions was going in the wrong direction (Clarke, 2011), this would not be known if only actions were being measured and not also community-wide greenhouse gas emissions.

In Halifax their regional plan considered growth based on water quantity and the feasibility of expanding municipal water infrastructure (Clarke & Erfan, 2007). As parts of the region are outside the municipal water infrastructure, all developments in those areas obtained water from wells. As there is only so much easily accessible ground water, housing density decisions were based on environmental criteria. Thus businesses that propose development in those rural areas can help achieve collaborative goals of working within ecological limits by building water-efficiency into their housing designs. Businesses were part of helping formulate the community sustainability plan and were critical for its implementation.

In Hamilton their community sustainability plan (initially called Vision 2020) had a collaborative goal around air quality (Clarke, 2011). To address this issue, Clean Air Hamilton was launched as a multi-stakeholder partnership. Major polluters (steel companies) worked with researchers at the local universities, the local government, environmental non-governmental organizations, and others to create and implement actions plans around air quality. Since the launch of Clean Air Hamilton in the mid-1990s, air quality has drastically improved in the region. While each company was taking initiatives on their own to address environmental concerns, being a part of this multi-stakeholder partnership focused their efforts, provided relevant research and suggestions, and enabled progress to be measured at the appropriate scale. A company can measure reduction in pollutants in their emissions, or actions taken, but at the community scale, improvements in air quality can be measured.

In Whistler, their community sustainability plan is called Whistler2020. One of the partners is an all-season resort (mostly known as a ski hill) called Whistler-Blackcomb. This company found that by engaging in the community-wide efforts to achieve sustainability, it provided them with a stakeholder engagement mechanism (Clarke & MacDonald, 2016). A micro-hydro project, which was controversial, was ultimately supported by community organizations because it was part of helping achieve community-wide sustainability goals and not just an effort to reduce costs for the company.

Part B: Partner Level Survey Results

As mentioned above the partner level survey questions were designed to build on what was learned from the results of earlier case studies (Clarke & MacDonald, 2016). The survey questions did so by asking respondents to rate the value of the resources that had been identified by partners in the case studies (Clarke & MacDonald, 2016). The information from the survey made it easier to determine the value proposition of LA21 multi-stakeholder partnerships to partners. The findings of the survey revealed that the top three resources that partners most value are networking, learning and reputation as resources gained from the partnerships studied. Most of the resources rated as most valuable by partners are linked to the partners' license to operate including reputation, networking, legitimacy, and positive relationships with the community. The results of the online survey by resource are shown below in Table 3.

Table 3: Outcomes partners' value

Benefits	Mean	SD	Var
Networking	4.29	0.97	0.94
Learning	4.26	0.86	0.73
Reputation	4.26	1.13	1.27
Positive relationships with the community	4.24	1.01	1.02
Legitimacy	4.24	1.06	1.11
Community sustainability	4.19	0.92	0.84
Organization's sustainability	4.02	1.07	1.15
Marketing opportunities	3.57	1.20	1.42
Financial performance	3.52	1.35	1.82

In order to determine if there are significant differences among the means, an ANOVA test was used providing the following information:

Table 4: ANOVA

Source of Variation	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*P-value*	*F crit*
Between Groups	31.08466	8	3.886	3.3955	0.0009	1.963514
Within Groups	422.2619	369	1.144			
Total	453.3466	377				

Results show that there is at least one significant difference among the means ($p < 0.05$). Then, in order to determine which ones are significantly different, a Tukey test is used considering the following parameters:

Table 5: Tukey test parameters

Number of treatments	9
Sample size	42
Total number of observations	378

Qu ($\alpha = 0.05$)	4.387
Q_df_num	9
Q_df_den	336

Then, for determining the significant differences, the absolute differences between means were compared to a critical range obtained through Qu, sample size per treatment, and the mean square within groups. Results showed that there are significant differences between: networking and financial performance (difference = -0.038); learning and financial performance (difference = -0.014); and reputation and financial performance (difference = -0.014), with an $\alpha = 0.05$. In other words, the top three were significantly different than the bottom one. The other benefits are not significantly different from each other. Implications of these results are explored in further in the discussion section of this chapter.

Discussion and Managerial Implications

As mentioned in the introduction, the main contribution offered through this chapter is identifying the value of businesses engaging in community sustainability strategies (for the local environment and for the business itself). While there is significant value for companies to develop their own sustainability strategies and/or embed sustainability in their business strategies (Borland, Ambrosini, Lindgreen, & Vanhamme, 2014; Gladwin, Kennelly, & Krause, 1995; Hart, 1997; Howard-Grenville, Buckle, Hoskins, & George, 2014; Porter & Kramer, 2011; Whiteman, Walker, & Perego, 2013), this chapter argues that even more can be achieved by aligning these strategies with the needs of the local community and limitations of the local ecosystems.

The 'state of the environment' can be measured for some topics at the community-scale, while only improvements can be measured at the organizational-scale. By measuring the actual condition of the environment, then the need for additional improvements can be determined. Water, biodiversity, and air quality are excellent examples of environmental topics that are best monitored at the local level. There are numerous social topics for which this is also the appropriate scale, such as housing, and employment. For greenhouse gas emissions, the impact is global, so even at the local scale, all that can be measured is progress towards goals.

What roles businesses can play in helping implement a community sustainability plan is not the same question as to why businesses would voluntarily engage. The roles they can play are numerous, from offering the products and services needed to move to a low-carbon economy and operate within ecological limits; to mitigating their environmental impacts and helping improve the social situation. The value of businesses engagement in achieving the goals within a community sustainability plans is obvious, but the value that same engagement offers businesses is less apparent. This chapter offers original findings about why organizations engage. By knowing this information, multi-stakeholder partnerships can be designed to better facilitate long-term engagement of key stakeholders.

As can be seen from the findings in Part B, gaining physical/financial capital (e.g., improving financial performance) was rated lowest in the survey responses regarding outcomes that partners valued (as a result of participating in the partnership). On the other hand, gaining organizational capital is critical; for instance, partners rated relationship building as the most important resource gained. Networking, reputation, learning, positive relationships, and marketing opportunities – items rated in this survey – are hard for competitors to replicate due to a dimension of social complexity which makes them especially valuable to firms (Clarke & MacDonald, 2016; Das & Teng, 2000). It is clear from the Whistler Blackcomb example, that these relationships were critical for achieving the company's goals. These findings are consistent with the corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate citizenship literature. For instance, the CSR literature indicates that businesses engage in CSR activities to improve their reputation and gain a social license to operate (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2003). More recent writing on corporate citizenship discusses the business case and value proposition of social responsibility (Mirvis & Googins, 2006). While business sustainability can be broader than CSR, engaging as partners in a cross-sector partnership is a form of CSR, and therefore some of the same benefits are found. That said, it is also an opportunity to make a measurable impact on community-wide sustainability goals.

The survey findings in this chapter show that the survey respondents felt very positive about their experience with these cross-sector partnerships and that their organizations gained many benefits. Given the response rate, it may be that only those businesses that gained positive outcomes filled out the survey. Nonetheless, this data indicates that businesses do benefit from their efforts to work with other community stakeholders to address local sustainable development issues. The findings presented in this chapter build on a previous qualitative study (Clarke & MacDonald, 2016) which provides insight into the benefits, including representative quotations. This study goes further through a quantitative analysis that allows the degree to which partners benefited to be understood (i.e., the mean scores out of 5 were very high), and the top benefits to be distinguished from the bottom one. While both studies focused on partners involved in cross-sector partnerships for implementing sustainable community plans, the partnerships studied were not the same. Thus, this study also helps validate the findings of the previous one about these items being valuable partner outcomes.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

This chapter argues that community sustainability strategies enable a better scale for monitoring certain environmental and social conditions, and therefore the impact of activities (both positive and negative). However, there can be challenges related to collecting data to measure the impact at this scale too. One such challenge is common method bias whereby a single source provides the data, which can impact the validity of the results. Also, some topics are not easily measured or data is not currently being collected (given the capacity of the community stakeholders). While there is increasingly more standardization to what is being measured in regards to local sustainable development there is still a huge variance in the indicators being used by communities, thus making comparisons between communities difficult.

In regards to future research, while Part B of this chapter was specifically designed to answer the question about what organizations value about the outcomes they experience through being involved in a multi-stakeholder partnership, more work could be done on this. For example, a larger scale study could be done that draws out the experiences of different types of businesses, different size businesses, etc. Also, the effect of the partnership size could be studied with a larger study.

In addition, this chapter is premised on the assumption that multi-stakeholder partnerships are an ideal way to engage businesses in helping achieve community sustainability goals. Further research about various approaches could be done – for example, voluntary versus mandatory, without versus with a community-wide strategy - to see what the most effective approach is. Evidence from the larger research project indicates that more action is taken by businesses as a result of being a part of the partnership, and that the sustainability actions taken by companies better align with community needs, but this has not been studied in detail.

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