

## Position Description

### 1. General Information

Name of the position	<b>Meta-organizing SME's for positive impact</b>
Foreseen enrolment date	September 2025
Position is funded by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COFUND, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), Horizon Europe, European Union</li> <li>• LUT University</li> <li>• RMIT University</li> </ul>
Research Host	LUT University
PhD awarding institutions	LUT University & RMIT University
Locations	Primary: Lappeenranta, Finland Secondary: Melbourne, Australia
Salary	32,600 EUR annual <b>gross</b> salary (2,716 EUR monthly gross salary)
Supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Henri Hakala, Professor, LUT University</li> <li>• Sanne Bor, Post Doctoral Researcher, LUT University</li> <li>• Anne-Laure Mention, Professor, RMIT University &amp; Assoc. Professor, Lena Wang, RMIT University</li> </ul>
Group of discipline	Business & Management / Entrepreneurship

### 2. Research topics (only one of these projects will be funded)

#### Project 1: *What do SMEs do to create a positive impact on their stakeholders and the environment?*

This thesis topic explores the strategies that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) use to create positive impacts on their stakeholders and the environment, particularly through sustainable innovations. As key drivers of innovation, SMEs are often at the forefront of developing new solutions for sustainability transitions within industries. However, despite the potential of these ideas, SMEs face the challenge of convincing consumers and b-to-b customer companies – often established companies to adopt their sustainable innovations. This research will examine the specific actions SMEs take to promote these innovations, analysing the factors that contribute to their success or failure in gaining market acceptance. Specifically, the study will focus on the role of meta-organizations—industry-wide associations or networks—in this process. Meta-organizations may provide crucial support to SMEs by helping to legitimize their innovations, facilitating industry acceptance, and translating sustainability goals into achievable standards. This research aims to uncover the dynamics of how SMEs, with the assistance of meta-organizations, can overcome resistance and contribute to a more sustainable industrial landscape.



**Supervisors:** Henri Hakala (LUT) & Sanne Bor (LUT)

**Research Fields:** Management, Sustainable Innovations

### **Project 2: *The positive impact of meta-organizations on increasing sustainability of SMEs***

This thesis topic suggests investigation of the potential of meta-organizations to drive sustainability among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Meta-organizations, which represent groups of companies within an industry, are often seen as key players in promoting sustainable practices. They can be especially beneficial for smaller or resource-limited companies, like SMEs, by providing support that these companies may lack on their own. For instance, meta-organizations might interpret complex regulations into straightforward, actionable guidelines or offer training on sustainable practices. These organizations help SMEs navigate environmental expectations and secure their standing within the industry. However, there is limited research on whether and how these meta-organizations effectively influence the sustainability practices of their members. This study will examine the specific ways meta-organizations encourage SMEs to adopt sustainability measures, assess the impact of these efforts on reducing environmental impacts, and explore how meta-organizations can become more effective in supporting a sustainable transformation across industries. The research aims to fill a gap in understanding the role of meta-organizations in fostering meaningful, lasting sustainability in SMEs.

**Supervisors:** Henri Hakala (LUT) & Sanne Bor (LUT)

**Research Fields:** Meta-organizations, Sustainable Transformation.

### **Project 3: *The dark side of meta-organizations: How SMEs try to avoid change toward a sustainable future***

This topic could explore the challenges and resistance that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) might display toward transitioning to more sustainable practices, especially when their innovations do not align with sustainability goals. This research will focus on the "dark side" of meta-organizations—umbrella groups or alliances that represent multiple companies or industries—and how these entities can sometimes lobby against rather than promote sustainable change. SMEs with innovations that are not environmentally or socially sustainable often still seek legitimacy and market acceptance. They may do this by leveraging the influence of meta-organizations to downplay sustainability issues or to resist industry pressures for greener practices. This study aims to investigate the strategies these SMEs use to avoid or delay sustainability-driven changes, the tactics involved, and how meta-organizations facilitate this resistance. The research will contribute to understanding the complex role of meta-organizations in balancing economic interests with sustainability objectives, and it will shed light on the barriers to a more sustainable future posed by influential industry networks that might resist change.

**Supervisors:** Henri Hakala (LUT) & Sanne Bor (LUT)

**Research Fields:** Sustainability, Meta-organisations



### 3. Employment Benefits and Conditions

LUT University offers a 48-month full time work contract (12-month term, extended for 36 months provided that the studies progress satisfactorily). There is a probation period of 6 months and the annual workload for researchers is 1,612 hours / year.

The remuneration, in line with the European Commission rules for Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant holders, and in line with the General collective agreement for Finnish universities, will consist of a **gross annual salary** of est. 32,600 EUR (excl. holiday bonus) with salary increases up to 44,700 EUR as the studies proceed. Of this amount, the estimated first year **net salary**\* to be perceived by the researcher is est. 2,080 EUR per month. However, the definite amount to be received is subject to national tax legislation.

For more information on Finnish taxation visit here [https://www.vero.fi/en/individuals/tax-cards-and-tax-returns/tax\\_card/tax-percentage-calculator/](https://www.vero.fi/en/individuals/tax-cards-and-tax-returns/tax_card/tax-percentage-calculator/).

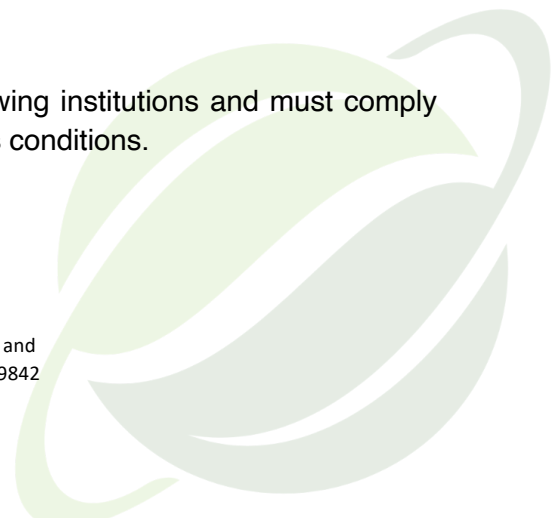
*\*Net salaries can fluctuate in accordance with an individual's personal circumstances (marital status, age, disability, family and dependents, etc. The above indicative net salaries offer an approximation of what a single person in their early 20s could expect to receive in their bank account after taxes.)*

#### Benefits include

- Becoming a Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow and be invited to join the Marie Curie Alumni Association
- Access to all the necessary facilities at LUT University and RMIT University
- Tuition fees exemption at both PhD awarding institutions
- Travel allowance to cover flights and accommodation for participating in DREAM+PLAN events
- Up to 12 months in Australia
- Occupational health care
- Paid sick leave for a limited period
- Holiday bonus
- 6 weeks paid holiday + Finnish public holidays (all together about 8 weeks).
- Social security coverage

### 4. PhD enrolment

Successful candidates for this position will be enrolled by the following institutions and must comply with their specific entry requirements, in addition to DREAM+PLAN's conditions.



## LUT University

To enrol in a Doctorate program, you must meet the general conditions, namely:

- a relevant Master's degree awarded by a university
- a relevant Master's degree awarded by a university of applied sciences; or
- a relevant applicable study programme abroad which in the awarding country gives eligibility for the corresponding level of higher education.

### International degrees:

- The degree has to be an official or recognised degree in its country of origin.
- As a rule, at least four-year education is required including a Master's thesis or corresponding final thesis.
- In all cases the doctoral programme in question considers case by case whether degrees earned abroad provide a sufficient foundation for postgraduate studies at LUT University.
- The precondition for the recognition of European degrees is that the degree is a university degree combination earned in accordance with the Bologna Process principles (3+2 years). The applicant is required to submit information in English (for example a Diploma Supplement) on the scope and the level of the degree/s obtained abroad when applying to LUT.
- If you apply for the right to study for a doctoral degree with an international degree please contact LUT Doctoral School for additional instructions before submitting study right application documents.
- **Economics and Business Administration:** One-year (60 ECTS credits) MBA-degrees do not generally qualify for doctoral studies. Candidates with an MBA-degree and their eligibility to apply will be considered case-by-case.

More information: <https://www.lut.fi/en/research/doctoral-school>

## RMIT University

Visit the website: <https://www.rmit.edu.au/research/research-degrees/how-to-apply>



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