



Handbook of entrepreneurship and sustainable development

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review of

Kyrö, P. (2015) *Handbook of entrepreneurship and sustainable development*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. (PB, pp viii + 427, \$225, ISBN 978-1-84980-823-1)

Entrepreneurship studies is advancing with the increased belief in the possibility of improving society and the environment via a reformation of entrepreneurship. *The handbook of entrepreneurship and sustainable development* follows up on this quest of merging the economic, the social and the environmental into one all-embracing unit of positive outcomes. In this review, I will first give a broad overview and brief comparisons of how the various authors turn to new forms of entrepreneurship, and conclude with a critical reading of the book's implicit and explicit promises of betterments of the world.

The handbook generally criticizes the exploitation and environmental degradation conventional entrepreneurship has left us dependent upon, where after the authors launch new forms of entrepreneurship as improved alternatives to an errant past. Social, green and sustainable entrepreneurship, which have flourished since 2008, are presented in the book not only as solutions to rectifying wrongdoings in progress, but also as a means to facilitate a general governing of populations for an optimization of the biospheric vitality. The reader is offered a consensus about the unfortunate fact that entrepreneurship has been disregarded within developing contexts, whereby the book reforms entrepreneurship into a transferable sustainable development programme to be

disseminated to reach beyond territorial borders. First and foremost, the book is thus a relevant read for scholars who are interested in broadening the normative perspectives on entrepreneurship, especially when it comes to how enterprising activities can coalesce with other political targets.

The editor, Paula Kyrö, pedagogically introduces the reader to the book by emphasising that the social sciences produce reality. She continues in chapter one to ask the pressing question: ‘To grow or not to grow?’ [3]. Her ambition is to produce a new agenda for economy and welfare by unearthing the historic separation of Nature and the human being in different economic schools of thought. Whilst entrepreneurship became human-centred, Nature was left to ecological economics. The separation between human and Nature left a wound the book now seeks to heal, by taking both the human being and Nature into consideration for an advancement of entrepreneurship within sustainable development. All chapters in the book engage the reader in this healing process and successfully fulfil the ambitions introduced in the introduction.

The book consequently repositions entrepreneurship as ‘a strong belief in human agency’ [147] by merging it with an advancement of Western development agendas, to make ‘the world a better place for everyone’ [363] through entrepreneurs with a ‘desire for helping others’ [203]. This wedding of humanistic ideals with entrepreneurship is never problematized. Rather, it is repeatedly stressed that new forms of entrepreneurship can function as a way to create change, govern others more effectively, implement democratization as well as commercialization processes, and sustain better ways of living in the long run. Tellingly for this sort of agenda setting, a majority of the authors who further the entrepreneurship-sustainable development agenda hold positions in Europe. With one exception, the remaining authors are in Anglo-Saxon countries. Only three out of 45 are not scholars in business/management/economics, which makes the contributions highly aligned with enterprising-oriented trajectories.

With hopeful articulations, the authors promote key notions linked to the promise of a resurrected entrepreneurship, such as ecological community, socio-ecological value, poverty alleviation, transformative power, emancipation, market participation, individual value creation, relations of exchange, opportunity recognition, market-driven capabilities, emotional involvement, competitive landscape, entry strategies, niche exploitation, capitalization on innovations, cultural capital and worldmaking. Their versions of the visionary individuals who are best equipped to fulfil these promises are: ecopreneurs, social entrepreneurs, policy entrepreneurs, rural entrepreneurs, institutional brokers, radical entrepreneurs and organic farmers, to mention a few. Furthermore, chapter eight draws on Zahra’s typology of social entrepreneurs and advances definitions

of the sustainable bricoleur, constructionist and engineer [209-215]. The reader will on a few occasions also encounter more surprising notions such as witchcraft, moon house and savoir-faire. This enumeration clarifies the number of different notions and approaches that currently attempt to take on the new challenges that arise for entrepreneurship within sustainable development. And the different chapters do complement each other when it comes to how these challenges are met differently in developed and so-called underdeveloped contexts.

Chapter two is specifically helpful in pinning down that the type of normative goal is what differentiates conventional entrepreneurship from sustainable entrepreneurship. If conventional entrepreneurship desires economic profit, sustainable entrepreneurship desires value creation in relation to the triple bottom line. According to the distinctions made in the book, sustainable entrepreneurship balances between social, ecological and economic goals, whilst environmental entrepreneurship focuses on ecological and economic goals, and social entrepreneurship emphasizes social and economic goals [53]. However, this categorization of the two latter types of entrepreneurship is also problematized in other chapters [e.g. see 212]. Social entrepreneurship may, for example, be less about economic goals than ecopreneurship. Ecopreneurship can even be more like sustainable entrepreneurship [e.g. see 260], or include a stronger focus on social aspects, as when it seeks to improve both environmental and human health at the same time [e.g. see p. 287]. The difference between CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and social entrepreneurship is also clarified by illustrations of a continuum of profit-seeking and social-value creation [182]. Even if there is a repeated ambition to define the various forms of entrepreneurship, and often in relation to each other, the reader is in summary provided with detailed and interesting cases that illustrate and problematize the heterogeneity of ‘alternative entrepreneurs’ – a concept developed elsewhere (Berglund et al., 2014). What is missing from these definitional exercises, however, is a critical engagement with the difficulties of merging the social and environmental with the economic into one all-embracing unit of positive outcomes.

Broaching the methods applied, several authors stress the current lack of both process perspectives and case studies, which is why analytical focus is often given to practices undertaken by entrepreneurs. Chapter three stresses a ‘social ontology of becoming’ and analyses ethnographic material provided by a colleague [81]. There is also a development of more psychological perspectives in order to learn about the motivations and intentions inside the heads of the new characters, i.e. entrepreneurs, which we are told we are dependent upon for an advancement of sustainable development. The last section of the book analyses

commercialization processes within renewable energy, where chapter 13 delves into the agency-structure problematic to emphasize more non-linear happenings. An ethnography in chapter 14 stands out with analytical focus on micro-aesthetic acts, argued to be transformative of the ecosystem. The handbook is thus useful for academics who wish to challenge their own work practices, and maybe advance entrepreneurship studies by more updated research approaches.

There is much to learn from the rich anthology and the different angles on entrepreneurship. The reader is informed that entrepreneurship could take the limits of Earth's resources into consideration, at the same time as renewable energy is defined as an unlimited resource [301], alas, taken for granted as sustainable and environmentally friendly to commercialize. By extension, the overall impression of the book is that the world already is moving towards sustainable acts [230], and thus we now need to calibrate according to which type of entrepreneur suits different types of sustainability challenges [227]. Several chapters call for more research if we wish to understand how to create co-evolution for a more prosperous merge of top-down and bottom-up approaches. They also interrogate how we can acquire more knowledge about the interplay of entrepreneurial actions and institutional structures. The normative quests are sometimes met by well-needed critical reflection, for example questions about avoidance of 'heroic accounts of voluntaristic actions' [335].

The traditional liberal discrepancy between radical entrepreneurs and bureaucracy is repeated, based on the cases provided in the later chapters on commercialization of renewable energy. In these long-term innovation projects on renewables, the reader is implicitly told that policymakers are resisting radical innovations, whereby the entrepreneur is determined to become a dysfunctional unit due to the polarized positions: one for the radical entrepreneur and one for those who seek to implement linear commercialization processes. According to the book, the strong requests for adaptation to bureaucratic systems do not open up for dynamism, but rather close off any attempts for the radical entrepreneur to act flexibly. At the same time as entrepreneurs are supposed to be sources of structural change, they are positioned in quite stable (social) systems [322]. Smaller firms are, however, stated to be more flexible in relation to the 'social system' [304]. In comparison to radical entrepreneurs who are allergic to linear systems, another chapter introduces 'policy entrepreneurs' as a means to 'increase resilience to climate change uncertainty' and stimulate adaptation to ecosystems [172]. Fundamentally, the book is about how entrepreneurs can better embed themselves within complex ecosystems, for example to reach higher levels of sensemaking [347]. Drawing on neighbouring fields, it is furthermore stated that the ecosystem and its uncertainties determine how functional we are as humans (*ibid.*).

The above non-exhaustive summary of the book quickly demonstrates that the intermingling concepts of social, ecological and sustainable could not only be of interest to entrepreneurship scholars, but could fruitfully be scrutinized by political scientists who are curious about the effects of entrepreneurship taken for granted as refulgent enterprising interventions. Chapter four criticizes institutional and market economics and could be a pedagogic case in point for scholars who teach or research within International Relations. In line with the development of fragile nations, the author constructs entrepreneurship as a more promising alternative to conventional interventionist approaches. To be able to critically reflect on this chapter, however, the reader needs to be literate in the basic genealogy of democratization efforts of 'failed states' and why the breakdown of relationships between state, citizens and market has previously been politically targeted.

Since the book is written in an excessively positive tone and with extensive academic calls for transformative change, it is very hard not to become a killjoy upon offering a critical reading. The advancement of alternative forms of entrepreneurships in a time portrayed as in deep need of sustainable development does indeed offer a seductive coping strategy that is hard to resist. The path is impressively opened up for us all to fulfil our long-due obligations as efficient functionaries of the ecosystem. But what are the wider effects of ecopreneuring and social entrepreneuring? What forms of life, relations and identities do these seemingly more ethical endeavours endorse? What sort of ethical judgement can be pursued by entrepreneurs if they are asked to reconcile the human being with Nature? (compare Clarke and Holt, 2010). It is moreover important to scrutinize the taken-for-granted transfer of entrepreneurship to developing contexts in relation to identified political problems with sustainable development (e.g. see Redclift and Springett, 2015), especially if we consider that scholars have studied 'transferability' from within developing contexts since the 1990s (Mtewa, 1990). The broadly informative anthology of 17 chapters consequently inspires future research paths, particularly questions about how entrepreneurship is introduced as a solution and what it does to those proposed to be in need of sustainable development. Taking these questions into account, future research could further our understanding of what role entrepreneuring plays in the well-known shift from a development-security nexus to a sustainable-development-resilience nexus (Reid, 2013). For now, the chapters leave an empty space for affirmations of other types of visions, to be performed beyond sustainable development as we fashion it today. Academically, much remains to do before entrepreneurship scholars and their research participants are not defined by the systems, structures, institutions and markets that in this book still are treated as prerequisites for processing entrepreneurship into becoming.

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