Editorial

David F. Murphy

Institute for Leadership and Sustainability (IFLAS), University of Cumbria, UK

In Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, the phrase "context is all" becomes a guiding thread that summons the reader to witness what happens to the novel's narrator and protagonist Offred and other "handmaids", as the novel's sociocultural context evolves. This contextual metamorphosis enables "certain casually held attitudes about women [to be] taken to their logical conclusions".[1] For Offred, putting things into context enables her to cope and to hope:

> "What I need is perspective. The illusion of depth, created by a frame, the arrangement of shapes on a flat surface. Perspective is necessary ... Otherwise you live in the moment. Which is not where I want to be ... But that's where I am, there's no escaping it ... Time to take stock ... I have trouble remembering what I used to look like ... But something has changed, now, tonight. Circumstances have altered. I can ask for something. Possibly not much; but something" (Atwood, 2012, p. 165).

---

1 This quote comes from an interview with Margaret Atwood, available at: http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/6125/the-handmaids-tale-by-margaret-atwood/9780307264602

Earlier in the novel, Offred reflects on how quickly one's context can be altered: "It has taken so little time to change our minds, about things like this" (p. 32). This is a helpful reminder about the importance and value of understanding the contextual evolution of ideas and experiences.

In a related vein, the eminent anthropologist and systems theorist Gregory Bateson (1979, p.15) reminds us that "without context, words and actions have no meaning at all. This is true not only of human communication in words but also of all communication whatsoever, of all mental process, of all mind". There is resonance here with the work of Arthur Kleinman (1980) who developed a theoretical framework for anthropologists and other investigators involved in cross-cultural research to study clinical problems and the contextual relationship between medicine, psychiatry, and culture in patient-healer interactions.

As a Canadian living and working in Europe since 1993 with dual citizenship of Canada and the United Kingdom since 2004, my own personal and professional contexts have evolved considerably over the past two

decades. This part of my life has taken me from my doctoral research at Bristol University's School for Policy Studies to my work with The Body Shop helping to establish and later lead the New Academy of Business in Bristol and Bath, before moving on to the UN System Staff College (UNSSC) in Turin, Italy, and culminating with my current academic position at the Institute for Leadership and Sustainability (IFLAS), University of Cumbria and my role as General Editor of *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship (JCC)*. My appreciation of human diversity and contextual difference has also been shaped and influenced by a career in international development that began in Nigeria at the age of 21 and which has continued to have a major influence on my personal and professional life ever since.

My eclectic, evolving life story means that my own understanding of the concept of corporate citizenship is inclusive, conditional and emergent. When I first encountered the nascent corporate citizenship paradigm in the late 1990s (McIntosh *et al.*, 1998), I saw it as an extension of the post-Rio business and sustainable development agenda which featured prominently in my doctoral research at Bristol. My last year with the New Academy in 2004 saw the publication of *Enhancing Business-Community Relations: The Role of Volunteers in Promoting Global Corporate Citizenship*, the final report of an international action research project with UN Volunteers that investigated "new models of business-community relations and enhanced corporate citizenship practices at the local level in developing and transitional countries" (Murphy and Shah, 2004, p. 6). Then, corporate

citizenship was primarily focused on business-stakeholder relations on various global and local environmental, social and economic matters.

Over the past decade, I have come to see corporate citizenship as one of a growing array of inter-related concepts such as business ethics, corporate social responsibility (CSR), corporate responsibility, corporate governance and corporate sustainability, among others (Carroll, 2008). The current corporate citizenship agenda is more wide ranging and ambitious than when I first encountered the term in the late 1990s. The changing context of the role of business not just in society but also in politics, leadership, wellbeing, social innovation, international relations, and wider global social change means that the global-local contexts of corporate citizenship (as well as responsibility, sustainability, ethics, governance etc.) are very different now as compared to then.

Lending impetus to this line of argument, Andromachi Athanasopoulou and John W. Selsky (2015, p.323) investigate the role of social context in CSR research and conclude that three avenues for future CSR research—social ecology, cross-sector social partnerships, and strategy-as-practice—offer opportunities to "transcend [CSR] levels and perspectives" and to produce "more context-sensitive CSR research" (See also Baue, 2014).

Corporate citizenship has never felt more relevant than in the current global context. Amidst international discussion of the implications of Brexit for British, European and global businesses—implications which are already being felt across national borders—leaders of two UK

national retail chains face investigation from UK parliamentary committees (New Statesman, 2016). Across the Atlantic Ocean, *The New York Times'* columnist David Brooks (2016, p. A27) evocatively captures the current American context which has echoes of the fictional Republic of Gilead in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*:

> "Economic and social anxiety has metastasized into something spiritual and existential. Americans are no longer confident in their national project. They no longer trust their institutions or have faith in their common destiny. This is a crisis of national purpose. It's about personal identity and the basic health of communal life".

The roles of corporations, governments and other actors, and the behaviour of their respective leaders have never been nearer the forefront of the public psyche on both sides of the Atlantic and further afield. To my mind, this confirms the place and importance of our vibrant, evolving discipline in helping to understand and shape relations between corporations, governments and societies in many different contexts.

Issue 63 is our first Open Issue of *JCC* following the June 2016 Special Issue on Intellectual Shamans, which was thoughtfully complied and contextualised by Sandra Waddock, Malcolm McIntosh, Judith Neal, Edwina Pio and Chellie Spiller. In the September 2016 issue, we present a series of papers which each bring a distinct perspective to our understanding of corporate citizenship. In some cases, this is in terms of a particular context, whether this be animal welfare or the pearl industry. Other articles provide new perspectives by offering theoretical lenses on relationships between corporate organizations and the spaces and societies they operate in. Together, the papers provide a fascinating insight into a range of ideas that cut across and strengthen the corporate citizenship movement.

Frans Melissen and Lars Moratis provide this issue's Turning Point; a thoughtful essay which considers whether current business models are suitable for promoting sustainable development. Looking beyond the business world, to interactions with governance mechanisms and the world of NGOs, the authors propose that only by employing "naïve, native and narrative intelligence" will these interactions generate the more sustainable business models necessary for our common futures.

This issue's first peer-reviewed article by David F. Thomas, Michael Kimball and Diane Suhr uses Organizational Place Building as a lens through which to examine approaches to corporate citizenship. Place is treated as a relatively overlooked concept through which several different perspectives on thinking about the relationship between organizations and the spaces they operate in can be united: sociology, geography, organizational behaviour studies, to name but a few. This reflects the importance of context when considering how diverse terminology related to corporate citizenship is utilised and embodied by corporations. Ultimately, as the authors point out, though the "terms are different, they all point in the same direction".

We move on to consider a responsible business context where the language of corporate citizenship is less used in common parlance, that of animal welfare. Monique Janssens and

Muel Kaptein present a comprehensive piece of primary research, based on commitments to animal welfare available on the websites of the Fortune Global 200. They suggest that greater discussion of these commitments, both by business itself, and the business ethics literature, is crucial for "integrating animal ethics into the ethics of business".

Elements of this focus on the natural world continue into Julie Nash, Clare Ginger and Laurent Cartiers' contribution, which uses the pearl jewellery sector as a case study of environmentally responsible messaging from industry-leading brands to consumers. Building on expanding literature addressing the intersection of luxury and sustainability, the authors are able to draw refreshingly positive conclusions about the ways in which "properly framed environmental messages" can enhance consumer perceptions of luxury value.

The issue concludes by going back to the theme of the opening Turning Point: the need to advance new models for sustainable development as we look to the future. Rooted in the partnership literature, Lea Stadtler's article examines existing models of collaboration between private, public and civil society sectors, and the implications of expanding such partnerships. Particularly in light of the still-infant UN Sustainable Development Goals, which emphasise the role of business and NGOs, Stadtler encourages us to think critically about scaling up these partnerships for more substantial and effective global societal impact.

In closing this Editorial, let us return to Gregory Bateson's inspirational story which may offer us a new research philosophy for understanding corporate citizenship and related concepts. When his daughter Mary Catherine Bateson (2014, p. 364) was working on a memoir of her parents, she realized that her father had "somehow turned into a philosopher" via an apparently discontinuous journey of inquiry that encompassed biology, anthropology, psychology and psychotherapy, among other fields of study:

> "only when [my father] drew together a group of his articles—all written in very different contexts for very different audiences, with apparently different subject matter—and put them into the book called *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, did it become clear to him that he had been working on the same kind of question all his life: The continuous thread through all of his work was an interest in the relationships between ideas".

We hope that Issue 63 leaves you with several points for reflection. Context may not be everything but in our efforts to develop corporate citizenship thinking and action, investigating corporate citizenship in context is critical. If the arguments and relationships between ideas presented here prompt you to respond, we invite you to submit a paper that offers your own individual, organisational and/or socio-cultural context or worldview about corporate citizenship. Contestation and collaboration amongst members of our learning and research communities are both vital to advancing the practitioner and academic debates that *JCC* serves to enable and host.

David F. Murphy
IFLAS, University of Cumbria,
Ambleside, UK
August 2016

References

Athanasopoulou, A., & Selsky, J.W. (2015). The social context of corporate social responsibility: Enriching research with multiple perspectives and multiple levels. *Business & Society*, 54(3), 322-364.

Atwood, M. (2012). *The Handmaid's Tale*. New York, NY: Vintage Digital. First published by McClelland & Stewart, Toronto (1985).

Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: A Revolutionary Approach to Man's Understanding of Himself*. San Francisco, CA: Chandler Publishing Company.

Bateson, G. (1979). *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton.

Bateson, M.C. (1984). *With a Daughter's Eye: A Memoir of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson*. New York, NY: William Morrow & Co.

Bateson, M.C. (2014). Composing a life story. In P. Loeb (Ed.), *The Impossible Will Take a Little While: Perseverance and Hope in Troubled Times* (pp. 363-371). New York, NY: Basic Books.

Baue, B. (2014). *Next-Generation Sustainability Targets: Toward Big, Context-Based Goals*. San Francisco, CA: Sustainable Brands, Sustainable Life Media.

Brooks, D. (2016, July 26). The materialist party. *The New York Times*, p. A27. Retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/26/opinion/hillary-this-is-why-democrats-are-still-struggling.html

Carroll, A. B. (2008) A history of corporate social responsibility: concepts and practices. In A. Crane, A. McWilliams, D. Matten, J. Moon & D. Siegel (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Corporate Social Responsibility* (pp. 19-46). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Kleinman, A. (1980). *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture: An Exploration of the Borderland between Anthropology, Medicine, and Psychiatry*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

McElroy, M.W., & van Engelen, J.M.L. (2011). *Corporate Sustainability Management: The Art and Science of Managing Non-Financial Performance*. London, UK: Routledge.

McIntosh, M., Leipziger, D., Jones, K., & Coleman, G. (1998). *Corporate Citizenship: Successful Strategies for Responsible Companies*. London, UK: Pitman Publishing.

McIntosh, M., Thomas, R., Leipziger, D., & Coleman, G. (2003). *Living Corporate Citizenship: Strategic Routes to Socially Responsible Business*. London, UK: FT Prentice Hall.

Murphy, D.F., & Shah, R. (2004). *Enhancing Business-Community Relations: The Role of Volunteers in Promoting Global Corporate Citizenship*. Bath, Bonn: New Academy of Business and United Nations Volunteers. Retrieved from: http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/fileadmin/docs/old/pdf/2004/Global_Report_EBCR.pdf

New Statesman (2016). Leader: Capitalism and insecurity. *New Statesman*, 28 July-4 August, Retrieved from: http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/economy/2016/07/leader-capitalism-and-insecurity