

Word from the Guest Editors

Entrepreneurship in the Face of Societal Collapse? Roles, Responsibilities, and Challenges

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Volume 27, Number spécial, 2023

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Emprendimiento ante el Colapso Social: Roles, Responsabilidades y Desafíos

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1109315ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59876/a-3pp9-6avf>

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Publisher(s)

HEC Montréal
Université Paris Dauphine

ISSN

1206-1697 (print)
1918-9222 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Constantinidis, C., Fadil, N. & Bloch, A. (2023). Word from the Guest Editors: Entrepreneurship in the Face of Societal Collapse? Roles, Responsibilities, and Challenges. *Management international / International Management / Gestión Internacional*, 27(spécial), 9–10. <https://doi.org/10.59876/a-3pp9-6avf>

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Entrepreneurship in the Face of Societal Collapse?

Roles, Responsibilities, and Challenges

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The world is currently experiencing a period of significant upheaval, leading to a profound reassessment and a confrontation of international value systems and social structures (Hugon, 2016). Our contemporary society, marked by rapid and numerous technological and social advancements, has exceeded the ecosystem's carrying capacity and is now facing the limits of its exponential growth (GIEC, 2023; Eberle *et al.* 2023). Climate change, biodiversity loss, including the extinction of hundreds of animal and plant species, the depletion of natural resources such as water and fossil fuels, soil impoverishment, and ocean acidification, are well-known phenomena supported by numerous scientific studies in various disciplinary fields (MacDougall *et al.*, 2013; Meadows *et al.*, 2004; Murray and King, 2012; Steffen *et al.*, 2015).

Environmental, energy, and climate challenges are accompanied by equally critical geopolitical, economic, and social complexities that the international community is striving to address (Eberle *et al.* 2023). While these challenges are global in nature, our multipolar world is characterized by disparities in wealth and power, along with variations in collective priorities and preferences, making consensus difficult to attain (Hugon, 2016). Heightened economic and social disparities are observable among individuals, social groups, regions, and countries across the globe, resulting in a significant divide between the populations of the Global North and South. This economic and political instability, in turn, perpetuates these disparities, creating a negative cycle interpreted as a vulnerability within our capitalist system (Piketty and Goldhammer, 2014). Hence, the rapid pace embraced by industrialized and emerging nations may contribute to destabilizing and, in some cases, even dismantling the systems that underpin and sustain our civilization.

In the last twenty years, the scientific and political communities have begun to address the intricate issues related to the potential collapse of societies (Diamond, 2006; Hawkins and Jones, 2013; Servigne and Stevens, 2021). In the field of entrepreneurship, social and environmental crises have typically been approached from a positive standpoint, highlighting the role entrepreneurs can play in devising and advancing solutions to global challenges. This perspective glorifies "heroic" entrepreneurship (Janssen and Schmitt, 2011) and portrays it as a source of both economic prosperity and social

transformation on local, regional, national, and international levels. However, it fails to thoroughly explore entrepreneurship's potential responsibility in the genesis and aggravation of the problems encountered within the dominant system.

Expanding on this observation, this special issue seeks to investigate the links between the field of entrepreneurship and the prospect of a societal collapse. It is a continuation of the 8th edition of the Georges Doriot Days which, in 2021, united the scientific community to collectively contemplate the challenges of entrepreneurship amidst the backdrop of potential societal collapse. This perspective on the roles and responsibilities of entrepreneurs in today's global society aimed to illuminate an aspect that has been under-explored in academic circles.

To start, the entrepreneur's myth appears to persist without us fully comprehending it, as it blurs the lines between heroism and solitude. Who is truly deceived? as suggested by Paul Veyne. Drawing inspiration from this historian's work, Olivier Germain's essay examines the tension between mythification and mystification in the era of revitalized myths, particularly in favor of startups. Does this renewal of the myth contribute to the perpetuation of a flawed world, or does it offer a solution in the face of potential collapse? The essay also delves into the practicality or authenticity of the myth for vulnerable populations and those marginalized in entrepreneurship. It highlights the risks of discussions focused solely on identities, often overlooking the realities of people's lives. Ultimately, the essay encourages us to explore the possibilities of entrepreneurial activism, which is filled with imaginative potential, or political entrepreneurship, which builds relationships and inevitably encompasses the potential benefits and drawbacks of a different mythology.

The text by Pierre Labardin, Stephane Jaumier, and Olivier Gauthier delves into the origins of the discourse linking profit with success in the context of French society during the 1980s. This discourse has since become deeply ingrained in our collective imagination, contributing to the proliferation of economic liberalism and business jargon in society. By examining the social and cultural history of profit, based on an analysis of 878 newspaper articles and 656 television programs from that era, the authors expose the primary role of the dominant discourse in concealing how companies generate and

distribute their profits. Their study illuminates how discourse can transform a measurement system, such as profit, into societal values, leading to the rise of entrepreneurship and financialization of the economy. Importantly, it also sheds light on the process of constructing an entrepreneur as a social model of success through discourse.

Elen Riot's text begins by acknowledging the industrial decline in France over the past fifty years, characterized by a decrease in employment and GDP. It aims to analyze the discourse by focusing on the emblematic case of Florange and Grandrange, representing the industrial crisis in Lorraine. The author scrutinizes the entrepreneurial promise, its alignment with the varying expectations of stakeholders, and its future potential. The discourse portrays the entrepreneur as a providential figure capable of sustaining or reviving industrial activities (continuity entrepreneur) and proposing innovative environmental solutions (disruptive entrepreneur). The analysis highlights the inherent ambiguity of the entrepreneurial promise, evoking a mix of hope and disillusionment among those impacted by the industrial crisis. This vague promise seems to serve more as a means to establish a presence in declining industrial areas, rather than genuinely providing sustainable solutions.

Finally, the text by Catherine Mercier-Suissa and Magdalena Godek-Brunel offers a complementary and alternative perspective, by examining the concept of common goods and governance of related resources, based on Ostrom's theory. The authors employ a unique longitudinal case study, "constructive hospitality", in which social partners collaborate to build temporary housing with and for refugees. They demonstrate that this cooperation is based on trust, solidarity, and the satisfaction of producing a common good, rather than on profit, marking a departure from dominant entrepreneurial practices. The results highlight the effectiveness of social partnerships in managing common goods and the role of the entrepreneur in coordinating the partners' actions. These partners have complementary skills and collectively establish self-governance rules.

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