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# Law Clinics as a Tool for Sustainable Entrepreneurship

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## Abstract:

What legal challenges do sustainable new ventures face, and can Sustainable Entrepreneurship Law Clinics (SELC) address these barriers? Sustainable entrepreneurs confront unique legal and institutional challenges, including navigating complex regulations, limited access to tailored legal knowledge, and resource constraints. These challenges hinder their ability to create societal, ecological, and economic values. Existing literature on Law Clinics and Sustainable Entrepreneurship (SE) remains fragmented. This study bridges this gap by exploring the potential of SELCs to support sustainable entrepreneurs in overcoming barriers. Key references include Cohen & Winn (2007) on market imperfections, Hoogendoorn et al. (2019) on barriers in SE, and Giddings et al. (2010) on Law Clinics' societal impacts. This study introduces SELCs as a novel adaptation of traditional Law Clinics tailored to SE. It builds on existing frameworks by highlighting the interplay between legal systems and the entrepreneurial ecosystem, offering actionable insights into bridging academic and practical applications. This study conceptualizes SELCs, identifies the specific legal challenges sustainable ventures face, and evaluates how tailored legal support can enhance their viability. Independent variables include legal complexity and resource availability, with the dependent variable being the success of sustainable new ventures. The study employs a structured literature review, synthesizing insights from SE and Law Clinic research across global academic databases. The research adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating institutional theory and ecosystem perspectives with legal frameworks, to evaluate SELCs' role within entrepreneurial ecosystems. SELCs address critical legal and resource gaps for sustainable entrepreneurs, providing tailored support for compliance, resource optimization, and investor relations. They also facilitate access to justice and social innovation, emphasizing their potential as transformative tools. This paper advances the understanding of legal frameworks in SE, proposing SELCs as a bridge between legal education and sustainable business practices.

**Keywords:** sustainable entrepreneurship, sustainable entrepreneurship law clinics, law clinics, entrepreneurship ecosystem, sustainable entrepreneurship education

**JEL Classification:** Q56, K23

## 1. Introduction

Sustainable Entrepreneurship (SE) has been examined as one of the main drivers of bringing about sustainable transformations (Anand, Argade, Barkemeyer, & Salignac, 2021; Stubbs, Dahlmann, & Raven, 2022) and potentially the fourth industrial revolution (Cohen & Winn, 2007). By identifying and reacting to market failures and imperfections (Cohen & Winn, 2007; Dean & McMullen, 2007), Sustainable Entrepreneurs identify opportunities for entrepreneurial activities. Thereby, they devise unique ways of creating societal and ecological value alongside profitability (Cohen & Winn, 2007; Dean & McMullen, 2007). In contrast to commercial new ventures, sustainable new ventures face different challenges including institutional barriers, financing constraints, and legal structures (Hoogendoorn, van der Zwan, & Thurik, 2019).

While research on financing within SE has progressed significantly (Bertello, Battisti, Bernardi, & Bresciani, 2022; Calic & Mosakowski, 2016; Mansouri & Momtaz, 2022; Munoz & Cohen, 2018), the role of legal frameworks and support systems remains underexplored (Halder, 2019; Hoogendoorn et al., 2019). Even though the sustainable entrepreneurship literature frequently applies institutional theory (Bruton, Ahlstrom, & Li, 2010; Welter, 2011) and ecosystems perspectives (Audretsch, Belitski, Eichler, & Schwarz, 2023; Cao & Shi,

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2021), studies often focus on the macro-level (Goyal, Sergi, & Jaiswal, 2016; Haigh, Kennedy, & Walker, 2015; Nicholls, 2010). Micro-level legal support systems have not received adequate attention, despite their significant impact on sustainable new ventures (Fichter, Luedeke-Freund, Schaltegger, & Schillebeeckx, 2023). Sustainable new ventures often face legal hurdles ranging from navigating complex regulatory requirements and intellectual property protection to structuring their sustainable enterprises with sustainability principles (Fichter et al., 2023). Without tailored legal support, these challenges can hinder the growth and impact of sustainable ventures, limiting their ability to drive positive change.

The concept of law clinics, providing pro bono legal assistance to underserved communities, is well-established (Giddings, Burrige, Gavigan, & Klein, 2010; Hewitt & Yeatman, 2023; Wilson, 2009). Adapting this model, Sustainable Entrepreneurship Law Clinics (SELC) are specifically designed to meet the unique needs of Sustainable Entrepreneurs. However, the application of this concept within SE remains nascent. Hence, our research pursues the question: What are the legal challenges of sustainable new ventures and can the concept of SELC offer a solution?

Given the limited academic focus and empirical studies on SELCs, we address this question through a literature review that bridges the fields of law and management. First, we review key areas where sustainable entrepreneurs require legal support. In the next step, we introduce the concept of SELC and evaluate its potential to address these challenges and support sustainable new ventures.

Our study makes three key contributions to the field of SE. First, we shed light on the specific legal support needs of sustainable entrepreneurs, an area that has been largely overlooked despite its critical importance. Second, we introduce and conceptualize SELCs as a novel framework designed to address these unmet legal needs, thereby enabling sustainable new ventures to overcome common hurdles. Third, we explore how SELCs can bridge the gap between legal education and SE, offering a forward-looking approach that integrates practical legal support with the promotion of sustainable business practices. By addressing these dimensions, we provide actionable insights for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers while paving the way for future interdisciplinary research at the intersection of law and sustainability.

## 2. Methodology

Given the interdisciplinary nature of our research question, our methodology integrates literature from both SE and law clinics, reviewed separately before synthesizing insights. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between these fields.

### 2.1 Sustainable entrepreneurship literature

To analyse the literature on sustainable entrepreneurship on legal topics, we conducted searches on common databases such as Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar. We also consulted recent reviews of SE studies (for extensive reviews see (Anand et al., 2021; Bonfanti, Crescenzo, Simeoni, & Loza Adauí, 2024; Muñoz & Cohen, 2018)). While these reviews address a wide range of relevant themes within SE, our analysis narrows the focus to aspects related to ecosystems and institutional challenges that might necessitate legal support through law clinics.

### 2.2 Legal literature

For the legal literature, we conducted a structured review focusing on law clinics, particularly their external impacts, such as access to justice, knowledge transfer, and social innovation, with relevance to SELCs. Initial searches in German-language legal databases and journals yielded limited results, prompting an expansion to international databases (JSTOR, Westlaw, HeinOnline, and Google Scholar) and specialized journals such as the *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*. Additional keywords such as “sustainable” and “entrepreneurship” were included to refine the search.

## 3. Law-related Challenges in Sustainable Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship, particularly SE plays a key role in addressing the Grand Challenges of our time, including climate change, biodiversity loss and social injustices (George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihanyi, 2016; Stubbs, 2017; Waddock & McIntosh, 2011). As these challenges intensify, there is a growing demand for businesses to be accountable for their societal, economic, and ecological responsibilities (Elkington,

1997; Elkington & Robins, 1994). This accountability is most famously demanded and visualised through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), developed by the United Nations General Assembly to be reached by 2030 (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). After their declaration in 2015, the UN released a subsequent statement on the particular importance of Entrepreneurship in Society, Ecology and Economy (United Nations General Assembly, 2018). Research on SE further supports this view, suggesting SE leads in integrating sustainability while engaging both market and societal needs (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). As a result, SE has gained attention as a transformative force that can drive the next “industrial revolution” toward sustainability (Cohen & Winn, 2007).

The field of SE has been enriched through contributions ranging from political sciences to law and finance (Hall, Daneke, & Lenox, 2010). Partly due to these different disciplinary routes can the field of SE be split into four variants, distinguished through their goals, motivations and challenges (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011): social entrepreneurship, focused on social impact; ecopreneurship, addressing environmental challenges; institutional entrepreneurship, aiming to reshape regulations; and SE, which targets all three dimensions of the TBL. Despite their differences, these forms share a commitment to creating value beyond mere profit and thus align with the broader definition of SE.

Unlike conventional entrepreneurs, SEs encounter multiple challenges stemming from their need to balance economic, social, and environmental goals simultaneously (Goyal et al., 2016; Hoogendoorn et al., 2019). Haldar (Haldar, 2019) identifies resource barriers, financial barriers, legal support and knowledge barriers among the main challenges for SE. Our review outlines three principal barriers that SE faces due to their sustainability orientation that necessitate the need for highly specialised SELCs: (1) navigating uncertainty, (2) resource-constraints, (3) financial barriers that are exacerbated through their sustainability orientation and that require highly specialised legal advice.

### 3.1 Navigating uncertainty

Sustainable entrepreneurs face unique uncertainties due to the “liability of newness” and their nontraditional business models, which often challenge the existing market and institutional structure (Belz & Binder, 2017; Bocken, 2015; Fisher, Kotha, & Lahiri, 2016). Institutional theory helps explain these dynamics, highlighting how SEs operate within evolving institutional norms that now emphasize sustainable practices. These SE business models frequently diverge from standard frameworks in areas such as corporate law, intellectual property protections, and corporate sustainability (Audretsch et al., 2023; Cohen & Winn, 2007; Davidsson, 2015). Many SEs choose company forms that prioritize the common good—such as the U.S. Benefit Corporation, the British Community Interest Company, or the Spanish *Sociedades de Beneficio e Interés Común*—which demand familiarity with evolving and complex legal structures (Hemphill & Cullari, 2014; Riolfo, 2020; Segrestin, Hatchuel, & Levillain, 2021; Ventura, 2023). Research shows that sustainable new ventures face uncertainty concerning such legal structures and often switch during their lifetime (Haigh et al., 2015).

The rapidly evolving field of corporate sustainability law adds further complexity, with frameworks such as the EU taxonomy demanding compliance with new standards (Agyabeng-Mensah, Afum, Baah, & Essel, 2022; Benrath, 2023; Mehling, van Asselt, Kulovesi, & Morgera, 2020). Additionally, SEs often collaborate closely with established companies and institutions, which amplifies their need for legal guidance to manage cooperative relationships and protect intellectual property (Bertello et al., 2022; Ribeiro-Soriano & Pineiro-Chousa, 2021; Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). Though models like social franchising offer promising solutions (Bretas & Alon, 2021; Vickers & Lyon, 2014), SEs frequently lack the specialized legal knowledge required to implement them effectively.

We argue that sustainable entrepreneurs, facing both the liability of newness and complex regulatory environments, can benefit significantly from tailored legal support to navigate these sustainability-specific challenges.

### 3.2 Non-financial resource constraints

The literature on SE highlights that resource constraints are among the most significant obstacles for sustainable new ventures (Bonfanti et al., 2024; DiVito & Bohnsack, 2017). While entrepreneurs generally enjoy advantages of agility and flexibility, which can confer a competitive edge over established firms, they often operate with limited resources, such as time, skilled labour, and access to networks or specialized knowledge (Bertello et al., 2022; Goyal et al., 2016; Hoogendoorn et al., 2019; Pinkse & Groot, 2015). This chal-

lenge is particularly pronounced for sustainable entrepreneurs, who must navigate a system that is inherently more “complex, dispersed, global, uncertain, interdependent, and having long-term horizons” (Cohen & Winn, 2007).

For sustainable new ventures, impact assessments and sustainability certifications are especially resource-intensive, yet crucial as they enhance credibility and secure partnerships (Di Vaio, Hassan, Chhabra, Arigo, & Palladino, 2022; Fisher et al., 2016). Certification processes, however, are often complex and demand expertise that nascent SEs may lack, thus adding to their resource burden. Unlike conventional entrepreneurs, SEs must also navigate extensive public law requirements, including environmental and social regulations, often requiring interaction with public institutions. Complying with public law consumes additional resources that could otherwise support core business activities (Grimes, Gehman, & Cao, 2018). For example, public procurement laws may place sustainable new ventures at a disadvantage in accessing government contracts. Additionally, applying for subsidies can involve extensive paperwork, creating institutional barriers that add further pressure on limited resources (Hoogendoorn et al., 2019; Pinkse & Groot, 2015).

In sum, legal and regulatory compliance demands an extra layer of resources that conventional entrepreneurs typically do not face. Sustainable entrepreneurs therefore stand to benefit significantly from specialized legal knowledge and support to navigate these unique requirements and reduce the burden on their already constrained resources.

### 3.3 Financial constraints and investor preferences

Research indicates that sustainable entrepreneurs face significant challenges in regards to financial resources (Dixon-Fowler, Slater, Johnson, Ellstrand, & Romi, 2013; Mansouri & Momtaz, 2022; Muñoz & Cohen, 2018; Pacheco, Dean, & Payne, 2010; Pinkse & Groot, 2015). Their sustainability orientation often comes with added costs related to eco-friendly materials, certifications, and compliance measures, further intensifying financial pressure (Bertello et al., 2022). More importantly, SEs struggle with securing financing, as professional investors tend to favour commercial over social or sustainable ventures (Calic & Mosakowski, 2016). This investor preference contributes to a financing gap for SEs, as they often struggle to find investors who align with their long-term, impact-driven goals (Mansouri & Momtaz, 2022). Establishing a robust legal framework is essential to bolster investor trust by demonstrating adherence to regulatory standards and ensuring transparency in operations (Clarkin & L. Cangioni, 2016). Although impact investing is gradually gaining traction (Bocken, 2015), traditional investment metrics have yet to adapt meaningfully to the unique priorities of sustainable businesses.

However, SEs are often cautious about accepting external investments due to concerns about maintaining mission integrity. In response, crowdfunding has emerged as a viable alternative, providing SEs not only with capital but also a means of building community support and remaining independent of external investors (Belleflamme, Lambert, & Schwienbacher, 2014; Calic & Mosakowski, 2016; Moss, Renko, Block, & Meyskens, 2018). Another alternative is government venture capital (Bertoni & Tykvova, 2015). Legal advice and best-practice models could support SEs in structuring financing agreements that protect their sustainability goals while allowing them to attract necessary funds. Guidance on navigating the impact investment landscape could also reduce uncertainty and help SEs identify investors aligned with their long-term vision.

Given these challenges, tailored legal advice could help sustainable new ventures structure financing agreements that protect their sustainable objectives while allowing them to secure the resources needed to scale. Legal guidance could also reduce the uncertainty associated with financing, helping new ventures to identify investors who align with their vision and supporting them in navigating complex financing options.

## 4. Law Clinics as a Solution

In reviewing the literature on Sustainable Entrepreneurship, we have found that sustainable new ventures encounter a variety of challenges, especially from a legal perspective. A powerful tool that has emerged to provide accessible legal support is the concept of law clinics. These law clinics are student-led initiatives that provide legal counselling free of charge. Law clinics are usually located at universities, where they supplement the traditional legal curriculum. The establishment of law clinics around the world follows a similar pattern: first, a law clinic is set up on the initiative of committed students and practitioners, which is later institutionalized at universities and integrated into the training (Giddings et al., 2010). SELCs are law clinics

specialised in legal issues regarding social and environmental sustainability. This tailored counselling framework is well-suited to the challenges faced by Sustainable Entrepreneurs. SELC provide individualised legal advice, particularly addressing topics of societal interest and targeting structurally disadvantaged groups.

Despite a variety of approaches, including the training of laypersons, most regular law clinics converge in primarily providing individual legal advice (Bloch & Noone, 2010). This arrangement allows students to gain practical experience while the clients receive legal advice that they might otherwise be unable to afford. In the context of SELC, this approach offers tailored legal solutions and counsel to sustainable new ventures where standardized solutions may be lacking.

Moreover, the concept of law clinics, often referred to as Clinical Legal Education (CLE), applies particularly to topics of broader societal interest. Originating in the US and gaining prominence during the civil rights movement, CLE has historically been associated with social justice movements (Milstein, 2001). Law clinics usually specialise in a specific field of activity, in the early phase in the USA, for example, in poverty law, civil rights, women's rights, consumer rights and environmental protection (Giddings et al., 2010). This specialization renders SELCs particularly well-suited for new ventures addressing pressing issues such as climate change and social injustices.

Despite the diverse designs of law clinics, a consistent feature is that CLE specifically target disadvantaged community groups, often due to deficiencies in available legal counsel. This can be attributed to mainly two factors: Firstly, there is a particular need for advice among the respective target group of a law clinic. Causes include structural disadvantages due to the legal system or other circumstances (typically on civil rights issues). Secondly, a material constraint contributes to this gap, as the citizens concerned are denied access to legal remedies due to financial constraints (Wilson, 2009). Applied to the concept of SELC, the target group comprises sustainable entrepreneurs, who face structural disadvantages within the legal system and are more susceptible to financial constraints than conventional entrepreneurs.

It is reasonable to posit that the law clinic concept is a suitable tool for addressing the challenges of sustainable new ventures, particularly through SELCs tailored to Sustainable Entrepreneurs.

#### 4.1 Literature review of law clinics

To validate our assumptions regarding the compatibility between SELC and SE, a second literature review was conducted on the effects of law clinics. Given the scarcity of research on SELC, we shifted our focus to the more general concept of law clinics and their benefits for target groups receiving advice. This review also extends to entrepreneurial law clinics, which share conceptual similarities with SELCs.

When examining the positive effects of law clinics, a fundamental distinction must be made between internal and external benefits. Internal benefits refer to advantages experienced by the law students, the legal profession, or the university, while external benefits primarily focus on the target groups receiving advice. The existing literature often emphasizes internal benefits and views the external added value as implicit (Mkwebu, 2020; Nicolson, 2016). However, a more detailed examination of the specific external benefits provided by law clinics is essential to validate and expand upon these assumptions.

##### 4.1.1 External impact of law clinics in general

The main benefit associated with law clinics is that they provide "access to justice" for their target groups (Bloch, 2010; Mkwebu, 2020; Nicolson, 2016; Wizner & Aiken, 2004). This primarily refers to the opportunity for citizens to protect their rights and hold others accountable (Balmer, 2015). In this context, access to justice can be understood as equivalent to access to the resources necessary to navigate legal challenges that might otherwise be beyond one's reach. For individuals facing social and financial vulnerability, this access to resources is particularly crucial, as it helps overcome barriers that would otherwise prevent them from fully exercising their rights. The more vulnerable individuals become, the less likely they are to access these resources without support (Drummond & McKeever, 2015; McKeown, Stege, & Tomoszek, 2023). Therefore, law clinics not only provide legal counsel but also help vulnerable individuals secure the resources needed to navigate the legal system and assert their rights.

The main starting points for dealing with these disadvantages are financial support and state contact points (Drummond & McKeever, 2015). However, there is space for innovative concepts such as CLE. The extent to which a CLE can contribute to social justice remains controversial as does the debate over whether this



is its task at all (Collard & Deeming, 2011). Nevertheless, law clinics offer more than legal advice—they facilitate access to essential resources for navigating the justice system, thus supporting individuals in overcoming their vulnerabilities.

Despite practical evidence and the popularity of law clinics and their assumed “access to justice”, little empirical research exists. Various studies have surveyed law clinics in different countries in different areas - mainly with an organizational focus, but one circumstance, in particular, can be an indicator of the effect of “access to justice”: the multiple institutional links between law clinics and instances of the welfare state (Drummond & McKeever, 2015; Herker, 2019). For example, more than half of the refugee law clinics in Germany cooperate with charities and other refugee aid organizations. In some cases, these organizations have been assigned tasks by the state in advising refugees (Looock & Greilich, 2023). While more precise data is lacking, the presence of these collaborations indicates a clear connection between law clinics and access to resources, such as housing, social support, and legal guidance.

There are also individual local investigations based on case studies. One example is the enforcement of the rights of crime victims in Maryland and South Carolina. Following the establishment of law clinics in this area, the number of court cases in these states increased (Davis, Anderson, Howley, Dorris, & Whitman, 2012). However, it is noteworthy that under similar conditions, the number of cases in Utah decreased during the same period (Davis et al., 2012). Furthermore, the correlation between this trend and regulatory changes, specific events, or jurisdictional alterations remains unclear. In addition, a mere increase in the number of cases does not mean that those affected have been fully granted their rights; however, it does provide some indication.

Similarly to enhancing access to the justice system, law clinics are often assumed to facilitate the transfer of legal knowledge from the university to external legal laypersons. Even though the receivers of advice may have used the counsel from CLE, it is simply assumed in many places, lacking qualitative and quantitative research approaches (McKeown et al., 2023; Nicolson, 2016). This deficiency extends to case-related studies and other indicators.

In addition, CLE is attributed with the potential to generate legal and social innovations. For instance, a law clinic practicing “rebellious lawyering” is intended to challenge existing legal frameworks for greater ecological sustainability and thus contribute to the socio-ecological end (Owen, 2020). This approach also remains largely theoretical. However, concerning environmental sustainability, individual successes have been noted in larger projects. For example, the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic used various tactics to prevent the construction of a chemical plant, albeit resulting in subsequent restrictions on law clinics’ activities in that state (Toffolon-Weiss & Roberts, 2004). This further reinforces the idea that law clinics not only provide legal advice but also facilitate access to resources that enable individuals and communities to challenge and address significant societal issues.

Overall, the literature mainly identifies three external effects of CLE: access to justice, the transfer of legal knowledge, and innovation potential. Yet, qualitative or quantitative research, especially regarding the target groups receiving advice, is lacking. However, from individual studies and descriptions of specific cases, certain indicators of effectiveness can be inferred. It is evident that a legally advised layperson fares better than an unadvised one, with a potential variety of social effects. Access to justice through law clinics can be understood as equivalent to access to the resources necessary to navigate legal challenges that might otherwise be unattainable.

#### 4.1.2 External impact entrepreneurial law clinics

A large number of law clinics operate in “social” areas (Bloch & Noone, 2010). Initially, the clinical education movement was designed with a primary focus on social justice, but this concept has since proliferated into other areas of law. This proliferation has drawn criticism, particularly regarding the concern that the original purpose of the social justice purpose of the clinical education movement is being lost (Gregersen, 2023). One such expansion of entrepreneurial law clinics is of particular importance for this study. These law clinics usually advise small and medium-sized enterprises and new venture founders, earning them the unofficial title “start-up law clinics”. These clinics are crucial for navigating the uncertainties faced by emerging businesses. Entrepreneurs, especially those in the early stages of developing a new venture, encounter significant legal and operational challenges. By providing legal advice, these clinics help entrepreneurs address potential legal risks, ensuring that they can better manage the inherent uncertainties of building a business.

The literature on this area also emphasizes the internal benefits, particularly for students. For instance, studies posit that advising new ventures transfers an entrepreneurial mindset to students (Platts-Mills & Wapples, 2023). Similarly, law tech clinics are expected to impart a technology mindset (Weinberg & Hyams, 2023). However, there is limited investigation into whether and to what extent the benefits derived from advice in entrepreneurial law clinics extend to the “entrepreneurial community” itself. Evidence indicates a significant demand for legal advice among micro-enterprises in the UK, suggesting that these clinics fulfil an important role in supporting entrepreneurial ventures through uncertain times (Platts-Mills & Wapples, 2023).

The verifiability of the external impact of advice provided by Entrepreneurial Law Clinics remains limited to individual cases. For example, the Social Enterprise & Economic Empowerment Clinic at UC Hastings College of the Law successfully advised a housing cooperative for agricultural workers in the case of the fair allocation of drinking water in an area characterized by extensive agriculture (Ball, 2017). This case illustrates how entrepreneurial law clinics can help navigate both social and legal uncertainties, providing critical support in navigating the legal challenges faced by social enterprises, as well as fostering broader social equity.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Our literature reviews on SE and Law Clinics shows that SELCs can play a crucial role in addressing the many challenges faced by sustainable entrepreneurs. These legal-related challenges include navigating uncertainty, resource-constraints and financial barriers. SELCs as a micro-level solution can significantly reduce the risks associated with these challenges, thereby allowing entrepreneurs to focus on their core mission of sustainability.

One of the key challenges, navigating uncertainty, is particularly pronounced for sustainable new ventures that aim to adopt innovative business models or integrate their sustainability goals into their communication and structure (Belz & Binder, 2017; Bocken, 2015; Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). Their environments are highly volatile with sustainability regulations unclear or changing. SELCs can assist in overcoming these hurdles by providing specialized legal guidance. This can ensure compliance with sustainability standards, obtaining sustainability certifications or integrating a suitable legal framework.

Second, sustainable entrepreneurs often face significant resource constraints, particularly in terms of time, skilled labour, and legal expertise (Bertello et al., 2022; Bonfanti et al., 2024; DiVito & Bohnsack, 2017; Pinkse & Groot, 2015). Many sustainable new ventures do not have the resources to hire full-time legal counsel or sustainability experts. SELCs can help save these resources by offering tailored legal counsel at little to no cost, allowing entrepreneurs to focus on their core business activities while ensuring compliance with complex legal requirements. Thus, SELCs can ensure that entrepreneurs concentrate their critical resources and attention on key activities such as scaling and funding. Future avenues for research at this intersection could focus on the specific resources required by sustainable new ventures and on whether SELCs can offer expertise in the demanded areas. Furthermore, it would be valuable to investigate whether such constraints and challenges apply to specific forms of SE (e.g., institutional or social) more than others.

Finally, financial barriers are a major challenge for SEs, as their sustainability-focused ventures often struggle to attract investment. Our literature review on law clinics was only able to provide limited evidence for SELC’s role in alleviating these challenges by appealing to impact investors (Clarkin & L. Cangioni, 2016; Fichter et al., 2023). Especially in this area, empirical insights on SELC’s role in structuring financial agreements and integrating new ventures’ sustainability mission into their legal documents would be valuable.

In sum, SELCs offer a vital service by helping sustainable entrepreneurs reduce legal risks, conserve resources, and secure financing, all while staying true to their social and environmental missions. Our research advances the field of sustainable entrepreneurship and points to the need to specifically study legal factors and ecosystems in addition to institutional contexts and ecosystems. Further studies should seek to address the intersection of SELCs and SE empirically by, for instance, studying the specific sustainability topics advised on by the SELCs, or whether the target group was successful in their area of consultation. Furthermore, for SELCs to substantively contribute to both clinical legal education and sustainable entrepreneurship literature, it is essential to articulate how they can enrich theoretical frameworks in these fields. Although SELCs can foster knowledge transfer, access to justice, and social innovation within SE ecosystems, a more explicit connection between these contributions and existing theories is needed to clarify their broader relevance. For instance, studies could focus on mapping SELCs in entrepreneurial ecosystems. By linking the operational impact of SELCs to frameworks within institutional theory or entrepreneurial ecosystems, we can better understand how SELCs might reshape traditional approaches to clinical legal ed-

ucation, while also addressing sustainability goals in entrepreneurship. Explicitly discussing these theoretical intersections can help illuminate SELCs' dual role as both practical support mechanisms and academic contributions to these fields.

Lastly, we deem it essential to address not only the potential benefits of SELCs but also the practical challenges they may face in diverse contexts. While SELCs present an innovative solution to the unique legal and regulatory barriers sustainable entrepreneurs encounter, the real-world implementation of such clinics requires a careful examination of potential constraints, such as funding limitations, scalability, and adaptation to varying legal systems or cultural expectations. For SELCs to be effective, these factors must be anticipated, as differences in legal structures or resources across regions may impact their ability to provide consistent and meaningful support. Recognizing these challenges could help policymakers and law schools proactively tailor SELC models to maximize their impact across varied entrepreneurial ecosystems.

### 5.1 Limitations and future research

Our study faces several limitations that must be acknowledged. First and foremost, there is a lack of empirical research on SELCs, as this concept is still in its early stages. While SELCs are slowly gaining momentum, with the first such clinic recently established in Passau, there remains a significant gap in empirical data. To address this, we plan to empirically test our assumptions by conducting case studies of firms that have consulted SELCs, focusing on their areas of consultancy and the outcomes related to their sustainability goals and business success.

Another limitation is the underdevelopment of interdisciplinary approaches within many areas of management studies, particularly regarding the intersection of law and entrepreneurship. The literature at the convergence of these fields is still in its infancy, and this paper seeks to contribute to its expansion. Furthermore, the broader concept of law clinics—especially those focused on entrepreneurship and sustainability—has been understudied. This limited body of research makes it challenging to draw firm conclusions or generalize the findings, as many aspects of SELCs and their impact remain speculative.

## Conclusion

SELCs potentially provide a vital service to sustainable entrepreneurs by reducing legal risks, conserving resources, and securing financing. These clinics help entrepreneurs address the uncertainties inherent in starting and growing a sustainability focused business while providing access to resources that allow them to stay true to their mission. However, for SELCs to be fully effective, they must be adapted to the unique challenges of different legal and cultural contexts, and adequate funding and scalability must be ensured to meet growing demand.

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