

Suricats Consulting at the CESE: A Young Researcher's Perspective

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My name is Ayushi MODI, a second-year PhD student focusing on how companies can shift their traditional business models towards sustainability. Attending the CESE's second summit, Impact Tank, organized by Groupe SOS and four renowned universities (Sorbonne, Dauphine PSL, CNAM, and Sciences Po), was an interesting experience for a young researcher like me. This event aims to merge academic expertise with entrepreneurial knowledge to scale social innovations and sustainable solutions. The summit commenced with Prime Minister Gabriel Attal's opening speech that emphasized the importance of measurable impact and societal symbiosis to address the existential challenge of reducing negative impact. Although the summit's impact was significant, attracting over 4,000 visitors, 50,000 online participants, and 300 speakers, I felt it fell short in some areas.

As a young attendee, I anticipated seeing a significant generational gap, with mostly older participants on the panel. Surprisingly, the discussions aligned closely with the aspirations of younger generations seeking meaningful work, prompting companies to rethink their practices. Organizations like La Fresque du Climat and Admical used interactive games to raise awareness about impact issues. This engaging approach stood out to me, demonstrating the effectiveness of innovative, hands-on methods in fostering awareness.

The summit featured 50 roundtables with ministers, representatives from large companies, notably associated with the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), associations, administrations, universities, and NGOs. However, I had higher expectations for concrete examples of solutions implemented by major companies, particularly the French CAC 40. I was disappointed by the lack of presence from these big corporations on the panels. This absence highlights a significant gap in representation and commitment from larger enterprises. This is problematic because even if small companies undertake numerous green measures, they don't have the same impact as big companies do, from their supply chain procurement to their clients' preferences. Furthermore, the few representatives from large companies that were present did not enthusiastically advocate for rapid or radical transitions, they merely acknowledged the necessity of transitioning. Based on this, the question that raises is: *Why are the bigger companies unable to discern the stakes related to transitioning their business models? What can be done to help them to be more impactful?*

What touched me the most, were the discussions focusing on the need for nationwide comprehensive impact measurement. I think that existing tools like GDP measures are insufficient, a sentiment echoed throughout various sessions, highlighting the gap in measuring social impact at the national level. Researchers, including Gilles Bœuf from the Banque de France, emphasized the need for qualitative and consolidated indices to measure total impact on national and firm levels. One notable proposal that stood out to me was the Impact Score formalized by Impact France, measuring 360° engagement with a focus on ESG governance.

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Already used by 4,500 companies and the Occitanie region, this index could significantly advance impact measurement by consolidating existing measures into one comprehensive tool.

A question that wasn't addressed enough was the integration of new social and environmental impact measurements with the existing reporting requirements. This disparity was evident in topics like the CSRD, where dissatisfaction with administrative processes was prevalent. A representative from Nexity remarked, "The complexity of these declarations is a significant barrier to adopting virtuous practices. This is just another excel sheet that we need to fill and will cost us dearly. Along with extra-financial reporting, asking us to do this is just too much!" There was a dire need for a panel that demonstrates the difference between the current reporting standards and CSRD, as well as practical demos of how it can be implemented without much hassle. The technical accounting aspects of extra-financial reporting, along with practical masterclasses, were completely missing from the panels.

Among the participants, a few representatives' sincerity stood out positively, while others' speeches seemed more performative than genuine. For instance, Carton Vert's model of repurposing cartons from SMEs and ETIs was inspiring, showing tangible environmental benefits and financial profits.

What struck me the most was the repetition of the same companies present at these kinds of summits. Last summer, I attended UEED 2023 (Université d'Été et d'Économie de Demain), where similar topics were discussed, notably relating to circular economic models and regenerative models. Axa Climate and Carton Vert were once again present to discuss their strategies. This suggests that the same actors dominate these discussions, with few others following suit. This raises the question: *Where are the other innovative actors and why are they not represented on the discussion panels?*

Although I appreciated the diversity of topics covered, such as territorial impact, generative AI, digital transformation for social sobriety, regenerative enterprises, the future of work, and new consolidated impact indices, I felt that the summit was too vague and lacked precision in the methods proposed for transitioning business models. Each panel included academic experts and company representatives, providing a well-rounded perspective, yet there were not enough new innovative examples or strategies proposed.

In conclusion, the fact that climate and social issues are being addressed in a political context highlights their growing importance in today's society. Although the summit's holistic vision and large-scale collaboration are crucial to understanding the symbiosis between sectors, there is an urgent need to develop new methodologies to replace outdated practices such as the GDP indicator, especially among large corporations. As a researcher working in this field for more than two years and having attended numerous summits, I believe it is high time for these summits to move from an "introductory/beginner" level to more critical and technical discussions.

A future line of inquiry could begin with an analysis of the structural characteristics that determine whether companies make the transition. In my thesis dissertation, I address this question analytically, using databases to understand the characteristics that make one firm more likely to transition than another. My initial analysis shows that small firms are more agile and open to adopting these measures than medium and large firms (in line with what I observed at the summits). I also note that, the transition gap between French and Nordic (Swedish and Norwegian) companies seems to be related to their progress in producing green products and

services, hiring employees in green jobs and implementing green measures in the workplace. A forthcoming article will elaborate on these findings and their implications. Keep up to date with these issues by visiting our website.