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Disembedded and beheaded

*- a critical review of the emerging field of
sustainability entrepreneurship*

RENT XXV

Boden, Norway November 16-18, 2011

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Introduction

“All too often, the word sustainability is used to focus only on environmental issues!” (Davis, 2011). In a recent blog post Peter Davis of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) lamented the tendency of business and government to restrict the application of the term “sustainability” to only the environment. He went on to call for a greater understanding of how to better harness the dynamism of companies and the market in promoting development and reducing poverty. Davis is not alone in his interest and in many parts of the world it is possible to note that governments, businesses and international bodies are investing in initiatives that are designed to involve businesses to a greater extent in the reduction of poverty and environmental degradation, and the promotion of equity. Often this attention centres on the innovative capacities of business organisations and on ways in which firms might attempt to combine “sustainability” and “entrepreneurship”. However, as Davis points out the term “sustainability” often means different things to different people.

In the academic world of entrepreneurship research it is possible to note a similar increase in interest in the contribution of businesses and entrepreneurs to society², with many authors employing the term “sustainable development” (SD) to refer to the positive contribution of entrepreneurship to society. Unsurprisingly, researchers have been quick to create a term for entrepreneurial activity that promotes sustainable development and it is possible to identify an emergent body of research that has labelled itself “sustainable entrepreneurship” (or “sustainability entrepreneurship”³).

My own search for academic articles that make use of these terms resulted in 42 publications, with a clear increase in the number of articles being published in recent years (see figure 1). Based on the journals that have published articles using this terminology (these include *Journal of Business Venturing* and *Entrepreneurship, Theory & Practice*), it is also apparent that the field is increasingly acknowledged in academic circles.

FIGURE 1: SUE PUBLICATIONS BETWEEN 1999 & 2010

In a recent special issue of the *Journal of Business Venturing* Hall, Daneke and Lenox (2010, p. 441) discuss the potential contribution of entrepreneurship to sustainable development and note that the SD concept is a controversial one, even if it is of increasing importance to businesses. Their comment is an interesting one, as it implies that the literature on sustainability entrepreneurship will naturally reflect the controversial nature of the SD conversation – with a diverse range of discussion and debate on the role of entrepreneurship in the light of these different understandings. Despite this optimism however, some studies suggest that businesses’ understandings of sustainability and sustainable development are limited in scope and occasionally only “ceremonial” (Jermier & Forbes, 2003; Springett, 2003). Springett’s (2003, p. 84) study of firms in New Zealand for example, notes that without the intervention of researchers managers would not have associated SD with “developing countries, poverty or cultural issues”. It is therefore important to ask whether the understanding of sustainable development developed in the emerging field of sustainability entrepreneurship is similarly

² For example: the special issues in the *Journal of Cleaner Production* (19/2011) and *Journal of Business Venturing* (5/2010).

³ In this paper the term “sustainability entrepreneurship” is abbreviated SuE to distinguish it from social entrepreneurship (SE).

limited, or whether our discussions reflect the dynamism and controversy depicted by Hall, Daneke and Lenox. The answer to this question obviously has significant implications for developing nations, as a form of entrepreneurship that only addresses issues of environmental sustainability without including issues of social sustainability (for example: poverty and equity), is of limited value to the world's poorest societies.

In this paper I seek to address the following questions with regard to the emerging field of sustainability entrepreneurship:

1. Which are the primary themes addressed by academic articles in the SuE field?
2. To what extent do these articles reflect the controversial nature of the SD concept?

In order to answer these questions I conduct a thematic literature survey and an analysis of the emerging academic field of sustainability entrepreneurship from the perspective of Critical Management Studies (CMS). I have structured my paper so that readers are first of all introduced to the Critical Management Studies (CMS) perspective adopted in this paper, before I outline the method I have used to survey and analyse the literature. After this I describe the main themes that are apparent in the SuE literature, and comment on the understandings of sustainable development that emerge from this survey. In doing so I contribute to the SuE literature by first of all providing an overview of the current state of the field, and secondly by identifying areas of study that have thus far been neglected by researchers – or only studied from a limited number of possible perspectives.

Critical Management Studies

Critical Management Studies (CMS) is a term used to identify an approach to studying management and organisations that is “critical” in the general sense that it suggests that “there is something wrong with management” (Fournier & Grey, 2000, p. 16). With regards to its origins, the CMS perspective has significant roots in the United Kingdom and the Marxism-inspired ideas of Labour Process Theory (LPT)⁴, even if CMS scholars may today be found on both sides of the Atlantic.

The primary characteristics of CMS identified by Fournier and Grey (ibid) are its emphasis of the study of individuals and organisations without a bias towards performance (non-performative intent), its focus on the provision of alternative interpretations of taken-for-granted ideas (denaturalization), and its demand that scholars reflect on their own roles and assumptions in research (reflexivity). Sotirin and Tyrell (1998, p. 319) suggest furthermore that CMS research also tends to take note of context, that it views communication as constitutive (or performative) and that it is committed to both describing and intervening in “relations of oppression”. Parker (2005, p. 354) also notes that in attempting to clarify the CMS identity leading scholars argue that the perspective is “non-sectarian” (methodological openness) and that it is necessary due to the tendency of traditional management tends to underplay or ignore issues of injustice and environmental degradation.

CMS scholars approach the task of studying organisations in what has been termed an “intrinsically suspicious” frame of mind (Alvesson, 2008, p. 13). A key task of CMS scholars is to bring to the surface patterns of understanding and power in organisations and their environments that are not initially obvious. A key characteristic of CMS research is thus on the one hand its questioning of the dominance of taken-for-granted ideas and practices, and on the other hand its provision of alternative explanations. This process often involves questioning the idea that organisations are characterised by homogenous identities and agreement with regards to

⁴ LPT has been studied and developed by authors such as Braverman, Sweezy & Foster (1974), Thompson (1989) and Burawoy (1979).

goals and processes (Huzzard & Östergren, 2002). Alvesson and Deetz (2000) label the initial process of exposing non-obvious patterns of influence “insight” and suggest that it needs to be complemented by two other tasks, namely “critique” and “transformative redefinition”.

“Critique” from a CMS perspective means that researchers need to go beyond observation and description (which is often of a more local, micro character), in order to counteract the more general organisational and societal characteristics that are foundational to the practices⁵ identified in the “insight” phase. Following this stage however, Alvesson and Deetz (ibid) emphasise the importance of providing readers with alternatives to the ideas and practices critiqued, a process they refer to as “transformative redefinition”. This idea is underlined by Susanne Ekman (2010, p. 215), who argues that there is a danger that the suspicion inherent in CMS will create unhelpful and inaccurate dualisms. For example: managers and employees may be simplistically caricatured as “good and bad”, even if managers may in reality not simply be guilty of using power in negative manners, but could simultaneously also be victims of employees’ manipulation (Sotirin & Tyrell, 1998). Consequently Ekman suggests that the “suspicion” of CMS needs to be complemented with a liberal dose of what she terms “compassion”.

Due to the fact that CMS scholars often perceive language as having a performative, or enactive function it is perhaps not unsurprising that discourse analysis is a technique that is frequently linked to critical studies of organisations. Alvesson and Kärreman (2000; 2011) however, critique the idea that discourse is necessarily performative and argue that scholars need to pay greater attention to the type of discourse they discuss, its social context and its impact. They point out that discourses can be differentiated on the basis of the extent to which researchers assume that language is performative (“muscular”) or not, and on the basis of its context or “range” (the degree to which the discourse is assumed to be of a primarily local, or a more widespread nature). At this point it is important to note that the above authors (2011) also distinguish between *text-focused studies* (TFS) that focus on “talk and text in social practices” and *paradigm-type discourse studies* (PDS) that focus on the analysis of ideational phenomena. This distinction is important due to the fact that I am engaging in a PDS type of study in this paper, in that I am attempting to identify and elaborate on a “mega-discourse” within the field of entrepreneurship, namely the “historically developed system of ideas” (ibid, p.9) that researchers refer to in their discussions of sustainability entrepreneurship.

Method

The literature included in this study was identified by online searches using the Publish or Perish[®] (PoP) tool, followed by the ISI Web of knowledge. The terms used in the PoP search centred on the term “sustainable entrepreneurship” and variations on it (including for example: “sustainability entrepreneur” and “sustainopreneurship”). My search in the ISI Web of knowledge added a further six 6 publications to the PoP list. Journal articles, working papers, conference papers and book chapters were included in the survey – totalling 65 publications in all, with a further 21 placed on a secondary “background” list. Of these 65, 42 are journal articles.

The literature is analysed in a manner that pays particular attention to the type of sustainability envisioned in the papers surveyed, and to common themes. I have attempted to take note not only of what authors explicitly write, but also what they *implicitly* infer by means of their examples. This process corresponds to the “insight” and “critique” stages of the CMS perspective. Additionally, a note is made of the nationality of the institution at which the author(s) were based at the time of writing, understandings of entrepreneurship, emphases, and

⁵ By practices I refer to among other things Alvesson & Deetz’ (2000, p. 18) “taken-for-granted goals, ideas, ideologies and discourses”.

theories used or recommended. Where authors define the SuE concept, a note is made of this. Finally, an attempt is made in the conclusion to provide a measure of “transformative redefinition” of the field, by suggesting areas where further research is needed.

Publications on SuE

As noted in the introduction, there has been a marked increase in academic writing on the subject of sustainable entrepreneurship during the past decade. In view of the global relevance of issues of sustainable development, it is important that academic studies include the perspectives of several different stakeholder groups and not only those of Western nations. Nevertheless, when the authorship of *all* of the publications surveyed was analysed, a somewhat (but not entirely) familiar picture emerged. In common with much academic publication in the English language, Europe and North America are overrepresented in terms of the number of authors published, with authors based in the UK and USA leading the field and publishing similar numbers of articles⁶. However, several countries are exceptionally active with regards to SuE authorship (taking into account their academic populations), most notably the Netherlands. Nevertheless it is important to note that several highly-cited articles make extensive use of sources that are not available in English (in particular articles in German), which suggests that the table below may underestimate the contribution of nations such as Germany, Switzerland and Belgium. Authors from emerging economies and developing nations are underrepresented.

Nationality		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	sum	%	%i
Europe	UK						2	1	4		1	6	5		19	19,2	58
	Netherlands	1			1					2		4	5		13	13,1	
	Germany					1				1		2	2	1	7	7,1	
	Switzerland				1				1		1	2	1		6	6,1	
	Sweden							3		1			1		5	5,1	
	Belgium						2			1					3	3,0	
	Greece									2					2	2,0	
	Denmark												2		2	2,0	
N.America	USA				2		1	2		3	2	1	9	1	21	21,2	27
	Canada						1			1	2		1	1	6	6,1	
Australasia	Australia				2							2	3		7	7,1	11
	New Zealand												3	1	4	4,0	
Emerging economies	Brazil											1			1	1,0	4
	Cameroon													1	1	1,0	
	South Africa											1			1	1,0	
	Tunisia													1	1	1,0	

FIGURE 2: PUBLICATION NUMBERS BY AUTHOR NATIONALITY

With regards to the *type* of journals in which SuE articles are published, figure 3 shows that authors tend to publish in journals that have an interest in issues of ethics, the environment and development. With the exception of special issues, entrepreneurship journals have not yet begun to publish articles on the SuE theme on a regular basis.

⁶ The total of 99 authors included in the table is based on *author nationality*, so that several authors have been counted more than once.

Journal /year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	sum
Journal of Business Venturing									2		1	5		8
Journal of Cleaner Production				1			1		1		1	2		6
Green Management International											4			4
Business Strategy & Environment								1		1		2		4
Entrepreneurship, Theory & Practice												2	1	3
Journal of Business Ethics							1				1		1	3
Business Ethics: A European Review											1			1
Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management												1		1
Ecological Economics												1		1
Entrepreneurship & Regional Development						1								1
International Journal of Business and Emerging Markets													1	1
International Journal of Innovation Science											1			1
Journal of International Entrepreneurship												1		1
Management Research News										1				1
MIT Sloan Management Review				1										1
Progress in Industrial Ecology									1					1
Sustainable Development											1			1
Sustainability												1		1
Triple Bottom Line											1			1
World Review of Entrepreneurship, Management & Sustainable Development								1						1
Journal totals/year	0	0	0	2	0	1	2	2	4	2	11	15	3	42

FIGURE 3: ARTICLE NUMBERS BY JOURNAL/YEAR

Terminology and definitions

As will become apparent, the definition of sustainability entrepreneurship is contested, and different scholars prefer different terms. By far the most popular term is “sustainable entrepreneurship”, although several researchers argue that this term could refer to *any* type of sustainability – or simply to the capacity of a firm or individual to continue innovating. For this reason I follow the suggestion of the 2007 World Symposium on Sustainable Entrepreneurship and use the term “sustainability entrepreneurship” (Parrish, 2008, p. 28). Other terms include: “sustainopreneurship” (Abrahamsson, 2007; Schaltegger, 2000) and with regards to *enterprise*, *innovation* and the *entrepreneur*: “values-oriented entrepreneurs” (Choi & Gray, 2008), “sustainability-motivated entrepreneurs” (Cohen, Smith, & Mitchell, 2008), “sustainability-driven enterprise” (Schlange, 2009) and “integrated enterprise” (Schieffer & Lessem, 2009). Closely related concepts are also: “corporate social opportunity” (Jenkins, 2009), “corporate social entrepreneurship” (Austin & Reficco, 2009; Hemingway, 2010) and “responsible” or “ethical” entrepreneurship (Azmat & Samaratunge, 2009; Fuller & Tian, 2006; C. Moore & de Bruin, 2003).

Sustainability entrepreneurship has been defined in three main ways in the literature. First of all, several writers suggest that “green” entrepreneurship may be termed “sustainable”. Consequently, the key traits put forward by Schaper in his book subtitled “developing sustainability entrepreneurship” can be seen to represent the two emphases of the “green” definition, namely: i) the importance of creating and operating “a project whose net environmental impact is positive”, and : ii) intentionality (by which it is possible to “separate green entrepreneurs from “accidental ecopreneurs””) (Schaper, 2005, p. 8).

A second approach suggests that SuE is a *general* concept (under which sub-themes such as “ecopreneurship” and “business social entrepreneurship” may exist). Schaltegger and Wagner (2010) represent this theme with their definition of SuE as: “an innovative, market-oriented and

personality driven form of creating economic and societal value by means of break-through environmentally *or* socially beneficial market or institutional innovations" (my italics). Important to note in this definition is that it opens up for entrepreneurship that focuses on the “double-bottom line”, and does not require firms to pursue sustainability in all three of the traditional “points” of the sustainability triangle.

A third way in which SuE has been defined is represented by authors such as Gibbs, Parrish, Tilley, Young, and Schlange (Gibbs, 2009; Schlange, 2009; Tilley & Parrish, 2006; Tilley & Young, 2009). Schlange (2009, p. 18) suggests that "a venture qualifies as sustainability-driven if it combines opportunities and intentions to *simultaneously* create value from an economic, social and ecological perspective" (my italics). This definition emphasises the idea that entrepreneurial behaviour needs to address all three “points” of the sustainability triangle if it is to qualify as sustainable. In other words: ““Only those entrepreneurs that balance their efforts in contributing to the three areas of wealth generation can truly be called sustainability entrepreneurs” (Tilley & Young, 2009, p. 87).

A definition of sustainability entrepreneurship that emphasises the SuE contribution to sustainable development, is that of Spence, Gherib & Biwolé (2010, p. 335). They suggest that SuE consists of “the ability to demonstrate responsible creativity while achieving viable, liveable, and equitable development through the integration and management of natural and human resources in business”.

Themes in the discourse on Sustainability Entrepreneurship

It is possible to identify several themes in the current SuE literature, with some themes and traits clearly more prevalent than others. The complete thematic list is summarised in figure 4.

Sustainability entrepreneurship as characterised by a “green” emphasis

A key source of SuE thinking is publications in the areas of environmental, or “green” entrepreneurship. Authors such as Isaak (1999), Gladwin et al (1995), Schaper (2002) and Schaltegger (2002) have all had a considerable impact on the field and in drawing on their “green” competence have contributed to the tendency of sustainability entrepreneurship to lean towards an environmentalist interpretation. Frequently the terms “ecopreneurship”, “sustainability entrepreneurship” and “sustainable development” are used either interchangeably or inconsistently⁷. Gibbs (2009) for example writes of “sustainable entrepreneurs or ‘ecopreneurs’”, while Hall et al (2010, p. 442) and Schaper (2005, p. 8) note that at times the terms “sustainable development” and “environmental responsibility” are used interchangeably. Even where authors consciously attempt to broaden the use of the term to include social issues, it is clear from the *examples* provided that the concept they associate with sustainability entrepreneurship is a green one (for example: the firms that illustrate the section "When do sustainable entrepreneurs emerge and who are they?" in Schaltegger & Wagner, 2010). Similarly, in Kuckertz and Wagner's (2009, p. 531) operationalisation of “sustainability orientation”, four of six indicators refer to environmental concerns.

⁷ This is primarily true of the terms “ecopreneurship” (and related terms) and “sustainable entrepreneurship”.

label	SUE as business opportunity	"Green" emphasis	Impact of individual	SUE as an expansion of entrepreneurship'	SUE as embedded	SUE as innovation	SUE in SMEs	Extended discussion of SD concept	SUE as double-bottom line	SUE as triple-bottom line
emphasis	SUE is primarily about market opportunities and how sustainability-oriented entrepreneurs discover / create / seize them	SUE is mainly about entrepreneurship in relation to the environment	Values, cognition and identities affect entrepreneurial behaviour in relation to sustainability	Entrepreneurship is about more than creating new firms and economic value; expansion to include (eg) institutions & organisations	SUE is affected by both individuals and their contexts	SUE behaviour can be explained using theories of innovation	The engagement of SMEs in SUE, and the factors that affect them	SD is a contested concept that needs to be discussed at length in order to be related to entrepreneurship	SUE can be a combination of only 2 areas of sustainability	SUE must be seen as a combination of at least 3 areas of sustainability
CONCEPTS	Cohen & Winn (2005); Dean & McMullen (2007); Hart & Christensen (2002); Jenkins' (2009); Kaskin, Brezet & Dieltjens (2009); Kueger (2005); Moore & Manning (2009); Patzelt & Shepherd (2010); Ras & Vermeulen' (2009); Shepherd & Patzelt (2011);	Cohen & Winn (2005); Dean & McMullen (2007); Gibbs (2009); Hall, Daneke & Lenox (2010); Holstra (2007); Keijzers (2002); Kleef & Roome (2007); Kueger (1999); Pacheco, Dean & Payne (2010); Schaper (2002); Vollenbroek (2002);	Abrahamsson (2007); Parrish (2008); O'Neill & Ucbasaran* (2010); Schlange* (2009); Shepherd & Patzelt (2011);	Abrahamsson (2007); Cohen, Smith & Mitchell (2006); Dean & McMullen (2007); Gibbs (2009); Holstra (2007); Jenkins' (2009); Johnstone & Lonaia's* (2004); Klein Woolhuis* (2010); Moore & Manning (2009); Parrish (2008); Pacheco, Dean & Payne (2010); Shepherd & Patzelt (2011); Schaltegger & Wagner (2002); Lessem* (2009); Tilley & Young (2009);	Gibbs (2009); Hockerts & Wüstenhagen (2010); Johnstone & Lonaia's* (2004); Keijzers (2002); Kaskin, Brezet & Dieltjens* (2009); Kleef & Roome (2007); Krueger (2005); Kuljer (1999); Lordkipanidze, Brezet & Backman* (2005); O'Neill, Hershaauer & Golden* (2009); Pacheco, Dean & Payne (2010); Schlange* (2009); Schaper (2002); Spence, Gherib & Biwole* (2010); Woodfield (2010);	Abrahamsson (2007); Bos-Brouwers* (2010); Gerlach (2003); Hart & Christensen (2002); Kaskin, Brezet & Dieltjens* (2009); Kleef & Roome (2007); Klein Woolhuis* (2010); Schaltegger & Wagner (2002); Vollenbroek (2002);	Craai & Vereeck* (2004); Hockerts & Wüstenhagen (2010); Jenkins' (2009); Moore & Manning (2009); Schaltegger & Wagner (2010); Schaper (2002);	Abrahamsson (2007); Gerlach (2003); JBV (Hall et al 2010: weak!); Parrish (2008); Shepherd & Patzelt (2011); Tilley & Parrish (2006);	Dean & McMullen (2007: 51); Hart & Christensen (2002); Hockerts & Wüstenhagen (2010); Jenkins' (2009); Shepherd & Patzelt (2011);	Bos-Brouwers* (2010: 419); Craai & Vereeck* (2004); Parrish (2008); O'Neill, Hershaauer & Golden* (2009); Schlange (2009); Shepherd & Patzelt (2011); Schiefer & Lessem* (2009); Tilley & Young (2009); Tilley & Parrish (2006); Woodfield (2010); Young & Tilley* (2006);
TYPologies	Cohen & Winn (2005); Dean & McMullen (2007);	Dean & McMullen (2007); Volery (2002)	Spence, Gherib & Biwole* (2010);	Dean & McMullen (2007); Klein Woolhuis* (2010); Schaltegger & Wagner (2010);	Spence, Gherib & Biwole* (2010);	Bos-Brouwers* (2010); Kleef & Roome (2007); Klein Woolhuis* (2010);	Bos-Brouwers* (2010);	Dean & McMullen (2007);	Dean & McMullen (2007);	Tilley & Parrish (2006);
PROCESS	De Palma & Dobes* (2010); Jenkins' (2009); Kaskin, Brezet & Dieltjens* (2009); Kaskis & Kyrgidou* (2007);	De Palma & Dobes* (2010); Kuckertz & Wagner*** (2010); Rodgers* (2010); Uhlener, Berent, Jeurissen & Wit* (2010);	Choi & Gray (2008); Gray & Balmer* (2004); Kuckertz & Wagner*** (2010); Meek, Pacheco & York*** (2009); O'Neill & Ucbasaran* (2010); Rodgers* (2010); Schlange* (2006);	Johnstone & Lonaia's* (2004); Kaskin, Brezet & Dieltjens* (2009); Klein Woolhuis* (2010); Kaskis & Kyrgidou* (2007); Parrish* (2010);	De Palma & Dobes* (2010); Hockerts & Wüstenhagen (2010); Johnstone & Lonaia's* (2004); Kaskin, Brezet & Dieltjens* (2009); Klein Woolhuis* (2010); Kuckertz & Wagner*** (2010); Meek, Pacheco & York*** (2009); Kaskis & Kyrgidou* (2007); O'Neill, Hershaauer & Golden* (2009); Schlange* (2006); Spence, Gherib & Biwole* (2010); Uhlener, Berent, Jeurissen & Wit* (2010);	Kaskin, Brezet & Dieltjens* (2009);	Hockerts & Wüstenhagen (2010); Jenkins' (2009); Lordkipanidze, Brezet & Backman* (2005); Rodgers* (2010); Schlange* (2009); Uhlener, Berent, Jeurissen & Wit* (2010);	De Palma & Dobes* (2010); Hockerts & Wüstenhagen (2010); Kuckertz & Wagner*** (2010); O'Neill & Ucbasaran* (2010);	Lordkipanidze, Brezet & Backman* (2005); Kaskis & Kyrgidou* (2007); Parrish* (2010);	

***individuals, firms, opportunities, value & capabilities

**includes case-study

FIGURE 4: LITERATURE OVERVIEW: SUSTAINABLE/SUSTAINABILITY ENTERPRISE/ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The emphases outlined above are also apparent in some of the CSR literature, with Blowfield and Murray (2011, p. 59) defining “sustainability” as “the ability of a company to continue indefinitely by making a zero impact on *environmental* resources” (my italics)..

Despite its somewhat unbalanced contribution, the work that has been done within environmental entrepreneurship is useful to the SuE field. This is also the case with regards to the field of social entrepreneurship, and has to do with the similarities of the fields in terms of processes of business development and the important influence of the individual entrepreneur, among other things. Some authors suggest that “green” entrepreneurship is in fact a sub-field within sustainability entrepreneurship, and for this reason some of its key characteristics are noted here (Dean & McMullen, 2007, pp. 51, 73; Gibbs, 2009, p. 65).

Within environmental entrepreneurship authors have suggested several typologies of both firm and entrepreneur. Both Isaak and Volery write of “green businesses” and “green-green businesses”, and distinguish between existing businesses that develop a “green streak” due to opportunity discovery, or legislation – and those more purposive businesses that are founded with the goal of promoting ecological sustainability (Isaak, 2005, p. 14; Volery, 2002, p. 551). Isaak suggests that the latter type be termed “ecopreneurs”. Walley and Taylor reflect this distinction (between economic and sustainability motivation) in their typology, but suggest that entrepreneurs can be further distinguished by taking into account the ambition and structural influences that influence the business (i.e.: either soft or hard structural influences). Consequently, they identify four types of “green” entrepreneur, namely: the ad hoc enviropreneur (accidental entrepreneur motivated by money), the innovative opportunist (the canny entrepreneur who recognises a profitable opportunity), the ethical maverick (the networking, sustainability-driven entrepreneur in the alternative sector) – and the visionary champion (the sustainability-driven entrepreneur who is determined to change the world) (Walley & Taylor, 2005, pp. 38-39).

Schaltegger suggests a similar framework to the above, but emphasises the idea of a concern for growth on the part of the ecopreneur – so that he categorises “green” firms on the basis of their market aspirations and position (“alternative actors” are positioned in the alternative scene, “bioneers” in an eco-niche, and “ecopreneurs” in the mass market) (Schaltegger, 2002, p. 49). Schaltegger suggests that bioneers are more inventive and pioneering, while ecopreneurs are more adept at adapting their innovations and moulding them into products that achieve significant levels of market penetration. In a later paper Schaltegger and Wagner build on this idea by linking these concepts to firm size, suggesting that SMEs and larger firms complement one another in promoting sustainability. They argue that larger firms tend to be good at incremental innovation and achieving mass-market penetration, while smaller firms excel at radical innovation in niche markets (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2010). Hockerts and Wüstenhagen develop this idea, and suggest that more attention needs to be paid to the interactions of large and small firms over time, given that large firms are often seen to be skilled at process innovation and smaller firms at product innovation (Hockerts & Wüstenhagen, 2010).

Before concluding my discussion of the “green” side of sustainability entrepreneurship, it is important to mention the influence of ecological modernisation theory on some authors’ discussions of the SuE concept (Gibbs, 2009; Tilley & Young, 2009). This theory (critiqued by Tilley and Young) suggests that existing political, economic and social institutions can internalise the care for the environment, that environmental problems can act as a driving force for industrial activity and economic development, and that there is no inherent conflict between environmental protection and economic growth (Hajer 1995; and Murphy 2000; cited in Tilley & Young, 2009, p. 82). These emphases are representative of what Parrish terms the “humans *and* ecosystems” approach to sustainable development, which suggests that SD can be achieved

either within the framework of the present market economy, or with relatively minor intervention (Parrish, 2008, p. 19). In contrast, the “humans *in* ecosystems” approach argues that a qualitative change needs to take place in society and in our understandings of growth, if SD is to take place.

The individual as the primary source of entrepreneurial values and identity

Although the most influential source of inspiration for current SuE research is undoubtedly the various forms of “green” entrepreneurship, many authors also suggest that SuE is about “values” and “causes” that are closely linked to the motivation, identity and cognition of the individual. Within ecopreneurship, Schaper (2005, p. 8) and Linnanen (2005) point out the importance of “intentionality” and “internal drivers” in the entrepreneurial process, but it is also possible to discern a similar idea in the broader SuE discourse (Krueger, 2005). Schlange for example (2006, p. 8; 2009, p. 25), emphasises not only the importance of entrepreneurs’ motivation in the venturing process, but also of their philosophy (or world view) – an emphasis that is echoed by O’Neill, Hershauer and Golden (2009) in their study of sustainability entrepreneurship among the Navajo. The general emphasis however is not on cultural embeddedness, but rather on individuals’ values and their sense of participating in an important endeavour. Choi and Gray for example: use the terms “mission-oriented” and “values-oriented” to describe the activities of the 21 entrepreneurs they studied, and who they describe as “sustainable” (Choi & Gray, 2008, pp. 558, 567). Hockerts and Wüstenhagen also emphasise the role of “mission”, but note that the “pronounced value-based approach” which often characterises SuE firms at start up, may be compromised as the businesses grows (Hockerts & Wüstenhagen, 2010).

The importance of individual values in the field of sustainability entrepreneurship is a trait that leads Shepherd and Patzelt to suggest that a key approach to studying sustainability entrepreneurship is the “psychological perspective”, which they describe as involving motivation, passion and cognition (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011, pp. 151-153). The above discussion suggests that the first two factors are already apparent in the literature, even if some authors stress the importance of being aware of different types of motivation. Parrish for example: distinguishes between firms that are driven by “duty” and those driven by “purpose” (Parrish, 2008, p. 32). Abrahamsson echoes this idea and emphasises the difference between “sustainable” entrepreneurship (which only addresses the common challenge all businesses encounter with regards to ongoing innovation) and “sustainability” entrepreneurship (which focuses on implementing solutions to sustainability-related problems)(Abrahamsson, 2007, p. 10). Abrahamsson describes this approach as “business with a cause” and suggests that the UN’s Agenda 21 (1992) and the Millennium Development Goals (2000) are those causes that should primarily be viewed as “sustainability problems”. He terms this type of entrepreneurship “sustainopreneurship” after Schaltegger (although from the discussion in this paper it should be clear that Abrahamsson and Schaltegger emphasise very different aspects of sustainability in their writing)(Schaltegger, 2000).

Having noted the importance of individual traits in sustainability entrepreneurship, several authors have begun to investigate these issues in more detail, paying attention for example, to issues of process and skill. Hence, Cohen, Smith and Mitchell note that sustainability entrepreneurs are not only “sustainability-motivated”, but also skilled at taking first-order optimisation decisions (decisions that require the combination of all three “triple bottom line” criteria, if sub-optimisation is not to occur)(Cohen, et al., 2008, p. 116). Kuckertz and Wagner note that sustainability entrepreneurs initially possess a strong “sustainability orientation”, but that this tends to be blunted over time as individuals gain business experience (Kuckertz & Wagner, 2009). Choi and Gray (2008), Gray and Balmer (2003), and Rodgers (2010) are further

examples of authors who have begun to study sustainability entrepreneurship with a particular emphasis on the traits and development of the individual.

Sustainability entrepreneurship as “opportunity-oriented”

The above paragraphs suggest that in keeping with traditional studies of entrepreneurship, sustainability entrepreneurship has begun its journey by emphasising the role of the individual. In much the same way, SuE researchers have also begun to discuss the concept of *opportunity* at an early stage. At the present time, only two papers provide typologies of the SuE concept of opportunity (Cohen & Winn, 2005; and Dean & McMullen, 2007), but many others discuss the concept at length – with five articles operationalizing the concept and relating it to case studies.

Conceptually, several publications portray sustainability entrepreneurship from the perspective of classical entrepreneurship theory and suggest that opportunities appear as a result of market imperfections. Cohen and Winn identify four types of opportunity that arise from these imperfections, which sustainability entrepreneurs can take advantage of (inefficient firms, the existence of externalities, flawed pricing mechanisms and imperfectly distributed information)(Cohen & Winn, 2007). Dean and McMullen (2007) also discuss market imperfections and suggest that five distinct types of sustainability entrepreneurship may be employed to take advantage of these opportunities (coasian, institutional, market appropriating, political and informational). Several of the ideas suggested by these authors are similar to one another (for example: their ideas on the role of information), but on the whole Cohen & Winn restrict their discussion of opportunity to the traditional, commercial realm of business to a greater extent than do authors such as Dean and McMullen, and Klein Woolthuis (who argue for an expansion of the concept of entrepreneurship)(Klein Woolthuis, 2010, p. 516). In this sense, they have more in common with Hart and Christensen’s strategic move towards the “base of the pyramid” (BoP), in that they focus primarily on “business opportunity” as opposed to “sustainability” (Hart & Christensen, 2002). Keskin, Brezet and Diehl (2009) can also be seen to belong to this category, as they portray sustainability entrepreneurship (through the product-service systems lens) as a means of commercialising sustainable innovations.

Despite the emphasis of the “business case” for sustainability entrepreneurship reflected in the above paragraph, several authors suggest that one of the roles that SuE might adopt, could be that of providing a new perspective on opportunity. Patzelt and Shepherd (2010) argue for such an expansion of the opportunity concept and suggest that individuals’ knowledge regarding the potential for natural, communal and sustainable development is a key factor. In keeping with Krueger they identify the importance of analysing the reasons why some individuals act on opportunities, while others do not (first-person vs. third-person opportunity)(Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011, pp. 152-155). Thus, together with authors such as Hofstra, they align themselves with some of Dean and McMullen’s ideas and argue for the need for entrepreneurial action in areas that are not traditionally included in the business fold, but which have an impact on business and society (most obviously the institutional framework)(Hofstra, 2007).

Linked to the “opportunities” theme are articles that discuss the skills and traits that are associated with opportunity recognition in the sustainability field. Here, Krueger discusses the importance of intentionality with reference to cognition and the need for opportunities to be perceived as both desirable and feasible (Krueger, 2005). Moore and Manring (2009, pp. 277-278) discuss sustainability opportunities from a SME perspective and suggest that smaller companies possess business models and are exposed to competitive forces in a manner that often gives them the edge over larger companies. In keeping with the “individual” SuE theme, several authors also either derive their concepts from empirical studies, or begin to test their theories by means of case-studies. De Palma and Dobes for example, portray sustainability entrepreneurship as the transition to a sustainable enterprise in eastern Europe (SuE as the

opportunity for eco-efficiency)(De Palma & Dobes, 2010). A similar emphasis is displayed by Jenkins, who looks at SuE from the CSR perspective and introduces the concept of Corporate Social Opportunity (CSO) as a source of competitive advantage for SMEs (Jenkins, 2009). The latter examples of corporate entrepreneurship illustrate the breadth of the SuE field, which can at times be seen to emphasise the entrepreneurial behaviour of the individual, over the firm. Consequently, it is useful to note that the SuE concept of opportunity is apparent both in the more traditional Dutch case-studies of Keskin, Brezet and Diehl (2009) – and in the Katsikis and Kyrgidou (2007) case-study of community entrepreneurship for sustainability, in Greece.

Sustainability entrepreneurship as Innovation

Within SuE publications it is possible to distinguish a stream of literature on innovation that is primarily of Dutch/German origin. Abrahamsson (Sweden), and Hart and Christensen (USA) are exceptions (Abrahamsson, 2007; Hart & Christensen, 2002).

Writing on sustainability innovation is frequently focused on entrepreneurial behaviour at the firm level, and could justifiably be termed “corporate sustainability entrepreneurship”. Most writers discuss primarily the *degree* of innovation that takes places (incremental vs. radical) and the *focus* of innovation (social, process or product), although Abrahamsson adds the idea of innovation also being of a tangible or intangible nature (Abrahamsson, 2007, p. 20). Gerlach suggests that sustainability entrepreneurs can be understood as “promoters of innovation processes for sustainable development”, and notes the usefulness of Witte’s ideas on barriers to innovation (willingness and capacity), as well as types of innovation promoter (power and expert)(Witte 1973; cited in Gerlach, 2003). Writing in the same academic context Schaltegger and Wagner note the different innovation roles that firms adopt, according to size (as discussed earlier)(Schaltegger & Wagner, 2010). Echoing the radical vs. incremental idea, Klein Woolthuis portrays sustainability entrepreneurs in the Dutch construction industry as either “system following” or “system building”, and complements Cohen and Winn’s ideas of market failure with a theory of “system failures” that emphasises the interplay of the entrepreneur with networks and institutions (Klein Woolthuis, 2010, p. 508). This emphasis is reflected in the writing of Vollenbroek, who portrays innovation as a key ingredient in a larger “transition” towards sustainable development (and the academic field of “sustainability transitions”)(Gibbs, 2009; Vollenbroek, 2002). Finally, the case-study based work of Crals and Vereeck (2004), and Bos-Brouwers’ recent doctoral research is particularly useful with regards to SMEs; with Bos-Brouwers (2010, p. 191) identifying seven key factors that affect innovation in these contexts (duty, skilled personnel, suppliers, trade associations, degree of formalization, customers and national governmental institutions). The factor “skilled personnel” relates to Kleef and Roome’s study of the capabilities that are associated with sustainable business management (SBM), in which they note that SBM requires higher capabilities with regards to dealing with a broader spectrum of actors, than is the case in businesses operating primarily on the basis of competitiveness (Van Kleef & Roome, 2007, p. 49).

Sustainability entrepreneurship as an expansion of “entrepreneurship”

The section on “SuE as opportunity” suggests that one implication of the multi-disciplinary nature of sustainability, is that “entrepreneurship” can be conceptualised in more than just the traditional “business-oriented” sense. This point is made by (among others) Dean and McMullen (2007, p. 70), who having outlined several ways in which entrepreneurs can contribute to sustainability (for example: by “coasian” or “political” entrepreneurship), argue that “the domain of the field may extend substantially beyond current perspectives”. Shepherd and Patzelt consolidate this idea by suggesting that future research include perspectives from the fields of economic development, psychology and institutional theory (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011). But in which ways might the field be expanded, specifically?

One such area is that of the business-society interface. Traditionally, scholars have often studied entrepreneurship as a business phenomenon that takes place in a societal context. Several SuE scholars suggest however, that sustainability entrepreneurship often involves entrepreneurial behaviour at the interface between business and society, with sustainability entrepreneurs having the opportunity to reshape “broader socioeconomic institutions” (Gibbs, 2009, p. 65). Many scholars suggest that SuE involves institutional change, with Pacheco, Dean and Payne (2010, p. 471) in particular identifying three key areas that may benefit from entrepreneurial attention (industry norms, property rights and government legislation). Schaltegger and Wagner (2010) agree and point out that SuE may involve “market or institutional innovations”. Schieffer and Lessem (2009, p. 724) suggest that the “integrated” enterprise may include not only economic (“private”) entrepreneurship, but also “public/political”, “civic/cultural” and “animate/ecological” entrepreneurship.

Another area that researchers suggest sustainability entrepreneurs may be active in, is that of the organisation. Abrahamsson (2007, p. 10) writes of SuE as (among other things) “creative organising” (citing Johannisson 2005), a theme also taken up by Parrish (2010), and Seelos and Mair (2005). Parrish (2010, p. 517) suggests (based on a multiple case-study) that sustainability entrepreneurship often involves “redesigning” organisations, and that five generative rules can be seen to govern this process (relating to organisational purpose, efficiency, trade-offs, criteria and inducements) (Parrish, 2010, p. 517). Katsikis and Kyrgidou (2007) also describe organisational change as one of the key sustainability-related activities they observed in the renewal of the *mastiha* industry on the Greek island of Chios.

A final “transformational” theme in the SuE literature is that of the concept of “value” (or “rent” in economic terms). Following their analysis of the entrepreneurship literature, Cohen, Smith and Mitchell (2008, p. 110) conclude that the dependent variables presently used by most researchers reflect primarily only *one* of a possible seven concepts of value. In view of the capacity they suggest entrepreneurs’ have for focusing on “first order objectives”⁸ they argue that other variables need to be included in research, if studies are to accurately portray the impact of entrepreneurship on sustainability. This idea is echoed by other scholars such as Hofstra (2007), and Johnstone and Lionais (2004, p. 218) who see in sustainability entrepreneurs the potential authors of paradigmatic change (for example: from profit to value, from competition to cooperation, and from space to place).

⁸ I.e.: “high level socio-enviro-economic objectives” (Cohen, et al., 2008, p. 116)

Sustainability and sustainable development

Based on my survey of the SuE literature, two trends emerge that are of relevance to the SD concept. First of all, the majority of writers explicitly link SuE activities to the “higher goal” of sustainable development. I interpret this to mean that authors consider SuE to be a form of entrepreneurship that may be expected to make a positive contribution to society in areas beyond that of economic impact. A second characteristic of the SuE literature is that the majority of articles link the concepts of sustainability and entrepreneurship to only one or two SD publications. The first one: “Our Common Future”⁹ was published in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED¹⁰) of the United Nations (Brundtland & Khalid, 1987). The second: “Our Common Journey” was published by the Policy Division of the National Research Council (NRC) in 1999. The influential Brundtland report emphasises the importance of growth (albeit *sustainable* growth) for development. The NRC publication on the other hand, is less “global” in its authorship and chooses to analyse the two words separately, by means of the two questions: “what is to be sustained?” and “what is to be developed?” (National Research Council, 1999, p. 24).

In my introduction I noted that entrepreneurship scholars have noted the contested nature of the SD concept and I suggested that the SuE literature might be expected to mirror this diversity in its discussion of the ways in which entrepreneurs contribute to the various areas of society that are in need of development. Nevertheless, my survey of the literature clearly suggests that this is not the case and that with a few exceptions (for example: Parrish, 2008), scholars are making use of what Alvesson and Deetz (2000, p. 18) term “taken-for-granted goals, ideas, ideologies and discourses”. Is this a problem? I believe it is for three reasons and in the following paragraphs I will outline these.

The “beheading” of the sustainable development concept

In my discussion of the themes that characterise the SuE conversation I noted that the literature is very “green” in character. This emphasis on the importance of environmental sustainability is one of the key messages of the WCED report that the majority of SuE scholars refer to. However, it is not the *only* one, as the WCED report also emphasises the importance of issues such as peace, security and legal change. Consequently many scholars and business leaders appear to be using the WCED publication in a selective manner: using it to support their focus on environmental issues, but not incorporating the entirety of the publication’s ideas on sustainable development in their activities. In a sense therefore, they have “beheaded” the SD concept presented by Gro Brundtland and her colleagues.

Uncritical use of popular SD concepts

A second difficulty associated with the overdependence of SuE scholars on the WCED and NRC conceptualisations of sustainable development is that few authors comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the publications they refer to. For example, with regards to the Brundtland report Quental et al (2011, p. 266) point out that although this publication is the most cited document in the SD field, this is only true in terms of popular acceptance. The Brundtland report has been criticised by academics and development practitioners for (among other things) its exclusion of participation from the SD process, its underestimating of the limits to growth and its ignoring of the links between developed nations’ prosperity and developing nations’ poverty (Björk & Wiklund, 1993, p. 613; Daly, 1990; Lélé, 1991). Similarly, the NRC report (which has not had as powerful an impact as the WCED publication) has been criticised

⁹ Also known as “the Brundtland Report”.

¹⁰ The Commission is also referred to as the UNCED in some publications.

for its failure to recognize social, political, and economic structure and culture as primary drivers of unsustainability (Bossel, 2000).

A failure to include alternative SD concepts

The third and perhaps most serious problem that is linked to the linking of the SD concept to sustainability entrepreneurship is scholars' failure to justify their choice of definition of sustainable development. Such a justification is necessary given that the concept of sustainable development is both embedded and normative (i.e.: reflecting the values and priorities of the author). As the NRC report (1999, p. 2) points out: "which goals should be pursued is a normative question, not a scientific one". Consequently, it is clearly arguable that the question of whether or not SuE has a positive impact on sustainable development depends on what kind of development we are talking about. Many credible alternatives exist and some reasons why these are needed are outlined below, even if it is not my purpose to provide a comprehensive overview of SD theories (such overviews may be found elsewhere, for example: Gladwin, et al., 1995; Quental, et al., 2011 are examples of useful summaries).

One useful addition (or alternative) to the goal-oriented emphases of the WCED report is the idea that many of the goals of SD can be seen to be dynamic and changeable, so that SD is necessarily not only about objectives, but also about *process* (Quental, et al., 2011, p. 273). A second improvement to "global" SD definitions¹¹ might be based on the suggestion that they are often based on concepts of "development" that privilege Western thought¹² (Banerjee, 2003). Negotiated definitions of SD seldom reflects the values of those communities whose views differ most from the ideas of the majority – or at least from those in a position to influence the content of these definitions. For this reason, the Indian economist Amartya Sen (1999) emphasises that development has to do with *social choice* (expanded capabilities and functionings). This emphasis is shared by Viederman (1994, pp. 5, 12) and Robinson (2004, p. 380), who not only stress the importance of participation in the SD process, but also of "commitment to place". In other words, by allowing a broader range of stakeholders to participate in the definition of sustainable development, the SD concept inevitably becomes embedded in local time, circumstances, culture and context.

At this stage it is interesting to note that SuE authors tend to display a strange ambivalence to the concepts of "embeddedness" and "sustainable development". On the one hand, my survey suggests that authors are highly aware of the embedded nature of entrepreneurship (see figure 4). A large number of authors describe the interplay of individual and context, and the impact of societal factors on sustainability entrepreneurship – not least in relation to opportunity (Cohen & Winn, 2007; Meek, Pacheco, & York, 2010; O'Neill, et al., 2009). At the same time, very few authors acknowledge the fact that the SD concept is *also* embedded, highly contested and not at all "globally accepted" (Hofstra, 2007, p. 505). Consequently, although Kuckertz and Wagner (2009, p. 527) suggest that the SuE literature so far tends to display a partial, superficial understanding of entrepreneurship concepts, the same can often be said for entrepreneurship scholars' understanding of the SD field! In other words: the tendency of SuE scholars' to rely uncritically on the Brundtland report of 1987 for an understanding of sustainable development, does not justice to the complexity of the concept. Nor does it acknowledge the perspectives of communities in developing countries, whose priorities in terms of sustainability may not reflect the more popular "global" meaning of UN publications (Springett, 2003).

¹¹ By "global" and "negotiated" I refer to the NRC and WCED publications.

¹² For example: the assumption that global equity can be attained without any reduction in living standards in the Western world.

Conclusions

An attempt at transformative redefinition

An integration of the alternative SD perspectives outlined in the preceding section implies that if we are to take into account the values and perspectives of the developing world, sustainable development may best be understood as a dynamic process that focuses on achieving human development in an inclusive, connected, equitable, prudent and secure manner (Gladwin, et al., 1995). For SuE researchers however, the implication of the above paragraphs is that there is an urgent need for authors to be more explicit about the kind of sustainable development they associate with entrepreneurship. In a similar vein, I suggest that SuE researchers urgently need to acknowledge the embeddedness of the SD concept, recognising its normative character and taking into account the importance of “place” (Lélé, 1991, p. 614). In doing so, it may be necessary to add a further “P” (i.e.: place) to the sustainability triad (people, planet, profit)(O'Neill, et al., 2009; Robinson, 2004). This implies that concepts such as “community entrepreneurship” (CE) may have an important role to play in future SuE study. Many CE authors are already grappling with sustainability issues that are of both a local and global nature, and that take into account the long-term value people attribute to community (Ekins & Newby, 1998; Johnstone & Lionais, 2004; Peredo & Chrisman, 2006; Smallbone, North, & Kalantaridis, 1999). Many CE authors are clearly aware of the issue of embeddedness, noting for example that a key question in SD is whether “society has developed practices and institutions that are responsive to, and sustainable in, their local environment” (Norton, 2005, p. 94). There are also clear links between the types of small firm identified by Schaltegger and the communities in which they thrive (Holt, 2011, p. 247). Observations such as these strongly imply that SMEs play a key, but under-researched role in contributing to the sustainability of local communities.

Further comments

In this paper I have chosen to focus primarily on the ways in which SuE authors include the concept of sustainable development in their writing. However, in my survey I have also noted several other trends/gaps that could be usefully addressed in future research.

The double- or triple bottom-line?

As noted in the section on “definitions” authors disagree on whether or not SuE necessarily includes all 3 “points” of the traditional CSR/sustainability triangle. This disagreement centres first of all on the question of whether certain forms of entrepreneurship (such as ecopreneurship) are sub-categories of sustainability entrepreneurship (as Schaltegger suggests), or whether they should be positioned outside of the SuE fold (as Parrish would argue). This disparity relates to the discussion on the difference between “efficiency” and “effectiveness”. Briefly, some authors suggest that a key SuE question is *not* whether or not a firm is using resources more efficiently than previously, or in comparison to other firms (i.e.: eco-efficiency). Instead a more important question is whether or not the firm is having a *net* positive, neutral or negative impact on the environment/on society (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002, p. 137). However, it has also been suggested that this improved approach may still lead to compartmentalisation and ignore the impact of a product or service in another “pole”(Tilley & Parrish, 2006, p. 290). For example: an artillery shell might be produced in an eco-efficient manner, but used in a way that has a negative impact on the “social” pole of the sustainability triangle. For this reason, Tilley and Parrish (2006, p. 287) suggest that a *pyramid* model of SuE is preferable (which, with some modifications, adds a further six criteria to the Dyllick and Hockerts model).

The above paragraph indicates that within the SuE field it is possible to identify both “strong” and “weak” approaches (to borrow the terminology of the sustainability and green entrepreneurship fields). “Strong” approaches (exemplified by authors such as Tilley, Parrish and

Young), demand that all three “points” of the sustainability triangle interrelate synergistically to produce value. “Weak” approaches (whose authors include Schaltegger, Dean and McMullen) tend to note the theoretical importance of the triple-bottom line, but clearly imply that in practice firms need only emphasise two of the “points” in producing value, in order to be categorised as “sustainable”¹³. In a sense this divergence to a certain extent mirrors a difference between an approach that is more normative and idealistic, and one which is closer to the present reality of business, not least that of SMEs (Schlange, 2009, p. 9). In other words, there is a clear tension between: “what is and what could be” (Tilley & Parrish, 2006, p. 292).

The role of CSR

A further gap has to do with the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in promoting sustainability. Some SuE authors mention CSR, but are generally dismissive of its potential – despite the fact that it is often linked to the idea of “corporate sustainability” (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011, p. 143). Similarly, some authors suggest that the SuE field reflects that of the CSR field in focusing primarily on large companies (Uhlener, Berent, Jeurissen, & de Wit, 2010, p. 4). I submit however, that SuE *is* including smaller firms in its analysis at this stage (see for example, the work of Choi & Gray, 2008; Schaltegger & Wagner, 2010). I also suggest that it would be fruitful to investigate the contribution of the “new” CSR approaches to SuE/SD; including the ideas of CSR 2.0, Corporate Social Entrepreneurship (CSE) and Corporate Social Opportunity (CSO) (Austin & Reficco, 2009; Grayson & Hodges, 2004; Hemingway, 2005; Jenkins, 2009; Visser, 2010).

The possibility of importing concepts from other entrepreneurship fields

SuE researchers can in all probability gain useful insights not only from the CSR field, but also from the fields of social-, “green-” and developmental entrepreneurship, where a common interest in the contribution of institutional theory is apparent (McMullen, 2011; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011, p. 147). Many researchers are aware of the limitations of a “single pole” approach to business and are including ideas from other fields. Isaak for example (2005, p. 21), writes of the importance of the “social” perspective in his studies of “green” entrepreneurship – and social entrepreneurs clearly do not confine their activities to the “social” field. Researchers could therefore contribute to the SuE field by testing the appropriateness of “importing” concepts from other fields. For example: Zahra et al's (2009) typology of the social entrepreneur as “bricoleur”, “constructionist” and “engineer”.

Family business

A further promising path for SuE study has to do with the role of family business (FB). At the moment only a few SuE authors discuss sustainability in the context of FB, despite clear links to several of the factors linked to the concept (such as business longevity and values) (Craig & Dibrell, 2006; Lordkipanidze, Brezet, & Backman, 2005; Meek, et al., 2010; Uhlener, et al., 2010; Woodfield, 2010). FB is also a dominant form of business in many societies that prioritise sustainable development (for example: the Middle East; Spence, et al., 2010, p. 348). Family firms also provide a clear example of the importance of embeddedness to sustainability and entrepreneurial behaviour. In doing so, they underline the core argument of this paper, namely the importance of acknowledging the embeddedness of both “sustainable development” and “entrepreneurship” in future conversations about sustainability entrepreneurship in SMEs.

¹³ An example of this is Hockerts & Wüstenhagen's discussion of SuE (Hockerts & Wüstenhagen, 2010, pp. 484-485).

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