



IRRADIUM
MAGAZINE

RESEARCH IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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The global pandemic we have been experiencing for the last year has shown how connected we all are, both as individuals and as members of society. It is truly global since the (responsible or irresponsible) behaviour of a single individual or community affects us all. Even communities and individuals not directly or only minimally affected by the pandemic have been experiencing its deep effects, and are bound to do so in the future: from the wider economic impact to the smallest changes in people's daily habits. It is *unity in diversity*, in the words of the European Union's motto. Regardless of our diversities, we are all united by this crisis.

While coordinating the collaborative effort for an *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, in the period between the mid 1930s and mid 1940s, Otto Neurath's vision experienced a double shift. Firstly, he moved from a hierarchical to a horizontal conception of science. From an idea of science as a pyramid to the idea of science as a mosaic. Secondly, he extended his unified vision of science beyond the so-called hard and natural disciplines, to include "all sorts of disciplines": from sociology and education to ethics and aesthetics. All disciplines are crucial for engineering a just society, and jointly contribute to the progress of humanity.

The current pandemic has precisely shown how all disciplines are relevant in our attempt to navigate the tumultuous waters we find ourselves in and safely reach the other side of the river. Not only medical disciplines, which are at the forefront of this crisis, but all the others as well. Consider how much we need the social sciences, history,

and the fine arts, just to name a few areas. The social sciences in order to study ways to successfully implement new health policies. History to tell us how past crises were tackled and how they affected social equilibria. The fine arts to devise new narratives for a collective processing of the lasting effects of this crisis. Once again, there is unity in diversity.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, research, at least EU research, has been facing a further, major crisis: a funding crisis. The European Commission has been planning to substantially cut funds for research. Cuts that will significantly affect all EU research activities, including its flagship programmes like the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and the European Research Council grants. Programmes that are based on the researchers' freedom to choose their own topics, and do not impose reaching immediate applications.

The European Commission's plan has raised widespread criticism. Many voices have highlighted that a global pandemic is not the right time to cut research funds. It is difficult to think of a *right* time where such considerable cuts in research funding are acceptable. On the surface, these protests may appear to be fuelled by self-interest: it is just workers complaining about cuts to their own salaries and work conditions. They are not. Many funding bodies, including the European Commission, have understandably (re)allocated specific funds to this pandemic. It is an emergency response action. A necessary and crucial one, but still an emergency response. Reducing funds and readdressing them towards topic-focused research cannot be a systematic strategy. As with any major social crisis, the lasting effects of this one will run so deep and become so widespread that one should not expect to tackle them on a case-by-case basis. We will need all the knowledge and expertise accumulated in decades of funding free research. The widespread call against the European Commission's cuts is a warning siren sounding a social alarm, as subtle as is pressing.

After all, today's free and well-funded research may help solve tomorrow's crises.

Gian Maria Greco
IRRADIUM Editor-in-Chief

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Chair's Letter

Dear Members,

Wishing health, safety and joy in 2021! I hope you had a good start to the new year. As we embark on yet another year filled with little-known and novel challenges, and as we are all working hard to meet researchers' exigencies, and barely holding onto our previously normal benedictions, I wish to emphasise the fact that MCAA is committed to supporting its members every step of the way. Looking back, 2020 was quite an unusual and challenging year for all of us. Let's take a look at all that has taken place despite the pandemic.

Prioritising the health of our members and the general public, the 7th MCAA Annual Conference (scheduled to take place at the end of March 2020 in Zagreb) was cancelled. Also at the end of March 2020, the new board started its tenure. By that time, the whole world continued to struggle with COVID-19. So, adjusting to this new reality was quite a challenge for me and the new board. Soon after the election, the new board supported the petition initiated by the MSCA Fellows for the "costed" extension of the MSCA projects.

The challenges posed by the pandemic, however, did not change our normal priorities: to support the career development of our members and help to shape the future of science policy. As such, the MCAA was vocal about the initial proposal to cut the Horizon Europe budget. We issued a statement to convey our concern to policymakers and noting my participation at a press conference on this issue organised by our partner ISE. I also organised a dedicated session during our Virtual Conference. The President of ERC Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, MEP Maria da Graça Carvalho and Science Europe General Secretary Lidia Borrell-Damián shared similar concerns. Together, with the support of many other organisations, the budget was slightly increased. Even though it is not what we hoped for, it is much better than what had been previously proposed.

These events made me focus on the particular issue that the value and impact of research & innovation (R&I) for societal gain are not always clearly communicated to the relevant stakeholders and the general public.

Therefore, as a researcher, it is crucial to unite together and collaborate as peers as well as organisations with

similar interests. To that end, I would like to strengthen our partnerships with organisations like the International Science Council, EuroScience, Science Europe, European University Association, Initiative for Science in Europe, Eurodoc, Young Academy of Europe, Global Young Academy, and European Research Council in 2021.

In the last 12 months, our members also contributed to several equally important events close to our hearts, such as Open Science, Mental Health of Researchers and Black Lives Matter.

Of all the many issues that MCAA members work on, supervision is considered the key that directly affects researchers' work & life. Hence, I moderated a session on supervision for Early Career Researchers at the MSCA conference organised by the German Presidency. Our Vice Chair Fernanda Bajanca was part of a similar session dedicated for postdoctoral researchers. We hope to produce guidelines to help researchers and supervisors navigate Europe's changing academic landscape.

Providing career development opportunities to our members is a central priority for the new board. The MCAA now has a dedicated learning platform (MCAA Learning) at LinkedIn, which is open for members and non-members. This platform will enable our members to take any course from the LinkedIn Learning platform in addition to courses organised by MCAA. The MCAA is also part of a ERASMUS+ Project OEDUverse and OSCAR which works on offering courses on entrepreneurship, mental health, research integrity etc. Plus, we have just approved a new working group on Career Development which will offer opportunities in the upcoming months. In addition, I organised and addressed several sessions on different aspects of researchers employability, postdoc challenges and entrepreneurship opportunities for researchers at the European Open Science Forum 2020, Wellcome Trust, European Research & Innovation Days in Europe as well as in Australia and New Zealand.

Our organisation currently counts 17 000+ members spanning over 143 countries and has more than 33 chapters. Consequently, internal governance has become more complicated and challenging. To meet the



changing environment of MCAA, we are now working on updating our Article of the Association to better serve future MCAA. Simultaneously, an Ethics Committee has been formed to work on the Code of Conduct for all MCAA members. Furthermore, our board member Esther Hegel is coordinating and supporting the chairs of our chapters and working groups.

Even during the pandemic, the value of networking and sharing ideas among peers has not been forgotten. For instance, MCAA members from the Board, Annual Conference task force members from Croatia, France and Poland, led by Vice-Chair Valentina Ferro, undertook organisation of the first Virtual Conference. With fewer than 10 days of promotion, the conference, which received over 330 registrations and 7+ exhibitors, was considered a success.

As we are coping with this new COVID reality, we need to understand how this changing environment is impacting our research and life. Ergo, our next annual conference will take place online between 5 and 7 March 2021 with the theme "Research in times of crisis". Registration for the conference opened on 15 January.

Finally, I would like to touch upon the individual and organisational support we received over the years and which, I hope, will continue developing MCAA into an even more vibrant and active organisation for, by and of researchers. Wherever I went, both as Vice-Chair and as Chair, be it in Buenos Aires for the MCAA Argentina and Brazil Chapters Event or in Budapest for the World Science Forum, or even during online events, I have watched dedicated and passionate MCAA members like you continuously supporting the growth of this association.

I have watched as our members from different parts of the world – speaking different languages and coming from different cultures and scientific backgrounds – united to achieve a common goal. Members have also been working non-stop, day and night, with babies by their side, to organise an event or write policy recommendations. Witnessing such compassion amazes me and fills me with pride and joy. "A thing of beauty is a joy forever," as John Keats said, and what can be more beautiful than human benevolence that I am honoured and humbled to share with you all every day! Your empathy, grace and commitment together creates the synergy that makes up the MCAA. I would like to personally thank each and every one of you, and the amazing board members, chapters chairs and working groups, task force members, volunteers and MCAA members for your wonderful humanity and integrity.

As humanity faces one of its greatest challenges with COVID-19, let's draw inspiration from a quote by Alan K Simpson. He said: "If you have integrity, nothing else matters. If you don't have integrity, nothing else matters."

Stay Safe and Stay Healthy!

Mostafa Moonir Shawrav
MCAA Chair

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Research and Democracy in the spotlight for MCAA's first-ever virtual event

MCAA made digital magic during its first-ever virtual conference in November 2020 which delved deep into issues relating to Research and Democracy. Valentina Ferro, MCAA Vice-Chair, who has been very active behind the scenes, shared with us the key takeaways.



**MCAA
VIRTUAL
CONFERENCE**



**06 - 07
NOVEMBER**

**RESEARCH &
DEMOCRACY**

#MCAACONF2020

With more than 300 registrations for participation, MCAA's November 2020 virtual conference was a big success. "I am very proud of the conference," says Valentina Ferro, MCAA Vice-Chair who was active behind the scenes with preparations. "Just 24 hours after the registration opened, we received more than 100 requests. The total at the end of the conference reached more than 300!"

According to Valentina, this success can be attributed partly to the theme: Research and Democracy.

"This theme is dear to MCAA, but often overlooked," she says. "We believe that science and research can't live in a vacuum. They are part of society. As such, researchers should take part in the discussion and help shape the future bringing evidence and facts to the decision-making process," she says.

This means it is crucial for science and research to be connected to politics so they contribute to build a better society. "Science and research are the key for society to understand the world, and can be a powerful tool to inform decision making and enrich individuals," explains Valentina. "Furthermore, what happens in the political arena profoundly affects researchers. Politics determine what funding is reserved for research, and on what topics this should be spent."

She quotes Harvard Professor and best-selling author Daniel Ziblatt, during the keynote lecture at the conference: "Scientists should be defenders of the truth." Therefore, researchers should follow what is true, in connection with the rest of the world.

"Discussing what is the role of scientists in society, on how politics affects us, on how to communicate effectively the benefit of scientific contribution to the policy world, will help us fill that gap. And hopefully, bring us closer together as a society."

PREVENTING POLARISATION

One of the most debated issues was the increasing polarisation of societies, as Valentina explains: "Society had been splitting and growing further apart on several critical issues. Politicians and the access to digital communication has contributed to enhance this phenomenon. Nuances and shades of grey are more difficult to communicate than a clear-cut black or white truth. As a matter of fact, the world is not clear-cut or black and white."

As regards efforts to combat polarisation, Valentina suggests that everyone can play a role. "We can be the actors of a quiet and gentle revolution, where we listen and understand and fight polarisation with the only tool that can disintegrate it: an acquired sense of community and participation," she explains.

ABOUT THE #DEMOCRACYATRISK SESSION

Valentina held a specific session dedicated to #Democracy-AtRisk and invited several experts to debate around this theme:

- **Nahema Marchall**, researcher in the field of computational propaganda at Oxford University
- **Giuseppe Porcaro**, geopolitical scientist who had written a fiction book to communicate his dream for a strong united Europe where young generations take part in the democratic process
- **Virginia Fiume**, coordinator for the EU initiatives from the pan-European groups “Science for democracy” and “Eumans”

“I wanted to learn more from experts in the field to have a key to interpret the division I see every day. Fake news spreading at a speed that is unprecedented in human history, the manipulation of truth by politicians, the intermission of foreign countries in others’ democratic processes,” explains Valentina.

The three invited experts agreed during the session that the risks and challenges social media poses to democracy cannot be combated by the media itself. “We have to play an active role, engage at the local level, understand our communities and, eventually, use the tool of internet and social media to mobilise politics on a larger scale, like at the European Parliament level,” says Valentina.

INSPIRING MCAA-LED SESSIONS

Valentina is particularly proud of the MCAA-led sessions. “It was crucial to have a session about Horizon Europe and the funding challenges of the future. Organised by MCAA chair Mostafa Shawrav, and with speakers such as ERC interim president Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, European Parliament member Maria de Graça Carvalho and Secretary General of Science Europe Lidia Borell-Damián, the session highlights once again that MCAA can and should play a role in this discussion,” she says.

Harassment and violence were also discussed within a dedicated session led by Lidia Natalia Trusilewicz from the Responsible Research Environments Taskforce of the MCAA Policy Working Group. “I am thankful for this session. It is difficult to be on the front line when it comes to combating

harassment and violence, especially for fear of repercussions. Lidia did an amazing job finding the right voices for this discussion and shining lights on these problems so that we can collectively act on them,” adds Valentina.

LESSONS LEARNED

Valentina is happy to note that no major technical issue happened on the day of the events, as many were anticipated and tackled in advance.

MCAA is currently working to get feedback from the attendees and make sure the association can increase the offering and tailor these virtual events to the attendees’ needs and expectations.

Valentina highlights relevant initiatives to encourage networking in the framework of virtual events: “We experimented with thematic zoom chat rooms to create a virtual network experience and with a comedy fundraising event meant to be a relaxing parenthesis at the end of a long day of thinking.”

AND THE NEXT MCAA VIRTUAL EVENT IS...

These lessons learned will constitute the basis of the next MCAA General Assembly and Annual Conference, which is likely to be virtual. “A virtual event is not a replacement for a live one. However, we are working very hard to improve upon the experience gained at this conference, to make sure we offer the best possible replacement for a live event,” adds Valentina.

Looking ahead, virtual events might be organised in the future, even when the COVID-19 pandemic is over. “Virtual events could be a pledge to our commitment to create meaningful connections without compromising on our core values of sustainability and of inclusivity. They give us the chance to network and grow as an association while reducing our footprint on the planet and while opening the door for participation to everyone who cannot afford to travel to in-person events, for accessibility or socio-economic issues,” concludes Valentina.

MCAA Editorial Team

A new MCAA website will be up and running

Marco Masia, Chair of the Information and Data Access Working Group, tells us about upcoming changes on the MCAA website.

The Information and Data Access (IDA) working group will soon bring to life a newly updated MCAA website.

The website currently uses the Drupal 7 content management system (CMS). However, this version will soon become outdated and will no longer be supported. Maintaining the old system would render the MCAA website vulnerable to cyberattacks, downtimes and other problems related to old and non-maintained software.

ON THE ROAD TO DRUPAL 9

This is why the MCAA website will upgrade to Drupal 9. “We need to redevelop the code for most of the website,” explains Marco Masia, who chairs the IDA working group. “This entails redesigning from scratch most back-end and front-end functionalities. To this end, we will have to migrate the data stored in the old database to a new database, devise the functionalities we want to keep and develop the new website while updating the old one.”

Using Drupal 9 will ensure that the MCAA website is more secure, faster and better performing, and with a cleaner code base. What’s more, Drupal 9 supports digital media and will provide more flexibility in terms of graphical and functional capabilities.

“We are using this opportunity to streamline the current website, change its design, and make it more user friendly,” adds Marco.

FOCUSING ON WHAT MATTERS

Upcoming changes will include a dashboard for the board to cast their votes on decisions related to microgrants, for example.

What’s more, the management of the applications to subscribe for the association will be taken to the next level thanks to a better automated process.



“Recently, we have automatised the process, but we still need to work on it. Finally, we will outsource many functionalities currently hosted by us to third parties,” says Marco.

The IDA working group started on this Drupal migration in June 2020. The new website should be up and running in Spring 2021. Stay tuned!

Want to find out more?

Get in touch with the IDA working group:
WG-IDA@mariecuriealumni.eu

Want to be involved?

Join the IDA working group!

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When MCAA members bring their expertise to tackle COVID-19 – Zi Wang and a school curriculum

During COVID-19-induced lockdowns across Europe (and beyond), families were required to reorganise households to accommodate online lessons. Many parents struggled in this unusual situation in which they were required to wear many hats (caregiver, teacher, worker etc.). The lines between family and work became blurry. In this context, Zi Wang studied the experience of Germany's Chinese community. He shares with us the main findings.

Zi Wang, in his own words

I am a German-Singaporean researcher with a PhD in sociology and Asian studies. My research spans the fields of education, happiness, migration and youth studies. My Marie Curie Individual Fellowship project examines how teaching methods in secondary schools affect youth's well-being in Japan, France and Finland. I have research and teaching experience in France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Turkey.

To combat the spread of the coronavirus, many countries in Europe (and beyond) instituted lockdowns (starting in the Spring 2020), including orders to stay at home and to shut down schools. This was the case in Germany, where all students stayed at home and their school lessons shifted online.

Amidst this unprecedented situation, Zi conducted a study to analyse how Chinese immigrant communities adapted. The study focused on three immigrant-run schools with a combined enrolment of 600 pupils (ages 5-19) in Bonn, Düsseldorf, and Munich (three cities with large Chinese-speaking communities).

"I focused on heritage language weekend schools. Such organisations were originally established by the communities to transmit the Chinese language and culture to young migrants and offspring," explains Zi.



To conduct his study, Zi developed a list of standard questions around the themes of digital education and well-being. "The open-ended nature of such questions allowed respondents to freely report the situation in their schools," he adds.

Each school provided a team of teachers and parent volunteers to take part. As this study was conducted when travel restrictions were in place, all interviews and follow-ups were conducted remotely via email and/or WeChat. The schools also provided text materials such as curriculum or programme descriptions.



INTRODUCING 'CORONA CURRICULUM'

Based on the findings of Zi's study, the heritage language weekend schools had managed to transfer all activities online by early March 2020. "The so-called 'corona curriculum' was an extension of their original language-based programme," he explains. What's more, these online activities had a positive result, not only on children, but also on parents.

Firstly, the schools increased the number of language classes. "For example, instead of having just one Chinese language class for each grade, they offered conversation, composition and story-telling classes for each grade," explains Zi.

Secondly, the schools introduced other types of lessons like mathematics, German, English, and even programming. Parents were also included! For instance, they were offered yoga lessons to increase their level of well-being.

Held in the afternoons, these lessons complemented the German school lessons in the morning. When restrictions were lifted and schools reopened, activities continued. "For instance, during the summer break, the schools organised on-site sports and math camps in addition to their online language classes. This reduced many parents' childcare burden and freed parents to seek (re)employment after the lockdown," explains Zi.

'CHILDREN GAINED MORE CONFIDENCE'

Based on feedback from parents whose children participated in the heritage language school lessons, this experience was very positive. "Children were not only able

to keep a healthy learning rhythm during the lockdown, but also gained more confidence learning German and math, because they could hear explanations in their native language," he says.

The findings of Zi's study also suggest there is a significant potential of collaboration between these community schools and relevant stakeholders in the field of education. "More research is needed to examine if and how other migrant communities took similar approaches to help parents and offspring navigate this trying time while providing learning, enrichment and supervision opportunities," he says.

Zi is also quick to note his confidence that the work conducted by researchers can contribute to tackle the pandemic. "This pandemic showed the importance of evidence-based policymaking," he explains. "I hope members of the scientific community across all disciplines realise the potential of our work in providing credible evidence so that governments can formulate better policy responses. Likewise, I expect policymakers to pay closer attention to what science has to offer."

Zi's [article](#) with full findings of this study has been accepted for publication by the journal *Migration Studies* (Oxford University Press).

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When MCAA members bring their expertise to tackle COVID-19 – Meet the new Health Manager

MCAA member Laura Moro is addressing the COVID-19 pandemic by delivering information based on academic research through The Health Manager, a digital platform ensuring accurate and timely knowledge translation.

Laura, in her own words

I am originally from Salamanca, Spain. I obtained my BSc in Biotechnology there and then moved to Barcelona for a master's in Biomedical Research. After that, I joined the Barcelona Institute for Global Health to perform a PhD project. My research focused on the immunopathology and diagnosis of malaria in pregnant women from Sub-Saharan Africa, and the interaction of malaria and HIV. During my PhD, I had a secondment in Germany and worked with a research institute in Mozambique.

After obtaining my PhD in Medicine from the University of Barcelona, I moved to Rome, to work as an experienced researcher (postdoc) within a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Innovative Training Network (ITN). I have always been interested in applied research, in particular in medical diagnosis, so it was exciting to be involved in the Research and Development (R&D) of biosensors and bioassays for medical and environmental applications and to gain experience in the biotech industry.

Eager to contribute to real-world applications of scientific discoveries, I am currently involved in health innovation and health entrepreneurship activities. I am the co-founder of AiScope, a non-profit organisation using Artificial Intelligence to improve the diagnosis of malaria and other infectious diseases in low-resource settings, and co-founder of The Health Manager, a digital platform for COVID-19 knowledge translation for doctors and patients. I recently completed a master's in Science Communication and Journalism, and I also work in scientific-medical communication.

Laura is building on her impressive experience in the field of infectious disease. As an MSCA ITN fellow in the framework of the SAMOSS consortium, she had the opportunity to transfer her research skills from academia to the biotech industry.

"I performed most of my work as Marie Curie fellow in a small biotech company in Rome but also had the opportunity to work in Germany and to attend training and meetings in other locations," she says. "I worked in the design and development of novel biosensors and bioassays for medical diagnosis and environmental monitoring."

She is quick to highlight the benefits of this experience. "Coming from the academic research world, it was a great opportunity to understand how the biotech industry works,

how to apply the scientific knowledge for the development of commercial products, and how to build synergies between academia and industry."

Her MSCA experience has been just as important. "Being an MSCA fellow was an incredible personal and professional experience. I felt part of a big multidisciplinary network of supportive and motivated scientists and I am still involved in Marie Curie Alumni Association."

ADDRESSING THE COVID-19 CHALLENGES

With the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, Laura felt the urgency to work on a solution to tackle this phenomenon.



“As a scientist with a background in infectious diseases, I wanted to contribute to tackling the challenges brought on by the pandemic. During the lockdown, I joined a few hackathons and online collaborative events searching for solutions to COVID-19-related problems,” she explains.

During one of these hackathons, Laura had the opportunity to mentor one of the winning teams presenting a project called The Health Manager, a digital platform for knowledge translation from scientific articles to patients and doctors. “I loved the project because it tries to fill a crucial gap between scientific research and clinical practice, so I decided to join the team – which just so happens to be an all-female team,” says Laura.

While COVID-19 is the reason for the launching of The Health Manager, the project will be used in the future for other health crises or chronic diseases. “The platform uses Artificial Intelligence to extract and summarise scientific evidence in an easily understandable and graphic format. In this way, doctors can keep up to date with COVID-19 research, while patients can find evidence-based answers to health questions,” Laura explains.

She is also proud of her contribution on various publications dealing with the COVID-19. “I have helped several teams of researchers to analyse and present epidemiological

data regarding COVID-19 in scientific publications. I have also written a few articles for digital outlets about COVID-19 in pregnancy, the discovery of new antiviral drugs, and the impact of the pandemic on clinical trials,” she says.

‘I AM AMAZED AND PROUD’

Laura highlights the scientific community’s commitment, working hard to develop solutions to fight the pandemic. “I am amazed and proud of the unprecedented response of the scientific and medical communities to the pandemic. We know, however, that scientific discoveries and their clinical translation require time and resources, but we are living a race against the clock.”

As for the explosive dissemination of fake news, especially on social media, about COVID-19, Laura explains this is contributing to bad decisions at all levels. “A distrust of science is rising among some sectors of the population, and politicians in some cases are making decisions that are not supported by science. I am firmly convinced that scientists are key actors to find solutions against the challenges put by COVID-19 and other global threats such as the environmental crisis. We need to convey this message to the general public and those making the decisions,” she says.

A solution could reside in fostering science communication and scientific leadership. “We need more scientists in leadership and decision-making roles to be ready to face global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic,” concludes Laura.

Read Laura Moro’s articles about COVID-19:

[The impact of COVID-19 on clinical trials: challenges and opportunities](#)

[COVID-19 and maternal health: is the virus a threat?](#)

[COVID-19 pandemic: the European panorama. Focus in Italy and Spain](#)

MCAA Editorial Team

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The next generation of EU researchers likely to be impacted by COVID-19 and budget cuts

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a negative impact on researchers, the progression of their work, and their careers. Due to lockdowns, many EU researchers have lost full access to their research institutions. What's more, the strain induced by this situation will likely be worsened by recent budget cuts.

To discuss these issues and find solutions, MCAA teamed up with the Young Academy of Europe (YAE) and Eurodoc to publicly support the Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE). At a joint press conference, they called for more investments to assist the next generation of scientists, who will be the backbone of future European research and innovation.

Giulia Malaguarnera, Gemma Modinos and Mostafa Moonir Shawrav, together with Lina Gálvez Muñoz, MEP, discussed the impact of the budget cuts.

MEP Lina Gálvez Muñoz, in her own words

I have been serving as a member of the European Parliament since 2019. I am Vice-Chair of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy and a member of the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee and of the Panel for the Future of Science and Technology (STOA). Before being elected, I was and - still am - an economic history professor at Pablo Olavide University in Seville. I also served as Regional Minister of Knowledge, Research and University of the Government of Andalusia 2018-2019.

Holding a PhD from the European University Institute, I have served as researcher, professor and visiting scholar at several European universities. The list includes France's Lumière University Lyon 2, London School of Economics (LSE) and University of Reading and Oxford in the UK, as well as Carlos III University of Madrid.

Gemma Modinos, in her own words

I am a neuroscientist from Spain, I have a PhD from the Netherlands, and I am currently a Reader in Neuroscience & Mental Health as well as a Sir Henry Dale Fellow at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience at King's College London. The overall aim of my lab is to understand the role of the neural mechanisms involved in emotional behaviour in the development of psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia, and to investigate whether targeting these mechanisms can help design new therapeutic strategies for psychosis.

I am also the current Chair of the Young Academy of Europe (YAE). The YAE is a bottom-up, pan-European initiative of excellent young scholars (up to 12 years from earning a PhD) for networking, advocacy, scientific exchange, and science policy. The YAE community provides input from a younger generation perspective to shape EU-wide policy for the benefit of future scholars. We are registered charity organisation since 2019.

Giulia Malaguarnera, in her own words

I'm currently an MSCA-Individual Fellow, working in a microfluidic start-up company, Cherry Biotech and visiting scientist at the Institut Curie in France. In July 2020, I was elected president of [Eurodoc](#), the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers. It is an umbrella association of 28 [national associations](#) representing doctoral candidates and junior researchers in 25 countries in Europe. Our [mission](#) is to “advocate for positive change in the policies, culture and environment that affect the quality of training, well-being and employment conditions of early career researchers”.

Mostafa Moonir Shawrav, in his own words

I am from Bangladesh. I studied and worked in the Netherlands, Belgium and Austria. Over the years, I conducted research in nanotechnology. From 2018-2020, I served as the Vice-Chair of the MCAA and handled the internal governance, the financial affairs and the sponsorship of the association. In a nutshell, I am a researcher who has connections with academia, industry and the nonprofit sector, with expertise in Science Diplomacy. In April 2020, I was elected MCAA Chair.

The [Draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2021: Council position](#) was published on 7 September 2020. It sparked numerous discussions and debates among researchers as regards the announced budget for Horizon Europe.

A [fact sheet](#) published by the Initiative for Science in Europe mentioned that, according to different calculations, the Horizon Europe budget is “at best” stagnant, compared with Horizon 2020. All four interviewees agree this situation is worrying.

EARLY STAGE RESEARCHER CAREERS ARE IN JEOPARDY

“Early stage researchers represent an ambitious, adaptive and pioneering collective that can act as the conduit for excellence in Europe,” said Giulia. However, these researchers, together with mid-career researchers are likely to suffer from budget restrictions. “Many early and mid-career researchers have temporary positions, even when holding European Research Council (ERC) or other prestigious grants, even when leading their own research group. A delay in their research and/or a freeze of research investment can block their career progression. This goes beyond the individuals, and damages research as a whole,” explains Gemma.

Having been a researcher herself, MEP Lina Gálvez Muñoz recognises how difficult the conditions of young researchers are likely to become. “Too many of Europe’s two million researchers face precarious conditions and uncertain futures, especially younger researchers, and

I speak as a researcher myself and as the head of a research team with plenty of young scholars dreaming and trying to design their future,” she says.

The risk to lose an entire research generation is therefore high, with potential dramatic effects. “In all cases, the challenges in producing data, higher pressures from supervisors, inaccessibility to appropriate research infrastructure, and lower networking opportunities will increasingly drive researchers away from the academic career path. This is particularly evident in a culture where research assessment based upon the notion of ‘publish or perish’,” added Giulia.

“These budget cuts will impact the future generation,” echoed Mostafa. And these budget restrictions take place in a context already fragile due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

During spring and summer 2020, Eurodoc, the Young Academy of Europe (YAE), and the MCAA collected feedback from their members on the [effect of Covid-19 pandemic on Early-Career Researchers’ working activities](#). This category of researchers is particularly suffering from the restrictions caused by COVID-19. “The precarious conditions and the pandemic have severely impacted the lives of ECRs,” said Giulia. “Anxiety and depression affected more than half of early career researchers, propagated by the fear of not being able to achieve the requirements to complete their doctoral training or losing their job.”

“During the pandemic, levels of stress increased, levels of motivation decreased, and a considerable proportion



of respondents had considered leaving academia,” added Gemma. She referred to a survey conducted by YAE to gather data on the impact of the pandemic on early career researchers since the end of June. The results are striking: 86 % of the respondents said the pandemic significantly delayed their research or publication progress, among other consequences.

THE RISE OF INEQUALITIES

The stress and issues caused by the pandemic increased especially with people with caring responsibilities, especially for those with young children, who had to stay at home during lockdowns. This means that women with young children are more likely to be in vulnerable positions. “More women are in temporary positions, while men are more established and in permanent positions, with less stress and worries about losing their job, even if they have to spend more time at home and have less time for work. This is one important reason for the exacerbation of inequalities,” explained Gemma.

According to MEP Gálvez Muñoz, such inequalities should be tackled to face the climate emergency and the digital revolution and invent together a green, just and human future. “We need to make sure all talents are included, as talents are equally distributed despite their gender, geographical origin, family background,” she said.

RESEARCHERS NEED THE FULL SUPPORT OF SOCIETY

According to Mostafa, the crisis caused by the pandemic should serve as a starting point for a change. “This crisis

is telling us how we should change our behaviour, how we should rethink how we work, how we do research, how we communicate,” he said.

MEP Muñoz explained that the EU Parliament should provide support to researchers. “We have a duty as a public sector to keep the tools needed to address the big challenges ahead of us and with investments and opportunities to support the next generation of researchers and innovators,” she said. Together with her colleagues, she will continue to push forward research and innovation as a priority in the European political agenda.

MEPs support has already been fruitful, as a compromise on long-term EU budget was reached at the beginning of November 2020. According to Mostafa, however, the support towards researchers should come from the entire society. “We need to make sure that the public understands the severity of this issue because the future of our industry would be really hampered.”

MEP Muñoz also highlighted the need to boost citizen involvement. “We need a science that interacts more with society, a better-informed population, with greater and better scientific training, so that citizens will demand a larger budget for science and will be more willing to pay taxes in order to achieve the common good,” she concluded.

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Lost in translation... No more!

In the time of COVID-19, the INTERACT project, funded under the H2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research and Innovation Staff Exchange Network, explores the importance of accurate translations in crisis management.

Imagine you are on vacation in a foreign country. There's news of a virus outbreak in the neighbouring country. How should you protect yourself and your family? The local government issues information in its official language, but you do not understand the instructions. If only the information were translated...

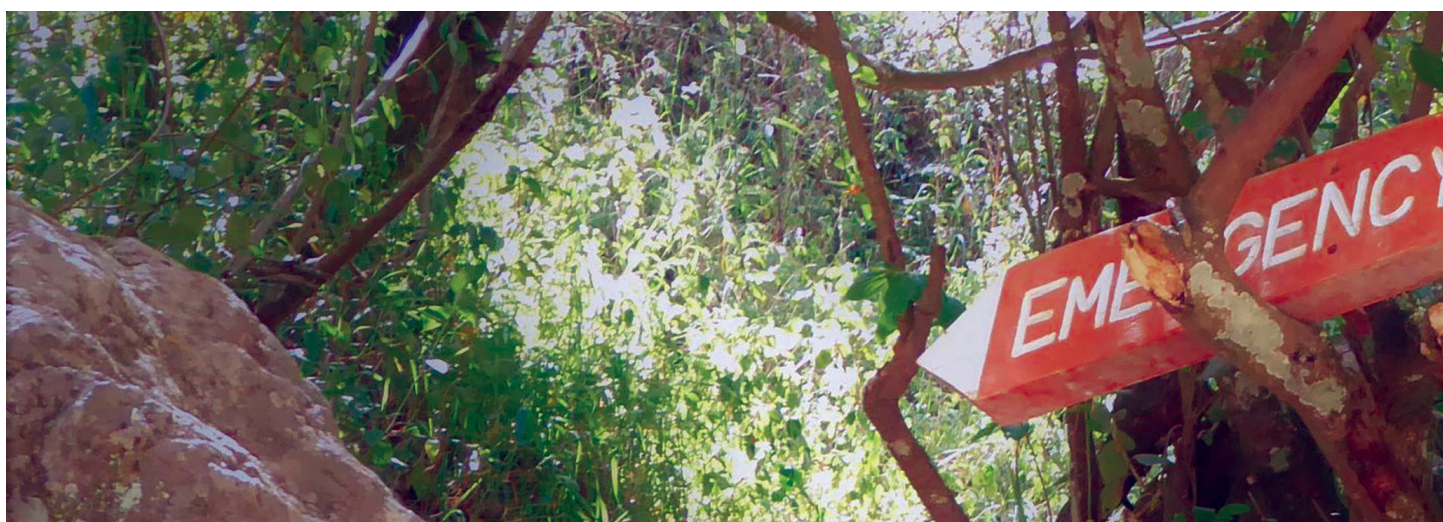
The World Health Organization (WHO) recognises that “accurate information provided early, often, and in languages and channels that people understand, trust and use, enables individuals to make choices and take actions to protect themselves, their families and communities from threatening health hazards.”

In this context, the EU-funded International Network in Crisis Translation (INTERACT) project has emerged to investigate the importance of crisis translation. According to Sharon O'Brien, project coordinator, the focus is twofold. “Firstly, we are convinced that transparent and accessible messages play a fundamental role in establishing a relationship of trust when communicating risks across languages and cultures. Secondly, organisation of translation (and interpreting) has too often been left to ad-hoc last-minute options when it could be more efficient and cost-effective to include all forms of language translation in preparedness activities and emergency planning.”

INTERACT has played an important role in raising awareness on the use of translation as a risk reduction tool globally. It released a list of 10 policy recommendations that were published on [PreventionWeb](#), the knowledge platform of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, and ReliefWeb, the humanitarian information service provided by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The project also designed crisis translation training materials and made it available on its YouTube channel.

SCENARIOS IN WHICH TRANSLATIONS IN CRISIS CAN HELP

Natural hazards such as floods, hurricanes and wildfires cause disruption and risk to local populations, including immigrants and tourists, who may need to act to save their lives or to protect their property. Information in a language and format that they understand enables them to make informed decisions. “Disseminating regular healthcare or emergency health advice – such as how to recognise symptoms in an epidemic outbreak – so that the effects of local risks are minimised and controlled was brought into sharp focus with the COVID-19 pandemic,” emphasises O'Brien. When at-risk populations receive



information that is pertinent to them this knowledge diminishes risks to them and to international humanitarian workers, rescuers, or healthcare professionals arrived to alleviate the impact of the crisis.

The above scenarios have seen the use of interpreters and translators in the past “from the 1999 Izmit earthquake to the 2019 cyclone Idai, until we reached the ‘biggest translation challenge’ with COVID-19,” says O’Brien.

IN ACTION

“COVID-19 is a textbook example of a crisis in which translation is crucial,” says O’Brien. “Information needs were global and multilingual. It made clear to much broader audiences that translated information, in a language and format that is relevant to its recipients, is a crucial risk response tool.”

On 23 January 2020, INTERACT members provided recommendations to the Office of Foreigner Affairs, Municipal Government of Wuhan, China, regarding dissemination of crucial information on the spread of SARS-CoV-2 virus that has caused the COVID-19 pandemic. Crisis communication plans in Wuhan were then based on INTERACT’s direct advice. Federico M. Federici, project co-investigator adds: “A local crisis manager adopted our crisis translation training. They needed to fill an enormous gap between the demand of translated information and of public service interpreting and the offer available through the language service providers that were suddenly stretched overnight.”

INTERACT’s work on integrating translation consideration in policies and in crisis management practices showed

its best results in New Zealand. Since 2017, INTERACT partnered with New Zealand Red Cross creating community focused resources offering translation training to rare language combinations. INTERACT crisis translation training of rare-language users gradually led to including translators and interpreters as trainers in 2020. Immediately after the 2019 Christchurch terrorist attack affecting the Muslim community, INTERACT’s trained speakers of rare languages supported dissemination of information and recovery efforts.

As New Zealand Red Cross integrated INTERACT’s policy recommendations with their standard operations they assisted in national efforts to disseminate mitigating measures against COVID-19. INTERACT has contributed to the country’s success with its COVID-19 containment measures as most language communities were kept informed and all communities have benefitted from the country’s communication success.

“We hope that the funders of INTERACT, the European Commission, and all EU institutions will benefit by embedding our policy recommendations in crisis communication practices. Disseminating trustworthy translation-enabled information in crises does save lives, and it speeds up social and economic recovery after a crisis,” conclude O’Brien and Federici.

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Time to say 'Adiós Corona'

Useful advice, recommendations and a digest of all the latest scientific studies about the COVID-19 pandemic can be found on the new [Adiós Corona](#) website. Run by researchers and doctors, the site was launched by Virginie Courtier-Orgogozo and Claire Wyart. They tell us more about this initiative.



Claire, in her own words

I am trained in Biophysics and Neuroscience and lead a team of 12 researchers at the Paris Brain Institute. On a personal level, I am a mother of three and my 15-year-old son Uzay in high school loves coding and contributed to our initiative by generating the website.

Virginie, in her own words

I am a researcher in Genetics and Evolution. I lead a team of six researchers at the Institute Jacques Monod in Paris. I am a mother of two. I love to inspire students and promote critical thinking and knowledge of biology.



How should I wear my mask? How is it safe to take the elevator? How to best protect myself during a flight? Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the public has been asking a lot of questions like these. Finding answers hasn't always been easy.

Questions like these (and many more) were the starting point for the Adiós Corona website. This is how Virginie

Courtier-Orgogozo and Claire Wyart, researchers and long-time friends, came up with the idea for the website. "We were aware and worried about the pandemic hitting Europe in February," explained Virginie. "During a phone conversation, soon after the lockdown was announced in March, we both realised that people were not aware of the danger, and that factual information based on scientific studies was missing or not explained properly to the general public."

SPREADING COVID-19 INFORMATION

Creating a website to spread information related to COVID-19, particularly for the general public, appeared as the most obvious answer for this scientific duo. Claire had recently set up a website (for the [Zenith](#) Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) initiative) so she was familiar with the process. She was, therefore, pleased to take on the creation of the Adiós Corona website together with her brother Olivier Wyart, graphic designer dedicated to the communication of science (https://headquarter.paris/HQ_Introduction).

The structure of the website is divided in two categories. The first, titled "Understanding Coronavirus," contains sub-categories like [Animals](#), [Distancing](#), [Hygiene](#), [Masks](#) and [Propagation](#). The second category is titled "Acting

in a COVID pandemic.” It includes sections dedicated to topics like [how to wash our hands properly](#), [how to take a taxi safely](#) or [how to have a meeting with friends with low risks of contamination](#). The “What’s new” section deals with questions and scenarios recently posted or updated by the Adiós Corona team.

The website was launched without a hitch. First in French and later in additional languages.

“It was fast launching the French version, once we had done a large part of the work like reading, writing and editing for the general public,” explains Claire.

“I had a few ‘to-do’ lists that I had already distributed to my family and neighbours, so the second part of the website ‘Acting in a COVID pandemic’ was easy to launch,” recalls Virginie.

20 EDITORS, 20 TRANSLATORS, 10 LANGUAGES

The website knows no borders. It was designed to reach not only the French-speaking public, but people all around the world.

“

We wanted our initiative to be international, like the pandemic.

Claire Wyart

“Each country and each culture brings its own approaches to deal with the pandemic. Combining several views can help to find a better way out. We decided to write our texts in French for an international public and to translate them into 10 languages.”

The Adiós Corona website can be read in Arabic, Indonesian, Italian, English, German, Greek, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. “Texts are automatically translated from French with [Weglot](#), and then our team of translators revises,” adds Claire.

The website brings together 40 scientists and involves 20 editors and just as many translators, plus the team is growing. “It is very nice to see scientists emailing us to join. We are very happy to welcome newcomers, there is so much to do,” says Virginie.

As is the case with all multilingual websites, there are challenges. First on the list is making sure the content is always up-to-date, in all languages. Virginie notes: “The biggest challenge for us is to find the time to analyse recent literature, to check our readers’ emails, to update the content, to manage the Adiós Corona group, to interact with journalists and to be active on social media. We also have a lab to run and a family to take care of!”

So far, Adiós Corona has received much positive feedback from its users. A [section gathering testimonials](#) is available on the website. The reviews are a sign of the growing community.

A CARTOON FOR 'LES CORONAGIRLS'

The story behind the website was recently illustrated by Fiamma Luzzati, an Italian cartoonist based in France. The [cartoon](#) was published in the French newspaper Le Monde.

Asked about this creative collaboration, Claire explains: “Fiamma wanted to show our altruistic initiative, and how we contributed to the Paris Brain Institute with Marie Claude Potier, to share information and promote simple COVID-19 tests based on autonomous sampling, using saliva instead of nasal swabs.”

FAREWELL, CORONA?

Looking into the future, both Claire and Virginie are hopeful their website will reach the greatest number of people possible. “I’d like our website to help the public more, by better reaching policymakers at the local level. Until safe and effective vaccination become available for a majority of us, we should avoid a third wave via mass testing with tracing and isolation. Sampling saliva and pooling samples, as it has been done in the city of Qingdao in China, is an effective way out of the crisis this winter” says Claire.

“I hope our website will reassure people,” adds Virginie. “We know enough now to accurately evaluate the risks of contamination and limit them as much as possible. I believe a collective effort is needed from all of us to fully get rid of this coronavirus. A few countries have succeeded. In Europe we are not there yet.”

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A New ERA in the digital age of interconnected education, research and innovation

The European Commission's Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager unveiled the next steps for the new European Research Area, together with a new digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)

The key lesson of the COVID-19 crisis is that digital education should no longer be viewed as an island of its own but considered an integral part of all education and training. So said European Commission Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager when she unveiled the New Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027.

In her [speech](#) on 30 September, Vestager outlined the three strategic proposals:

- [Communication on a European Education Area](#)
- [Digital Education Action Plan](#)
- [Communication on a renewed European Research Area](#)

"Digital education is now an integral part of our future," said Vestager. In this context, the European Research Area and the European Education Area are expected to work together to achieve a new level of ambition in which education, research and innovation are interconnected.

Both are serving the same purpose: beyond preparing ourselves for future similar challenges as the one we are currently facing. They are about creating the right conditions to ensure Europe makes the most of its twin digital and green transitions.

A NEW ERA

The Commission's proposal for a new European Research Area (ERA) is based on four strategic objectives.

- 1. Prioritising investments and reforms:** The interaction between national and European Research and Innovation systems will be simplified, keeping in mind the principle that "the best researchers with the best ideas obtain funding".
- 2. Improving access to excellence:** EU Member States will be supported to increase the performance of their Research & Innovation (R&I) system through Horizon Europe and the Cohesion Policy.

3. Translating R&I results into the economy: ERA will focus on Europe's competitive leadership in technology and will work to improve the environment for business R&I investments.

4. Deepening the ERA: Researchers will be helped to develop the skills they need to conduct research, and all stakeholders will be connected across Europe.

FUTURE ACTIONS

To reach these objectives, the Commission proposes a set of 14 actions to be implemented in the coming years. Above all, the new ERA stresses the 3 % Gross Domestic Product (GDP) EU R&I investment target and proposes a new EU 1.25 % GDP public effort target to be achieved by Member States by 2030.

At the beginning of 2021, a platform of peer-reviewed open access publishing will be launched. It will aim to analyse authors' rights to enable sharing of publicly funded peer-reviewed articles without restriction, to ensure a European Open Science Cloud and incentivise open science practices.

The ERA Forum for Transition will also be launched in 2021, to support Member States in the coordination and prioritisation of national R&I funding and reforms.

In addition, ERA will support Member States who are below the EU average as regards Research and Development (R&D) investment over GDP. The aim will be to increase their total investment in R&D by 50 % within the five coming years. Less performing Member States will be supported, as the new ERA will set up a dedicated work stream in the ERA Forum for Transition and help them to increase their number of highly cited publications, by one-third over five years.

Moreover, inclusive gender equality plans will be developed with Member States and stakeholders, to promote gender equality in R&I. Also, Europe-wide participatory citizen science campaigns will be organised to increase awareness.

In the course of 2021, the strategy plans to develop a roadmap of actions to create synergies between higher



education and research, as well as to develop with Member States an approach to set and implement strategic priorities through the ERA Forum.

The European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (EFSRI) White Paper will be implemented, by the end of 2021, to establish an updated governance structure for research and technological infrastructures.

By the end of 2022, common industrial technology roadmaps will be developed, as well as a networking framework to support Europe's R&I ecosystems. Guiding principles for knowledge valorisation will be set up together with a code of practice for the smart use of intellectual property.

Finally, the strategy plans a new toolbox to support researchers' career development by the end of 2024.

A NEW DIGITAL EDUCATION PLAN

Over the past few years, digitalisation has changed many aspects of work and daily life. In her [political agenda for Europe](#), the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen emphasised the necessity to unlock the potential of digital technologies for learning and teaching, and to develop digital skills for all.

Development of a digital education ecosystem

The first strategic priority of the digital Education plan aims to foster the development of a digital education ecosystem. A dialogue with Member States will be launched by 2022 in order to prepare a proposal for a Council Recommendation on the enabling factors for digital education.

The plan also proposes a Council Recommendation on online and distance learning for primary and secondary education, by the end of 2021. What's more, Erasmus cooperation projects will play a major role in supporting the digital transformation plans of primary, secondary, vocational education and training (VET), higher, and adult-education institutions.

Finally, Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be at the centre of the strategic priority, as ethical guidelines and data usage in teaching and learning for educators will be drafted.

Digital skills and competences for the digital transformation

The second strategic priority of the digital Education plan focuses on digital skills and competences for the digital transformation. Common guidelines for teachers and educational staff will be set up to foster digital literacy.

The European Digital Competence Framework will be updated to include AI and data-related skills. In addition, Europeans will have the possibility to indicate their level of digital competences thanks to a new European Digital Skills Certificate (EDSC).

A Council recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training will be proposed in accordance with the Skills Agenda.

Students' digital skills are also in the spotlight of this strategic priority, as it is planned that the share of 13-14-year-old students who underperform in computer and information literacy will be reduced to under 15 % by 2030.

Finally, advanced digital skills development will be strongly encouraged, as well as women's participation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

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From the Western Balkans with love

Since conditions for doing research in this region are not always ideal, researchers from the Western Balkans need to be flexible, interdisciplinary and creative. So says Dr Radenka Krsmanović Whiffen, who tells us how the research environment in the Western Balkans has helped to shape resilient and adaptable researchers.

Dr Radenka Krsmanović Whiffen, in her own words

I was born and raised in Montenegro and studied Electrical Engineering at the University of Montenegro. Subsequently, I completed my Masters at ISUFI, the University of Salento and graduated with a PhD in Physics at EMAT, the University of Antwerp.

After several years working in Material Science across the European research space, including in Serbia, France, Portugal and Italy, I was awarded an MSCA Individual Fellowship in Physics in 2018, for my project NanoPyroMat, investigating nanomaterials for pyroelectric energy harvesting at the ENEA Casaccia Research Centre in Rome. I am the chair of the MCAA Western Balkans Chapter which I helped found in 2019. Alongside my research interests, I try to focus on representing MCAA members in and from our region, promoting Open Science and RRI, and exploring the impact of science policy and regional cooperation as pathways to delivering systemic change and improvement in the research culture, both in the Western Balkans and beyond.

There is something to be said for being left to “work it out for yourself”. Radenka Krsmanović Whiffen, chair of the MCAA Western Balkans Chapter, says others across Europe could benefit from the experience of Western Balkan researchers having to navigate winding and unusual career pathways.

In an interview, Krsmanović Whiffen explains why building a career when your starting point is the Western Balkans is not always simple or straightforward.

“Science and research” is one of the negotiating chapters of the European Commission’s latest Communication on enhancing the accession process for the Western Balkans. In your opinion, and based on personal experience, how can a focus on science and research support the region’s accession to the EU?

Science and research are areas where cooperation and collaboration are the cornerstones of success. Researchers are thus generally aware of the importance of working together, whether at a regional or international level, in order to build opportunities and achieve results. That is not to romanticise researchers as somehow being “selfless.”

We also benefit from the opportunities we receive from that cooperation. We do, however, have a different perspective on the two-way nature of the process of integration.

In the context of the process of EU accession, which is of course at different stages in the different territories of the region, researchers can act as ambassadors for EU praxis and values, pointing to the ways in which embedding those values, including the importance of cooperation through for example Horizon 2020 projects, can enhance the prospects of accession. That need for cooperation has only been reinforced by the daily experience of the challenges of COVID-19. We cannot find all the answers alone. Cooperation at a global level is clearly the way forward.

Where does the region’s biggest strength lie, when it comes to research and innovation? Which qualities of the research environment in the Western Balkans could the rest of Europe learn from?

The biggest strength of the region is its people. We have always produced excellent researchers, and we have always exported them to other regions of the world due to lack of opportunities at home. That causes a paradox,



because this process of brain drain creates a fantastic science diaspora which is innovative, collaborative, and deeply embedded in the research culture of Europe or America, but which has comparatively little influence on the research space in their home region.

To be frank, those who leave often don't come back. That's not because they don't want to. In fact, they would often like to, for reasons of family ties and a desire to help build something better at home. More often than not, however, the opportunities to return are limited, due to structural issues with academia and research across the region. This is something that we need to acknowledge if we want to promote and speed up sustainable change. I recently finished my IF and decided to come back to Montenegro, not least because of the situation with COVID, so I know first-hand how difficult it is to reintegrate and communicate the value of an "outside" perspective.

The value of the research environment in the Western Balkans comes in shaping resilient and adaptable researchers. Conditions for doing research in our region are not ideal, even at the best institutions. What that means, though, is we have researchers who can do a lot with only minimal support, and who flourish sometimes even despite the environment they work in rather than because of it. In my experience, this tends to make researchers from the Western Balkans very flexible, interdisciplinary and creative. There is a lot to be said for being left to work it out for yourself, and sometimes I think the rest of Europe could benefit from our experience of navigating winding and unusual career pathways. Building a career when your starting point is the Western Balkans is not always simple or straightforward.

What is the biggest challenge faced by researchers in the region?

In simple terms, it's the absence of opportunities. By that I mean both that there is a lack of opportunity to engage in cutting edge research in the region, for example, due to the absence of large-scale research infrastructure or limited investment, but also due to a lack of awareness of the opportunities offered by EU funding programmes like MSCA or Erasmus+. These are what I would call the "visible" barriers to research success in the region, and we at the Western Balkan Chapter aim to contribute to raising awareness of ways to overcome them.

There are also structural "invisible" barriers in our region, which are specific to the Western Balkans but which resonate with the experience of researchers in other "Eastern" regions, and I think more widely as well. To give just a few examples, in the Western Balkans, we have a very hierarchical system within academia and research, which closes off opportunities to people who don't move in the right circles, or who have been away from the region and wish to return. The region as a whole also has a rather limited view of gender equality, which is much more declarative than substantive, meaning that career paths are designed by and for men, with little thought given to supporting women in research.

There is also a degree of corruption in academia across the region, both in terms of nepotism and "favours for favours," but also a lack of commitment to academic integrity and Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), which means that plagiarism is to some degree tolerated, while positions are awarded on the basis not of open, meritocratic competition, but rather processes which are specifically designed so that only "preferred" candidates will succeed. Even though there are mechanisms to combat this, there is a lack of will to really change the situation, and the daily experience of academic research in our the region reflects this. The greatest taboo is speaking up against these "unspoken" rules of the game, for fear of permanently marking yourself out as not welcome. We need more honesty about the problems if we are seeking to find solutions.

I realise this paints quite a gloomy picture, but we have to be realistic and say it how it really is. On the other hand, we should remember that there are lots of bright points in the region, where excellent researchers are producing ground-breaking research, and we should work to support and promote those practices which will help spread fairness and integrity more widely, so as to offer more opportunities to our talented researchers and, hopefully, improve the research culture over the long term.

The countries in the region are in different stages of the accession process. Does this affect research in the region and regional collaborations?

It's absolutely correct that the stages of the accession process vary widely across the Western Balkans. We have long-standing candidates in Montenegro and Serbia, as well as two states that are about to start accession talks, Albania and North Macedonia, while Bosnia and Kosovo still have a long way to go. Each of those processes is moving at different speeds, and while the region as a whole benefits from the EU's commitment to its European perspective, it is also clear that engagement and collaboration across the region is affected.

In terms of regional cooperation in research, we see that those candidates who have been in the process of accession for some time often find it easier to work together, or to create bilateral projects with existing EU member states, rather than build collaborations with other parts of the Western Balkans. The reasons for that are complex, but might include the available research infrastructure, the level of funding or the perception of prestige and added value. Research capacity and opportunities also vary considerably.

Which role can the MCAA Western Balkans Chapter play in boosting research in the region?

As I see it, we have two roles. The first is to be ambassadors for the opportunities offered by collaborative research across the European research space through the Marie Skłodowska- Curie Actions, and indeed more generally

the other EU-funded programmes and opportunities that are available to the Western Balkans. MCAA members from our region have all benefitted from the opportunity to conduct innovative, collaborative and cutting edge research, and have compelling stories to tell about the impact of their experiences on themselves, their careers and their perspectives. As such, we can drive home the positive impact and practical benefits of engaging with EU research opportunities.

More generally, at least from my perspective, the Western Balkans Chapter has a responsibility to operate almost as a research lobby, both in the region and further afield, to promote RRI, equality of opportunity, academic integrity and fairness in research and academia, and to communicate the importance of science as part of society. All of us are proud of our roots, and we all want to see our home region doing well by expanding opportunities for everyone to showcase their talent. Where we see problems in our home societies, it is our job to talk about them openly, and to engage with other stakeholders, so that we can work together to tackle them and change our region for the better.

The Western Balkans has had a turbulent history, one which has an often negative impact on how the region is perceived by the wider world. In that context, science can play a diplomatic role at the level of bringing people together to share perspectives and seek mutually beneficial solutions. The Western Balkans Chapter is proof that we are better and stronger when we work together and speak with a unified voice to connect and represent our members. That's our mission, and we hope by doing that we can contribute to offering a different, positive perspective and boost the status of research and researchers at a local, regional and international level.

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Supporting Roma in the long-term in the EU



On 7 October 2020, the European Commission unveiled a new plan to support Roma in the EU. This is a first step to start implementing the [EU Action Plan against racism 2020-2025](#), and President von der Leyen's commitment to a Union of Equality.

A new [10-year plan](#) and a [proposal for a Council Recommendation](#) are among the measures issued by the European Commission on 7 October 2020 to support Roma people.

'Roma' encompasses diverse groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti etc.).

The Roma are considered as Europe's largest ethnic minority. Around 10 to 12 million Roma live in Europe, and approximately 6 million are EU citizens or residents.

The 10-year plan notes that this population continues to face discrimination, antigypsyism sentiments and socioeconomic exclusion in their daily lives. Moreover, hate crime and human trafficking (especially women and children), continue to be matters of high concern.

Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli, declared: “For the European Union to become a true Union of Equality we need to ensure that millions of Roma are treated equally, socially included and able to participate in social and political life without exception.”

SEVEN OBJECTIVES AND QUANTITATIVE TARGETS

The 10-year plan proposes seven objectives and targets to tackle Roma's marginalisation. For the first time, the Commission proposes quantitative EU headline targets.

1. Fight and prevent antigypsyism and discrimination:

It is expected that the proportion of Roma experiencing discrimination will be cut by at least half, and that the proportion of the general population that feels uncomfortable having Roma neighbours will drop by at least a third.

2. Reduce poverty and social exclusion to close the socio-economic gap between Roma and the general population:

The poverty gap between Roma and the general population will be reduced by half, as well as the gap between Roma children and other children.

3. Promote participation through empowerment, cooperation and trust:

The plan foresees to engage at least 90 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in EU-wide coordinated Roma civil society monitoring. The participation of Roma NGOs as full members in national monitoring committees will be ensured, and the involvement of Roma in political life at local, regional, national and EU levels will be encouraged.

4. Increase effective equal access to quality inclusive mainstream education:

It is expected that the gap, as regards participation in early childhood education and care, will be reduced by at least half.

5. Increase effective equal access to quality and sustainable employment:

The employment gap, the gender employment gap and the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) gap will be reduced by at least a half.

6. Improve Roma health and increase effective equal access to quality healthcare and social:

The life expectancy gap will be reduced by at least a half.

7. Increase effective equal access to adequate desegregated housing and essential services:

The plan is to reduce the gap in housing deprivation by at least one third, and to shrink the gap in overcrowding

by at least a half. What's more, it is planned that at least 95 % of Roma will have access to clean drinking water.

'CELEBRATING ROMA AS PART OF OUR UNION'S DIVERSITY'

Even though the situation of Roma varies across countries, it is crucial that Member States mobilise resources to implement the Commission's strategy.

For this purpose, Member States are invited to develop, adopt and implement national Roma strategic frameworks by including common features, minimum commitments which should apply to all, possible additional commitments depending on the national context, and more ambitious commitments for Member States, with large Roma populations.

Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli, said: “We expect to make real progress by 2030 towards a Europe in which Roma are celebrated as part of our Union's diversity, take part in our societies and have all the opportunities to fully contribute to and benefit from political, social and economic life in the EU.”

Further reading

[10-year plan](#)

[Proposal for a Council Recommendation](#)

MCAA Editorial Team

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Empowering Roma women through Public Narratives – Discover the Narratives4Change project

Public Narratives is a leadership practice, and is one of the keys of inspiring leadership. We discussed with Emilia Aiello how those narratives can empower Roma women in the framework of the Narratives4Change project.

Emilia, in her own words

I was born in Uruguay. In 2003, when I was 14 years old, I moved to Europe together with my parents. This was when the economic recession, sparked in Argentina, spread to my country. We settled in Catalonia, being one of those Uruguayan families with Italian nationality living in Spain. My father's family had migrated from Italy to Uruguay at the beginning of the 20th century, fleeing poverty and looking for opportunities, and a century later it felt like we were doing the same.

This experience had a strong impact on me and how I understand the world. I realised how important community was for me, for my family, and how paramount it was for me to fully understand how some political, economic and societal factors shape society at the macro level. And also how counting with community networks is key to open up spaces that enhance our agency as human beings, and allow us to at least contest those societal constraints.

At university, I majored in Political Science and had the opportunity to spend one year in the United Kingdom, in the framework of the Erasmus exchange programme. This stay strengthened my convictions on how academic work can influence society, and how higher education institutions need to work to mirror social diversity.

Returning to Barcelona, I started to collaborate with Teresa Sordé Martí, professor in sociology, who at that time back in 2009 had recently returned from Harvard where she was doing her dissertation, focussed on Roma community and inequalities. She became my mentor. It is thanks to her and her amazing work and her mentoring that I became involved in conducting research on the Roma community, and started working on the Narratives4Change project.

Roma women have powerful stories to tell and should be given adequate space to make their voices heard. Even though Roma women-led movements can provide these spaces, the current groups lack the necessary structure.

What's more, Roma women tend to not be considered as key actors on the public stage. This is due to numerous prejudices. "We tend to overlook these women, whereas

they are very active within local associations and have been doing amazing work. Nevertheless, when it comes to participating and to be involved in debates and in the decision-making process, Roma women are not yet represented," explains Emilia.

STRUCTURING ROMA WOMEN-LED MOVEMENTS

Focusing on Roma women narratives and giving them the opportunity to share their stories within structured organisations could transform into a unique leadership opportunity for them. This is the overall aim of the Narratives4Change project.

Narratives4Change (launched in 2019 and expected to end in 2022) is focussed on associations working in the field of education, health and gender equality. The project aims to better organise the Roma women movement in Europe. “This project could provide a lot of added-value for both the Roma community and those working in grassroots-based organisations tackling seriously how to organise around social inequalities, showing that leadership matters,” says Emilia.

In this context, Emilia is currently conducting research on a key aspect of the project: Public Narratives.

EFFICIENT PUBLIC NARRATIVE MAKES GREAT LEADERS

Together with Professor Marshall Ganz at the Harvard Kennedy School (who developed the public narrative leadership framework, which was adapted by the 2008 and 2012 Obama campaign, and now is used by organisations worldwide), Emilia is analysing the social impact of the public narrative framework as a pedagogy for developing collective leadership which could be used by Roma women.

This framework is based on the following three stories:

- 1. Story of Self:** This narrative can be used to communicate sources of caring and sources of hope, inviting others to be empathetic.
- 2. Story of Us:** This narrative can unearth the shared values on which a collective identity can be grounded.
- 3. Story of Now:** A narrative generating a sense of urgency on the individual and activating sources of care, ultimately encouraging to take action today (not tomorrow).

As such, the Narrative4Change project considers that public narratives enhance leadership, and provide a framework for leaders, which can be further adapted to diverse geographic, cultural contexts, and areas of action. “Ever since people have been using narratives across different geographical contexts and cultural contexts. But what we are looking at is how the use of public narrative contributes to change things, diving deeper in the specific elements of this leadership practice, that of communicating one’s own values by engaging with others (Story of Self), our shared values with our community (Story of Us),



and the urgent challenges to those values that require a response today (Story of Now)” added Emilia.

In 2020, Emilia deepened her research by conducting a survey among persons who learned public narrative either being students at Harvard or participating in workshops held between 2006 and 2020. The survey aimed at mapping how the public narrative framework was being used in public leadership in different domains (workplace, constituency groups, campaigns, private), areas of action (e.g. advocacy/organising in education, health, politics etc.) as well as cultural and geographical contexts.

One of the main survey findings was that public narratives are being used all around the world, mostly in the US, but also in countries as diverse as Uruguay, Sierra Leone, Jordan or Japan.

What’s more, against what we initially thought, public narrative is not solely being used by leaders within their workplace, or at the public sphere, but it is also being used at the private sphere, to engage with friends and family.

Enthusiastic about these first results, Emilia is convinced that public narrative can be useful for Roma women organising at the local level, in Spain and in Europe, and that at the same time those working in public leadership across the world have yet a lot to learn from the Roma communities themselves, and their dialogic way of leading. She is looking forward to communicating the final results of the Narrative4Change project in 2022.

[Learn more about the Narratives4Change project](#)

MCAA Editorial Team

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Changing the perspective towards Roma in Europe – Discover the InviCitRom project

Julija Sardelic has been working on the InviCitRom project, which aims to propose an innovative perspective on Roma as European citizens.

Julija, in her own words

I am a Slovenian and Croatian citizen. While finishing up my PhD in political sociology (how the position of Romani minorities changes after the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia) at the University of Ljubljana, I started my first research position at the University of Edinburgh. It was with the ERC-funded research project CITSEE (Europeanisation of Citizenship in the Successor states of the former Yugoslavia) led by Professor Jo Shaw.

This is when I became interested in citizenship studies on how the position of Roma as citizens changed after the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

After completing my PhD, I embarked on my first postdoctoral position in 2014, as a Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute, under the supervision of Professor Rainer Bauböck. Afterwards, I was a Postdoctoral Researcher at the School of Law and Social Justice at the University of Liverpool.

In 2017, I started my Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Individual Fellowship (IF) Postdoctoral Fellowship under the supervision of Professor Peter Vermeersch at LINES (Leuven International and European Studies, University of Leuven, Belgium).

Before starting my academic career, I worked with Romani communities for 10 years in Southeast Europe, as a human rights activist.

Today, I am Lecturer in Political Science at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington.

In the European Union documents, Roma are described as the largest ethnic minority. Asked about the situation of Romani people, Julija Sardelic explained how their human rights are being violated in numerous EU countries. "This phenomenon carries on in post-socialist countries, where the greatest number of Romani minorities live, but also in Member States, such as France, where Romani EU citizens have been expelled," she said.

DISCRIMINATION AND POVERTY

Looking back, Julija says the results achieved by the previous European Commission's framework to inclusion of Roma were not as positive as expected, as many of the policies looked at Roma as a 'problematic' minority rather than fellow citizens in Europe that should have the same human rights protection and adequate standard of living that most people have in the European Union. "According

to some reports, it brought mixed results in best cases, for example in the field of education, where new practices for inclusion of Romani children have been adopted, while at the same time segregated education for Romani children persists around Europe,” she said.

Moreover, Julija highlighted the increase in racism against Roma and the deterioration of social conditions. “We have witnessed more extreme white supremacist violence against Roma and worse condition when it comes, for example, to housing and access to healthcare. Moreover, the far-right racist rhetoric became more normalised also by the most prominent politicians in the EU.”

What's more, numerous Roma live in extreme poverty in several EU Member States. “Many Roma face conditions that would be unimaginable to the average EU citizen, like not having access to clean drinking water and sanitation. This is extremely problematic during the COVID-19 pandemic, as a number of NGOs such as the European Roma Rights Centre has warned,” explains Julija. She referred to an [article](#) issued by the European Roma Rights Centre and to an [article](#) she published on the Discover Society website.



A CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE

Addressing this situation, the InviCitRom project proposes an innovative approach. “The InviCitRom project suggests a change of perspective on Roma in Europe. Instead of treating the position of Roma as a marginalised minority that does not seem to fit or as an exception, the InviCitRom project reversed the question to ask what the position of Roma tells us about citizenship formation in Europe,” explained Julija.

From 2017 to 2019, the project investigated different dimensions of citizenship (rights, dimensions, belongings) in order to show that Roma are not an exception. Julija added: “The aim of the project was to analyse the position of Roma as a position of citizenship, and also to question if citizenship can be considered as truly inclusive, if it perpetuates marginalisation of a certain group of citizens.”

Having analysed diverse socio-legal analysis of laws (laws related to minorities in all the EU member states), policy documents and after having conducted interviews (in Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Germany, for example) Julija came to the conclusion that Roma have been visible in Europe as a minority, but invisible as citizens.

In her forthcoming book (which is one of the main outcomes of the InviCitRom project) *The Fringes of Citizenship: Romani Minorities in Europe*, Julija highlights a paradox: “While Roma are unique as a minority in Europe, I have shown in my book that they have been treated like many other marginalised citizens around the globe. Roma have been positioned on the fringes of citizenship,” she adds.

Policy recommendations for the EU Member States and the European Commission are proposed in the book.

The first recommendation states that the EU Member States should focus on Roma as citizens, rather than as an exceptional ‘problematic’ minority. When drafting broader citizenship policies and legislation, institutions should always take into account whether or not these policies have a potential of excluding a group of citizens.

Secondly, the policies and legislation shouldn’t exclude citizens from equal citizenship: the fringes of citizenship are created through invisible edges, and addressing those fringes addresses therefore exclusion.

It can be hoped that these recommendations will contribute to help Member States to implement the new action plan in favour of Roma people for the coming ten years.

[Read more about the InviCitRom project](#)

MCAA Editorial Team

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In November 2020, the MCAA Newsletter hosted its first special issue. The special issue focused on “Diversity in Research”. In the following pages, we republish two articles from the special issue, and encourage you to read the full issue on the MCAA website.

The challenge of inclusivity

What are the challenges faced by researchers with disabilities? Yahaya Yabo of the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) Editorial Team interviewed Carlo Antonini, a member of the MCAA Gender, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (GEDI) Working Group (WG), who shared his story, point of view and current work.



PREAMBLE

Carlo is a researcher with disability and a member of the MCAA GEDI WG. He is actively involved in the WG's ResearchAbility task force, which focuses on researchers with disabilities. Currently, he is a Rita Levi Montalcini tenure-track researcher and the coordinator of a recently funded MSCA Innovative Training Network (ITN), SURFICE¹.

Carlo Antonini in his own words

I am concentrically Lombard, Italian and European. I am an aerospace engineer by training and, since a few years, I am working in the field of Materials Science and Technology, more specifically on non-wetting and anti-icing surfaces. I have been an MSCA fellow at ETH Zurich at the Laboratory of Thermodynamics in Emerging Technologies, in Prof. Dimos Poulikakos' group (2012-2014). I recently started coordinating an MSCA-ITN project called SURFICE.

CAREER PATH

Carlo is currently a tenure-track assistant professor at the University of Milano-Bicocca, and a scientific advisor for the start-up ApiTech², which supports innovation in SMEs. He had faced the well-known difficulties of finding a balance between mobility and family, with the need to

find a long-term position. Talking about his disability, Carlo says: “I was born with a below-elbow amputation which has generally not restricted my career as an experimental scientist working in the lab. Certainly, I was fortunate to find colleagues and supervisors who supported my *being* different, without making me *feel* different.”

¹ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/956703/en>

² <http://www.api-tech.it/>

DISCRIMINATION AND LACK OF POSSIBILITIES FOR RESEARCHERS WITH DISABILITIES

While discussing with a colleague about a student, who was using crutches after a surgery and was not allowed to come to the chemistry lab, Carlo realised “that a person with permanent limited mobility, e.g. using a wheelchair, may be prevented from becoming a chemist: if he/she cannot do the lab activities, how can he/she get the degree?” After this discussion, Carlo felt that “so much still needs to be done to level barriers.”

In order to make research/academia inclusive, Carlo believes that, by educating ourselves and the people around us, solutions can and must be found, if there is a specific need. He emphasises that “supporting people with specific needs does not mean favouring them, but rather creating the right conditions for everyone to succeed. Eyeglasses are a simple and perfect example: giving glasses to short-sighted people does not favour them; it simply brings them at the same condition as the others.”

The University of Milano-Bicocca, where Carlo works, took some steps to address the problems of discrimination in academia by making inclusion one of its core pillars. Carlo recounts his initial reaction to this: “I must confess the expression struck me at first: shouldn’t a university aim at being ‘exclusive’? Usually ‘exclusive’ is a synonym associated with being top ranking and cool, rather than ‘inclusive’. However, inclusivity is a key factor with extremely positive practical consequences.”

“At my university, once a year we have the B.inclusion days³ to promote awareness on diversity,” says Carlo. “The university has a team of people with diverse competences, from psychology to IT, to help students find solutions for their specific needs. We, as teachers, are provided training to help successfully interact with students with specific needs. In case a student needs help, I know what to do and there is a whole team that can support me.”

DIVERSITY AS A STRENGTH IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Carlo’s definition of diversity is straightforward: “We are all differently equal.” Although he works and collaborates with people in a diverse research community, he feels that “the Italian academy certainly needs a generational turnover to develop a more diverse environment.” Having different needs and experiences, including a diverse education background, is a strength: “Over the past few years, in my university, having an international MSc has certainly become beneficial, because it means exposing everyone, from professors to students, to different languages and cultures.”

According to Carlo, diversity can be a driver for inclusion: “Belonging to a minority, or having specific needs, helps people to develop awareness about diversity, as well as to understand that others may see things differently and may have different needs.” As a scientist, Carlo had the opportunity to live in different countries (Germany, United Kingdom, Switzerland and Canada): “Although I did it in a privileged position as an exchange student first or as a highly qualified professional later, I have learnt what it means to be far from home and a foreigner. This increases my empathy for people with a different background than mine, even now that I am back home, in Italy.”

FROM AN MSCA FELLOW TO AN MSCA COORDINATOR

Carlo is currently coordinating the MSCA-ITN SURFICE project, about which he has this to say: “As a proud MSCA Alumnus, I am enthusiastic to lead a consortium in which we will train 13 PhD students to become the next generation of EU scientists and possibly innovative entrepreneurs. Together with a couple of colleagues, we started to plan the proposal in late 2017. Such a long time to write it and then have it granted. But patiently working on it was well worth it.”

WHAT CAN WE DO TO SUPPORT RESEARCHERS WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS?

“I think mentoring and advice from peers is a key element within the association,” says Carlo while referring to how MCAA members support each other within the Association. At the EU level, he believes that we should all advocate for a uniform regulation on health support. This is because “national health systems are so different, and some disabilities and specific needs may not be recognised, when moving from one country to another. This can be a tremendous barrier for researchers’ mobility within the EU. We need to have a more uniform and recognised disability scheme at the European level.” A quick way to render some support in the meantime would be “providing support through a specific insurance scheme. Some specific financial support, like the MSC Lump Sum, may help the transition too.”

The MCAA can play a key role in promoting the value of diversity and inclusion in research: “The MCAA represents the current and the next generation of leaders in science. It is important to educate all of us to promote diversity and inclusion, through events, meetings and panel discussions. We must create awareness on the unconscious biases we all have, so that we can go back to our institutions and promote a bottom-up change in our daily business.”

Interview by Yahaya A. Yabo
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3 <https://www.unimib.it/eventi/binclusion-days-2019>

Empowering young entrepreneurs

Diversity

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Passionate about sport, Christina Makoundou is currently working in Bologna on a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) project that aims to develop sustainable, accessible, safe, resilient and smart urban pavements. With her, we talked about the role of youth in creating a more diverse world and about the importance of solidarity through #Blackunity.

Christina, in her own words

I am Christina Makoundou, a French PhD fellow working in Italy, in collaboration with Swedish institutions. I graduated from Sorbonne University (Material Chemistry) in 2018, and I had the chance to join the University of Bologna as the youngest early-stage researcher part of the Horizon 2020 – Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions “SAFERUP” project (Sustainable, Accessible, Safe, Resilient and Smart Urban Pavements).

In addition to science, I am incredibly passionate by sport, either as a player or instructor. Besides, I was lucky enough to live my passion in the framework of international or young exchanges and volunteering projects around the world.

Short, general-public-adapted speech is the form of communication I love to use while sharing my research's work. I am proud of my multidisciplinary background linking chemistry, materials sciences and high-level sport skills.

As a PhD student, I am currently working on the following question: Can roads be made of recycled materials and save lives at the same time? My project encompasses various aspects like reactions or materials, people and their safety, along with the future of our environment. This project is a part of my life goal aiming to find a solution to tackle today's problems, to make the future better for all.

“

I have an incredible chance to have a double culture. This opened me to the world at a very young age.

Christina believes in the positive impact that youth can have on the world no matter from where they are from. Involved in various volunteering activities, she is continuously looking for opportunities to meet her peers and, above all, to learn. “I am extremely active as an international volunteer in the framework of sports events, European solidarity corps, European voluntary service, etc. During these volunteering activities, I have met amazing young people from several continents,” she says.

ONE YOUNG WORLD SUMMIT

She recently became aware of the One Young World Summit whose purpose is to identify, promote and connect the world's most impactful young leaders to create a better world, with more responsible and effective leadership. Christina is looking forward to participating in this summit hopefully in 2022. “I follow the event communications and the discussions they propose very closely. I really would like to attend this summit one day and to meet brilliant individuals from everywhere. I can say that my position as an MSCA fellow now allows me to meet international researchers, inspirational people,” adds Christina with enthusiasm.

While waiting for the summit, our fellow had the opportunity to attend a discussion led by the One Young World Africa network/community: “The objective of the discussion was

to point out some problems linked to the history mainly, and to enhance the entrepreneurship behaviour of the young generation, to be aware of their capabilities and to empower the ideas or projects coming from Africans or African descendants,” explains Christina.

Should the concept of #Blackunity (and #Unity) appear as a solution to tackle systemic racism and inequalities? “I think we reach the point where we should not differentiate people because of borders. If we aim to work together, everyone is a strength, no matter if the person is based in Nigeria, Canada, Brazil, Spain, New Zealand or Japan. I think the #Blackunity and the unity, in general, is the definition of this state of mind,” answers our fellow.

INSPIRATION

Rooted in a “double culture” (from France, the country where she was born and raised, and from the country where her parents were born), Christina considers this situation as an advantage and a pride: “I have an incredible chance to have a “double culture”. This opened me to the world at a very youthful age.”

Among others, Christina’s inspirations come from black or African entrepreneurs.

BLACK OR AFRICAN ENTREPRENEURS WHO INSPIRE ME

Moussa CAMARA, Founder and President of «Les Déterminés», which aims to help and support people with entrepreneurship/professional projects.

Marie DASYLVA, Founder of Nkaliworks, an empowerment/ coaching agency supporting the victims of discrimination, microaggressions or even denial of skills.

Thione NIANG, Founder and CEO of GIVE1PROJECT and JeufZone Farms, diplomat, lecturer and social entrepreneur. He notably worked with Barack Obama when he was president and received several awards.

Gloria ADE and **Gipsy ILUNGA**, Co-founders and CEOs of Japade&co, a cooperative working with small producers and labs in Africa.

Denis MUKWEGE, Gynaecologist, Founder of the Panzi Foundation and Mukwege Foundation. He received in 2019 the Nobel Peace Prize for his effort and action against wartime sexual violence.

Fatoumata KEBE, Astrophysicist and educator specialising in space debris and author of the book *La lune est un roman* (The moon is a novel). She was a student at Sorbonne University.

What’s more, Christina is pleased to share with us the [list of the 100 most influential young Africans](#) that was released on 4 November 2020.



EMPOWERING IS KEY

According to Christina, empowering young, female, African and black entrepreneurs is vital in enhancing diversity. This should be done by highlighting and contributing to the discussions to praise the numerous initiatives they launch. She mentions, amongst other actions, Afrogenius, which aims to spread scientific knowledge and the Instagram account tous.afro, whose purpose is to raise awareness about African traditions, cultures, and languages.

Christina highlights how important it is to recognise the work done by African and black entrepreneurs and gives a few tips on how to impact diversity positively: “Consider black people when they apply to grants, scholarships, positions, consider their education, let them express themselves when they are and feel concerned.” Moreover, “Don’t / never hide negative/harmful/toxic behaviours behind humour or habits/usual practices” she adds.

“The world of tomorrow starts today, and no matter our skin colour, our citizenship, our field, we should all be actors of positive change”.

MCAA Editorial Team

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