

**8th International Conference on
Rethinking Clusters 2025
in New Geopolitical and Sustainability Dynamics: Exploring
Emerging Markets**

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University of Vale do Itajaí (UNIVALI), SC, Brazil

**Special Session: What's behind the Ecological Transition? Investigating
Individual and Community Engagement in Firms, Clusters, and Regional
Ecosystems**

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Summary of the Session's Theme and Objectives

This special session investigates how individual, managerial and community behaviors act as key drivers of sustainable transformation across enterprises, industrial clusters, and broader territorial systems. Drawing on empirical insights from the [GRINS project](#) – particularly Spoke 6, WP 6.3 – the session explores the drivers of ecological transition, with a specific focus on how personal and collective engagement fosters inclusive and resilient sustainability trajectories. In an era where new geopolitical and environmental dynamics are reshaping global value chains, understanding local behavioral shifts is important to strengthening firms' and regional competitiveness, sustainability, and innovation.

We aim to bridge a gap in local economic development research by analyzing how individuals and communities evolve from passive stakeholders into active agents of change. This involves examining the micro-foundations of sustainable practices within organizational settings and their diffusion across territorial ecosystems. The session will discuss how enterprises internalize sustainability and how communities contribute through grassroots initiatives, circular economy networks, and collective action.

Furthermore, we will address how individual and community dynamics interact with governance structures, policy instruments, and digital technologies. By highlighting the roles of AI, smart platforms, and data analytics in enabling behavioral and entrepreneurial transformation, the session expands the discussion to include the digital dimension of sustainability. It also explores the mechanisms through which knowledge spillovers and social learning within clusters and innovation ecosystems support systemic change.

Contributions will examine drivers of pro-environmental and pro-social behavior, cross-cultural comparisons, and the different dimensions of ecological transition. The session seeks to provide evidence-based insights into how policies and organizational strategies can be designed to activate

individual motivation and community engagement, ultimately advancing sustainable development and territorial cohesion.

Expected outcomes include practical frameworks and tools for promoting sustainability within firms and territories, insights on policy and governance approaches for a broad understanding of how individual and collective action support the ecological transition.

The session welcomes a broad range of theoretical and empirical contributions, including but not limited to experimental and field studies, survey-based research, longitudinal analyses, case studies, qualitative contributions, cross-regional comparisons, policy evaluations, and methodological innovations. Emphasis is placed on interdisciplinary work that bridges management studies, economics, sustainability, and territorial development.

Topics Covered in the Special Session

The session explores – but is not limited to - the following interrelated thematic areas:

- **Individual, Community and Organizational Behavioral Change:** Examining the individual and social mechanisms that drive pro-environmental behavior in enterprises and how these influence different sustainability dimensions, and business models, at both firm and cluster levels.
- **Community-Enterprise Sustainability Partnerships:** Investigating how local communities co-create sustainability strategies with firms, how grassroots initiatives contribute to regional sustainability, and how firms can launch initiatives with social impact.
- **Multi-Level Governance and Policy Design:** Exploring the design and effectiveness of policy instruments and strategies across organizational and territorial scales, through a multi-stakeholder and ecosystem perspective.
- **Digital Technologies and Behavioral Analytics:** Analyzing if and how digital platforms, AI tools, and smart technologies support behavioral change and engagement in sustainability transitions by individuals and organizations.
- **Territorial Competitiveness and Innovation:** Understanding how behavioral change and responsible innovation fosters sustainable competitive advantage in firms and clusters, building durable regional innovation ecosystems.
- **Energy transition, Renewable Energy Communities, and Composting Communities:** Investigating how individual and collective action shape the development of renewable energy and composting communities, and how these initiatives support a just and inclusive energy transition at the local and regional levels.

Key references

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