



Sustainable development and entrepreneurship: Past contributions and future directions

Jeremy K. Hall ^{a,1}, Gregory A. Daneke ^{b,2}, Michael J. Lenox ^{c,*}

^a Faculty of Business Administration, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, B.C. Canada V5A 1S6

^b Morrison School of Agribusiness, and Resource Management, Arizona State University, PO Box 0180, Tempe, AZ 85287, United States

^c Darden School of Business, University of Virginia, PO Box 6550, Charlottesville, VA 22903, United States

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the emerging research concerned with sustainable development and entrepreneurship, which is the focus of this special issue of the *Journal of Business Venturing*. Entrepreneurship has been recognized as a major conduit for sustainable products and processes, and new ventures are being held up as a panacea for many social and environmental concerns. However, there remains considerable uncertainty regarding the nature of entrepreneurship's role and how it may unfold. We begin with an overview of sustainable development and the role of entrepreneurship and outline recent contributions exploring this role. We then summarize the papers presented in this special issue and conclude with suggestions for further research.

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1. Executive summary

This article outlines the emerging research and potential future research directions concerned with sustainable development and entrepreneurship, the focus of this special issue of the *Journal of Business Venturing*. Sustainable development has emerged as an influential, albeit controversial, concept for business and policy, and there is growing recognition that a fundamental transformation is needed to reduce detrimental environmental and societal impacts created by our currently unsustainable business practices.

Within this context, entrepreneurship is increasingly being recognized as a significant conduit for bringing about a transformation to sustainable products and processes, with numerous high-profile thinkers advocating entrepreneurship as a panacea for many social and environmental concerns. Yet, despite the promise entrepreneurship holds for fostering sustainable development, there remains considerable uncertainty regarding the nature of entrepreneurship's role in the area, and the academic discourse on sustainable development within the mainstream entrepreneurship literature has to date been sparse. While entrepreneurs have long been recognized as a vehicle for exploiting emerging opportunities associated with societal need, we have little understanding of how entrepreneurs will discover and develop those opportunities that lie beyond the pull of existing markets. Thus, while the case for entrepreneurship as a panacea for transitioning towards a more sustainable society is alluring, there remain major gaps in our knowledge of whether and how this process will actually unfold.

The purpose of this special issue is to begin to address this gap. We begin this paper with an overview of studies exploring the role of entrepreneurship for sustainable development. We then summarize the papers presented in this special issue and conclude with suggestions for further research in this increasingly important area. While this special issue offers considerable insights, there remain ample opportunities for further research in this emerging area. For example, the potential for societal transformation

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 434 924 3212.

E-mail addresses: jeremy_hall@sfu.ca (J.K. Hall), daneke@asu.edu (G.A. Daneke), lenoxm@darden.virginia.edu (M.J. Lenox).

¹ Tel.: +1 778 782 5891.

² Tel.: +1 480 727 1012.