



## **SIG 12 - RM&RP - Research Methods and Research Practice**

We invite you to submit your research to explore the theme of *The Business of Now: the future starts here* for the EURAM 20<sup>th</sup> Conference.

We look forward to receiving your submissions.

### **T12\_06 - The transformative firm: Re-thinking the role of firms in transition processes to sustainability**

#### **Proponents:**

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#### **Short description:**

Which role can and should firms play in innovation systems (IS) dedicated to sustainability transitions?

Arguably, the transformative potential of currently powerful actors in the private sector remains under-explored with respect to sustainability transitions in IS, where the potential of incumbents is even less researched than the role of startups.

Recent advancements in terms of IS for sustainability also lack discussions about the potential contributions of 'transformative firms'.

This topic proposal aims to attract a wide range of methodological, conceptual, and empirical contributions. Submissions are encouraged to explore diverse approaches linked to IS and (entrepreneurial) ecosystems with an explicit focus on sustainability transitions.

#### **Long description:**

Awareness of the systemic character of global sustainability issues is rising and the complexity of societal, environmental, and economic problems is increasingly acknowledged. Accordingly, sustainability scholarship has revived systems thinking and respective notions of transitions governance to improve our understanding of these issues and address them more effectively. In contrast, private firms often tackle sustainability issues following a rather narrow, local and, therefore, inadequate understanding of sustainability. Consequently, (sustainable) innovation endeavors are usually directed towards incremental improvements instead of transcending current trajectories.

The well-established framework of innovation systems (IS) has proven to be a suitable approach to examining innovation processes from a systems perspective. Recent conceptual diversifications of IS for sustainability in terms of 'dedicated' or 'reflexive' IS (Pyka, 2017; Lindner et al., 2016; Schlaile



et al., 2017; Urmetzer and Pyka, 2019) have advanced the framework to make it more suitable for addressing current problems. The dedicated innovation system (DIS) framework offers a conceptual basis for addressing the gap between research on the management of sustainable innovation (corporate sustainability) and the required renewal of the production and consumption systems (sustainability transitions).

IS thinking considers innovation as a collective output emerging from the systemic interplay among scientific, political, and business actors who continuously exchange knowledge according to given rules and patterns (institutions). While the co-evolution of the IS and its elements has generally been widely acknowledged, the effect of individual decisions within firms on the functioning and outcome of the IS remains under-explored. We currently lack a deeper understanding of exactly how incumbent firms can or probably even should operate in the system to contribute to sustainability transitions. Arguably, transitions research has frequently framed successful firms as part of the problem that must be overcome in order to destabilize unsustainable regimes. The observed disconnect between regime-conforming firms and transformational endeavors is reflected by a paucity of conceptual as well as empirical exploration of the role of incumbents' innovative activity in sustainability transitions.

We propose to explore the role of firms in contributing to the dedication of IS to sustainability. We call for methodological, conceptual, and empirical contributions, and we encourage the exploration of a wide range of approaches linked to IS and (entrepreneurial) ecosystems with an explicit focus on sustainability transitions. These include but are not limited to co-evolution, corporate social entrepreneurship, institutional entrepreneurship, systems thinking, ecology, responsible research and innovation, sustainability transitions, sustainable business models, and complexity theory.

#### **Keywords:**

innovation systems  
sustainability  
entrepreneurial ecosystems  
incumbents  
sustainability transitions  
system transformation

#### **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):**

Goal 1: No poverty, Goal 2: Zero hunger, Goal 3: Good health and well-being for people, Goal 4: Quality education, Goal 5: Gender equality, Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation, Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy, Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth, Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, Goal 10: Reducing inequalities, Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities, Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production, Goal 13: Climate action, Goal 14: Life below water, Goal 15: Life on land, Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions, Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals.

#### **Publication Outlet:**

Sustainability (MDPI)  
Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions (Elsevier)



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**AUTHORS GUIDELINES**

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