

# Navigating resilience in international business: organizational mechanisms, partners and ecosystems from a Central and Eastern European perspective

VIKTÓRIA ENDRŐDI-KOVÁCS<sup>1</sup> – MIKLÓS KOZMA<sup>2, \*</sup>

Received: 16/01/2026 – Revised: 16/01/2026 – Accepted: 16/01/2026

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**ABSTRACT:** Resilience in international business is increasingly shaped by what happens within organizations, not only by shocks and public policy (Hillmann – Guenther 2021). For firms in and around Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), overlapping crises in the post-COVID period, the war in Ukraine, geopolitical tensions, and the accelerating digital and green transitions test their capacity to adapt. In this setting, governance, coordination, and innovation practices within firms have become central levers for implementing strategy and securing survival.

This guest editorial introduces a special section that brings together four articles selected from contributions to the 10th anniversary AIB CEE Chapter Conference, held in Budapest between 18 and 21 September 2024. The papers form a thematic collection on organizational mechanisms, key international partners, and innovation ecosystems in international business. One of the four articles, on cooperative governance (Amon 2025), was published in Issue 4, Volume 47 of this

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1 Institute of Global Studies, Corvinus University of Budapest, Budapest, Hungary  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3083-3700>

2 Institute of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Corvinus University of Budapest, Budapest, Hungary  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2837-1079>

\* Correspondent author: [miklos.kozma@uni-corvinus.hu](mailto:miklos.kozma@uni-corvinus.hu)

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journal due to a change in the journal's publisher, but it is part of the same thematic set and is treated as such here.

**KEYWORDS:** organizational resilience, international business, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), governance mechanisms, innovation ecosystems.

**JEL CODES:** F23, L22, O30

## 1. Resilience as an organizational challenge in CEE international business

Resilience is now widely discussed as a multilevel phenomenon that depends not only on national institutions but also on the ability of firms to anticipate, absorb, and adapt to shocks through the reconfiguration of resources and relationships (Hillmann – Guenther 2021). Research on multinational enterprises highlights business model adaptation and the ability to reshape global value chains as key mechanisms for responding to major disruptions (Strange, 2020). For CEE-based firms and subsidiaries, these demands are amplified because they are deeply integrated into European and global production systems but operate in environments still marked by post-socialist legacies and uneven state capacities (Meyer – Peng 2016).

In this context, resilience depends on organizational mechanisms that connect strategy with coordinated action, on an informed understanding of important international partners, and on access to innovation ecosystems that link business with broader social outcomes. Rather than treating resilience as a vague macro property, recent work stresses the importance of concrete design choices in governance, coordination, and partnership management that create flexibility without losing coherence (Hillmann – Guenther 2021). This editorial adopts that perspective and considers how the four articles in this special issue speak to organizational, partner-related, and ecosystem related aspects of resilience in and from CEE.

## 2. The AIB CEE conference and a regional lens on global debates

The Academy of International Business (AIB) has long been a core forum for research on multinational enterprises, cross-border strategy, and the institutional context of international business (Cantwell et al. 2010; Dunning – Lundan 2008). Its Central and Eastern Europe Chapter extends this agenda to a region that has undergone rapid marketization, privatization and European Union inte-

gration, yet remains highly exposed to external shocks (Meyer – Peng 2016). Earlier debates in and about CEE focused on competitiveness and the role of foreign direct investment in convergence, but more recent work stresses vulnerability to crises and the need for more resilient development paths (Lane – Myant 2007).

The 10th anniversary AIB CEE conference in Budapest located navigating new realities in uncertain times at its core, with business collaboration, digitalization, and innovation highlighted as key transformative forces. This mirrors wider trends in international business research, where uncertainty, resilience, and digital transformation have become central themes alongside classic concerns about location and entry modes (Strange 2020; Verbeke 2020). Conference tracks on global value chains and reshoring, international strategy under uncertainty, digital platforms, sustainable finance and international entrepreneurship provided a regional lens on global questions about redesigning supply chains, using digital tools to increase transparency and flexibility, and responding to social expectations about sustainability and inclusion (Endródi-Kovács – Stukovszky 2022).

### **3. Organizational mechanisms of resilience: project management offices and democratic governance**

Mechanisms that connect corporate strategy with project-level work are vital when organizations operate in turbulent, complex environments. Tóth and Pető (2026), in this special collection examine how different PMO types and maturity levels support organizational development and the structuring of project work in firms located in Hungary and Switzerland. The article presents PMOs as brokers between corporate strategy and project delivery and shows that their effectiveness depends less on formal structure and more on positioning, access to senior leadership, and the maturity of project culture. It finds that hybrid PMO configurations that combine support, advisory, and governance roles are common, and that these arrangements are important for transparency, prioritization, and resilience, especially when resources are tight and uncertainty is high.

The article on, cooperative governance, which is thematically part of this special collection but appeared in an earlier issue, offers another view of resilience through the lens of organizational design. Amon (2025) uses a multiple case study of cooperatives in Germany and Italy to examine how democratic practices are built into everyday operations, how institutional embeddedness shapes governance, and the tensions this creates. The study identifies four central tensions: cohesion versus diversity in membership, participation

versus efficiency in decision making, economic versus social performance, and mainstream versus alternative identity. It shows how cooperatives respond to these tensions by adapting their governance structures, participation mechanisms and narratives of democracy to specific contexts. For CEE countries, where cooperative and social enterprise traditions are being revisited to build more inclusive and crisis-ready economies, the findings offer concrete ideas combining participation and social responsibility with competitiveness and internationalization.

#### **4. Understanding key partners under uncertainty: contemporary Chinese management**

A nuanced view of key international partners is another important element of resilience. Chinese firms have become major players in global trade, investment, and innovation, and their engagement with CEE through trade, infrastructure projects, and investment has intensified in recent years. At the same time, Chinese management studies have grown into a substantial field that brings together mainstream management theories and China-specific perspectives on politics. A recent meta-analysis of matched samples shows that this literature now covers state-driven sustainable development, distinctive corporate governance, and the interplay between political institutions and firm strategy.

The systematic literature review on Chinese management in this special issue adds to that picture by synthesizing the most-cited empirical studies on Chinese organizations between 2017 and 2022 within a contingency framework. Koczkás and Vaszkun (2026) show that recent empirical work focuses heavily on organizational behavior, human resource practices, and leadership, while structure and some traditional contextual factors attract less attention. It also highlights the prominence of innovation and sustainability strategies as well as stakeholder-oriented approaches. For firms and policymakers in CEE, this implies that resilient engagement with Chinese partners requires attention not only to culture but also to how Chinese firms' innovation agendas, human resource strategies, and sustainability priorities shape their behavior in cross-border collaborations.

#### **5. Innovation ecosystems for inclusive resilience: the case of sports**

Innovation ecosystems that connect business with identity and social outcomes offer another route to resilience, especially for regions that seek to combine competitiveness with cohesion. The sports industry illustrates this clearly, as

clubs, leagues, and related organizations build global brands, adopt new technologies, and work with sponsors, media, and technology partners while also contributing to local and national identity. Sports innovation has emerged as a distinct field situated at the intersection of sport management, entrepreneurship, and innovation, concerned with how technological change, new business models, and social expectations interact.

The bibliometric work by Haq et al. (2026) on sport management shows strong growth in publications and citations, along with a more diverse set of themes, including strategy, governance, marketing, and social impact. The sports innovation article in this special issue focuses specifically on innovation and maps the development of this field over three decades. It identifies three core themes: strategic and organizational innovation in sports organizations, identity-driven consumption and fan engagement, and innovation linked to health and wider social programs. The study also notes that management and governance model innovation remains underexplored and argues that more attention is needed to how organizational forms, decision processes, and accountability influence the social and economic value created by sport. For CEE, where sports organizations often balance commercial, public, and community goals, these ecosystems can act as laboratories for socially grounded innovation that strengthens long-term regional resilience.

## **6. Implications for research, practice, and policy in CEE international business**

The contributions in this special issue show that resilience in international business arises from organizational mechanisms, an informed understanding of partners, and consciously designed and sustained innovation ecosystems. For researchers, promising lines of work include comparative studies of PMOs across CEE countries that link governance to digital transformation and supply chain robustness, longitudinal case studies of cooperatives that track how democratic governance evolves under institutional change and further syntheses of Chinese management research that connect contingency dimensions with internationalization paths (Hillmann – Guenther 2021; Liu et al. 2022). In sport, there is scope for studies that bring together innovation in management and governance models with established themes such as performance, fan engagement, and social impact (Geeraert 2018; Kozma – Teker 2022; Ratten 2017).

For practice and policy, the articles suggest that investment in internal coordination capabilities, such as well-positioned PMOs and learning oriented communities of practice, is as important for resilience as financial buffers or new technology. Engagement with Chinese firms needs to reflect their complexity

as innovation-driven partners whose approaches to sustainability and human resources create both opportunities and challenges for organizations in CEE (Liu et al. 2022; Turcsányi – Qiaoan 2020). Cooperatives and sports organizations can play central roles in regional innovation systems that combine economic, social, and health goals, and deserve more attention from scholars and policy-makers concerned with inclusive and sustainable development (Battilana – Lee 2014; Kozma – Kazainé Ónodi 2014; Ratten 2017).

In line with the spirit of the 10th anniversary AIB CEE conference, this special collection supports a view of resilience that moves from abstract ideas about shock absorption toward specific organizational choices, cross-border relationships, and innovation practices that can be shaped and improved in and from CEE.

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