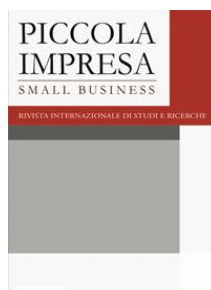


Piccola Impresa/Small Business

Call for papers – “SMEs and human entrepreneurship overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic”



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The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has brought dramatic changes to our world. People's lives have been altered unimaginable ways (McKibbin & Fernando, 2020) such as social distancing, mask-wearing, working from home, etc., as elements of a ‘new abnormal’. The business world has been called to cope with unexpected day-to-day difficulties and face challenges that are particularly critical for SMEs due to their inherent shortage of financial and human resources (Pal et al., 2014) and their diffused presence in sectors dramatically hit by the pandemic e.g., tourism and manufacturing (Bartik et al., 2020; Hadi, 2020; Gössling, et al., 2020). However, SMEs are a key socio-economic pillar in every economy, making substantial contributions through employment, competitiveness, innovation, and overall economic activity (Eggers, 2020). They also possess instinctual characteristics that help them rise above crises and that could help them overcome the COVID-19 pandemic (Kuckertz et al., 2020).

SMEs are socially and economically vital and play a key role—even more than before—in mitigating and “taking care” of the effects of the crises by supporting people and their families, preserving jobs, and nurturing the socio-economic fabrics and the community in which they are embedded. Despite the lack of tangible resources, SMEs are rich in intangibles such as social capital and relational capital (Light & Dana, 2013; 2020; Dana et al., 2019) that empower SMEs to be attentive to the needs of internal and external stakeholders and find innovative solutions for resilience in times of crisis (Pal et al., 2014). Resilience comes from to a set of common values and virtues promoted by the entrepreneurs and shared by their community, which many SMEs abide by, i.e., the centrality of people and relationships, authenticity and responsibility, prudence and fortitude, long-term orientation, and adaptive capacity (Spence & Schmidpeter, 2003; Jenkins, 2006; Constantinescu & Kaptein, 2020; Wehrmeyer et al., 2020). The latter are drivers of responsible and sustainability-oriented behaviors that, though not always formalized or communicated (the so-called “CSR walk the talk”; see Schoeneborn et al., 2020), have shown to be particularly suitable for facing and overcoming the crisis triggered by the pandemic.

SME entrepreneurs are known for their capabilities that enable their firms to be resilient, having experienced adversity directly or operated in uncertain environments (Branicki et al., 2018). Such capabilities rest on shared values that incorporate the “pillars” of humanistic management (Melé, 2003; Teehankee, 2008; Kim et al., 2006; Ylmaz, 2013). Examples of virtuous actions carried out by many entrepreneurs and SMEs in the time of COVID-19 around the world are testimonials of good practices that contribute to spreading a new business

culture and enhancing the model of humanistic entrepreneurship as a driver for current and future sustainability.

We argue that the COVID-19 crisis has (re-)triggered a vision, forcing attention to be drawn to essential changes in a transition to a more sustainable future that revolves around the conceptualizations of weak and strong sustainability, radical opportunities (Cohen, 2020), and the model of humanistic entrepreneurship (Bruni, & Uelmen, 2006; Jakobsen et al., 2017). As the world retreats inward, both business practices and consumer habits have been influenced by this global reset and have significantly shifted. This re-establishment opens a place for human entrepreneurship that can (and should) be applied in practice, based on ideals led businesses—with many SMEs being examples (i.e., purpose-driven businesses, benefit corporations, the economy of communion enterprises)—where the entrepreneur and the management embody the values of solidarity, empathy, equity, and fairness (Del Baldo & Baldarelli, 2019; Molteni, 2009; Nigri et al., 2020). In addition, the leadership appropriately creates a culture encompassing these values, which are capable to generate innovation, appropriate risk-taking, and decisive action, particularly consistent with the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic (Eggers, 2020; Jakobsen et al., 2017; Bouckaert & Van den Heuvel, 2019). Hence, SMEs that express a humanistic-driven model are capable of disaster resilience, which involves “a dynamic condition describing the capacity of the organisation” (Alonso et al., 2020, p. 368) and its stakeholders to adapt, innovate, assess, and ultimately overcome potential disruptions (Brown et al. 2017).

Therefore, the PISB Special Issue call for papers aims to advance the discussion on SMEs, human entrepreneurship, and their role during the COVID-19 pandemic and post-COVID-19. We welcome submissions from a wide range of theoretical, methodological, and empirical approaches. Suggested topics can address several issues aiming to investigate, among others, the following aspects:

- the drivers of SMEs' capability to cope with the impact of a systemic crisis;
- SMEs' weaknesses and strengths in managing risks that are increasingly systematic in nature due to the strong link between companies and society;
- how a humanistic management/entrepreneurial orientation can help SMEs avoid systemic crisis effects by acting upon the capacity to understand risk interdependencies;
- values by which SMEs humanistic orientation abide;
- how SMEs' socially responsible behaviors can promote specific business initiatives deemed as strategic in relation to the crisis (e.g., productive reconversion, production of essential goods, facilitated access to services);
- how SMEs' socially responsible behaviors can alleviate the crisis effects and enhance virtuous behaviors towards both employees and customers (e.g., smart working for employees, relationships with customers, etc.);
- how SMEs' socially responsible behaviors can support the community (i.e., through hospital donations, the provision of essential medical suppliers, etc.);
- to what extent does the COVID crisis affect SMEs' implementation of responsible public policies, actions, and tools?

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Timeline and submission information

- Full paper submission:
October 15th, 2021 for paper to be eligible for presentation on a special track of the 4th PISB Conference, Urbino, December 3-4, 2021, “*Beyond the crisis: what future for small business? Challenges, opportunities and lessons learned*” (for updated information, please visit the Journal website: <http://rivistapiccolaimpresa.uniurb.it/>)
February 28th, 2022 for all other papers
- Notification of acceptance/rejection/revision: **May, 15th, 2022**
- Deadline to submit revised version: **July 15th, 2022**
- Notification of final acceptance/rejection: **September, 15st, 2022**

All articles will be subject to the standard double-blind review process. The Special Issue is scheduled to be published in the **second half of 2022/early 2023** (third issue, 2022/first issue, 2023).

Full papers should be submitted through the online platform <http://rivistapiccolaimpresa.uniurb.it/>

The platform can be browsed also in English by using the button “selection language” on the top right side of the home page. Authors will be first requested to fill in the section “Registrazione/registration”; then, they will need to click on “Nuova Proposta/New proposal” in the section “Cruscotto/Dashboard” to upload the files related to their submission. All the papers need to strictly adhere to the specific guidelines of the journal that can be found at this link:

<http://rivistapiccolaimpresa.uniurb.it/index.php/piccola/about/submissions#authorGuidelines>. The guidelines can be also browsed in English by using the button “selection language” on the top right side of the webpage.

About the journal

Piccola Impresa/Small Business Journal aims to contribute to the study and diffusion of knowledge on small-sized entrepreneurial firms. It is an academic journal with international vocation, dedicated specifically to the investigation and theoretical reflection on the administration and management of small businesses, their role in the economy, as well as the policies and regulations they face.