



THE ROLE OF ECOPRENEURS IN DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

David Gibbs

University of Hull, UK.
Email: d.c.gibbs@hull.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with investigating the role of *ecopreneurs* - entrepreneurs developing businesses that are founded from the outset on an environmentally friendly basis and which seek to transform their particular business sectors, both socially and ethically. Ecopreneurs are seen as social activists who aspire to restructure the corporate culture in their sectors and develop proactive, ecologically oriented business strategies. In this view, entrepreneurship may be beneficial to environmentalism rather than opposed to it. Work on ecopreneurship focuses upon the key role of individuals in any shift towards more sustainable business practices. In attempts to explain the motivation and impacts of ecopreneurs, researchers have developed various typologies that explore the interplay between personal motivations and the influence of the economic and social structures within which they operate. While some researchers have argued that there needs to be congruence between personal ideals and this context for ecopreneurs to develop, others suggest that the tensions between these two may be a source of creative tension. However, a major shortcoming in current debates is that they are based on very little empirical evidence. We know little about the usefulness of existing typologies, nor how (or if) individuals or businesses shift between categories. Moreover, the emphasis on frequently charismatic and pioneering individuals neglects the multiple factors at work and the role of supporting infrastructures at the local and national scales. In this paper I develop a research agenda for future work on ecopreneurship. We need to know why, where and when individuals are able to exploit opportunities and the role of different external socio-economic contexts in encouraging or deterring ecopreneurship. We also need to examine whether ecopreneurial activity *does* represent a shift towards a new business paradigm of ecological modernisation or simply the exploitation of small-scale niche markets.