

FECYT Webinar III
ERC Starting Grant
September 20, 2024

My Starting Grant Application Experience (2021-2024)
Konrad A. Antczak



**Universitat
Pompeu Fabra**
Barcelona

Facultad
de Humanidades

Starting grant | Background



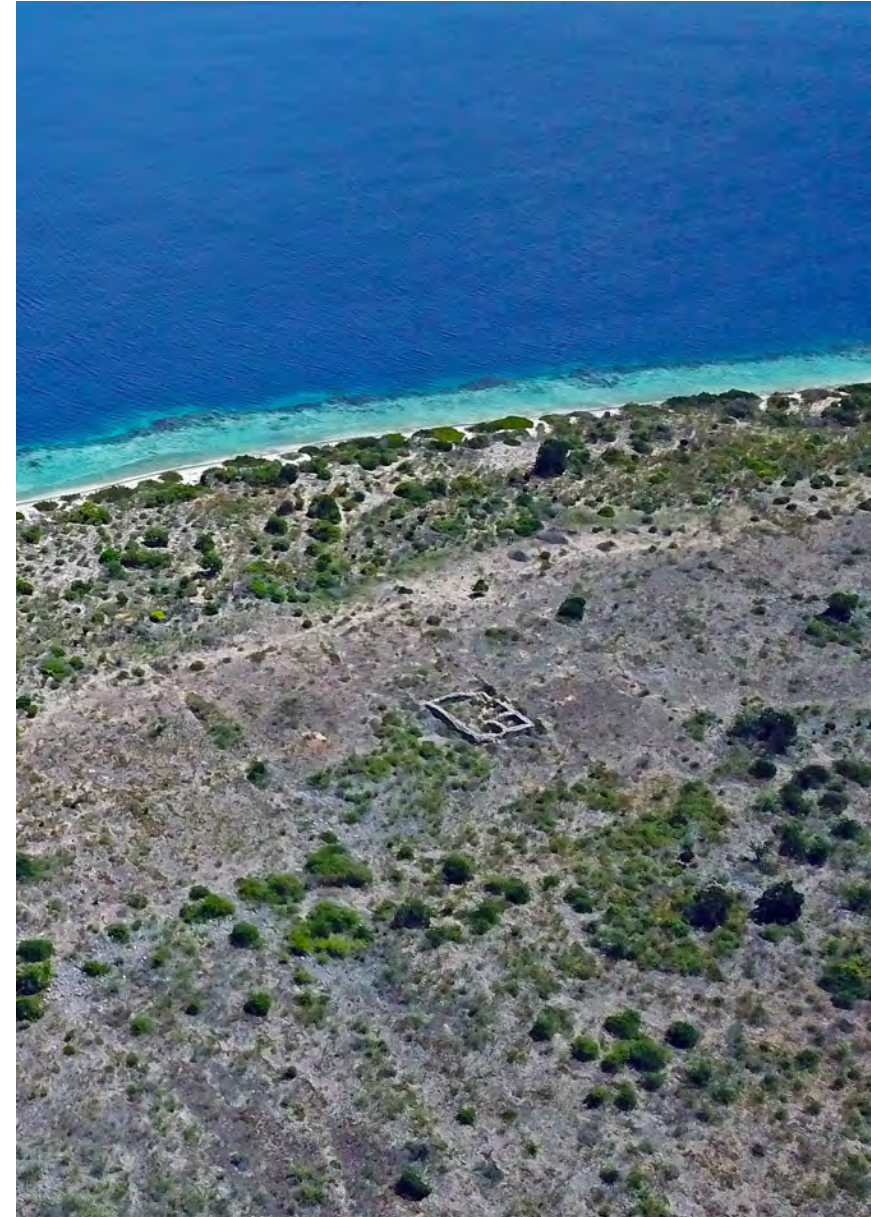
Alternative Modernities and Everyday Life in the Pre-emancipation Southern Caribbean (c. 1634–1863)

Development

- The project is a natural continuation of my previous historical archaeological research in the Southern Caribbean **BUT** it isn't merely an incremental step — balance continuity (feasibility) and breakthrough (risk) **carefully**.
- I **dialed up the complexity** of my previous research by incorporating many more sites to excavate, an interdisciplinary team, and a whole panoply of cutting-edge science techniques.
- I use my tested conceptual framework developed in my PhD but employ it to answer a **novel** and **risky, big-picture question**: How does the early modern past of the Southern-Caribbean make us rethink modernity writ large?
- I did the writing myself and only had a few close friends/colleagues revise it. My wife was my most important springboard for ideas!

Context

- I first applied in 2021 after just finishing my Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action (first postdoc).
- Reached second stage in 2021, 2023 & 2024. Received “B” in 2021 & 2023.
- By 2023, I was midway through my Juan de la Cierva Incorporación – 7 years after PhD.



Starting grant | B1: The Structure & Content

Form

- **Break the monotony.** Invest time and effort in smart graphics that synthesize key aspects of your project.
- **Readability.** Put effort not only into content but also into the readability of the content.
 - Use various headings, **highlighting**, size, **color**, **bolding**, *italics*, underlining, indentations to make it easily readable and make the key words, phrases, and sentences stand out. Don't overdo it, less is more.
- **Your contributions.** make your contributions immediately recognizable in the bibliography (e.g., put them in a different **color**).

Content

- **Seek inspiration.** Find or ask for successful proposals.
- **Keywords.** Seek out keywords that are important to your topic/discipline and use them throughout.
- **Don't save the hardest for last.** Write B2 first, then B1. Remember, the B1 is NOT an extended abstract of the B2!
- **Audience.** Gear the B1 for a broad multidisciplinary audience, pare back jargon.

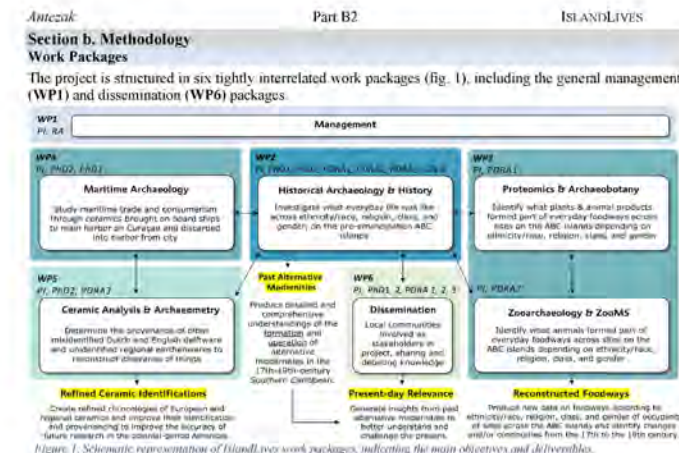


Figure 1. Schematic representation of IslandLives work packages, indicating the main objectives and deliverables.

WP1: Coordination and Management

The PI will be responsible for the general coordination and management of the project, including: a) hiring of two PhD students, three Postdoctoral Research Assistants (PDRAs), a Global Information Systems Specialist (GIS-S), and a Research Administrator (RA); b) maintaining communication between project staff and external collaborators; c) managing the WPs, specifically maintaining the quality of the research and the synergy between WPs; d) organising the archaeological fieldwork; e) filing of annual and final reports; and, f) engaging the public and local stakeholders and coordinating the dissemination of the project results.

WP2: Everyday Lives: Historical Archaeology and History

Archaeological excavations and collection studies. Excavations will be undertaken at three sites on Curaçao, two on Bonaire, and one on Aruba, along with studies of legacy (existing) archaeological collections on Curaçao and Bonaire. On each island, households as well as temporary campsites will be investigated, revealing everyday life across the intersections of race/ethnicity, religion, class, and gender, that will ultimately speak to the formation and operation of alternative modernities at each location. **For the first time in Caribbean archaeology, multiple urban and rural sites will be compared, and the sites studied will include places occupied by Dutch, Sephardim, freedpeople, slaves, and indigenous people, from the 17th to the 19th century** (fig. 2). Excavations at San Juan and Otrobanda on Curaçao, and one site in northern Aruba, will begin with surface survey utilizing metal detectors and a LiDAR-equipped UAV to determine locations for test pits, and will then proceed to larger trench excavations based on a 1x1-m grid once suitable locations and features are identified. Since survey and preliminary excavations have already been undertaken at Raphaël on Curaçao and Pos Kangreu and Oranje Pan on Bonaire, trench excavations will proceed at established locations.

Based on the PI's prior field experience in the region, the large team will be capable of excavating a min. of 15m² per site per season, which is sufficient area to obtain an adequate sample size of archaeological materials from everyday practices at household sites. All excavations will include tight stratigraphic controls (arbitrary 10cm-levels or levels based on visible stratigraphy) and will employ cutting-edge archaeological and survey techniques such as high-precision photogrammetric and 3D documentation of sites, features, and finds by means of a digital camera and a UAV equipped with a photogrammetric and a LiDAR sensor, generated with open-source photogrammetric software (Douglass *et al.* 2015; Galeazzi 2016). The photogrammetric sensor on the UAV will achieve site maps with 3cm horizontal accuracy and 5cm vertical accuracy with no ground control points and covering 3km² during a single flight, making traditional, expensive, and laborious surface survey with a total station unnecessary; the LiDAR sensor will provide highly detailed digital elevation models even in areas of high-foliage cover (a common characteristic of the ABC islands), also aiding in identifying structures and features on the landscape that would not be visible otherwise. Trenches and finds will be recorded in situ through photogrammetry with a camera and tablets will be used in the field for more

Starting grant | B1: Curriculum & Track Record

Form

- **Make it attractive.** For example, include the covers of the books/articles you have written in the track record.
- **Hyperlinks.** I use hyperlinks (just in case someone is interested in clicking them). Don't overdo it, though.
- **Draw the eye.** Put amounts of funding received and other critical details in **red** and **bold** key phrases.

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Part B1

Section b: Curriculum vitae and Track Record (max. 4 pages)

PERSONAL DETAILS

ANTCZAK, KONRAD A.

Nationality: Venezuelan, Polish
ORCID [0000-0002-6170-5069](#); ResearcherID [K-8383-2018](#)
Staff websites: [UPF – Department of Humanities](#); [USB – Unidad de Estudios Arqueológicos](#)

- **Education**
 - 2017 PhD in Historical Archaeology, Summa cum laude, College of William and Mary, USA.
Supervisor: Neil Norman
 - 2014 Master's in Historical Archaeology, College of William and Mary, USA
 - 2011 Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology, Magna cum laude, Rollins College, USA.
- **Current Positions**
 - 2022 – Juan de la Cierva – Incorporación Postdoctoral Fellow (Spanish government), Colonialism, Gender, and Materialities Research Group (CGM), Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain. **Ranked no. 2** in history/archaeology in Spain. **Funding received: €97,800.**
 - 2011 – Historical Archaeologist, Unidad de Estudios Arqueológicos, Universidad Simón Bolívar, Caracas, Venezuela.
- **Previous Positions**
 - 2019 – 2021 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow (Horizon 2020), Department of Humanities, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Spain.
 - 2018 – 2019 Guest Researcher, Amsterdam School of Heritage, Memory and Material Culture (AHM), University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

RESEARCH ACHIEVEMENTS AND PEER RECOGNITION

Research achievements

Peer-Reviewed Edited Volume

Antczak, Konrad A. [ed.] (2024). *Venezuelan Historical Perspectives on Current Colonialism, and Contact, Colonialism, and Independence*. Tabouli Caribbean Archaeology Series. Sidestone Press, Leiden.

Peer-Reviewed Book

Antczak, Konrad A. (2019). *Islands of Salt: Historical Archaeology of Seafarers and Things in the Venezuelan Caribbean, 1624–1880*. Tabouli Caribbean Archaeology Series, Vol. 6. Sidestone Press, Leiden.

In press. Featuring most Venezuelan archaeologists, this is the first volume on historical archaeology in the country and the first volume in the subdiscipline to be published in two languages in separate Spanish- and English-language versions. The volume evidences my leadership in the field and my capacity to mobilize & bring together numerous researchers. 17 chaps. | 24 authors | 157 figures | 12 tables

This exhaustive historical and archaeological study of two Venezuelan salt pans and the mariners who visited them marshals my conceptual framework of *assemblages of practice*, revealing changes in seafarer-things entanglements through time and bringing to light surprising and unknown aspects of their elusive everyday lives. **Fernando Coronil Prize 2022 & 4 excellent book reviews.** 426 pgs. | 135 colour ills. | 36 tables | 8 citations

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Part B1

ISI AND LIVES

Lemoine, L. & Antczak, K.A. (2024). "La Guairita: Historical Archaeology of a Rural Coffee Hacienda on the Periphery of Caracas, 1830–1930". In *Venezuelan Historical Archaeology*. K. Antczak (ed.).

Antczak, K.A. (2023). "Saltertuda: Los angloamericanos y la sal de la isla de La Tortuga en el mundo Atlántico, 1638–1781, I & II Parte". *Boletín de La Academia Nacional de la Historia* 419-41-85, 421-101-70.

Stelten, R. and Antczak, K.A. (2023). "Life at the Salty Edge of Empire: The Maritime Cultural Landscape at the Orange Saltpan on Bonaire, 1821–1960". *Int. J. of Historical Archaeology* 27.543–573.

Marie Skłodowska-Curie-IF. (2019–2021) ArCarib: Archaeology of Informal Maritime Commerce in the Colonial Caribbean. Grant agreement No 840992.

Funding received: €172,932.48

Antczak, K.A. and Baudry, M.C. (2019) "Assemblages of practice: A conceptual framework for exploring human–thing relations in archaeology". *Archaeological Dialogues* 26(2): 87–110.

Antczak, K.A. (2018). "Historical Archaeology in Venezuela" in *Post-Medieval/ Historical Archaeology: What's Happening in the World?*. *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 52(3): 416–418.

Antczak, K.A. (2018). "Cultivating Archaeology in Venezuela" in *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 52(3): 416–418.

Antczak, K.A. (2017). "The Disentanglement". *Archaeological Dialogues* 24(2): 144–148.

A collaborative chapter in the above edited volume where we reconstruct the everyday life in a rural Venezuelan coffee hacienda. The first systematic investigations of a coffee hacienda in the country and an important contribution to the study of rural non-elites and their material entanglements.

A purely historical article published in Venezuela's most prestigious history journal. A lengthy two-part paper on my archival research on the surprising history of the island of La Tortuga. My first publication in Spanish, it recognizes me as a capable historian and not only an archaeologist.

An innovative article in historical archaeology because it dovetails data from terrestrial and underwater archaeological survey to throw new light on the lives of the enslaved in Bonaire. I led the terrestrial survey and analysis of finds and provided the comparative study from neighbouring Cayo Sal.

This first cross-border archaeological study between the ABC islands and Venezuela has revealed new insights on 17th–18th-century illicit trade in the Southeastern Caribbean from the perspective of the colonized. I excavated at Klein Bonaire and Raphaël, Curaçao, where excavations will continue with IslandLives. Analysed 55 coarse earthenware samples from islands using XRF and XRD. Developed a strong network of local collaborators and community stakeholders and worked closely with local cultural centres.

An ambitious article that articulates deep theory with archaeological data through our novel conceptual framework of *assemblages of practice*. The framework was developed with Baudry. **Top 10 most-read** article in journal since Dec. 2019, **1,900+** downloads, **39** Google Scholar citations.

An invited review article that presents a synthesis of the development of the discipline of historical archaeology in Venezuela, as well as a state of the art and directions for future research. The review recognizes me as a **leading specialist in the country**.

An interdisciplinary article that dovetails archaeological, historical, climatic, biological, environmental, and chemical data to reveal how humans were not separate from nature in the cultivation of solar sea salt but intimately entangled within it. **11** citations.

An invited commentary on "The symmetries and asymmetries of human–thing relations. A dialogue" between leading scholars G. Lucas and I. Hodder. I suggest the concept of *disentanglement* and gain recognition as a **growing young theoretical voice**.

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Starting grant | B1: Curriculum & Track Record

Content

- **Don't just cram all of your achievements in.** Choose those aspects of your CV that best fit the ERC excellence criteria and the project topic and scope.
- **Expand upon.** Add succinct and punchy sections that explain your achievements and aptitudes.
- **Showcase.** Think of “research achievements” as an elevator speech in visual form. Show why your publications & projects are important, and how they make you an ideal PI for the project.
- **Suggested structure.** Personal details (.5 p), research achievements (1.5 p), peer recognition (1 p), additional information (1 p).
- **Think like a reviewer.** Consider the evaluation criteria. *E.g.* “To what extent does the PI have the required scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project?”
 - What CV aspects *demonstrate* expertise and capacity to be a PI?
 - Don't overplay research and underplay teaching and supervision if you will have personnel in your project.

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Part B1

ISLANDLIVES

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

• Archaeological Fieldwork (selection)

- 2020 **Head archaeologist** – Month-long archaeological STP (Systematic Test Pit) and trench excavations at the site of plantage Raphaël on Curaçao, Fieldwork 2 of ArCarib project.
- 2020 **Head archaeologist** – Month-long STP and trench excavations at the site of Pos Kangreu on Klein Bonaire, Fieldwork 2 of ArCarib project.
- 2019 **Head archaeologist** – Month-long survey, Curaçao, Fieldwork 1 of ArCarib Project.
- 2019 **Head archaeologist** – Two-week long survey, Bonaire, Fieldwork 1 of ArCarib Project.
- 2016 **Head archaeologist** – Archaeological survey on and around the salt pans of Bonaire.
- 2015 **Head archaeologist** – STP and trench excavations of a 19th-century salt exploitation site on the Island of Cayo Sal, Los Roques Archipelago, Venezuela.
- 2013 **Archaeologist** – Two-week long survey and STP excavations, Îlet Chancel, Martinique.
- 2012 **Head archaeologist** – Weeklong trench excavations of an 19th-century salt exploitation site on the Island of Cayo Sal, Los Roques Archipelago, Venezuela.
- 2010 **Archaeological Assistant** – Two, two-week-long archaeological expeditions involving STP and trench excavations at the 18th-century site on La Tortuga Island (January, July).

• Master's thesis advisor

Tianyi Dong (2022) and Kayrine Almeida (2023), Master in World History, Universitat Pompeu Fabra.

• Language Skills

English, Spanish, Polish (*native speaker all three*); Catalan (*B1 level*); Papiamentu (*reading competence*)

Over the years I have gained **ample experience in archaeological fieldwork campaigns** involving surveys, large excavations, and management of complicated logistics and teams in complex insular environments. During the past decade, I have **led 9 of the 25 fieldwork campaigns** that I have participated in on numerous islands in the Venezuelan Caribbean (*e.g.* La Tortuga, Cayo Sal, Curaçao, Bonaire) and on Martinique, and have broad experience processing and analysing archaeological finds in the laboratory and **undertaking research in various archival collections** (*e.g.* National Archief, The Hague, The Netherlands; Colonial Office, National Archives, Kew, U.K.). Through my MSCA project and my Juan de La Cierwa-Incorporación fellowship I have also built up and broadened my network of professional and community collaborators on the ABC islands, in Spain and Europe, and in Latin America, a number of whom are the project's external advisors.

Career breaks, diverse career paths and major life events

The COVID-19 pandemic erupted right as I was beginning the second year of my MSCA-IF. Fieldwork was postponed and I could eventually travel in August-September 2020, but due to the restrictions on everyday life my research productivity declined drastically since I had no access to the archaeometry laboratories at the Universidad de Barcelona and my office at UPF and am still catching up on publishing the results from the excavations. Moreover, I was invited to present the keynote speech at the *Encuentro de Antropología del Caribe* to be held at the Universidad del Norte, Colombia, in June 2020, and the organizers had already bought my airplane tickets, but the event was cancelled due to the pandemic and has still to occur.

Other contributions to the research community

• Community and Professional Workshops (selection)

- 2015 **Co-Instructor.** weeklong community archaeology workshop on the Island of Krasky, Los Roques Archipelago, with middle and high school students from the Escuela Bolivariana Archipiélago Los Roques (EB-ALR), Venezuela.
- 2014 **Head Instructor.** Workshop presented at the Institute of National Heritage (Instituto del Patrimonio Cultural), Caracas, Venezuela, June 11–12th, entitled: “Taller de Arqueología Histórica: Cultura Material de las Islas Venezolanas entre los Siglos XVIII y XIX”.
- 2013 **Head Instructor.** Weeklong community archaeology workshop at 19th-century site on the Island of Cayo Sal, Los Roques Archipelago, with middle and high school students from EB-ALR, Venezuela.

Convinced that archaeology as a past-oriented discipline should exert a **transformative impact** on the present, I have actively engaged my investigations with various publics, investing in **local communities** through experiential **community archaeology workshops**, workshops for heritage professionals, and public lectures and talks. Through these activities I seek to instil a **deeper valorisation** and a **discerning appropriation** of the **recent past** among local stakeholders and publics including the inhabitants of Venezuela, the ABC islands, and the general Latin American and European publics.

Starting grant | B2: The Structure & Content

Form

- **Illustrate.** If applicable, design compact yet easy-to-understand diagrams/charts that visualize important aspects. Make sure they are legible!

Content

- **Summary.** I included a paragraph-length summary at the beginning of the B2.
- **Suggested structure.** Section a (4 p), section b (14 + biblio).
- **Confident tone.** Balance the tone carefully to not sound overconfident/presumptuous but also not uncertain/hopeful.
- **Superlatives.** Be judicious with how many times you say, “the first”, or “unique”, or “groundbreaking”. When you say this, give the reason why.
- **Granularity.** Explain, explain, explain. Don’t leave terms/concepts undefined or without sufficient detail. Avoid assuming and implying things.
- **Examples.** Providing specific examples (citations) from previous/current research is very important!

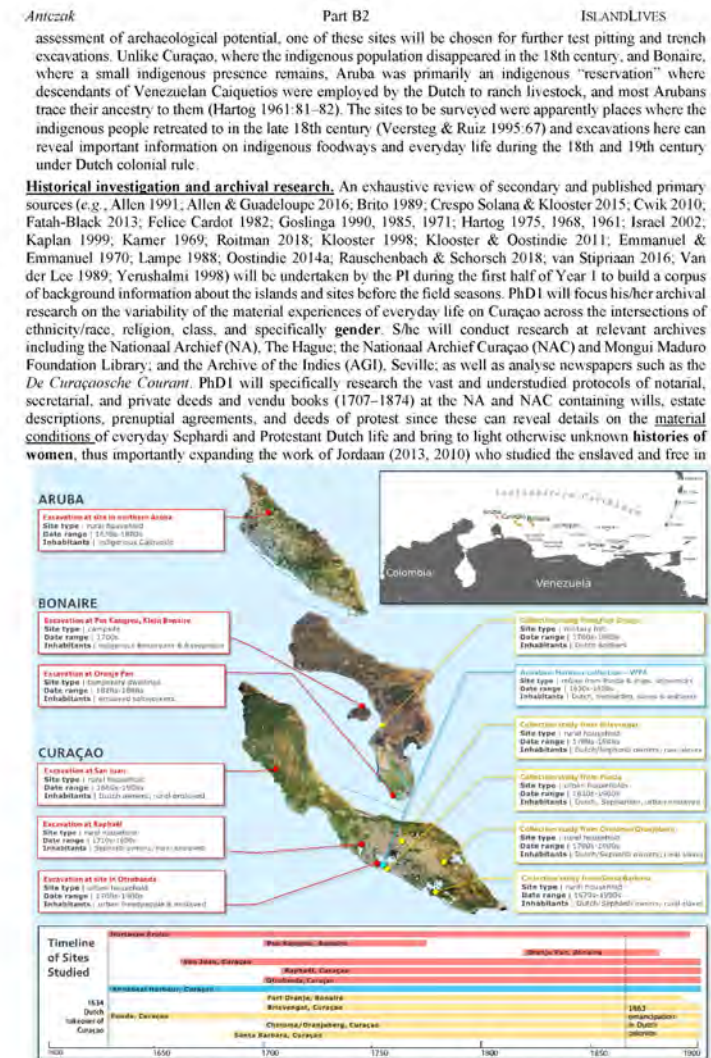
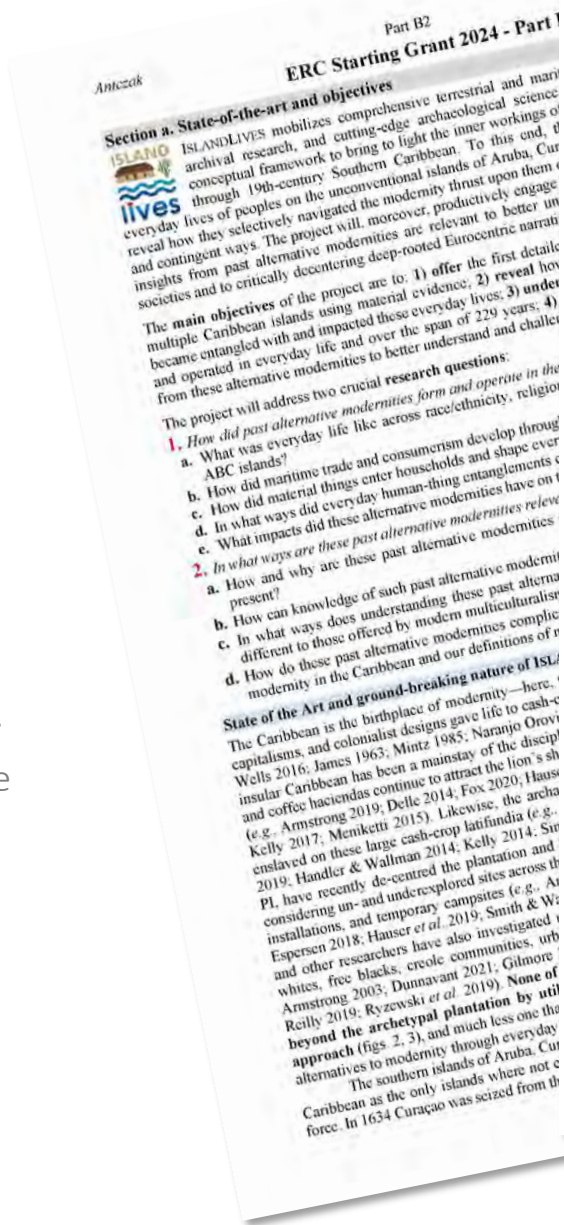


Figure 2. Infographic showing the location of the ABC islands (inset map), the different archaeological sites studied on each island, highlighting key comparative aspects of each site, and a timeline of the human occupation of the studied sites (image: Google Earth).

Starting grant | Review & Resubmit: Lessons

- **Mature the project.** The first time I applied, a reviewer (rightly) said: “I think that it [the project] is underdeveloped and that the PI should spend another year or so developing it further” and scored my scientific expertise and capacity to execute the project as “good”.
- **Take comments on board.** I took on board all the constructive comments offered by 18 reviewers. They are invaluable resources to polish the project, tie up loose ends, and address blind-spots. Alternatively: have more than 10 friends/colleagues revise it!
- **Invest time in reworking.** Don’t leave the critiques of the reviewers for the last minute – take this as seriously as you did writing the proposal from scratch. Give yourself one month of full-time focus to address comments and adjust the proposal.
- **Multidisciplinary panels.** *E.g.* if you are an archaeologist in SH6, think about what a historian would critique in your proposal and address it. Give your proposal to a colleague from another discipline that is present on your panel.
- **Be judicious with unfair/mean reviewers.** Out of the 18 reviews I received (in total), one seemed mean-spirited, biased, and simply unfair. I ignored the nastiness, but adjusted what might have provoked some of it in my following proposal (some of my language might have sounded overconfident, I had not cited enough people).
- **Pack in the citations.** In both rounds I realized that many comments were simply that I had not included many references I should have. My bibliography nearly doubled from my first to my last proposal!

ERC Associated with document Ref: Ares2021172 [Panel: SH6, Page 1, 25112021]

Step 2 Evaluation Report
CONFIDENTIAL

Call reference	ERC-2021-STG
Activity	HORIZON ERC Grants
Funding scheme	ERC STARTING GRANTS
Panel name	SH6
Proposal No.	101040510
Acronym	ISLANDLIVES
Applicant Name	Konrad ANTczak
Title	Alternative Modernities and Everyday Life in the Pre-emancipation Southern Caribbean (c. 1634-1863)

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Criterion 1 - RESEARCH PROJECT
Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project
To what extent does the proposed research address important challenges?
To what extent are the objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art (e.g. novel concepts and approaches or development between or across disciplines)?
To what extent is the proposed research high risk/high gain (i.e. if successful the payoffs will be very significant, but there is a high risk that the research project does not entirely fulfil its aims)?

Scientific Approach
To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible bearing in mind the extent that the proposed research is high risk/high gain?
To what extent are the proposed research methodology and working arrangements appropriate to achieve the goals of the project?
To what extent does the proposal involve the development of novel methodology?
To what extent are the proposed timescales, resources and PI commitment adequate and properly justified?

Criterion 2 - PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Intellectual capacity and creativity
The questions below can have one of the following five responses: Exceptional/Excellent/Very Good/Good/Non-competitive
To what extent has the PI demonstrated the ability to conduct ground-breaking research?
To what extent does the PI provide evidence of creative independent thinking?
To what extent does the PI have the required scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project?

PANEL SCORE AND RANKING RANGE

Final panel score: B (meets some but not all elements of the ERC's excellence criterion and will not be funded)	Ranking range*: 50%-100% For your information, only the top of the proposals evaluated in panel SH6 in Step 2 were funded.
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* Ranking range of your proposal out of the proposals evaluated by the panel in Step 2, as percent, from 1% for the highest ranked proposal to 100% for the lowest ranked.

Submitted: 15 February 2021
European Research Council Internal Administrative Department, Public Project ID: 101040510
Page 1 of 1
ERC-2021-STG

Starting grant | **Lessons learned, (Personal) Tips, and Best Practices**

1. **Invest time.** Invest a lot of time into the proposal writing. The more time you invest, the more likely you are to pass to stage 2!
2. **Fine-tune.** Read and re-read it. Then re-read again.
3. **Let it sit.** Leave yourself with enough time to let the finished proposal sit a few weeks. Then return to it with fresh eyes and a sharper mind.
4. **Seek help.** Ask colleagues, friends, and family to look through the proposal (or sections of it). The more they are from outside the field or academia, the better for the B1. For the B2 look for close colleagues in your and related fields.
5. **Different panel.** Applying to the same panel committee, that is an odd year or even year only, can be a bad strategy as they might remember and pigeonhole you. A new committee gives you a fresh start!
6. **Budget.** Don't leave the budget for last, it will be a nightmare!

Don't overthink it, also pay attention to your instincts.

**Don't forget: *you* are the expert in your field!
Make that come through in your proposal!**