



GRONEN 2026 Research Conference

JUNE 7-10, 2026

ESADE Business School, Barcelona

Rethinking Sustainability for a Disrupted World

The business sustainability agenda is facing unprecedented complexity. The interwoven nature of today's crises—such as the complex nexus between wars and access to food and energy—calls for a deeper and more systemic understanding of the role of organizations in addressing environmental and societal challenges. The 2026 GRONEN Research Conference invites contributions that critically examine how organizations can not only adapt to these complex dynamics but also contribute to regenerating life-supporting social and ecological systems in times of profound disruption.

Interconnected Crises: A Changing Landscape for Organizations

We are living through a moment of profound transformation. The current decade has been marked by the intensification of multiple, mutually reinforcing global crises:

- **The climate crisis** is accelerating faster than anticipated. Record-breaking temperatures, the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events, and the persistent transgression of planetary boundaries are reshaping ecosystems and economies alike.
- **Social inequalities** are becoming more visible and more acute. In the Global South, climate impacts are deepening structural vulnerabilities and threatening livelihoods. In the Global North, housing shortages, rising living costs, and mounting precarity of living conditions exacerbate exclusion and fuel social unrest. In both contexts, threats to human rights and civil liberties are also on the rise.
- **Geopolitical instability** is transforming global trade dynamics, dismantling recent progress on supply chain traceability, transparency, and sustainability. Emerging populist and protectionist policies are fragmenting regulatory landscapes and challenging the role of multilateralism in fostering sustainable development.

Together, these crises are not isolated phenomena—they are **deeply entangled and systemic**, with complex feedback loops across environmental, social, and economic domains which engage individuals, firms, polity actors and society as a whole.

Organizational Responses: Diverging Paths in Times of Crisis

In the face of such challenges, organizations are reacting in markedly different ways:

- **Some firms are retrenching**, stepping back from previously held sustainability commitments and aligning with growing waves of anti-ESG sentiment. For these firms, short-term cost-cutting and market opportunities trump long-term value creation or social responsibility.

- **Others adopt a reactive or incremental approach**, waiting for clearer signals from the market or regulators before making small, calculated steps toward more sustainable practices. Sustainability becomes a matter of business case justification rather than strategic transformation. These organizations may be silencing or hushing their efforts without abandoning them fully.
- **A third group seeks to lead**, actively responding to institutional voids and uncertainty with bold initiatives that aim not just to sustain but to regenerate. These firms confront trade-offs directly and embrace the challenge of innovating for both environmental recovery and social justice.

These varied organizational stances raise critical questions: What motivates different responses? Which internal and external conditions shape them? What role do values, leadership, firm capabilities, and stakeholder pressure play? How are organizations implementing those strategies, and how are they legitimizing their move away from previous, more ambitious plans? How should organizations respond to such changing political and market landscapes? And ultimately—what are the implications for the resilience, legitimacy, and long-term survival of companies as well as societies and eco-systems?

Understanding Systemic Challenges and Responses

The GRONEN 2026 Conference invites submissions from a wide range of methodological, theoretical, and cultural backgrounds that explore how organizations understand, interpret, and respond to the systemic and complex nature of today's sustainability challenges and crises. Relevant questions and topics include, but are not restricted to the following ones:

- **Tensions, trade-offs, and paradoxes:** How do organizations and managers perceive the conflicts and interdependencies among climate, social, and geopolitical crises? How are these perceptions shifting, and why? How do they respond to paradoxical demands stemming from the multiple complex crises they face? How do they make sure to address the root cause of debilitating paradoxes rather than just managing paradoxical consequences?
- **Backtracking or backlash?** Which firms are more likely to reduce or abandon their sustainability ambitions; which ones are more likely to adopt greenhushing? What roles do institutional pressures, organizational characteristics, and leadership values play in such retrenchments? How do these shifts affect stakeholders, both internally (e.g., employees, subsidiaries) and externally (e.g., communities, investors, NGOs)?
- **Business-as-usual in crisis mode:** Does a business case logic influence the tendency toward incrementalism in responding to crises? What are the different rationales for building business cases used by companies in the face of crises and how do they interact? What novel business cases rationales could be used to spur more ambitious business responses to crises? What are the risks of waiting too long, and what organizational routines prevent firms from stepping beyond familiar modes of change? How can a robust business case logic protect environmental or social commitments in times of turmoil?
- **Regeneration through leadership:** Which firms and sectors are engaging in transformational change? What business models, governance arrangements, and innovations are enabling them to regenerate the social and ecological systems in which they are embedded? What is the role of investors? What type of regenerative strategies that seek to restore and revitalize rather than merely sustain ecosystems do organizations pursue? How and when do

businesses and investors become active agents of systemic transformation, especially in light of interdependent crises?

- **The role of innovation:** What kind of innovations are relevant for handling multi-layered systemic sustainability challenges? What forms of technological, organizational, or business model innovation support regenerative outcomes? How can we evaluate their effectiveness across social and environmental dimensions?
- **Enabling and constraining technologies:** How do Industry 4.0 technologies (AI, IoT, blockchain, etc.) facilitate or hinder the development and implementation of different kinds of sustainable business models? What other technologies play a key role in navigating sustainability challenges? What new technologies have the potential to work against sustainability, and when and how is this likely to happen? In what ways is technology detrimental or counterproductive?
- **Collaborative ecosystems:** What partnerships among firms, governments, NGOs, and communities are critical to address sustainability challenges? What new governance mechanisms are emerging to support cross-sector collaboration? What is the role of cities or local regions?
- **Multi-level dynamics:** How do local actors implement or adapt global solutions? What tensions and opportunities arise in the interplay between global agendas and local realities? What is the role of individual actors such as employees, consumers, managers, or investors?
- **Systems thinking and complexity:** How can scholars better engage with systems dynamics to inform more holistic understandings of sustainability? What methods and approaches are needed to analyze interdependence, emergence, and tipping points?

A Community for Impactful, Engaged Scholarship

GRONEN is an open network of scholars committed to rigorous, relevant, and transformative research at the intersection of management and the natural environment. We welcome submissions from all methodological traditions, theoretical perspectives, and geographic contexts. We particularly encourage interdisciplinary research and contributions that seek to engage with practice and policy.

Program and submission details

GRONEN 2026 will combine a range of session formats to provide a suitable platform for academic exchange on research across various stage of development. This will include both traditional sessions – for discussing advanced papers – and interactive formats designed to provide feedback to earlier-stage work. All sessions will be chaired by members of the GRONEN community and other thought leaders to facilitate active and constructive discussion and idea development.

Paper submissions will undergo a double-blind review process prior to acceptance. All accepted submissions will be reviewed, and awards will be granted for the Best Conference Paper and the Best PhD Student Paper. We are open to full paper submissions (for traditional paper sessions), and 5-pagers of early-stage research ideas (for interactive sessions). More detailed submission guidelines will be available through the conference website.

In addition, a special issue of *Organization & Environment* that will focus on the conference topic is being planned.

Professional Development Workshop (PDW)

Furthermore, the conference will host a number of Professional Development Workshop (PDW). PDWs offer a unique space for experimentation, reflection, and skill-building. We welcome proposals that provide participants with opportunities to explore emerging topics, engage with novel research methods, or reflect on key aspects of our professional lives as scholars – including both research and teaching dimensions. We particularly encourage proposals that aim to spark professional growth, collective learning, and meaningful exchange.

Examples of suitable PDWs might include sessions on innovative research frontiers intersecting different disciplines, ways to collect or analyze sustainability-related data (e.g., incorporating natural science data or spatial data), workshops that experiment with new pedagogical approaches for teaching sustainability, or spaces for discussing how to navigate challenges related to the job of a researcher (i.e. navigating students, expectations, dealing with eco-anxiety,...)

PDWs can take many forms – hands-on workshops, facilitated discussions, collaborative exercises, or experimental formats – and should be designed to be interactive and inclusive. To submit a PDW proposal, please send a short (max 1-page) document that includes:

- The title and objectives of the proposed PDW
- A description of the session format and intended audience
- The names, affiliations, and relevant experience of the organizers

Proposals will be evaluated based on their relevance to the GRONEN community, clarity of purpose, and potential to foster professional development and dialogue.

Doctoral consortium

A doctoral consortium limited to approximately 25 PhD students will take place before the main conference, starting in the morning of June 7, 2026 and ending after lunch on June 8, 2026. The doctoral consortium offers a platform for PhD students to discuss their projects and concerns openly with each other and with more senior researchers from the field. Participants can expect an inclusive atmosphere and opportunities to interact informally with members of the GRONEN community. In addition to ensuring valuable feedback and career advice, participation in the consortium is a great way to meet fellow conference attendants before the official conference starts.

The doctoral consortium is open to PhD students at any stage. PhD students must apply separately for the doctoral consortium too.

Applications to the doctoral consortium must include an extended abstract, a current CV, and a motivation letter. Doctoral students are invited to submit a full paper for consideration in the main program, but this is not a requirement. In any case, participants who get accepted to the PhD consortium are required to register for the main conference as well. There is no additional registration fee for attending the doctoral consortium. Detailed instructions for how to apply will be made available on the conference website.



Key dates

A link to electronic submission system will be posted on the conference website. The selection process, notification of authors, and registration of participants will follow the schedule below:

December 4, 2025: Submission system opens

January 31, 2026: Deadline for submissions of papers, PDW proposals, and applications to participate in the PhD consortium

March 15, 2026: Notification of acceptance

April 30, 2026: Deadline for registration

June 7-8, 2026: Doctoral Consortium

June 8 - 10, 2026: GRONEN Research Conference

Conference web page and details regarding the call for papers

Please check the conference website for more information and subsequently regular conference updates: <http://www.gronenonline.com/gronen1/gronen2026/>

For any questions, please contact: gronen2026@esade.edu

We look forward to welcoming you to Barcelona in 2026!

The organizing committee:

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