
Entrepreneur & Innovator

Special issue # 53

Entrepreneurship in the Service of Sustainability:

Leveraging Business Models to Achieve Environmental and Social Goals

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The aim of this special issue is to advance thinking on an increasingly common form of entrepreneurship, one in which new firms and business activities are expressly created in order to achieve an environmental or social goal, or broadly speaking a sustainability goal (Gast et al., 2017; Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2010). While this form of entrepreneurship has made appearances over two decades of research on entrepreneurship in the service of sustainability, including eco-entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, sustainable entrepreneurship (Dean & McMullen, 2007), and hybrid organizations (Haigh, Walker, Bacq & Kickul, 2015; Santos, Pache & Birkholz, 2015), our aim is to single it out as a phenomenon, the better to study it. We suggest the following definition as a starting point of our reflection:

Sustainability entrepreneurship aims to conserve, restore and/or distribute more justly a natural or social resource via the commercialization of new products or services and by extension the creation of revenue-generating organizations.

Despite being readily visible, sustainability entrepreneurship, as such, lacks conceptualization and, by extension, operationalization, particularly regarding the business models that sustainability entrepreneurs develop. The lack of clarity about the relationships between sustainability entrepreneurs and new and adapted business models renders difficult the task of establishing best practices for the current and would-be entrepreneurs and enterprising managers who fall into this category.

Indeed, business model innovation is arguably central to what sustainability entrepreneurs do and is therefore the locus of this call for papers. While such entrepreneurs may strive to achieve

sustainability across their business model, the artistry of what they do lies in that they are able to design it in such a way that it achieves their specific and intended environmental or social goal (Lüdeke-Freund & Dembek, 2017; Schaltegger, Hansen & Lüdeke-Freund, 2016; Schaltegger, Lüdeke-Freund & Hansen, 2016). Of particular interest in that matter is the way they select, secure, and develop resources and competences able to nurture the sustainable nature of their new, or renewed, business model (Ballereau & Reboud, 2020). The quest for sustainability may therefore play the role of antecedent of a business model innovation process (Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013; Foss & Saebi, 2017, 2018) that will have a strong impact on the way small firms in particular have to adapt their resources and competences (Reboud, Lequin & Tanguy, 2020).

Examples of sustainability entrepreneurship abound. Earthwatch aims to advance research in the life sciences by selling vacation packages to people who want to volunteer on research missions. The beer company, Trappist Westvletern, is run by and supports an order of Trappist monks. Algo paints and Veja shoes leverage their supply chains to achieve their non-pecuniary aims. Others do so by selling products and services that, when used, achieve the desired objective. Blueland, Tesla or Blabla Car fall into this category. In all cases, the non-pecuniary objective is specific and central to the *raison d'être* of the venture.

The objective of this special issue is, first, to elaborate on the notion of sustainability entrepreneurship from both theoretical and empirical perspectives and, second, to learn more about how such entrepreneurs leverage business models to achieve their environmental and social goals.

An environmental goal might be achieved by creating a business in order to source or produce in such a way as to contribute positively to the global climate system, or to help conserve or restore a specific ecosystem or species (often labelled eco-entrepreneurship). A social goal might involve creating a business in order to support a specific stakeholder group, for example by sourcing from specialized artisans whose craft is disappearing, or to preserve something of social and cultural importance (this would typically be called social venturing or social entrepreneurship).

These ventures are created by passionate individuals who might otherwise have chosen to achieve their goal via non-commercial means, such as through the creation of a foundation, non-profit or non-governmental organization (NGO). Many of these individuals are using new or adapted business models and various commercial and hybrid logics (Laasch, 2018, 2019) to achieve their sustainability goals.

The forms or patterns these business models take, their origins and effects, both positive and negative, intended and not, are key areas of exploration. The process of innovation is particularly pertinent, which is to say the manner in which sustainability entrepreneurs create, deliver, and capture value as they innovate their supply chains, production processes, products and services. What is different about business models when the actors in question seek not just to apply their ideas commercially, but to do so in a way that allows them to achieve a non-pecuniary goal? How does the seemingly complex duality of entrepreneurial action in this context affect the shape and patterns of applied business models (Lüdeke-Freund, Carroux, Joyce, Massa & Breuer, 2018)?

These and further questions - see below for a non-exclusive list - should be dealt with by prospective special issue contributors.

We invite full papers according to the [submission guidelines of *Entreprendre & Innover*](#). Contributions that deal with the following subject areas are most welcome:

- *First, contributions that elaborate on the notion of sustainability entrepreneurship as such (as defined above) from both theoretical and empirical perspectives.*
- *Second, contributions that focus on business model-related phenomena. Such contributions build on and extend business model theory in ways that help us better understand and explain how entrepreneurs develop, implement, and revise their business models in the service of sustainability.*

List of additional invited topics:

- Shapes of sustainability ventures
- Processes leading to the creation of such ventures
- Entrepreneurial intention and sustainability entrepreneurship
- Tensions and paradoxes related to sustainability entrepreneurship
- Conceptual frameworks of sustainability entrepreneurship (e.g. classification frameworks of sustainability entrepreneurship business models)
- Methods, tools, and frameworks to assess the impact and ecological and social value creation of sustainability entrepreneurship
- Empirical evidence of actual sustainability impacts (incl. case studies, statistical analyses etc.)
- Methods and tools for developing and managing sustainability entrepreneurship organizations, including startups, entrepreneurial ventures, and intrapreneurship
- Best practices of sustainability entrepreneurship education in academic and business contexts

The main dates to remember are:

- 1/11/2021: Submission of papers
- 1/01/2022: Feedback to authors
- 1/09/2022: Deadline for submission of final revised papers
- 1/12/2022: Publication of the issue

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Editorial line

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As this review is primarily aimed at practitioners, we are careful to ensure that the contributions are concerned with practical applications, business implications and/or policy recommendations.

With this in mind, contributions should:

- **have a section making explicit reference to these concerns:** the reader should always be able to say at the end of the reading: so what? how does this article help me to act or to improve my future actions?
- **adopt more concrete and operational language** than is customary in academic journals: theory should not be absent but popularised, i.e. translated into simple terms. Abstract concepts should be made explicit and/or illustrated with practical examples.
- **not accumulate scientific references:** the aim is to select a few reference authors useful for understanding the subject, not to show the completeness of the academic literature on the subject. Scientific references should be cited exclusively through footnotes.

Detailed instructions to authors are available on the journal's website in the "How to contribute" section. **It is imperative that you respect them when sending your submission.**

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