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Call for papers IFSAM TRACK

Small Business and Sustainable Development

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Sustainable development presents considerable challenges to SMEs. However, given the sheer number of small firms in any country and their significant contribution to employment and the economy in terms of added-value, they cannot be omitted from the debate. As a result, countries are starting to realize that the trend toward sustainable development cannot be maintained without the inclusion of these firms. Consequently, a number of measures have been added to their economic policies to facilitate the adoption of sustainability by SMEs. Unfortunately, it has been demonstrated that the resulting proliferation of tools and programmes tends to confuse more than support the movement and does not seem to significantly change SMEs' owner/managers attitudes and behaviours (Murillo and Lozano, 2006; Roberts et al., 2006).

Studies on the impact of sustainable development on SMEs have started to gain momentum among researchers in the last decade with an emphasis on the determinants of SMEs' involvement in sustainable development (Cabagnol and Le Bas, 2006; Spence et al., 2007; Paradas, 2007), comparisons between small and large firms in terms of sustainable behaviours and practices (Jenkins, 2004; Perrini et al., 2007), barriers and motivations to the firms' involvement (DTI, 2002; Longo et al., 2005). This field of study is still under construction and a theoretical framework and better operationalisation of some of the constructs have yet to emerge. Consequently, a number of questions require further investigation.

- Firstly, most of the studies dealing with sustainable development, whether they include SMEs or not, focus on the environment. By limiting the investigation to only one aspect of sustainable development out of three, this approach ignores the fundamental challenge of the synergetic relationship of environment, society and economy;
- Secondly, a central dimension of sustainable development which is often neglected, is that of the owner/managers' understanding and perception of the concept of sustainable development. Studies have demonstrated that barriers to SMEs' involvement in sustainable development are more influenced by the owner/managers' perceptions and lack of know-how than by the firm's availability of resources. Hence, more studies are needed to further our understanding of SMEs' owner/managers attitude and behaviours in terms of sustainable development and what would drive their motivation to become more involved;

- Thirdly, research on entrepreneurship and SMEs has demonstrated the vast heterogeneity of strategic stance among small firms in general. The same has been observed in their sustainable strategic orientation. Given the relative newness of the field, knowledge of SMEs' strategic commitment to sustainability remains fragmented preventing more in-depth studies on the extent and the nature of their commitment and the operationalisation of this concept. There is also very few research about SMEs' commitment process in sustainable development. Therefore, studies suggesting ways of measuring SMEs' levels of commitment in sustainability as well as the process through which they reach this commitment could benefit researchers, practitioners and policy-makers' understanding of the field and the implementation of practical measures for firms' support.
- Finally, beyond the drivers, the outcomes of SMEs' commitment to sustainability are not well known and studies in this field often lead to contradictory results (Longo et al., 2005; Larson, 2000). Authors often disagree on how to measure sustainable performance in SMEs, one that combines the social, environmental and economic aspects. Further development in this field would greatly enhance SMEs' uptake of the concept.

This track encourages empirical and theoretical contributions furthering our understanding of sustainable development in SMEs. More specifically, we would be interested in receiving contributions that deal with the following aspects of sustainability in SMEs (but are not limited to them):

- The synergetic relationships between the three poles of sustainable development in SMEs, namely the social, environmental and economic aspects;
- The specificity of sustainable management in SMEs;
- SMEs' commitment process to sustainable development
- The size effect in terms of sustainability in SMEs;
- SMEs owner/managers' perception of sustainable development;
- Measures of degrees of SMEs' commitment to sustainable development;
- "Sustainable entrepreneurship";
- The sustainability dimension in SMEs transmission and acquisition;
- Measures of "sustainable performance" in SMEs.

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