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Research Article


Why Do Companies Engage in Sustainability? Propositions and a Framework of Motivations


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ABSTRACT

This article proposes a framework of corporate motivations for sustainability based on the study of sustainability engagement most prevalent in the different UN-defined macro-regions. Four main motivations were uncovered in the literature: Legitimacy – the perception that the actions are appropriate within a system of norms and beliefs; Market Success – increase in turnover, brand equity, or innovation due to sustainable practices; Process Improvement – sustainability-oriented optimization of processes; and Social Insurance – preemptive insurance against reputation or goodwill losses. Field articles were selected via a bibliometric review to develop the propositions. They indicate which motivations are of more academic concern in general and in Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern America, and Oceania. Legitimacy appears as the most prevalent motivation, followed by Market Success. More developed regions tend to have more studies on Market Success, while Social Insurance seems linked to less developed markets, where corporations must provide access to needs beyond their business.

Keywords: sustainable development; corporate sustainability; corporate motivation; business motivations; bibliometrics

JEL Codes: F3, M14, M16, M19, Q56

INTRODUCTION

The current article's objective is to analyze the primary motivations for corporate engagement in the sustainability agenda along time and across different geographies of the world, proposing a conceptual framework that encompasses these concepts. Most of the motives for change seem to be external to the business (Lozano, 2015; Pless, Maak, & Stal, 2012) as companies need a solid push to leave their inertia. The mining and heavy industry sectors, for example, soon adopted the idea of a 'social license to operate' as their reason to invest in a more sustainable business model (Sustainable Business Council, 2013). However, since the early studies on corporate motivations for becoming more 'green' in the 1990s (Dillon & Fischer, 1992; Lawrence & Morell, 1995; Suchman, 1995; Winn, 1995), internal or competitive motivations have also appeared as potential drives for change.

This discussion on the endogenous or exogenous character of corporate sustainability motivations leads to a reflection that different motives may conduct to different implementation in distinct markets (regionally) while changing along the time (longitudinally). Thus, the present article's central research question is how corporate sustainability motivations arise through time and in different areas of the world, determining how companies address the issues related to sustainable development (SD).

Motivation literature is rooted in psychology, initially described by Sigmund Freud in his seminal study about the unconscious (Bargh & Morsella, 2008), and later extended to several different study areas. Many works have been systematized with a focus on motivational drives, or individuals' needs, as described by Maslow (Maslow, 1943). Sekhar, Patwardhan, and Singh's (2013) review on drivers demonstrates that they are directly linked to performance, first at an individual and only then at an organizational level. For them, each person's contribution toward an organization's goals helps form encompassing corporate motivations and allows it to succeed.

The present work narrows in on the corporate motivations for sustainability as systematized by a group of scholars (Windolph, Harms, & Schaltegger, 2014) after the work of several authors described in the Literature Review section below. It does not aim to focus on the description of drivers for sustainability, which are contained within the broad motivations and are studied by another group of authors, such as Hamidu, Haron, and Amran (2016); Lozano (2015); Lozano and Haartman (2017); Okereke (2007); among others. It is worth noting that the literature on corporate motivations for sustainability builds upon previous, and parallel, research on motivations for corporate social responsibility (CSR) as well.

There are also references in the literature to individual motivations of leaders – attitudes of top management, board members, or influential executives within corporations. However, this article concentrates on corporate motivations that are "generally relevant for business and potentially interesting to any company" (Windolph, Harms, & Schaltegger, 2014, p. 273) instead of decisions taken by powerful individuals. Although literature stresses the importance of management attitude and belief in improving a company's social performance (Garcia-Castro, Ariño, & Canela, 2010), this paper focuses on corporate motivations only, not personal ones.

Thus, the literature on corporate motivations for sustainability presents a multitude of concepts in both theoretical and field studies. However, it lacks a discussion on the intensity of the motives in different geographies and the pace they appear along the time, as more deeply described and analyzed in the Literature Review and the Findings sections below. The present study aims to fulfill this central gap – the lack of a comprehensive model to examine business motivations for sustainability engagement, including regional and longitudinal differences.

Even the most recent literature has not addressed the corporate sustainability progression from a motivations' timing and regional perspective. The study developed by Windolph, Harms, and Schaltegger (2014) supported extensive corporate sustainability research, as companies accepted further responsibility for it and the topic became more and more prevalent (Epstein & Roy, 2003; Pless et al., 2012). Among different lines of research, work has been conducted on business involvement for companies that market to consumers or to other businesses (Johnson, Redlbacher, & Schaltegger, 2018), strategic modeling for the future (Rodrigues & Franco, 2019; Schaltegger, Hansen, & Lüdeke-Freund, 2016), business motivations within a single country (Chen & Chen, 2019; Govindan, Kannan, & Shankar, 2014; Pureza & Lee, 2020), social exchange (Buhusayen, Seet, & Coetzer, 2021), corporate identity (Simões & Sebastiani, 2017), and firm performance (Gupta & Gupta, 2020). Many of these studies recognize the need and suggest future research to address corporate sustainability with a longitudinal or regional perspective (Chen & Chen, 2019; Gupta & Gupta, 2020; Johnson et al., 2018; Pureza & Lee, 2020; Rodrigues & Franco, 2019), reinforcing the gap covered by the present study.

Below, in the Literature Review section, a list of motivations was compiled from the literature. It brings one additional concept that was not included in previous studies, that of Social Insurance, which appears as a financial dimension not adequately contemplated by the three other motivations discussed by the authors. In the Findings and Discussion sections, the article derives propositions and a framework from a comprehensive review of corporate sustainability field articles compiled by a systematic search of different world geographies.

For the operational use of this study, the terms 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development' will be used interchangeably as the latter is the former's end goal (Diesendorf, 1999) and as sustainability is commonly used as a short format for SD, especially in composed terms such as 'corporate sustainability.' Another operational term is 'macro-regions of the world.' This concept was created and delimited by the United Nations Statistics Division (2012) and comprises six regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern America, and Oceania. Those macro-regions were defined for statistical purposes and follow the continental borders to the maximum (Andel, Bicik, & Bláha, 2018). However, the UN strived to maintain a distinction between developed versus developing regions along with the borders (United Nations Statistics Division, 2012), as reported by the academic literature on inequality (Mann & Riley, 2007). Thus, it is possible to make inferences regarding regional development based on this concept with Africa, Asia, and Latin America/Caribbean as the less developed macro-regions on average. There is significant heterogeneity among and also within these macro-regions; thus, the

word ‘average’ must be stressed in the previous sentence. It is, however, not within the scope of the present study to further discuss these differences.

The next section of this article recalls the SD concept’s creation and evolution and dissects the extensive literature on corporate motivation. It also conciliates scholars’ views on companies’ motives to embrace the sustainable development agenda, compiling a list of motivations for corporate sustainability. The Method section explains the process used to conduct the field articles’ review, necessary to construct the framework. The Findings and the Discussion and Propositions sections show the results of this study, develop the propositions, and propose an encompassing framework. The final section brings the conclusions and limitations of the present work and points out the gaps that researchers may explore further in this area of study.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF CORPORATE MOTIVATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The term ‘sustainable development’ was coined in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Brundtland Commission, after its chairperson, Harlem Gro Brundtland, Norway’s former prime minister. The Commission’s final report defined sustainable development as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations, 1987, p. 16). This definition aimed to go beyond the environment, also contemplating the social and the economic aspects of the development. It later inspired the creation of a global agenda that would go well into the 21st century, responding primarily to the concern of less developed countries. The Agenda 21, launched at the Rio de Janeiro 1992 UN Sustainable Development conference, recognized the significant difference in development and investment capacity between the world’s macro-regions (Mann & Riley, 2007) and addressed the necessary mechanisms to reorient public policy toward SD, combat poverty, and improve the use of resources and the management of wastes and chemicals (Meakin, 1992).

Since the concept’s launch, there have been three global sustainable development conferences – Rio 1992, Johannesburg 2002, and Rio+20 in 2012. Initially understood as a government-led initiative, sustainable development has grown to include every level of society, from individuals to NGOs, from governments to corporations, as it became clearer that sustainability cannot be realized without everyone’s involvement, in particular that of companies (Benn & Dunphy, 2007; Blindheim & Langhelle, 2010). Corporations became relevant global players, and without their inclusion in the sustainable development efforts this change may not be possible (Pless et al., 2012).

But why would companies be motivated to participate in the SD effort? Most of them were created prior to the very conceptualization of sustainable development and functioned successfully on a business model that simply did not take it into consideration (Schneider, 2014). Also, there is no definite consensus on whether sustainable activities can positively impact companies’ financial performance (Garcia-Castro et al., 2010; Marques, Reis, & Gomes, 2018; Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003). However, the literature shows increasing involvement with the topic as business

leaders accept their companies' co-responsibility to find solutions to the global sustainability issues and make sustainable development a reality (Epstein & Roy, 2003). Companies are, therefore, becoming 'greener' and adopting a proactive attitude that surpasses legal requirements (Achabou & Dekhili, 2016), transforming the way they conduct their operations.

This new role of corporations derived from their own strength and visibility. It is no longer enough to create jobs and reward investors. They are now required to behave as model, charitable citizens, and to report it to society, as portrayed by Sierra-Garcia, García-Bernal, and Zorio (2013). Reputation became closely linked to the concept of sustainability (Eberle, Berens, & Li, 2013). An extensive number of studies around the world have portrayed a positive impact in consumer relations, employee recruitment, government and media treatment, and even company valuation (Martins, Lemme, & Leal, 2015; Orlitzky et al., 2003; Park, Lee, & Kim, 2014; Robinson, Kleffner, & Bertels, 2011; Rose & Thomsen, 2004; Saeidi, Sofian, Saeidi, Saeidi, & Saeidi, 2014; Soleimani, Schneper, & Newbury, 2014).

In the years 2010, corporate motivations for SD were systematized around three main clusters by Windolph et al. (2014), namely Legitimacy, Market Success, and Process Improvement (Internal Improvement in the original article) based on the work of previous authors (Bansal & Roth, 2000; Darnall, 2003; Epstein, 2008). In the literature review conducted for this study, a fourth motivation added an angle that did not seem covered by the previous three, namely Social Insurance (Brammer & Pavelin, 2005; Godfrey, 2005; Godfrey, Merrill, & Hansen, 2009). The latter motivation was mostly contained within the business finance literature after being proposed by Paul Godfrey (2005).

The first concept, Legitimacy, is widely studied beyond the motivation literature. Legitimacy theory developed from political economy (Deegan, 2002) and focuses on the relationship between corporations and their operating environment in a quest for compliance to legislation or socially accepted norms. Legitimacy theory operates at a conceptual level and explains the more recent need for companies' voluntary social disclosure (Laan 2009). Legitimacy is the corporate's response to institutional theory (Barbieri, Vasconcelos, Andreassi, & Vasconcelos, 2010; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). It is how companies comply with institutions, adapting their practices and discourses to the evolving system of beliefs present in any society (Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine, Lucas, & Schilke, 2016; North, 1990) and have the moral obligation to improve the way they do business (Graafland & van de Ven, 2006). A concern raised by scholars in CSR is that responsible attitudes are more beneficial to a company if its stakeholders believe that it is more interested in the greater good than in its self-interest (Karaosmanoglu, Altinigne, & Isiksal, 2016). Windolph et al. (2014) demonstrate in their research that this attitude may be true for sustainability attitudes as well. A public service broad motivation seems more positively influential among stakeholders, from employees to consumers and politicians, than apparently self-serving motives.

Market Success refers to a given company's ability to successfully respond to its business partners' SD expectations. "The behavior of consumers, investors, and competitors can create the motivation to achieve market success through sustainability management" (Windolph et al., 2014, p. 274). Innovation is a vital part of continuous success, and SD may be a radical enough

change to present new opportunities for serving the market and building new business models (Boons, Montalvo, Quist, & Wagner, 2013; Charter, Gray, Clark, & Woolman, 2008; Hart & Christensen, 2002; Kima, Brodhagb, & Mebratu, 2014). The theory of disruptive innovation (Christensen, 1997; 2006) provides the background for constructing successful market strategies derived from such a change.

Process Improvements are means of delivering a reduction in costs and in using resources. By optimizing processes, companies not only improve their results but can also achieve a more sustainable operation (Bansal & Roth, 2000; Darnall, 2003; Windolph et al., 2014). Examples are abundant in the business practice, ranging from energy or water rational use to sustainable materials in construction to the reuse or recycling of materials (Bansal, 2002). Certifications such as 'Leed,' awarded by the Green Building Council in different parts of the world (United States Green Building Council, 2016), guide office buildings and plants' creation or evolution to reach increasing sustainability levels.

Finally, Social Insurance prevents potential losses in corporate reputations, protecting shareowners against financial distress that could not be insured in regular financial markets and preserving economic value in addition to goodwill from activities that generate value (Brammer & Pavelin, 2005; Godfrey et al., 2009). Thus, it is unique in its evident financial self-serving characteristic. It differs from the Legitimacy motivation, which is a positive response to institutional, legislative, or social forces and needs to be perceived as ethical by the public while reputation losses are uncertain and depend on the occurrence of adverse incidents. Preventive social investments help face crises, mitigating the company's involvement in such events (Aßländer, 2013), as predicted by the insurance theory (Brammer & Pavelin, 2005). Corporations have come to understand the risk associated with discontented communities and have engaged in activities to minimize the risk of jeopardizing their operations (Trebeck, 2008). The larger the potential losses, the more incentive companies have to engage and invest in social responsibility and sustainability, going beyond what they would be required to comply with social requirements, regulation, or the law (Brammer & Pavelin, 2005; Godfrey, 2005; Godfrey et al., 2009).

Table 1 summarizes the four motivations used throughout the present work with the description for each of them, the keywords connected to each concept, and the authors who discussed or described each of the motivations.

Table 1

Motivations characteristics

Concept	Description	Working keywords	Authors cited
1 Legitimacy	Perception that an organization's actions are appropriate and wanted within a socially accepted system of beliefs, rules, legislation, or values	Legitimate, law, norm, rule, institutional, compliance, accepted, social values, beliefs	Bansal & Roth, 2000; Epstein, 2008; Windolph et al., 2014; Lozano, 2015; Epstein & Buhovac, 2014; Deegan, 2002; Laan, 2009; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Barbieri et al., 2010; North, 1990; Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine et al., 2016; Graafland & van de Ven, 2006
2 Market Success	Increase in an entity's ability to compete in its market, generating more sales or brand equity	Competition, competitors, market, brand, sales, turnover, innovation, differentiation	Bansal & Roth, 2000; Epstein, 2008; Windolph et al., 2014; Lozano, 2015; Epstein & Buhovac, 2014; Charter et al., 2008; Hart & Christensen, 2002; Boons, Montalvo, Quist, & Wagner, 2013; Christensen, 1997; Christensen, 2006; Kima, Brodhagb, & Mebratu, 2014
3 Process Improvement	Reduction in the use and related costs of resources via ecological or social optimization of processes	Resource, process, optimization, improvement, enhancement, reduction	Bansal, 2002; Bansal & Roth, 2000; Epstein, 2008; Windolph et al., 2014; Lozano, 2015; Epstein & Buhovac, 2014; Darnall, 2003
4 Social Insurance	Engagement in ecological and social responsibility activities to pre-emptively insure against potential reputation losses	Insurance, goodwill, reputation, preempt, anticipate, prevent	Godfrey, 2005; Brammer & Pavelin, 2005; Godfrey, Merrill, & Hansen, 2009; Trebeck, 2008

This table is both a summary of the literature review on corporate motivations for sustainability and a guide to classify and place the field articles analyzed within each of the motives. As a result of the most current literature on the subject, three motivations were used for clusterization by many authors. The fourth one was brought as a contribution from the finance literature and added as a relevant one for the current study.

Method

A bibliometric approach was used to examine a large number of scientific field articles on corporate sustainability and observe which motivations sparked more academic interest in different regions of the world. This article aimed at finding regional differences in corporate motivations for sustainability; thus, bibliometry allowed examining the vast field literature on the subject. The method not only fit the purpose of this study but also actually made it possible.

The term 'bibliometry' was coined in the late 1960s to express "the application of mathematics and statistical methods to books and other media of communication" (Pritchard, 1969, p. 349) and gained increasing popularity in different areas of management studies throughout the years (Marques et al., 2018; Teixeira, Iwamoto, & Medeiros, 2013), especially with the advent of computer programs that allow the treatment of large amounts of data rapidly. During this research, three complementary bibliographic approaches were used to treat the data and prepare

it for analysis: a database systematic search, a meta-analysis, and a social network analysis, as explained throughout this section. The aggregation and analysis of the data allows for insights that could not have been reached otherwise (Zupic & Čater, 2015). The 90 papers on the final dataset were also analyzed individually to provide information on the motivations and regions/countries they addressed (Appendix 1). Figure 1 below summarizes the steps for the bibliometric work and the individual analysis of selected papers.

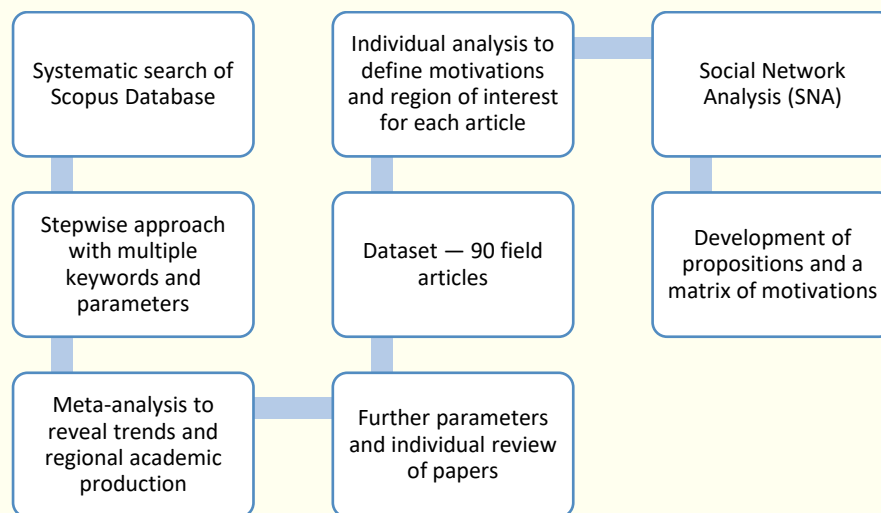


Figure 1. Methodological steps.

The systematic search of the literature (Creswell, 2014; Kitchenham, 2004; Webster & Watson, 2002) was conducted using the Scopus Search engine. Scopus was selected because it is one of the leading literature databases with a comprehensive catalog that encompasses several decades while providing enough reliability for academic searches (Ball & Tunger, 2006; Burnham, 2006; Harzing & Alakangas, 2016) and also the flexibility to download both bibliometric (.bib) and individual files. This flexibility proved essential to compose this article, which used both traditional and computerized bibliometric analyses. The use of another large database, Web of Science (WoS), was considered to increase the number of field articles for analysis, but previous research showed that there is a large overlap between the two databases and Scopus is the one that has the largest number of unique articles indexed, particularly in social sciences (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016).

During the search, a stepwise process (Kitchenham, 2004) was used by adding further keywords to narrow the articles' scope and reach the most optimized sample within the database researched. After testing different concepts that brought an unmanageable number of articles, the first successful round of search was conducted, including as parameters the words 'corporate' and ('sustainable development' or 'sustainability') for a query in titles, abstracts, and keywords. This query resulted in a list of 6,858 documents.

The search engine was then limited to articles indexed and with abstracts in English; to sources including journals and conference proceedings (thus excluding books, trade publications, reports, and other formats); and to document types including articles, conference papers, and reviews

(excluding book chapters, press articles, short surveys, editorials, and others). These limitations brought the number of papers down to 5,387. No time interval was defined after it proved unnecessary for the proposed search, since most of the papers were published over the last decade, as seen in the Findings section below. The query included all documents until April 2017.

The second round of search parameters included the words above plus ‘motivation’ or ‘motive’ or ‘reason,’ as the query aimed to identify motivations for sustainability. The new parameters showed a list of 1,005 documents. To focus on regions, as required for the analysis, the regional parameters were added to a third search ‘field’ or ‘region’ or ‘country’ or ‘territory,’ bringing the results down to 632 documents. ‘Area’ could not be used because many times it does not refer to geography, but rather to other concepts such as ‘area of knowledge’ or ‘measured area.’

A new limitation of study fields was applied on those documents since the search interest narrowed to business motivations and not engineering, arts, computers, or other areas. The fields chosen were business, management, and accounting as per the Scopus engine’s options, which resulted in a list of 446 documents.

These 446 documents generated a ‘.bib’ file, exported from Scopus to be analyzed using a bibliometric tool aimed at providing landscape information on the growth in the number of studies, most productive countries, and primary authors working on this field. This analysis’ results were kept to provide the general background of global research on corporate motivations for sustainability, as shown in the next section’s opening.

A new round of parameters was applied to the 446 documents base, aiming to exclude the papers on human resources-related activities or corporate issues, which focused mostly on employees’ preparations for sustainable activities and the non-peer-reviewed conference papers via the Scopus search engine. For this query, the keywords for exclusion were ‘human resources’ or ‘hr’ or ‘staff’ or ‘staffing’ or ‘institutional.’ After this round, 158 papers were left for further analysis.

The documents that did not provide the complete information necessary for the purpose of the present research were discarded, including the ones that were not written in English and those that lacked data required for the analysis, such as geographic location or unclear treatment of the data regarding underlying motivations. With these exclusions, a list of 90 field articles comprised the dataset to be further analyzed both individually and through a bibliographic program designed explicitly for this purpose. Each of them was examined to provide information on the region where the research was conducted and the motivation(s) they addressed. The individual papers’ data was coded in a spreadsheet, allowing the grouping by motivation and region, which generated the next section’s findings and propositions. During the coding process, no new motivation stood out, and the four categories initially uncovered in the theoretical literature remained as the ones used for analysis.

After the systematic search, a bibliometric protocol was developed in RStudio and first used meta-analysis to examine the ‘.bib’ list file generated by Scopus with the 446 documents and then a social network analysis (SNA) to find the relationships between the motivations and the regions

of the world, as well as to generate the figures based on data from the final dataset of 90 field articles. Available R packages were used to perform the bibliometric analysis, including Bibliometrix, Dsplr, and Igraph, and the authors performed additional programming to extract the required data. Since the graphs generated by RStudio with the protocols used mainly were low quality ones, the final data was also transferred to a spreadsheet software that allowed for better quality and more flexibility in formatting the graphs.

FINDINGS

The number of scientific papers on sustainable development's corporate motivations has grown significantly and consistently since the year 2000. The bibliometric findings of the '.bib' file show that business scholars started to take a more in-depth look at this topic with the new millennium and increasingly produced more and more papers. The first article found was from 1991, but it was an isolated paper in the 1990s. Since 2000, the number of articles published has grown consistently, as seen in Figure 2, confirming previous findings on the growth of academic interest in sustainability and CSR (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012), bearing in mind that 2017 only included articles for the first four months of that year.

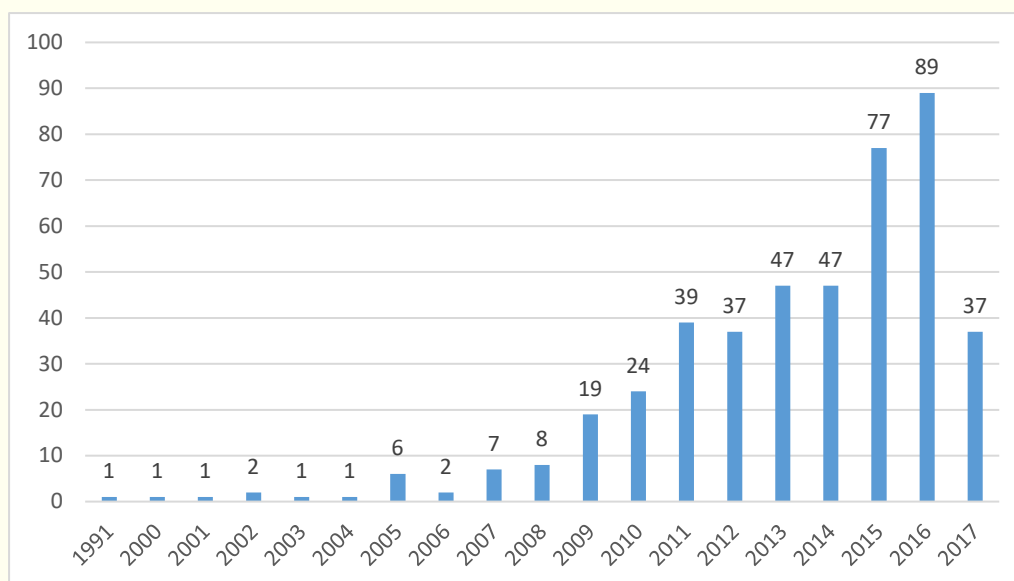


Figure 2. Field articles on corporate sustainability motivation per year.

Full year until 2016 and Jan.-Apr. for 2017

Since the concept of sustainable development was promulgated by the Brundtland report late in the 1980s (United Nations, 1987), it could be expected that corporate implementation would start over the next decade, followed by theoretical studies, as seen in the previous Literature section, and finally by field studies, subsequent to theory. Figure 3 shows the fifteen most academically productive countries about corporate motivations for sustainability. Here, the country origin is that of the researchers' institutions, as exported to the '.bib' format.

This figure shows countries from every macro-region, but mostly countries with a large gross domestic product (UK, Australia, Germany, Canada, Spain, Italy...) and/or that are rich in natural resources (USA, Canada, Brazil, Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand...). Other large countries follow immediately after the 15th in the number of papers, with China, India, and South Africa producing five articles each. It can be expected that larger and wealthier countries would be the most productive in any given field of study; however, it is important to observe that the most productive countries are scattered worldwide, with every geography of the world represented among the top 20.

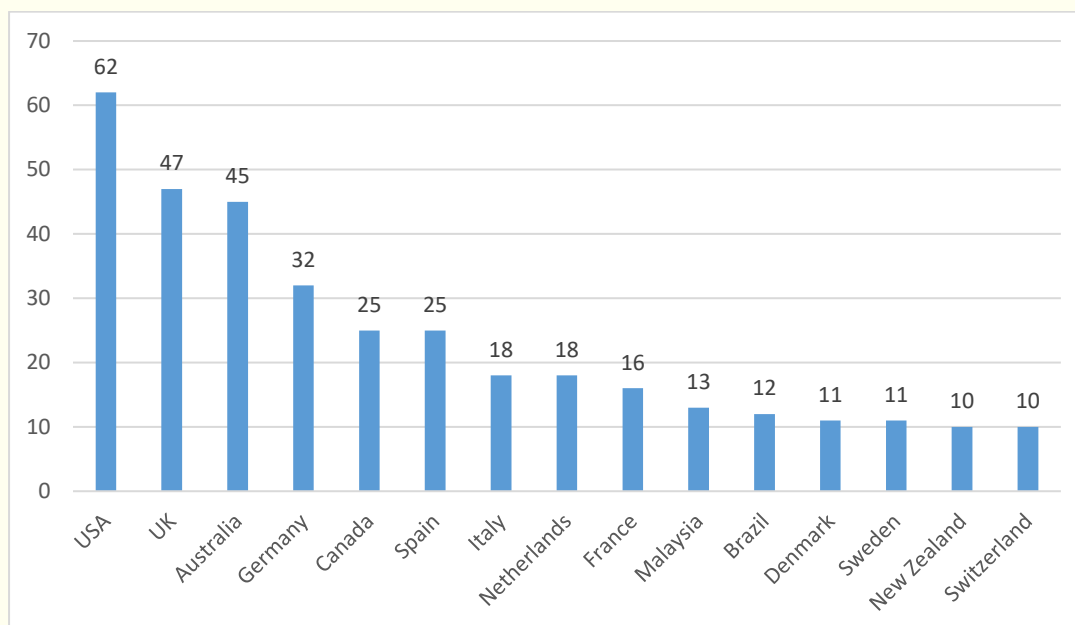


Figure 3. Fifteen most productive countries in articles about corporate motivation for sustainability.

In summary, the world experienced an increase in the number of studies on corporate sustainability over the last two decades, and the larger and more affluent countries in each UN macro-region often appeared among the most productive academically.

Among the 90 articles selected for in-depth analysis, 34 were global papers, depicting all or most macro-regions; 28 were about Europe; 12 on Asia; 7 on Northern America; 6 on Oceania; 5 on Africa; and only 2 on Latin America. The low number of papers from less developed regions may reflect lower production. Prior studies have identified this gap in Latin America (Ciravegna, Lopez, & Kundu, 2013; Cuervo-Cazurra & Genc, 2008), which impairs a deep and balanced analysis of the region. On the other hand, it reveals a theoretical gap that must be pointed out as an opportunity for future studies. The articles' total adds to 94 because some focused on two regions and were accounted for both. Two articles were for Europe and Northern America, one for Europe and Oceania, and one for Latin America and Africa. Appendix 1 summarizes the list of papers classified by macro-region and motivations.

This dataset provided valuable information on the most present motivations researched around the world, the growth of academic interest on each of them through time, and the relationships

between each macro-region and the motivations' research. Field research reflects what has already been planned or accomplished (Kaplan, 1998) within the companies. So, this article's propositions and the final framework should not be read as an indication of management practice. Still, its findings can provide a guide for future validation in the field.

The motivations and keywords described in Table 1 in section 2 above were instrumental in classifying each article under one, two, or in one case, three motivations. This article addresses three of the four motivations (Reyers, Gouws, & Blignaut, 2011) and classified case studies under broad motives containing aspects of Legitimacy, Social Insurance, and Process Improvement. Most other papers did not classify motivations, but the reasoning behind each case described was clear when compared to the definitions of each motivation.

Figure 4 shows the accumulated total number of articles year after year and clarifies that studies of every type of motivation grew with time, in line with the growth trend seen in Figure 1. Figure 5 depicts the articles published each year by each specific motivation type, revealing the trends in the specific interest per type of motivation.

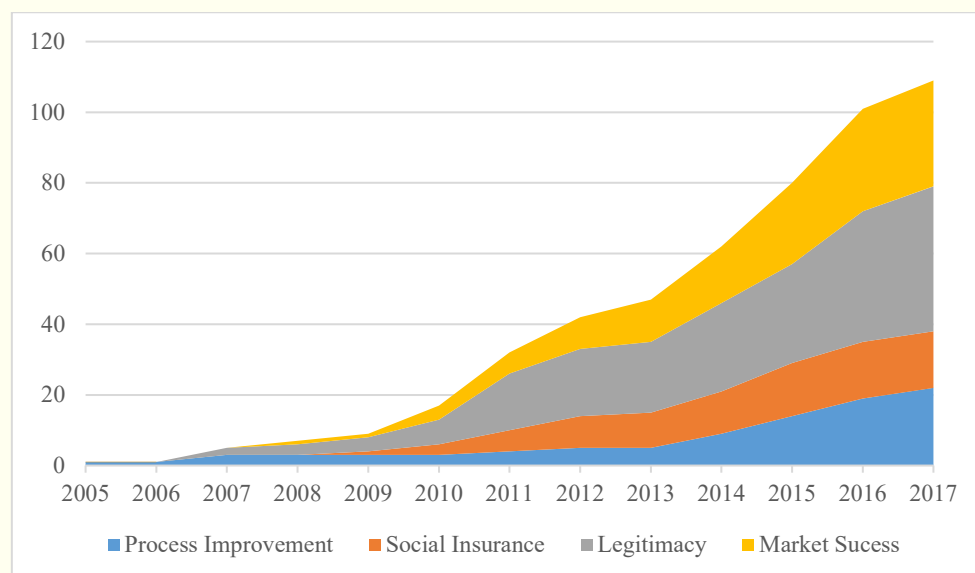


Figure 4. Accumulated number of articles by type of motivation.

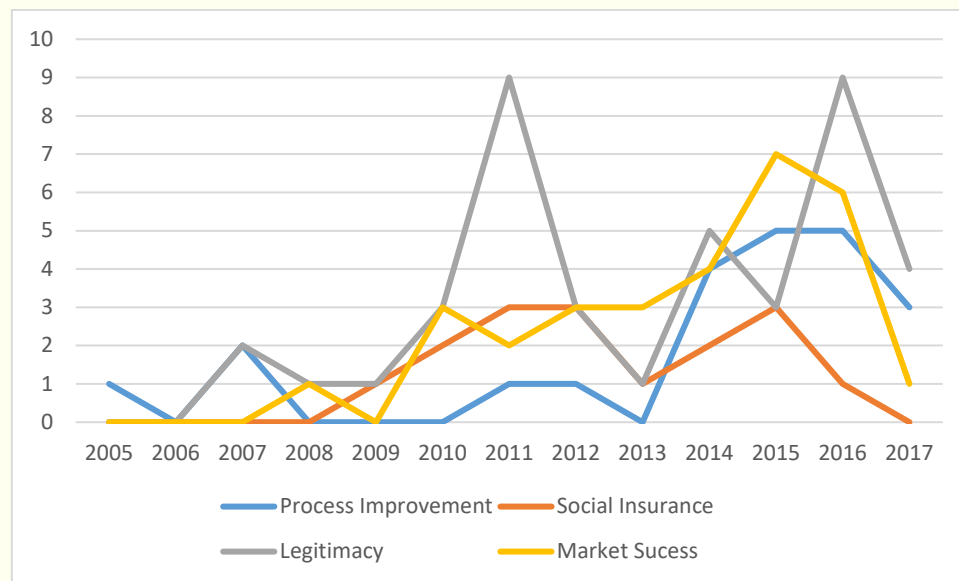


Figure 5. Number of articles per year by motivation.

Thus, the motivations stood out with an in-depth analysis of each field paper. Legitimacy was the most prevalent of them, particularly in developing and poorer countries, and some of the papers from Asia and Africa are exemplary in their definitions. Govindan, Kannan, and Shankar (2014) describe how the implementation of CSR in businesses in India depended on government regulations – “... after implementation of ISO 14001, many industries practice environmentally benign manufacturing. If ISO 14001 were not mandatory, this achievement would not be possible” (Govindan et al., 2014, p. 228). Another study, about the olive oil industry in Tunisia (Achabou, Dekhili, & Hamdoun, 2017), shows that the implementation of SD practices in developing countries is highly influenced by the multilateral institutions’ programs, such as the World Bank’s, the participation in global value chains (GVC), and the pressure of regulation and NGOs. In the China textile and apparel industry, researchers (Chen, Larsson, & Mark-Herbert, 2014) have also found that participation in GVCs, pressure from NGOs and government, and the international markets’ atmosphere were determinants in the development of a code of conduct for the sector. In another article, the quest for Legitimacy was described as the critical corporate sustainability motivation in Sub-Saharan Africa (Samy, Ogiri, & Bampton, 2015). The authors indicate that even though African governments have not yet developed formal policies to promote CSR, most countries have the basis for it in their constitutions (i.e., South Africa) or at least view social responsibility as a moral obligation, such as Ghana and Nigeria.

Other field articles were based on the Market Success motivation, mainly concentrated in Northern America and Europe. Authors recognize that sustainable innovation for competition may be at once an expense burden and a source for continued growth for companies (Hall & Wagner, 2012), so using SD for market differentiation may be more appropriate in developed markets where sophistication can provide increased returns via competition. When analyzing data from two European countries’ manufacturing firms, these authors confirmed that companies “who build their business model on cross-functional problem solving have better economic performance than those who do not” and they also “have a more positive and significant

association of their integration with environmental performance” (Hall & Wagner, 2012, p. 193). Sustainable innovation has also been pointed out as a source of synergistic effect on investment outcome in a large study encompassing 619 multinational firms listed in the European DJ Stoxx 600 and MSCI indices (Kima et al., 2014). Another study intended to understand if good environmental practices may have impacted the success in the internationalization of (mostly global) companies based in Brazil (Hrdlicka & Kruglianskas, 2010). Among the conclusions, a better corporate image led to positive differentiation for the export firms’ operations and products.

Process Improvement proved to be a long-standing motivation for companies of all sizes, with the following examples in the developed markets of Northern America, Europe, and Australia. One article covered eight years before 2014, investigating two programs that assisted and recommended improvements for small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) in the United States (Kuppig et al., 2016). Nearly 200 SMEs were assisted during this period, and the most significant motivation both to implement (37%) and not to implement (56%) an SD recommendation was finance-related. More than eight tenths of these companies expected to improve resource use or reduce waste, becoming at once more sustainable and more productive. In Europe, a web-based survey encompassed 266 responses from five different countries – Germany, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, and Spain (Maletič, Maletič, Dahlgard, Dahlgard-Park, & Gomišček, 2015). The evidence suggested that sustainable practices may also improve both financial and nonfinancial performance, mainly through modernization in processes and products. In Australia, a case study of a small-medium enterprise indicated that sustainability is a way to improve companies both in tangible and intangible aspects, leading them to processes that enable a positive ‘multiple bottom-line’ approach (Stewart & Gapp, 2014).

The Social Insurance motivation appeared connected to many of the field articles on developing countries’ companies in Africa and Asia, as summarized in upcoming Figure 6. A review of African practices in CSR (Hamidu, Haron, & Amran, 2016) revealed that most companies find that economic responsibility toward oneself and the surrounding society comes first in relation to philanthropy or even legal and ethical obligations. According to the authors, by picking a need that covers a government gap, the company intends to foster loyalty from the community where it operates, thus insuring itself from future issues. The same is true for the global mining industry, which often operates in the more impoverished regions of the world, “side-by-side with indigenous people” (Jenkins & Yakovleva, 2006, p. 272). This global paper defines the context for an SD mining operation and the imperative need that companies face to engage with autochthonous groups in order to keep them sufficiently pleased not to reach out for social movements and NGOs that might oppose the work of these transnational corporations, thus increasing the costs associated to their business.

However, the Social Insurance motivation affects developed markets as well, sometimes by happenings in less privileged areas of the world. A case study developed in Scandinavia reports how the 1990s child labor crisis and other global issues of poorer countries in Asia, Africa, or Latin America affected the operation of a sizeable low-cost fashion manufacturer from the Northern European region (Lueg, Pedersen, & Clemmensen, 2015). The fashion group positioned its sustainability program to ensure the protection of shareholders against downside

risk, rather than for altruism or to attract more consumers, by transferring responsibility to its suppliers via a code of conduct. The regional-specific research interests are evident when narrowing at each of the macro-regions. Figure 6 shows the number of motivations per region. Some of the papers analyzed revealed more than a single motivation.

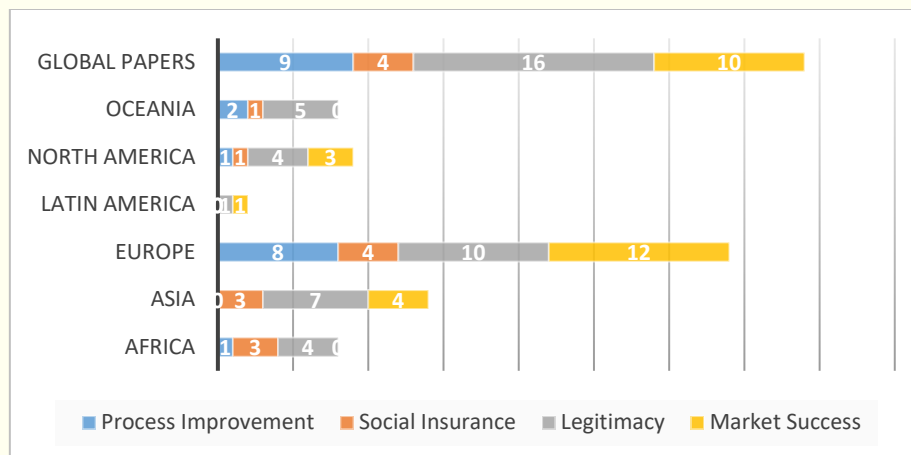


Figure 6. Motivations by UN macro-region.

Figure 7 is a relationship map between regions and motivations. The larger the balloon, the larger the number of articles produced in that region or about that topic. The lines between the balloons represent the relationships between them.

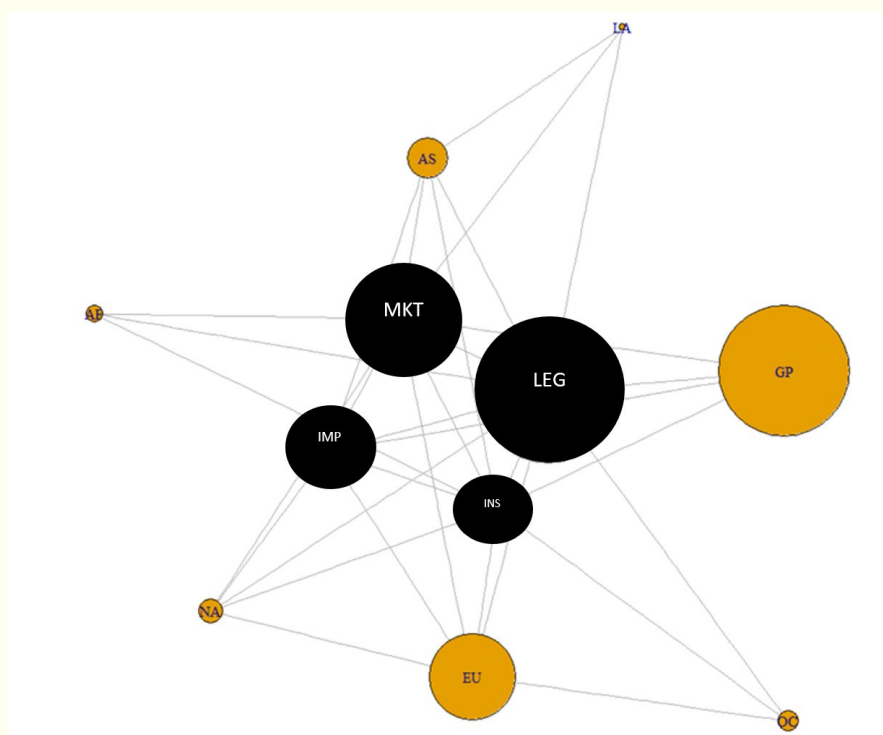


Figure 7. Relationship map between motivations and macro-regions.

IMP = Process Improvement, INS = Social Insurance, LEG = Legitimacy, MKT = Market Success; AF = Africa, AS = Asia, EU = Europe, GP = Global papers, LA = Latin America/Caribbean, NA = North America, OC = Oceania.

Europe is the macro-region that concentrated most of the field articles on motivations for corporate sustainability. It is also where Market Success appeared as the primary motivation for research, closely followed by Legitimacy. In Northern America, these two motivations were close to a tie. In Asia and Africa, Legitimacy dominated, but in Asia, Market Success came second and Social Insurance third, while in Africa, Social Insurance came at a strong second. Oceania had a concentration on Legitimacy. Latin America only appeared with two exclusive articles, one on Market Success and the other on Legitimacy. The articles that focused on several geographies, called global papers, were distributed among all four motivations, but more concentrated on Legitimacy and with Social Insurance last.

DISCUSSION AND PROPOSITIONS

As forecasted in literature and confirmed by the field papers, the earliest and most prevalent researched motivation is Legitimacy (Bansal & Roth, 2000; Epstein & Buhovac, 2014; Windolph et al., 2014). Process Improvement appeared as an early motivation as well. Social Insurance appeared stable through time. Market Success looks like an ever-growing motivation, ranking number two in the accumulated number of articles, 30 compared to 41 on Legitimacy, and even surpassing the latter in specific years. Thus, the data allows inferring the following propositions for future validation:

Proposition 1 – Motivations for corporate sustainability change over time, reflecting societal changes and interest groups involved.

Proposition 2 – Early motivations for corporate sustainability derived from compliance to institutions. Later motivations also relate to competition and differentiation.

It does seem from the field studies that companies are initially motivated to become more sustainable due to legislation and the overall compliance to the institutional environment, in line with the literature's predictions (Windolph et al., 2014). As depicted in this article's Introduction, the very concept of sustainable development was born under the auspices of governments and multilateral organizations such as the UN and later nurtured by the NGOs. Regulation and compliance have been the historical common ground for all companies as organizations, administrations, and national-institutional arrangements set the SD boundaries for global capitalism (Fransen, 2013). Over time, however, companies find that the lack of sustainable practices may become a competitive disadvantage (Hoepner, Oikonomou, Scholtens, & Schröder, 2016) while innovation and improvements that derive from SD may foster their market position, possibly influencing them even to rethink their end goals beyond profit and into social and environmental arenas (Schneider, 2014). In addition, in line with the literature review analysis in this article, summarized by the keywords in Table 1, this brings new stakeholders, such as clients and consumers, into the companies' considerations, motivating them for changes beyond the ones required by pressure groups or governments.

Beyond the timing considerations of corporate sustainability motivations, different macro-regions of the world seemed more skewed to specific motivations given local needs and development

stages. As mentioned in the Findings section, Legitimacy appeared as a concern in every region. Other motivations were more prevalent in specific ones. More developed economies were depicted in studies showing Market Success as a strong motivation for companies, since a more significant number of competitors in a market make innovation and differentiation a competitive advantage. In Europe, for instance, a study of the banking industry linked corporate social performance to financial performance, advocating for a new way to evaluate risk and, thus, credit availability (Stellner, Klein, & Zwergel, 2015). Process Improvement appeared in every macro-region except Asia as a basic but not as a prominent motivation. Finally, the Social Insurance motivation research was more relevant in Africa and Asia, which house many developing economies. In Africa's case, the small role of the national states in social provisioning forced corporations to get involved beyond their externalities and in issues such as poverty reduction (Aaron, 2012), which helped them prevent a crisis. On the other hand, the findings lead to the propositions for future research below.

Proposition 3 – Motivations vary by macro-region based both on socio-economic development and on regional legitimization needs.

Proposition 4 – The more sophisticated a market becomes, the more corporate motivations for sustainability go beyond legitimization and into innovations that may support incremental business results.

The more sophisticated the consumers, the more sophisticated the market, meaning that their choices allow for ethical considerations that would not be present otherwise (Titus & Bradford, 1996). Innovations are as diverse as the industries, so each field article describes a different internal process, as forecasted in the literature (Boons et al., 2013; Kima et al., 2014; Maletič et al., 2015). However, they all share the same motivation for an improved operation and increased results. The regional variations captured on Proposition 3 also reflect the companies' changing motivations as markets evolve to reward companies with better governance (Soleimani et al., 2014) and according to national-institutional arrangements (Fransen, 2013). Thus, their motivation to implement a particular SD strategy may vary according to the geographies where the corporation does business.

As in the case of Social Insurance, more or less developed economies require a different sustainability strategy (Boons et al., 2013). The other motivations also vary accordingly: Legitimacy may mean different conditions in different societies, as it depends on social judgment (Bitektine, 2011); consumer perceptions will define the strategies necessary for a company's Market Success (Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, & Murphy, 2013); and legislation, as well as competition and other market conditions, will impact the implementation of Process Improvements.

The findings also indicate that both timing and regional considerations play a defining role in corporate motivation for sustainability. Apparently, Legitimacy and Process Improvement tend to be early motivations, while Market Success and Social Insurance appear as later ones. Since the former two tend to be a case-by-case response to institutions (Bitektine et al., 2016) or to

legislation, they may be implemented initially as obligations. The latter two, however, may appear as choices for growth or market differentiation (Boons et al., 2013) or for managing risk (Epstein & Roy, 2003) in order to protect a company's tangible or intangible assets.

Similarly, differences in the level of development and market sophistication of each macro-region seemed to play a role in the corporate motivations for sustainability. Market Success appeared more often in regions with a higher level of competition, while Social Insurance seemed like a motivation more often connected to developing regions. This suggests two new propositions related to the changing academic interest in corporate motivation by region and development:

Proposition 5 – Independently of its national origin, a company's motivations for sustainability in its international operations are aligned to the development level of each market it serves.

Proposition 6 – As a macro-region, or country within it, changes its development level, so shall the companies' motivations for sustainability in this market change as well.

These are complementary propositions, as both look at necessary adjustments to different market conditions, one concerned with implementation and the other with adaptation through time. Future field studies on Proposition 5 may profit and expand from work already developed in the area of transnational companies' SD (Achabou et al., 2017; Escobar & Vredenburg, 2011; Soleimani et al. 2014; Surroca, Tribó, & Zahra, 2013), which show that the integration within each market a corporation serves depends on strategic alignment to local conditions and expectations. Concerning Proposition 6, the motivation changes have also been described partly in the longitudinal data study of companies by Bansal and Roth (2000). Further longitudinal studies may provide more evidence of this matter. As sustainability is a relatively recent concern of companies, changes in development level and their impact on corporate motivation for SD have not yet been described significantly in field studies. Nevertheless, this adjustment in strategy may be expected for the same reason that companies adjust due to geographic considerations or other changing conditions.

The findings based on field research and the subsequent propositions inspired creating a framework that may be operationalized in future studies of corporate motivation for sustainability in different world geographies. An important piece of this framework is the external environment. External pressures and conditions must be understood as a background to the motivations and shall be examined in each specific situation. All together, these conditions lead to the framework proposed in Figure 8 below.

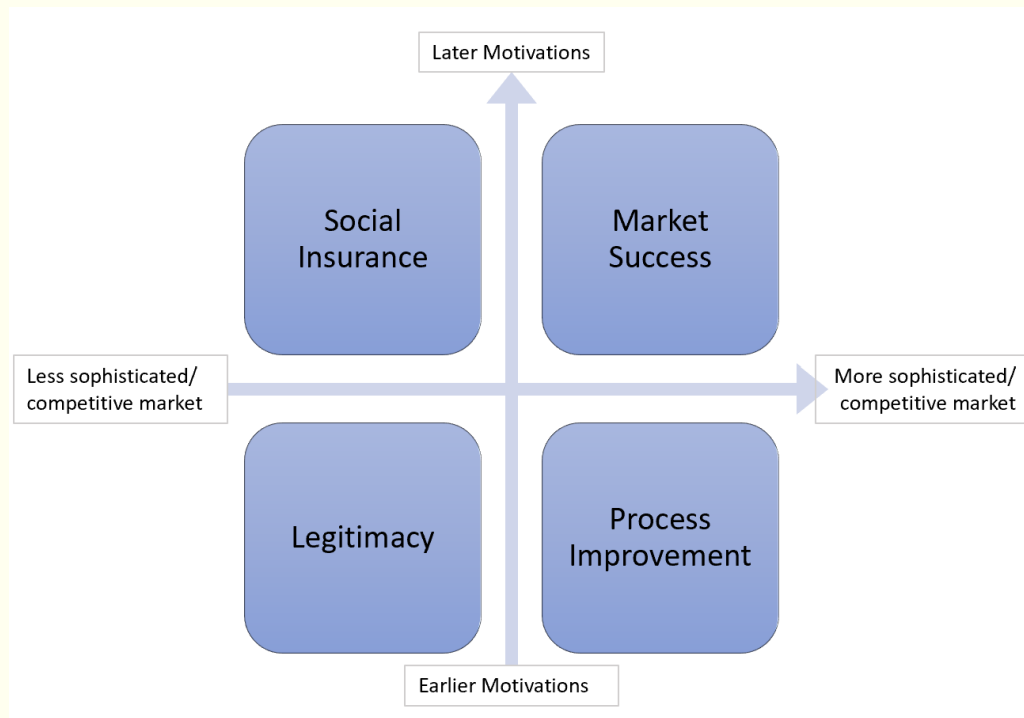


Figure 8. Framework of corporate motivations for sustainability.

As per the six previous propositions, the corporate motivations for sustainability should move according to two main axes: one of time or experience and one related to the market's sophistication or competitiveness. Thus, this framework proposes that the longer the topic of sustainable development has been a concern for a society, the more companies will move from adjusting its procedures to regulations (Legitimacy) and internal opportunities (Process Improvement) searching for innovations that will increase their market presence, be it to prevent unforeseen incidents (Social Insurance) or to gain share (Market Success). Simultaneously, as their market matures and the consumers become more sophisticated, innovations turn out to be vital for competing from both a cost (Process Improvement) and a differentiation (Market Success) point of view.

Figure 9 on the next page intends to condense the motivations, articles, findings, and propositions presented in the current article. The framework has a tridimensional quality that needs further clarification, showcased in this figure.

The field and theory articles presented in section 4 are at the center of this summary because they are the instrument that connected the motivations, the main findings (time and development considerations), and the six propositions. On the motivation side, the articles were the ones that exemplified how the motives worked in field research. On the findings side, they were mostly theoretical papers. Together with the findings of timing, going from earlier to later motivations, and development, from less to more sophisticated markets, allowed the inference of the propositions as demonstrated throughout the article.

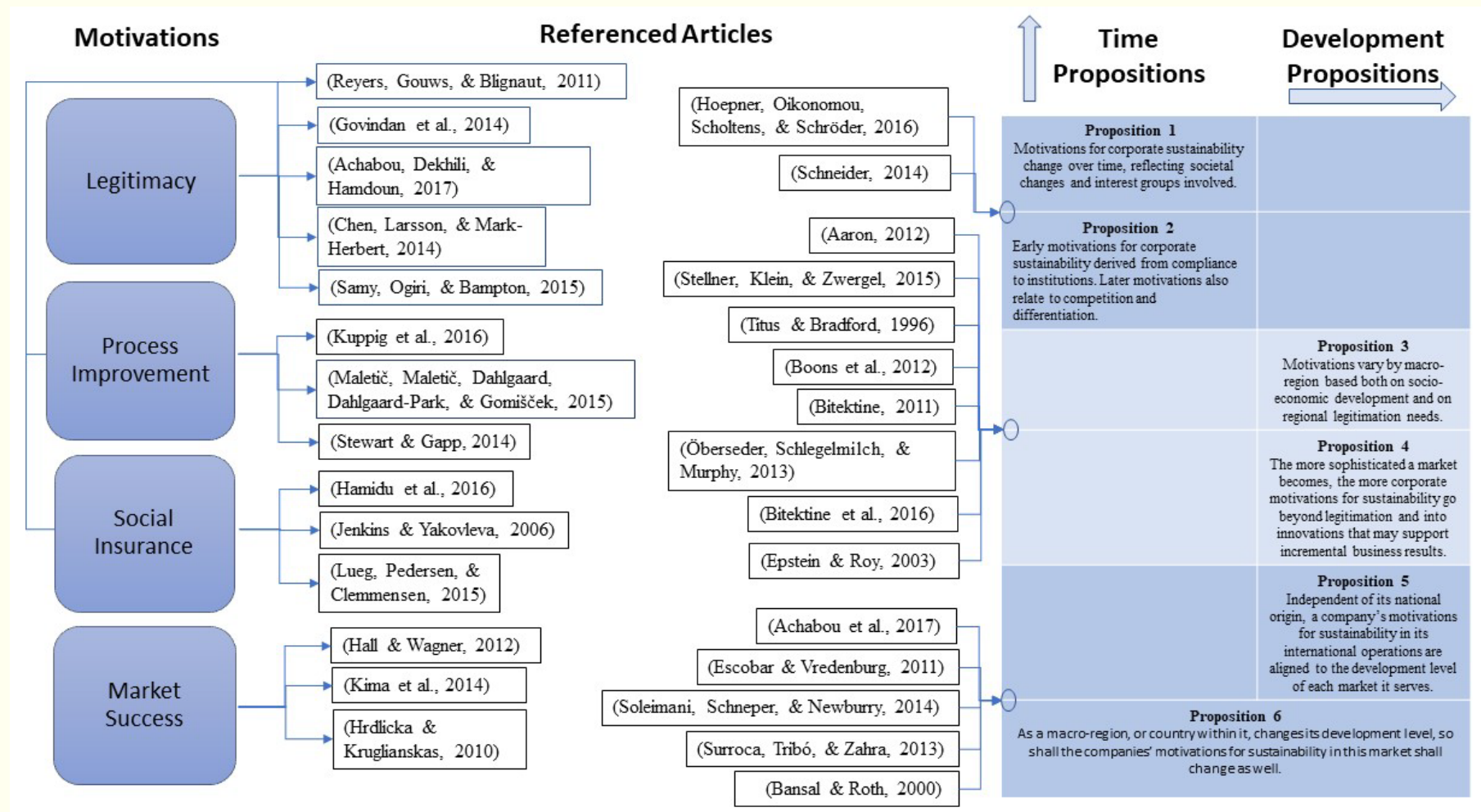


Figure 9. Summary of motivations, articles, findings, and propositions.

CONTRIBUTIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE STUDIES

The research question narrowed in the alterations in corporate motivations for sustainability through time and in different global areas. The findings led to the development of six propositions and a corporate motivations conceptual framework that contemplate different regions and the longitudinal corporate evolution. These reflections will support field research and professional awareness on how these motivations translate into practice.

Previous studies of corporate motivation for sustainability focused on up to three external reasons, namely Legitimacy, Process Improvement, and Market Success. As an initial contribution, this article proposes the inclusion of a fourth motivation, Social Insurance, used previously in the finance literature.

This study's second contribution is to present findings and develop propositions derived from analyzing field articles concerning the four motivations. Two propositions focus on the longitudinal changes in corporate motivation for sustainability research. Three propositions focus on the regional differences found in field articles about the markets' development and sophistication. The final proposition depends on both timing and regional considerations.

The main contribution of this article is to create a framework that encompasses the motivations, the findings behind the field articles examined, and the propositions derived by them. This framework concentrates the findings, including the timing and regional development considerations, and may improve the academic knowledge about corporate motivations for sustainability by geography. Scholars may apply the framework in fieldwork to assess motivations at different locations, hopefully contributing to form a global blueprint of why companies engage in SD and how the engagement turns into strategy differently.

This research may be beneficial for practitioners as well, as it may support the development of a geographic-based corporate SD strategy. The framework can be used as a tool for managers developing a global corporate sustainability strategy. It may provide insights on the underlying motives for sustainability in each region where a company operates and support business executives in decisions to engage in programs more suited to address these motivations. There may also be social implications for using this framework by pressure groups, individuals, or NGOs, which can be assessed in additional studies.

Bibliometric methods were used in this study both to enable the review of a large amount of data and to improve the validity and reliability of the findings, as these methods tend to enhance the rigor on the otherwise subjective evaluation of the researcher (Sinkovics, Penz, & Ghauri, 2008; Zupic & Čater, 2015). The methodology was meant to be public from the start, and the full description of the steps aimed at increasing reliability and allowing readers to assess possible applicability to similar or different contexts (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Thus, future studies will be essential to validate and expand the information on this topic as the present study faced several limitations. One limitation was the choice of field articles, which relied

on the Scopus Search engine, widely used and respected in academic studies (Burnham, 2006; Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016), but naturally unable to index the totality of articles globally. The keywords selected may have significantly affected the number of articles available for analysis. When defining the regional consideration with the words ‘country’ or ‘field’ or ‘territory,’ it is possible that articles that only cited country names or regions were excluded.

An additional limitation was the reduced number of studies depicting developing regions, which may be derived from the smaller scientific production in these areas of the world as described by statistical research (Davis, 2014; National Science Board, 2018). For instance, in the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, which has been a relatively little-studied region (Ciravegna et al., 2013; Cuervo-Cazurra & Genc, 2008), only two articles passed the entire stepwise process to become part of the final 90 articles analyzed. Only papers written in English were considered, which may also have limited the number of papers from these regions.

The analysis of each article also indicated a small number of cases describing individual company’s motivations. It is a nascent field of study that may profit from the increasing availability of corporate documentation requested by NGOs, regulatory agencies, compliance officers, and other stakeholders (Laan, 2009). Future studies may profit from this initial documentation to access global companies and verify if their motivation for sustainability varies by region or even country, leading to different engagement forms.

In short, there is still a gap in the literature both in relation to studies on developing regions and on how large corporations cope with global and local motivations for sustainability, which can profit from work already developed in this area (Achabou et al., 2017; Escobar & Vredenburg, 2011; Soleimani et al., 2014; Surroca et al., 2013). All findings and propositions of this article reflect the academic interest raised by each of the motivations in different geographies, which may not reflect the reality of countries or companies operating in them. Future studies may build upon the propositions and framework presented in this article to produce theoretical and empirical advances for the sustainability management area.

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APPENDIX A

Table A1.

Regions, motivations, and references for the 90 papers analyzed in depth.

Region	Motivations	Reference
Africa	INS	Hamidu A.A.; Haron M.H.; Amran A., 2016
	LEG	Kehbila A.G.; Ertel J.; Brent A.C., 2010 Achabou M.; Dekhili S.; Hamdoun M., 2017
	LEG + IMP + INS	Reyers M.; Gouws D.; Blignaut J., 2011
	LEG + INS	Rampersad R.; Skinner C., 2014
Asia	INS	Hansen E.G.; Sextl M.; Reichwald R., 2010 Khan M.H.-U.-Z.; Islam M.A.; Fatima J.K.; Ahmed K., 2011 Wang Y.; Liu J.; Hansson L.; Zhang K.; Wang R., 2011 Burritt R.L.; Christ K.L.; Omori A., 2014 Jenkins N.R.; Karanikola I., 2014 Govindan K.; Kannan D.; Shankar K.M., 2014 Prates C.; Pedrozo E.; Silva T., 2015 Chen T.; Larsson A.; Mark-Herbert C., 2016
	MKT	Tencati A.; Russo A.; Quaglia V., 2010 Choi J.-S.A., 2016 Koo Y., 2016
	MKT + INS	Collier K.A., 2014
	IMP	Munshi D.; Kurian P., 2005 Maletic M. et al., 2016 Witjes S.; Vermeulen W.J.V.; Cramer J.M., 2017
	IMP + INS	Lueg R.; Pedersen M.M.; Clemmensen S.N., 2015
Europe	IMP + MKT	Hall J.; Wagner M., 2012 Johnson M.P., 2015
	INS	Kallenberg K., 2009
	INS + LEG	Willets R.; Burdon J.; Glass J.; Frost M., 2011
	INS + MKT	Scarpato D. et al., 2011
	LEG	Quaak L.; Aalbers T.; Goedee J., 2007 Coles T.; Fenclova E.; Dinan C., 2011 Giannarakis G.; Sariannidis N.; Litinas N., 2011 Horrach P.; Socias Salva A., 2011 Coles T.; Fenclova E.; Dinan C., 2014 Kend M., 2015 Taghizadeh S.; Jimmy Gandhi S., 2016
	LEG + IMP	Schylander E.; Martinuzzi A., 2017
	LEG + MKT	Ciasullo M.V.; Troisi O., 2013
	MKT	Gallego-Alvarez I. et al., 2010 Liu A.M.M.; Fellows R.; Tuuli M.M., 2011 Daddi T.; Tessitore S.; Frey M., 2012 Nemoianu E.L. et al., 2013 Kim Y.; Brodhag C.; Mebratu D., 2014 Maletic M. et al., 2015 Jansson J. et al., 2017
	MKT + IMP	Arena M.; Chiaroni D., 2014
Latin America	LEG	Prates C.; Pedrozo E.; Silva T., 2015
	MKT	Hrdlicka H.; Kruglianskas I., 2014

Region	Motivations	Reference
Northern America	IMP + LEG	Kuppig V.D. et al, 2016
	INS + LEG	Willetts R. et al, 2011
	LEG	Taghizadeh S.; Jimmy Gandhi S., 2016 Guo Y.; Yang D.C., 2017
	MKT	Berthelot S.; Coulmont M.; Serret V., 2012 Goldring D., 2015 Kim H.; Lee S.H.; Yang K., 2015
Oceania	IMP	Stewart H.; Gapp R., 2014
	INS	Murphy D.; McGrath D., 2015
	LEG	Haigh M.; Guthrie J., 2010 Dobbs S.; van Staden C., 2013 Kend M., 2015 Bevan E.A.M.; Yung P., 2016
	LEG + IMP	Petrovic-Lazarevic S., 2010
Global	IMP	Steger U.; Ionescu-Somers A.; Salzmann O., 2007 Ahern G.M., 2015 Jo H.; Kim H.; Park K., 2015 Temminck E.; Mearns K.; Fruhen L., 2015 Hickle G., 2017 Maniora J., 2017
		Owen J.R.; Kemp D., 2012 Weisenfeld U., 2012 Sharma D.; Bhatnagar P., 2015
		Castka P.; Balzarova M.A., 2008 Fuchs D.; Kalfagianni A., 2009 Cowper-Smith A.; de Grosbois D., 2011 Fenclova E.; Coles T., 2011 Giunipero L.C.; Hooker R.E.; Denslow D., 2012 Hsieh Y.J., 2012
		Leadbitter D.; Benguerel R., 2014 Kim Y., 2015 Gaither B.M.; Austin L., 2016 Kuo T.C. et al, 2016 Stacchezzini R.; Melloni G.; Lai A., 2016 Roos J., 2017 Rueda X.; Garrett R.D.; Lambin E.F., 2017
	LEG + IMP	Hales J. et al, 2016 Lozano R.; Nummert B.; Ceulemans K., 2016
	LEG + INS	Schrader C.; Freimann J.; Seuring S., 2012
	MKT	Trim P.R.J.; Lee Y.-I., 2008 Loorbach D.; Wijsman K., 2013 Amatucci F.M.; Pascale A.M.; Serluca M.C., 2015 Bolton L.E.; Mattila A.S., 2015 Ingenbleek P.T.M.; Meulenbergh M.T.G.; Van Trijp H.C.M., 2015 Aschemann-Witzel J.; de Hooij I.D.; Normann A., 2016 Austin L.L.; Gaither B.M., 2016 Fatma M.; Rahman Z.; Khan I., 2016 Sick N. et al, 2016
		Camilleri M.

Note. LEG: Legitimacy; MKT: Market success; IMP: Internal improvement; INS: Social insurance.