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Rediscovering local roots and interactions in management

Conference Proceedings

Short papers

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Rediscovering local roots and interactions in management

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Short Papers

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To the reader,

this volume contains the short papers of the Sinergie-SIMA 2023 Management Conference, hosted by the LUM University and University of Bari at Mercure Villa Romanazzi Carducci (Bari) on June 29th and 30th 2023.

Theory and practice in the field of management have been challenged by the emergence of deep transitions such as those driven by globalization, the rise of social and environmental issues, and the diffusion of digital technologies. Events such as the ensuing geopolitical crises and the pandemic further contribute to spur management scholars to feel the call to produce impactful research with theoretical and managerial implications on the relationship between location and strategy (Bathelt and Li, 2022).

As a consequence, scholars and practitioners have been asked to design new business models and rethink value chains in a twofold direction (Mazutis et al., 2021). First, the relevance of local roots sheds light on the way people create and shape places, as much as places shape people and their organizations, suggesting a need to rethink how all lives ‘take place’ in places, as well as how all business happens in places (Sternad et al., 2017). Second, a need for new interactions emerges, suggesting that businesses are deeply connected to their roots, that are their homes, from which they draw inspiration, identity, and sources of competitive advantage (Soderstrom and Weber, 2020).

Rediscovering local roots and specific assets, as well as developing new ways of interaction among the economic actors and their stakeholders, can help firms to design effective and innovative strategies to create and share values (Mair et al., 2016), with positive economic, social, and environmental impacts (Attig and Brockman, 2017).

Several research questions stimulate an interdisciplinary debate in the field of management. These questions relate to the ability of firms and managers to move, among the others, between global and local relations, near/physical and far/digital interactions, reshoring and offshoring activities, omnichannel competition and retail interactions, market transactions and system operating structures, traditional and innovative approaches, social/local benefits and financial/global performances, business ethics and ethics in business.

In the same way, different theories, methodological approaches, and units of analysis are required to generate scientific research that has an impact not only in terms of theoretical contribution but also on the real business world.

The Sinergie-SIMA 2023 Management Conference was a great occasion to discuss about the research efforts of our research community on thematic tracks related to the Conference theme (the function of territorial or cultural roots and of operational interactions in management) and the SIMA thematic groups (Entrepreneurship, Innovation & technology management, International business, Marketing, Retailing & Service management, Small & family business, Strategic communication, Strategy & Governance, Supply chain management, logistics & operations, Sustainability, and Tourism and culture management).

The Conference call for papers gave the opportunity to submit either short or long papers. Overall, the editorial staff received 215 short papers and 63 long papers.

For the *short and long papers*, the evaluation followed the peer review process, with a double-blind review performed by two referees - university lecturers, expert about the topic - selected among SIMA and the community of Sinergie members.

In detail, the referees applied the following criteria to evaluate the submissions:

- clarity of the research aims,
- accuracy of the methodological approach,
- contribution in terms of originality/innovativeness,

- theoretical and practical contribution,
- clarity of communication,
- significance of the bibliographical basis.

The *peer review* process resulted in full acceptance or rejection of the submissions. In the case of disagreement among reviewers' evaluations, the decision was taken by the Chairs of the SIMA thematic groups or conference track. Each work was then sent back to the Authors together with the referees' reports. The suggestions received by the referees were used by the Authors during the presentation of their research works at the Conference.

The evaluation process ended with the acceptance of 215 short papers and 62 long papers, which were published in two distinct volumes.

All the short papers published in this volume were presented and discussed during the Conference and published online on the web portal of Sinergie-SIMA Management Conference (<https://www.sijmsima.it/>).

While thanking all the Authors, Chairs and participants, we hope that this volume will contribute to advance knowledge about the rediscovering local roots and interactions in management.

The Conference Chairs

Angelantonio Russo, Savino Santovito, Arabella Mocciaro Li Destri and Marta Ugolini

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Renewable Energy Communities in Africa: evidence from a systematic literature review

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Framing of the research. Africa is vastly gifted with energy resources, especially renewable ones, but it performs really bad in terms of supplying of energy, leaving more than 660 millions of people without access (IEA, 2022b). Considering the demographic projections on the growth of the population, the rising energy demand in Africa represents one of the most significant challenges to sustainable economic growth (Adenle, 2020). An improvement in access to energy, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), can lead to the enhancement in healthcare, life expectancy, recreation, education, and economic opportunities (Opuku et al., 2021). The main reasons for not accessing to energy, in Africa, are lack of infrastructure and poverty (IEA, 2022c). Moreover, the lack of energy is a form, outcome, and cause of poverty (Action, 2010). According to the International Energy Agency-IEA, the percentage of people without access, in Africa, increased in 2021 after declining for 6 years, due to the Covid19 shock (IEA, 2022c).

The IEA, in the Net Zero Emissions by 2050 scenario (NZE), illustrates a trajectory to achieve full access to electricity by 2030: more than half of the people gaining access by 2030 is doing this through decentralized solutions, including mini-grid and stand-alone systems, which are 90% based on renewable solutions (IEA, 2022a). Mini-grid solutions are emerging as a third alternative to rural electrification, coming between the option of large-scale grid extension and pico-scale stand-alone solutions (Pedersen, 2016). Especially in rural areas, where over 80% of the electricity-deprived live, mini-grids and stand-alone systems, mostly solar based, are the most viable solutions. (IEA, 2022d). In addition, micro-grids are considered a cost-effective and reliable energy option (Pedersen, 2016). Finally, in the last decade, the technological cost to supply rural communities through local renewable energy sources has dramatically dropped (Irena, 2018; Moretti et al., 2019). Therefore, decentralized renewable energies (mini-grid, micro-grid, stand alone, etc) represent an attractive alternative to grid extension (Mandelli et al., 2016).

There are several ways of managing decentralized renewable energy systems. One of these is when the local communities own, manage, operate, and maintain the plant (Peter et al., 2019). In the research conducted by Katre and Tozzi (2019), community-led model in developing community-based projects on decentralized renewable energies can be a factor of success. At the same time, Peter et al. (2019), in their work, identified some challenges related to community management of mini-grids, like initial investment, skills and financial and technical sustainability. On the other side, some scholars argue that the nascent energy systems in SSA offer an opportunity to collaboratively design energy communities and address energy access challenges present in many SSA countries (Ambole et al., 2021). In particular, the involvement of communities and local ownership can be a driver to create value and solve problems, such the economical and skills' ones (Ahlborg & Sjöstedt, 2015). Moreover, energy communities could also represent a response to barriers to the electrification of rural areas, such as the little interest from private sector (Ahlborg & Hammar, 2014).

Looking to the local communities' role in managing RE plant, the European Commission has recently presented the revised Renewable Energy Directive (2018/2001/EU) which is dedicated to renewable energies-RE and a light is turned on the role of citizen (Lowitzsch et. al, 2019). European Union, through the directive, gave a definition of Renewable Energy Communities (RECs) as a legal entity: (a) based on open and voluntary participation, autonomous, and effectively controlled by shareholders or members that are located in the proximity of the renewable energy projects that are owned and developed by that legal entity; (b) the shareholders or members of which are natural persons, SMEs or local authorities, including municipalities; (c) the primary purpose of which is to provide environmental, economic or social community benefits for its shareholders or members or for the local areas where it operates, rather than financial profits. Energy communities and consumer (co-)ownership in RE are essential cornerstones to the overall success of the energy transition (Lowitzsch et. al, 2019). RECs can foster the ecological transition (Dóci et al., 2015) and in Europe this seems to be one of the most recurrent motivations (Soeiro & Dias, 2020) to participate.

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Renewable Energy Communities, therefore, may represent, if applied and properly shaped taking into consideration the features of a different context such the African one, an epochal turning point in order to bring energy to those who are disconnected from the grid and ensure sustainability of the three pillars. RECs can help in achieving a just and fair low carbon transition, in line with the UN2030 Agenda on the SDGs, especially n.7 “Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all”.

Purpose of the paper. *Considering their possible role in enhancing energy access and pursuing environmental and social benefits, RECs can represent an innovative business model for electrification in Africa, able to “actively create and drive sustainable economic development in underserved areas” (Trotter & Brophy, 2022). Nonetheless, the majority of the studies have been conducted in the Global North and the RECs’ concept, as intended in Europe, may not work in Africa (Ambole et al., 2021). Therefore, this research aims at identifying the status of the art and the challenges for the development of RECs in Africa, especially concerning the management related issues. The study makes an important contribution to the management sector through a systematic literature review on the existing literature between 1985-2022. In doing this, the study relies on the theoretical framework developed by Bauwens et al. (2022), identifying the different dimensions of RECs, such meaning, energy activities and objectives. In particular, the objectives pursued by the RECs can be iconic of the possible impacts in terms of elements of sustainability of the business model. Regarding to the latter, we added to our analysis a dedicated part on the factors that affect the implementation of REC, such as managerial and financial issues, failure factors, and on the features of the eventual business models which have been adopted, when present.*

Methodology. *We carried out a systematic literature review according to Xiao and Watson (2017)’s methodological approach. We used Web of Science (Wos) and Scopus that are the two most used scholarly databases and cover most of the scientific contributions related to the field of investigation. Considering our aim, we were willing to include all the studies which provide insights on energy communities in Africa. We immediately realized that few studies covered the topic, therefore we had to use a set of words that goes a little beyond the strict “Renewable Energy Communities” expression. First, the literature search used the following keywords: “renewable energy communities”, “renewable energy”, “bottom-up initiatives”, “micro-grid”, “stand-alone”, “standalone”, “rural energy communities”, “energy poverty”, “Africa”, “developing countries”. Then, we realize, with an iterative process, that that set of keywords was too wide, bringing us to generic and broad results. Therefore, we decided to exclude “renewable energy”, “energy poverty”, and “developing countries”. At the same time, we needed to narrow the field to management studies or studies related to the management field, to limit the results in numbers, still high. In doing this, we used the options available in the two databases, selecting a specific topic/field of study, through a research area (WoS) or a sub-area (Scopus). We therefore decided to restrict our search to Business Economics, Development Studies, Government Law, Public Administration, Urban Studies, Energy Fuels, Science Technology, Environmental Sciences Ecology research areas (WoS), and sub-areas of business, social, economics, energy and engineering (Scopus). Lastly, we decided to only include studies written in English.*

We limited the publication date to 1985 and 2022, considering 1985 the possibility given by one of the two databases and aligning to that. With the final algorithm based on the keywords selected and the inclusion criteria, we found n. 194 on Scopus and n. 111 studies on Web of Science. The following step was a duplication check for avoiding overlapping between the two databases, which brought us to a first-step final selection n. 238 studies. After this step, we went through a selection of the articles, based on the title and abstract analysis. In case there was not unanimity among the team (two researchers were working in parallel), discrepancies within the team were discussed and resolved, also going through a full text read of the paper. Finally, a total of n. 33 studies were deemed relevant. Then, we obtained the full-text article for eligibility assessment. In addition, through backward and forward search, and recurring to most cited articles, we identified other additional articles (n.13). A total of n.46 articles was analyzed.

As anticipated, we used an electronic sheet to extract the data and to response to the purpose of our paper. Therefore, first we systematized the manuscripts considering the pertinence to some general information, as year of publication, journal, type of article, etc. Then, we extracted the information related to the dimensions and sub-dimensions proposed by Bauwens et al. (2022). Bauwens et al. (2022) identified various sub-dimensions related to the meaning of community: outcome, process, identity, actor, network, place, scale, technology. Then, the second category divides the energy-related community activities in three groups: supply-side activities, such as energy generation and distribution; to demand-side activities, including energy use, energy efficiency measures, and information and dissemination; integrated activities, when the two different sides are combined. Finally, the last category of observation are the objectives pursued by the communities. These could be various, such as economic, environmental, social, political, and infrastructural, or energy autonomy. In the second step of our content analysis, we add extraction dimensions, such as managerial and financial issues, failure and barriers, and other factors, essential to the purpose of our research.

Through the full-text analysis for the extraction of the data, we identified articles that were not fitting our purpose and we deleted them. The final number of articles used for the Systematic Literature Review was n. 39.

Results. *The analysis of selected paper is still ongoing. Therefore, we present some preliminary results.*

Most of the articles were published in the last decade with an increase in the last years, especially 2022. Both data indicates that the field of study has raised an increasing interest of scholars. At the same time, the concept of RECs has been developed and adopted in Europe but is not present in papers investigating experiences of energy communities (also non-renewable: i.e., with diesel power plant) or the involvement of local communities in the implementation of energy stand-alone installations in African countries. Finally, regarding the type of renewable energies (REs) studied,

the analysed papers mainly focus on solar and partially on hydro and hybrid powerplants (with diesel generator or biomass). Other REs are really rare, such as wind. Geothermal energy is absent.

Regarding the framework adopted from Bauwens et al. (2022), the dimension “meaning of communities” is generally not deepened in literature. This can be related to the type of articles (most of them are techno-economic studies). Considering the sub-dimensions “actor” and “network”, studies analyze mostly rural communities of villages, where the prevalent activities are related to agriculture and fishing. Regarding the scale observed, it includes micro-grid, off-grid, mini-grid, with plants that are small-scaled. Regarding “energy-related community activities”, they indicate a prevalence in use in comparison with production. Most frequent use purposes are domestic, agriculture, cooking purpose, but also water pumping, and some little business activities.

The dimension “objectives pursued by the communities” is giving interesting results. Environmental objectives are not the prevalent ones: REs are used because of their availability, not for sustainability reasons, even if some effects are of course beneficial for the local communities (i.e. clean cooking technologies). Economic objectives are pursued through REs, especially related to the possibility of enhancing the wealth of local communities, allowing commercial activities and businesses. Social objectives, directly pursued or indirectly resulting, are wide. Among the others, gender inequalities are reduced; education for children is more accessible; safety during dark hours is improved. Finally, political objectives are pursued, through the participatory approach described in a few articles. Other effects experienced by the local communities were enhancing people’s sense of well-being, through the possibility of communication and entertainment.

Regarding managerial and financial issues, what emerges is that there is not a unique or prevalent management model adopted represented in literature, while rather a variety of tentative solutions are proposed. Some scholars (Ambole et al. 2021) argued that “the sophisticated business models used by energy communities in the Global North (peer-to-peer, prosumer-to-grid, and organised prosumer group models) are not - yet - replicable in SSA” because of a lack of regulatory framework allowing to govern such complexity. In relation to the regulatory and policy aspects and business models, it has been observed that off-grid sector development plans in SSA have opened up the market for business and created opportunities for companies to innovate (Trotter, & Brophy, 2022).

Experiences of the involvement - with a real responsibility - of local communities in the management of the plant are present, such as, i.e., the creation of a village energy team, properly established and trained (Ahlborg, 2018). Local communities were also involved in the initial investment for the plant, even if not covering the total amount. Butu et al. (2021) promotes Community Based Organisations - groups of individuals with a common goal, are mainly formed to help otherwise poor individuals aggregate capital for varying purposes - with an active role in managing and financing the plant, also in contrast to banks that often charge farmers relatively high maintenance fees, even on their savings account.

Ensuring financial sustainability of the project is still a challenge, especially for the high investment cost of some components of installations, such as, i.e., batteries (Barelli et al., 2019; Camblong et al 2009; Gammon, & Sallah, 2021), or lack of funding - considering the diffused poverty of the rural context. Nevertheless, the willingness has been observed to be high in some rural villages (van Gevelt, 2016) and this can be an enhancing factor for their development.

Finally, other soft barriers are present, such as lack of skills to ensure the managing of the project at the end of the donor’s supervision, impeding the long-term perspective. In most of these projects, local communities are inadequately resourced to institute and manage their own projects (Ambole et al. 2021). In addition, regulatory barriers such as lack of a legal, regulatory and institutional framework promoting renewable energy communities hamper the implementation of projects.

Research limitations. The paper is affected by some limitations. First, the concept of RECs is not still directly addressed in scientific papers investigating initiatives for the development of renewable energies in rural and remote African context. Therefore, this literature review might overlook existing cases of RECs in African countries and already reported in grey literature. Second, our sample focused only on English scientific articles and published in journals as listed in Scopus and Web of Science.

Managerial implications. The paper provides a framework for implementing a management model to be replicated in rural and remote areas in African countries. Moreover, this study highlights the needs in terms of knowledge, financial resources, and technologies for developing effective renewable energy stand-alone initiatives in African countries.

Originality of the paper. The study contributes to the management field addressing both the new concept of RECs and a new field of research related to managerial aspects associated with the effective implementation of RECs in rural and remote areas. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, there are not systematic literature reviews on this field.

Keywords: Renewable Energy Communities; Africa; local communities; rural communities, Energy access;

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