



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The growth paradox, sustainable development, and business strategy

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Abstract

Economic growth is a two-edged sword. Expanding economies and industries create wealth and employment, but global economic expansion is having unprecedented deleterious impacts on vital planetary systems. Despite this, the core strategic goal of all economies and many businesses continues to be the pursuit of ongoing economic growth. To resolve this paradox, a reconceptualization of firm-level growth is presented. I describe and discuss the organizational characteristics of the growth paradox and follow this with a metatheoretical review of economic, organizational, and ecological perspectives on growth. From this review, a typology of firm-level strategy is developed that radically reconceptualizes business growth as developmental activity primarily concerned with social–ecological flourishing. The features of this typology and its implications for business strategy are discussed according to three principles that emerged from the analysis: multidexterity, resilience thinking for design, and inclusive balance (embeddedness). Together, these strategy principles form the prerequisite management competencies needed for the development, implementation, and evaluation of sustainable business strategies. Transformative firm-level responses to the growth paradox are needed if sustaining forms of organizational growth are to be achieved and this paper presents a novel integrative framework for informing those strategies.

KEYWORDS

business strategy, degrowth, growth paradox, growth typology, metatheoretical research, social–ecological systems, sustainability, transformation

1 | INTRODUCTION

Contemporary understandings of strategic management increasingly emphasize the importance of managing organizational contradictions, dilemmas, and tensions (Dameron & Torset, 2014; Sched et al., 2016; Zimmermann et al., 2015). A growing source of tension for contemporary businesses is the balancing of economic growth with social and environmental development. The ongoing pursuit of economic growth, also known as “the growth imperative”

(Banerjee et al., 2020, p. 1), is, however, a two-edged sword. This imperative provides a financial foundation for all organizational activities, generates employment, drives improvements in living standards, provides benefits to individuals and communities through wealth creation and can result in greater consumer choice. Economic growth provides a set of widely shared goals that galvanize organizational purpose and provide readily measurable outcomes to guide business strategies. Simultaneously, however, the unchecked pursuit of exponential growth¹ has profound, deleterious impacts on the health of

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The Sustainable Development Paradox The Sustainable Development Paradox

Andy Pike, Andres Rodriguez-Pose, John Tomaney



The Sustainable Development Paradox The Sustainable Development Paradox:

The Sustainable Development Paradox Rob Krueger, David Gibbs, 2007-08-30 Sustainability with its promise of economic prosperity social equity and environmental integrity is hardly a controversial goal Yet scholars have generally overlooked the ways that policies aimed at promoting sustainability at local national and global scales have been shaped and constrained by capitalist social relations This thought provoking book reexamines sustainability conceptually and as it actually exists on the ground with a particular focus on Western European and North American urban contexts Topics include critical theoretical engagements with the concept of sustainability how sustainability projects map onto contemporary urban politics and social justice movements the spatial politics of conservation planning and resource use and what progressive sustainability practices in the context of neoliberalism might look like **Sustainable Development** Andrew B. Loewenstein, 1997

Sustainable Development and Governance in Europe Pamela M. Barnes, Thomas C. Hoerber, 2013-06-26 This book analyses the evolution of the sustainability discourse in the European Union exploring the conditions necessary for sustainable development to move from a conceptual model into a model for action for strategic decision makers at all levels of governance This book questions the extent to which the discourse on sustainability has become embedded into governance structures in Europe It focuses on the importance of the nature of the language of the political discourse on sustainability and how ideas are communicated amongst the actors and stakeholders in the policy making process as well as assessing the conceptual political institutional and operational barriers apparent across the European geographic region Drawing case studies from numerous policy areas including climate change EU emissions trading scheme renewable energy nuclear energy the European integrated energy market transport mobility and environmental protection expert contributors unveil a narrowing of the discourse on sustainability that has taken place in Europe However a considerable discontinuity remains between the economic and environmental objectives of sustainable development and the authors argue that it is essential that conditions for a dynamic discourse open to multiple participants are developed Sustainable Development and Governance in Europe will be of strong interest to students and scholars of comparative politics governance sustainable development and environmental politics and studies **Economics and Sustainability** Karl Bruckmeier, 2020-11-21 This textbook provides an overview of economic perspectives on sustainability It synthesises economic ecological and interdisciplinary sustainability research and by applying an integrated social ecological and economic framework demonstrates how this research can be improved and implemented in practice Split into three parts the book begins by introducing a range of topics forming the basis of knowledge needed to understand the varying sustainability discourses in economics ecology and interdisciplinary sustainability research Chapters cover the political context of sustainability the history of sustainability in European environmental discourses dating back to the seventeenth century as well as various problems and forms of interdisciplinary knowledge integration and synthesis in the sustainability process Part II reviews the

core economic themes relevant to sustainable development including natural resource management environmental economics and ecological economics Also highlighted are often neglected issues such as conflicts disasters and interrelated crises on the way towards sustainability The chapters in Part III discuss the future of the sustainability process They argue for the necessity of overhauling the relationship between science and practice explore failures and the unforeseen difficulties of sustainability transformation and discuss how to enable a long term sustainability process that reaches into the distant future An innovative resource for a broad range of interdisciplinary programmes on sustainability The book will be an invaluable reference for master and PhD students instructors researchers and practitioners in sustainability governance

Crisis, Conflict and Celebration Katarzyna Kajdanek, Anna Bednarczyk, Rui Carvalho, 2025-02-03 This book illuminates how the profound challenges faced by contemporary societies over the past few decades encompassing climate change and other environmental risks global health threats warfare and mass migration manifest themselves in European cities The chapters bring cutting edge ethnographic studies which address these complex issues through three key conceptual dimensions of urban life crisis conflict and celebration The concept of crisis is critically explored in its various economic political and cultural dimensions affecting urban residents in multiple social and spatial aspects of their lives Crises often lead to conflicts dynamic processes that give rise to interest groups and complex social landscapes of resistance By examining conflicts in urban contexts the book uncovers the power dynamics and vulnerabilities emerging during turbulent times Crises and conflicts also present opportunities for urban transformation and regeneration bringing underlying beliefs and norms into question paving the way for new social dynamics within urban environments These conflictual spaces can therefore become arenas for celebration of urbanity where communities express resilience cultural identity and collective solidarity As well as providing new insights into the present and future of European cities and the pivotal role of urban areas as centers of social change contestation and community building the book provides an important methodological contribution through innovative qualitative research in a diverse range of European urban areas

Incomplete Streets Stephen Zavestoski, Julian Agyeman, 2014-08-27 The Complete Streets concept and movement in urban planning and policy has been hailed by many as a revolution that aims to challenge the auto normative paradigm by reversing the broader effects of an urban form shaped by the logic of keeping automobiles moving By enabling safe access for all users Complete Streets promise to make cities more walkable and livable and at the same time more sustainable This book problematizes the Complete Streets concept by suggesting that streets should not be thought of as merely physical spaces but as symbolic and social spaces When important social and symbolic narratives are missing from the discourse and practice of Complete Streets what actually results are incomplete streets The volume questions whether the ways in which complete streets narratives policies plans and efforts are envisioned and implemented might be systematically reproducing many of the urban spatial and social inequalities and injustices that have characterized cities for the last century or more From critiques of a mobility bias

rooted in the neoliberal foundations of the Complete Streets concept to concerns about resulting environmental gentrification the chapters in Incomplete Streets variously call for planning processes that give voice to the historically marginalized and more broadly that approach streets as dynamic fluid and public social places This interdisciplinary book is aimed at students researchers and professionals in the fields of urban geography environmental studies urban planning and policy transportation planning and urban sociology

Rethinking the Green State Karin Bäckstrand, Annica Kronsell, 2015-06-12 This innovative book is one of the first to conduct a systematic comprehensive analysis of the ideals and practices of the evolving green state It draws on elements of political theory feminist theory post structuralism governance and institutional theory to conceptualise the green state and advances thinking on how to understand its emergence in the context of climate and sustainability transitions Focusing on the state as an actor in environmental climate and sustainability politics the book explores different principles guiding the emergence of the green state and examines the performance of states and institutional responses to the sustainable and climate transitions in the European and Nordic context in particular The book's unique focus on the Nordic countries underlines the important to learn from Nordics which are perceived to be in the forefront of climate and sustainability governance as well as historically strong welfare states With chapter contributions from leading international scholars in political science sociology economics energy and environmental systems and climate policy studies this book will be of great value to postgraduate students and researchers working on sustainability transitions environmental politics and governance and those with an area studies focus on the Nordic countries

Gender, Sexuality and the UN's SDGs Drew Dalton, Angela Smith, 2023-06-27 Against the backdrop of Covid 19 this edited volume will utilize a gendered lens to explore the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals SDGs with a clear focus on challenging the omission of sexuality in relation to the SDGs as well as analyzing the ways in which the SDGs are also equally relevant for Western countries While acknowledging the importance of these goals contributors unpack the exclusion of marginalized genders and sexualities as well as how popular media and social media contribute to the wider understanding of issues of gender and sexuality and the SDGs This volume also dispels assumptions about the irrelevance of SDGs to countries in the West with a particular focus on the UK Chapters examine a variety of topics including HIV AIDS sex work global migration climate change and environmental sustainability poverty education and sexual harassment This collection will be of interest to scholars researchers and students across Sociology Gender Sexuality Studies Education Development Studies and Sustainability Studies

Key Concepts in Economic Geography Yuko Aoyama, James T Murphy, Susan Hanson, 2010-11-17 A comprehensive and highly readable review of the conceptual underpinnings of economic geography Students and professional scholars alike will find it extremely useful both as a reference manual and as an authoritative guide to the numerous theoretical debates that characterize the field Allen J Scott University of California Guides readers skilfully through the rapidly changing field of economic geography The key concepts used to structure this narrative range

from key actors and processes within global economic change to a discussion of newer areas of research including work on financialisation and consumption. The result is a highly readable synthesis of contemporary debates within economic geography that is also sensitive to the history of the sub discipline. Sarah Hall, University of Nottingham. The nice thing about this text is that it is concise but with depth in its coverage. A must have for any library and a useful desk reference for any serious student of economic geography or political economy. Adam Dixon, Bristol University. Organized around 20 short essays, *Key Concepts in Economic Geography* provides a cutting edge introduction to the central concepts that define contemporary research in economic geography. Involving detailed and expansive discussions, the book includes an introductory chapter providing a succinct overview of the recent developments in the field. Over 20 key concept entries with comprehensive explanations, definitions and evolutions of the subject. Extensive pedagogic features that enhance understanding including figures, diagrams and further reading. An ideal companion text for upper level undergraduate and postgraduate students in economic geography, the book presents the key concepts in the discipline demonstrating their historical roots and contemporary applications to fully understand the processes of economic change, regional growth and decline, globalization and the changing locations of firms and industries. Written by an internationally recognized set of authors, the book is an essential addition to any geography student's library.

Critical Environmental Politics Carl Death, 2013-12-04. The aim of this book is to review central concepts in the study of environmental politics and to open up new questions, problems and research agendas in the field. The volume does so by drawing on a wide range of approaches from critical theory to poststructuralism and spanning disciplines including international relations, geography, sociology, history, philosophy, anthropology and political science. The 28 chapters cover a range of global and local studies, illustrations and cases. These range from the Cochabamba conference in Bolivia to climate camps in the UK, UN summits in Rio de Janeiro and Johannesburg to climate migrants from Pacific islands, forests in Indonesia to Dutch energy governance reform, indigenous communities in Namibia to oil extraction in the Niger Delta, survivalist militias in the USA to Maasai tribesmen in Kenya. Rather than following a regional or issue based e.g. water, forests, pollution etc. structure, the volume is organised in terms of key concepts in the field including those which have been central to the social sciences for a long time such as citizenship, commodification, consumption, feminism, justice, movements, science, security, the state, summits and technology; those which have been at the heart of environmental politics for many years including biodiversity, climate change, conservation, eco-centrism, limits, localism, resources, sacrifice and sustainability; and many which have been introduced to these literatures and debates more recently: biopolitics, governance, governmentality, hybridity, posthumanism, risk and vulnerability. Features and benefits of the book: Explains the most important concepts and theories in environmental politics. Reviews the core ideas behind crucial debates in environmental politics. Highlights the key thinkers both classic and contemporary for studying environmental politics. Provides original perspectives on the critical potential of the concepts for future research agendas as

well as for the practice of environmental politics Each chapter is written by leading international authors in their field This exciting new volume will be essential textbook reading for all students of environmental politics as well as provocatively presenting the field in a different light for more established researchers

Routledge Handbook of Environmental Anthropology Helen Kopnina, Eleanor Shoreman-Ouimet, 2016-08-12 Environmental Anthropology studies historic and present human environment interactions This volume illustrates the ways in which today's environmental anthropologists are constructing new paradigms for understanding the multiplicity of players pressures and ecologies in every environment and the value of cultural knowledge of landscapes This Handbook provides a comprehensive survey of contemporary topics in environmental anthropology and thorough discussions on the current state and prospective future of the field in seven key sections As the contributions to this Handbook demonstrate the subfield of environmental anthropology is responding to cultural adaptations and responses to environmental changes in multiple and complex ways As a discipline concerned primarily with human environment interaction environmental anthropologists recognize that we are now working within a pressure cooker of rapid environmental damage that is forcing behavioural and often cultural changes around the world As we see in the breadth of topics presented in this volume these environmental challenges have inspired renewed foci on traditional topics such as food procurement ethnobiology and spiritual ecology and a broad new range of subjects such as resilience nonhuman rights architectural anthropology industrialism and education This volume enables scholars and students quick access to both established and trending environmental anthropological explorations into theory methodology and practice

The Routledge Handbook of Environmental Justice Ryan Holifield, Jayajit Chakraborty, Gordon Walker, 2017-09-14 The Routledge Handbook of Environmental Justice presents an extensive and cutting edge introduction to the diverse rapidly growing body of research on pressing issues of environmental justice and injustice With wide ranging discussion of current debates controversies and questions in the history theory and methods of environmental justice research contributed by over 90 leading social scientists natural scientists humanists and scholars from professional disciplines from six continents it is an essential resource both for newcomers to this research and for experienced scholars and practitioners The chapters of this volume examine the roots of environmental justice activism lay out and assess key theories and approaches and consider the many different substantive issues that have been the subject of activism empirical research and policy development throughout the world The Handbook features critical reviews of quantitative qualitative and mixed methodological approaches and explicitly addresses interdisciplinarity transdisciplinarity and engaged research Instead of adopting a narrow regional focus it tackles substantive issues and presents perspectives from political and cultural systems across the world as well as addressing activism for environmental justice at the global scale Its chapters do not simply review the state of the art but also propose new conceptual frameworks and directions for research policy and practice Providing detailed but accessible overviews of the complex varied dimensions of environmental justice and injustice

the Handbook is an essential guide and reference not only for researchers engaged with environmental justice but also for undergraduate and graduate teaching and for policymakers and activists **Sustainability at Work** Marilyn

Waite, 2016-10-04 Sustainability at Work is a compelling guide for everyone who wants to have both a successful career and a career that makes a positive difference in society Containing career advice of great value to students of sustainability and explaining how they can apply their knowledge to their future careers its appeal extends well beyond the classroom

Sustainability at Work includes an easy to follow framework that anyone wondering how they can make a sustainable difference in the workplace can apply Professionals from a variety of backgrounds and territories explain how they brought a sustainability approach to various sectors agriculture health care business economics and financial services education and research law and policy science and technology and entertainment and media Through inspiring narratives and a structured framework Sustainability at Work illustrates how sustainability can be incorporated into every imaginable career to impact the quadruple bottom line environment economy society and future generations **Governing Urban Sustainability** Lisa

Pettibone, 2016-04-22 In her study of the interactions between tools of urban sustainability governance in key cities Lisa Pettibone argues that a new factor sustainability minded groups may be critical to building momentum for sustainability The book presents in depth case studies of six cities in the USA and Germany New York Portland Seattle Berlin Hamburg and Heidelberg Drawing on 75 interviews document analysis and a bilingual literature review the book analyzes how sustainability is politically constructed in city strategic plans and sustainability indicators The volume provides a comprehensive introduction to the principles of sustainability discusses the key governance instruments relevant to urban sustainability and delivers new empirical and theoretical material on their role in a sustainability transition It concludes that despite the national level differences cities experiences in both countries are similar Political sustainability at the city level differs in several important ways from academic principles of sustainability Finally it proposes that sustainability minded groups may be a key link to connect urban sustainability in practice to theoretical concepts **Sustainability Education**

Stephen Sterling, 2010-09-23 How do we equip learners with the values knowledge skills and motivation to help achieve economic social and ecological well being How can universities make a major contribution towards a more sustainable future Amid rising expectations on HE from professional associations funders policy makers and undergraduates and increasing interest amongst academics and senior management a growing number of higher education institutions are taking the lead in embracing sustainability This response does not only include greening the campus but also transforming curricula and teaching and learning This book explains why this is necessary and crucially how to do it Bringing together the experience of the HEFCE funded Centre for Sustainable Futures CSF at the University of Plymouth and the Higher Education Academy s Education for Sustainable Development Project the book distills out the curriculum contributions of a wide range of disciplinary areas to sustainability The first part of the book provides background on the current status of sustainability

within higher education including chapters discussing interdisciplinarity international perspectives and pedagogy The second part features 13 chapter case studies from teachers and lecturers in diverse disciplines describing what has worked how and why and what hasn't Whilst the book is organised by traditional disciplines the authors and editors emphasise transferable lessons and interdisciplinarity so that readers can learn from examples outside their own area to embed sustainability within their own curricula and teaching Subject areas covered include geography environmental and Earth Sciences nursing health law dance drama music engineering media and cultural studies art and design theology social work economics languages education business and built environment

Implementing Sustainability in Higher Education Matthias

Barth, 2014-10-17 In a time of unprecedented transformation as society seeks to build a more sustainable future education plays an increasingly central role in training key agents of change This book asks how we can equip students and scholars with the capabilities to promote sustainability and how the higher education curriculum can be changed to facilitate the paradigm shift needed Across the globe a rising number of higher education institutions and academics are responding to these questions by transforming their own teaching and learning and their institutions curricula This book contributes to that development by examining in depth case studies of innovative approaches and curriculum changes at multiple levels of the education sector Elaborating key principles of higher education for sustainable development and identifying drivers and barriers to implementing sustainability in the curriculum the book provides a comprehensive overview of what makes higher education for sustainable development a unique field of research and practice as well as offering a coherent narrative of how change can be effected in it This much needed book is a valuable resource to inform guide and inspire students academics administrators and community partners whether experienced or new to the field whether already committed or not to higher education for sustainable development in an age of transformation

Handbook of Local and Regional Development

Andy Pike, Andres Rodriguez-Pose, John Tomaney, 2010-11-17 The Handbook of Local and Regional Development provides a comprehensive statement and reference point for local and regional development The scope of this Handbook's coverage and contributions engages with and reflects upon the politics and policy of how we think about and practise local and regional development encouraging dialogue across the disciplinary barriers between notions of local and regional development in the Global North and development studies in the Global South This Handbook is organized into seven inter related sections with an introductory chapter setting out the rationale aims and structure of the Handbook Section one situates local and regional development in its global context Section two establishes the key issues in understanding the principles and values that help us define what is meant by local and regional development Section three critically reviews the current diversity and variety of conceptual and theoretical approaches to local and regional development Section four address questions of government and governance Section five connects critically with the array of contemporary approaches to local and regional development policy Section six is an explicitly global review of perspectives on local and regional development from Africa Asia Pacific

Europe Latin America and North America Section seven provides reflection and discussion of the futures for local and regional development in an international and multidisciplinary context With over forty contributions from leading international scholars in the field this Handbook provides critical reviews and appraisals of current state of the art conceptual and theoretical approaches and future developments in local and regional development

The Barcelona School of Ecological Economics and Political Ecology Sergio Villamayor-Tomas, Roldan Muradian, 2023-02-28 In this open access book ecological economics and political ecology traditions converge into a single academic school The book constitutes a common ground where multiple and critical voices are expressed covering a broad scope of urgent matters at the crossroad between society economy and the natural environment The manuscripts composing this compendium offer appealing material for both experienced and younger researchers interested in interdisciplinary exchanges in the field of the social environmental sciences It combines historical accounts with recent theoretical and empirical developments revolving around the interaction between three foundational notions of the Barcelona School social metabolism environmental justice and self reflective science

The Academic Profession in Europe: New Tasks and New Challenges Barbara M. Kehm, Ulrich Teichler, 2012-08-21 This book is the first of several with the results of a collaborative European project supported by the European Science Foundation on changes in the academic profession in Europe EUROAC It provides a short description of the ESF EUROHESC programme and the particular forms of international collaborative research projects which are funded under the umbrella of this programme It then outlines the EUROAC project This project has chosen three foci governance professionalisation academic careers to analyse changes in the work of the academic profession The first results in the form of in depth literature reviews constitute the content of the book These eight literature reviews about the state of the art of existing research feature the various dimensions of the overall theme A particular emphasis is put on factors leading to changes in the work tasks of the academic profession in Europe and how the academic profession is coping with these new challenges Thus the book provides a state of the art account of existing research about the following themes main results of previous studies on the academic profession the academic profession and their interaction with new higher education professionals professional identities in higher education extending work tasks civic mission and sustainable development academic careers in academic markets the changing role of academics in the face of rising managerialism the influence of quality assurance governance and relevance on the satisfaction of the academic profession

Resilience in Social-Ecological Systems Marianne E. Krasny, Cecilia Lundholm, Ryan Plummer, 2013-10-18 Resilience thinking challenges us to reconsider the meaning of sustainability in a world that must constantly adapt in the face of gradual and at times catastrophic change This volume further asks environmental education and resource management scholars to consider the relationship of environmental learning and behaviours to attributes of resilient social ecological systems attributes such as ecosystem services innovative governance structures biological and cultural diversity and social capital Similar to current approaches to

environmental education and education for sustainable development resilience scholarship integrates social and ecological perspectives The authors of Resilience in social ecological systems the role of learning and education present a wealth of perspectives integrating theory with reviews of empirical studies in natural resource management and in youth adult and higher education The authors explore the role of education and learning in helping social ecological systems as they respond to change through adaptation and transformation This book also serves to integrate a growing literature on resilience and social learning in natural resources management with research in environmental education and education for sustainable development This book was originally published as a special issue of Environmental Education Research

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