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## Call for Papers

### Start-ups within Entrepreneurial Ecosystems towards a Circular Economy

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#### **Objective and justification for SI**

The overall aim of this special issue is to develop new scientific knowledge on how start-ups and entrepreneurial ecosystems can contribute to a circular economy. Research on start-ups and circular economy is limited although highly relevant on the political and business agenda when working towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Addressing this research gap would contribute with both theoretical, practical and policy implications on how to effectively support circular start-ups in their quest to scale up and make real sustainability impact beyond niche markets.

Start-ups are essential for developing circular business models. In contrast to incumbent companies, start-ups, as new market entrants can adopt circular business models from the start with a holistic and

ambitious approach. New ventures are often not exposed to the risks of business model cannibalization or devaluation of previous investments (Henry et al., 2020). Start-ups can also be more responsive to changes in market circumstances and tend to embrace strategies corresponding to higher levels of circularity than incumbents (ibid).

In a circular business model value is created, delivered and captured by slowing, closing, and narrowing resource loops (Bocken et al., 2016). Developing circular business models is challenging. It requires different domains of knowledge, as well as collaborations with different stakeholders, and across different sectors (Geissdoerfer et al., 2020). Incumbents might have vested interest in defending the existing regime (De Clercq and Voronov, 2011). Furthermore, start-ups may have limited financial and human resources, need to work with social, environmental and economic sustainability of their business (Harlin and Berglund, 2020), and address challenges related to the liability of newness (Kuratko et al., 2017). Thus, start-ups need support to access essential resources such as knowledge, finance, and networks in different phases of their development (Van Gelderen et al., 2005). For example, as shown by (Djupdal and Westhead, 2015) a structured certification process can help firms gain legitimacy and alleviate liabilities of newness and smallness. Support in close geographical, institutional and relational proximity can be conceptualised as entrepreneurial ecosystems (Brown and Mason, 2017). Entrepreneurial ecosystems focus on the cultures, institutions, and networks that build up within a region over time and foster or hinder entrepreneurship (Mason and Brown, 2014). Entrepreneurial ecosystems is a systemic approach to entrepreneurship and includes a range of entities, such as universities, science parks, incubators, technology clusters, start-up programs, and intermediaries (Brown and Mason, 2017). Universities are highlighted as key actors in entrepreneurial ecosystems that can contribute to firm performance through knowledge production and co-creation (Link and Sarala, 2019). Intermediaries connect actors in the entrepreneurial ecosystem to facilitate the effective use of their resources to support entrepreneurs (Kanda et al., 2020).

Global production and consumption systems are dominated by linear resource flows. Circular economy offers opportunities for a paradigm shift from the linear economic model to one which is restorative and regenerative by design (MacArthur, 2013). A transformation to a circular economy will depend on the strategic actions of policymakers and businesses (Lewandowski 2016). Businesses can engage with the circular economy through sustainable entrepreneurship. Sustainable entrepreneurship consolidates a new paradigm that environmental problems are businesses opportunities (Cohen and Winn, 2007). The value creation of such businesses emphasizes product, component and material reuse, sharing, refurbishment, remanufacturing, repair, cascading, and upgrading, as well as renewable and waste-derived energy utilization (Korhonen et al. 2018). However, circular business models need to be scaled up, i.e., become mainstream business practice, if their full economic, social, and environmental benefits are to be realised (Vermunt et al., 2019; Vickers and Lyon, 2014).

Since circular business models are based on different value generation logics compared to “traditional” business models, they encounter different challenges and drivers (Tura et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial ecosystem actors do not have extensive experience with circular business models (cf. Fichter et al., 2016; Volkmann et al., 2019). This is also reflected by the lack of research that applies the concept of entrepreneurial ecosystems to the circular economy (Konietzko, 2021). Furthermore, few contributions focus directly on the sustainability-related aspects of entrepreneurial ecosystems (e.g. Volkmann et al., 2019). Previous research on sustainable entrepreneurship has focused among others on analysing core concepts (Schaltegger and Wagner, 2011), analysing entrepreneurial opportunities embedded in market failures (Cohen and Winn, 2007), and the relationship between start-ups and incumbents (Hockerts and Wüstenhagen, 2010). However, sustainable entrepreneurship research applied to the circular economy is limited and focuses mainly on incumbent companies, while start-ups have largely been neglected (Henry et al., 2020).

In this special issue we welcome contributions from a range of perspectives and methodological approaches that analyse the interrelationships between start-ups, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and circular economy. Furthermore, we seek to understand how start-ups working with circular business models can be supported successfully.

Potential topics of interest include but are not limited to the following:

- What are the distinctive challenges encountered by start-ups developing circular business models?
- What are the existing competencies on circular business models in entrepreneurial ecosystems?
- What is the match or mismatch between the challenges of start-ups and the existing competencies in entrepreneurial ecosystems regarding circular business models?
- How can the concepts of entrepreneurial ecosystems, start-ups and the circular economy be connected as analytical lenses in sustainable entrepreneurship and small business research?
- What business incubation (and acceleration) mechanisms are needed to enhance the start and growth of new ventures with a circular business model orientation?
- How can the different types of impact (economic, social, environmental) of entrepreneurial ecosystems in a circular economy context be measured and improved?
- What are the leverage points for start-ups to drive circular economy transitions through entrepreneurial ecosystems?
- How can digitalisation in an entrepreneurial ecosystem support the start and growth of new ventures with a circular business model orientation?
- What are the major challenges and opportunities in supporting circular economy-oriented start-ups in a (post-)pandemic world?
- How do different regional contexts influence the entrepreneurial ecosystem support for new ventures with a circular business model orientation?
- What is the role of universities in enhancing competence about circular economy and collaborating with stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem?
- How can intermediaries facilitate collaborations within the entrepreneurial ecosystem in order to support new ventures with a circular business model orientation?

The deadline for submission of papers is 1 December 2022. The journal submission site will be open for submissions from 21 November 2022. The Special Issue is scheduled to be published in May 2024. Papers must be original and comply with ISBJ submission guidelines. Please refer to <http://isb.sagepub.com/> for submission guidelines and a link to the on-line submission system. In the online system please ensure you submit your paper within Manuscript Type: 'Special Issue: Start-ups within Entrepreneurial Ecosystems'.

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