

Position Description

1. General Information

Name of the position	Sustainable Entrepreneurship Ecosystems
Foreseen enrolment date	September 2025
Position is funded by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COFUND, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), Horizon Europe, European Union • TalTech • RMIT University
Research Host	TalTech
PhD awarding institutions	TalTech & RMIT University
Locations	<p>Primary: Tallinn, Estonia</p> <p>Secondary: Melbourne, Australia</p>
Salary	32,400 EUR annual gross salary (2,700 EUR monthly gross salary)
Supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aki Harima, Assoc. Professor, TalTech • Merle Küttim, Assistant Professor, TalTech • Alemayehu Molla, Professor, RMIT University • Ashenafi Biru, Senior Lecturer, RMIT University
Group of discipline	Sustainable entrepreneurship, Innovative business models

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

Project 1: *Unpacking the role of digital platforms in the global interconnectedness of sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems*

The concept of sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems has recently gained prominence, emphasizing the need to cultivate ecosystems tailored to the requirements of sustainable entrepreneurs. These ecosystems are defined as interconnected networks of stakeholders within a regional entrepreneurial environment that actively foster engagement in sustainable entrepreneurship, contributing to sustainability transitions at the regional level (Cohen, 2006; Bischoff, 2021). Recent studies have largely focused on understanding the unique characteristics of sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems (Grigore & Dragan, 2020) and identifying their essential components and key actors (Tiba, van Rijnsoever, & Hekkert, 2020). While these studies have established sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems as a distinct research domain, they frequently limit their analysis to geographical boundaries. However, prior research highlights that entrepreneurs and ecosystem stakeholders increasingly interact with global actors via digital platforms, which serve as critical enablers of cross-boundary collaboration and resource access.

This geographically confined perspective presents a significant limitation in current research, as it overlooks the role of digital platforms in connecting local actors to global networks. These platforms facilitate knowledge exchange, resource mobilization, and partnership formation that transcend regional boundaries. Consequently,



focusing solely on local dynamics fails to capture the interplay between local and global dimensions that shape sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems. To fully understand the evolutionary mechanisms of these ecosystems, it is essential to explore both local and global dynamics, with particular attention to the role of digital platforms as mediators of interaction and innovation. While prior studies have predominantly examined local mechanisms, addressing the global dimensions of success and their integration through digital platforms is increasingly crucial for advancing this field.

Supervisors: Aki Harima (TalTech), Merle Küttim (TalTech), Alemayehu Molla (RMIT), Ashenafi Biru (RMIT)

Research Fields: Digital Platforms, Entrepreneurial Ecosystems, Sustainability

Project 2: Examination of the Inclusiveness of Digital Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

Digital entrepreneurial ecosystems are increasingly pivotal in supporting sustainable entrepreneurs addressing global challenges like climate change and inequality. These ecosystems, enabled by digital platforms, connect entrepreneurs, investors, and intermediaries, creating virtual networks that transcend geographical constraints. Impact investment plays a vital role within these ecosystems, bridging funding gaps for entrepreneurs with unconventional models or perceived risks (Hoogendoorn et al., 2019). By leveraging digital tools, impact investors provide not only capital but also risk mitigation and strategic guidance, empowering entrepreneurs to scale solutions and expand globally.

Unlike traditional investors, impact investors in digital ecosystems emphasize long-term strategies aligned with sustainable entrepreneurship. They prioritize measurable social and environmental outcomes through frameworks like IRIS+ and B Impact Assessment, ensuring transparency and accountability. Digital platforms enhance these processes by enabling real-time impact tracking, co-innovation, and collaboration, fostering systemic change aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Regional policymakers are now fostering digital impact investment ecosystems that integrate stakeholders, tools, and financial instruments such as green bonds. Digital platforms streamline capital allocation, facilitate transparent impact measurement, and support scalable solutions to pressing issues like poverty and climate change. However, this reliance on measurable outcomes can unintentionally marginalize vulnerable groups. Standardized frameworks often overlook initiatives addressing intangible needs, such as cultural preservation or mental health, while pressure to demonstrate quick results may encourage "impact washing," exaggerating benefits or avoiding meaningful, high-risk ventures.

This study explores the "dark side" of digital impact investment ecosystems, highlighting how dominant metrics and digitalization dynamics risk excluding certain sustainable entrepreneurs. By examining these mechanisms, the research aims to uncover how these ecosystems can evolve to become more inclusive, ensuring equitable opportunities for diverse actors while maintaining their transformative potential.

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Research Fields: Digital Entrepreneurial Ecosystems, Sustainable Entrepreneurship

Project 3: Digital and Sustainable Entrepreneurial Intentions: Navigating Conflicting Logics

Sustainable entrepreneurs are critical in achieving a climate-neutral future, as they develop innovative solutions that reduce carbon emissions, promote renewable energy, and foster sustainable practices across industries. Their Digital and sustainable entrepreneurs are central to achieving a climate-neutral and technologically advanced future. By integrating digital innovation with sustainability, they develop solutions that reduce carbon emissions, promote renewable energy, and foster sustainable practices, aligning with global objectives like the



Paris Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. However, these dual ambitions often bring conflicting logics. While digital entrepreneurship prioritizes efficiency, scalability, and technological advancement, sustainable entrepreneurship emphasizes long-term environmental, social, and economic balance. The tension between these logics raises critical questions about how digital and sustainable entrepreneurial intentions are formed. Digital and Sustainable Entrepreneurial Intention refers to the planned commitment to create or manage a venture that simultaneously addresses sustainability challenges and leverages digital technologies. Yet, the interplay of these distinct priorities—efficiency versus sustainability—can complicate decision-making, goal-setting, and motivation in twin entrepreneurship.

Motivations for digital and sustainable entrepreneurship arise from internal values and external drivers like market opportunities, societal needs, and policy frameworks. However, the alignment—or misalignment—between digital efficiency and sustainable practices remains underexplored. For instance, digital solutions may inadvertently increase resource consumption or perpetuate inequalities, creating a disconnect with sustainability goals. How these conflicting logics influence the formation of entrepreneurial intentions is still unknown. This study investigates how individuals navigate these tensions, examining the social, institutional, and contextual factors shaping digital and sustainable entrepreneurial intentions and motivations. It explores how conflicting priorities affect the emergence of these intentions and their translation into action, bridging the gap between conceptual commitment and practical implementation. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for designing policies and ecosystems that support entrepreneurs in balancing digital innovation with sustainability, ensuring these twin goals drive meaningful and systemic change.

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Research Fields: Sustainability, Entrepreneurship, Digital Innovation

3. Employment Benefits and Conditions

TalTech offers a 48-months full-time work contract, and the total working hours per week are 40. The remuneration, in line with the European Commission rules for Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant holders, will consist of a **gross annual salary** of yearly 32,400 EUR (which is of monthly 2,700 EUR). Of this amount, the estimated net salary to be perceived by the Researcher is 2,082 EUR per month. However, the definite amount to be received by the Researcher is subject to national tax legislation.

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 TalTech 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
- 42 calendar days paid holiday leave
- Social security coverage
- Sick leave
- Parental leave

4. PhD enrolment



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement N° 101179842

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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.

TalTech

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

(1) Persons who hold a master's degree or an equal qualification have the right to apply for doctoral studies.

(2) A candidate from a foreign country applying for a doctoral student position must have a valid Estonian residence permit or right of residence and a permanent legal income in accordance with the provisions of the Aliens Act, except in the case of a doctoral student studying under a joint supervision or any other cooperation agreement.

(3) A public competition is announced based on doctoral thesis topics for early stage researcher and industrial Ph.D. positions where there is no definite candidate. An applicant can apply for one competition at a time.

(4) Notices of the competitions by topics, including the names of the supervisors, shall be published on the websites of the Schools and doctoral studies websites, international websites and in the online environment for applying for doctoral studies.

(5) The documents required for application are the following:

- 1) an application;
- 2) a curriculum vitae, incl. data on education and research and development activities;
- 3) a copy of an education certificate and a diploma supplement;
- 4) a copy of the passport, identity card or residence permit card;
- 5) a motivation letter in English;
- 6) other documents required by the supervisor to determine eligibility of the applicant. Additional documents may be requested during the competition period.

(6) Applicants who do not have Estonian citizenship, a long-term resident's residence permit or permanent right of residence must prove their English language skills with at least a B2 level certificate.

(7) If an education certificate acquired in a foreign country is submitted, the university has the right to request assessment of compliance of the qualification from the Estonian ENIC/NARIC Centre.

(8) If an applicant cannot submit an education certificate as proof of completing the previous academic cycle, the applicant must provide evidence of his/her academic results. An admission decision can be made once the education certificates have been duly submitted. [entry into force 23.01.2024]

(9) Application documents shall be submitted electronically via the online application environment. If necessary, the applicant who has received the admission decision, shall submit his/her education certificates on paper to the Research Administration Office in accordance with the instructions received from the Research Administration Office. The university reserves the right to revoke the admission



decision if the applicant fails to submit paper documents meeting the specified requirements to the Research Administration Office. The university also reserves the right to revoke the admission decision if the applicant is an alien and after the decision has been made, the university becomes aware of facts that give rise to suspicion that the alien may pose a threat to public order, national security, international relations or public health.

More information: <https://taltech.ee/en/phd-admission>

RMIT University

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



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