

DRIVING THE EU GREEN DEAL THROUGH INNOVATIVE UNIVERSITY CURRICULA ON CIRCULAR ECONOMY

*Assoc. Prof. Reis Mulita**

* Canadian Institute of Technology, Faculty of Economy, CIRD Economy, Tirana, Albania
Corresponding author email address: reis.mulita@cit.edu.al

ABSTRACT

Challenging the global warming and its social and economic consequences to the society, in January 2015, the General Assembly of UN, began the negotiation process on the post-2015 development agenda. The process culminated in the subsequent adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 17 SDGs at its core, at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015. (UN, 25 September 2015). Driving solutions to these challenges the EU also launched the European Green Deal as part of its permanent actions to transform and reshape the model of economic development generating wellbeing's while tackling global warming consequences to the society and nature. The EU Green Deal is a new growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use. COM (2019). EU Green Deal includes climate action, deforestation, biodiversity protection and restoration, circular economy, critical materials and batteries, sustainable blue economy, international ocean governance, plastic pollution and green transition.

EU GREEN DEAL AND THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

One of the main focus of the EU Green Deal is Circular Economy. Circular Economy is a new format of doing economy using technological advancements. A circular economy is an alternative to a traditional linear economy (make, use, dispose) in which, we keep resources in use for as long as possible, extracting the maximum value from them whilst in use, then recovering and reusing products and materials. Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2013;2015a). In a circular economy, growth comes from 'within', by increasing the value derived from existing economic structures, products, and materials. This major report quantifies the benefits for Europe – in terms of growth, household income, and environmental outcomes – of adopting a circular development path compared with our current linear one. (McKinsey Center for Business and Environment, 2020).

Achieving a climate neutral and circular econo-

my requires the full mobilization of industry. It takes 25 years – a generation – to transform an industrial sector and all the value chains. (UN, 2019). To be ready in 2050, decisions and actions need to be taken in the next five years. From 1970 to 2017, the annual global extraction of materials tripled and it continues to grow, posing a major global risk. About half of total greenhouse gas emissions and more than 90% of biodiversity loss and water stress come from resource extraction and processing of materials, fuels and food. The EU's industry has started the shift but still accounts for 20% of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions. It remains too 'linear', and dependent on a throughput of new materials extracted, traded and processed into goods. (Global Resources Outlook, 2019).

Studies show that in Europe, the Circular Economy can generate benefits of up to 1.8 trillion Euros by 2030. (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2019). Beyond these figures, the circular economy in Europe can contribute to facing the challenges of preserving natural resources, promote

innovation, take care of the environment and create employment. All these indicators can be articulated as indicators of growth for Europe and not only. OECD (2021).

The Circular Economy enables a model of economic development, according to which the continuously increasing fulfilment of the all-round needs of society does not exhaust the resources of nature, generates economic growth and care for the human and natural environment. The Rocky Mountain Institute estimated in the year 2000 that the flow of natural materials globally is 500 billion tons per year but only 1% is put into durable products and still there 6 months later, the other 99% is waste. (CB insights, 2001).

UNIVERSITIES AS CHANGE MAKERS TOWARD A CIRCULAR AND SUSTAINABLE MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT.

The Canadian Institute of Technology EU Erasmus+ project "Inclusive Digital Education for Circular Economy" as a case study.

The mission of universities to transform and progress the society, economy and protect the nature is indispensable for the contemporary society. Challenging global warming, climate changes, poverty reduction, creating an equity, fair and a just society requires the particular power of universities, with their unlimited power of knowledge. The most advanced knowledges and knowhow coming from universities can illuminate the society and empower it to transform development models across all its levels in time and space. Universities can design and apply kits and delivering them to society and business in order to transform mindsets and models of development across all stakeholders and communities.

Curricula design and implementation across all levels of education is very crucial in this process. Through university curricula's and educational programs, students' benefits knowledges, acquire professional skills being able to implement them facing challenges in their social and professional life. A concrete model in this regard comes through the project "Inclusive Dig-

ital Education – a Tool to Understand Circular Economy" where CIT is partnering among other six academic and research institutions from EU countries. This project focuses on the topics of Circular Economy and circular business models that helps HEI's to implement digital education solution into their curricula. The project will develop an innovative, asymmetrical online course on Circular Economy and Green Business theme and it will strive to improve digital pedagogical competences of educators, enabling them to deliver high quality interactive digital education. The project will achieve the above listed overall results in different ways. It will develop an E-Learning Course "DiGiTOOL toCE" consisting of 5(five) modules, for circular economy and circular business models. It will be asymmetric online course, which will be executable completely independently from the lecturers within set deadlines. Asymmetric online courses will bring potential advantages to students such as, flexibility to study in time and place which is for them the most appropriate, especially important in cases when students do not have access to internet, necessary hardware or free private room) while they set the most appropriate pace of the learning - one can go through and review materials as much as need to. Quick learners can power through materials and units quickly and use time for other reasons, if it takes for somebody longer to absorb new knowledge, one can review information, take notes, and practice retention without worrying about falling behind classmates or missing key points in a lecture. In this situation this model of curricula's design goes in line with EU policies and strategy growth for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. (EU strategy growth, 2022).

E-course will be developed with modern authoring tool (e.g., Adobe Captivate or similar) which are covered with creative and catching templates that are supported with several Learning Management Systems (e.g. Moodle or html) and supports SCORM (tracks, for example, how did students answered to quizzes and tests, did the user really took the whole eLearning course, how much time it took, etc. which are important

factors to become an elective course and receive ECTS credit points.

The project will develop an electronic tutorial “DiGi MENTOR” of how to plan, develop and run asymmetric courses in Higher Education institutions (like DiGiTOOL to CE”). This tutorial itself will be as an e-learning module and will strive to improve digital pedagogical competences of educators, enabling them to deliver high quality interactive digital education. In development of this tutorial, partners will consider all the experience they will have while developing e-learning modules for CE course. Direct target groups of the project will be students of higher education institutions, educators of the higher education institutions of business, economy and finance fields. The project will support “EU Digital Skills & Jobs” policy, Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) and by including topics of CE in the E-learning, it will help to forward EU to its set objective in “Green Deal” to be the first continent, that becomes environmentally neutral by year 2050. The project will lay under Horizontal priorities “Innovative practices in a digital era”, “Environmental and Climate Goals” and in Higher Education sector “Promoting and rewarding excellence in teaching and skills development”. Developed E-Course in Circular economy (CE) will rise awareness about environmental and climate change challenges. Circular economy promotes the environmentally friendly and responsible production of products, reasonable and responsible consumption and purchase of products that do not increase number of the waste. Whole modules of the study course are dedicated to specific CE issues promoting sustainability and waste reduction. In response to environmental challenges, the circular economy (CE) is an essential new concept and will revolutionary change the existing business. The importance of CE is stressed by: - UN Sustainable development goals 2030, EU Green Deal strategy (EC, 2019) aiming to transform EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a resource-efficient, competitive economy with no emissions of greenhouse gases and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use, CE Action Plan (EC, 2020)

calls for immediate actions to accelerate circularity on whole EU, requiring multi-level collaboration, radical changes of business education and mindset of entrepreneurs and other beneficial impacts.

Project aims at developing competences in various sustainability and environment friendly relevant sectors, developing green sectorial skills strategies and methodologies of Circular Economy. CE models promote environmentally friendly production & consumption and by development of the E-Course better explains these aspects to ensure the circularity and sustainability, in thus it will also better explain Environmental issues. Society in general, lack the understanding about CE and this project will improve this knowledge and understanding. The study course will be designed not just provide a knowledge, but also specific skills that change behaviour towards more sustainable and environmentally friendly thinking. Based on the most advanced knowledge coming from EU academic and research institutions, CIT is offering digital skills on Circular Economy beyond university auditoriums through extracurricular programs. As a direct impact of this EU Erasmus+ project, an interactive digital platform is designed and established in order to deliver digital knowledge and certified skills on circular economy in an open and free mode to all interested communities(<http://www.edu-csace.com>).

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Reis Mulita, holds a PhD/Doctor of Research from University of Trieste, Italy, a MSc in European Studies from University of Tirana as well as a Master of Second Level in History and Geography from “E.Cabej” University.

Prof. Mulita study and research activity is focused on Sustainable Development, Business Ethics, Circular Economy, Technology and Society. He is author of Sustainable Development courses in Bachelor and MSc. Prof. Mulita is member of experts group of the innovative courses on “Open Innovation” and “Circular Economy, under Long Life Learning and Erasmus+ EU programs. He is awarded with Doctoral scholarship from Italian Ministry of F.Affairs, the USAID-NDI Political Management Program and the Brain Gain program, of UNDP. Prof. Mulita, has backgrounds across Ministries of Transport- Public Works, Telecommunication, Labour-Social Affairs and Migration.