

Original Research Article

Green Entrepreneurship & Western Balkans in the Post-Pandemic World: Sustainable, Green, and Scalable Investments in the post COVID-19 Era

ABSTRACT

The disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has triggered worldwide multiple environmental, social, political, and economic consequences. In the entrepreneurship domain, now it is the time for reimagining the relationship between people (employees, customers) and technology. This is very important in the Western Balkan (WB) countries, which aspire to EU membership whilst facing serious environmental, social, political, economic and governance problems. The disruptions brought by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis have made WB countries and a number of international and domestic companies think about increasing the resilience of their production through sustainable, green, and scalable investments and management (e.g. supply diversification, geographically closer to customers activities and delivery centers, shorter supply chains, smarter solutions, thoughtful initiatives, increased home production, smart scalable inventories, open governance, new technology transformation, adaptable management, trusted relations, etc.). In this article, we examine several green entrepreneurship perceptions and green investment initiatives should formed in the WB just after the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, the factors that influenced these perceptions/initiatives, and the consequences should they had on the political, social, and economic dynamics in WB. This article aims: (i) to analyze how the WB economies could benefit from these initiatives after the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, and (ii) to form the environmental, social, economic, and governance commitments.

Keywords: Green entrepreneurship, Western Balkans, Sustainable and Green Investments, COVID-19 pandemic crisis, Environmental commitments, Social commitments.

JEL Classification: F21, E22.

1. INTRODUCTION

The eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 has triggered a worldwide and multiple crisis, whose consequences will be significant in terms of changing international structures and economic progress. During the COVID-19 pandemic, all European countries and particularly the ones located at the poorer part of the EU, the Balkan Peninsula (and for which the EU has devised a special political name – the Western Balkans (WB) – which consists of five non-EU member countries: Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Albania) experienced problems with the lack of medical supplies and protective equipment, insufficient capacity of health systems, declines in economic growth, increasing public debt, and problems with fiscal constraints. After the end of the pandemic, all of them will face financial problems and the need to bring their economy and life back to normal [1].

In this paper we have dealt with the crucial issue of developing a healthy green entrepreneurship in the post-COVID-19 era for the western Balkans. It is indeed a great opportunity for the countries of the Western Balkans to take advantage of the opportunities and funding provided by their prospect of joining the European Union and to make a business leap on the occasion offered by the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The proposal of the present work refers to the adoption of good and innovative practices for a sustainable green entrepreneurship. In particular, we reimagine the relationship between people (employees, customers) and the new technology and discussed the issue of team-work (collaborative entrepreneurship and solutions) and the geospatial optimization initiative (e.g. geospatial optimization for delivery centers).

The rest of the article is organized three sections. In Section 2 (“Entrepreneurship in WB: Getting Stronger after the COVID-19 Crisis”), two key initiatives (keystone pillars) as core strategic are proposed. In Section 3 (“Entrepreneurship in WB: Building on a Team-work Sustainable Approach”), the concept “team-work” is introduced and a coordinated framework for this concept regarding sustainable investments is defined as a term. In Section 4 (“Entrepreneurship in WB: Environmental, Social, and Governance Commitments”), the necessary commitments for greater impact toward a sustainable, scalable, and green COVID-19 recovery are proposed, described, and documented. Finally, in Section 5 (“Conclusions”), the concluding remarks will summarize the research and the conclusions reached, after which the author provides a projection which direction it is best for the WB region to move in order to overcome the crisis in the post-pandemic world and makes recommendations for developing sustainable transformative resilience.

Finally, the innovative contribution and the research footprint of this paper is to discuss, list, and categorize the necessary environmental, social, political, and government commitments for the transition, in the post COVID-19 times, of the Western Balkan companies to a modern era with various state-of-the-art functionalities within the context of the so-called “technology transformation”.

2. ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN WB: GETTING STRONGER AFTER THE COVID-19 CRISIS

An Inclusive sustainable prosperity, through quality job creation and innovation, is one of the main pillars of the proposed development policy. Micro, small, and medium size enterprises, as the bulk providers of employment, are in the front line of the pandemic crisis, with the risk that their liquidity constraints increasingly turn into solvency problems. The COVID-19 recovery requires countercyclical sustainable, green, inclusive and gender-sensitive investment on a massive scale including by helping to mobilize sustainable private finance and investment, with the objective of building back better and greener in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

In order the WB entrepreneurship to getting stronger after the COVID-19 crisis, the current article proposes two key initiatives (keystone pillars) as core strategic purposes: (a) Reimagining the relationship between people involved in entrepreneurship (employees, customers) and new technology functionalities; and (b) Geospatial optimizations in delivery centers, inventories, offices, and stores.

In particular, “Reimagining the Relationship” should mean to create an environment and a culture that breeds success by caring for customers as individuals and enabling employees to do the best that they can do. Also, for instance “Geospatial optimization for delivery centers” should mean delivery centers across WB countries that are responsible for the recruitment, career development and deployment of employees. So, working in partnership with customers, clients, and account teams they are responsible for deploying the right skills and experience to deliver high quality client and industry solutions. When on a client engagement, all delivery people report into the account teams ensuring they are measured and rewarded based on the delivery success achieved with the customers and clients. By reimagining the relationship between people and technology, we help customers to accelerate transformation in their industries. We give the people who use the systems we design, build, and operate more confidence and motivation to engage digitally.

This challenge should be well appreciated by international financial institutions and public development banks to be able to [2,3]:

- Enhance the transformative, sustainability, green and gender functionalities of their operations,
- Sustain higher investments, and
- Plan activities with greater impact regarding poor and more vulnerable people.

For this purpose, the improvements, and modifications to be considered include [4]:

- Adopt innovative instruments and approaches for smarter green solutions,
- Promote project development towards sustainable pipelines of projects,
- Commit to “Paris alignment” and foster green investments,

- Enhance international cooperation and partnership with local actors for green solutions,
- Reaching out to poorer and more vulnerable local communities, and
- Encourage decentralized environmentally friendly management and governance.

3. ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN WB: BUILDING ON A TEAM-WORK SUSTAINABLE APPROACH

The “team-work” concept experienced glories and honors in the COVID-19 era and now is a driving force for a more coordinated and coherent approach among international enterprises, including the European financial institutions involved in Western Balkans. So, it would be useful to define a coordination framework for this concept and then to define the “team-work” term for sustainable investments.

More efforts could also be made to reach out the European economic diplomacy dimension to sustainability, developmental, green, inclusive and gender-sensitive objectives. For a team-based decision-making framework we need: In-person: Meeting space, large screen projectors, and digital collaboration hardware and software tools [5]; and In-remote: Video conferencing with a screen sharing functionality, and digital collaboration hardware and software tools [5].

Hence, the team-work for sustainable investment, with great collaborative functionalities, could be operationalized through several options, including:

- (a) At the headquarter level, by reviving and reforming strategic platforms such as the EU Platform for Blending in External Cooperation (EUBEC), or building on the Practitioners Network (i.e., an expanded dedicated group on investment), which would also include all relevant European financial institutions involved in Western Balkans.
- (b) At the local level (i.e., regional or country level), under the coordination of EU Delegations, regional/country coordination platforms including all European financial institutions for development.

In addition, the so-called ‘Team Europe’ and ‘Working Better Together’ approaches of the EU provide the key strategic principles and basic guidance for flexible EU collective action, enabling greater complementarity and synergies among European actors, including European financial institutions combined with the numerous initiatives by the EU, its members and their financial institutions, the European financial architecture for development has the potential to mobilize significantly more investment for greater, more sustainable, greener, inclusive and gender sensitive impact. The challenge is to unleash this potential effectively and fully in a decisive and coordinated manner [5].

4. ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN WB: ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, AND GOVERNANCE COMMITMENTS

In this Section we deal with necessary commitments for greater impact toward a sustainable, scalable, and green COVID-19 recovery [6,7].

The six Western Balkans countries on the road to EU integration are facing severe entrepreneurship problems, particularly in climate change, green economy, digital transformation, energy transition, and environmental protection. The so-called “Green Economy - Green Entrepreneurship” concept is in infancy in the Western Balkans area and in this domain the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the problem. Obviously with the end of the pandemic there are will be excellent prospects for recovery in correct and bio markable solutions.

In the process of determining the current stakeholders in the Western Balkans, the current proposed paper identified seven (7) commitments that fully or partially support green entrepreneurship through specific flow-charts, regional plans, national and European Union projects, collaborative mechanisms, European Union research programs, and financial initiatives.

The proposed introduced seven (7) commitments are:

- (a) Smarter green solutions: The applied practices and solutions should be based on clear market needs and criteria with a green functionality always.
- (b) Thoughtful green initiatives: The post COVID-19 entrepreneurship must care deeply about the success of the established green initiatives (recycling, environment respect, green energy, renewables resources, consumption discipline) at all the scale levels (employees, customers, clients, etc.).

(c) Open decentralized corporate architecture and governance: The “open architecture” established with the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD), and further enhanced with the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) under the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). This proposed corporate architecture provides a strategic framework and set of mechanisms for blended finance and guarantees to significantly enhance the ability of mainly European companies to invest at scale for greater impact.

The European External Investment Plan (EIP) with its 3-pillar structure helps enshrine the EU blended finance activities and guarantees (pillar 1); with more traditional aid and technical assistance support (pillar 2); and greater efforts to improve the investment climate in EU partner countries (pillar 3) [8].

(d) Adaptable environmentally friendly management: Given the scale and longer-term nature of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and its consequences and in order to be effective, this more comprehensive approach to programming, harnessing investment potential, also requires flexibility and adaptivity, as investment details and grants cannot be planned and organized in the same manner and to the same level.

(e) Trusted relationships (employees, customers): It is very important the post COVID-19 entrepreneurship to believe in the power of community to spark change, contributing to local communities and, more broadly, to the Technology and Services industry.

(f) Sustainability – “We Care” governance concept (CSR functionalities):

The proposed “We Care” governance concept, by incorporating CSR-corporate social responsibility functionalities, become a framework used to articulate how an enterprise has been making a difference for the next decades and to bring sustainability mission to life. In this proposed governance concept, we have to determine the key pillars that reflect our sustainability approach, which are underpinned by our core purpose and values, making it easy for employees, customers, and other stakeholders to understand the corporate priorities [9,10].

The proposed “We Care” concept should use the industry frameworks set by the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [11,12,13,14].

(g) Feasibility – Feasibility study template:

A feasibility study template is an invaluable and convenient project management tool that helps businesses research and assess the risks associated with a proposed project or operation. It is regarded as a critical tool particularly for low-income countries [15]. Writing a comprehensive feasibility study template is the ultimate responsibility of project managers and the relevant department. The feasibility document requires in-depth research and insight into existing corporate practices and problems and knowledge of how different solutions will affect a particular business environment.

The feasibility study should be considered -on the process of strengthening the future European financial architecture for development toward a sustainable, scalable, and green COVID-19 recovery in Western Balkans- as a necessary commitment for greater impact and better functionalities [16].

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The so-called “Green Entrepreneurship Roadmap of Western Balkans” [17] has been designed to provide a solid and operational overview of the economic and political status in this area of the Europe and to record and document the local entrepreneurship stakeholders (particularly those who are involved in the development process of a green entrepreneurship in a sustainable base). The development of this roadmap has been initiated as part of the so-called “Balkan Green Academy Program” that consisted of modules that covered three main pillars: Policy, Economy and Society [17].

In this paper we have dealt with the crucial issue of developing a healthy green entrepreneurship in the post-COVID-19 era for the western Balkans [18,19]. It is indeed a great opportunity for the countries of the Western Balkans to take advantage of the opportunities and funding provided by their prospect of joining the European Union and to make a business leap on the occasion offered by the end of the COVID-19 pandemic [19].

The proposal of the present work refers to the adoption of good and innovative practices for a sustainable green entrepreneurship. In particular, we reimagine the relationship between people (employees, customers) and the new technology and discussed the issue of team-work collaboration (collaborative entrepreneurship and solutions) and the geospatial optimization initiative (e.g. geospatial optimization for delivery centers).

Finally, we discussed, listed and categorized the necessary environmental, social & government commitments for the transition of the WB companies to a modern era with various state-of-the-art functionalities within the context of the so-called “technology transformation” incorporated CSR-corporate social responsibility and environmental functionalities (smarter green solutions, thoughtful green initiatives, open decentralized governance, adaptable environmental friendly management, trusted relationships, sustainability “we care” management, and feasibility study functionalities).

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