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Dear Members,

We are pleased to present the eighth issue of the Marie Curie Alumni Association newsletter. This edition focuses on one of the year's major events: the MCAA General Assembly which took place in March in Venice (Italy). We have special coverage of this popular and exciting event.

MCAA General Assembly 2016: what happened? Our digest highlights the key moments from this special event.

You are probably wondering what the Association's newly elected Board will do. With this in mind, we spoke to its members to find out more about their visions and intentions:

- Brian Cahill – Chair
- Marco Masia – Vice-Chair
- Amit Zodge – Vice-Chair
- Kiran Kumar Chereddy – Treasurer
- Wuraola Akande – Ordinary Board Member
- Zoran Andjelic – Ordinary Board Member
- Bala Attili – Ordinary Board Member
- Francesco Grassi – Ordinary Board Member

MCAA Award Ceremony 2015 – who are the winners? Each year the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) highlights and rewards significant actions and activities carried out by its members. We unveil the lucky winners of 2015!

A letter to all Alumni: Mike Rogers has been elected the first Honorary Member of the MCAA. He has written a letter to all Alumni.

Impressions of an Alumnus: Yaroslav Verkh was present at the recent MCAA General Assembly. He shared his impressions and thoughts with us.

MCAA/Euroscientist webinar: "One EU, one science. Overcoming EU countries' inequalities in science". We met Marco Masia to discuss the outcomes of this fruitful event.

Application for a Humboldt Alumni Award: Ira Didenkulova has submitted a project proposal for the Humboldt Alumni Award for Innovative Networking Initiatives.

Alumnus creates own start-up: We met Filippo Neri who is about to create his own start-up in the field of gardening.

What's next? The MCAA is entering a new period!

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MCAA General Assembly 2016: what happened?



The official minutes of the General Assembly will be published in due course, once the processes of approval and legal deposition have been completed. However, for those who do not want to wait for this, here is a rough idea of the day's events.

Like the MCAA Conference on the previous day, the General Assembly took place on the Saturday 5th March (09h00 to 17h00) in the historic Auditorium S. Margherita of the Ca' Foscari University in Venice. A total of 188 MCAA members were present or represented.

Opening

The meeting was launched with a short presentation by Snezana Krstic, the Chair of the outgoing MCAA Board, in which she reminded participants of the principal objectives and workings of the association. This speech was followed by another short presentation by Odissefs Panopoulos, Policy Officer of DG EAC.C3 from the European Commission, with an explanation of the EC's role and objectives in setting up the MCAA, some comments on the development of the association so far, and some insights into the expected future of the association.

Legal formalities and approvals

Following this introduction, the more formal aspects of the General Assembly were initiated by Maria-Antonietta Buccheri, Secretary of the MCAA Executive Committee, with a presentation of the minutes of the 2015 General Assembly in Porto; the members formally approved these minutes. Maria-Antonietta then went on to present the report on 2015 activities, before handing over to Roy Someshwar, Treasurer of Executive Committee, who presented the 2015 Financial Report detailing the distribution of the annual budget and other financial matters; again the members formally approved this financial report. A final formal part of the proceedings was presented by Francesco Grassi, Vice-chair of the Executive Committee, who briefly presented the nine official



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Working Groups and twenty official Chapters currently within the MCAA, and confirmed the formal appointment of each chair-person of these nine groups and 20 chapters, who are also ex-officio members of the MCAA Board.

Think-tank sessions

After these formal proceedings, two 'think-tank' sessions were presented. The first session, presented by Zoran Andjelic and Mauricio Manfrini, looked at proposals for a 'structural profiling' system amongst MCAA members. This will aim to solicit members to define their sector(s) of activity in a new 'vertical profiling' section of their personal profile; this additional information will facilitate inter- and cross-disciplinary and multi-cultural synergies and networking amongst members, allowing stronger and more productive professional and/or business relationships to be nurtured. The proposal document they presented is available to members in the MCAA Library at <https://www.mariecuriealumni.eu/library/mcaa-structural-profiling>

The second 'think-tank' session focussed on how MCAA members could contribute more to association activities, with presentations by two speakers. Firstly, Roy Someshwar went through the various schemes currently available under which members can use MCAA funding to initiate and support a range of networking activities. Secondly, Brian Cahill illustrated how the German Chapter had leveraged both local and association resources to organise activities that attracted record numbers of new chapter and association members in German.

Elections

After lunch (again in the *Ca'Foscari* main building with magnificent views across the Grand Canal) the members proceed to elect the members of the new MCAA board that would serve from 2016 to 2018. The election was introduced by Odissefs Panopoulos, who emphasised the importance of this election, invited the members to study carefully the document with the profiles of each of the 25 candidates, and explained the electoral process whereby each member could vote for their preferred candidate(s) to select the eleven members of the new MCAA board. The members then proceeded to vote, and there was then a coffee and informal networking session while the votes were counted. Odissefs Panopoulos announced the results of the election for the eleven Board positions, as follows:

- Brian Cahill, as Chair of the Executive Committee
- Marco Masia and Amit Zodge as Vice-Chairs
- Kiran Kumar Cherreddy as Treasurer of the Executive Committee
- Maria-Antonietta Buccheri as Secretary of the Executive Committee
- Wuraola Akande; Zoran Andjelic, Bala Attili, Matthew Di Franco, Francesco Grassi and Cláudia Simão as Ordinary Board Members.

Closure

The day was closed formally with a short speech by Snezana Krstic, in which thanked the MCAA members, the representatives of the European Commission and the representatives of the Service Provider for their attendance and hard work in making a great success of this two-day combined conference and general assembly.

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Meet the new MCAA Board!

Interview with Brian Cahill, Chair



Brian Cahill
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1. May I ask you to introduce yourself briefly?

I am Brian Cahill, an Irish mechanical engineer who develops sensing technology for bioprocess engineering.

After completing my Masters degree, I left Ireland in 1998 to work for Hewlett-Packard in Germany. In 2000, I moved to Switzerland to pursue PhD in the Nanotechnology Group of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich. After defending my PhD, I relocated as a postdoctoral researcher to French Switzerland at the Laboratory of Colloid and Surface Chemistry of the University of Geneva.

At the end of 2007, I applied for an Experienced Researcher position as part of a Marie Curie Transfer of Knowledge Project at the Institute of Bioprocessing and Analytical Measurement Techniques in Heilbad Heiligenstadt in Germany. In this project I worked together with German, Estonian and Greek researchers to develop sensing techniques for microfluidic applications. I was so happy with this project that I applied (successfully) for a Marie Curie Reintegration Grant with my host institution and have remained there ever since. I am now Leader of the Junior Research Group.

2. Why did you apply for the Chairperson position within the MCAA?

I became Chair of the German Chapter of MCAA at the beginning of 2015. The German chapter quite quickly became the biggest chapter. Our activities were almost exclusively focused on career development issues. I felt that these issues were central to the aims and existence of MCAA but were relatively under-developed apart from providing micro-grants to Members to attend events. It is my opinion that MCAA has a huge capacity to play a positive role in the Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions with regard to career development issues.



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3. As the MCAA Chairperson, what do you plan to do first?

My first activity as Chair was to attend the General Assembly of the Initiative for Science in Europe in Cologne on 9 March: less than a week after the General Assembly in Venice. The ISE is a group of learned societies (EMBL, EMBO, EuroScience and others) that promotes the involvement of scientists in the design of European research policy. The greatest success of ISE was advocating for the creation of ERC grants. The MCAA is currently an observer Member of ISE but MCAA Members are quite active serving in its working Groups.

By participating in such activities we grow our network, develop the capacity of the MCAA to provide feedback on research policy issues to the European Commission and also help to design a research landscape that better serves the needs of our Members.

4. What do you think the MCAA's priorities should be?

In the medium term, the MCAA must increase its membership and engage the membership with interesting activities. In the framework of the MSC Actions, the activities that stand out are career development training and outreach. By promoting our own events we can build the network of the MCAA with our own Members, research agencies, host institutions and sponsors.

Career development training can be one of very many topics relevant to MCAA Members: bridging science and business, dual careers, gender equality, science communication, research integrity, intellectual property rights, proposal writing or laboratory management. There is a gap in the market for providing such training in the English language in non-English speaking countries.

Outreach activities within the MSC Actions are very often quite generic and rather boring (having your photo taken beside a poster). There is a huge gap for MCAA to develop entertaining outreach activities that engage both our own membership and the general public. The Scottish chapter has been quite active in this field with their series of seminars on "The Science of Fi". I see that their event on 1 April in Edinburgh has sold out.

5. How do you plan to organise your work within the MCAA and especially your collaboration with the other Members of the Board?

Our first Board Meeting will take place on 8 April in Brussels. Our Board Members are spread throughout Europe and the rest of the world but the wonders of modern communication technology make organisation much less complicated nowadays.

I have already had several requests to add topics to the agenda and welcome all contributions from our Board Members. I have quite good relations with all Board Members and trust that we can drive the development of the MCAA in the coming years.

6. What would you say to the Alumni, especially to those who elected you?

Our activities depend on the initiative and engagement of volunteer Members. As such we must be open to enabling our Members to help build the MCAA into a successful organisation. I will support all those who bring energy and creativity into the life of the MCAA.

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Meet the new MCAA Board! Interview with Marco Masia, Vice-Chair



Marco Masia

1. May I ask you to introduce yourself briefly?

My name is Marco Masia, I am Italian and I was an MSC Fellow at Boston and Frankfurt Universities from 2012 to 2015. I have been an Assistant Professor of Theoretical Chemistry at the University of Sassari (Italy) since 2006. I have been a visiting scholar in seven Universities in Europe and USA. I joined the MCAA in 2014 and I have chaired the Policy on Successful Researchers working group since last year.

2. Why did you apply for the Vice-Chair Person position within the MCAA?

I had the opportunity to work with the previous Board, and I wanted to contribute more actively to the Association's decision-making process. I knew that Brian Cahill was going to run as Chair; I have been working with him within the Board of the German Chapter and I decided to join as Vice-chair.

3. How will you organise the handover with the previous Vice-Chair?

Luckily the previous Vice-Chair sits in the board and I am in contact with him continuously. We have a good personal and working relationship and I know that I can always count on his help.

4. As the MCAA Vice-Chair, what do you plan to do first?

I would like to sit with the new Board and make a strategic plan before deciding what to do first. I have many ideas that I will share with the Board at our first meeting in April. The main goal is to exploit the yet-untapped potential of the association. I think that we should do more to help our Members make an impact in Europe, either in research or in any other field in which they are in.

5. What do you think the MCAA's priorities should be?

Boost members' careers, create high quality content, contribute to policy debate in Europe, partner with outstanding organisations and exploit synergies.

6. How do you plan to organise your work within the MCAA and especially your collaboration with the other Members of the Board?



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As I said, I have worked with Brian (the current Chair) within the German Chapter, where team work was a very good experience. I expect to use a similar work pattern within the MCAA Board.

7. What would you say to the Alumni, especially to those who elected you?

First of all, I would like to thank those who elected me.

Unfortunately I couldn't stay in Venice for the vote and I haven't had the opportunity to thank people. As for the Alumni in general, I would like them to participate more in the Association and to help us make it as lively and interconnected as possible. We have many ideas and we need people to make them reality.

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Meet the new MCAA Board! Interview with Amit Zodge, Vice-Chair



Amit Zodge

1. May I ask you to introduce yourself briefly?

My name is Amit Dadabhau Zodge, I am from India.

My Marie Curie Action was an ITN DoHip. I have international experience as a PhD candidate.

2. Why did you apply for the Vice-Chair Person position within the MCAA?

Well, this is the key and important question for me. The sixth President of USA, John Quincy Adams, said: "if your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader". I joined the MCAA for scientific leadership to popularise science by means of global scientific outreach activities.

3. How will you organise the handover with the previous Vice-Chair?

Mutual communication, sharing of experience, advice for tackling key issues would be my tools for handover with the previous Vice-Chair.

4. As the MCAA Vice-Chair, what do you plan to do first?

To focus on global scientific outreach activities. An agile and progressive internal system to address MCAA milestones with a broader perspective.

5. What do you think the MCAA's priorities should be?

As stated in the objectives, the MCAA is connecting all nationals, regardless of borders. Its activities are also bridging the gap between industry and academia. I think more efforts will be needed to broaden the scope. To address Alumni's issues and to emerge as a global scientific platform should be the priorities.

6. How do you plan to organise your work within the MCAA and especially your collaboration with the other Members of the Board?

I wish to dedicate my active involvement to establishing protocols, from the apex level to those for associated Chapters for global outreach activities. Those activities include a global scientific quiz, a novel scientific write-up award, a global scientific awareness programme etc. continual group events, activities with associated chapters, and exchanges of the views, ideas with board members.



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7. What would you say to the Alumni, especially to those who elected you?

I wish to thank my voters and all MCAA members for giving me an opportunity to work for the MCAA. I will always give my best to take the MCAA to new heights – with your support. Let's join hands to work together for a “Global MCAA”.

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Interview with Kiran Kumar Chereddy, Treasurer

May I ask you to introduce yourself briefly?

I am a Sandoz Talent Excellence Program trainee, currently working as a project manager at Strategic Planning and Transformation team, Sandoz (a Novartis company) International GmbH. I have assignments in Munich (Germany), Denver (USA) and Ljubljana (Slovenia).

By birth I am an Indian and by education I am a pharmacist. My journey in Europe started in 2010, when I joined the Erasmus Mundus Advanced Spectroscopy in Chemistry master programme. I studied one year each at the University of Lille-1 (France) and University of Leipzig (Germany). Later, I was selected for the Marie Curie ESR in NANOD-RUG network, where I completed PhD research at Louvain Drug Research Institute, Université Catholique de Louvain in Belgium (2012-15). In parallel, I also completed a Master of Business Administration with majors in finance and project management.

2. Why did you apply for the Treasurer position within the MCAA?

I am committed to making the MCAA a great association and a networking platform that offers extensive benefits to its members for their career and knowledge development. For this ambitious vision and goal, we need huge financial resources in addition to the support from European Commission. I have the '5S' plan to financially empower the MCAA and create more value for the MCAA brand in its members perception: sustainable resources (internally and externally); give extensive support to tax/salary issues; stay flexible and give freedom to Chapters and Working Groups; focus on successful career for members; find strategic partners and encourage MCAA start-ups. All these actions generate additional resources and at the same time high visibility. So, to put forward my financial strategy and to give my best to the MCAA, I decided to be part of the MCAA Executive Committee to set a benchmark for coming Board Members. This is the main motivation behind my application for the treasurer position.

3. How will you organise the handover with the previous Treasurer?

I will organise a 1:1 meeting with the ex-treasurer and get insights into current projects and actions. The knowledge gained and our new strategy will be churned together to prepare a roadmap for the coming two years. I always believe that the status quo should be challenged and we have to strive for betterment.



Kiran Kumar Chereddy



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4. As the MCAA Treasurer, what do you plan to do first?

I have many great ideas for the MCAA. But an idea without a clear plan is just a wish. I should mention here that, since we are very diverse in backgrounds and cultures, our vision for the MCAA is also very diverse. To turn my ideas to action plans, I would like to present my '5S financial plan' and align with our Board Members, which would be my first task. Then my job would be to develop a clear roadmap, timeline, deliverables and targets for implementing the 5S plan and budget allocations.

5. You were an Ordinary Board Member within the previous Board. How will this experience help you in your new role?

During the previous Board, I served as an Ordinary Board Member which gave me different opportunities to work in task forces. For example, I led the negotiation task force which is meant for partnership between the MCAA and IOM (start-up of Riccardo Biondi). From this deal, MCAA procured financial resources and IOM got great visibility within the MCAA. I represented the MCAA in strategic partner meetings with EuroDoc and Erasmus Student Network associations where we worked to find synergies and sustainable ways to have long-term partnerships. I drafted the guidelines for the procurement of external finances and later it became the finance working group's fundamental document. I started the tax benefits and mobility queries group and today it is one of the most viable and useful groups on MCAA website. These are only some of the examples and there are many more which guided me to draft the 5S plan. Without a doubt, I can tell that the experience I gained during my service as an Ordinary Board Member is invaluable and it will definitely remain a motivation for my new role as treasurer.

6. What do you think the MCAA's priorities should be?

In my opinion, all long-term/short-term strategies and action plans of the MCAA should reflect needs and requests of members. My experience tells me that MCAA members need active support on tax/salary issues and request for reasonable grants for their business travel. Career development, of course, is the second biggest need of our members and is also reflected in one of our surveys. Organising training/workshops on interviews and preparing proposals/CVs which could help our members for their future career plans. Chapters and working groups ask for flexible rules and freedom for their activities and how the budget is spent. Funding start-ups would be a long-term plan of the MCAA that transforms our Members into entrepreneurs, generating employment opportunities for our members. Making the MCAA self-sustainable and fulfilling the needs/requests of members should be the highest priorities.

7. How do you plan to organise your work within the MCAA and especially your collaboration with the other Members of the Board?

The newly elected Board is an amalgam of people with MCAA experience and new aspirations. An open dialogue, equal respect for others' opinions, prompt responses and absolute professionalism are the key skills I employ in our Board discussions and brainstorming. To encourage and engage more members, I would delegate/form task forces and follow both bottom-up and top-down approaches as and when required. The aim is to align with the other Board Members, involve high numbers and find a pragmatic solution.



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8. What would you say to the Alumni, especially to those who elected you?

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all the members who trusted my vision and plans for the MCAA. I will keep my spirits high according to your expectations throughout the term of office.

During my conversations with many interesting people in our general assembly in Venice, I listened to many inspiring thoughts such as those of Teresa and Klaus, who want to promote the MCAA in their network; Heiko, Nikolai and Matthew want to contribute to the IGCMT working group; Raelize Du Plooy wants to find inter-chapter initiatives with other chapters; Vakhtang wants to host the general assembly in Georgia; Junhua wants to start a Finnish chapter; Yeshasvi wants to contribute to a Tax/salary discussion group; Amit wants to organise large MCAA events; Laura wants to lead a collaboration with another like-minded association; the BeNeLux chapter is talking about a researcher's night in Amsterdam; Angela wants to continue the legacy of NI chapter; many others asked how to get involved! There is a never-ending list of amazing thoughts and motivations.

I only request that all the MCAA members stay active and, if you have any ideas/suggestions to improve the system, please write to the Board at any time. I am looking forward to hearing your stories and answering your queries. Together, we can make our MCAA a sustainable and member-friendly association.

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Meet the new MCAA Board! Interview with Wuraola Akande, Ordinary Board Member

1. May I ask you to introduce yourself briefly?

My name is Wuraola Akande. I am Nigerian; My Marie Curie Action project was MONACO-EXTRA (218242); full title: "Monolithic Adsorbent Columns for Extracorporeal Medical Devices". I spent part of my Ph.D training in Sweden, (Lund University, Protista Biotechnology), Germany (Polymeric GmBH), Austria (Krems Donau University), and the United Kingdom (University of Brighton). The international experience I gained has been tremendously useful and it is highly recommended for researchers to gain work experience abroad.

Since August 2015, I am based in Nigeria, where I work as a lecturer at the Department of Clinical Pharmacy and Pharmacy Administration, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

2. Why did you apply for the Ordinary Board Member position within the MCAA a second time?

I applied for the Ordinary Board Member position within the MCAA mainly because I wanted to be part of the core of an association that represents the voice of the Alumni and bridges the gap between researchers and the European Commission. I also intend to use the opportunity to foster greater public awareness of European research and develop global relationships within the worldwide research and innovation community, with particular emphasis on the Marie-Curie experience of international and inter-sector mobility. Finally, it will be my pleasure to develop support activities between Alumni at a national and international level as part of the MCAA.

3. You were an Ordinary Board Member within the previous Board. How do you intend to use the skills you gained from the experience?

I had the privilege of been a founding Board Member within the previous Board. These experiences, especially that of working with a team of international and cross-cultural people to make decisions, have been very helpful to my personal development, and will be useful in both my daily administrative role and my role as a Board Member within MCAA.



Wuraola Akande



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4. As an Ordinary Board member within the MCAA, what do you plan to do first?

I would like to encourage and improve networking among Alumni, hence I will gear the executive of the Association towards classification of interdisciplinary research and efforts to reach members effectively through the MCAA web-portal and other social media.

5. What do you think the MCAA's priorities should be?

The MCAA priorities should be to promote and support the Alumni in developing their careers, and to create a platform where Alumni can exchange ideas and collaborate on projects.

This could include, among other activities:

- establishing itself as an important 'voice of researchers' within EU Research Policy;
- guiding Alumni through the funding possibilities;
- providing opportunities for further career development and training for the Alumni.

6. How do you plan to organise your work within the MCAA and especially your collaboration with the other Members of the Board?

I plan to have regular meetings with other Board members, either through Skype, e-mail or face-to-face meetings. Collaboration should be a strength of the association and members, hence we need to prioritise our objectives for the coming two years, setting clear deadlines and discussing progress.

7. What would you say to the Alumni, especially to those who elected you?

I would like to thank them for trusting and believing in me for this new role within the board, and I really want to bring together all the alumni to create a successful Association, which benefits researchers worldwide.

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Meet the new MCAA Board! Interview with Zoran Andjelic, Ordinary Board Member



Zoran Andjelic

1. May I ask you to introduce yourself briefly?

I am Zoran Andjelic, I have German citizenship but am originally from Croatia. In the past I have coordinated several international projects with international agencies like NSF-USA, KFA-DE, including three MC projects in FP3, FP5 and FP7. I spent the first part of my professional career working in the academic environment (professor of electrical engineering at the University of Sarajevo) and the last 20 years as a research Fellow in industrial enterprises like ABB. I am currently CEO at POLOPT Technology (www.poloapt.com).

2. Why did you apply for the Ordinary Board Member position within the MCAA a second time?

In the second half of last year, the previous Board launched a Task Force to initiate a re-thinking process on the possible new structural profiling of MCAA. As I was one of the initiators of that process, I feel responsible for trying to push it further during this second mandate.

3. You were an Ordinary Board Member within the previous Board. How do you intend to use the skills you gained from this experience?

It was a great experience working with the previous Board. I am convinced that these two initial years helped us a lot to improve our understanding of the functioning of MCAA as association, to gain more of a feeling for potential improvements, to focus us on more pragmatic actions with the main goal of fostering the MCAA, making it more attractive for the entire pool of MC Fellows.

4. As an Ordinary Board member within the MCAA, what do you plan to do first?

Work on the realisation of the established MCAA Structural Profiling roadmap.

5. What do you think the MCAA's priorities should be?

Define the concrete actions needed to make the MCAA a highly attractive, propulsive association for the entire pool of MC Fellows.



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6. What would you say to the Alumni, especially to those who elected you?

First of all, thanks to all of you who voted for us in the new Board! I am really glad to see new faces in the new Board and I must express my personal feeling that this new Board seems to be highly motivated to take the MCAA forward for the benefit of all its members! But, I want also to emphasise that the new Board alone cannot achieve the postulated goals without a very tight link to all of you! Please, be active and let us together make the MCAA a world-class association for world-class researchers.

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Meet the new MCAA Board! Interview with Bala Attili, Ordinary Board Member



Bala Attili

1. May I ask you to introduce yourself briefly?

I am Bala Attili, from India. I am a PhD researcher and started my MC fellowship in Hungary in the RADIOMI consortium before moving to the EU-funded FP7 Co-fund project IN-MiND at KU Leuven, Belgium. I am involved in developing small molecule diagnostic agents for neuroinflammation – the main cause of neurodegenerative disorders like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

2. Why did you apply for the Ordinary Board Member position within the MCAA?

I have been a member of the MCAA since 2013. I attended the first two General assemblies held in Brussels and Porto. Late in 2015 I took over the Chairmanship of BeNeLux chapter and got involved in active promotion of MCAA activities by organising workshops, hangouts, Researcher Nights, career info sessions. It's time to expand my services to the MCAA and become a Board Member, proactive in this organisation.

3. As an Ordinary Board Member within the MCAA, what do you plan to do first?

As an Ordinary Board Member, I would like to increase the visibility of the MCAA. Currently 10 % of global MC Fellows are registered with this association. I would like to increase this number with many innovative ideas that I have, in collaboration with the new Board. Being a PhD researcher, I know the significance of career guidance for the ESRs and ERs, so I would foresee organising workshops and career/job fairs.

4. What do you think the MCAA's priorities should be?

MCAA is a global association with professionally skilled people around the globe; it should serve as a platform for career building and networking, able to form inter- and intra-university and industrial collaborations. The prime priorities of the MCAA should be overall development and assistance to MC Fellows, which for sure the Board will work on.



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5. How do you plan to organise your work within the MCAA and especially your collaboration with the other Members of the Board?

Planning and organising of work is crucial to the success for any association. In my view it should be more professional; I wish to delegate and discuss my work with other Board Members and to hear their opinion. As a BeNeLux Chapter chair, I always wish to collaborate with other Chapters and Working groups. Now, as a Board Member, I will be more effective if I team up with other Board Members. I believe in Team Work-More Work.

6. What would you say to the Alumni, especially to those who elected you?

Let me say I am very delighted to have been elected an Ordinary Board Member and I would like to convey my sincere thanks to one and all who voted for me and enabled me to stand here. I will make sure that I will stand up for your hopes and work for the effective running of this association. I will make sure this association is "MC friendly". If you have an issue or a story of success, come to us and share your stories, we will encourage and promote you!

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Meet the new MCAA Board! Interview with Francesco Grassi, Ordinary Board Member

1. May I ask you to introduce yourself briefly?

Francesco Grassi. I am a pharmaceutical chemist working as a senior researcher at the Rizzoli Orthopedic Institute in Bologna (Italy).

I was awarded an OIF MC fellowship during the 6th Framework Programme, for a project on the role of immunity in regulating skeletal homeostasis. I have lived and worked in the United States for four years.



Francesco Grassi

2. Why did you apply for the Ordinary Board Member position within the MCAA?

As a former Vice-Chair, I enjoyed taking part in the starting phase of the MCAA. The Association has just recently started to exploit its full potential as the largest association of excellent scientists and scholars. I wanted to keep contributing to the growth of the MCAA, but in the meantime, I thought that some turnover within the Executive Committee would be beneficial. This is why I decided to apply to be an Ordinary Board member

3. You were Vice-Chair within the previous Board. How will this experience help you in your new role?

Being the Vice-Chair during the past 2.5 years has been a learning experience for me. We started many activities from scratch, including micro-grant programmes for Members, collaboration with the EC and the contractor, and the Chapters' and Working Groups' activities. Therefore I now expect to be instrumental to the new Board smoothly taking over the tasks that we committed to working on. Building on the results obtained by the previous Board, I can now support the new Board in planning activities for the new period.

4. As an Ordinary Board member within the MCAA, what do you plan to do first?

First, it is a priority for us to close our budget period (ending 8 May) and lay the ground for the next contractual period with the EC. This requires very fast and efficient planning of our spending ability in the next few weeks. Moreover, the next four years will be marked by a larger EC budget, but our biggest challenge will be to start attracting money from the outside, opening the way for a self-sustainable MCAA in the future.



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5. What do you think the MCAA's priorities should be?

I think the MCAA has the potential to gradually become more influential in shaping future policies for research within the EC, and this is one of the priorities we are pursuing through our dedicated Working Group. Moreover, Members are increasingly asking for practical information and support to solve some common issues such as taxation differences between countries. The MCAA cannot fix this issue but can collect concerns, good practices and help draw up common standards to make the Marie Curie experience more enjoyable for everyone. Lastly, we are constantly committed to the career development of our Members – a topic for which our BSB Working group will play a key role by opening new avenues to bridge the gap between scientist, scholar, and the business.

6. What would you say to the Alumni, especially to those who elected you?

This is an exciting time for MCAA. Recently we enjoyed an exponential growth of enthusiasm, ideas and talented Members who are willing to participate in the life of MCAA. The next couple of years will be critical to shape the future of MCAA as this burst of new energy will turn into new projects and opportunities for all Members. So, keep in touch with us, the Board Members, and keep stimulating us with your input for a better and more effective MCAA.

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MCAA Award Ceremony 2015 – who are the winners?

Each year the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) highlights and rewards significant actions and activities carried out by its members. We unveil the lucky winners of 2015!



Career Award 2015: Dr. Ira Didenkulova

Dr Ira Didenkulova presents the profile of a devoted and talented researcher who has made major contributions not only to her scientific area (oceanography specialising in sea and coastal hazards) but has also been a role model for younger generations of scientists, especially women. Dr Ira Didenkulova is able to reach outstanding achievements in her country as well as abroad. The field of studies concerns hazards; as such it can reach interdisciplinary audiences.

What are the selection criteria:

- Value and Impact of contribution to the Marie Curie community;
- Effectiveness of outreach activities to the Marie Curie community;
- Engagement and commitment to the MCAA.

Alumni of the Year 2015: Dr. Brian Cahill

Dr. Brian Cahill has been rewarded for his outstanding and exemplary contributions and leadership of the German Chapter and his contributions to the entire MCAA community.

What are the selection criteria:

- Excellence of results / research work;
- Gained awards/prizes in recognition of research activities;



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- Outreach and Impact of research activities.

We wish both a lot of success in their respective careers!

Selection procedure

Selection of 2015 winners was supported by an Award Committee composed by five independent personalities; they provided recommendations to the MCAA Board that made the final decision.

The five members of the 2015 Award Committee were:

- Prof. Paolo CIACCIA – University of Bologna (IT)
- Prof. Laurent Sébastien FOURNIER – Aix-Marseille Université (FR)
- Dr. Anett KISS – University of Sussex (UK) / MCAA Grants & Awards Working Group
- Dr. Mojca RAMŠAK - University of Ljubljana (SL)
- Dr. Ingrid WAKKEE - VU University Amsterdam (NL)

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Mike Roger's letter



Mike Rogers
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Mike Rogers has been elected the first Honorary Member of the MCAA. He has written a letter to all Alumni.

Dear Marie Curie Alumni,

At the last AGM in Venice I had the honour to be elected as the first Honorary Member of the Association. It was the context of the meeting though that was really exciting. After many years in public service, many projects start but few survive. I had the opportunity to be involved with some of these, notably the peer review process of the R&D Framework programmes, The Science Shop movement, and then CORDIS; and at the start of FP7 the opportunity to start an internal awareness in the Commission of the benefits of an alumni movement with the active support of my hierarchy.

Through paradigm changing moments in geopolitics, like the Fall of the Berlin Wall, 9/11 and EU Enlargement, the Marie Curie fellowships concepts of excellence science and mobility to bring together the best researchers with the best faculty in the best locations have become de facto standards to which other programmes aspire. The Commissions recognition of this and the benefits to Science as a whole has resulted in ever larger budgets; even at times of great fiscal prudence in the Member States, who also support this programme consistently. It is no accident that at least a dozen countries that are not EU member states pay for the privilege of participating fully. The Commission has also sought to ensure that fellowships are well funded, are family and gender-friendly and promote interdisciplinary and current research. The absence of any scientific priorities other than those agreed on by experts in the relevant fields at the time of evaluation has also not happened by accident.



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Now that the Alumni association has matured after 2 years of hard work by the initial board and executive; and the contractors; and has reached 10% of eligible members, it is time to look forward to build a platform where Membership is rewarding for all, and the goodwill and expertise gathered in mobility is shared and mentored into the new generation of alumni that every wave of the Actions generate, and provide the Commission and its Agency, and your political representatives, a rich source of feedback and evidence of the systemic impact of such a diverse action; to ensure future proposals continue what is sound policy, good science and supports the knowledge based economy that will see a stable and peaceful continent well into the 21st Century.

If I can be a small part of that through this membership in my evening years, I will be happy to serve you. Thank you for the opportunity afforded me.

Mike W Rogers

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MCAA General Assembly
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Yaroslav Verkh was present at the most recent MCAA General Assembly in March 2016. He shared his impressions and thoughts with us.

The 2016 Marie Curie Alumni Association General Assembly attracted more than 200 participants from all over the world – a conclusive success for the young organisation. The MCAA was created in 2013 to promote career opportunities and cooperation between the current and former members of the prestigious Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, a set of scholarships awarded by the European Union for priority research projects.

The General Assembly in Venice, which I had the privilege to attend, boasted an impressive concentration of intelligent people in one room. PhD holders, professors, post-docs and entrepreneurs from all over the world came together to exchange ideas, look for collaborations and make friends for life. The value of such gatherings cannot be stated enough, since they create very powerful links between scientists from different backgrounds at a time when multicultural expertise and multidisciplinary approaches to challenges are becoming increasingly important.

Being a new member, I was both pleasantly overwhelmed by the egalitarian character of the MCAA and the warm people around me. Although some of them are very big players in industry and academia, there was no segregation by status, age or nation as is often the case at such big gatherings. Communication between all members was encouraged and the scientific endeavour of MCAA Members was equally celebrated by beginners and veterans of the field.

The MCAA's goals lie beyond the scope of a professional networking organisation. It concentrates on the promotion of career opportunities for its members by mutual help and exchange of ideas, independent of background or current status. The MCAA creates a professional community that supports and nurtures us in our pursuit of personal development and a better society. And having over 6 000 (at the time of writing – and growing) highly intelligent members is a good way to ensure it.



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The MCAA has already become a great way to meet clever people and join exciting events throughout Europe. After seeing the potential of the MCAA and actively helping to shape the organisation at the General Assembly, I am firm in my belief that the MCAA will play a very big role in shaping European science in the near future.



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MCAA/Euroscientist webinar:

"One EU, one science. Overcoming EU countries' inequalities in science"

The webinar "One EU, one science. Overcoming EU countries' inequalities in science" took place on 15 March. We met Marco Masia to discuss the outcomes of this fruitful event.

1. Doctor Masia, you organised this webinar on overcoming EU countries' inequalities in science. Why is this topic important?

I think that the financial crisis has triggered an unexpected effect on European Science: some countries have made huge cuts to research funding and, consequently, have lost their best researchers to those countries that have kept the investment in R&D high. This has caused a huge brain drain that could have important consequences for the future of European Science. This webinar is the first in a series aimed at forming a big picture of European policies, always with an eye on potential future developments.

2. How did the webinar go?

We are happy with the outcome. More than 180 people registered and approximately 100 attended it; we had a constant number of 60 attendees for the whole webinar, which lasted 70 minutes. Personally, I found it was great, but I might be biased! 95 % of the attendees have said that it exceeded their expectations and 25 % found it excellent. At the end of the debate we even received an invitation to organise a session on the topic at ESOF 2016. I think that the journalist who moderated the debate should take most of the merit for this success. He worked hard on the preparation and was able to glue together different perspectives with a nice narrative.

3. Which stakeholders were present? What was their role?

We invited four people: **Amaya Moro-Martin** is an 'activist' scientist from Spain who launched a very popular campaign to have countries like Spain or Italy investing more in R&D (for more info, have a look at 'They have chosen ignorance' – <http://openletter.euroscience.org/open-letter>).

Then we had **Kieron Flanagan**, a Senior Lecturer in Science and Technology Policy at the Alliance Manchester Business School, who has published conceptual and empirical work on a range of issues in science, technology and innovation policy and has worked with or advised international, national and regional/local policy-makers.

Katrien Maes is the chief Policy officer of the League of European Research Universities. She is responsible for policy development in many areas; from research funding, management and assessment, to research careers, doctoral training, professional development and gender issues. She is an expert in EU research policies and programmes.

Finally, we had invited **Octavi Quintana-Trias**, who works at the European Commission's DG Research and Innovation. Unfortunately, due to a last minute work commitment, he could not participate.



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4. Do you have any tips to share on how to organise and advertise such events?

We started organising the event in November, more than four months ago. I think that time is one of the most important factors for organising this kind of event successfully. We could contact the journalist and the speakers and let them choose the most convenient date to hold the webinar. In addition, partnering with EuroScientist gave us the advantage of disseminating the information to a broad public, including outside of the MCAA. In spite of good planning, we had some minor glitches in the last few days; we are still in the learning process and we need to improve on some points.

5. How was the webinar financed?

The MCAA provided the webinar platform and contracted the journalist. We also provided most of the organising infrastructure and we took care of part of the advertising.

6. How can the MCAA support this kind of event?

I think that the MCAA has huge potential for content creation. I would like to stress that I mean content demonstrating a high level of expertise and therefore with a potentially high impact on its audience. I believe that the MCAA should invest a lot in this aspect.

7. Did you learn anything while organising this event that you would like to share with other Members?

The organisation was a team effort. Within the PSR-WG, Claudia Simao helped set it up; then David Anciaux at Inova+ helped with technical support, and Simon Robinson, Aurélie Chaise and Zina Kremer helped with advertising, both within the MCAA and on social media. Externally I dealt with EuroScientist, the journalist and the participants to take care of other details. I must admit that was been an interesting and demanding experience. I think that the takeaway of this experience is that the team is important to make an event successful.

8. What will the next webinar be about?

We are considering various options. The attendees have expressed a preference for the topics 'science and business', 'open science' and 'research integrity'. They are all topics of high interest for the MCAA. As soon as we have the new funding (let's say September) we'll work on organising more webinars.



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Ira Didenkulova has submitted a project proposal for the Humboldt Alumni Award for Innovative Networking Initiatives. We wish her a lot of success!

Networking and mobility of excellent women scientists in science, engineering and technology

Women have been widely recognised as a source of untapped potential. Different steps have been taken so far for a deeper understanding of barriers and different obstacles faced by women in the Science field. Present calls in the Science in Society panel in HORIZON 2020 deal with the horizontal and vertical segregation experienced by women in their careers and best practices to manage these issues. The general aim is to foster women participation in all scientific fields with particular regard to male dominated disciplines as SET (Science, Engineering and Technology) and increase the number and the effective representation of women in decision-making positions, to help also speed up the whole process.

While problems related for example to unconscious gender bias in the selection processes and the definition of excellence in Science, the work-life balance and dual career issues have been explored to some extent, the issue of mobility of women scientists has been relatively neglected although being for example strictly related to the mentioned aspects.

There have been quite a few debates and also projects based on extended surveys to understand the role and impact of mobility on a scientific career. Although in general it is true that these issues are sensitive to the country and the scientific field for example, it is believed by the scientific community at least, that there is a connection between mobility and scientific excellence. Rewarding mobility is becoming a concern at the European level as mechanisms to measure in the best and objective way possible scientific excellence are not homogeneous. But still mobility is a key issue to strengthen a researcher's scientific curriculum and be recognised at the international level.

Moreover, mobility allows to enhance the knowledge and handling of new and different techniques and methods and to improve personal skills of project management and communication of scientific topics.

When the dual career problem was not an issue, it was often taken for granted that a woman followed her spouse whenever he decided or was asked to be mobile. Nowadays, it happens that women decide to be mobile mainly if they are single and often to give up instead for the sake of taking care of their children, spouse, elders and in general their family. Different statistical data show that male scientists are mobile during their whole career continuously and that women may be even more mobile than men but only at the earliest stages of their career, when they do not have to reconcile work and family life.

The problem regards mobility in its most general way, including participation to conferences or accepting a work place which requires commuting. These issues reflect in a decreased capacity to build scientific networks with colleagues in the same field and a reduced flexibility to meet different work possibilities.

Mobility has demonstrated to be partly gender sensitive and this needs to be addressed in some way in order to ensure at least equal opportunities to male and female scientists regarding possibilities and benefits offered by mobility programmes. This is also applied to Alexan-



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der von Humboldt foundation, which supports mobility in science by funding either a stay of researchers from abroad in Germany or vice versa. This Project focuses on the networking of women in science and technology paying special interest to their mobility, and should provide mentoring support to those women, who do or plan to do their research abroad.

Networking

The networking will be organised through a number of the relevant associations in which the applicant has already been involved and to which she is going to connect during the project. Being a Humboldt, Marie Curie and l'Oreal-UNESCO "For Women in Science" fellow, the applicant already has a rather wide network of excellent female scientists. Moreover, being a deputy President of the Natural Hazard division at the European Geosciences Union and the member of the Outstanding Young Scientist Award committee, she has all means to enlarge this community to women in geophysics. This activity has already been implemented once in 2011-2012 and will be reinforced during this project. Being an active member of the Women in Science working group of Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA), namely GEMS (Gender Equality for Mobile Researchers in Science), the applicant will use all current contacts of this working group, and also strengthen and enlarge them for the purpose of the proposed project. Among the target associations are as follows:

- GEMS Working Group of MCAA;
- ECWT (European Center for Women in Technology);
- EUWIIN (European Women Innovators and Inventors Network);
- EPWS (European Platform of Women in Science);
- m-WiSET (mobile Women in Science Engineering and Technology) Working Group of Marie Curie Fellows Association (MCFA);
- and others.

Applicant is also a founding member of the Estonian Chapter within MCAA, which ensures that the project will well cover excellent female scientists from Estonia and the Baltic States.

Annual workshops

For strengthening the Network we plan to organise annual workshops in collaboration with the associations above and European Universities. Among the potentially interested Universities are the following:

- Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia;
- Tartu University, Estonia;
- University of Bremen, Germany;
- Leibniz Universität Hannover, Germany;
- University of Kiel, Germany;



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- University of Bari, Italy;
- University of Salento, Lecce, Italy.

Participation in conferences

To support and strengthen networking among Women in Science we will also participate and propose special sessions, booths and town hall meetings at the major relevant conferences, such as:

- Gender Summits;
- EuroScience Open Forums (ESOF);
- International Conference of Women Engineers and Scientists (ICWES);
- European Geosciences Union (EGU) General Assemblies (for networking women in geosciences);

organise workshops and meeting with Women in Science organisations on specific topics, such as:

- Mobility of women scientists;
- Promote e-Leadership of women scientists;
- Responsible Research Innovation Gender aspects;
- Dual Career for mobile women scientists.

Coaching and mentoring

One of important applications of this project is coaching and mentoring of young female scientists, which will be supported in several ways:

- Publishing e-books on Role Models for mobile female scientists;
- Publishing papers on Role Models in high-level peer-reviewed journals;
- Creating an electronic database with a possibility to request mentorship.

E-books on Role Models for mobile female scientists

There is still a gap between female graduates and the pool of female job applicants – even though the proportion of female graduate students and postdocs in most scientific fields is higher today than it is ever been. Therefore we suggest that focus should be placed on examining the real challenges which women need to overcome, particularly when "mobility" comes into play. Role models who have overcome these challenges will continue to play an important part in moving in the right direction, because it may take some time to achieve true gender equity in science.

The benefits gained from the mobility experience and the ease of reintegration afterwards also depend largely on the career stage and country of origin. Challenges may



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arise in the early career stages, for example just after completing a PhD, when one may encounter a lack of funds or specific equipment necessary to implement new or different techniques. In addition some individuals experience challenges arising from discrimination or scarce opportunities in their own home lands to obtain a stable position. For people facing such issues the availability of role models who have triumphed over similar situations can be inspiring.

Challenges specific to mobility can arise due to family situations; often it can be difficult to fulfil the needs of dual careers. Even when one's partner is willing and able to relocate, it is not always straightforward to find the partner job or a position close to the one's new working place. When children are involved, in particular when they are little, special attention must be devoted in order to organise their new life, as well. Therefore role models for dual career couples are needed.

We will develop two electronic books (e-books) of Role Models of excellent women scientists and the role of mobility in their career. It is hoped that reading about successful scientists who have achieved a healthy work-life balance while moving to new locations will be particularly helpful for those individuals considering mobility in their own career. The selection of Role models will be done in the way to support maximal diversity, what regards their (i) scientific field, (ii) age, (iii) country of origin, (iv) destination country, (v) academic and non-academic (industrial) occupation. The last point should also demonstrate to female scientists the alternatives for the academic career.

At least one of the books will be fully dedicated to Humboldt fellows for branding Alexander von Humboldt foundation.

These e-books will be available to be used by coaching programs that support the development of systematic approaches to increasing the representation and advancement of women in science, engineering and technology, since mobility plays a key role in these programs. The stories contained in the e-books will be useful to mentoring or advising program focusing on career, networking opportunities, discussion and grants opportunities in conjunction with mobility.

Paper publication

The results of the project on Role Models in Humboldt and MCAA alumni association and the role of mobility in their careers will also be published in high-level peer-reviewed journals, such as, for example,

- Nature;
- Sex Roles (Springer);
- Women's Studies International Forum (Elsevier);
- Gender & Society.

Database of Role Models for mobile female scientists

The most innovative implementation of the project is a database of Role Models from several Women in Science organisations offered to the Humboldt Alumni through a portal in a similar way of AcademiaNet.



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AcademiaNet was established as a European database for those searching for suitable female candidates for influential academic and scientific positions and was primarily focused on German-speaking women academics. In this scheme, outstanding women academics and scientists were nominated for the portal by AcademiaNet partners; therefore, it was not possible to apply directly.

Our database has a slightly different focus. We are more interested in general networking between excellent women scientists and the role of mobility in their careers. Therefore, we will not limit ourselves to outstanding candidates (e.g. recipients of the Leibniz Prize or ERC Advanced Grant), but rather to successful researchers who found healthy balance between their academic career and family life. We do not see any point in complicating and restricting application procedure, therefore, our database will be open to all nominations, including self-nominations. As it was mentioned before, the database will be primarily advertised among Alexander von Humboldt, Marie Curie and L'Oreal-UNESCO fellows inviting them to apply and nominate their colleagues.

However we like the organization of the AcademiaNet profiles: search options and profile structure, and plan to keep it the same in our database. In addition to this we will implement special section of whether our candidates are interested in coaching and mentoring. In this case they will be eligible to receive coaching and mentoring requests (see below).

Dissemination and exploitation

Finally, we propose to implement a website of the network project to facilitate the dissemination and exploitation of project activities, results, contacts and references. It will be the portal to access the database of successful female scientists as well as the e-book of mobile female scientists.

For higher impact, we will also start social network accounts, such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, where we will advertise our Project and Network and highlight all major activities.

All database candidates will also have access to their profiles on the website, so that they can keep them updated and select different levels of security for the provided information (open to everybody /to other successful researcher of the database).

The website will also be complemented by open and closed forums, so that the female candidates can open discussions as within the Network community as open to the general public. In the latter case all followers and readers of our webpage would also be able to participate in the discussion. It is also expected that widely open discussions will be organized with further involvement of other relevant association listed above to have more impact, and highlighted through the dedicated social network accounts.

In order to support younger female researchers we will allow them sending requests to the candidates who are interested in coaching and mentoring through a special link on our web site. These requests will be visible in the candidate's personal area and the candidates will be able to accept or reject them.

The project will also be supported by a Newsletter to advertise its activities in the communities and associations mentioned above.

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Filippo Neri

We met Filippo Neri who is about to create his own start-up in the field of gardening. He told us about the challenges involved in such a project.

After some years of thinking, I am going to found my start-up – a kind-of Uber for gardeners.

After several years in research roles as a machine learning expert both in academia and private R&D Labs, and having enjoyed a Marie Curie Fellowship and a few other professional experiences, I have decided to apply myself to a new challenge: to start my own company. This won't just be an ordinary professional firm, but a start-up that follows as closely as possible the Silicon Valley path of development.

Trying to develop a Silicon-Valley-style start-up in Europe is challenging, but doing it in Italy will add some special 'treats' to the challenge.

So first things first, the start-up will focus on developing a Uber like service for gardeners. Anyone wanting someone to take care of their garden can select one of the many available gardeners in the Uber-for-Gardeners app. The user may select according to type of service and price, and the app will also manage the payment.

Setting up the app and introducing it to the market involve a number of technical and business challenges. But the actual product is not really the focus of my attention at this stage. What is important is to plan and organise the work from the beginning so that the start-up is able to quickly locate a product market fit, or create a new market if needed (you may have heard of this concept as part to 'The Lean Startup Methodology' by E. Ries).

The other unmissable element of a SV style start-up is its ability to scale fast: it is important to be able to service more and more users in different markets/countries quickly. In the meantime, I am trying to recruit smart collaborators (I have just posted a [job advertisement](#) on the MCAA and EURAXESS websites) to help me create the company.

How does all this sound for a new challenging task for a Marie Curie Alumnus?

At this moment, I have no idea if I will be successful or not. However, I hope that other Marie Curie Alumni will take up the challenge of applying their significant skills (yes, they have plenty!) to the start-up arena as I would really like to soon see a Facebook or Google-type of company being created by one of us in Europe. Good luck with your current endeavours!

Filippo Neri

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Dear Members,

From May 2016, the MCAA take charge of all the Association's editorial activities, have until now been handled by a contractor. As the contractor, we would like to wish the very best to the Board, the Association and all future editors of the MCAA website, newsletter and magazine.

For us, it has been a pleasure to work in close collaboration with an Association that gathers such huge talent. We would like to thank all the Members who have contributed to the diverse articles and interviews published in all previous newsletters and magazines.

Yours,

The MCAA editorial team (Aurélia Chaise and Nicola Davenport)
The MCAA social media team (Zina Kremer)

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