

Dennis Jancsary (Wien), Renate E. Meyer, (Wien), Markus A. Höllerer, (Sydney) & Eva Boxenbaum, (Copenhagen)

## **Visual and multimodal instantiations of role identities and stakeholder relations in the CSR communication of Austrian and Danish corporations**

In this manuscript, we present preliminary findings on how organizations' role identities and role-sets are instantiated multimodally in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability communication. Literature on CSR and sustainability suggests that social responsibility substantially changes their role(s) in broader society. Conceptually, we combine insights from role identity theory with the study of (multi)modal registers. We start from the insight that role identities are routinely expressed through communicative acts. Organizations rhetorically claim specific identities that categorize, yet also differentiate them from other organizations and position them towards their stakeholders. Since organizations commonly enact relationships to multiple stakeholders simultaneously, they become embedded in complex 'role sets', encompassing a multiplicity of organizational roles towards a variety of Others.

We focus on the idea that such identity claims go beyond the spoken and/or written word, and that visual text is able to assign positions in social space subtly and in an embodied manner that complements verbal text in crucial ways. Visual text, just as verbal text, provides resources to (a) present the desired identity of the *organization* and (b) assign specific typified roles to its *stakeholders*. Additionally, photographic visual elements also (c) suggest roles for the *viewers* of CSR communication. The totality of distinct positions suggested visually for the corporation, its stakeholders, and the readers of reporting documents complements the reconstruction of the organization's role-set in addition to verbal self-presentation and categorization of others.

We empirically systematize and extend these conceptual ideas with multimodal data from corporations' reporting on CSR and sustainability activities in two different cultural and institutional contexts: Austria and Denmark. From the annual reports of corporations listed in the Austrian Trading Index (ATX 20) and the Danish C20 Cap-Index, we collected 344 multimodal texts for Austria and 134 multimodal texts for Denmark that are subject to ongoing multimodal semiotic analysis. With our manuscript, we aim at contributing to ongoing discussions about the role identities and role-sets underlying sustainability debates in different cultural contexts. Additionally, we connect to emerging literature on multimodal organization studies by presenting first ideas towards a novel, conceptually guided heuristic for analyzing sets of multimodal data.