



# Breaking Barriers to Promote Sustainable Development in the Wine Industry: A Theoretical Study on the Role of the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Approach ⊗

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## Abstract

The focus on sustainability is one of the different strategies adopted by companies looking for arguments for their differentiation from other competitors. Implementing this concept in the wine industry implies environmental soundness, social equity, and economic feasibility since when pursuing sustainable development, these companies are protecting the identity of their terroirs. Nevertheless, this is not an easy task because companies have to face several potential barriers to the adoption of sustainable practices. Thus, the objective of this chapter is to introduce the entrepreneurial ecosystem approach (EEA) as an instrument to help to understand and identify the mechanisms to remove the barriers to the adoption of sustainable practices in the wine industry, preparing the ground for a more detailed investigation to assess the effective implementation of the EEA.

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### Introduction

Environmental degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss, demographic growth, and poverty faced nowadays lead companies to establish awareness of the need to implement and develop sustainable practices. Indeed, the challenges related to this issue affect different firms and industrial sectors. The attention paid to sustainable development does not focus only on less-established industries but also on well-established ones, such as the wine industry, where sustainable development has been awakening more and more attention throughout the years (Willer & Lernoud, 2018). This attention is related to the need to lessen the adverse environmental, social, and economic impact of the increased industrialization of this sector. However, these new responsibilities also translate into business opportunities. The concern to implement these practices can also be seen as a strategy that companies follow to meet the needs of the market more efficiently (Garanti & Berberoglu, 2018) or to differentiate themselves from the other competitors (Gilinsky et al., 2016; Atkin et al., 2011), repositioning their competitive advantages and ensuring their process of economic growth. Furthermore, when implementing sustainability in the wine industry, an evident positive effect occurs: protecting the distinctive capabilities of the *terroir*.

The modern definition of *terroir* refers to the space recognized as capable of conferring distinctive characteristics to products from their originating (Castellucci, 2010), thanks to the combination of natural and human factors (Seguin & Leeuwen, 2006). For its turn, in the wine industry context, sustainability can be referred taking into account the three-dimensional balance of sustainable development as follows: growing and winemaking practices that are sensitive to the environment (planet), respecting the needs and interests of society at large, and promoting equal opportunity (people), and being economically feasible to implement and maintain long-term economic viability (profit; Gilinsky et al., 2016; Sellers-Rubio & Nicolau-Gonzalbez, 2016; Forbes et al., 2009; Zucca et al., 2009). The very definition of the *terroir* encapsulates the three main pillars of sustainable development: natural conditions (environmental), human factors (social), and competitive advantage (profit). This directs our attention to the fact that *terroir* and sustainable development concepts walk side-by-side.

Nevertheless, the need to establish a trade-off between the adoption of sustainable practices in the wine industry and the impact on costs for wine (cost compliance) can lead sustainability-oriented companies to face more barriers than conventional ones<sup>1</sup> (Gast et al., 2017). It is expected for sustainability-oriented companies to find, among others, not only significant financial or market-related barriers (Gast et al., 2017; Trianni et al., 2017) but also regulatory barriers (Champoux & Brun, 2003), which they have to overcome.

From the importance of removing the many obstacles to the adoption of sustainable practices emerges the proposal to structure an approach to ensure sustainability-oriented companies their self-sustaining and self-generating. The development of this theoretical stream grounds on the ecosystem approach. In particular, following an implementation axis that starts in the reasoning of Isenberg's (2010, 2011) entrepreneurial ecosystem approach (EEA). In the literature, "the fundamental ideas behind entrepreneurial ecosystems emerged (...) towards a broader community perspective that incorporates the role of social, cultural, and economic" (Stam & van de Ven, 2019, p. 2) characteristics underlying sustainability. Thus, this study aims to propose a multidimensional sustainability model that allows the characterization of the different development stages, components, and models. Simultaneously, understanding the dynamics of its evolutionary process (Shwetz et al., 2019), including its antecedents, interdependence, and related concepts (Colombelli et al., 2019; Woolley, 2017). Nevertheless, in hindering a stream of corporate sustainability research that focuses on the design of instrumental strategies aiming to achieve environmental, social, and economic objectives, or to align these objectives pursuing business goals (Voinea et al., 2019), the focus of this study is not capturing the content but the process.

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