

Researcher-Led Initiative Fund Application Form

Applications are invited from University of Sussex doctoral researchers and early career research staff for funding to support a short-term, well-defined project on one of four themes: equality, diversity and inclusion; mental health and wellbeing; public engagement; or training and development.

The deadline for applications has been extended to **Friday 23 April 2021**.

Please ensure that you have read the [guidance notes in full](#) before completing your application.

About the lead applicant

Name

[REDACTED]

Sussex email address

[REDACTED]

School of lead applicant
Global Studies

Are you a doctoral or early career researcher?
Doctoral researcher

About your application

Which of the four RLI strands does your initiative fit into? Check the guidelines on our website if you're not sure.

Public engagement

About your public engagement initiative

Title of initiative

Portrait of a man-made valley [Working title]

Brief description of initiative

There are few places that capture the complexity of Italy's history of industrialisation and post-industrial transition better than the Susa Valley, an Alpine valley near the French border, in the Northwest of the country. This wide, long and diverse valley is one of the easiest ways to cross the Alps, and as a result it has always had the dubious privilege of being a strategic corridor for the movement of people and goods. Today, after over a century of drastic transformations, the landscape of the Susa Valley carries the signs of many different kinds of human impact: from subsistence agriculture to industrial production, and more recently logistics, financial speculation and large-scale infrastructural development. Bringing together crowd-sourced photographic material showing the evolution of this unique environment in recent decades, the aim of this initiative is to facilitate a public discussion on the impact of human activity on the landscape and territory of the Susa Valley.

When is the proposed initiative running?

On multiple dates

Start date
01/10/2021

End date
31/10/2021

Tell us about the purpose of your public engagement initiative by selecting one or more of the options

below. Explain your rationale when prompted.

You are encouraged to use [National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement resources](#) to help with your application.

Is the purpose of your activity to inform and inspire the public?

No

Is the purpose of your activity to consult and listen to public views?

Yes

Please explain your rationale

The intended public of this initiative is primarily the population of the Susa Valley, who know the complexity of the valley better than any external observer ever could, either because they have lived these transitions first-hand, or because they have indirect experience of these transitions in their families or broader social circles. This, coupled with a very strong environmentalist sensitivity that has developed in recent years among a large part of the local population, means that the often-excessive human impact on the local environment is seen by many as a pressing concern. In this context, a photographic exhibition bringing together different perspectives on the valley could serve as a prompt and a pretext to explore a familiar topic once again, as well as offering a cultural attraction at a time when there is very little on offer in Italy, especially in rural regions. The debate and the exhibition will see a high level of involvement of local partners at every stage.

Is the purpose of your activity to collaborate with the public?

Yes

Please explain your rationale

Proactive engagement and collaboration with the public will take place both in the run-up to the initiative, and in the evaluation that will take place during and after the initiative. Firstly, a large part of the photographic material (especially archival photos) will be crowd-sourced from several members of the public, whose insight will also help to articulate the material in the best possible way. Further, the discussion – which will be the main focus of the initiative – will be an invaluable opportunity to gain direct and dynamic feedback on the implications of the current challenges faced by the Susa Valley. Finally, the initiative itself will also be evaluated in a highly collaborative way: as this initiative is part of a wider ethnographic project, it will build on research partnerships that have already been formed over the course of my fieldwork, and the evaluation will contribute to further collaborative work between myself and a number of key participants.

Why do you want to engage with the public? What do you hope to achieve by engaging?

I want to engage with the public because I recognise that the subject of my research project is a truly public issue for many people in my field site, and one that many people attach a great deal of importance to in their everyday lives. I believe that the most appropriate way to address such a sensitive topic is to reach outwards from my research practice and engage with the public importance of these issues in an open and stimulating way. By taking this approach, I hope to improve my ability to communicate my work to a wider public, and I also hope to get a better sense of what contribution my project might make within a non-academic context. As a best-case scenario, I hope that this project might open the possibility of further public collaborations around these issues, both within and outside of the Susa Valley.

Who is your target audience and how many people do you expect to engage with?

My main target audience is the local population in the Susa Valley, and I expect to engage with 20-50 people directly through the public initiative, and a further 100-200 people indirectly, through the circulation of a small, pamphlet-like publication and/or flyer. A much wider pool of people may be engaged with through social media posts, however, the main focus of this initiative will be offline, working through local

networks.

What are the objectives of your activity? List the steps you will take to achieve these objectives.

The objectives of the activity are to (1) gather photographic material, both contemporary and archival; (2) exhibit the photographic material in a local venue; (3) organise and run a participatory discussion/public discussion on the subject matter of the exhibition. All these objectives will necessarily be completed with the direct, constant involvement of local partners.

1: contemporary photos will be gathered among local photographers or photographers who have worked in the valley in recent years; archival photos are currently being scoped within the wider remit of this project, by consulting local archives, town halls, and past historical work conducted in the valley;

2: availability of the local venue, Casa Aschieri in Bussoleno, will be secured well in advance; once prepared, the photographic material will be professionally printed and exhibited in the venue, with curatorial and editorial contribution by [REDACTED] my brother, a Manchester-based photographer and curator whose work similarly explores the complex relationship between people and their environments; the duration of the exhibition will be decided in partnership with local organisers and other stakeholders.

3: the public discussion will be planned well in advance, and will be announced 1-2 months prior to the exhibition, once the material (including any informational pamphlets or flyers) has been finalised; local partners, including relevant activist groups and environmental organisations, will be engaged in facilitating the discussion, with the role of steering the discussion as appropriate; given the public relevance of this topic, the discussion may be included in a wider calendar of events, if appropriate; additionally, some form of catering may also be provided after the discussion, depending on the availability of local providers and current coronavirus restrictions.

* For more information on [REDACTED] curatorial and photographic work, see below:

Of Flesh And Stone, 2018:

Sweet Debris, 2019:

How will your activity be organised? Include details of who will be involved, how the initiative will be managed, and how it will be promoted.

- All parts of the activity, from crowd-sourcing the material to setting up the exhibition to convening the discussion will be organised very closely with local partners.

- The initiative will most likely take place in the town of Bussoleno, one of the larger towns in the valley.

- The photo exhibition itself will be on display for 1 to 2 weeks at Casa Aschieri, a recently refurbished medieval townhouse now used as an art gallery in the historical centre of Bussoleno, managed by the Bussoleno town hall, who will be the primary local partner for the exhibition.

- As the main organisers of the initiative, the exhibition will be directly managed and curated by myself and by [REDACTED] especially the aspects to do with the selection and printing of the photographs and of any promotional material, which will all be done locally.

- Additionally, the public discussion will be organised in partnership with a local environmentalist organisation [TBC], and catering/refreshments, if any, will be organised by local partners [TBC].

What is the timeline of the project? Include start and end dates, and key milestones.

Stage 1: May – June 2021:

- Securing availability for the venue: dates confirmed;

- Initial engagement with local partners, including Bussoleno town hall, environmentalist and activist organisations: formation of project team with a view to organising the initiative in all its aspects;

- Investigating the possibility of catering: rough agreement on the possible arrangements with local food providers;

- Crowd-sourcing contemporary and archival material from local partners and photographers: selection of long-list of photos to be displayed.

Stage 2: July-August 2021:

- Two field visits by [REDACTED] getting familiarised with the local context, including the venue, issues on the ground, and current long-list of photos;
- Collaborative work with local partners through regular meetings: agreement on the framing and approach for the initiative, and drafting of promotional material, including pamphlets and/or flyers.

Stage 3: September-October 2021:

- Final agreement on promotional material: printing of pamphlets/flyers, and dissemination across the Susa Valley, as well as in local news media;
- Final selection of photographs to be displayed: professional printing of all the material for the exhibition;
- Exhibition launch: material displayed at Casa Aschieri for 1-2 weeks (depending on availability and cost);
- Public initiative to be held during the display period of the exhibition (date TBC), followed by an evaluation of the initiative itself and of the work done by the project team.

NB. In order to allow for the likelihood of forced interruptions because of the ongoing pandemic, this initiative will extend beyond the funding deadline for the RLI, set for the end of the financial year (31/07/2021). For this reason, I would be interested to know if the budget can be split in two different lump sums to be distributed before and after the funding deadline. In order to facilitate this, the budget has already been divided into two groups – see below for the detailed breakdown.

Given the current pandemic, how will you adapt your plans if Covid-19 restrictions mean an in-person activity is not possible?

Until the most recent lockdown (March 2021), Italy has had a tier-system of coronavirus restrictions, like that which was in place in the UK in late 2020. Under this system, galleries and museums have been able to remain open in the lowest tier of restrictions, albeit with strict limitations. The possibility of holding the exhibition as planned will depend on the coronavirus restrictions in October 2021, but if necessary, the initiative will be postponed until it can be safely displayed. With regards to the public discussion, the coronavirus contingency plan will still include the possibility of holding an in-person event, in an outdoor space, with a strict limit on the number of participants.

It has become current practice in this region of Italy to maintain in-person gatherings of this kind even with coronavirus restrictions in place, with the proviso that local authorities must be kept informed. This reflects the priority that is given to in-person contact above virtual contact, an important aspect that has to be taken into account in the coronavirus contingency plan for this initiative: from direct experience, online-only solutions are not viable among the local population and are therefore not worth pursuing because of the evident lack of engagement they produce. The coronavirus contingency preparations will be updated as and when the local regulations change.

If, for any reason, it becomes clear that the photo exhibition cannot be displayed until long after the public discussion, and should therefore be considered as a separate initiative altogether, more resources will be directed towards a pamphlet that might substitute the photo exhibition as an accompaniment to the public discussion.

How will you measure success and impact, and whether you have achieved your objectives?

Consider how you will evaluate as the initiative progresses, as well as at the end of the project.

The evaluation of this initiative will look at two different aspects: the public impact of the initiative, and the added value to my research practice; both will be measured throughout the preparation of the initiative and at the end of the project.

1a: public impact in the build-up to the initiative will be measured in terms of the quality of participation that the project team is able to foster: what is the variety of perspectives that we are able to engage with in preparing this initiative? How many stakeholders are we able to interest in our initiative? How does this degree of participation affect the quality of the material that will be presented at the exhibition?

1b: public impact at the end of the initiative will be measured through brief evaluation questionnaires (to be completed in writing or in the form of short vox-pop interviews, recorded after obtaining informed consent)

and through a collective reflection on behalf of the project team, either individually or through the format of a recorded group interview. What were participants' sensations in the aftermath of the initiative? Was it a relevant exercise for them? Would they participate again in something similar? For organisers, was this a fruitful way of engaging with a wider and more heterogeneous public?

2a: the added value to my research practice in the preparation of the initiative will be measured in terms of the snowball sampling that this initiative is able to produce. Does the activity of gathering photographic material and working collaboratively with other people open up access to different perspectives that are relevant to my broader research project? In case there are new research encounters and/or interviews that stem from this initiative, does the prospect of a concrete short-term output facilitate the building of relations in the field, or does it create a new barrier?

2b: the added value to my research at the end of the initiative will be measured by identifying and categorising my research material in terms of its origin: as the end of my fieldwork draws near, how much ethnographic material is derived from the initiative as a whole? How does the quality of this material compare with the material collected in different contexts, unrelated to the initiative? Did the initiative substantially affect – either positively or negatively – other aspects of my ethnographic practice?

How does your proposal relate to your own research? Indicate how it will benefit yourself and your work.

During the course of my fieldwork, a major theme that has emerged has been the impact of infrastructural projects on the territory and the landscape. Infrastructure affects how people perceive the environment that surrounds them, their memory of places and their feelings of belonging. This initiative would benefit my work by providing a focused opportunity to raise some of these issues and discuss them with a wider public that I have not been able to contact so far.

The RLI Fund is designed to provide short-term support to researcher initiatives. Describe how your initiative will be sustained in the future (if that is the intention). What is the potential legacy of the project?

The Susa Valley is a place where public discussions about the environment have remained pressing and lively even despite the pandemic. With such a highly active local public sphere, I'm convinced that this exhibition and the accompanying discussion would work well as a standalone initiative. But given the relatively short amount of time available to prepare it, its scope is necessarily rather limited. However, the issues raised by my research will continue to be relevant to my work even after the end of the initiative and once my fieldwork as a whole has ended, and therefore my approach is to see this initiative not just as a one-off, but also as something of a dry run for a visual project that could potentially be further developed in the future. Leading up to the initiative, and during the exhibition itself, I will take the first step in reaching out to representatives from civil society organisations that operate in the wider region, with the aim of exploring with them the possibility of expanding the scope of the project, and potentially presenting the photographic material outside of the Susa Valley, perhaps with an accompanying public talk on the local situation in the valley. [REDACTED]'s interest in similar issues, as well as his long-standing experience and knowledge of this field could also provide a fruitful avenue to develop the visual aspect of this project, and possibly bring a version of it to the UK as well. With the right framing and the right support, this specific and local initiative could potentially become part of a multidisciplinary and multimedia intervention into a pressing debate about Anthropocene landscapes, which could attract the attention of a much wider set of publics.

Budget

Please provide a detailed budget indicating what you would spend the funding on if you are successful in your application.

Your budget should include a breakdown of costs and justification for each item (e.g. cost of printing 50 booklets at £10 per booklet from the Print Unit; lunch for 30 people at £6 per head from Sussex Food;

accommodation for external speaker at £80 per night at a University approved hotel). See the guidance notes for further advice on your proposed budget.

Budget details

Item details	£
Travel for [REDACTED] - 3 trips (paid before 31/07/2021)	£180.00
Venue (paid before 31/07/2021)	£70.00
Printing (paid after 31/07/2021)	£250.00
Additional printing for flyers and other material (paid after 31/07/2021)	£30.00
Catering (paid after 31/07/2021)	£150.00
Contingencies, if needed (paid after 31/07/2021)	£70.00
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Total: £750.00	

Total requested
£750.00

Budget code

[REDACTED]

Supporting statement

You must submit a supporting statement (in PDF format) from your PI or supervisor (for doctoral researchers) or Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange (for research staff).

Their name, title and electronic signature should be included in the statement.

If you have any difficulty with this, please contact researcher-development@sussex.ac.uk.

Upload your supporting statement here

[REDACTED].pdf

Declaration

I understand that if I am successful I will be required to submit a short report and final budget statement at the end of my initiative.

Yes

I understand that I must inform the Doctoral School of any budget amendments and await approval before my initiative takes place.

Yes

I understand that any funding must be spent by the end of this financial year (31 July 2021) - if this will cause problems please email researcher-development@sussex.ac.uk to discuss once you've submitted your application.

Yes

