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0. ABSTRACT

This deliverable (D 8.11) serves two main purposes in the wider context of EU-InnovatE project outputs. The first is to capture and condense the personal observations and reflections of EU-InnovatE work package leaders around their experience of conceptualizing and implementing the project over the past four years. The second is to create a Learning History which can be leveraged by other consortium partners, as well as a wider research community, to strengthen the design, delivery and overall impact of future multi-actor, collaborative research actions – either within their own institutions, or as part of the international research landscape supported by e.g. Horizon 2020 funding.

The Learning History draws on a number of semi-structured interviews conducted in November and December 2016 with the coordinator of the research project and selected work package leaders. More specifically, interviewees were asked to reflect on and articulate what they saw as the key factors and areas for improvement during: 1) proposal design and submission phase 2) the early kick-off phase, and 3) the implementation phase of the project. They were additionally encouraged to reflect on the project's wider scientific and societal impact.

Our findings highlight a number of important variables which have combined to make EU-InnovatE an excellent case study for future research initiatives of this scale and ambition. In the following sections, we will touch on the importance of scientific vision and clarity, of collective ownership and accountability, of interdisciplinary exchange and dialogue, of flexibility and imagination in response to emerging insights, and of ambitions for impact beyond a project contract.

1. INTRODUCTION

More than four years ago we set out on a remarkable research journey. Driven by a conviction that (end) users, citizen innovators and entrepreneurship would have a key role to play in accelerating green economy and sustainable lifestyles in Europe by 2050, we formed a community of selected partners and launched the large-scale European research project EU-InnovatE (**E**nd **U**ser **I**ntegration, **I**nnovation and **E**ntrepreneurship).

Bringing together researchers from nine European countries, we aimed to make a significant interdisciplinary contribution to the understanding of *“the underlying factors, challenges and opportunities linked to the transition to a sustainable society from an economic, social and environmental point of view”* (as per the European Commission’s stated objective in the 2013 SSH Work Programme). Our project’s design and scope were framed by the SPREAD 2050 scenarios, with our central research question focusing on the creative, innovative and entrepreneurial role of users on the pathways to realizing the SPREAD future, both inside and outside of established corporate innovation systems.

This Learning History Report seeks to complement the project’s key findings – which are summarized in the Final Report to the Commission (Deliverable D 9.9) – with personal reflections on the joint working process and critical success factors within the project, as well as the overall impact which the consortium can claim to have achieved already. The report is structured as follows:

- An overview over the process of collecting and analyzing our data (chapter 2)
- A summary of our main lessons and insights, following the three primary cycles of the project’s development and delivery (chapter 3)
- Reflections on the interconnectivity and complementarity of different factors which ensured the overall success of the project (chapter 4)

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to learn more about the critical factors of success in this research project, we interviewed involved researchers and key decision makers within the EU-InnovatE consortium. More specifically, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the coordinator of the research project and with selected work package leaders.

Following a semi-structured interview guide, we asked our project partners about their experiences and lessons learned in 1) the proposal design and submission phase, 2) the early kick-off phase and 3) the implementation phase of the project. In addition, we encouraged them to reflect on the project's scientific and societal impact. The table below provides some additional information about the interviews, including the name of the interviewees, their role in the research project, their institutional affiliation and the duration of each interview.

Name of the Interviewee	Main Responsibilities in the Project	Institutional Affiliation	Duration of Interview
Belz, Frank-Martin	Project coordinator, co-leader of work package 4 („ <i>User sustainability innovation and Entrepreneurship</i> “), leader of work package 7 („ <i>Synthesis from the Multi-Level Perspective</i> “)	Technische Universität München	26 min
Goodman, James	Leader of work package 2 („ <i>Assessing short- and long-term opportunities and obstacles: Future scenarios</i> “)	The Forum for the Future LBG	38 min
Halme, Minna	Leader of work package 3 („ <i>Company-driven sustainability innovation integrating users</i> “)	Aalto-Korkeakoulusaatio	48 min
Pickard, Simon	Leader of work package 8 („ <i>Dissemination and Outreach</i> “)	ABIS - The Academy of Business in Society	01 h 11 min
Reisch, Lucia	Leader of work package 6 („ <i>Policies for user integration, innovation and entrepreneurship</i> “)	Copenhagen Business School	15 min

Table 1. Additional information about the conducted interviews

This report is an attempt to condense and structure the observations and the reflections made by the interviewees. We analyzed the interviews in line with the three outlined phases of the project's life cycle. In a first step, we searched for

emerging issues and concepts within each of the interviews. In a second step, we began to compare these insights across the interviews and looked for recurring patterns and themes. In order to convey a relatively unbiased impression of the thoughts and ideas of our project partners, we have not only summarized and structured the content of the interviews in this report, but also incorporated direct quotes which illustrate key reflections from the work package leaders.

3. REPORTING OF FINDINGS

In the following, we present the main findings and lessons learned from the various interviews in regard to the preparation and submission phase, the kick-off phase and the implementation phase of the project. In addition, we will outline how the project partners conceptualized the scientific and societal impact of the project.

3.1 Proposal design and submission phases of the project

While the EU-InnovatE project formally started in January 2014, the project leaders already identified some critical factors in the project's conceptualization and design phase which proved to be highly important for its subsequent implementation.

First and foremost, the importance of a clear scientific focus and vision was emphasized. Simon Pickard for example stated that EU research proposals need to outline a *“credible, coherent vision”* which is communicated to all partners and stakeholders from the very beginning of the engagement process. In the case of EU-InnovatE, such a *“red thread”* was established by focusing on the role of end user innovators and entrepreneurs as a new phenomenon which could feasibly drive progress towards the European Commission's policy and development goals. Put differently, Simon Pickard concluded that *“we were able to link policy challenges with what we saw as a clear gap in current scientific theory and practice”*. In this context, he also mentioned that important role of developing future scenarios. On the one hand, scenarios functioned as an exciting attractor for business and other stakeholders to play a more active role in large-scale research projects. On the other

hand, they also encouraged scientists to adopt innovative methodologies that did not simply seek to analyse the past.

Against the background of the remarkable scale and ambitions of the proposal and the multiple partners involved, creating such a credible vision was not a trivial task. It was important that the central theme of the proposal was supported by multiple institutional voices, in order to have the greatest possible legitimacy in the eventuality of success in the application process.

Based on past experience, some interviewees highlighted the risk that prospective partners engage in these large-scale proposals as a way to satisfy and finance their own scientific priorities, with limited interest in delivering results that inform future thinking and practice in the European Commission and other stakeholder communities. Such attitudes can also undermine the clear and compelling vision that others are seeking to define. James Goodman for example stated that *“at the very beginning there were so many partners involved that it was very hard to see the bigger picture”*.

In this context, Frank-Martin Belz, the Scientific Coordinator of EU-InnovatE, recalled having to make some tough decisions to maintain this sense of unity and purpose. During the negotiation phase, it became necessary to replace a consortium partner due to their unwillingness to commit the requisite faculty expertise and resources to deliver their part of the project.

Once a common understanding among the modified consortium had been established, it was possible to maintain *“an immediate openness to bring in new perspectives around a central vision”* (Simon Pickard).

Within the academic group of partners, the interdisciplinary diversity of institutional and individual profiles was hugely important in developing the multi-dimensional research framework and methodology mix. In addition, partners such as *ABIS* or *Forum for the Future* brought an invaluable set of perspectives (on the materiality of certain research questions, insights from current practice, and strategic stakeholder issues & challenges) from the worlds of policy and business. This helped to ensure that project’s nascent work plan and targets did not become “trapped” in a narrow academic space, but were framed within a broader context that reflected the key societal challenges set out by the European Commission in the original Call.

Furthermore, the project's overarching impact ambitions (scientific and societal) were identified as another critical factor of success in the pre-launch phases. For example, in the project's Description of Work (DOW) the various work packages deliberately committed themselves to deliver a high number of "publishable manuscripts" as a conduit to engage a wider research community in the work of the project.

While this formulation signaled high scientific standards and expectations, it still left sufficient leeway for the specificities of the scholarly publishing process, which often exceeds the time horizon of a three-year research project. Minna Halme for example stated that the project's elevated scientific ambitions were a critical factor in order to create synergies between the objectives of EU-InnovatE and the motivation of researchers to commit wholeheartedly to the project's execution. More specifically, she outlined the following dynamic: *"In the university setting we have to work for publications. Otherwise the researcher is less committed. Researchers then live with the contradiction that they have to write deliverables while they know that they should work on their publications. This can ultimately result in minimizing the time and efforts you invest in your deliverables – but in EU-InnovatE this was not the case"*.

Another important factor in securing and developing the EU-InnovatE proposal was the leverage of institutional and individual relationships and trust. Frank-Martin Belz emphasized the value of being able to draw on outstanding expertise and experience from his personal network of senior research collaborators, and to complement that with the depth of resources available within ABIS's wider research network, of which most consortium partners were and remain active members. This level of familiarity drove the desire of leading scholars to work together on such an ambitious initiative, with a high level of confidence that the project (if successful) would meet their own expectations about scientific quality and societal impact.

Similarly, Simon Pickard remembered that *"during the application process there was time pressure (...) but we felt that we had a shared view of what could be achieved. The complementarity was there in terms of resources but also in terms of personalities. Had there not been such a good connection, the bid would not have happened"*.

Summary of Key Learnings:

- A key idea which embraces multiple disciplines is essential to a successful EU research proposal.
- All partners should buy into the promise of delivering a blend of high quality scientific publications and innovative outputs that serve different stakeholder audience needs.
- Project design must be grounded in the policy challenges that frame a Call for Proposals.
- The inclusion of non-academic partners (from the beginning of a proposal design process) allows conceptual or theoretical ideas to be balanced with real-world needs and perspectives.
- Futures and scenarios are exciting attractors for business and other stakeholders to play a more active role in large-scale research initiatives. They also encourage scientists to adopt innovative methodologies that do not simply seek to analyse the past.

3.2 Kick-off phase of the project

The EU-InnovatE project formally started in January 2014 with a General Assembly held at Technical University of Munich, at its “Alte Akademie” in Weihenstephan. As Simon Pickard noted, this first project meeting set an *“invaluable tone”*. First of all, it was framed by the culture and spirit of pan-European collaboration, acknowledging the partners from nine different nations represented. It also drew on the institutional ethos of TUM as an outward-looking, ambitious home of science and intellectual reflection, but with close and enduring connections to its community and its roots. This meant that beyond the intensive discussions about the project launch itself, there was still enough time to get to know each other and to familiarize with Bavarian cuisine and culture.

This tradition was maintained throughout the entire project when other partners hosted an event and introduced participants to their respective cultural background. James Goodman for example stated that the emphasis on social capital building within the project had enormous benefit and that the General Assembly *“had a fun aspect in it”* and that *“it feels like a team and we feel like colleagues”*. Minna Halme

similarly emphasized that at the beginning a lot of time was successfully invested into building trustful relationships and social capital between the various partners.

In parallel, the project coordinator initially communicated very clearly that the project would require the full commitment of all project partners, that *“it has to be jointly led”* and that *“we only have different roles and responsibilities”* (Simon Pickard). However, such a shared understanding of leadership only functions with a common vision, or as Simon Pickard put it: *“when things become inspiring but within a structured space”*.

Therefore, instead of limiting discussions to the concrete steps for the implementation of the project, the project coordinator encouraged the group to *“talk about what we think we have the potential to achieve, about our ambitions as a group”* (Simon Pickard). More specifically, it was at this very first meeting that the participants already began to think about things that might live on beyond the project. In this context, the metaphor of *“lighthouses”* was introduced, which would have the potential to *“shine and to point the way for both internal and external audiences”* (Frank-Martin Belz).

During the course of the project, these lighthouses took several forms, such as the implementation of a strategic partnership with the Sustainable Entrepreneurship Award (<http://www.se-award.org/en>), the creation of a Future Shaper network (<http://future-shapers-network.squarespace.com>), and the Sustainability Innovation Exchange (http://www.globescanforum.com/sustainability_innovation_exchange/), all of which sought to identify and engage communities of stakeholders with a vested interest in advancing the user innovation and entrepreneurship agenda.

The project coordinator also stated that specifying the project’s aspirations and gaining the commitment of all project partners at the very beginning of EU-InnovatE was critical to its longer-term success. Frank-Martin Belz noted that signaling high expectations both in terms of scientific output and societal dissemination was an important leadership instrument in the management of the project. He explained that within such a large-scale research project with so many senior researchers, the formal managerial authority of the coordinator is rather limited. As there is no hierarchical relationship between the work package leaders, *“transformational leadership”* took precedence over *“transactional leadership”* (Frank-Martin Belz). While transactional leadership is largely based on the mere compliance of rules by

followers, transactional leadership aims to foster their commitment by creating a common vision.¹ In addition, he emphasized not only the importance of managing the project's process but also the significance of the project's outputs, which were largely operationalized in terms of top publications and the lighthouses mentioned above.

That said, while these measures proved to be effective incentives for overall project management, some interviewees felt that their transferability to individual work packages could have been specified more clearly. Lucia Reisch for example reported that it was sometimes difficult to transfer the idea of lighthouse projects to the specific needs of the respective work package. James Goodman also critically self-reflects on the project's strong focus on top academic publications and raised the general question in this context whether the project was “*output driven rather than outcome driven*”, that is, whether academic publications were an adequate proxy for measuring scientific and societal impact. He also suggested that it would have been helpful at the beginning to elaborate in greater depth on key terms and definitions for the project (i.e. the “user innovator and entrepreneur”) and to reach a more fine-grained and joint understanding of these terms, which was ultimately integrated in the agenda for the 2nd General Assembly in January 2015.

Summary of Key Learnings:

- Establishing early consensus around terminology and definitions is essential to an effective *modus operandi* within a group of many partners.
- Building social capital among partners at the start of a project significantly increases levels of trust, collaboration and mutual understanding.
- The definition of „lighthouse goals“ encourages partners to reflect on the longer-term impacts and outcomes of their work, and not just concentrate on generating a narrow list of deliverables against a grant contract.
- A „transformational leadership“ approach to coordination (versus a transactional, hierarchical equivalent) empowers partners to accept greater ownership and take more responsibility for realising a common vision.

¹ See for example Bass, B. M. (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. *Organizational Dynamics*, 18(3): 19-31.

3.3 Implementation phase

One of the key objectives in the implementation phase was to ensure a contiguous exchange and flow of ideas and findings between the various work packages as the project developed.

The value of this cannot be understated. By mobilizing a large consortium to start work in parallel, with an understanding that their outputs have direct significance for other partners, it ensures that all partners embark on a journey together, with an ethos that everyone's contributions matter to the achievement of overall targets.

Simon Pickard stated that large research projects often entail the risk *“that you lose people along the way”*. However, in the context of EU-InnovatE *“people were locked in to be active throughout the entire project”* and *“there were far clearer connections and exchanges of data, publications and workshop events between partners in different work packages”*.

Thus, the design ensured that there was proper engagement with many partners over the life cycle of the project. However, while the simultaneous temporal phasing of the project provoked heightened exchange between the work packages, it occasionally caused some coordination difficulties. A case in point here was the fine-tuning between the future-oriented and scenario-based work of work package 2 and the systematic, historically-grounded elaboration of past trends and developments of work package 1. Due to the partial synchronism of these activities, it was difficult to integrate past trends in the development of future scenarios.

In accordance with the DOW the exchange and interaction between the various work packages continuously increased during the project. On the one hand, this was achieved as the project partners developed a *“spirit of sharing new insights which could strengthen the whole project”* and started to discuss their findings out of *“nascent curiosity”* (Simon Pickard) for findings in other work packages. Particularly helpful in this context were regular online work package conferences, the additional use of an online platform to share scientific insights, personal meetings and frequently held paper development workshops. This process was further enhanced by the fact that the Steering Committee of the project consisted of senior researchers and leaders of stakeholder-based platforms, which made it easier to establish

impact-oriented links between the findings of the work packages without micro-managing them.

The exemplars of this collaborative approach were the Synthesis Meetings in the final year of the project. These workshops brought together all consortium partners to ensure a common understanding of the implications of the findings emerging from all of the empirical work packages, as well as a collective commitment to translating these into outputs that would move us closer to the intended impact objectives set out in the Description of Work.

Reflecting on this working culture of the project, Simon Pickard summarized that *“it was inclusive, not exclusive, it was collaborative not hierarchical, it was about achieving something significant together”*. Lucia Reisch similarly emphasized the opportunity at the general assemblies and synthesis workshops to agree on a main message of the project. However, James Goodman also suggested that future projects of this scale could further support cross-disciplinary exchange between work packages by taking greater advantage of online and social media tools, beyond physical meetings.

More broadly, one of the specific challenges for the management of this large-scale, project was to strike the right balance between control and flexibility. On the one hand, it was important to continuously interpret the emerging findings against the conceptual background of the user innovator and entrepreneur. On the other hand, however, the management of the project also required a *“willingness to evolve and to remain flexible”* (Simon Pickard). Simon Pickard also stated that *“we started with end-user innovation and entrepreneurship but as we saw that people find it difficult to understand these terms, we had to reframe it”*. Similarly, Minna Halme agreed that at the beginning the focus on the user was extremely helpful, yet *“what happens in qualitative research is that you are finding new things, you don’t only find what you go and look for, and that is actually a sign of good research”*.

Therefore, it was not only necessary to meet the minimum criteria of the DOW but to move beyond these requirements to provide more space for new findings and to *“elaborate on the chosen language and terminology”* (Minna Halme). In a nutshell, the challenge was to *“follow the data and not only the contract”* (Simon Pickard). Interaction between the various work packages was key here and could have been even further improved by taking greater advantage of online communication tools

which would have guaranteed a closer consultation between the various work packages on a continuous basis.

However, these points of improvement notwithstanding, Minna Halme concluded that *“these complex projects are such a challenge: Keeping the level of control and flexibility such that it satisfies everyone is almost impossible. Frank [as the project coordinator] did an incredibly good job.”*

Summary of Key Insights:

- Research activities implemented in parallel, not sequentially, increase partners' motivation and spirit of collaboration.
- This is enhanced by open and inclusive dialogue between Work Packages, which also helps Coordinators to strike a suitable balance between control and flexibility.
- Similarly, it is important for a consortium to follow where the data leads them – and if necessary to challenge and adapt some of the original theses, definitions and intended outputs that were defined in previous years.
- All partners should be involved in the synthesis of findings from the overall project. This creates a sense of shared achievement and commitment to the key messages which will be relayed to the outside world.
- Inclusion in the synthesis process is equally important so that all partners can take on defined roles in dissemination and outreach to their respective networks and other stakeholders.

3.4 Scientific and societal impact of the project

One of the main objectives of EU-InnovatE was to create a lasting impact on science and society through its research. Reflecting on the scientific impact of the project, the work package leaders largely agreed that EU-InnovatE contributed significantly to the legitimization of sustainable innovation and entrepreneurship as an emerging field of interdisciplinary study.

In this context, Minna Halme for example described the idea of user sustainable innovation and entrepreneurship and the collaborative nature of it as *“new paradigms*

in the making". Pointing to the impressive numbers of conference papers (56), manuscripts (21), submissions (10), "Revise and Resubmits" (8) and successful publications in peer-reviewed journals (13), she also argued that "*we have a voice and we are being heard in the scientific community*".

Additionally, EU-InnovatE has made tangible progress in defining this field of study as an attractive career development path for PhD and post-doctoral students. Consortium partners recruited a significant number of young researchers to play active roles in scientific activities, not merely to deliver basic administrative support to senior scholars (as is often the case in this type of project).

Through a policy of inclusion and empowerment, the project provided ample opportunities for this next generation of researchers to develop their scientific competences as well as a pan-European network of peers and senior professors. The focal point for this process was the three Annual PhD Summer Academies organized by Politecnico di Milano. On these occasions, the young researcher community from the EU-InnovatE consortium would meet in Italy to learn about latest developments in the fields of entrepreneurship, innovation and organization studies from distinguished international scholars, and – perhaps more importantly – to present and receive feedback on their own research from these eminent figures.

Thus, while the immediate scientific impact of EU-InnovatE can be operationalized with indicators such as number of publications or conference attendances, the long term scientific impact will also be shaped by this cohort of young researchers who will hopefully become prominent and influential scholars and professors in their own right in the context of sustainability innovation and entrepreneurship. This process has already started: two PhD students who completed their theses during the project have secured post-doctoral positions in the field of entrepreneurship at leading European universities.

Regarding the societal impact of the project, the work package leaders also mentioned some activities and outputs of the project which complemented each other because they addressed various societal audiences and stakeholder groups. For example, it was frequently emphasized that the policy-related deliverables provide a tangible set of tools and recommendations which - due to their collaborative development with policy makers – have a relatively high probability of implementation success.

Furthermore, it was emphasized that within EU-InnovatE stakeholder network building was fostered beyond the academic realm. While traditionally non-academic stakeholders are only given limited access to and engagement with these large-scale research projects, EU-InnovatE fully empowered these stakeholder groups as the Future Shaper Network, the Policy Innovation Workshops or the Final Conference for example demonstrate. Within these groups and networks that will (in principle) continue beyond the end of the project, these stakeholders became co-creators of the projects final outcomes.

In terms of public outreach, it was also highlighted that the strategic partnership with the Sustainable Entrepreneurship Award will most likely outlast the time span of the project and will continue to spread the idea of sustainable entrepreneurship in broader parts of society.

One of the other major learnings from the project, however, was the importance of our consortium's flexibility and creativity when confronted with unexpected developments and findings emerging from the research.

In the original Description of Work, some of the anticipated outputs and deliverables included special issues of academic journals and a textbook on end user innovation. As the empirical work in EU-InnovatE generated new insights, it became clear that such conventional, static vehicles to disseminate our findings would not be enough to achieve our wider impact objectives.

Against this backdrop, the list of outputs was revised to include a number of more dynamic, engaging and long-lasting deliverables with direct relevance to stakeholders. Foremost among these is an adaptation of the Scenarios Exploration System, created by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, which will be made available to 100 business schools, universities, companies and other associations as a stakeholder and student engagement and learning tool.

The project has also generated 16 mini-teaching cases for use in undergraduate and graduate classrooms, a project blog run by TUM which will support international debate on sustainable entrepreneurship for the next 2-3 years, and a number of videos that present and explain some of the headline results and inspirational company cases from WP3 and WP4. Similarly, a "Cookbook for Sustainability Innovation" has been created which provides "Recipes for Co-Creation" and conveys empirical insights of the project in an entertaining manner.

Finally, it was noted that the highest overall impact of this project, both in terms of scientific knowledge building and societal dissemination might well be achieved by building a university-affiliated ecosystem for sustainable entrepreneurs which fosters exchange between theory and practice. Bringing together institutions and key stakeholders from the private and public sector would provide a highly conducive environment for sustainable entrepreneurs to develop and scale new products and services, inspired by the latest thinking and best practice from established pioneers in the field.

Summary of Key Learnings:

- The integration of formal (doctoral) training for young researchers with overall implementation ensures a unique scientific legacy beyond the project's end.
- Projects are enriched by engaging stakeholder communities and networks around specific activities. These become co-creators of a future vision, eager participants in the research journey, and advocates for its ultimate findings.
- **Scientific impact** is clearly strengthened by the volume and quality of publications produced. However, visibility at top international conferences is another vital way of influencing scholarship and advancing the field.
- **Societal impact** is enhanced by adapting to new opportunities for project outputs which were not originally foreseen. These can be linked to new technologies and applications, experiential learning materials, practitioner guidebooks, and similar – but taken together, they create a legacy of resources that can be used long after the project.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the previous sections we have attempted to capture the reflections of the work package leaders about the overall project experience and derived key learnings which might help research leaders to enhance the impact of future initiatives, regardless of their scale. Based on our interviews, we believe that it was a clear and aspirational scientific vision, grounded in an understanding of current gaps in theory

and analysis versus a new phenomenon happening in the real world, which laid the foundations for the success of the project. The dynamics of common understanding, collective accountability and commitment, and shared ambitions to achieve genuine impact through research were the key building blocks. The duality of control and flexibility in the project's management ensured that all partners remained committed to the delivery process throughout, even if the actual design of what we were constructing changed over time based on new conditions and ideas.

Ultimately, we would like to highlight once more that it was not one single factor which made this project a success, but the combination of various influencing factors. As Simon Pickard vividly summarized, *“when a project has gone well, it is a combination of different dimensions. One is good design, the second is process management and the third is the attitude and the mindset of these being involved”*. Having outlined the project design, process management and general attitude of EU-InnovatE, we hope that future research projects with similar aspirations will find our reflections helpful as they continue to address our world's grand societal challenges to build a more sustainable future.