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Dear MCAA members,

Summer is approaching, and we are pleased to present the fourth issue of the Marie Curie Alumni newsletter.

First of all, we hope you have marked these dates in your agenda – from 19 to 20 and from 21 to 26 June, two exciting events for Marie Curie Fellows and Alumni will take place in Copenhagen, Denmark:

- MSCA Satellite event “Transferable skills: MSCA added value for your CV” (19-20 June);
- 2014 Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF) (21-26 June).

Some members of the Association will be present. Do not hesitate to contact the Board with any enquiries linked to this special event.

In the fourth issue of the MCAA newsletter, you'll find testimonies and advice from Alumni, as well as news from the Association and the following useful information for researchers:

- **Definition of the day: European Innovation partnerships:** an overview of this new approach.
- **What's new from the MCAA?** Find out what has been happening over the last few months.
- **How one man has worked to improve mobility for researchers:** an interview with Conor O'Carroll.
- **Special coverage radioastronomy:** highlights from the seminar “Investing in People, Prosperity and Peace at the African-European Radio Astronomy Platform (AERAP)” and an interview with Gerlinde Bedö from Coriant.
- **10 essential websites you need to know if you are looking for calls for tender to fund your research:** these 10 websites list calls from a range of bodies and institutions.
- **During my Marie Curie project, my host country was... Switzerland:** tips and advice from Marie Curie Fellows who have worked or are currently working in Switzerland.
- **I benefited from a Marie Curie Action – COFUND in the spotlight:** 8 Fellows share their experience of one of the most famous Marie Curie Actions.
- **Five top tips on how to make a successful presentation at a conference:** you'll be prepared to present from now on if you follow these top tips!
- **Special coverage Neurobiotech project:** we attended the press conference which launched the Neurobiotech project at the European Parliament and interviewed Professor Carla Andreani from the University of Rome.
- **Ten minutes with...Li Songjun:** this Alumnus from China tells us how his Marie



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Curie project boosted his career.

- **All you need to know about the European Research Area:** a stage for developing attractive opportunities for researchers within Europe, ERA is intended as a unified research area and much more.
- **What's next?** Find out what's coming up for the Association after summer!

Yours,
The MCAA Team



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The European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs) represent a new approach of partnerships by focusing on the societal benefits of Research and Innovation and on a rapid modernisation of the associated sectors and markets.

European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs) make up some of the key initiatives established under the Innovation Union (IU) (one of the targets of the European Union 2020 Strategy). EIPs are launched in cases where combining funding from national governments, with support from EU, other national and regional actors is justified.

Four objectives

EIPs bring together actors at the European, national and regional level to focus on four objectives:

1. stepping up research and development efforts;
2. coordinating investments in demonstration and pilots;
3. anticipating and fast-track any necessary regulation and standards;
4. mobilising 'demand' in particular through better coordinated public procurement to ensure that any breakthroughs are quickly brought to market.

EIPs areas

- **Active and Healthy Ageing:** the EIP on Active and Healthy Ageing aims to enable EU citizens to lead healthy, active and independent lives. Improving the sustainability and efficiency of social and healthcare systems, boosting and improving the competitiveness of the markets for innovative products and services. Responding to the ageing challenge at both EU and global level, creates new opportunities for businesses.
- **Agricultural Sustainability and productivity:** the agricultural EIP (EIP-AGRI) aims to foster competitive and sustainable farming and forestry, ensuring a steady supply of food, feed and biomaterials, thus developing its work in harmony with the essential natural resources on which farming depends.
- **Smart cities and Communities:** the EIP on Smart Cities and Communities (EIP-SCC) looks to establish strategic partnerships between industry and European cities to develop the urban systems and infrastructures of tomorrow. It aims to reduce high-energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, bad air quality and traffic congestion.
- **Water:** the EIP Water aims to speed up development of water innovation, to contribute to sustainable growth and employment, and to stimulate uptake of water innovations by market and society.
- **Raw Materials:** the EIP aims to reduce the shortage of raw materials, which may undermine EU industry's capacity to produce strategic products for society.



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More information about EIPs:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?pg=eip

Frequently Asked Questions about EIPs:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/eip_faq_may_2012.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none

http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/eip_faq_december_2010.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none



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Since the election of the MCAA Board during the General Assembly in November 2013, the MCAA has emerged step by step. As you are probably wondering what has been happening within your association in recent months, here is a quick overview of the latest developments.

More information about the Board

The website page presenting the Board members has been reworked so as to provide more information about them. Check out the short biographies of each Board member here! If you want to contact any of them, you can do so via this page.

MCAA Chapters

You have probably seen the MCAA Chapter Application Form that was published on the website on March, calling on Alumni to create chapters so as to:

- encourage local networking and establish mutually-beneficial relationships between MCAA and its Alumni within defined countries/territories;
- initiate activities that add value to the Alumni network and provide input to the general body;
- recruit, attract, support and facilitate connections between MC fellows and Alumni;
- sponsor and support activities that will enhance the image of MCAA.

We are pleased to announce that the chapters nominated will soon be available presented on the website. Just for you, here is a sneak preview of the list:

- **Austrian Chapter;**
- **BeNeLux Chapter;**
- **Croatian Chapter;**
- **Israeli Chapter;**
- **Balears Chapter;**
- **Paris & Île-de-France Chapter;**
- **Sicily Chapter;**
- **United Kingdom Chapter.**

More information on the chapters and their objectives is available here.

MCAA Working Groups

Information on the MCAA Working Groups is also coming soon. The Working Groups' objective is to support the overall aims of the association by proposing and executing activities in a given field:



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- **Communication;**
- **Events and Networking;**
- **Grants and Awards;**
- **Information and Data Access;**
- **Policy on Successful Researchers.**

Bring your website to life! Use the Blog section!

Share your ideas, news, events, career accomplishments and other information with the wider community of MCAA members. Feel free to give feedback in the comments section. Here are the advantages of using the Blog section:

- Social and academic networking;
- Maximise the impact of your research project;
- Discussion;
- Publicity;
- Career development;
- Share your experience/information with peers;
- A means to maintain the momentum of your research and to find new audiences.

Coming up: important events for the MCAA

Don't forget that the **MSCA satellite event will take place from 19 to 20 June** at the Copenhagen Business School, in Copenhagen, Denmark. The theme of the event is 'Transferrable skills: MSCA added-value for your CV'. Both days will focus on non-research skills such as management, working with colleagues in a team, interview skills and transitioning from academia to industry. Snezana Krstic, Chair of the Marie Curie Alumni Association, will speak during the MSCA plenary session.

The 2014 Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF) will take place from 21 to 26 June in the Carlsberg City District, Copenhagen, Denmark. ESOF 2014 will incorporate a number of activities (science programme, media programme, exhibition, etc.) dealing with 8 scientific themes as follows:

- The healthy society;
- A revolution of the mind;
- Global resource management;
- Learning in the 21st century;
- Green economy;
- Material and virtual world;
- Urbanisation, Design and Liveability;
- Science, democracy and citizenship.

You can let other Alumni know that you are attending by clicking on the blue button here. What's more, we are pleased to inform you that the **MCAA will have a stand**. All members are invited to pass by and say hello!

The next General Assembly of the MCAA will take place on 22 November 2014. The place is yet to be defined, we will keep you informed!

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Brief Timeline

1982-1985: *Marie Curie PhD Fellow*

1990-1994: *Research scientist at the Institute for Transuranium Elements, European Commission.*

1995-1998: *Senior Administrator, European Commission. Managed the peer review of Marie Curie Training and Mobility of Researchers Grants.*

Since 2001: *Research Director, Irish Universities Association.*



1. You were a Marie Curie PhD Fellow. How would you describe your experience in terms of work and networking?

It was a real challenge to go abroad and work in a completely different environment. I was in the JRC Research Centre in Ispra and these types of centres are quite different from the university. By the way I had already been in the Italian university of Pavia so was fairly fluent in Italian, so I was used to the way of life. I was able to pursue a PhD on a topic (Nuclear Fusion) that would not have been possible in Ireland. It was a great opportunity to work in an international setting and get on with people of many different nationalities.

2. During your Fellowship, did you ever think about the potential for creating a network of European excellence worldwide?

Over the period of the Fellowship, I recognised the potential of all the Fellows to create a network. Here was a situation where a group of researchers are together for 2-3 years and will then move on to another position. We did talk about this among the Fellows and many of us have maintained long term contact. However I think to be really effective one needs a structure like the Alumni Association.



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3. What do you think of how the Marie Curie Actions (MCAs) have evolved?

Fundamentally there is no change in that the Fellowships support the career development of researchers at all stages. That being said, the schemes have evolved to take into account European policy developments that improve the prospects for researchers. For example, the introduction of the European Industry Doctorate in 2012 has recognised the specific need to give researchers more opportunities to carry out their research in the private sector. This in turn leads to greater employment opportunities.

In the past there was a fortress Europe attitude reflected in the fact that mobility was allowed only within Europe. The global nature of research has been well recognised and this has led to the now international nature of the Marie Curie Fellowships. In my opinion, the introduction of the outgoing fellowships has been a real success. It facilitates researchers going to world class organisations outside of Europe but with close links to a European organisation to which they return. This most certainly has helped to reduce brain drain. Another really positive effect is that similar schemes have sprung up in many national schemes. This leads me to another really positive development; the COFUND scheme that allows national funding schemes to leverage Marie Curie funds as long as they focus on the career development of the fellows and maintain international openness in peer review and recruitment. The consequence here is that the COFUND Marie Curie scheme has acted as a catalyst in changing national policy.

4. You have been the Research Director of the Irish Universities Association since 2001. How are you preparing Irish universities for preparation in Horizon 2020?

Last year I led the development of an action plan for the universities on how to access Horizon 2020 funding ("Horizon 2020: Sustaining Excellence in University Research and Innovation"). Ireland has a strong track record of involvement in the Framework Programmes and in particular the Marie Curie Actions. However we are well aware that with the reduction in national investments across Europe there will be far greater competition for Horizon 2020 funds. We are looking at new opportunities in Horizon 2020 through, for example, increasing the participation of the Humanities and Social Science and also strengthening collaboration with industry.

5. How is collaboration between the Irish Universities Association and the National Contact Points (NPCs) organised?

The Irish Universities Association has run the NCP office for the Marie Curie Actions since 2001 when I established the Research Office in the IUA. This means that we are an integral part of the national support system. By the way, there has been a radical change in the national approach for Horizon 2020. National Contact Points are now European Advisors. This is not a semantic difference but reflects the interrelated nature of the components of H2020. Each European Advisor, while focusing on a specific area, should have a good grounding in all of the Horizon 2020 funding streams.



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The IUA as a support service works with academia and industry alike. One of the consequences of this approach has been to foster closer collaboration between academia and industry.

6. How does the Irish Universities Association work with EURAXESS?

The IUA hosts the EURAXESS office for Ireland working with researchers in academia and industry. We are currently in a FP7 project led by Spain (TOP II) to improve EURAXESS services across Europe and provide training for the service centre staff. We have developed a new interface to the EURAXESS portal in Ireland specifically for businesses in order to attract greater private sector participation.

I am also a delegate to the Steering Group on Human Resources and Mobility (SGHRM). The SGHRM has delegated from all of the Member States, Associated and Candidate countries. It focuses on leading policy developments on researcher career development. I am currently the Chair of the Steering Group.

One of the key activities is to run the fast track visa scheme in collaboration with the Government departments responsible for Enterprise and Immigration.

7. You managed the peer review of Marie Curie Training and Mobility of Researchers (TMR) Grants Programme for the financing of researchers in science throughout Europe (between 1995 and 1998). You wrote in the Irish Times that "the Commission needs a large pool of researchers who are willing to give their time to review proposals." How do you think the peer review process will evolve under Horizon 2020?

I think it is important to recognise that the peer review process for the Framework Programmes is a highly effective and respected process. Having worked with successful and unsuccessful researchers, I would not be aware of any significant problems. However in areas of low success rates there is a real challenge in providing meaningful feedback. When a proposal with a score of 93% is below the threshold of say 94%, the comments of the reviewers will of course be very positive, and it is difficult for applicants to understand why they were not funded.

It is laudable that the Commission has a very open system for potential reviewers to make themselves available. I think it will be important to have greater verification of reviewers as it is difficult to select purely from a CV. Perhaps endorsements from scientific societies and similar bodies will help.

We are encouraging researchers in the public and private sector to register as experts for Horizon 2020. I would urge Marie Curie Fellows to do the same. It is a great opportunity to be part of the peer review process and understand how European projects are funded. It is also a great opportunity to network with researchers in similar disciplines and perhaps to form future consortia!



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8. Do you have any tips for researchers who would like to apply for a fellowship under the Horizon 2020 programme? On which aspects should they focus to be successful?

I do have an approach that many may find bizarre as I recommend that applicants start at the end rather than the beginning! The evaluation is about Excellence, Implementation and Impact. Prospective fellows often get caught up in the first part and focus on the project and their track record. However Marie Curie Fellowships are not about research, they support the career development of the researcher. Therefore I believe that it is far better to start with focusing on the impact of the fellowship. Unfortunately many applicants underestimate the importance of this section. Yet it is here where they can show how the Fellowship will facilitate their career development, the core of Marie Curie funding.

Remember that this is what the reviewers will be looking for; there are many excellent researchers and research projects. Successful fellows are those that can show how the Marie Curie Fellowship will enhance their career.

9. To you, the Scientific Visa implemented as a European Directive in 2005 is in itself an effective method for attracting researchers to Europe. Ireland has been operating the Scientific Visa for non-EU researchers since 2007 and you have always supported it. Over the last six years, 1 720 researchers have come to Ireland under this scheme. What would you like to see happen to further improve researcher mobility in Ireland and in Europe?

Directives are the hard end of European policy implementation. Despite many countries signing up, there are still problems for non EU researchers entering some states as the procedures are complex and lengthy. We have found that 24% of the international researchers in Ireland would not have come if the fast track visa were not in place! Making entry conditions easier really does work. We do have an issue in Ireland for international researchers travelling to Europe for short visits and conferences as there can be problems in getting visas. I think that countries across Europe should better recognise that immigration of non EU researchers brings real added value to their economy and society. A real commitment to implementing the Scientific Visa would be really beneficial.

10. You chaired the Career Programme for ESOF 2012 in Dublin. What did you learn from this on the latest career development trends?

There are still many challenges for researchers despite all of the advances that have been made.

Gender remains an issue and Europe is losing a highly talented cohort of women through the use of evaluation and recruitment methods that do not recognise career breaks.

Increasing the number of researchers has made it far more challenging for them to get a job.



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There are far greater opportunities for international mobility. However it has become clear that mobility can have some serious drawbacks in terms of career development. The new concept of virtual mobility is gaining traction by policy makers and funding agencies

There is now far greater recognition that the PhD should be a lot more than a pure academic apprenticeship. Doctoral candidates need opportunities through placements and structured training to prepare them better for employment in many different professions. However much needs to be done to have similar professional development opportunities in place for postdoctoral researchers.

I am looking forward to seeing the latest trends at ESOF 2014 in Copenhagen this June. I would encourage Marie Curie Fellows to attend as these are great events.

11. Since the launch of the Marie Curie Alumni Association web-portal in summer 2013, have you consulted it? What remarks or suggestions do you have for the Association?

Yes, I do use the portal on a regular basis.

There are over 50,000 Marie Curie Alumni worldwide and there is a real opportunity to draw on that wealth of experience. All of them have moved abroad and understand the difficulties of working in a very different environment.

Back in 1983 when I was a MC PhD Fellow in the JRC Ispra Italy, we set up a Fellows Association in order to share practical information, give ourselves a stronger voice and support new Fellows. We now have the EURAXESS network across Europe, which provides excellent practical information. However I believe that the need to mentor new fellows still exists. This is where the Association can play a key role. I for one would be willing to act as a mentor for Fellows coming to Ireland, as I am sure many others would in their own country.

Being a Marie Curie Fellow should be seen as a badge of honour; difficult to obtain and proud to hold!

12. What in your eyes is the future for the profession of 'researcher' in Europe?

Twenty years ago a PhD graduate could expect to see this qualification as the first step of a career in research. Remember that numbers doing PhDs were far lower than now and there were more job opportunities. The major increases in research efforts across Europe follows the Lisbon Agenda and the 3% of GDP on R&D has had a perverse effect. It has certainly led to greater national research activity, and as a consequence has a far greater number of PhDs and postdoctoral researchers. However the number of jobs available in the academic and public research sector has not increased.

A report by the UK Royal Society showed that less than 5% of PhD graduates become academic researchers. The traditional system of training PhDs at university is



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a form of academic apprenticeship and the expectation of the student is to become an academic themselves.

The approach of the European Research Area policy has recognised this issue and the new focus on Innovative Doctoral Training and Professional Development of Researchers. This provides a real solution for the burgeoning numbers of PhD graduates.

I think that aspiring researchers will have to think carefully about their future prospects. They need to recognize early on that they have a multiplicity of career options in the public and private sector. They should recognize that their talents can be used in many different areas. Being a researcher requires single mindedness, dedication and being able to work well with others. They have the ability to analyse and solve highly complex problems using evidence.

Europe has a highly talented pool of researchers and it will be important that in the coming years they have every opportunity to use their skills for the benefit of society and the economy.



Special coverage - Radioastronomy

Events that we attended for you – African-European Radio Astronomy Platform (AERAP) seminar “Investing in People, Prosperity and Peace”

We attended the African-European Radio Astronomy Platform (AERAP) seminar “Investing in People, Prosperity and Peace” during the 4th EU Africa-Summit. The aim was to highlight the role of international science and technology collaboration within the African-European partnership.

Installation of new telescopes in South Africa. A representative from the Astrophysics Institute of the Canary Islands presented the Quijote project, which links South Africa and the European Union (EU). It aims to promote the installation of new telescopes in the Karoo Observatory in South Africa. With an estimated budget of €6 million, this project could generate:

- **scientific benefits** by complementing the observation in the Northern Sky and increasing the current target sensitivity;
- **socio-economic benefits** by training South African scientists and engineers in techniques and strategies.

Transfer of skills in Africa. “People first, success follows” is the motto of the Goonhilly Earth Station, a large telecommunications site located on the Lizard Peninsula in Cornwall, England. The representative of Goonhilly emphasised the link between radio astronomy and the origin of the universe, and stressed the role of radio astronomy within transferable skills. Goonhilly is currently working on the transfer of skills in Africa, hoping this will contribute to peace and prosperity.

Reducing the carbon footprint. A representative from Portugal’s Institute for Telecommunications introduced the audience to the ENGaGE-SKA project and the ‘green’ data centres. These centres are contributing to efforts to reduce the carbon footprint of Cloud computing.

Submarine connections between Europe and Africa. Radio astronomy faces a lot of challenges linked to high-capacity transport, distribution of synchronisation signals and transmission knowledge exchange. A representative from Coriant explained the company’s vision on dealing with those challenges, and stressed how big data will shape industry in the future. There is a high capacity of submarine connections between Africa and Europe thanks to the well-connected sea cables between the two continents. In addition, Coriant will support radio astronomy in Europe, as well as Africa.

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Radio astronomy as a key for development. A researcher from the University of Leiden explained the importance of introducing astronomy to children from an early age to develop their interest. This was the purpose of the EUNAWWE project, funded under the FP7 Programme. According to the International Astronomical Union strategic plan, astronomy can be used as a tool for development and should be taken into account within the framework of the Horizon 2020 Programme.

The power of new technologies to improve vulnerable people's lives. SafetyNET is a global cyber café project that uses the power of new technologies to help reduce violence against women and children. Projects are currently operating in North America, Asia, North Africa and Europe. SafetyNET also provides women with opportunities to develop computer skills and experience creative technologies for themselves (in videography, digital photography, web design and other forms of mediated storytelling).

Astronomy as a tool to expand African development initiatives. A representative from Italy's National Institute for Astrophysics presented a tender launched by the government of Namibia for the observation and computation of the international terrestrial reference system. This involves several actors and tools, such as the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), the Global Navigation Satellite Systems in Africa (GNSS-Africa), and the African Reference Frame (AFREF).

More information about the seminar:
<http://www.aerap.org/event.php?id=37>

About the African-European Radio Astronomy Platform

The African-European Radio Astronomy Platform (AERAP) is a stakeholder forum convened to define priorities for radio astronomy cooperation between Africa and Europe. It provides a framework for stakeholders from industry and academia to define research action plans across the wide range of technological areas that will be essential for the future of radio astronomy.

More information on AERAP:

<http://www.aerap.org/aerap.php>



Special coverage - Radioastronomy

Linking industry with research to tackle the big data challenge – An interview with Gerlinde Bedö from Coriant

Gerlinde Bedö is Director of Business Development at Coriant. She specialises in optical transport markets and technologies, with a focus on National Research and Educational Networks (NREN) and research communities. She also has experience of copper and fibre based broadband access.



1. Ms Bedö, you work at Coriant. Could you present the company in a few words?

Coriant, a global supplier of dynamic metro-to-core transport solutions, emerged from Nokia Siemens Networks' Optical Networks business unit a year ago and merged with Sycamore Networks Solutions, Inc. in August 2013. The company recently integrated Tellabs' SDN-enabled packet optical and edge router products – creating a market-leading, end-to-end solutions portfolio.

With 3 500 employees worldwide, R&D centres in Germany, Portugal, China and the U.S., the company is a leading supplier of future-proof optical transport, packet-optical switching and aggregation, and software-defined service control and management solutions to Tier 1 service providers worldwide. Our markets include mobile and fixed line service providers, large enterprises, electric utilities, government agencies, submarine network operators, and content providers – in total more than 500 customers worldwide across six continents and in more than 100 countries.

2. How do big data link radio astronomy with industry?

Big Data, including “Big Radio Astronomy Data”, has the capacity to shape whole industry sectors. Transporting Big Data requires new modulation formats, new technologies, solutions and products – or faster development of new products – from

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which the core telecommunication core business can also benefit. Additional large scale deployments from radio astronomy increase the volumes and thus reduce the price, making these technologies more affordable.

The fibre connecting the dishes of SKA and the African VLBI Network, and then linking them to the outside world, is spread across the whole of South Africa and the African continent. Once deployed, it can carry, together with the radio astronomy data traffic, commercial data traffic, which supports local government broadband development targets. Fibre deployment is a major part of the overall costs for building a country-wide broadband network. Reducing this portion has a positive impact on the realisation and availability of national broadband networks.

Scientists in Europe and around the world have to connect to radio astronomy sites. In Africa the existing submarine cables linking Africa with Europe (WACS, ACE) build the gateway from the science venue to the European science community. In order to carry the science traffic, the capacity of these cables needs to be upgraded, thus increasing connectivity between Europe and Africa.

Radio astronomy Big Data projects have the ability to open up new cooperation areas between industry and academia/research institutes with joint partnership programmes, and knowledge and staff exchange between science and industry, and between Europe and Africa. The National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) will be empowered by the data boost, as they have the mandate to provide dedicated services for the research community. So Big Data will strengthen local and global interdisciplinary research communities.

3. How does the company intend to share knowledge and experience with the research sector? What kind of collaborations could be established with researchers?

All the research projects we have participated in and are participating in now involve consortia of several partners across the whole of Europe, including academia, operators, vendors and standardisation entities. Knowledge exchange happens within these projects on a daily basis.

Currently, eight PhD students are working in the advanced technology transmission R&D lab in Munich – from the Technical University Eindhoven, Technical University in Munich, University Kiel, University Dortmund, Heinrich-Hertz-Institute. We also collaborate with the Instituto de Telecomunicacoes in Lisbon, Portugal.

Researchers – PhD students, post doctorates and experienced researchers are sometimes delegated to our R&D labs in Munich, Lisbon or another RD site and actively contribute to our research work.

We recently submitted a Marie Curie RISE proposal including European and South African universities in research entities – where we plan to delegate experts to the research entities, but also host experienced researchers in our R&D lab in Munich.



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4. What would you say to Marie Curie Alumni wishing to collaborate with Coriant in the field of big data?

Coriant is the Big Data transmission expert – and we would be delighted to start new collaborations.



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A large part of your time as a researcher is likely to be spent preparing tenders – it's where the majority of research funding comes from. Maybe you'll be working on a call for tender from one of these bodies?

1. European Commission, Tenders

The Commission uses public contracts to buy goods and services – studies, technical assistance and training; consultancy, conference and publicity services; books and IT equipment etc. The providers are selected via calls for tender, which are issued by Commission departments, offices and agencies around Europe.

http://ec.europa.eu/contracts_grants/contracts_en.htm

2. European Commission, Directorate-General for Research & Innovation

The Directorate-General for Research and Innovation's mission is to develop and implement European research and innovation policy with a view to achieving the goals of Europe 2020 and the Innovation Union.

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/index.cfm?pg=tenders-open>

3. European Research Centre

The ERC's mission is to encourage the highest quality research in Europe through competitive funding, and to support investigator-driven frontier research across all fields, on the basis of scientific excellence.

<http://erc.europa.eu/about-erc/calls-tender>

4. Joint Research Centre

The Joint Research Centre's mission is to provide EU policies with independent, evidence-based scientific and technical support throughout the whole policy cycle.

<http://www.jrc.ec.europa.eu/callsfortender>



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5. Innovation and Networks Executive Agency (INEA)

INEA's mission is to support the Commission, project promoters and stakeholders by providing expertise and high quality programme management to infrastructure, research and innovation projects in the fields of transport, energy and telecommunications. The Agency also promotes synergies between these activities, to benefit economic growth and EU citizens.

<http://een.ec.europa.eu/about/tendersandcalls>

6. European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

EFSA is the cornerstone of European Union (EU) risk assessment for food and feed safety. In close collaboration with national authorities and in open consultation with its stakeholders, EFSA provides independent scientific advice and clear communication on existing and emerging risks.

<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/procurement/tenders.htm>

7. Consumers, Health and Food Executive Agency (Chafea)

Chafea manages relations with some 2 800 beneficiaries and contractors involved in close to 400 projects/service contracts in the fields of health, consumer protection and food safety

http://ec.europa.eu/eahc/health/tenders_H07_2013.html

8. Single European Sky ATM Research (SESAR)

As the technological pillar of Europe's ambitious Single European Sky (SES) initiative, SESAR is the mechanism charged with coordinating and concentrating all EU research and development activities in Air Traffic Management (ATM), pooling a wealth of experts to develop the new generation of ATM.

<http://www.sesarju.eu/procurement/calls-for-tenders>

9. EUREKA

EUREKA is an intergovernmental organisation for market-driven industrial R&D. It is a decentralised network facilitating the coordination of national funding on innovation aiming to boost the productivity & competitiveness of European industries. The network integrates over 40 pan-European economies, but also includes Israel, South Korea, and Canada.

<http://www.eurekanetwork.org/calls>



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10. COST

COST is an intergovernmental framework for European Cooperation in Science and Technology, allowing the coordination of nationally-funded research on a European level.

http://www.cost.eu/participate/open_call

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During my Marie Curie project, my host country was... Switzerland

Matevz Cerv (Slovenia), Agni Faviola Mika Gavriilidou (Greece), Wookjin Lee (South Korea) and Nicole Stichling (Germany) have all worked or are currently working in Switzerland for their Marie Curie project. All have been struck by the country's high level of research, but highlight the changes generated by the February 2014 referendum against mass immigration.



From left to right: Nicole Stichling, Wookjin Lee, Agni Faviola Mika Gavriilidou and Matevz Cerv

Switzerland, a country on top of leading universities in research and innovation

Gavriilidou benefited from an Initial Training Networks (ITN – under the Seventh Framework Programme) to study chemistry – in particular noncovalent interactions with electrospray ionization mass spectrometry. She chose to work at ETH Zürich because it is one of the leading universities in this field. “The group I’ve joined in Switzerland (Empa) is the best, leading research group in my topic,” echoes Wookjin Lee, who worked in the field of engineering on thermomechanical characterisation and the modelling of novel Fe-based shape memory alloys. This was also due to a co-funding Action, in Zürich. According to Stichling, the main advantage of Switzerland is that the country spends 3% of its Growth Domestic Product (GDP) on research and innovation, which is shown in infrastructures, facilities, laboratories and technologies.

A high standard of living

Having benefited from an ITN, Cerv is currently working on scientific design, construction, manufacturing, testing and commissioning of advanced instruments for very high radiation environments at the European Nuclear Research Centre (CERN) in Geneva. He highlights how the country is one of the most expensive in Europe,



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stressing particularly the “customs duties for shipping to Switzerland”. Stichling was awarded an ITN and is working on a project that deals with how immune cells are infected with Adenoviruses – a non-enveloped DNA virus known to cause usually mild gastrointestinal, respiratory or ocular symptoms, which can be fatal in the young and elderly. She is based at the Institute of Molecular Life Science at the University of Zurich. The standard of living is high in Switzerland, says Stichling, adding, “there are a lot fewer holidays and vacation days than anywhere else in Europe. Also the 42 hour week is implemented, which means more work for which the remuneration is slightly better”.

Quality of life

Switzerland appears to be a competitive and innovative country, where much care is taken to protect the renowned landscape. Stichling appreciated the balance between work and leisure: “What I like in Switzerland is the proximity to nature and outdoor sports.” Happy memories of Switzerland involve nature for Cerv, who says his most memorable moment was “the morning view from a mountain, with white slopes waiting for your skis to carve the first tracks in the snow”. For Wookjin Lee, a laboratory summer excursion was one of the most memorable experiences in Switzerland.

Four official languages

Four official languages are spoken in Switzerland (French, German, Italian and Romansh), divided among the country's different regions. Stichling appreciates this diversity: “I like Switzerland for its multilingual people.” Even though English remains the language of research, it seems to be important for our Fellows to communicate in the language of the region where they work, as Gavriilidou emphasises “The only drawback I can think of is that I do not speak the native language (German), but I am working on that.”

How to obtain a residency permit in Switzerland

As an EU citizen, Stichling recognises that moving in Switzerland was quite easy because “the work contract basically opens the door to register for residency, find housing and obtain a bank account”. Concerning residency, EU-17 and EU-8 citizens are entitled to B-permits that last 5 years. For any other country, the permit has to be renewed every year. Nevertheless, Stichling muses, “This feels like a lot of bureaucracy and it actually is, but it is very fast and effective, and the people behind the counter are understanding and help you as a client”.

Documents, translations and recognition procedure

All of our four Fellows agree that applying in Switzerland was relatively easy, and was “nothing more than the usual application procedure” according to Gavriilidou. Each Fellow had to provide a CV, transcripts, diploma, recommendation letters with an official translation of a diploma and transcripts (if the university's official language was not English). Stichling points out that “references and formal requirements are very important to the Swiss. At the University of Zurich, every student registering for a PhD has to be part of a Graduate School. This application consists usually of a paper-



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based round and subsequently a selection by an admission committee as well as interviews." She adds that a degree obtained abroad has to go through a recognition procedure and that "If it is found to be non-equivalent to a Swiss degree, extra-credits are imposed on the applicant." Cerv considers himself lucky that CERN "handled most of the paperwork".

Finding accommodation in Switzerland: the most tedious issue

Finding a place to stay was not easy for our Fellows, who to high demand, high prices and low availability of apartments. According to Cerv, "many agencies require you to enclose salary payslips for the last three months, which makes it difficult to apply for an apartment before moving to Geneva". Stichling echoes this: "Coming from another country with often limited financial means and a high-priced, over-demanded housing market, means owners tend to be picky about their new inhabitants." Nevertheless, all the Fellows she knows succeeded in finding a nice and affordable place to live.

A supportive working environment connected to industry and societal needs

Our Fellows point out several advantages linked to research in Switzerland. Work is well organised according to Wookjin Lee: "I think Switzerland is one of the best countries in the world for basic and applied research in engineering. I received efficient support from the other departments during my research." Graviilidou considers that ETH's work connects research to society's needs. What's more, Wookjin Lee was glad to see that his research was concretely implemented by industry. In a nutshell, the working environment is supportive and encouraging according to both Cerv and Graviilidou, and it offers scientific freedom.

After the referendum

On 9 February 2014, a referendum took place in Switzerland as part of the initiative "Against mass immigration". This led to consequences for researcher mobility. According to Stichling, "Marie Curie projects in Switzerland are now a more tense story than when I joined in 2012. This all came about during the referendum against mass immigration in February 2014. A razor-thin majority of 50.4% voted in favor of that initiative resulting in Switzerland being granted only third-party status in Horizon 2020." She advises any researcher interested in applying in Switzerland to "keep your eyes open for any positions posted, and follow the political development of the situation concerning Horizon 2020 by checking out the Federal administration webpage."

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I benefited from a Marie Curie Action – Co-funding of Regional, National, and International Programmes (COFUND) in the spotlight

The Co-funding of Regional, National, and International Programmes (COFUND) is considered the most well-known Marie Curie Actions, according to the Fellows who contributed to this article. Despite the fact that the application might be complex, all of our eight Fellows, Martha Escárcega (Mexico) Gemma Giménez (Spain), Carrie Griffin (Ireland), Alessandro Jedolwski (Italy), Michael Kirkedal (Denmark) Jodi Schneider (United States), Emil Thybring (Denmark) and Chiara* recognise that COFUND changed or is changing their career.



From left to right: Emil Thybring, Gemma Giménez, Martha Escárcega, Michael Kirkedal, Jodi Schneider, Alessandro Jedolwski, Carrie Griffin

What are COFUNDS? COFUNDS are open to public or private bodies responsible for funding and managing fellowships or research training programmes. They may be:

- ministries,
- research academies or agencies,
- international organisations,
- other similar bodies with a public mission, such as universities.

They aim to help regional, national or international fellowship programmes in order to increase the transnational mobility of experienced researchers, and improve their working and employment conditions. It is a mono-beneficiary action.

Researchers are able to choose the research topic, destination, research group or supervisor for their fellowship.

If you want to benefit from COFUND, keep a close eye on your network. In most cases, our Fellows heard about COFUND thanks to friends or colleagues – this was the case for Schneider and Jedolwski. Kirkedal was introduced to COFUND by a research collaborator. Chiara's colleagues suggested she submit an application to a scheme, whereas Griffin heard about the scheme through her national funding agency. Other Fellows, like Escárcega, attended conferences where they picked up information on COFUND.



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Apply for COFUND after a Ph.D or post-doc. Some of our Fellows (Chiara, Schneider, Thybring and Jedolwski) applied for a Co-funding action after a Ph.D. Kirkedal was particularly glad to receive this grant through the Bremen TRAC scheme, just one year after his Ph.D. This enabled him to further his research in computer science, develop scalablign methods for describing reversible logic, and formulating the foundations of the reversible circuit model "I had different teaching positions at my old university, but no open possibilities for longer contracts. This support gave me the opportunity to try something new and to get back to doing more research". Giménez and Escárcega were doing their post-doc when they were awarded funding. So did Griffin, who was finishing work on a book, an edition of the Middle English Wise Book of Philosophy and Astronomy.

Contact people you dream of working with. Chiara received funding through the CARA COFUND scheme run by the Irish Research Council to study coverage of the Civil war and Francoism in the Spanish media since 2007. Having to conduct research in Barcelona, Madrid, as well as in Zaragoza, she identified a pool of leading cultural historians whose work she admired. She then short-listed two professors to mentor her. Giménez received funding under the Beatriu de Pinós Programme, from the Commission for Universities and Research of the Ministry of Innovation, Universities and Enterprise of the Autonomous Government of Catalonia, for research on microalgae at the Cawthron Institute in New Zealand. She contacted her future supervisor to propose collaboration and was thrilled by her enthusiasm. Griffin was funded by the IRCHSS CARA to investigate the impact of the first printing presses in England, and the ways in which texts were read, received, understood and organised. From this research she then created a monograph for publication She also contacted her future mentor – "because of her expertise and her extremely impressive publication record, particularly around materiality, manuscripts and early printed books. As well as the transmission and reception of texts in the later medieval and early modern period".

Be open to new collaborations. Escárcega was happy to be contacted in advance about establishing an academia-industry Joint Venture. She was funded under the TECNIO SPRING Programme to conduct research on a technology that develops materials based on carbon nanotubes interconnected in a neural network fashion in polymer matrices. For Thybring, it was also very simple "My current Professor was in the process of gathering one of the best research groups within my field and wanted me on board." Thanks to this new collaboration, he received funding to study the nano-scale and how chemical modifications change the way wood interacts with water. Funded through the ERCIM Alain Bensoussan Fellowship Programme, Schneider is working on social platforms such as Wikipedia to establish how well-maintained content and controversial content are both characterised by frequent editing. The objective is to understand what kind of content is controversial. She was recommended by her advisor to work with a team in France. For Jedolwski, collaboration started as follows: "A colleague from a Belgian university with whom I had worked on a number of other research projects put me in touch with the research group based at the University of Liege." He was then funded by the BelPD COFUND programme to work on a comparative analysis between Nigeria and two other growing sub-Saharan African cinema and television industries, in Ethiopia and the Cote d'Ivoire.



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Prepare your application carefully. Schneider and Kirkedal regard their application process as straightforward because they could reuse some existing material (CV, biography, sample research papers, etc.). To Jedolwski, time was an important factor "It was hard to find the time to carefully fill in the application while working as a lecturer. Since application writing is highly time-consuming, it is hard to combine it with other work activities, and this can have an impact on the chances of the application being successful". The rest of our Fellows concede that the application process was lengthy, especially because of the required coordination between the applicant and the home university and host university. Griffin emphasises, "As well as managing the bureaucratic side of things, the applicant must pay attention to the intellectual content of and the structure and organisation of the research proposal". To Chiara "the most time-consuming issue was the selection of viable Home and Host Mentors. It is often the case that leading researchers find it difficult to take on extra work." For our eight Fellows, it took between 2 weeks and 4 – 5 months to prepare the COFUND application.

Work individually or with a group. Because of their project, Kirkedal, Griffin and Jedolwski have had to conduct research individually. But it can be a good opportunity to be active in different ways, as Griffin emphasises "I also felt a strong responsibility to disseminate my findings as regularly as I could. I spoke at several international conferences. I stayed in touch with colleagues and made new connections. I also attended Marie Curie events in Dublin to meet with academics, administrators and fellow researchers, I published work as I continued to research for and write my monograph. I had to remain organised and focused." To be able to participate in groups, Chiara drafted monthly research plans as well as activity plans. Schneider wrote a training programme at the beginning of her fellowship and arranged several meetings to discuss collective projects with her colleagues.

A position in a foreign country can sometimes be unclear. An unclear job description caused Giménez some difficulties, as she explains: "I was working at Cawthron, but I was not hired by them, as I was paid from overseas. I was a long-term visitor and they had no previous experience in this situation, so it was a challenge concerning basic administrative issues." Chiara echoes: "Third level institutions in countries like Spain (and Italy) are often unfamiliar with the notion of a 'visiting researcher', so it is rather difficult to arrange for desk space, library privileges, an e-mail address, and to have our status recognised at faculty and departmental level." Other Fellows stress the difficulty of integrating in a different environment – Kirkedal says: "Understanding a new university environment has, so far, been the largest obstacle." Coming from the United States and needing a visa, Schneider highlights that dealing with an administration in a foreign language can be stressful. Nevertheless, the EURAXESS office at the host institution can be a source of useful information, as well as the host mentors.

Be prepared to cover any extra costs. Griffin, Escárcega and Jedolwski say that their funding covers all their needs. To Chiara, Kirkedal and Giménez, extra costs have included travel to conferences, research related activities and open access publishing costs. Chiara adds: "I was unable to travel to three important conferences (in the US, South Africa and Australia respectively) due to the fact that I did not have enough money for the flights and hotel accommodation." Schneider points out that



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visas are not covered and mentions that she encountered difficulties in terms of housing "We also didn't anticipate how expensive the area is, and how difficult it is to find suitable housing on a one-year contract."

An impact on you and your career. All of our eight Fellows agree that COFUND changed or will change their career. In the words of Giménez: "COFUND has boosted my career by providing me with international experience, new and interesting contacts, my two years of work have increased my publications in number and quality, and they will boost my career by giving me the opportunity to go back to my country with the experience and knowledge I've gathered overseas with a more competitive curriculum." To Griffin, her experience thanks to COFUND had professional benefits but she also became "aware of the changing nature of research structures across Europe and of the necessity for collaboration and communication between scholars internationally".

**This Fellow wishes to provide her testimonial under this name.*

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Presenting work and results in front of an audience comes with the job of researcher. Even though the exercise is a good opportunity to increase the visibility of your project, it is daunting and difficult if you're not well prepared. If you want to make giving presentations as valuable as possible for your career, feel free to take inspiration from our top tips, gathered thanks to Tonni Andersen (Denmark), Victor Cardenes Van den Eynde (Spain), Thomas Goudoulas (Greece) and Melis Serefoglu (Turkey).



From left to right: Melis Serefoglu, Victor Cardenes Van den Eynde, Thomas Goudoulas and Tonni Andersen

Tonni Andersen received an Intra-European Fellowship for career development (IEF) and is currently working in Lausanne (Switzerland) on how plants take up and distribute nutrients at the molecular level.

Victor Cardenes Van den Eynde was also awarded an IEF, but for work on the project "New uses for X-ray Tomography in natural building stones: Characterisation, Pathologies and Restoration of historical and recent roofing slates" in Ghent (Belgium).

Thomas Goudoulas' project focuses on innovative scientific exchanges in the field of designing and optimising distributed networks for efficient energy supply, management and use. He conducted research in Amman (Jordan), having received funding through the International Research Staff Exchange Scheme (IRSES).

Melis Serefoglu benefited from a Career Integration Grant (CIG) to work on a project which focused on microstructure evolution dynamics in eutectic materials in physics, in Paris (France) as well as in Istanbul (Turkey).



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Tip 1: Prepare yourself: boost your confidence

Our Fellows recognise that they don't always feel comfortable when they have to make a public presentation. Cardenes muses that his state of mind depends highly on how many times he has practised it. That's why our first piece of advice on making a successful public presentation would be "Practice as much as you can in front of someone", in the words of Goudoulas. This will ensure your speech runs smoothly. What's more, it is also important to know your topic beyond your presentation so as to anticipate questions. With this in mind, Goudoulas recommends reviewing all the details of experimental technique, for instance. It will make you feel stronger in front of your audience. "Just have a good rehearsal" says Cardenes.

Tip 2: Find information about the audience

Knowing information about your audience (academic level, industrial partners, etc.) is crucial, to the extent that this will help you to structure your presentation. According to Andersen, if the people who are listening to you come from a field very different to yours, you have to "start much simpler than you would do" and to "ensure that your presentation is pedagogical and easy to follow". On the other hand, if your audience has the same background as yours, an over-simplified presentation is bound to become a bit annoying. Andersen advises speakers to put themselves in the shoes of the people who will listen to you and to think about how they would like the presentation to be. And don't forget to breathe deeply, as Serefoglu advises, especially if the audience appears to be larger than expected!

Tip 3: Tell a story – unveil the best part at the end

According to Andersen, a good presentation has to be structured like a story, even like a "fairy tale". Here is the structure that he advises "Introduce the background, build up the problem slowly and in an easy-to-understand way, but with more and more tension. People will then feel the frustration. Then you can bring the release in the form of your solution to the problem. I find this structure to work well, because everybody is used to the structure of a fairy tale". Goudoulas echoes this: "You have to gradually increase the interest, and never communicate the most important information at the beginning of your presentation."

Tip 4: Catch the attention of your audience

Make your presentation as interactive as you can by using slides. Goudoulas remembers his first presentation with amusement – he used transparent sheets at a time when presentations were performed without computers. What Serefoglu advises,



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when using slides, to show information little by little instead of displaying the whole content from the beginning, so as to keep the audience's attention focused on what you are talking about. For Cardenes, having an object linked to the research that he can show to the audience also adds to a presentation. Andersen advises dropping in "teasers" about your results at the beginning of your presentation and then grabbing the attention of your audience by saying "I will try to convince you that...". In this way, he explains, "people will feel provoked, and will make an effort to follow your talk in order to discuss".

Tip 5: Boost your career: take any opportunity to present your work

All of our four Fellows agree that making presentations is a key component of a successful career. It is therefore crucial to practise as much as you can so as to improve your skills. You have to be prepared to answer questions, sometimes not even related to your topic, as Cardenes remembers when he talks about his first presentation "I had to answer one question which had nothing to do with my research". Andersen concludes that practising will also benefit your personal development.

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Special coverage - Neurobiotech project



Events that we attended for you – the Neurobiotech project's press conference at the European Parliament

We attended the press conference hosted by Neuromed and the Intelligence in Science communication agency that launched the Neurobiotech project at the European Parliament. Here is a sneak preview of the project's aims and stakes.

What is it? The "Neurobiotech" project aims to set up an International Research and Innovation Community on Neuroscience.

The community will take the form of a scientific cluster, where research, innovation, technology transfer and training will be focused on the common goal of sharing and integrating knowledge. Neurobiotech will also stimulate research activities in the field of Neuroscience with a multidisciplinary approach, encouraging research, exchange of know-how, intensive interaction and the joint use of infrastructures, facilities and services.

Who are the leading organisations of the project? Neurobiotech is promoted by the Italian research Centre Neuromed in cooperation with:

- The Molise Regional Government;
- The Italian National Research Council;
- The University of Rome Sapienza;
- The University of Tor Vergata;
- The University of Molise.

Why an International Research Community? The Community will involve different actors from the scientific and international innovation system, all wanting to increase both progress and knowledge in the neurosciences and technologies. It will be a network of companies, researchers, clinicians and scientists.

The Research and Innovation Centre, located in Pozzilli, Italy, will stimulate, sustain and lead projects of technological and scientific research in neurosciences and biotechnologies.



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What is the focus of the project?

- Cutting-edge biotechnologies;
- Stem cells, tissue engineering and cell biology;
- Genomics and oncogenomics;
- Nanotechnologies and biomaterials;
- Biomechanics, robotics and human-computer interface;
- Neurodiagnostic tests and advances imaging;
- Telemedicine and remote diagnostics;
- Bioinformatics.

Want to become a member of the Community? More information available here:

<http://www.neurobiotech.it/>



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Neurobiotech: a promising project for research and beyond – an interview with Carla Andreani, full professor in Condensed Matter at the University of Rome Tor Vergata

Carla Andreani is full professor in Condensed Matter at the Department of Physics – Faculty of Science – University of Rome Tor Vergata. She is also Director of the NAST Centre for Nanoscience, Nanotechnologies, Innovative Instrumentation and Rector Delegate for Research Infrastructure.



1. Professor Andreani, you spoke at the press conference that launched the Neurobiotech project. What were your expectations for this event?

The expectation was to monitor the interest of the participants, as well as individuals and public and private institutions. We wanted to see their willingness to join in the Neurobiotech initiative. The goal was to extend progress and knowledge in the field of neuroscience and biotechnology, and to improve human health and quality of life. This expectation in a way is also reflected in the forward-thinking statements of Neurobiotech and in the interdisciplinary approach the initiative has assumed.

2. What do you believe to be the added value of the Neurobiotech project?

The interdisciplinary approach and knowledge-based region of Molise (southern Italy) are the essential keys that will help meet future challenges in neuroscience. It is also important to be competitive and have a significant impact in the international arena, as well as focusing on human capital. Further impact is expected from the organisation of advanced courses, seminars, workshop and roadshows which are bound to be linked to the initiative in the year to come, with possible student placements being organised at European universities.



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3. This project involves several types of actors, from researchers to companies. Can you tell us more about the participants already involved in this project?

I can provide some information about the Tor Vergata Translational medicine programme's involvement in the project, which has an international reputation for its strengths in technology integration and methodology development. The genetics expertise in Tor Vergata contributes to many different disease areas, and the extensive collaborative networks that they draw upon are uniquely positioned in Italy to further biomedical applications of genomics. Some specific research and development aims relevant for the Neurobiotech project are:

- **To apply new genomic approaches** involving new generation sequencing approaches (sequencing of exomes and other regions based on genomic selection, whole-genome resequencing, expression, methylation analysis) **complemented by array-based assays** (SNP genotyping, express and methylation analysis) **across a portfolio of disease studies**, where this work will lead rapid and important advances through identification of novel genomic biomarkers.
- **To obtain new patient collections and population cohorts** to link disease markers to disease prognosis, responses to treatment, diagnostics and epidemiological studies to improve patient health.
- **To develop and apply novel approaches and tools for amino-acid analysis, functional genomics (and proteomics) related to biomarker identification and diagnostics.** A critical point, which we are addressing in several projects, is the ability to move from identification to an understanding of the functional consequences of disease-associated genetic markers.
- **To adapt and create new methods in quantitative biology, statistical genetics and bioinformatics** to support these activities.

These scientific objectives are also closely linked to Tor Vergata's programme for translation and exploitation of results.

4. What are the expected benefits of the Neurobiotech project?

The benefits of the Neurobiotech project are expected to be seen in the stimulation and production of research and innovation within the field of Neuroscience, and also in the production of new services and installations, which may support technology transfer and the international dissemination of knowledge. Further expected benefits of the Neurobiotech project will be in the training of a new generation of research scientists, taking into account pressing needs to create multidisciplinary expertise in a synergic, quantitative and systems approach to large-scale neuroscience and biology.

5. What would you say to Marie Curie Alumni wishing to collaborate on the project?

The approach and capacity of this initiative will be of benefit to international networking seminars, and is expected to lead to research and development opportunities for those following an interdisciplinary career. Additional opportunities



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will come from workshops, schools, and advanced courses, which are being held in European public and private institutions. These will possibly offer student placements, which could also be significant for Marie Curie Alumni looking to advance their careers.

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Biography

Songjun Li is a distinguished professor at Jiangsu University and currently president of the Chinese Advanced Materials Society. He was also behind the launch of the International Congress on Advanced Materials (AM2011). As a post-doctoral associate, he joined the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (USA) in 2008, then took up a Marie Curie Fellowship in Cranfield University (UK), where he has worked with the world-renowned scientists Professor Anthony P.F. Turner and Professor Sergey A Piletsky during 2009-2011. He joined Jiangsu University as a distinguished professor in 2012. Here, he is leading the 'Polymers and Functional Materials' research group in the School of Materials Science and Engineering. Professor Li was further awarded the "Jiangsu-endowed distinguished professor" by Jiangsu Province in 2012 due to his outstanding contribution to polymer research. He currently holds the editorship for the "Journal of the Chinese Advanced Materials Society" (Taylor & Francis), "International Journal of Physical Science", "The Open Electrochemistry Journal", and "Advancement in Scientific and Engineering Research". He also sits on editorial boards for the "Journal of Inorganic and Organometallic Polymers and Materials" (Springer) and the "American Journal of Environmental Sciences".

1. When you started your project through the Marie Curie initiative, what were your expectations?

I started my Marie Curie Fellowship on 8 Dec 2009 in Cranfield University (UK). My expectation was to strengthen the existing cooperation and communication between China and European countries. Of course, I personally had an aspiration to gain a better outlook for myself. Now, I feel comfortable to say that I have met my expectations, in other words I feel a stable connection between me and my European colleagues. Due to the 'humble' prestige I won within the scientific community, and having now a much better academic position (compared with before). These may be partially reflected in the fact that I was authorised in 2014 by the Society of Molecular Imprinting (with European origin) to organise the 8th International Conference on Molecular Imprinting.



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2. When you started your placement, did you imagine that you'd be where you are today?

I left Cranfield University on 8 Dec 2011 and subsequently joined Jiangsu University. I was immediately promoted from an associate professorship to the distinguished professorship in 2012. Following the promotion, I was awarded the "Jiangsu province-endowed distinguished professor" by Jiangsu Province for my 'humble' achievement in polymer research. I became the academic leader for the Department of Polymeric Materials in 2013. Indeed, I never expected this to happen! I believe that my Marie Curie-IIF experience played a part in steering these promotions!

3. If you had to choose the most memorable moment during your Marie Curie project, what would it be?

The most memorable moment for me would be the first work meeting I had with my supervisors, in which Prof. Anthony Turner and Prof. Sergey Piletsky told me how to do better! I will never forget their comment on scientific research that "the essence of scientific research is to learn from nature and to solve complicated problems through inspiration sought from nature".

4. Three words that sum up your Marie Curie Actions experience?

Motives, enthusiasm, and hard-working

5. How do you see your past 10 years?

I see my past 10 year as an enthusiastic, hard-working and fruitful period. I have published some high-quality papers and edited 5 books for worldwide publishers, including Elsevier and Wiley-VCH. During this period, I have also founded the International Congress on Advanced Materials with the first one having take place on 13-16 May 2011 in Jinan (China), followed by the second one of its kind, which took place in Jiangsu University (16-19 May 2013) and which proved to be a great success. The scientific programme has involved 600-plus participants, 700 full manuscripts and 315 abstracts from across the world. I was elected president of the Chinese Advanced Materials Society in 2011 and I founded the Journal of the Chinese Advanced Materials Society in 2013, which is being published and issued by the prestigious Taylor & Francis. It is so true that "the important thing in life is to have a great aim and the determination to attain it" (Johann W. von Goethe) and that "you have to believe in yourself and that's the secret of success" (Charles Chaplin).

6. Is there a famous researcher who inspires you?

Sure! Not one single but a few! Although I want to specifically mention Anthony P.F. Turner, since I spent two years with him and so can present a relatively comprehensive profile. Professor Anthony P.F. Turner is a world-renowned scientist, well known for his outstanding contribution to the field of biosensors. He contributed to pioneering work on "bioelectrochemical fuel cells" that underpinned his early innovations in electrochemical biosensor systems. When I asked him how he had this pioneering idea, his answer was "the inspiration sought from nature, plus motives,



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enthusiasm, and hard-work". Although this answer did not appear to be a direct response to my question, I regard it as key for a professional researcher, which has encouraged me to dedicate myself to science. "If observations confirm the scientist's predictions, the theory is supported. If observations do not confirm the predictions, the scientists must search further".

7. What is your favorite quote by a scientist?

"I want to bring out the secrets of nature and apply them for the happiness of man. I don't know of any better service to offer for the short time we are in the world" (Thomas Edison).

8. Your advice to a researcher who would like to apply for a Marie Curie Action?

The world can be changed by a man's endeavour, which might lead to something new and better! Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet!

9. Imagine your ideal Marie Curie Alumni Association event. What would it be and where?

I envisage the Marie Curie Alumni Association being composed of worldwide branches. The worldwide branches will help promote cooperation and communication between the local and European countries, which would also casually organise academic conferences and help contact Alumni.

10. If you could introduce us to another Marie Curie Alumni, who would it be?

Sure! As per my knowledge, these two MC fellows are probably not currently listed in the Alumni Association. Please feel free to contact them if necessary:

- Dr Shunsheng Cao

Jiangsu University, China

- Dr Shenqi Wang

Huazhong University of Science and Technology, China



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All you need to know on the European Research Area (ERA)

The European Research Area (ERA) was launched by the European Commission in 2000, with the idea of developing attractive opportunities for researchers within Europe. Today, ERA is at the heart of the EU 2020 Strategy and of the Innovation Union (IU) where it can help contribute to growth and jobs.

The Legal basis of ERA is found in Article 179 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union:

- The Union shall have the objective of strengthening its scientific and technological bases by achieving a European research area in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulate freely, and encouraging it to become more competitive, including in its industry, while promoting all the research activities deemed necessary by virtue of other Chapters of the Treaties.
- For this purpose the Union shall, throughout the Union, encourage undertakings, including small and medium-sized undertakings, research centres and universities in their research and technological development activities of high quality; it shall support their efforts to cooperate with one another, aiming, notably, at permitting researchers to cooperate freely across borders and at enabling undertakings to exploit the internal market potential to the full, in particular through the opening-up of national public contracts, the definition of common standards and the removal of legal and fiscal obstacles to that cooperation.
- All Union activities under the Treaties in the area of research and technological development, including demonstration projects, shall be decided on and implemented in accordance with the provisions of this Title.

Definition of ERA. ERA is composed of research and development activities, programmes and policies with a transnational angle. The national research systems of the Member States, funded from national tax revenues, remain as they are. They are however encouraged to be more open to each other and the world, more interconnected and more inter-operable. The following definition of ERA is taken from the Lisbon Treaty and the European Council's conclusions:

“A unified research area open to the world based on the Internal Market, in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulate freely and through which the Union and its Member States strengthen their scientific and technological bases, their competitiveness and their capacity to collectively address grand challenges”.



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What are ERA priorities?

- **More effective national research systems** that include increased competition within national borders and sustained investment in research;
- **Transnational cooperation and competition** which define and implement common research agendas on challenges, raise quality through Europe-wide open competition, and construct and run key research infrastructures on a pan-European basis;
- **An open labour market for researchers** so as to ensure the removal of barriers to researcher mobility, training and attractive careers;
- **Gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research** to end the waste of talent and to diversify views and approaches in research and to foster excellence;
- **Optimal circulation, access to and transfer of scientific knowledge including via digital ERA** to guarantee access to and uptake of knowledge by all.

The European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) is a strategic policy advisory committee whose mandate is to provide timely strategic input to the Council, the European Commission and Member States on research and innovation issues that are relevant to the development of the European Research Area, the European Semester and the Innovation Union.

State of play of ERA in 2013. Several Member States have already included a dedicated ERA section or referred indirectly to ERA in their National Reform Programmes (NRP). The ERA progress report highlights however the need for more transparency concerning the conditions for transnational access to research infrastructures. Researchers should also have access to an open labour market. What's more, the report stresses the importance of reducing the existing gender gap between men and women in research institutions and programmes.

What's next for ERA? The European Commission is seeking to enhance its contribution to ERA through Horizon 2020. Member States are invited to use the European Semester as an instrument to implement ERA priorities.

More information:

European Research Area website

http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/index_en.htm

Key documents

http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/key-documents_en.htm



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Dear MCAA Members,

This fourth edition of the MCAA Newsletter will be the last published before the summer break. We hope you enjoy reading it and, that you find the information useful.

In the next edition, we will tell you all about what happened at ESOF and at the MSCA Satellite event. Other exciting events are also coming up, so stay tuned!

We wish you a good summer!

The MCAA Team