CALL FOR PAPERS

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“Grand Challenges and Entrepreneurship”

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Full Paper Submission Deadline: October 15, 2019

The scholarly community uses the label “grand challenges” to indicate broad societal problems that, if left without solution, result in serious consequences at the global scale (Colquitt & George, 2011). Examples include poverty, climate change, demographic imbalances, or ICT-driven disruptive changes in the labour market. Addressing grand challenges typically requires changes in behaviours, scientific advancement, and technological progress. Even more importantly, grand challenges require collective, coordinated and sustained effort from numerous and different actors.

In 2015, the United Nations adopted a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as “no hunger”, “renewable energy” or “responsible consumption”, that have rapidly become the global reference agenda for addressing grand challenges. All the scientific disciplines are called into action in a collective effort to pursue the SDGs. It is not surprising, then, that the top journals in the business disciplines are increasingly eliciting and hosting studies on the management implications of grand challenges and SDGs (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015; George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihanyi, 2016).

Entrepreneurship studies are no exception. The societal role of entrepreneurs has been reflected upon since the times of the Austrian school, especially by Lachmann (Chiles, Bluedorn, & Gupta, 2007; Lachmann, 1976), who developed the concept of embedded entrepreneurship. Today, the links between entrepreneurship and societal challenges are being investigated by several viable research streams (Hossain, Saleh, & Drennan, 2017), such as green entrepreneurship/ecopreneurship (Schaper, 2002), sustainable entrepreneurship (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011), social entrepreneurship (Dacin, Dacin, & Tracey, 2011; Grimes, M., McMullen, J., Vogus, T., Miller, 2013; Hossain et al., 2017; Mair, Marti, & Ventresca, 2012; Santos, 2012), and sustainability transitions (Gibbs & O’Neill, 2014).

Institutional theory, and particularly the literature on institutional logics, institutional work and organizational fields (Nicholls & Huybrechts, 2016; Pache & Santos, 2010; Purdy & Gray, 2009; Smets, Morris, & Greenwood, 2012; Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012; Venkataraman, Vermeulen, Raaijmakers, & Mair, 2016), plays an increasingly relevant role in these blooming streams (Jennings, Greenwood, Lounsbury, & Suddaby, 2013). Thanks to the institutional lens, we are gaining in-depth understanding on how, why and under what conditions (de Gooyert, Rouwette, van Kranenburg, Freeman, & van Breen, 2016) entrepreneurs abide by sustainability-related laws, norms and social expectations, such as developing products that are perceived as eco-friendly or hiring unemployed people. In addition, a viable
stream of study is exploring how, why and under what conditions entrepreneurship, in turn, influences sustainability-related institutions (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; Tolbert, David, & Sine, 2011).

However, institutionalism does not provide a theory of the system-level consequences of institutional dynamics. Being radically constructivist, institutional theory is neutral about whether the institutions that organizations and entrepreneurs conform to (or contribute to create) are really effective in protecting the planet and enhancing human wellbeing. Therefore institutional theory, if taken in isolation, may hinder the scholars’ capabilities to understand the role of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial organizations in addressing grand challenges. In fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that grand challenges imply to address extremely complex, wicked problems, so that the efforts to develop solutions often result in new problems that were unforeseen in the first place, like, for example, in the case of biofuels (Etzion, Gehman, Ferraro, & Avidan, 2017).

In this light, system-level sustainability can never be totally accomplished, because the very efforts to pursue it paradoxically trigger new sustainability-related challenges. This means that the system could spiral into vicious cycles even when the “classical” problems of opportunism, disengagement and policy resistance have been successfully addressed. Entrepreneurship is increasingly regarded as a key factor for addressing these risks, because entrepreneurship can provide irreplaceable capabilities to learn from previous mistakes and continuously experiment new sustainability-oriented solutions (Dorado & Ventresca, 2013). Entrepreneurial ecosystems (Cavallo, Ghezzi, & Balocco, 2018) can become powerful engines of sustainability transformations. The dynamic co-evolution of knowledge, technologies, entrepreneurship, communities and institutions is increasingly regarded as the only force that can cope with wicked societal problems (Gasbarro, Annunziata, Rizzi, & Frey, 2017).

Therefore, the eco-socio-technical system’s sustainability-oriented resilience, that is, the system’s capability to resist crises and keep evolving towards economic, social and environmental sustainability, is probably going to be a key target for entrepreneurship studies and entrepreneurship policies for the years to come (Williams & Shepherd, 2016). The studies on robust action (Etzion et al., 2017; Ferraro et al., 2015), on the one side, and the adaptive co-management of the commons (Cantino, Devalle, Cortese, Ricciardi, & Longo, 2017; Plummer & Armitage, 2007), on the other side, converge in suggesting that a cross-disciplinary and cross-theoretical contamination is key to understand the emerging role of entrepreneurship in a world facing unprecedented grand challenges while technological innovation continuously accelerates.

This special issue aims to contribute to this very relevant and viable debate. The research outputs should inform policymakers and the public of the possible roles of entrepreneurship for addressing sustainability challenges, and of the conditions under which the potential of entrepreneurship can be fully leveraged for the common good. On the other side, the studies published in this special issue should also help entrepreneurs to view themselves as co-builders of complex eco-socio-technical systems whose resilience is in the entrepreneurs’ very interest.

Manuscripts can be both international in scope as well as investigating domestic issues with global relevance. Manuscripts accepted for publication should include implications for business practice. Both conceptual and empirical papers, from different analytical and methodological perspectives, can be submitted. In doing so, we can together build a body of high quality, cumulative research that extends our current knowledge.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to the following aspects:
• How can we distinguish and measure truly sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship, rather than mere façade and greenwashing ventures?
• How can we monitor and evaluate the system-level effects of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial organizations?
• How, why, and under what conditions is the process of business model development and innovation influenced by the will to contribute to addressing grand challenges?
• What are the characteristics of entrepreneurial ecosystems that enable entrepreneurs to better contribute to robust action and sustainability transformations?
• How can we build effective niches to nurture and protect entrepreneurial actions that actually contribute to sustainability-oriented resilience at the system level?
• How, why, and under what conditions do business networks/value chains/industrial clusters enable (or constrain) the contribution of entrepreneurship to addressing grand challenges?
• How, why, and under what conditions do communities, public authorities, research institutions, educational institutions, positively co-evolve with entrepreneurship for sustainability transformations?
• How, why, and under what conditions can the credit system support entrepreneurship’s contribution to addressing grand challenges?
• What is the possible role of technological innovation (e.g. Industry 4.0, big data, internet of things, new media, CRISPR, etc.) in supporting (constraining) entrepreneurship’s contribution to addressing grand challenges?
• What is the emerging role of entrepreneurship in reconciling the economic, social and environmental sustainability of fragile and protected areas?
• What are the (new) organizational forms and mechanisms that support sustainability-oriented efforts in entrepreneurial organizations?

Important dates
Deadline for full paper submission: October 15, 2019.
Please send your papers directly to the guest-editors and make sure to follow the Submission Guidelines available at: http://www.springer.com/business+%26+management/entrepreneurship/journal/11365. Papers should be a maximum of 10,000 words in length.

For informal inquirers related to the Special Issue, proposed topics and potential fit with the Special Issue objectives, please send a voluntary abstract (250 words) until July 31, 2019 to Francesca Ricciardi (francesca.ricciardi@unito.it).

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