



Ever heard of Masdar City? It's an uber-ambitious scheme to develop a carbon free metropolis in the middle of Abu Dhabi. That's a long way from Glasgow - especially by bike. But if Amina Nabi's plans come true, Clyde-built electric bikes will be the transport mode of choice in this grand experiment in ecological living.

So how does a recent graduate, formerly a freelance consultant and event planner in Glasgow, find herself pitching the idea of electric bikes to the movers and shakers of Abu Dhabi? Part of the answer is Amina herself – a bright, engaging, ambitious twenty-something with business in her blood. The other part is the Saltire Foundation, an innovative Scottish leadership programme aimed at undergraduates and young entrepreneurs.

The Saltire Foundation offers a unique opportunity to two sets of people – undergraduates at Scottish universities and future business leaders who are already in the labour market. The model offers a hybrid of learning about entrepreneurship at Babson College - the Boston based world leader in this field – combined with business placements in the United States and then Scotland. This once in a lifetime opportunity has been established on the back of the Global Scots network – which links successful expatriates in businesses worldwide.

A recent graduate of Strathclyde University in Glasgow, Amina was encouraged to apply for the 2010 Saltire intake. Against stiff competition she won a place on the programme and found herself with her peers on the Babson campus. Coming from a family of self-starters, she thought she knew about business. But she was blown away by the intensity of the experience there, where successful serial entrepreneurs shared their stories and considered case studies with the group. One of those case studies was Masdar City.

Next stop was a placement at Liberty Mutual, one of America's largest insurance companies. There Amina pitched four propositions (she'd been asked to do one) and all of these were taken up by the company. Back in Scotland, her final Saltire placement was with a small high growth start up called Freeflow owned by Neil MacMartin. The company's core product is a battery-powered bike which weighs approximately 14 kilos and has zero carbon emissions.

Amina suggested that her 12-week placement assignment should be to produce a business plan to commercialise this new product.

Amina saw a potential connection between Neil's bike – subsequently branded the 'Saltire' – and the Masdar City project. Through a combination of perseverance and network utilization, she managed to make contact with key decision makers there. These initial discussions went well – so well that within weeks they had invited Amina and key members of the FreeFlow team to undertake a trade mission to pitch their 'transport network solution' to them.

The core pitch was that the Saltire bike could make a significant contribution to Masdar's commitment to develop their city through a reliance on non-carbon emitting vehicles. The Masdar board embraced the concept and offered Freeflow the opportunity to pilot the bikes. This will start in September 2012 and the decision on next steps will be based on the evaluation of data gathered during the trial period. Freeflow have also been invited to exhibit the product at the World Future Energy Summit taking place in Masdar City in January 2013.

So what does Amina's story tell us? Of course it says a huge amount about her – a young woman with vision, energy, enthusiasm and prodigious networking skills. It also says a lot about Saltire Foundation and the way in which it helps to nurture talent, cross-pollinate ideas and broker collaboration between Scotland's key players in education and industry (both at home and abroad). It also says something about what a healthy economic future might look like for Scotland.

In these troubled times we ask where will the jobs come from? Amina's story provides an encouraging account of how quickly change can come about, the importance of thinking big and of looking at the bigger picture. Amina continues to work at the company with two roles – Non Executive Director of Innovation and Planning combined with Project Manager for Freeflow Global. In the meantime, the company is currently pursuing investment to realize the huge potential of this opportunity which would mean the product being designed and manufactured in central Scotland.

So if you or someone you know is looking for an investment opportunity – please pass this on!

Links:

<http://www.masdar.ae/en/Menu/index.aspx?MenuID=48&;CatID=27&mnu=Cat>

<http://www.saltirefoundation.com/>

<http://www.freeflowbikes.com/>

