

# CALL FOR PAPERS

## Special Issue



## Sustainable innovation in small businesses

### Background

Social and environmental issues are increasingly a challenge for companies and an ingredient for competitiveness (Wagner, 2009; Hall & Wagner, 2012; Forsman, 2013). Setting a positive and virtuous relation between business and society and the natural environment entails a needful evolution of business models, managerial structures, processes, and systems. Most of the previous literature investigated if and how large corporations integrate socio-environmental issues into their businesses and the impact of this integration on financial performance, but still little is known as regards how small businesses are tackling these issues (Russo & Tencati, 2009). As many institutional contexts are characterized by small companies, it is important to advance extant research, by theorizing, testing, and creating knowledge on the intersection between sustainability, social entrepreneurship, and social innovation as regards small businesses (Russo & Perrini, 2010; Shields & Shelleman, 2015; Spence, 2016). In this vein, financial, social, and environmental missions coexist in small companies but relationships between them are complex (Doherty et al., 2014). Often, innovations are needed for small businesses to pursue and promote such goals in combination (Haigh & Hoffman, 2011; Saebi et al., 2019), and so gain sustainable competitive advantages (Stoian & Gilman,

2017). Regarding this, scholars have documented that small companies often pursue sustainable innovations leveraging their limited resources to maximise benefits (Ciambotti & Pedrini, 2021).

In recent times, policymakers and researchers are increasingly emphasizing the role of the sustainable entrepreneur as an orchestrator of environmental transformation and social change (Dean & McMullen, 2007; Dey et al., 2018; Bansal et al., 2019; Johnson & Schaltegger, 2020). Moreover, a prominent literature stream has documented the resources and ecosystems created to bootstrap sustainable entrepreneurial actions (Ciambotti & Pedrini, 2021), and processes to promote social and sustainable innovation toward a more holistic and inclusive development (Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013; Schaltegger, Lüdeke-Freund, & Hansen, 2016). Furthermore, scholars have investigated the role of innovation to address new and more heterogeneous and urgent societal and/or environmental issues (Hahn, Spieth, & Ince, 2018). Accordingly, research has reported on the innovations pursued by small companies at the business model, product, and process levels, to integrate economic, environmental, and social sustainability dimensions whilst also maintaining financial sustainability (Hahn, Spieth, & Ince, 2018; Doherty et al., 2014). Finally, scholars have investigated strategies and challenges to integrate and balance the economic, environmental, and social sustainability dimensions (Weerawardena et al., 2019), as well as social and environmental impacts (Holt & Littlewood, 2015).

## Aims and scope of the Special Issue

The purpose of this special issue is thus to encourage research on sustainable innovation in small businesses, as well as to facilitate cross-fertilization of ideas across research streams and communities traditionally focused on different institutional contexts. We are interested in deepening and extending theoretical and practical knowledge on the drivers, processes, models, enablers, and outcomes of sustainable entrepreneurship and social innovation in small businesses. Against the backdrop of sustainable entrepreneurship and social innovation, new theory building, and testing seems increasingly necessary to understand their implications for small businesses. To address the theoretical, managerial, and policy challenges that ensure sustainable development, we invite researchers to reflect, theorize, and apply rigorous and novel methodological approaches. In sum, we invite contributions to this special issue on the following non-exhaustive topics:

### **A. Antecedents and challenges of sustainable innovation in small businesses**

- Social and environmental entrepreneurial processes in small business
- The combination of social, environmental, and economic aspects in small businesses
- Development and scaling of innovative hybrid models in small business
- Barriers to the adoption of sustainable innovation in small business

### **B. Managing for sustainable innovation in small businesses**

- Organizing for sustainability in small businesses
- Managing the process of sustainable innovation in small business
- Business models of small businesses for sustainability and social innovation
- Different types of sustainable innovations in small businesses

### **C. Contextualizing sustainable innovation in small businesses**

- Sustainable innovation in small businesses in and across different institutional contexts
- Sustainable innovations in small businesses in developing and developed economies
- Contextualizing social, environmental, and economic issues in small businesses
- The role of institutions in sustainable innovation in small businesses

### **D. Innovating for sustainable entrepreneurship and social innovation in small businesses**

- The role of technology and innovation toward sustainability in small business
- How sustainable small business interact with different stakeholders for sustainability
- The role of sustainable small business in the achievement of the SDGs
- Critical perspectives on sustainable innovation in small business

## Deadlines

- Submission 31 December 2021
- R&R notification of acceptance/rejection/revision: April 2022
- Reply to Reviewers: 30<sup>th</sup> July 2022
- Expected publication: December 2022 / first semester 2023

The special issue is planned to be published in 2022 the first issue of the journal. However, it could shift to the second issue when required to cope with reviewing and editing needs. All the submitted papers need to be written in English, original, unpublished and/or under revision in other journals. All the submitted papers will be subject to a double-blind review process.

Full papers need to be submitted through the online platform: <https://journals.uniurb.it/index.php/piccola>.

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.

Manuscript guidelines can be found at this link: <https://journals.uniurb.it/index.php/piccola/about/submissions%22%20/1%20%22authorGuidelines%22>.

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