

## BOOK REVIEW

**Helen KOPNINA, Rory PADFIELD and Josephine MYLAN,**  
*Sustainable Business. Key Issues, Abingdon and New York,*  
**Routledge, 2023, 302 pages**

First published in 2015, this book is now in its third edition, which proves its continued usefulness for successive generations of readers. And no wonder as it builds on the problem of economic activity intertwining with sustainable development, which has not yet lost its relevance in any way. News about human-led disruptions that affect local communities and their natural environment are spreading in an instant, reaching masses of recipients all over the globe. Some of those events are misunderstood, some are ignored, while others may be reacted upon with exaggeration and some even fuel conspiracy theories. People become confused faced with a difficult and increasingly uncertain future. In this context, business has become a key player. On the one hand, companies are one of the main sources of disrupting activities, and, on the other, they themselves experience negative externalities generated by other economic entities. Therefore, nowadays more than ever, a thriving business world depends on profound knowledge about sustainable development. There is a pressing need for responsible and reliable explanations of the motives, mindsets, and possible consequences of unsustainable business practices. More importantly, both societal and business actors must be informed how such effects might be avoided or at least mitigated. An excellent field to promote such deep understanding and expand specialist implementation-ready knowledge is the higher level of education, where future professionals working in the business community and natural environment are trained. This is exactly the idea Helen Kopnina, Rory Padfield and Josephine Mylan had as they offered an introductory-level textbook for business, management, and sustainability courses.



Obviously, *Sustainable Business* is not the first or the only voice in the discussion on the possibilities and limitations for business in the context of environmental challenges. Yet it does offer many fresh insights. However, its main value lies in a systematic, extensive, solid, balanced and reliable approach. For students, and all other readers just starting their adventure with sustainability within an economic context, such a concept is indisputably accurate.

The book is refined in terms of both content and form. Consisting of four main sections ('Key concepts,' 'Critical evaluation: Key challenges,' 'Globalization, technology, and new trends in business,' and 'Solutions'), it is further divided into chapters and subchapters. Despite this seemingly complex structure, getting familiar with the content and navigation through the publication does not pose any difficulty.

Naturally, the publication begins with a comprehensive introduction to sustainable business with the key terms clearly explained (e.g., eco-efficiency, green growth, and degrowth) and exemplified, while the following chapters elaborate in detail on business ethics. They discuss the corporate environment from the perspective of its social responsibility, PR and governance practices, employment, and poverty. Again, multiple examples showcase how this topic intertwines with sustainable development. Actually, that is one of the most valuable features of the book. There is no doubt that for academic textbooks scientific theory is essential. However, it is real life cases that make it more appealing to the readers. In section one, such examples enhance exploring the essence of business ethics and visualise the consequences of stretching or breaking the rules. At the same time, the examples also reveal feasible remedial actions (that is just a foretaste of what yet is to come in the final section).

The second part of the textbook is devoted to a critical assessment of environmental, and social and economic challenges for business activity. Among those challenges, biodiversity, climate change, ecological justice, and ecocentrism (just to name few) are discussed. Much attention is paid to the commodification of nature, as well as to economic inequalities – their causes, ways to measure poverty, and their ethical dimension.

As expected, the following section elaborates on globalisation, technology, and new trends in business activity. The authors explore divergent perspectives on increasing connectedness and the interdependence of national economies, reflecting on them in a neo-liberal context. Moreover, the reader finds here a concise review of theories which tackle development and innovation (the EKC hypothesis, the ecological modernisation theory, and the post-material value theory). Also, competitive advantage issues in relation to sustainable business practices, as well as the role of employment practices and eco-entrepreneurship are discussed.

One third of the publication is devoted to sustainable solutions. They are discussed in the final part of the book. The presented solutions obviously have a great application value, while being extremely captivating (even despite the fact that

the section almost completely devoid of graphics). Not only can readers become familiar with an array of tools, possible actions, and frameworks, but they also learn that these are just some of the necessary means and actions as there might be a need to adapt them to a particular context, account, medium of communication, etc. Environmental management systems, audit schemes, eco-labels, collaborative consumption, consumer choice editing, biomimicry, and blue economy are investigated among many more tools and frameworks. The last two chapters of this section scrutinise the cradle to cradle and circular economy concepts. The final pages of the book contain an extensive glossary, references, and an index.

I find the range of issues covered and the selection of the related examples impressive, especially since an edition of around 300 pages (A5 format) cannot possibly contain all the useful knowledge in the field of sustainable business. Nevertheless, the authors have skilfully balanced the number of issues covered with the level of detail in which they are discussed. For those to whom sustainable business is a secondary point of interest, this single textbook offers sufficiently solid and reliable knowledge. For students eager to specialise in this field the book offers an excellent foundation, as well as a rich source of reference that can be explored further.

Another feature of this book is that its authors were not afraid to ask tough questions (leaving some of them unanswered), and reveal paradoxes. *Sustainable Business* presents a great variety of contrasting opinions and explanations. Some might fear that this approach makes the textbook difficult to comprehend for less experienced readers, but that is not the case. The authors' reasoning (or questioning) is logical and their subtle guidance ensures that no one gets lost along the way.

The book is not captivating as far as its visual form is concerned, but, after all, this is a compendium of sustainability and economics. You would not expect it to contain a myriad of colourful graphics on a glossy paper. In fact, some grayscale photographs appear here and they keep the reader intrigued. Also, key text content is framed (not in a fancy way, but legibly enough). Despite the visual purity, the book's arrangement is apparently student-friendly, being perfectly tailored for the requirements of academic teachers as well. The content is reasonably structured, enabling quick navigation. As the scope is so wide, some readers might want to go back and forth to explore a selected issue or retrieve the meaning of the abbreviation (there are plenty of them). However, the fact that the book is provided with an extensive contents' lists at its beginning makes that task less burdensome. What the teacher will probably appreciate the most (apart from the rich content, of course) is the clear emphasis in the book on key issues, the summary of each chapter with questions for discussion, and excellent proposals for additional activities for the course participants. Those include role playing exercises, debates, watching recommended films, preparing a marketing strategy, and other tasks requiring the use of additional material available on the publishers' website.

On a final note, the reader might find the book both disturbing and reassuring. It exposes a whole array of business malfunction and failures (Volkswagen's emissions scandal, Coca-Cola's overall 'split personality,' Patagonia's 'good intentions' vs actual outcome, etc.), weaknesses, and adverse effects. At the same time, it showcases numerous 'green' and responsible ways of doing business, being a handy tool for increasing social, economic, and environmental awareness. In any case, *Sustainable Business* stimulates critical thinking. Therefore, I would broaden the target audience to include at least students of urban studies, spatial planning, and geography. Actually, this is a valuable textbook for anyone interested in sustainable business, regardless of whether they are involved in business and natural environment professionally or not. It might seem less captivating for non-professionals. However, if one aspires to become a more aware citizen, parent, businessperson or consumer, digesting Kopnina, Padfield and Mylan's publication is definitely worth the effort.

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