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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The role of place in shaping responsibility logics: Revisiting the relation between place and business sustainability

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Abstract

Place has been suggested to play a role for the sustainability orientation in business. A research gap exists in zooming in further on this relationship and in analysing how the organizational sense of place influences such an orientation. Applying the conceptual lens of institutional logics, we operationalize sustainability orientation as hybrid responsibility logic and analyse the role of place in the forming of such a logic. We present the results of a case study of businesses from a local sustainability network in the German city of Wuppertal and surroundings. Based on qualitative interview data, we found place to function as a coping mechanism in dealing with conflicting logics in the context of sustainability challenges. Across four heuristic types, we describe different roles of place in shaping responsibility logics: from providing the scenery for philanthropic engagement to being the nucleus for transformational efforts.

KEYWORDS

business sustainability, institutional logics, learning, sense of place, transformation, typology

1 | INTRODUCTION

Business organizations play a central role in dealing with sustainability challenges in the 21st century, yet the way how firms take on that challenge varies widely (Hermelingmeier & von Wirth, 2021). Recent research suggests organizations' sense of place to be an influential factor in how businesses comprehend their role in the context of sustainability (DeBoer et al., 2017; Mazutis et al., 2021) and that organizational sustainability will stay under its potential as long as it is operating with under-theorized concepts of place (Guthey et al., 2014; Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013). In management and organizational theory, place has long been treated as the backdrop for organizational practices and has only in recent years received more conceptual attention (Elmes et al., 2012; Guthey et al., 2014; Lawrence & Dover, 2015; Mazutis et al., 2021; Thomas & Cross, 2007). In their much-cited work, Shrivastava and Kennelly (2013) suggest a rootedness in place to have a positive effect on the

sustainability orientation of business. While these authors conceptually suggest a business' relation to place to generally have a positive effect on (the place-based) business sustainability, the question remains how place influences the general sustainability orientation in business (see also Mazutis et al., 2021). In order to address this question, we applied the concept of institutional logics to get a better grip on the notion of sustainability orientation: In the context of the growing societal discourse on sustainable development, business organizations are facing new stakeholder demands and competing expectations which goals to pursue (Battilana et al., 2022; Kraatz & Block, 2017). These competing expectations are informed by different institutional backgrounds and their respective logics. Whereas business organizations are ideal typically guided by the logics of the market and the corporation, in reality, they are often confronted with multiple logics, for example, due to their ownership structure (e.g., family businesses) or to their core business being rooted in the realm of the public sector (e.g., health) (Laasch, 2018; Silva &

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Nunes, 2022). The transversal demand to take on societal responsibility in the context of sustainability challenges combines multiple first-level logics including those of the market (e.g., competitiveness) but also those of the state (e.g., regulation), of professions (e.g., sustainability managers) and of the community (e.g., local resource management) (Radoynovska et al., 2020; Wijethilake & Upadhya, 2020). Coping with and negotiating these various logics produces a third, hybrid logic that Radoynovska et al. (2020) refer to as 'responsibility logic'. We employ this concept as a more fine-grained consideration of sustainability orientation and in a second step ask for the role of place in the forming and the characterization of such a logic. Former research at the interface of institutional logics and place has focused on place-specific logics by, for example, studying the relationship between regionally-tied logics and the location of organizations (Tillemann et al., 2020) or the supportive role of regional institutional logics for shared local meaning systems (Vedula et al., 2019). In the context of their work on institutional logics in sustainability transitions, Fuenfschilling and Truffer (2014) suggest a potential influence of place on organizational logics as an interesting pathway for future research. Building on these prior works, we relate institutional logics with a sociological perspective on place that goes beyond place as geographical location. We operationalize place as sense of place, defined as the combination of place-attachment and place-meaning. For our empirical study, we took interviews with a sample of businesses that are all part of a local business sustainability network in the city of Wuppertal, Germany. Expressed by their participation in the network, all businesses consider themselves sustainability-oriented. Furthermore, all of them share a tradition in the region of 30–200 years and are either family-owned or focused on doing business in the region, which allows for the assumption that these businesses attach meaning to the place although their business operations are not necessarily place-specific. In the following section, we elaborate on the concept of responsibility logic and on the concept of sense of place. Next, we introduce the methodology. In Section 4, we give an overview of insights we gained from interviews and accompanying conversations. We then aggregate our findings into a heuristic of four roles of place in relation to different types of responsibility logics across our case study sample. In the discussion section, we critically reflect on our findings and suggest implications for practice and research. Finally, we draw a brief conclusion.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 | Responsibility logic as sustainability orientation: The institutional logics' perspective

Inasmuch as institutional logics are the logics of institutions, we can also consider responsible management as an emerging logic (...) central to an emerging logic of responsible management is sustainability. (Radoynovska et al., 2020, p. 4)

Over the past decades, the demand for a corporate responsibility in the context of sustainable development has introduced a new layer of complexity and institutional pluralism to business (Bondy et al., 2012; Campbell, 2007; Wickert & Risi, 2019). Diverse expectations and the pursuit of financial and societal goals at the same time have been described as potentially synergetic (Freeman & Laasch, 2020; Porter & Kramer, 2011) but also as often being in tension or even incompatible (Battilana et al., 2022; Hahn et al., 2010). Institutional logics shape how individuals and organizations 'produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality' (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). In the organizational context, they refer to 'a set of assumptions and values, usually implicit, about how to interpret organizational reality, what constitutes appropriate behaviour, and how to succeed' (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). Thornton et al. (2012) describe six first-level logics, representing the major institutions of society: the family, community, religion, state, market, professions and corporation. At the level of the organization, institutional logics translate into organizational rationales and shape how the organization operates.

Ideal typically, business organizations operate in the institutional context of the market and the corporation, thus following the first-level logics derived from these institutions (Laasch, 2018). In reality, business organizations operate in complex environments: They do not operate exclusively in markets, but also within societies, fields, industries or in relation to other organizations (Radoynovska et al., 2020). Many of these aspects are part of the specific place that organizations are rooted in and in which logics are additionally shaped (Schüßler et al., 2022). Business organizations thus have to learn to deal with multiple, potentially conflicting, institutional as well as locally produced logics (Boiral et al., 2022). Obvious examples for businesses operating in institutional pluralism are for example Public-private partnerships (PPPs) operating at the interface of the state and the market, family businesses being influenced by the logics of the family and often rooted in the local context or social businesses that pursue a social objective by the means of a commercial logic. Organizations that incorporate elements from different institutional logics are referred to as hybrid organizations (Battilana & Dorado, 2010), and they are gaining prevalence in modern societies (Kraatz & Block, 2008). It is in the nature of hybrid organizations that the considered logics are not always compatible (Besharov & Smith, 2014; Greenwood et al., 2010), so coping mechanisms resulting in an integration or combination of logics have come into focus of research (Greenwood et al., 2010; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007; Pache & Santos, 2013; Tracey et al., 2011). According to Pache and Santos (2013), *decoupling* points to strategies in which a single logic dominates and additional logics are more peripheral, *compromising* refers to attempts to reconcile various demands by fulfilling a minimum standard of what is expected by institutional referents, while *combining* describes an integration of intact elements of multiple logics in the core mission and strategy of the organization.

The concept of a responsibility logic builds on the idea of such a hybridity, with its different rationales and thus potential conflict: It is

constituted by multiple, quite contradictory, first-level logics such as that of the market (e.g., holding a competitive advantage and meeting shareholder interests), the corporation (e.g., meeting the demands of top management), professions (e.g., attending to the values of new professions, such as sustainability managers), the family (e.g., representing the values of the owner family) and the community (e.g., appealing to the interests of the local community and encouraging responsible use of natural resources) (Radoynovska et al., 2020). The common motive behind these various rationales is the concern for sustainability through stewardship of economic, social and environmental resources (Laasch & Conaway, 2015; Rasche & Gilbert, 2015). Furthermore, former research has related the emergence of a responsibility logic to place by stressing the role of ‘market-protected spaces’ in the forming of such a logic (Schüßler et al., 2022) and by asking for the ‘situatedness’ of responsible management as practice (Gherardi & Laasch, 2021). In sum, the concept of a responsibility logic helps to better understand the different *rationales* that businesses are confronted with in the context of sustainability and specifically also in the context of the place they are rooted in, whether and how they learn to deal with *conflict* arising from a clash of rationales, and how this translates into concrete *practice*.

2.2 | Sense of place

A pragmatic sense of place must be an essential component in the development of effective ways to cope with 21st century environmental and social challenges. (Relph, 2009, 24)

In recent years, the critique of the placeless character of the social sciences and the long underestimated role of place in social processes has become more prominent (Frantzeskaki & Rok, 2018; Thomas et al., 2008). Especially in management and organizational theory, place has mostly been treated as the context for organizational practices rather than an influential factor for organizational processes (Thomas et al., 2011). Taking on this critique, more recent research has conceptually argued for the significance of place in the development and definition of a sustainability orientation in business (Mazutis et al., 2021; Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013). Place in this context is more than the location (geographic coordinates) and the locale (natural and built attributes of a specific place). It includes a sense of place, defined as ‘the collection of meanings, beliefs, symbols, values, and feelings that individuals and groups associate with a particular locality’ (Williams & Stewart, 1998). The latter has been studied across a range of fields and disciplines—from human geography and sociology to environmental psychology and urban planning (for an overview see Erdiaw-Kwasie & Basson, 2018). A sense of place describes the way that people and by extension organizations subjectively perceive and experience a specific place (Smith, 2011). Frantzeskaki et al. (2018) define sense of place as (usually) positive, emotional bond people form with their environment, where they become personally attached not so much to a place as such, but to

the meaning they ascribe to this specific place (p. 1047). Gieryn (2000) goes so far as to argue that ‘[w]ithout naming, identification, or representation by ordinary people, a place is not a place’ (p. 466). We understand sense of place as a combination of place-attachment and place-meaning (see also Brehm et al., 2013; Kudryavtsev et al., 2012), the former being the more functional bond between people (or in our case organizations) and place and the latter being the meaning that people ascribe to that place.

Former research has shown that shared emotional bonds in a group towards a place can be important for mobilizing collective action towards sustainability (McPhearson et al., 2016; Nevens et al., 2013). In the context of urban transition research, Frantzeskaki et al. (2018) suggest sustainability challenges to become tangible in local contexts and that people experience motivation and self-efficacy especially when they get engaged in something that matters to them personally. Hence, a sense of belonging can be a useful starting point for a transformation as a strong sense of place can leverage the kind of stewardship and collective action needed to foster sustainability oriented change (Hansen & Coenen, 2015). However, there is usually a multitude of meanings and attitudes held by different groups of actors in relation to a specific place (Stedman & Ingalls, 2014). As argued by Chapin and Knapp (2015), there may be a shared sense of place in general, but its inherent complexity and multiple meanings can lead to different attitudes and actions of different groups of actors or organizations. Existing research suggests that sense of place generally motivates or promotes a sustainability orientation of actors (Frantzeskaki et al., 2018) and business organizations (Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013). Fuenfschilling and Truffer (2014) even suggest place to be able to change dominant logics in institutional incumbents.

In this article, we focus on the meaning a place is given as part of the forming and characterization of responsibility logic in business. In the following, we will look into different empirical cases of businesses, all located in the same region, in order to elaborate on the various types of relations that might exist between the sense of place and responsibility logic.

3 | METHODOLOGY

3.1 | Choice of cases

The sample of businesses was drawn from a local sustainability network in the city of Wuppertal and its direct surroundings in the Western part of Germany. The city is marked by a long industrial history, especially in the textile industry, and experienced a big outflow of industry in the 1970s–1990s. A shrinking economic prosperity brought along a dwindling population, industrial brownfields and vacant residential space as well as social challenges. In recent decades, however, the city has experienced a comeback with a very active civil society scene, creative spaces, research institutions, and with a continued high number of family-owned businesses or small and medium sized enterprises that have remained loyal to the region. Although very different in size, scope and sector, the businesses in our sample share a tradition in the region. They were either

founded there or have a branch in the region that is exclusively focused on doing business in that region. Only three of them are clearly classified as SME by size with less than 250 employees (Kieffhaber, 2018). All other firms are self-reportedly oriented along the values of an SME rather than along the ones of a multinational company due to their organizational structure or due to being a family business. As the sample was drawn from the network 'Future Circle Sustainability' (FCS) focusing on exchanging sustainability practices and engaging in joint action in the region, they all were presumed to be somewhat sustainability-oriented and to have a relation to place (although different in their attachment), which they all confirmed in the interviews. The FCS was jointly initiated by business and civil society in 2017 and has grown into a local network with about 25 active participating organizations. While the focus is on business sustainability, additional actors such as the three municipalities in the region, research institutions and civil society are part of the regular exchange and activities.

3.2 | Qualitative research and content analysis

This piece of research was part of a larger research process with the FCS starting in 2018. Observations from many network meetings and conversations with their representatives provided the background knowledge. Due to the long-term commitment of the authors in the network, trusted relationships were built with participants that allowed deeper insights into the different organizational worlds. As core to this study, we took 10 interviews with sustainability managers, owner managers or other positions dealing with organizational sustainability in the business sample described in Section 3.1 (Table 1). Interviewees were assumed to represent their organization's perspective, unless they stated otherwise during the interview, which

happened a couple of times. These situations offered interesting insights on internal conflicts and gaps between individual and organizational logics, so we took them into account in our findings. The interviews were taken in person or by phone, took about 1 h, were recorded and transcribed.

Questions in the semi-structured interviews were based on the two main categories being the organizational definition of sustainability and the sense of place. The interviews were analysed using a qualitative content analysis approach (Mayring, 2015). Since responsibility logic is drawn from different overarching logics and relates them to one another, in a first round of analysis, we were specifically looking for references to conflicting rationales or examples of where conflict has been overcome; that is, rationales were reconciled successfully. Since logics also find their expression in concrete practices, we also searched for references to sustainable practices and their relation to the core business. In a second round of coding, we checked the material for references to place and for the role of place described in conflicts and in practices. In a final step, we identified recurring patterns of how place was described as part of the forming and characterization of different types of responsibility logics (Figure 1). The following is therefore not about reconstructing a responsibility logic or line of conflict per organization (which would be beyond the empirical evidence). Rather, the objective was to give insights into different lines of argumentation and to finally aggregate them in a heuristic overview of different types of responsibility logic—place relations that we found across our specific empirical sample. We reference citations with 'I' for Interviewee and the assigned numbers (1–10). In addition, we refer to some of the meeting protocols from network meetings with 'P' and the assigned number (1–12). Citations were translated from German to English by the authors.

TABLE 1 Overview of interviewees regarding their organizational background and their job roles

Alias	Industry	Company type	Company size (No. of employees)	Ownership structure	Operating scope	Founding year	Job role
I1	Insurance	Service	2,000	Mutual insurance association	National	1904	Sustainability manager
I2	Public service	Service	3,000	Public	Local	1948	Manager of the climate fund support program
I3	Banking	Service	1,200	Public	Local	1822	Assistant to the board of directors
I4	Printing	Service	20	Family-owned	Local	1923	Procurator
I5	Crafting tools	Producing	1,500	Family-owned	Global	1882	Sustainability manager
I6	Heating and cooling	Producing	16,000	Family-owned	Global	1874	Sustainability manager
I7	Home appliances	Producing	11,700	Family-owned	Global	1890	Sustainability manager
I8	Iron	Trading	1,125	Family-owned	Global	1931	Sustainability manager
I9	Mobility	Service	2	Franchise	Local	1992	Local manager
I10	Event/gastronomy	Service	12	Manager-owned	Local	1992	Owner manager

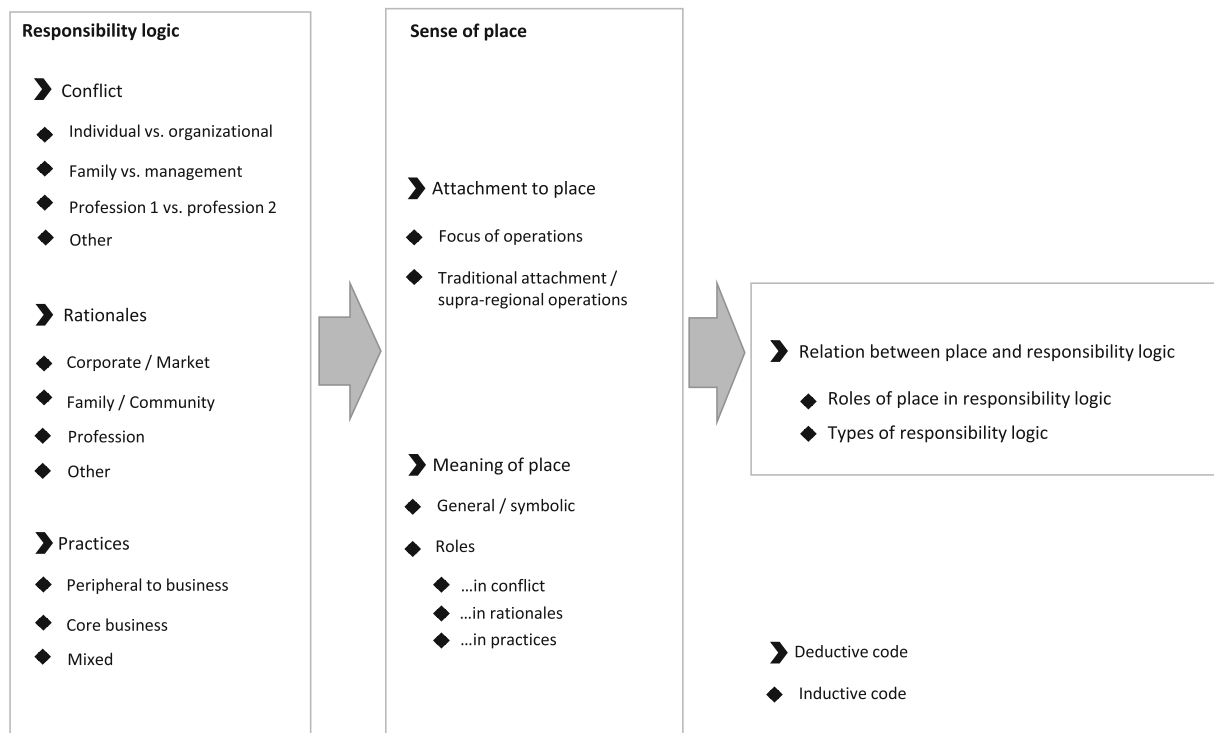


FIGURE 1 Overview of codes for data analysis. The analysis was done in three steps (from left to right). Deductive codes were complemented with inductive codes.

4 | FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In the following section, we start out with the conflicts described in reference to sustainability and from there examine underlying rationales and exemplary practices that were drawn on (Section 4.1). Next, we take a closer look at the references made to place (Section 4.2). Finally, we introduce a typology, in which we aggregate our findings into a heuristic of four different types of relations between responsibility logics and place in our sample (Section 4.3).

4.1 | Responsibility logics: Conflicting rationales and related practices

It is interesting to see the potpourri of different perspectives on the topic of sustainability amongst the various businesses that are part of the network. (I9)

Whereas all of the businesses in our study (self-reportedly) were sustainably oriented, interviewees reported very differently on the definition as well as the degree of acceptance and integration of sustainability throughout the organization. In line with the conceptual background outlined under Section 2.1 and the deductive codes drawn from it (Figure 1), we focused on conflicts, rationales and practices that were referred to in the context of organizational sustainability. Central to almost all of the interviews were *conflicts* on different levels. Along with a high reported conflict in the organization,

interviewees most often stressed cost–benefit considerations opposing sustainability practices. Here, sustainability practices focused mostly on activities peripheral to the core business. In contrast, the fewer ones reporting on sustainability having a central role in the organization, also saw ‘everyone in the organization involved’ (I1, I6) with conflict being low or already overcome. High conflict went along with a clear differentiation between the corporate and the individual perspective. Interviews announced that ‘I will now speak from my individual perspective’ (I3) or ‘saying this between us but this is of course not the official answer’ (I5) or stating that ‘in my opinion much more would have to be done but the only thing I can do is further pushing for it’ (I2). For some, conflict and justification for one’s position are daily business (I5) as they are constantly ‘fighting windmills’ (I5, I7) but have accepted that ‘having a difficult role is part of the job’ (I5). Their roles as sustainability managers range from seeing oneself assigned with tasks ‘by coincidence’ (I2) and ‘next to many other tasks’ (I3) to feeling valued as ‘Mr Sustainability’, reporting directly to the managing director (I1). A common theme here was the assertion that it lastly depends on individual decision-makers that ‘hold the flag high’ (I7) and push the topic (I1, I2, I5, I6 and I9) but that employees had to be taken along and considered drivers of innovation as well (I4).

Differences showed in the *rationales* of how sustainability was argued for in the context of corporate structures and strategies. One prominent distinction revolved around the question of sustainability as a competitive factor or not. In this context, one interviewee stated that ‘When we engage in sustainability activities, let’s say install e-

charging stations for our employees - we don't compete with other firms, it's a different story when I for example raise the quality or lower the cost of my product' (I5). Being seen as an add-on, sustainability was depicted as an issue of 'having the time to deal with extra activities' (I3) and as only feasible in a state of good economic performance (I8). In contrast, especially the larger companies stated that nowadays 'the awareness is growing that we can no longer avoid disclosing what we use in our products, and developers are also becoming more aware that they can no longer buy anything without knowing what's in it' (I6) and that sustainability has evolved to become the core business strategy (I1). Across all interviews and irrespective of the conflicts described above, key arguments for a general responsibility drew on the family or the community. A common argument was that 'these [family] businesses per se have an intergenerational scope and a stronger connection to people, especially to the local community' (I5). Some of them stated that the topic of sustainability was initially brought to the agenda of the organization by the family (who is in most cases not involved in daily operations) (I6, I7 and I8). The three biggest corporations with a couple of thousands of employees all asserted that in their values they would be comparable to an SME with a long tradition and a strong connection to the local community. A couple of times the notion of continuity—in management, in employees and in inter-organizational cooperation—came up as being key to the development of a shared sense of responsibility in the organization (I1, I6 and I10). Related to that, a community-oriented argument was the perceived responsibility for the direct environment that resources are taken from (land, water, energy etc.) and the people that the organization is interacting with (its employees, neighbours, etc.).

The interviewees referred to examples of *practices* in the organization to support their argumentation. Some interviewees exclusively related their societal engagement to add-on activities to the core business, while others put an emphasis on the variety of practices implemented at the core of the organization's functioning. The former set of answers drew on examples ranging from donations to initiatives (I8) and sponsoring of events (I2) to promoting biodiversity and beekeeping on the firm's premises (I5). The same interviewees stated that 'surely, there could be done more about the core business but that so far there was no time or financial resources to get there' (I8) or doubted that an energy intensive product as theirs could truly become more sustainable (I5). The set of answers referring to practices in the core business were often related to a reduction of negative impact in the context of a changing regulatory environment—through energy savings (I10), less waste production (I10), the reduction and compensation of CO₂ emissions (I1 and I6), divestment (I1) and better working conditions for employees (I4). Others reported on the will of internal decision-makers to foster change beyond regulation or economic benefit. One interviewee described the situation of having decided against a certificate that was commonly regarded as sustainable but did not go far enough for the organization. In consequence, some customers turned away as they were explicitly looking for this certification (I4). To summarize, rationales for sustainability were commonly associated with logics of the family and the community.

Notions of tradition and continuity as well as the will of the owner family played an important role across all interviews. Differences occurred mainly in the degree of internal conflict. Lines of conflict were described between the individual and the general organizational position, between different professional roles (e.g., sustainability manager vs. financial director) and between the owner family and the top management. Content-wise, the most common tension was seen between meeting financial demands and 'doing good'. Only in a few cases, conflict was described as being almost non-existent as the organization had an explicit focus on sustainability and had gone through a learning process for many years (I1 and I6).

4.2 | Sense of place in responsibility logics

It is only in a shared place that you experience community, vicinity & real synergies. (P6)

Along our definition of sense of place outlined in Section 2.2, we assessed sense of place on the level of a general place-attachment and on the level of place-meaning. The attachment to place was described in two major ways: as (a) having the focus of business operations in the place as opposed to (b) having a supra-regional business focus but being attached to place due to tradition. In both cases, the meaning of place was generally related to the realm of tradition, the family and the community, as '[w]e all have a responsibility to meet the challenges ahead (...) that's especially true for the place in which we consume resources, produce waste, where we recruit our employees—yes, we have a responsibility towards the local environment, the people, the community' (I10). The region itself was described as 'structurally weak region that needs companies like us—as one of the biggest employer and as taxpayer' (I1) on the one hand but having a lot of sustainability potential as 'all the family businesses and SMEs in the region per se operate in a more responsible manner than other companies' (I8) on the other hand. Another benefit of the region regarding sustainability was seen in the existence of research institutions and think tanks working on this matter (I2, I7). Finally, the region was seen as unique due to its history and the spirit of the people having emerged from it (I4) with their openness for exchange (I9) and their hands-on style of getting things done (I3). While the symbolic meaning of place related to the family and the community was quite similar amongst interviewees, we found differences in the roles assigned to place in the context of sustainability efforts: First, place was described as the scenery for sustainability efforts, in which 'sustainability practices are no competitive factor' (I5) but a way of doing good without interfering too much with the operational business (I8). Typical practices here included local biodiversity projects (I5) donations and supporting local initiatives (I8) as well as funding events (I5). Also, place in this context was said to enable joint activities and the bundling of synergies with other organizations (I5 and I8). Examples included a joint e-mobility fleet between organizations or collective beekeeping across organizations together with the municipality. Second, place was referred to as the nexus of (partly

conflicting) demands in business operations and sustainability. In these cases, business operations were by founding agreement or by the company's mission tightly or exclusively interwoven with the place and any form of responsibility was said to be—by definition—targeted at the place (I2 and I3). Examples here included experimentation with new forms of energy production and supply (I2) as well as the support of 'almost every local event and initiative' (I3). Third, place was seen as a platform for showcasing and multiplying sustainable engagement. Objectives here included inspiring others, sharing knowledge, building collaborative relationships and acting as a 'lighthouse' (I1) as part of the larger organizational mission of taking over responsibility on many levels (I1 and I6). Finally, place was referred to as the nucleus for transformative efforts—either because their 'product was born from a transformative intent and as such will only profit from (local) sustainable change' (I9) or because of a personal conviction to be 'pioneering a movement' (I10) or to have the responsibility even as a 'small fish' to set statements locally and maybe convince other actors beyond the local context (I4). Analogies that came up in this context were 'a wave that would spill over to other regions' (I4) and a 'swinging pattern that would inspire others to follow suit' (I9). In summary, we found two basic types of place attachment (having the business focus on the region versus having a business focus beyond the region—both stressing a traditional attachment to the place) and four roles assigned to place in the context of sustainability efforts (place as focus of sustainability, place as nexus between conflicting demands in business operations and sustainability, place as scaling platform for sustainability and place as nucleus for transformative efforts) (Table 2).

4.3 | Typology: Place as coping mechanism

We started out from the definition of a responsibility logic as hybrid logic that emerges from a combination of various first-level logics. In Section 4.1, we showed that many of the prevalent rationales for sustainability efforts are related to the family or the community. Differences, however, emerge from the degree that these are in conflict or reconciled with dominant corporate logics. Accordingly, in Section 4.2, we saw that meanings attached to place in the context of sustainability vary especially regarding their role in coping with conflicting logics: Building on Pache and Santos (2013), we saw differences in the degree of integrating or combining various logics with each other as opposed to strategies of decoupling or compromising. For some, the place offers an opportunity to decouple or compromise conflicting logics by engaging in local sustainability practices that the management would be easier to convince of as there would be little conflict in terms of cost-benefit considerations (I8). For others, place helps combine various logics by providing the tangible level for a larger corporate mission. We took this insight—the place as a coping mechanism—as a hook to craft our typology with four types of relations between responsibility logic and place in our specific empirical sample (Figure 2). The axes of the matrix represent (a) the reported

degree of conflict around the theme of sustainability and (b) the type of place attachment as being the focus of business operations versus being the traditional location with supra-regional business operations. The quadrants then flesh out the meanings and related roles assigned to place in combination with the coupling strategy employed. We heuristically assigned four labels to the types of responsibility logics that we identified in these combinations: Employing strategies of decoupling or compromising, 'Philanthropists' and 'Local compromisers' are more focused on responding to institutional demands than on trying to change them. In contrast, 'Multipliers' and 'Political agents' pursue combining strategies with differences in the degree to which the respective organizations take on a proactive role in fostering institutional change. Whereas the 'Multipliers' use the place as a platform to foster inter-organizational learning, the 'Political agents' see place as their home territory for lobbying and for embedding structural change. We will briefly describe each type in the following.

4.3.1 | Place as *scenery for add-on activities*: Philanthropists

At the intersection between high conflict and a place attachment characterized by supra-regional business operations, philanthropists see the place as the main scenery for sustainability efforts. Organizational representatives in this category reported on a long tradition in the place but a tension between the owner family's value-driven push for sustainability and the external manager's focus on profitability, which then result in a decoupling of a family- or community-oriented focus in the place and an economic focus in the core business. To them, sustainability is not a competitive factor but a value-driven add-on activity. They are looking for collaborative relationships to learn from each other, exchange best practices and create local synergies. Practices are focused on place-based donations and volunteering.

4.3.2 | Place as *nexus of conflicting demands*: Local compromisers

Also with high conflict but with a place attachment characterized as the focus of their business operations, local compromisers are by founding agreement tied to the region and by organizational structure exposed to different logics (e.g., market vs. state or market vs. social welfare). Following the definition of Pache and Santos (2013), compromising here refers to the purposeful enactment of some practices, allowing hybrids to satisfy symbolic concerns or a minimum standard that is expected by stakeholders. In these cases we saw a rather unstructured and selective way of coupling elements of logics in order to satisfy stakeholder demands aggregated in the place. Their representatives drew a clear distinction between their personal perspective and the current organizational orientation and stressed the learning position that they see their organization in. Practices include sector-specific experiments and sponsoring of local events.

TABLE 2 Overview of codes and exemplary references with the relation between place and responsibility logics as main outcome and basis for the typology

Main categories	Deductive codes	Inductive codes	Example references
Responsibility logics	Conflict	Individual vs. organizational	'Saying this between us but this is of course not the official answer' (15)
		Family vs. management	'The family wanted to install a sustainability management but as long as the manager is not behind this decision, we will be fighting windmills' (17)
		Profession 1 vs. profession 2	'It remains a challenge to convince the quality manager of exchanging materials just because one is more environmentally friendly than the other'
		Other	'We are always fighting windmills as sustainability managers but I guess that's just part of the job' (15)
	Rationales	Corporate/market	'Of course we cannot act sustainably if the finances are not well off' (18)
		Family/community	'We have a long tradition in the region and therefore have a responsibility towards the city, our employees, the people that live here' (11)
		Profession	'I am not the official sustainability manager and without lowering the importance—I have to do these things on top of everything else' (13)
		Other	'It has always been my personal interest to contribute to sustainability and that shows in how I run my business' (110)
	Practices	Peripheral to business	'It is important to contribute locally and we have always made a lot of donations to take on responsibility' (18)
		Core business	'It is in our founding DNA to transform the mobility market so everything we do is targeted at making mobility more sustainable' (19)
		Mixed	'We have changed our investment strategies, have formulated a new mission [...] but it is down to the food in the canteen that we define sustainability' (11)
Sense of place	Attachment to place	Focus of operations	'We are by definition a local service provider' (12)
		Traditional attachment	'We operate in 26 countries worldwide but Wuppertal is our home territory' (17)
	Meaning of place	General/symbolic	'We are Wuppertalers, we like to get things done' (15)
		Role in conflict	Local efforts are a way of 'doing good without interfering too much with the operational business' (18)
		Role in rationales	'Sustainability is no competitive factor, so it is in the local that you can exchange on practices without being in competition' (15)
		Role in practices	'We are virtually sponsoring each local event' (13)

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Main categories	Deductive codes	Inductive codes	Example references
Responsibility logics & sense of place	Relation between place and responsibility logic	Roles of place in responsibility logics	'[w]e all have a responsibility to meet the challenges ahead (...) that's especially true for the place in which we consume resources, produce waste, where we recruit our employees—yes, we have a responsibility towards the local environment, the people, the community' (I10)
		Types of responsibility logics	'Even as a small fish, we can set statements locally and maybe convince other actors even beyond the local context' (I4)

		Conflict	
		Low	High
Place attachment	Focus of business operations	Place as nucleus for transformative objectives "Political agents"	Place as nexus of conflicting demands "Local compromisers"
	Traditional attachment	Place as scaling platform for sustainability "Multipliers"	Place as scenery for add-on activities "Philanthropists"
		<i>Selective coupling / combining</i>	<i>Decoupling / Compromising</i>
		Coping mechanism	

FIGURE 2 Matrix showing four different types of place: Responsibility logic relations with the axes 'place attachment' and 'conflict/coupling mechanism'. The four quadrants heuristically relate roles of place to types of responsibility logics.

4.3.3 | Place as *scaling platform* for sustainability: Multipliers

At the intersection of low reported conflict and a place attachment characterized by tradition with supra-regional business operations, organizations in this category were bigger companies that see the place as one (out of several) important platforms to perform and draw attention to their sustainability activities. They see their own mission in serving as a role model for other firms and as pushing the region to take on a 'lighthouse position' (I1). Corporate sustainability is referred to as 'chief matter' (I1) and 'corporate mission' (I6), while practices reported stretch from local activities to the entire value chain. To them, no bigger company can afford to not take sustainability seriously nowadays (I6).

4.3.4 | Place as *nucleus* for transformative objectives: Political agents

With low reported conflict and their business operations being mostly focused on the place, political agents see the place as nucleus for a transformative movement. The representatives are owner managers or highly engaged individuals in decision-making positions that not only see their company's responsibility in reducing their negative impact but in lobbying for structural change with their actions. Like multipliers, political agents want to be frontrunners that push the region but see the place with all its facets in a more proactive and dynamic role than being the (more passive) platform that 'needs firms like us' (I1).

5 | DISCUSSION

We started out from the suggestion in the literature that there is a generally positive relation between businesses' sustainability orientation and sense of place (Guthey et al., 2014; Mazutis et al., 2021; Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013). Our objective was to zoom in on this relation. In order to do so, we operationalized sustainability orientation as responsibility logic forming against the background of growing stakeholder expectations in the context of sustainability challenges (Radoynovska et al., 2020). We showed that place (in our sample) does in fact play a relevant role in the forming of a responsibility logic: With the responsibility logic evolving as a hybrid logic, we find that place plays a role in dealing with the multiple, partly conflicting, rationales that are part of this process. Therefore, we extend former research general finding of the positive impact of sense of place on a business sustainability orientation by thinking of it as a coping and learning process on two levels.

On a first level, we see place to function as a coping mechanism (Pache & Santos, 2013) across different logics—be it as the scenery for decoupling responsible management from everyday business or be it the context, in which transformative efforts are taking their beginning. We described these and further recurring patterns of coping strategies in our typology. In our sample, some businesses stressing a long tradition and a high sense of responsibility in the region were the ones that decoupled logics between place and the core business. Their sustainability orientation is high regarding the place only, and logics driving this orientation are in conflict with the ones dominating the core business. For these businesses, we found place to be serving as market-protected space for the accommodation of responsibility logics while partly suspending dominant market logics as described by Schüßler et al. (2022). In contrast, we found combining strategies to be reported on by two different groups of companies: by the small place-based organizations that are run by an owner manager with high individual ambitions as well as by the biggest businesses that are more exposed to a competitive market, in which integrating a rather encompassing responsibility management has become a benchmark in recent years. Both the smallest and the biggest companies explicitly related their place-based sustainability engagement to a more encompassing organizational sustainability orientation. On this level, we draw the conclusion that place indeed seems to have a positive impact on place-based business sustainability (as suggested by Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013) but that decoupling strategies related to place may even have an adverse effect on an overall sustainability orientation: The conflict between traditional corporate logics and those logics demanding a larger societal engagement are not reconciled but somewhat externalized as they are bundled in sustainability practices focused on the place. In a sense, place thus brings to light different versions of how a responsibility logics corresponds with a 'responsibility' (Gherardi & Laasch, 2021, p. 1) of organizations to deal with complexity and the challenges arising from it.

On a second level, however, former research has stressed the power of local collaboration (Hermelingmeier & von Wirth, 2021), learning arenas (Augenstein et al., 2020) and collaborative

relationships (Reay & Hinings, 2009) in sustainability transitions. And while some researchers describe the presence of multiple logics in an organization as a threat to its performance (Tracey et al., 2011), others even argue that logic multiplicity makes organizations more enduring, sustainable and innovative (Jay, 2013; Kraatz & Block, 2008). Extrapolating the function of place as coping mechanism over time, we would assert that it can potentially open up processes of organizational transformation. Our typology is to be regarded as a snapshot of a status quo at the time of the study. However, a responsibility logic is by definition not static but rather constantly evolving and part of a larger learning process (Radoynovska et al., 2020). Its fluid nature implicates that place can be a catalyst not so much for a sustainability orientation per se, but for (inter-)organizational processes of learning and transformation. Place thus plays another important role as the common (geographical and symbolic) ground on which personal and collaborative relationships are based and from which stewardship and collective action for sustainability are leveraged (Frantzeskaki et al., 2018; Hansen & Coenen, 2015). As one member of the FCS noted, 'I was always convinced that sustainability was all about the core business but learnt that joint activities in the region can be a good starting point for those that are still at the outset of their learning journey' (P4). Our suggestion is that in its function as a coping mechanism, place with its meaning to an organization is constantly part of co-producing an organization's responsibility logic. Place-based collaboration and personal relationships are an additional place-related lever for new logics to gain more prevalence in the overall strategy and practice of the organization over time.

There are some practical implications to our findings. First, we see potential in fostering the general sense of place and local engagement of business, not as leverage to a sustainability orientation per se but as a door opener to learning processes and organizational change. This, second, needs to be combined with the attempt to convince decision-makers and with the structural anchoring of responsible management and sustainability as a core theme in the organization, including the integration of employees of all levels into crafting new strategies and practices. A way to foster these processes, thirdly, is the initiation and support of local exchange and collaborative relationships as levers for learning. In terms of implications for future research, we want to point to some limitations of our study. Due to a limited number of cases, all drawn from one sustainability network, our findings are not necessarily generalizable to other organizations or the entire region, let alone other places. It would thus be interesting to apply our conceptual approach to a wider range of organizations, including different contexts and different organizational forms as our sample was quite specific with a high density of SME and family businesses. For our study, we assumed the professional representatives of the organizations to give insight into the general organizational logic. We recognize that this assumption holds only to a limited extent. It would therefore also be interesting to study single cases more in depth and to collect various perspectives from within one organization to get a better picture of an organizational logic. Furthermore, our analysis is a snapshot that would benefit from adding a time component and undertaking a similar study over a longer time period to

assess the transformative potential of place on responsibility logics. Finally, in our typology, we heuristically show different relations between responsibility logics and place. However, organizations are always active components in producing and transforming places (be it consciously or unconsciously) (Guthey et al., 2014). Westman et al. (2020) have identified various types of place-building in that context. We assume interesting connections here and see potential in further studying the relation between sense of place, responsibility logics and roles in place-building: Which roles in place-building support the forming of more transformative responsibility logic? How can a role of place as coping mechanism be fostered (e.g., by the municipality) in this context?

6 | CONCLUSION

Former research found a positive relation between place and an organization's sustainability orientation. We employed an institutional logics' lens to shed more light on this relationship and to better understand the role of place in the forming of a business' responsibility logic. We found place to function as a coping mechanism, allowing businesses to deal with the different rationales and conflicts arising from the demands made to business in the context of sustainability challenges. We describe four heuristic roles of place in relation to a responsibility logic: Place as the scenery for add-on activities, place as the nexus of conflicting demands, place as the platform for scaling sustainability and place as the nucleus for transformative efforts. We extend this finding by the suggestion that place in its function as a coping mechanism with conflicting logics can open up processes of organizational learning and transformation in the long term.

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