

# Sustainable business pathways and innovation activities in the context of large societal transformations

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## Summary

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*This PhD project focuses on sustainable business pathways and innovation activities in turbulent environment in the framework of a project "Just transition governance models and entrepreneurship pathways: monitoring and analyses" (01.01.2024–31.12.2028), work-package "Ida-Viru changing business models", which is funded by the European Just Trust Fund and is carried out in close cooperation between TalTech and University of Tartu in Estonia. The overall ambition of the Just Trust Fund research activities is to achieve a fundamental improvement of the Ida-Viru County region's economic, environmental, social, living and business conditions, and to develop a theoretically grounded framework for transition processes as well as methodology and model(s) for empirical monitoring of relevant aspects of transition. In the context of large societal transformations, namely transitioning to a climate-neutral economy, it is essential to restructure the economy of Ida-Virumaa and achieve sustainability, as well as to identify a new development trajectory. This represents a core theme of economic geography in the context of regional development (Sotarauta 2020). The changing economic environment, alongside new technologies (i.e., renewable energy solutions), influences governance, internal management models of businesses, their value propositions, supply chains, and the entrepreneurial ecosystem, as well as the daily lives of local people and communities. At the core of transitioning to a climate-neutral economic model is the identification and implementation of new business opportunities. This involves business model innovation which means creating and applying new business models, diversifying operations by adding additional models, adopting new models, or replacing an existing model with another (Geissdoerfer et al. 2018). It is influenced by micro (knowledge and skills, previous experiences, mindset and orientation, values), meso (networks, economic sector, finances, human capital, innovation culture, technology) and macro level (entrepreneurial ecosystem, geography, societal transformations) factors (ETC/WMGE Report 2/2021; Jacobsson & Bergek, 2011). The aim of the PhD project is to study with mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) found mainly in business research, the factors that influence sustainable business development pathways at micro, meso and macro levels, incl. business model innovation, its drivers and barriers, with the overall aim to develop a methodology for business model innovation analysis and typology of business model innovations to contribute to the sustainable transition of Ida-Viru County in Estonia. The consideration of comparative aspects, for example, with other Estonian and EU regions (preferably other just transition regions), is possible. The project addresses research questions as follows: What are the (sustainable) innovation-related activities Ida-Viru businesses have implemented and plan to implement (product and process innovation)? What are the drivers and barriers at various levels (knowledge, technology, financial resources, market and customers, supply chains, legislation, productivity, and R&D intensity, networks, etc) and how these have influenced the changes in Ida-Viru business models? Based on the innovation activities and their influencing factors identified in the study region, which business model innovation typology emerges as relevant and applicable in the context of big societal transformations?*

Research field:	Business
Supervisors:	Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Dieter Gerstlberger Dr. Merle Küttim
Availability:	This position is available.
Offered by:	School of Business and Governance Department of Business Administration
Application deadline:	Applications are accepted between January 01, 2025 00:00 and January 24, 2025 23:59 (Europe/Zurich)

## Description

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Main supervisor: Merle Küttim

Co-supervisor: Wolfgang Gerstlberger

### List of crucial references:

ETC/WMGE Report 2/2021: Business Models in a Circular Economy. <https://www.eionet.europa.eu/etcs/etc-wmge/products/etc-wmge-reports/business-models-in-acircular-economy>.

Geissdoerfer, M., Vladimirova, D., & Evans, S. (2018). Sustainable business model innovation: A review. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 198, 401-416.

Grillitsch, M., & Sotarauta, M. (2020). Trinity of change agency, regional development paths and opportunity spaces. *Progress in Human Geography*, 44(4), 704-723.

Jacobsson, S., & Bergek, A. (2011). Innovation system analyses and sustainability transitions: Contributions and suggestions for research. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 1(1), 41-57.

### **Responsibilities and (foreseen) tasks:**

- Compile and develop further an analytical framework for the planned mixed-method research, considering project aim and research questions as well as project's ongoing activities.
- Map possible cases of business model innovation and develop a sampling strategy for conducting qualitative and quantitative studies within the Ida-Viru context.
- Undertake their own and contribute to ongoing qualitative and quantitative data collection by conducting interviews and surveys among various stakeholders (businesses, local governments, associations and other umbrella organizations, educational institutions, etc.) as well as analyzing existing business statistics, e.g., Business Registry data, Community Innovation Survey data, Research and Development Survey data, Environmental Protection Expenditures of Enterprises Survey data, etc.
- Analyze innovation-related activities of Ida-Viru companies and their influencing factors with the overall aim of developing a typology of business model innovations.
- Develop proposals for practical business model innovation-related activities at company level and wider policy suggestions at region or country level.
- Participate in research and practitioner workshops where project findings are presented and discussed.
- Engage in small-scale teaching and supervision related to their field of expertise and actively participate in the department's activities.

### **The candidate is expected to have:**

- A master's degree in social sciences.
- A clear interest in the topic of the position.
- Excellent command of English.
- Command of Estonian and Russian is an asset for candidates.
- Strong and demonstrable writing and analytical skills.
- Proficiency in qualitative and quantitative research analysis (i.e., data collection, data handling, and performing uni- and multivariate statistical analysis).
- Capacity to work both as an independent researcher and as part of an international team.
- Capacity and willingness to assist in organizational tasks relevant to the project.

### **The following experience is beneficial:**

- Working knowledge of data analysis software, e.g., SPSS Statistics, Stata, R, Python, NVIVO, MAXQDA, Qualtrics, SurveyExact, or other similar software.

The candidate should submit an initial research plan for the topic, including the overall research and data collection strategy. The candidate can expand on the listed research questions and tasks and propose theoretical lenses to be used. The research plan will be developed further considering the project's aim and research questions as well as ongoing project activities once the candidate is admitted.

### **We offer:**

- A 4-year PhD position (employed as an Early-Stage Researcher at the Department of Business Administration) in a strong team of researchers.
- The chance to do high-level research in one of the most dynamic sustainability contexts globally.
- Opportunities for conference visits, research stays, and networking with leading universities and research centres in the fields of energy, environmental, and innovation studies.
- All PhD positions are guaranteed a gross income of at least €2,300 and Estonian national health insurance.

### **About the department:**



Tallinn University of Technology (TalTech) is an international scientific community with approximately 9,000 students and 2,000 employees; it is one of the largest universities in Estonia, the leading EU country in digitalisation. The university's strengths are broad multidisciplinary study/research interests, a modern research environment, and strong collaboration with international educational and research institutions. TalTech aims to be an organization leading the way to a sustainable digital future.

The research carried out at the Department of Business Administration in the School of Business and Governance at TalTech deals with various aspects of business – entrepreneurship, sustainability, knowledge and technology transfer, operations and strategic management, digitalisation, marketing, supply chain management, accounting, and performance management. The School has over 200 employees.

**Additional information:**

For further information, please contact Assistant Professor Merle Küttim at [merle.kuttim@taltech.ee](mailto:merle.kuttim@taltech.ee) and visit <https://taltech.ee/en/department-business-administration> and <https://taltech.ee/en/phd-admission>

TalTech has a green and one of Europe's most compact university campuses, including the Tehnopol Tallinn Science Park. Low hierarchy, academic freedom, and a balanced work and family life are valued at TalTech. The university provides individual development and training opportunities, material and non-material tokens of acknowledgement, sporting opportunities at TalTech Sports Club, and all-staff activities.

TalTech, as an employer, brings together representatives from a wide range of disciplines – engineers and economists, business and biotechnology, and data scientists – with a shared mission to develop Estonian higher education and research. Keywords that characterize TalTech today are rapid development, interdisciplinarity, and internationalisation. The university has an international working environment; the functional languages are English and Estonian.



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