One Ph.D. scholarship on the Social and Solidarity Economy, and the Après-M project

University of Liège (Belgium), Faculty of Social Sciences (FaSS), Institut de Recherches en Sciences Sociales (IRSS)

Applications are invited for a Ph.D. scholarship as part of the InstituÉS project –

Quand l’institutionnalisation dévoile du conflit politique. Enquête de terrain sur le.s identité.s politiques de l’économie solidaire.  
When institutionnalisation unveils political conflicts. Fieldword on political identity.ies within solidarity economy

Application deadline: 26th May 2021 (2 p.m. GMT+1).

Start date: 1st July 2021.

Position:

One doctoral position: a full-time, fixed-term position available for 4 years

Topic:

The aim of this call is to select the doctoral project that best demonstrates its ability to connect a specific field site (“l’Après M social” fast-food in Marseille, France) to a specific research programme (InstituÉS).
General information:

- Research Environment: the faculty and the PragmApolis team

The Faculty of Social Sciences (FaSS) at the University of Liège is a small, dynamic faculty committed to developing research that reaches beyond Belgian borders, as shown by its two recently-awarded ERC grants and its involvement in numerous FP and Horizon 2020 research projects. Researcher hired to work on the InstituÉS project will join PragmApolis, a sociological team part of whose research focuses on epistemology, critical theory, political philosophy, social movements and gender.

Alongside its core focus on social movements, research conducted by PragmApolis so far has mainly been in epistemology and sociological theory. As a close collaborator with the Groupe de Recherche Politique et Morale, founded by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, PragmApolis contributed to the development of a new sociological style, which is referred to today as pragmatic sociology or the sociology of critique. This form of sociology, whose principal goal is to take the actors (and their sense of justice) seriously when conducting sociological investigations, had a considerable influence on PragmApolis’s fieldwork, which until then had principally been informed by phenomenological conceptual tools imported from philosophy. In a series of articles PragmApolis’s members indicated why, if one cannot escape the critical stance that it entails, Bourdieusian genetic structuralism cannot result in a reflexive sociology that, like pragmatic sociology, does not confine social actors within the illusio. By joining the heuristic model of this pragmatic sociology’s famous “Cités” to the phenomenology of Husserl, Scheler and Merleau-Ponty, their latest work (since 2010) has sought to uncover the different senses of justice and diverse common goods that have always coexisted at the very centre of the social and solidarity economy (SSE), and which explain why its organisations have never combined forces politically.
Objectives of the overarching InstituÉS research programme:

The offered scholarship is attached to the research project InstituÉS, funded by the Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique (FNRS) and led by Dr Bruno Frère. This project aims to extend the research methodology recently developed by the PramgmApolis team by applying it to the study of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) in France. InstituÉS is designed to help resolve impasses faced by mainstream approaches to understanding the SSE, taking into account the justifications and states of mind of participants in this economic activity themselves. The challenge is simultaneously to improve a new analytical tool to understand the ideological and economic contradictions of the SSE, and to assess the role that it could play in the economic crisis.

In studies of the contemporary SSE in France a paradox has gradually come into view. These studies have made it increasingly clear that four common goods (with four corresponding senses of justice) systematically structure SSE actors’ practices, as well as how they represent these practices and the meaning they give to them: self-management (perceived as a democratic model that prevents the private appropriation of the organisation or of profits), care (taking care of the vulnerable), local eco-innovation (which often means converting to short supply chains) and political anticapitalism (which represents SSE activity as a vehicle for an economy that refuses to replace State action altogether, but which dreams of substituting itself for capitalism (fig. 1).

But although reference to these common goods can be found in the discourses of all the actors, the investigations shows that their practices regularly compromise these goods, provoking irritation among other actors. These disputes were hardly mentioned by existing monographs and articles about the SSE. And the issue of this justification-practice contradiction remains wide open to this day.

Some recent InstituÉS work has outlined the first elements of a possible solution to this paradox, which this proposed doctoral research could seek to confirm or refute. To solve the paradox – which pragmatic sociology cannot do alone – this work employs the notion of topical states of mind (borrowed from phenomenology): by moving constantly from one (topical) state of mind to
another, SSE actors justify their actions using a common grammar that – regardless of the sector in which the activity is taking place – systematically combines the four common goods that historically have embodied the SSE’s sense of justice. Without tying itself again to the genetic point of view – which attributes actors’ misconceptions about their own action to the illusio – the hypothesis InstituÉS proposes is that the actors, concentrating on the particular common good on which their state of mind is focused, agree in all good conscience to bracket out the other common goods. Even though all SSE actors value these four common goods – self-management, care, local eco-innovation, and political anticapitalism – and are able to move between the four corresponding states of mind, most of them shut their eyes to certain common goods when various challenges constrain them to focus on only one of them in practice. We might say that they make a grammatical mistake due to their extrapolation of one of the common goods at the expense of the others. In Weberian language, they abandon pursuit of the kind of ideal-type SSE organisation (fig. 2).

The conclusion of previous research was that these extrapolations generated disputes inside and between different sectors of the SSE (Community Supported Agriculture, Solidarity Microfinance, Local Exchange Trading Systems and Community Services such as the social fast-food organisation l’Après M), disputes that explain why the SSE is politically and economically so weak. The Après-M research will evaluate whether things are different or not in a very new organisation. If it is not, is this because of the same disputes and extrapolation? If it is, can we therefore conclude that there are resources there to help SSE to become more politically mature and unified?
Figure 1. The grammar of the solidarity economy with its four values structuring states of mind

Mind

Care

Anti-capitalist Activism

Self-Management

Local economic innovation

Figure 2. The grammar of the solidarity economy with its four states of mind and their extrapolations

Care

Christian charity

Anti-capitalist Activism

Radical Left

Self-Management

Local economic innovation

Neo-liberal business model

See:
Ph.D. on l’après M: an expression of the SSE grammar?

Tasks expected from the Ph.D. candidate

- Complete a Ph.D. dissertation on a question directly related to this topic.
- Develop the PragmApolis webpage.
- Participate in the political & social sciences Ph.D. programme at ULiège and in the intellectual life of FaSS and PragmApolis (including reading and research seminars).
- Submit for publication a minimum of two articles or book chapters.
- Present research results in international conferences.
- Participate in administrative tasks related to the project (reporting, conference organization, etc.)

All work is expected to be done in close consultation with the Principal Investigator and other members of the PragmApolis team.

Profile required

- A 120 ECTS Master’s degree in Social Sciences (sociology, anthropology, political science or political philosophy), no earlier than three years before
the beginning of the project (or four years before if the applicant has given
birth to or adopted a child in the interim).

- Ability to conduct qualitative interviews.
- Language skills: fluent French and English speaker/reader/writer.
- Ability and desire to work in a team.
- Ability to organise a website.
- A background in political philosophy and/or the social and solidarity economy
  would be welcome.

What we offer

- Attractive scholarship.
- Resources to conduct fieldwork and participate in conferences and summer
  schools.
- Opportunities to train and develop new skills.
- A stimulating, international research environment located a train ride away

How to apply

The selection process has 2 steps.

**First step:** Applications must be submitted electronically in French or English to
Bruno Frère (bfrere@uliege.be) by the **26th May 2021** with the message subject
**InstituES – Après M doctoral project.** The following documents must be attached
to the e-mail in two separate PDF files:

a) A file named ‘Motivation_[applicant’s last name]’ including:
• A motivation letter (maximum 800 words);

• A CV (2 pages maximum) with detailed information on degree results, computer and language skills;

• The names and contact details of two referees who would agree to write a reference letter for the 1st June 2021.

b) A second file, named ‘Sample_[applicant’s last name]’, presenting the Ph.D. project proposal in English or French. In this proposal, the applicant will demonstrate their ability to take up the theoretical, sociological and methodological framework of the InstituÉS project and apply it to the case of l’Après M cooperative (Marseille) (single-spaced, maximum 3,500 words, Times New Roman 12, space 1, margin 3). The applicant is free to use any kind of literature they can find about this recent occupation, and to draw on any aspect of the overall InstituÉS project and the article attached (phenomenology, political philosophy, law sociology, critical or pragmatic theory, etc.). To be sent the InstituÉS project details and the related article, please contact the principal investigator, Bruno Frère (bfrere@uliege.be).

Second step: Shortlisted candidates will be interviewed in person at ULiège or remotely via Skype at the beginning of June 2021. The interview will assess applicants’ academic track-record and Ph.D. proposal: Does it outline a clear Ph.D. project connected to InstituÉS? Does it suggest a realistic and clear plan for fieldwork to investigate the specific case mentioned above? Does it include information on methodological strategies, possible theoretical developments (phenomenology, critical theory, law, sociology, pragmatism, etc.), and relevant literature and data sources?

Applicants will be notified of the final outcome of the selection process before 15th June 2021. The successful candidate would be expected to start on 1st July 2021.

For more information, please contact the Principal Investigator Bruno Frère (bfrere@ulg.ac.be)