

## **Marie Curie Innovation 4 Sustainability Mark II bid**

**Workshop Proposal to the ABIS Knowledge Into Action Forum & Annual General Assembly,**

**19 May 2016, Brussels**

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### **1.0 Building on a strong foundation of success and learning – the I4S network**

This proposal benefits from 4 years learning by the partners of the FP7 ‘Innovation 4 Sustainability’ (I4S) Marie Curie Training network co-ordinated by ABIS (I4S see <http://www.abis-global.org/projects/i4s>). I4S is in its fourth and final year. The focus of attention in our final year is to ensure the lessons from I4S are captured and disseminated, and that these lessons feed into subsequent bids.

In a sense, I4S provides ‘proof of concept’ of an exemplary Maria Sklodowska-Curie (MSC) Initial Training Network (ITN) for Early Stage Researchers, forming doctoral graduates readied for a range of research and professional careers in the academic, public and private sector.

I4S also provides a spring-board for a follow-up ‘Mark II’ bid which takes the lessons into a new or more targeted topical and important research area. We are proposing that this new research area be ‘Circular Economy’ connecting to a priority research area of the European Commission under H2020.

The workshop will be in two parts. Part 1 will ‘look back’ at the success factors and lessons learnt from I4S whilst Part 2 will look forwards, proposing a sketch of a new grant proposal, for which we seek new partners and collaborations

**Part 1** of the workshop will cover:

- Critical criteria for successful MSC ITNs – what are they about and what do they aim to achieve?
- History and context of the I4S network
- Key features and demonstrable success of the I4S network and demonstrable expertise of the I4S partner business schools combining both ESR/Doctoral Training and frontier research at the interface of sustainability and innovation.

**Part 2** of the workshop will sketch a new grant proposal which will need to:

- Involve academic partners closely engaged with practitioner partners (eg the successful I4S was structured around university/practitioner ‘couplets’)
- Address a pressing /original research need
- Combine research with Early Stage Researcher (PhD) Training demonstrating the academic partners state of the art knowledge and practice in ESR and Doctoral Training in Europe.

### **3.0 The proposal : ‘Perspectives and practices of Circular Economy’**

There are a number of foci and features we could take to anchor the proposal. A first might be to investigate and practically engage in the development of Circular Economy in the urban context, creating a bid around linked-cities, and facilitating learning and knowledge exchange across the cities of the network partners. A second would follow I4S by prioritising deep engagement with research with/for society mobilising multiple research methods such as action research and deliberative/participative approaches. A third would recognise that Circular Economy sits at the interface of a number of disciplines and pro-actively build inter-disciplinarity into the project (management studies, engineering, sociology, economics). A fourth would enrol and learn from global and diverse perspectives, by building international visitorships and speakers into the programme of ESR training events.

The research programme of the submission will need to demonstrate that it sits at the leading-edge of research in the field of CE, further that it does not shy from engaging difficult questions and intellectual debate and actively facilitate knowledge exchange and learning (between academic and practitioner partners, and across regions of the world) at and beyond the frontier of the State of the Art in the academic, practitioner and policy literature on CE.

The research programme would combine conceptual, empirical and thought-leadership dimensions:

#### **3.1 Conceptual review and avenues for conceptual advances**

- **Conceptual continuities** : Rhetorically, to what extent is CE a re-labelling of old concepts and how have previous cognate concepts contributed or not to the development of CE (eg dematerialisation, cradle to cradle, , closed-loops, food from waste; specifically locally bounded - industrial symbiosis, industrial eco-parks, - ) – What are the foundations of each concept, how do they differ, and what do they mean for CE?
- **‘Absences’ in conceptual framings – challenging received wisdoms** : the theoretical assumptions, frameworks and normative ideals/world-views that underpin CE – why? and does it matter? (industrial ecology as a relatively new discipline at the intersection of Engineering and Economics carry’s into it the ontological and normative preferences of both – efficiency measured in close systems. Absences ideas that can be illuminating from other disciplines in particular eg from sociology -> sociology of practice, institutionalisation processes and how things get locked-in and isomorphic, role of agency eg institutional entrepreneurs in change processes, -> from innovation studies - attention to dynamics and transformation rather than equilibrium and stasis, attention to open systems rather than closed systems.... . Here the project proposers have a particular track-record in developing methodologies appropriate to the study of emergence and processual approaches: how new business models emerge and unfold for example.
- **Remedying received wisdoms – the difference it makes**  
The project will centralise discussions of scale/system boundaries and the difference it makes (global, EU, nations, sub-national regions), covering both temporal (eg the short-termism of the finance industry) and spatial scale.

### **3.2 Empirical research – some possibilities for empirical projects.**

- ***New Business Models and Innovation for CE.*** (the focus of individual practitioner projects, or practitioner multi-stakeholder platforms with an interest eg WBCSD are on I4S and may like to continue.) . Franks papers. Methods – case studies? Action research?
- ***‘Comparative locals’*** – a series of case studies using a common methodology (LCA? + social and institutional perspectives). Eg Cape Town have expressed interest in local food systems governance & social enterprises. Perhaps compare with a case in a region of Europe? Previous literature on this shows the importance of local networks (Kalundborg – iconic project but it was driven by a small elite network in the city – the municipality, energy, hospital etc). methods – systems approach. (closed/open/complex systems approaches – what difference does it make?). Materials flows + social and institutional analysis.
- ***Comparing across scale*** – Scale-shifting and the difference it makes. local/national/ global including implications for trans-national corporations (Randles, Scale, TNCs and Industrial Ecology paper). Methods – needs some comparative quant modelling? To highlight analytical problems? Shift scales and see what difference it makes? Cases based on products inc sending electronic waste to developing countries where standards are lower. (but this is already established in the literature?)
- ***Durability, consumption and the difference it makes*** (product focus, eh mobile phones V household boilers).
- ***.... Suggestions from the workshop***

### **3.3 Intellectual, Policy, and thought-leadership contribution**

***Abstracting from empirical work programme and case studies to critically re-connect and address the political-economy of CE, writ-large,***

- Is CE old neo-liberalism in new clothes? Eco-modernisation, (critique – the sum of CE business models does not add up to circular economy).
- Varieties of capitalism – what institutional conditions and regulatory instruments would potentially take us nearer to an abstract de-materialisation ideal? Niche models co-existing or connecting *into* the global economy and co-existing outside of it? Role of standards and new labels (eg extending labels which govern the conditions of production eg Fair Trade)

### **4.0 Some ideas for consortium composition and partners**

- ***I4S network*** (interest already shown from ABIS, Manchester, Exeter, Nyenrode, Univ Cape Town) – others? Luneburg on New Business Models?
- ***New academic partners*** with specific expertise and track-record in CE? (connecting new areas eg bringing consumption into CE – Finnish contact?).
- ***Mobilising an International network of expert speakers and examples of CE,*** drawing on experiences from USA, Latin America, S Africa, SE Asia
- ***Practitioners – businesses, multi-stakeholder platforms (ABIS members)***