**ASSEGNO Circular business models for resilient food systems**

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**Introduction**

According to the UN’s environment chief, Inger Andersen, nature is sending us a message with the coronavirus pandemic and the ongoing climate crisis. Andersen suggested that humanity is placing a dramatic pressure on nature generating permanent negative consequences and denying the access to natural resources to the next generations (The Guardian / 25th March 2020). Also, the coronavirus pandemic recalled the complex relationship between economic systems, human health and natural resources unveiling the fragility and the inefficiency of increasingly industrialized food systems and forcing modern societies to reconsider current paradigms and production models to shift toward more circular, sustainable and resilient food systems.

Sustainability and **circular economy** are “the number one priority” for the European Green Deal and represent “half” of the EU’s effort to achieve **net-zero carbon emissions by 2050**. Using circular business models applied to the way we produce, transform, delivery and manage food resources could **reduce emissions almost by 50%** **in 2050**. This challenge needs to be driven by **business models** based on sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices, built on production processes that prevent, reduce and valorize waste and keep materials in use, taking advantage of the use of digital technologies to design in a smart way more circular short supply chains and innovative products and food services, and ensuring social and economic benefits for local communities.

A transition to more sustainable, circular and resilient food systems should be led by “**agricultural practices that are considering the human-environment interactions within the different agroecosystems**”, by a “**holistic view based on a new relationship between local communities, natural resources and production systems**” and “**multi-stakeholder approach**”. Again, economic transformation, pandemic crisis and climate change have brought complex and dynamic challenges for territorial food systems emphasizing the need for more efficient links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas.

Those challenges are particularly crucial in those regions and countries characterized by high unemployment levels, significant inequalities between urban and rural areas, important out-migration trends and limited access to innovation, like RIS countries. In territorial contexts with these characteristics the identification of new pathways for local and regional food systems represents an extraordinary opportunity for shifting from linear to circular and more sustainable food systems that are leading to a new relationship between urban and peri-urban and rural areas, proving social and economic benefits for local communities and reducing the pressure on natural resources.

**Objectives**

The aim is to overcome the traditional model of working on solutions in a research environment and then transfer them to farmers, entrepreneurs and to the society. This summer school (SS) want to connect students from different backgrounds providing with insights into current academic/ industry trends on **sustainable circular** and **bio-based food systems** by enhancing the biodiversity of local systems combining tradition with innovation aiming at feeding humanity in the most sustainable way. Thus, more circular and sustainable systems can enhance the quality and distinctiveness of local products making them more competitive at local and global level. Participants will be empowered to become responsible future innovators and “circular ambassador” for younger generation (ie. high school students) within the field and beyond.

**Purpose**

The SS is following a project based and situated learning approach, where participants work on authentic tasks that take place in real-world settings requiring data-driven decision-making.The main objective of this course is to develop skills and knowledge related to the tools, techniques, and methodologies needed for the transition to circular food systems able to cope resiliently with volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous scenarios that feature the “new normal”. The development of awareness, knowledge and expertise for resilient, smart, sustainable and inclusive food system growth in RIS countries as well as the need to increase employability creating new jobs and new businesses, boosting productivity and innovation in traditional agro-food systems, is one of the main missions of the SS.

Students and young professionals will better understand these concepts from a theoretical and applied perspective, developing innovative solutions in the area of sustainable agriculture (ie. agroecology, organic farming), responsible consumption, waste preventions, reduction, and valorization in the food chain. The societal challenge of resource efficiency will be thought by considering innovative solutions from a multidimensional perspective. This concerns products, processes, and circular business models as well as exploiting the synergies between public authorities, research institutions, SMEs and non-profit organisations active in this field.

**Target group**

Masters Students and young professionals with an affinity and an interest for sustainable and circular production and consumption systems. Candidates are welcome from a variety of disciplines, including agricultural sciences, economics, environmental studies, engineering, urban planning, etc.

Role of the young researcher

**The selected candidate will be engaged in the following activities:**

* Ensuring general support to the organization of the Summer School;
* Supporting the development of learning tools and the preparation of learning material;
* Interacting and tutoring summer school participants;
* Supporting the scientific coordination of the project;
* Supporting project implementation both within the local unit and at project level.

**Preferred key competencies (not mandatory)**

* Some knowledge of economics with focus on business models;
* Some knowledge of circular economy practices and approaches;
* Some knowledge on low input agri-food systems (ie organic)
* Good English reading, writing and speaking capacity (mandatory);
* Good communication and team collaboration skills.