



Issue 36 - September 2023

Marie Curie Alumni Association

Newsletter

The new MCAA mentoring initiative

Giving a voice to researchers:
Introducing the MCAA
Whistleblowing Channel

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Dear MCAA Members,

I hope you are all fine and everything is going well. This issue of the MCAA Newsletter focuses on what is happening/has happened recently in our community.

Utterly important news is related to a **reshuffle of the MCAA Board**: Corinne Portioli is currently MCAA Board Secretary and Excom member and Giulia Malaguarnera, the former Secretary, is now an ordinary Board Member until the end of the current mandate (2024). The decision was taken after reviewing the individual skills compared to the positions and the time availability. The Board decided to give Giulia the opportunity to increase the focus on Open Science and policy, freeing her from the administrative and organizational duties in which Corinne excels. In legal terms, this was based on the possibility of cooptation of board members allowed by the [MCAA statutes](#) (article 8).

In the Operational Team, **we welcome newly hired staff**: Stephanie Paoloni and Jake Vinnacombe-Willson as Administrative Assistants, Antonino Puglisi has joined as Community Manager, Federico Torres as Director of Internal governance, Abdallah

Bahlit as Financial Accountant, Juliette Ferte as Events Organization Supporter, Fabrizio Martina as Graphic Designer, and Ruben Riosa as Communication Manager. The hiring process is still ongoing for further support positions, made possible with the support from the EU funded Coordinated Support Action, CSA, [MCAA New Horizon](#).

We are excited to announce that the 2024 [MCAA Annual Conference and General Assembly 2024](#) will be held in **Milan, Italy**, on March **14th-16th, 2024**. The theme will be **"10 years of MCAA: Past, Present & Future"**. Satellite events will be planned on March 14th, while the core of the conference will be on March 15th-16th, 2024, so block the week to fully enjoy the event! Last July, MCAA Secretary Corinne Portioli and MCAA ordinary Board Member Gian Maria Greco joined the **Italy Chapter Annual Meeting**, organized at the Università Bicocca in Milan, where the main topics discussed were the chapter's activities and the organization plan for the 2024 Annual Conference. The [Call for Session Proposals](#) for the 2024 Annual Conference is now open and we look forward to exciting topics and unique sessions focused on the areas of interest of the MCAA and discuss the work and role that the MCAA has conducted as well as future paths. Importantly, 2024



MCAA Board at the AC&GA 2023 closing ceremony in Cordoba (Spain)

Photo by Valentín Gámiz | Fotografía



Corinne Portioli
at the AC&GA
2023 in Cordoba
(Spain)

will be the year for MCAA board elections: a call for applications will be launched in due time. If you feel hyper engaged with the MCAA goals, if you have free time and enthusiasm to dedicate to the community, if you feel capable of high level commitment to take on the responsibilities of driving the MCAA for the next two years - all on a volunteering basis - then keep an eye for coming announcements.

In addition to the main grant that supports the MCAA, the association is a partner in several [funded projects](#), which help in financing the MCAA activities. Another important note, is that the MCAA has established the [MCAA Whistleblowing Channel](#), which provides a secure and confidential platform for members to report any form of unethical behavior they have witnessed or experienced first-hand, within the MCAA itself, but also in their work environment.

Among the many opportunities and services provided by the MCAA to its members, those supporting career development are amid the most rewarding. We have recently launched our mentoring platform [MCAA Academy](#), designed specifically for MCAA members. We call for alumni to register as mentors and/or mentees, to give and get support! The platform will also enable members to build connections and expand professional networks, at all career stages and across all fields. In addition, we recently evaluated the effectiveness of the [MCAA learning program](#) initiative as a tool

for career development. Through free access to the Coursera platform, members get into a wide range of courses and specializations taught by leading academics from renowned universities worldwide. Many members described engaging, relevant, and valuable this initiative which has been pleasantly proven to be highly successful. The [MCAA Training Program](#) organizes personalized courses, developed and led by MCAA members with professional expertise on given themes. The combination of online learning, mentoring and training has proven to be a powerful support in achieving professional goals. We encourage you to take advantage of the MCAA Academy, enroll in the learning programs, attend the variety of workshops, webinars and training provided, and to continue exploring the invaluable resources available to MCAA members. The MCAA has also been working on a joint project with an international consortium of funders to launch a mentoring platform to support the implementation of narrative CV, to respond to a change in the requirements by many funders worldwide. More details will be available soon on the platform. Stay tuned!

As we know, the MCAA provides financial support to our members with the aim to contribute to their Career Development, to facilitate their participation in MCAA's activities and the promotion of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions' community. The MCAA supports the participation of members in external and internal events by providing financial assistance in the form of **microgrants (MGs)**. The MCAA is currently reviewing its MG's policy and rules, to better target member's needs, to improve the impact of MCAA to the member's career development, and to make simpler and more transparent the application and evaluation processes. While the new MG's policy and rules are expected to be available in Autumn 2023, [the MCAA is opening a bridge call for MGs](#), using a simplified and provisional set of rules.

We are happy to announce that the election process for the renewal of some Chapters

and Working Group (WG)s' Chairs is now completed. **The MCAA Board gives a warm welcome to the newly elected 19 Chairs (16 Chapters & 3 WGs).** Their mandate started on September 1st, 2023 and will last for two years. As you know the MCAA lives and thrives thanks to the effort that volunteers generously offer. We wish to express our gratitude to everyone for their active participation in these activities as members or candidates.

As usual, **the MCAA has been represented in conferences and high-level initiatives.**

Of note, in May 2023, Vice Chair Gledson Emidio represented the MCAA at the [Workshop on Scientific Freedom](#), organized by UNESCO, and at the [International Science Council Meeting](#) in Paris. In May-July 2023, Chair Fernanda Bajanca joined the ERA group 7 Consultation on attractive and sustainable research careers in Horizon Europe and the ERA action 3 Workshop on lessons learnt from national activities on Research assessment, and together with Mostafa Moonir, Executive Director, joined the [EU Science Diplomacy Alliance](#) General Assembly. Fernanda also joined the Program Committee for the MSCA Presidency Conference, while Vice Chair Alexandra Dubini joined the conference Organizing Committee. In June 2023, Treasurer Pavlo Bazilinskyy participated at the Meet the Entrepreneur one-day meeting in Namur, Belgium, where the topic was about innovation and how researchers and innovators can synergistically and successfully work together. Last July, Pavlo represented the MCAA at 2 other events in Brussels, Belgium: the OSCAR closing event and the Education and Innovation Summit. On June 14th-16th, 2023, Ruben Riosa represented the MCAA at the [2023 EUA CDE Annual meeting](#) in Lathi, Finland, an event organized by the Council for Doctoral Education.

Of interest to many MCAA members are **some of the coming events where the MCAA will be represented:**



Giulia Malaguarnera at the AC&GA 2023 in Cordoba (Spain)

Photo by Valentín Gámiz | Fotografía

- [Open Science FAIR 2023](#), Madrid, Spain, on September 25th-27th, 2023
- [2nd Diamond Open Access Conference](#), Toluca, Mexico, on October 25th-26th, 2023
- [3rd MCAA Latin America \(LATAM\) Conference](#), Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, on October 26th-28th, 2023
- [MSCA Spanish Presidency Conference](#), Toledo, Spain, on November 14th-15th, 2023

Overall, this first year and a half of activity, implementing the new CSA contract, has been exciting and intense for all of us. We are getting ready to start a new academic year with the same passion and commitment to **support and engage researchers** in creating a global network of opportunities. We wish you a pleasant reading with the great articles prepared for you by the Newsletter team.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us if you have any questions or to give us feedback. We look forward to continuing to support you in your career development journey.

On behalf of the MCAA Board

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Editorial

Dear MCAA members,

Like every year, the September-October issue of the MCAA Newsletter opens a new academic year and a breath of fresh air after a hot summer vacation. I like to call it a wave of change. This time, the change is reflected not only in the ongoing transition to autumn in nature, but also in the MCAA itself.

First, biennial elections for the MCAA Chapter and Working Groups (WG) have just taken place. On behalf of the entire editorial team, I would like to welcome and congratulate all newly elected chairmen. In the next issue, you'll have a chance to learn more about the vision they have for the MCAA and where they want to take us over the next two years. As a newsletter, we look forward to writing about the activities they will be working on and the milestones they will achieve during the term.

The MCAA Newsletter is an intrinsic part of the Communications Working Group: the leaders of the WG and the editorial team work closely together every day, spreading the news to the MCAA community. We would therefore like to thank Ruben Riosa and Nicoleta Spinu, former chairman and vice-chairman of the Communication WG, for all the work they have done and their continued contribution to the newsletter. Even at the very end of their tenure, they still had enough energy to guest edit the June 2023 special issue of the Large Language Models newsletter, which ended up being a big success. At the same time, we would like to welcome Ashish Avasthi, the new chairman, on board. If you are curious about Ruben's journey with the MCAA over the past five years and the vision Ashish has for the Communications working group, go straight to the farewell and welcome letters.



Photo by Human Resources, Leiden University Medical Center

For ten years, the MCAA has grown rapidly and transformed into a strong international network for current and former MSCA fellows. I joined it myself about 8 years ago, just after completing the PhD project, and was fortunate to see how it has evolved to meet the ever-changing needs of the community. Therefore, I am very proud to see that even now we are seeing that the MCAA is starting new and highly anticipated projects. Over the years we have observed in the newsletter that there are several topics that particularly resonate with the community and have come up very often in our articles. These are the need for mentorship in a highly competitive academic environment and the need for a safe space to communicate your concerns, a safe place to express one's opinion. That's why we are very proud to see that the MCAA has launched two very important channels in the summer of 2023, namely the mentoring initiative and the whistleblowing channel. We would like to introduce these initiatives to you through the people behind them. If you want to learn more, go directly to "[The new MCAA mentoring initiative](#)" and "[Giving a voice to researchers: Introducing the MCAA Whistleblowing Channel](#)".




Image by Midjourney, prompt by Fabrizio Martina

As mentioned above, the MCAA is approaching its tenth anniversary. Ten years and several thousand members, hundreds of networking activities and micro-grants awarded every year, annual conferences and general meetings, which became important forums for science diplomacy, strong representation within the European academic communities, and even an ongoing transition towards financial independence of the association. As one can imagine, the 10 year anniversary will not just pass by, but will be greatly celebrated by the community. In this issue of the MCAA newsletter we are already starting to discuss events and activities that will take place in Milan, host city of the AC 2024. If you are interested, there are many ways in which you can get involved with the organization of the AC, or simply get inspired to attend the event. The Italian Chapter of the MCAA, kindly organizing the event, is giving a glimpse at their plans in "10 years of MCAA: Come

to share stories, come to celebrate and to envision together the future ahead", yet more details will follow in the December issue of the MCAA Newsletter.

At last, just as usual, the editorial team prepared a great overview of past and upcoming activities organized by the MCAA, as well as an overview of ongoing initiatives one can get involved in. We are inviting you to read about these activities and thanking all the authors that have contributed to the newsletter.

Enjoy the issue!

Oleksandra (Sasha) Ivashchenko 

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On behalf of the editorial team

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News from the MCAA

10 years of MCAA: Come to share stories, come to celebrate and to envision together the future ahead!

What to expect from the Annual Conference and the hosting at University of Bicocca in Milan? Monika Weissensteiner chats with some members of the Organizing Committee to get a sneak peek into the upcoming Annual Conference and General Assembly 2024.

The MCAA Annual Conference and General Assembly in 2024 will take place in Milan, Italy, starting with satellite events on March 14th, followed by the conference on March 15th and 16th.

We dedicate the 2024 conference to the 10th anniversary of the Marie Curie Alumni Association and to everyone who has made this journey possible.

The call for sessions is currently open for six thematic tracks: (1) Bridging Science and Business, (2) Career Development, (3) Genders, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, (4) Policy, (5) Research Funding, (6) Research Management and (7) Science Communication.

SAVE THE DATE & CHECK THE WEB FOR:

- Session proposals deadlines: **10 September & 20 October 2023**
- Speaker registration: **1 November 2023 - 1 February 2024**
- Upcoming information: travel grants, poster sessions, registration and more

<https://www.mariecuriealumni.eu/conference-2024>

MCAA MILAN,
ANNUAL ITALY
CONFERENCE MARCH
& GENERAL 14-16,
ASSEMBLY 2024

10 Years of
MCAA
Past, Present & Future
#MCAACONF2024



Photo by Carlo Antonini

Milano-Bicocca Campus

Monika Weissensteiner (MW): The 10th anniversary of the MCAA will be hosted in Italy. What were your thoughts when the candidacy by the Italy Chapter was accepted?

Riccardo Biondi (RB): We were obviously thrilled to see that our effort had been successful. When Carlo initially approached me with the idea of proposing Milan as the conference venue, I embraced it, though I was also a bit nervous since it is a big challenge for the Italy Chapter's capabilities. We are all volunteers and devote our free time to supporting the Chapter's activities. After receiving the news, we were conscious that there was no turning back. The excitement fuels hard work and we aim to make it a great experience for all the participants.

During the conference and beyond, what can participants expect from coming to Milan?

Carlo Antonini (CA): Milan is a young and attractive city for research. It has a population

of 200K students distributed among some of the best universities in Italy and in Europe. I think coming to Milan represents a good opportunity for young scientists in the MCAA to connect with other fellows and alumni that will gather for the AC&GA, and also to meet the local scientists and research groups and to establish new collaborations.

Any practical advice for planning the trip?

CA: Milan is in the heart of Europe, so it can be conveniently accessed by plane but also by train, which can be cheaper and quicker, and is, of course, the most sustainable option. Milan is full of events, so try to book your trip as soon as possible, as hotel prices can skyrocket.

What are topics important to the Italy Chapter which you are looking forward to seeing addressed on the occasion of

the 10th anniversary conference?

RB: Some of the main objectives of the Chapter are boosting the career of young members and improving networking and communication within the association and outside. For this reason, we will support the involvement and collaboration with industry and academies to enable the members to analyze the pros and cons of both working-environments, to get new contacts and to exchange ideas and experiences.

What does it mean for the Italy Chapter to host this important MCAA event?

RB: This is the biggest event that the Chapter has ever organized. It will be a great opportunity to involve as many chapter members as possible and to test our capabilities. So far the Chapter has achieved important results at the national level, but the involvement of the members was mainly virtual. This event will also be important for attracting new active members, as well as to find collaborators for future activities and to put the fellows and alumni in touch with possible national and international stakeholders.

What does the 2024 edition of AC&GA mean for the MCAA?

Gian Maria Greco: The 2024 Annual Conference & General Assembly in Milan is

Promotional poster of the MCAA AC 2024



set to mark a pivotal moment in the annals of the MCAA. It is our chance to look back on an amazing ten years and to plan how we can make the next ones even better. Hope to see everyone there!

Come and join us for the 10th anniversary MCAA conference in Milan!

On behalf of the 2024 MCAA AC&GA Organizing Committee

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News from the MCAA

Giving a voice to researchers: Introducing the MCAA Whistleblowing Channel

In July 2023, the MCAA launched the MCAA Whistleblowing Channel. Through this channel, MCAA members can report on ethical issues within and outside the association. We interviewed Fernanda Bajanca and Gian Maria Greco, who lead the project.

A few months ago, the MCAA launched two valuable and long-awaited initiatives for its fellows, the Whistleblowing Channel and the Mentoring Initiative. In this interview we wanted to know a little bit more about the ideas behind the whistleblower channel from the leaders of the project, Gian Maria Greco who is an MCAA board member and Fernanda Bajanca, the current chair of the MCAA.

What is the new whistleblowing initiative and why was it created?

Communities everywhere can suffer from misconduct, and the fear of backlash can silence those who see it. The MCAA stands firm against any unethical practices or violations, ensuring an atmosphere where its members can voice concerns without facing consequences.

Recognizing the potential dangers of reporting such issues, our main objective is to maintain transparency, responsibility, and integrity in our community by protecting the welfare and rights of those who step

forward. Thus, the MCAA introduced the [MCAA Whistleblowing Channel](#). This offers members a protected and private avenue to share firsthand experiences or observations of unethical actions.

Highlighting wrongdoings is vital to uphold transparency and accountability within the MCAA. By coming forward, one bolsters the association's credibility and aids in addressing any breaches of the [MCAA Code of Conduct](#). For an in-depth overview, please refer to the [MCAA Whistleblowing Channel Policy document](#).

How can one report an incident? What type of events can be reported? How will they be processed?

While the MCAA's ability to address unethical issues outside its purview is limited, the Association is dedicated to offering its members a secure environment for reporting unethical matters they witness or experience with third parties like universities, research centres, funding bodies, private firms, and so on. Accordingly, the MCAA Whistleblowing Channel allows members to report concerns in two main contexts: A) issues directly linked to the MCAA, and B) those connected to third parties. It's crucial to recognize that:

1. The MCAA can only act on concerns that fall within its domain, i.e., context A.



Image by Midjourney, prompt by Fabrizio Martina

2. Regarding third-party related issues or context B, while the MCAA is committed to fostering dialogue about one's report with relevant stakeholders, it won't undertake an investigation. This is because the Association lacks both jurisdiction and legal authority. Additionally, it's legally required for one to use the communication channels of the concerned third party before turning to an external platform like the MCAA Whistleblowing Channel.

Currently, while we test the tool under a pilot phase, only MCAA members can access the MCAA Whistleblowing Channel. Members can submit their reports using [the form](#) accessible at the MCAA website. Once a report is submitted, members can track its status and any related developments via a separate form, found on the same page.

Are there any ethical or privacy concerns?

Ethics and privacy were major concerns taken into account during the design of the MCAA

Whistleblowing Channel. Upon accessing the platform, members will be walked through the steps to file a report. Should they wish to remain anonymous, there is an option to select that preference. The system is structured to prioritise the safeguarding of their identity. Rest assured, their personal details will be kept confidential and only the [MCAA Ethics Committee](#), an independent and unbiased body of the Association, will have access to it. No board members or MCAA staff has access to the complaints.

How will the initiative be coordinated?

While it was designed under the supervision of two MCAA Board members (Editor's Note: Fernanda Bajanca and Gian Maria Greco) with support from the MCAA Ethics Committee and an external partner company specialised on the matter, the MCAA Whistleblowing Channel will be managed by the MCAA Ethics Committee.


Once a member has submitted a report, it will be reviewed by the MCAA Ethics

Committee to determine if an investigation is warranted. Within a 90-day timeframe, the Ethics Committee will present its findings and conclusions to the MCAA Board, duly anonymised. This report may include recommended corrective actions to be eventually implemented by the Board. Serious breaches of the MCAA Code of Conduct may require the intervention of the MCAA General Assembly as per the [MCAA statutes](#).

What do you expect from this initiative? Where do you see/hope it goes in the next 2-3 years?

First and foremost, our aim is to bolster our association's growth and reinforce a culture of transparency and trust among our members. Additionally, we aspire to set a benchmark for organisations like ours and research institutions. In the long term, our vision for this initiative is to significantly influence the creation of a dedicated

whistleblowing channel within the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions. Initiatives do exist within the European Commission, such as an Ombudsman, and mechanisms are offered for MSCA fellows to report ethical issues. However, fellows still feel these are difficult to navigate and not fully adequate to their needs. We hope to collect information about what is failing and how to improve the official reporting mechanisms to provide recommendations from the community to the MSCA.

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Image by Midjourney, prompt by Fabrizio Martina

News from the MCAA

The new MCAA mentoring initiative

The MCAA Academy is a new program to support the career development of MCAA members with mentoring at its core. We interviewed Mariana Rosca to learn more about the motivation behind and objectives of this initiative.

What is the new MCAA mentoring initiative and why was it created?

MCAA Academy is a new mentoring program of MCAA and was created to support the career development of MCAA member. "Our advanced mentoring platform provides a continuous, full-spectrum learning experience, allowing mentees to focus on the skills that matter the most, when they matter the most. It consists of mentoring members for their next career steps and providing them with support for their career development plan."

How can one contribute to the initiative? Can anyone become a mentor or a mentee?

All MCAA alumni can become both mentors or mentees, depending on their interest and expertise. To join the platform is very easy and it requires to follow just three simple steps (see "[how do I join the MCAA Academy platform?](#)"). To contribute, it is necessary to register first. When the registration is complete, you are free to start interacting with peers, sharing the experiences/expertise or learning from others.

What is the difference between the

Mariana Rosca, a personal account

Mariana Rosca is MCAA's Ordinary Board Member from 2022, a freelance trainer and a researcher. Currently, she participates in the development of the curriculum and assists in the creation of teaching tools for a new human rights course at the Moldova State University that aims to foster human rights education in Moldova. He is also a project director at the Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania for the project "@Work: Resilient societies in the wake of persistent crises. A case study of Ukrainian women refugees' digital work" financed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization from Romania.



Photo by Valentín Gámiz | Fotografía

MCAA and other publicly available mentoring initiatives (e.g., Euraxess)?

The MCAA Academy has been specifically designed for MCAA members. It relies on each member's contribution to advance their own and their peers' career development as well as the engagement of the overall



Image by Midjourney, prompt by Fabrizio Martina

MCAA community. Also, unlike other similar platforms, the MCAA mentoring initiative is not managed from the top. It has a more peer to peer approach, where each member, depending on their career needs, can identify common interests, get in contact with the members and share information and resources each one needs most, etc. So, in addition to a mentoring platform, it also acts as a networking platform.

How will the initiative be coordinated?

The launch of the initiative has been coordinated by the board members but, as mentioned before, it is aimed to foster direct cooperation between alumni. Being such a big community of more than 20K members, it is necessary to have optional free and safe spaces of cooperation amongst the members, without any coordination. However, at the registration stage, there is a need to have some support and from July 2023, Antonino Puglisi (Nino) has joined the operational team as the Community Manager, and one of his core tasks is to help with the MCAA mentoring platform. Of note, Nino is also an active MCAA member, so despite this being a professional work, it keeps an "inside" coordination.

What do you expect from this initiative? What are your hopes and visions for the


mentoring platform?


The initiative is in its first steps of trial, and we hope to soon have many registered and active members, and then be able to start developing this initiative into a vibrant community, where each member could find support in advancing their careers as well as sharing their experiences.

Would you like to share any final words or remarks?

From the board, as we mentioned during the annual conference in Cordoba when the platform was officially launched, we invite all the MCAA members to register and actively participate in the platform, by becoming mentors or mentees.

Being connected inside the MCAA mentoring platform will make it possible for everyone to stay in touch, make the MCAA more connected, expand one's professional network and develop fruitful connections across different sectors and career stages.

Mariana Rosca 
MCAA Board Member

Namrata Iyer 
Editorial Board Member, MCAA Newsletter

News from the MCAA

The COFUND PASIFIC Programme. An interview with Paweł Rowiński

I spoke with Paweł Rowiński, the coordinator of the PASIFIC, one of the most recent COFUND programmes in Poland. We discussed the programme's vision and how the current political situation is influencing science.



Could you briefly introduce yourself and the PASIFIC programme?

I am a professor, researching environmental hydrodynamics at the Institute of Geophysics of the Polish Academy of Sciences. From 2015-2022, I was the Vice-President of the academy, and from September 2023, I will be heading the office.

The PASIFIC is a postdoctoral fellowship programme offering a unique opportunity for researchers to undertake state-of-the-art research in a dynamic scientific environment. It enables scholars of all nationalities and scientific disciplines to establish their scientific independence and conduct ground-breaking research. The Programme is co-funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie COFUND scheme.

The Programme recruited 48 excellent researchers from a pool of 550 candidates in two calls announced in 2021. Selected candidates have come to Poland for 24

months to conduct their research at the Polish Academy of Sciences- one of the country's most prestigious scientific institutions. Each project was awarded up to €93,000. Fellows collaborate with experienced supervisors and participate in training. For up to six months, they can also participate in secondments outside academia.

What led to the initiation of the programme and who constitute the team members?

The PASIFIC programme aims to support the international mobility of excellent researchers at the postdoctoral level who wish to pursue their research at the Polish Academy of Sciences. In Poland, the Academy is an umbrella organization for 70 research institutes. The expected benefit is twofold: for the incoming researchers and the participating institutes of PAS, and the non-academic sector in Poland. The Programme is open to European and non-European researchers, and contributes to strengthening the European research sector.

We wanted to create strong research ties and long-term, sustainable research cooperation between the incoming fellows and their host institutes. This is achieved by encouraging the fellows to apply for funding schemes with the PAS institutes.

To develop the programme, we put together a team of professionals including a Project Coordinator, Project Manager and four Work Package Leaders who are supported by team members from the Chancellery of PAS. We are also aided by the Advisory Board, comprising the best scholars and experts in their scientific fields, who played a major role in developing the evaluation and selection processes.

What are the main outcomes attained so far? Are they in line with the initial expectations?

Currently, the fellows, together with their respective PAS institutes, are reporting on their achievements in the first year of their projects. We evaluate each report from substantive, financial and ethical points of view, so it is pretty early to evaluate the results. However, several articles have been submitted and some of them have been published. Our fellows are actively participating in many conferences, some also as keynote speakers. Three of them received prestigious awards. They are also very active in outreach activities. They have written numerous articles, which have been published in the Polish media.

Was the programme influenced by the situation in neighboring countries and other political issues?

Unfortunately, yes. First of all, the pandemic delayed the start of the programme by over a year, which was followed by the war in Ukraine. Sadly, these events discouraged many fellows from either coming to Poland or staying here. Additionally, in the current economic situation and the growing research


costs, we have faced enormous challenges in sustaining projects of the fellows. To mitigate this issue, we have introduced the valorisation of the research budget of the programme.

Science should be without borders. What could be the role of PASIFIC fellows in promoting such a vision within Poland and beyond?

Science has no borders, and we encourage the fellows coming to Poland, to network within their PASIFIC community and beyond. I am sure that after their experiences within the PASIFIC, the fellows will be well-equipped to share the vision of science without borders. Their activity would contribute to the internationalisation of the PAS institutes and their scientific environment. We hope that after their fellowship in Poland, they become ambassadors of Polish scientific institutions.

As the PASIFIC is coming to an end, is there any plan for developing similar programmes within the Polish Academy of Sciences and in Poland in general?

We received very positive remarks about our programme from the research community and questions about future PASIFIC calls. Therefore, we plan to continue the programme. And yes, we have plans to develop the programme by adding new features, the details of which can be shared in due time.

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News from the MCAA

When Science Meets Design: A workshop with scientists and designers

Understanding how scientists and designers teamed up to explore career options with a journey of imagination and creativity developed by the Brazilian MCAA chapter.

A scientist may be described as a person who connects his/her knowledge with the world's challenges and the technologies available in order to solve global problems. Problem-solving is one of the strongest skills you can find in a scientist and great solutions require creative thinking, a skill found in 100% of designers. So, the combination of a designer and a group of scientists can bring thousands of ways to help society solve problems or even, redesign science careers. This idea sounds so interesting that the Brazilian MCAA Chapter decided to invite a designer, Julia Dias, to moderate an online workshop "Design your career in science" for scientists.

In this online training, ten researchers needed to imagine themselves as explorers, equipped with a backpack full of tools to explore six islands and overcome some challenges in their five-day journey. With a playful and positive attitude, Julia guided us on this adventure using some well-known

methodologies, such as design thinking and the science of happiness. Julia is a happiness designer and CEO of Design Peculiar, a programme that uses design thinking to explore career options for professionals and has helped people from high school students in Brazil to researchers in Norway.

If you are unaware of using design thinking to solve problems, know that it is well-used in business and regardless of the field, it aims to bring creative and innovative solutions to problems. The science of happiness is a concept associated with positive psychology and the social sciences that makes life worth living.

Julia's workshop was based on six stages, or, as she likes to call them, six islands to be explored: discover, define, imagine, plan, test and review. Every stage has different challenges and goals that involve a lot of drawing, notes and activities to get you out of the box and inspired to create. "Discover" was the first, most laborious, but interesting stage to develop because, more than being the first step into the adventure, we needed to understand what brought us to the present by creating a map with our experiences in life.

Uncovering the events of the past is hard, but it's essential to figure out the choices we've made and our interests that have always been within us. However, when we started the "define" stage, I immediately remembered Lewis Carroll's quote from the classic children's tale, *Alice in Wonderland* "If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there." In other words, defining where you want to reach brings focus to one goal, or it makes us break down a complex journey into small and simple pathways to sail. Knowing our trials, barriers, and obstacles in that way helps us create strategies to walk through them easily.



Photo by UX Indonesia on Unplash

The stage that required the most creativity from the group was "imagine," when we needed to imagine all the possibilities of our careers according to where we wanted to reach. According to Julia, it's a great opportunity to create new journeys and see the world through tourist eyes. Next, it was time to plan the journey chosen to be explored. It involved networking and being exposed to possibilities, like joining congress, attending events and professional meetings, and contacting friends or acquaintances. "Test" and "review" were the last stages, and more than revisiting the journey, it was the moment to share the thoughts, discuss ideas and options from all the attendees. It was a vote for hope and positivity for our future as the positive psychology proclaims.


Scientists are experts in their research, and sometimes it blinds them to see other career options and possibilities that are one step away from being achieved. Focused on data

analysis, technical writing and regulations, some days with imagination and ludic activities can take them out of their comfort zone and help them imagine possibilities not thought of before. I am convinced this workshop was a great initiative from the Brazilian MCAA Chapter to provide us with an effective toolbox to clarify some roads we were afraid to take because of the darkness we were facing.

Relevant information:


Design Peculiar: www.designpeculiar.com

How to improve your career with design: <https://rb.gy/7dcry>

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News from the MCAA

European Fellowships after PhD: MSCA and ERC opportunities



Photo by Giulia Rizzo

Photo of the conference

Do you have any questions when you think about these prestigious grants? How to apply? Who can apply? How can you get funding for your proposal? What do these funded proposals look like, and how to submit them? Do not panic. Many of our Chapter members had the same questions before this panel discussion.

To answer these questions, the MCAA France Chapter, with the collaboration of Maison de l'Île-de-France of Paris, organized the conference "European Fellowships after PhD: MSCA and ERC opportunities." It was an excellent opportunity to discuss two main types of European funds: the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship (PF) and the ERC Starting Grant.

The conference took place on the 22nd of June, 2023 at the Maison de l'Île-de-France, Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris. This campus, in the south of Paris, hosts Erasmus students, PhD and postdoctoral fellows every year. It is a good environment for international students and researchers who want to move to Paris. In this atmosphere, the conference was followed by a networking aperture between the audience and the speakers. Five speakers were invited on the stage to share their experiences with these European fellowships.

Eugenia Shadlova is the [MSCA National Contact Point for France](#). She and her team

provide information, training, tools and support for proposal preparation and project implementation. She talked about the MSCA PF application and mobility rules, the deadline (13th September), and the budget dedicated from the European Commission for this scholarship. All researchers with a maximum experience of 8 years after the award of their PhD degree can apply for a European Postdoctoral Fellowship (across Europe), or a Global Postdoctoral Fellowship in a Third country. She encouraged anyone interested in MSCA postdoctoral fellowship to contact her team for help in the proposal application: "MSCA Postdoctoral fellowships were initiated to support researchers' careers and foster excellence in research. It's a great opportunity, don't lose it!"

The second speaker was Jeronimo Rilla, an MSCA postdoctoral fellow in Paris, currently researching the 'History of Ideas.' Jeronimo is a historian of political thoughts. He obtained his PhD in 2018 at the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, for the thesis "Leviathan as Prosopoeia: Towards a New Theory



Photo by Giulia Rizzo

of Conflict in Hobbes." His advice for new applicants: "Think like a sniper, not like Rambo. If you decide to apply, be prepared to only focus on the application."

The third speaker was Lucile Alexandre, an MSCA Global Postdoctoral Fellow. Lucile won her grant for a biophysics project developed between Canada and France. Now she is based in Paris at the Pasteur Institute, working on the extraction and detection of extracellular vesicles. Her advice for new applicants: "MSCA PF was a great opportunity to work on my project, having my fund to support my research. It is a leverage for a conference and new ideas, but also an opportunity to learn how to organize a project."


Maria Clotilde Camboni was an MSCA postdoctoral fellow at Oxford University in Social Science and Humanities. Her research interests include medieval Italian literature, the circulation of knowledge during the Middle Ages, and Renaissance intellectual history. From her experience, she said: "Choose your supervisor and host institution well, find out about them, talk to them before the application, and clarify with them how you will work together."

The last speaker was an ERC fellow, Silvia Lasala. Silvia has been an associate professor at the University of Lorraine in France, since 2018. In 2016, she got her PhD at Politecnico

di Milano in Energy Engineering. Afterward, she pursued her postdoctoral research in Nancy at the Laboratoire de Réactions et Génie de Procédés, with a contract funded by Air Liquide. Her research currently aims to improve the efficiency of technologies producing electricity, heating and cooling. From her experience, she said: "Individuate your weakness and try to work on it before the application."

The conference was open to all the MCAA members, Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris (CIUP) residents, and all CIUP visitors. Given the extraordinary response of this edition, MCAA France Chapter would like to repeat the conference next year. So, if you want to attend the next one, stay tuned to our mailing list or social accounts. If you want to be updated about the activities and events promoted by the [MCAA France Chapter](#), you can join the chapter or follow us on our Instagram page ([MCAA_francechapter](#)), Twitter page ([MCAAFrance](#)), or LinkedIn page ([MCAA France Chapter](#)).

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News from the MCAA

Intelligent Recommendation System for online stores: An interview with Mariya Evtimova

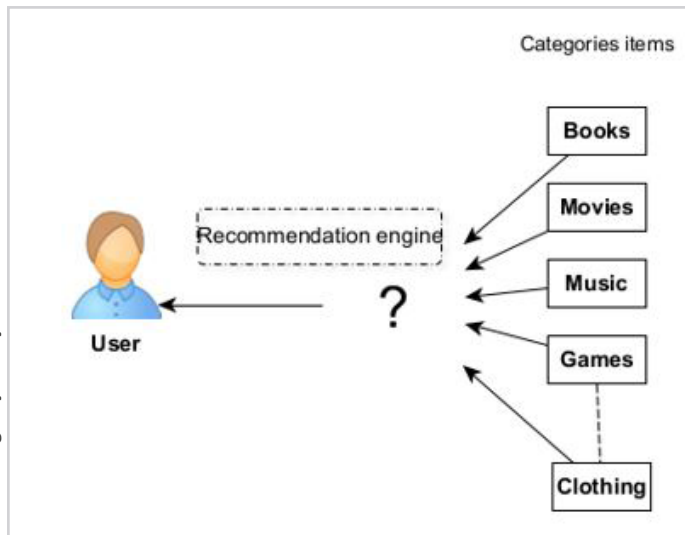
In today's digital landscape, 'Recommender Systems' have gained immense popularity for their abilities to suggest relevant contents to the users. Dr. Evtimova's research introduces a semantic e-shopping Recommendation System employing a 'distributed belief' algorithm. The innovative algorithm effectively combines diverse information, from user profiles, to offer personalized recommendations for their search queries.

Dr. Mariya Evtimova presented a talk about "Intelligent Recommendation System for online stores", in the webinar organized by MCAA Career Development WG on 11th August, 2023. We interviewed her about her research in Big Data Management and Intelligent Recommendation systems.



Mariya Evtimova-Gardair, a personal account

Mariya Evtimova-Gardair is a Teaching & Research Assistant at Sorbonne University, Paris. She is also a visiting lecturer at Nepal College of Information Technology (NCIT, Nepal) and a COST project member. From 2019 to 2021, she worked as a research software engineer at National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and the Environment (INRAE, France). Previously, she worked as an assistant professor at the Technical University of Sofia (Bulgaria) for 7 years. In 2017, she obtained her Ph.D. for the thesis titled "Semantic Agents for Personalized Search". Her expertise not only includes computer science but also electronics. She has participated in various scientific projects related to AI, Information Retrieval (IR), semantics, multi-agent systems and reasoning. She has authored over ten publications, including two book chapters, and has participated in numerous invited presentations.



Scheme of Recommender system

What is a Recommender System?

A Recommender System is an information filter, which suggests personalized recommendations, based on the user preferences and behaviors. Online suggestions of products, contents or services help the user to find relevant items from a large pool of options, enhancing their experience. These systems employ algorithms and data analysis to predict preferences using user behavior, item attributes and social networks. They are vital for e-commerce, streaming, social media and content platforms. Furthermore, their results are fundamental to enhance engagement, satisfaction and revenue through personalized experiences and reasoning algorithms.

What is a Semantic Reasoning algorithm?

A Semantic Reasoning algorithm leverages semantic information, like data meaning and context, to draw logical inferences and to make decisions. In Recommendation Systems for online stores, these algorithms improve the quality and relevance of product recommendations.

What are the advantages of using Semantic Reasoning in online store

Recommender System?

Overall, using Semantic Reasoning algorithms in Recommendation Systems for online stores create more accurate, diverse and contextually relevant product recommendations. It helps to improve user satisfaction, engagement and conversion rates by presenting customers the products that match their preferences and needs, ultimately driving higher sales and customer loyalty.

What is the innovative technology that you propose?

I am proposing a new Intelligent Recommendation System and a new layered model of Semantic Intelligent algorithm for online stores. In particular, the proposed system will employ personalized user profiles for online stores. Furthermore, the new Semantic Model will use an innovative distributed reasoning algorithm, based on Disjunctive Belief Rule Base.

Why should it be important to use these new Intelligent Models and Systems?

There are several reasons to use them, like increasing the business performances of the online stores. If we want to analyze the reasons in detail, we can see:


- **Improvement of Accuracy:** New algorithms often incorporate advanced techniques and approaches that can lead to more accurate and relevant recommendations. This can enhance user satisfaction and loyalty.
- **Personalization:** New algorithms can capture individual user preferences better, leading to more personalized recommendations, tailored to each user's unique interests and behaviors.
- **Overcoming Limitations:** Existing Recommendation algorithms may have limitations such as data sparsity, cold-start problems or inability to handle certain types of data. New algorithms may address these

issues and offer more robust solutions.

- **Adaptability to Changing Environments:** As user preferences and item catalogs evolve over time, new algorithms can be designed to adapt and continue to provide high-quality recommendations in dynamic environments.
- **Diverse Recommendation Strategies:** New algorithms can introduce diverse recommendation strategies, enabling users to discover a wider range of items and reduce the risk of recommending only popular or mainstream items.
- **Enhanced User Engagement:** By offering more accurate and relevant recommendations, new algorithms can increase user engagement and longer user sessions on the platform.
- **Competitive Advantage:** In highly competitive markets, utilizing state-of-the-art Recommendation algorithms can differentiate a platform from its competitors, thereby attracting and retaining more users.
- **Scalability and Efficiency:** New algorithms may introduce more efficient and scalable methods, making it easier to handle large datasets and provide real-time recommendations in high-traffic online environments.

- **Business Performance:** Improved recommendations can lead to higher conversion rates, increased sales and improved customer loyalty, directly impacting the business's bottom line.

However, it is essential to thoroughly evaluate and test new algorithms before deploying them in real data. A careful analysis of their performance, impact on the user experience and potential biases, is crucial to ensure that the new algorithm is suitable for the specific user case and target audience. Additionally, combining different algorithms or employing hybrid approaches may further enhance the Recommendation System's overall performance and adaptability.

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News from the MCAA

Addressing the Latin America scientific collaboration: the 3rd MCAA Latam Conference.

The MCAA Andean-Caribbean Chapter organizes the 3rd edition of MCAA Latam conference addressing science diplomacy, Latam collaboration, citizen science and other relevant scientific topics of the region.

Latam Conference organization

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The 2020s are considered a multipolar world, where multiple interests and values were raised, not only by emerging regional powers but also by the high globalisation and innovation of the century. Yet, Latin America (Latam) plays an important role in the next global challenges, being a source of solutions for food security, climate change, and biodiversity. Accordingly, a scientific collaboration must be supported in the region to bring better decisions to the world.

To communicate, disseminate, and discuss the challenges of such collaboration, the MCAA Andean-Caribbean Chapter is organising the 3rd edition of the MCAA Latam conference focusing on scientific cooperation in Latin America. Taking place on October 27th and 28th, 2023 (preceded by a MCAA Latam Board meeting on October 26th) and hosted at the Universidad Tecnológica de Bolívar in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, this conference will be a forum for discussion of research impact, citizen science, and science diplomacy in the Latam region led by representatives of different chapters and initiatives, along with poster presentations (remote or on-site) and a short story competition.

According to the organisers, the meeting will serve as a venue for MSCA current and former fellows attached to the Latam region to address regional interest, networking, collaboration, and promotion of MSCA and EU funding opportunities in the region. The conference targets not only MSCA members, but also university managers and practitioners associated with the MSCA Latam National Contact Points Network, Euraxess and Colombia Challenge Your Knowledge (CCYK) Network. Attendees will also enjoy career development sessions with talks/workshops on MSCA opportunities, research proposals and grant writing.

Check this [link](#) to find the complete programme of the event.

The MCAA Andean-Caribbean Chapter welcomes all applicants to join this inspiring event!

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Photo by drazenphoto on Envato Elements

News from the MCAA

What is the role of communication in doctoral education? Insights from the EUA CDE Annual Meeting

Between the 14th and 16th of June, the Council for Doctoral Education organised the 2023 EUA CDE Annual meeting that took place in Lathi, Finland. This year's topic was "Engaged research - the role of communication in doctoral education," and the MCAA, represented by Ruben Riosa, former chair of the Communication Working Group, was invited to be part of the discussion.

About the meeting

The 2023 EUA CDE Annual Meeting organised by Council for Doctoral Education in Lathi, Finland focussed on a very important topic for Early Stage Researcher: "Engaged research - the role of communication in doctoral education."

During the annual meeting, many institution and doctoral school representatives gathered together to discuss "the different dimensions of communication in doctoral education in order to develop comprehensive approaches to include communication in doctoral education strategy and practices." The MCAA's main objective was to report what are our experiences when it comes to communication in doctoral education and try to bring our expertise in trying to fill up the gaps that we think exist nowadays. One of the key aspects we also wanted to highlight is our involvement

Ruben Riosa, a personal account

Ruben is an Associate Medical Communications Manager for Excerpta Medica, a Medical communications company with the tasks of providing scientific and strategic support and guidance to several medical communications projects for a variety of clients, mostly in the pharma industry. Ruben is currently the Communication Manager of the MCAA, being responsible for a team managing social media dissemination, creation of events, training and plenty of other activities.

in the European Citizen Science (ECS) project and the importance of bringing Science communication and increasing the involvement of society into the research world.

The EUA CDE meeting took place over three days and covered a huge variety of topics of communication, focussing specifically on the importance of science communication as an integral part of the doctoral candidate career as well as a key soft skill to be developed by Early Stage Researcher.



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Participants of the 2023 EUA CDE Annual Meeting.

More SciComm training is needed at the Doctoral level

I've got the honour to participate in the first plenary Session, "Doctoral education as communication hubs," together with:

- Gian-Andri Casutt, President, European Association of Communication Professionals in Higher Education (EUPRIO); Head of Communications and Public Affairs, ETH Board, Switzerland
- Romain Ledroit, Journalist, France
- Cláudia Cavadas, Professor, former Vice-Rector for Research, University of Coimbra; Member of the Scientific Council, Portuguese Science Foundation, Portugal

And moderated by Peter Hanenberg, EUA-CDE Steering Committee Member; Vice-Rector for Research and Innovation, Catholic University of Portugal, Portugal.

The session focussed on the importance of communication competencies, which are not only essential for researchers in different stages of their careers but also for everyone working within universities.

During the session we discussed the importance of good communication, and how much this is relevant not only for a good scientific presentation, but especially to foster successful exchanges between supervisors, doctoral candidates and institutions.

The session discussed the importance of sharing results to the wider audience and giving back something to the society. As it has been underlined by Gian Andri, "We [as scientists] are part of the society and our funds are normally paid by the taxes, so, we need to give back to the society." A concept that was very well received by the other panelists, especially by Claudia, who also shared the importance of "teaching and reaching out to the younger generation and making them aware of what is going on," which was also expanded to the concept of citizen science, particularly important in the MCAA involvement within the ECS project.

Another key topic was doctoral training. All the panellists agreed that there is not enough communication training out there for Early Stage Researchers. This aspect will need to be ameliorated, and there should be more



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Ruben Riosa participated in the first panel discussion: "Doctoral education as communication hubs." From left: Peter Hanenberg, Ruben Riosa, Cláudia Cavadas, Gian-Andri Casutt, and Romain Ledroit.

professionalism when talking about Science Communication. Gian Andri underlined that "Science communication is becoming more and more professional, and it is important for researchers to facilitate the discussion and spread their research efficiently."

Moreover, the role of the journalists is becoming more and more important. According to Romain, "journalists can play an important role in supporting Early Stage Researchers in developing their skills on Media training." He stressed the concept of working together, even though sometimes journalists are still seen negatively, especially when it comes with the spreading of fake news. Romain in fact, concluded his pitch by mentioning that "journalists and scientists need to work together on projects, such as open source intelligence, as these collaborations could help the scientists understanding the best way of communicating their data and at the same time journalists would be able to have a specialist proof-reading their pieces before being published, reducing the publication of fake news."

Take home messages

What could we do to improve the training on Science Communication at the doctoral level?

Many ideas were discussed, but Gian Andri underlined the importance of developing a common platform in which there could be a selection of training free of charge which could be always available and supporting the career of Early Stage Researcher.

Finally, throughout the conference, other key topics discussed covered the world of scholarly publishing, the role of social media and the importance of AI and what to expect in the upcoming years.

I would like to briefly conclude this article by thanking the MCAA for having given me the opportunity to represent the Association to such event, and I am sure that we will keep offering training, webinars, and workshop and SciComm to our members, but not only, and I'm sure that the Association will always be in the front row when it comes to finding new solutions and creating new materials to support Early Stage Researchers.

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News from the MCAA



Science Speaks All Languages: The Impact and Ignorance of Multilingualism

Globally, science needs and uses many languages for research to reach everyone. Yet, publications communicated in languages other than English get overlooked in assessments.

Introduction

Thinking, producing, using, and communicating in different languages broadens perspectives, enhances cultural sensitivity, reduces ethnocentrism, and advances local relevance and application of the body of knowledge. Multiple languages are needed to ensure broad access to research-based knowledge, interaction between science and society, as well as inclusive and diverse higher education systems. No single language can be the only language of science.

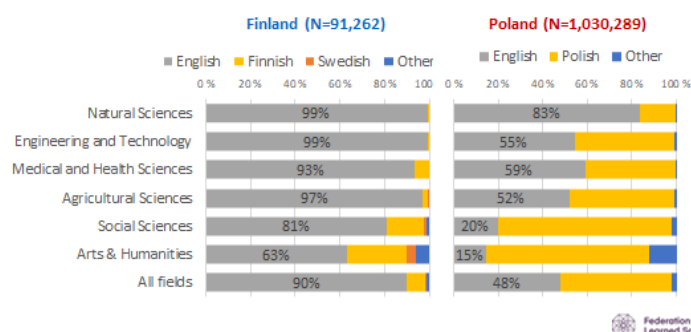
The World Speaks Many Languages, So Should Science

International publishing, projects, collaboration, and mobility have increased the use of English as the global lingua franca of science and education. Even if there are large differences between fields and countries, the use and appreciation of other languages

in academia has diminished. Yet, with over 6,500 languages spoken globally, and large variations in foreign language skills, there is a need for production and transfer of knowledge in multiple languages. Europe alone has 24 official languages, and in 2016 one-third of Europeans aged 25-64 reported not knowing any foreign language.

The impact of research can be worldwide, but it is realized only locally in societies and communities where different languages are written and spoken. The application of both globally and locally produced knowledge requires critical discussion and dialogue between researchers and societal actors. In addition to the production of vast amounts of research published in English, the COVID-19 pandemic saw a widespread need for multilingual communication, not only between researchers, but also to reach and advise decision-makers, professionals, and citizens.

2b. How large share of the peer-reviewed publication output of Finnish and Polish universities is in different languages?



3. How large share of the non-peer-reviewed publication output of the Finnish universities is in different languages?

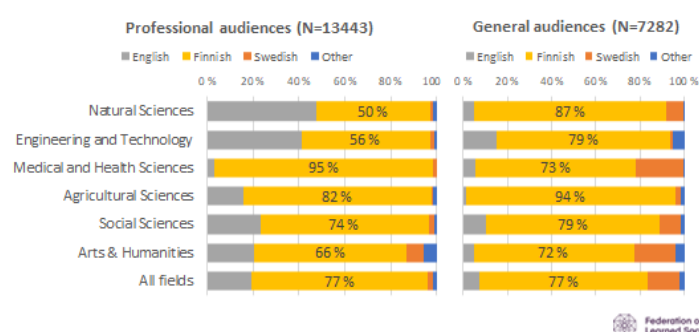


Figure 1. Publication languages in Poland and Finland. Source: Pölönen and Kulczycki (2023).

All Fields Need Multiple Languages

The whole range of national and local languages remain relevant for the social sciences and the humanities (SSH) scholars, whose focus on specific societies and cultures creates a need for publishing original results in the main languages of citizens who are affected by the research. Recently, Pölönen and Kulczycki (2023) compared Poland and Finland to discover that also science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) researchers maintain multilingual publishing strategies (see figure 1).

In Poland, over 70% of researchers in engineering, medicine and agriculture published peer-reviewed outputs in two or more languages, and nearly one-half of the universities' output in these fields is in Polish. In Finland, almost all peer-reviewed STEM publications are in English, but the universities' output from both STEM and SSH fields targeted to professional and general audiences is predominantly in the national languages.

Fairness in research assessment

Ideally, language is a non-issue in assessment. Researchers should be recognised and rewarded according to the quality and impact of their contribution. In practice, assessment criteria and methods are often far from language-neutral. International excellence is too often equated with English language publications, especially those in journals having an impact factor and indexed in the international Web of Science and Scopus databases. To many evaluators, research published in languages other than English and outside these databases remain invisible.

Amano et al. (2023) have shown how privilege of English language communication in science also results in severe disadvantages in scientific activities for second language speakers (see figure 2), especially to those with moderate or low proficiency. Compared to fluent speakers, they need more time and effort in reading, writing and revising publications and presentations, and may decide not to attend a conference or give an oral presentation. Such disadvantages lead to inequality in the career development of researchers from non-anglophone countries.

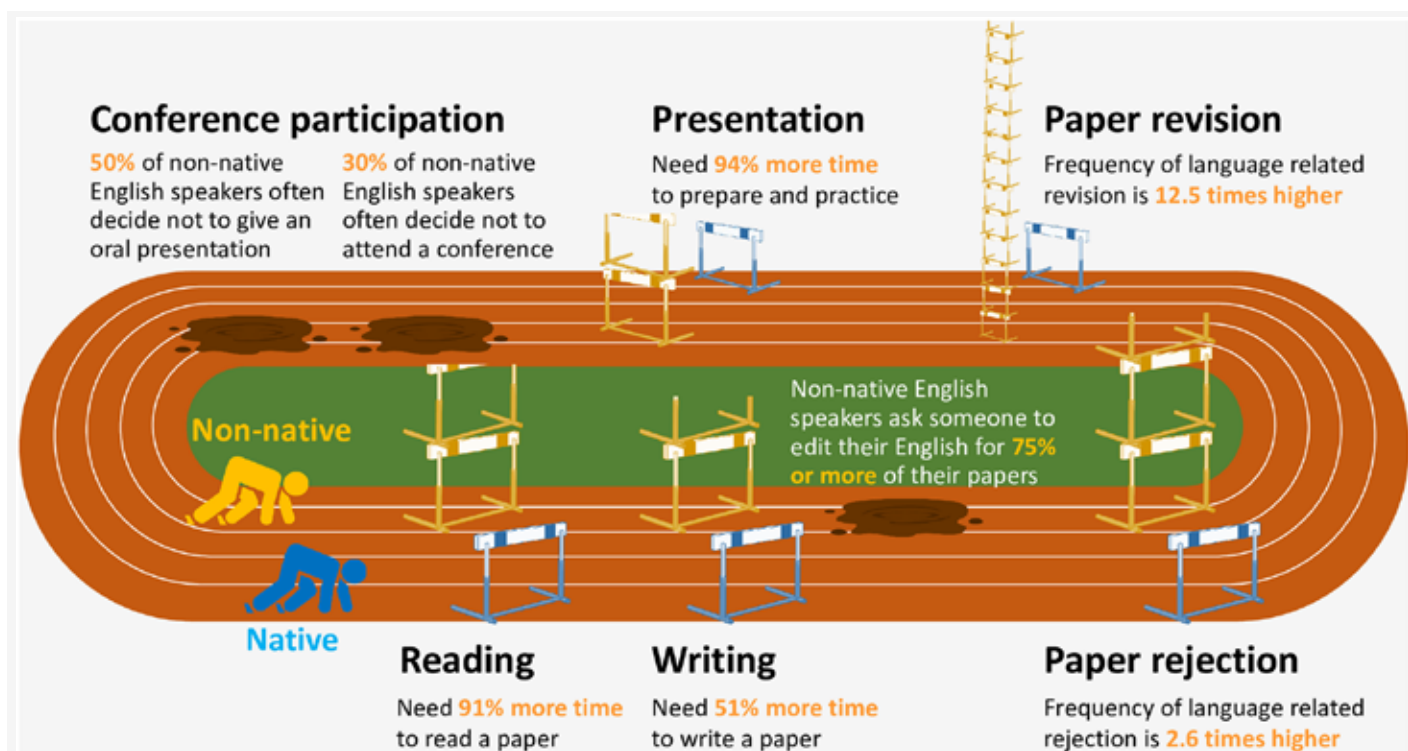



Figure 2. The manifold costs of being a non-native English speaker in science. Source: Amano et al. (2023).

Time for Change

More than 600 organisations have already signed an international Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment, according to which, the diversity of contributions should be recognized “irrespective of the language in which they are communicated.” The Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), a community of the signatories of the agreement, will have a Working Group on “Multilingualism and Language Biases in Research Assessment.” The group was proposed by the Federation

of Finnish Learned Societies in collaboration with over 30 partners, including the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) which will co-chair the working group (in the person of Gian Maria Greco). We look forward to the active contribution of the MCAA members in this work.

Janne Pölönen 

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News from the MCAA

Embracing Change as The Only Way to Grow

Step out of your comfort zone and embrace the winds of change. Discover how this transformative journey can lead to personal growth, new adventures, and a better version of yourself.

The Constant of Change

Change is constant in life. It is often said that the only thing that does not change is the fact that everything changes. It is a fact we all know, yet we often resist it, fearing the unknown and the discomfort that comes with it. Embracing change, especially when it comes to our careers, can be an overwhelming task. Nevertheless, I have learned that change is not just inevitable, but it is also the only way to grow.

The Limits of Safety

Before the MSCA fellowship, I found myself in a comfortable position. I was doing well, but I felt stagnant. For a while, I was not learning anything new, and no challenge excited me. I realized that I was in a comfort zone, and while it was safe and secure, it was also limiting my growth.

A Leap into the Unknown

I took on a new project that was entirely out of my comfort zone. This opportunity was a significant change for me, both professionally

and personally. It meant leaving my comfort zone, moving to a new country, and immersing myself in a completely different research environment. The prospect was both exciting and terrifying.

Adapting and Growing

The initial days were challenging. I had to adapt to a new working culture and navigate a different academic landscape. I was filled with self-doubt and fear. However, I was determined to make the most of this opportunity. I embraced the change, and with each passing day, I found myself growing - learning new things, meeting new people, and gaining a fresh perspective on my research.

Overcoming Doubts

The journey was not easy. There were times when I felt overwhelmed and questioned my decision. But each time, I reminded myself why I had embarked on this journey in the first place - to grow, to learn, and to make a difference in every way I could. I embraced the change, and with it, the challenges and opportunities that came my way. I learned new skills, met new people, and faced challenges that I never thought I could overcome. And it definitely did make a difference.

Broadening Horizons

Being an MSCA fellow allowed me to become a member of the MCAA. This platform allowed me to connect with other researchers and professionals from different parts of the world. The exchange of ideas, knowledge, and experiences was enriching. It broadened my horizons and gave me a global perspective of the way things function. It was a period of intense learning and growth.

Where I Stand Today

Today, I am in a place in my career of which I am proud. I have grown as a researcher and as a person in general. I have contributed to my



Hotpot.ai (hotpot.ai/art-generator)

The Art of Embracing Change: Leveling Up and Unlocking Growth in All Areas of Life


field, made meaningful connections, and gained invaluable experiences. And all of this has been possible because I chose to embrace change. It was not comfortable, but it was worth it.

The Power of Embracing Change

Looking back, I can say with certainty that being an MSCA fellow and a member of the MCAA has been a transformative experience. It has taught me that change, while scary, is also an opportunity—to learn, to grow, and to become a better version of ourselves. So, I encourage you, whether you are at the beginning of your career or well into it, to embrace change because change is the only way to grow.

Take Home Message

Go make a difference in the world. Do not fear it. Learn new things, meet new people, and experience new adventures. It is the only way to become a better version of yourself. Always remember: growth and comfort do not coexist. So, step out of your comfort zone, embrace change, and see how it leads you to growth.

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News from the MCAA

"Reflecting on a Year: My Impactful Journey as the MCAA Africa Chair"

Join me on a retrospective journey through the past year at the MCAA Africa chapter. From groundbreaking conferences that positioned us on the African innovation map to events that enhanced community collaboration, we have made significant advances. Explore how our 140 members have flourished and catch a glimpse of the promising opportunities that await us for further impact in the coming years.

Reflecting on my first year as the MCAA Africa Chapter Chair, it is both humbling and inspiring to see how far we have come. With the dedication and contributions of our members and the support from the MCAA board members, MCAA Africa has grown to encompass a vibrant community of 140 individuals who are united by their passion for advancing research, collaboration, and innovation across the continent.

One of the significant milestones we achieved during this year was our active representation in prestigious conferences across Africa. These endeavors not only showcased our commitment to excellence but also allowed us to make meaningful connections on a larger scale. One notable instance was our participation in the AU-EU Innovation Agenda meeting held in Nairobi, Kenya. This provided us with a platform to engage with influential stakeholders, exchange groundbreaking

ideas, and contribute to the advancement of collaborative research initiatives. Similarly, our involvement in the World Academy Forum in South Africa and the conferences for Rectors, Vice Chancellors, and Presidents of African universities not only reflected our commitment to academic excellence, but also placed MCAA Africa in the spotlight within the African academic landscape.

Looking ahead to the next year, our aspirations are even more ambitious. We are eager to expand our reach and impact through institutional engagements that will enable us to foster stronger ties with universities, research institutions, and governmental bodies. By partnering with these key players, we aim to facilitate greater access to resources, funding, and collaborative opportunities for our members, thereby propelling the African research ecosystem to new heights.

Over the past year, our commitment to empowering our members has been evident through the myriad of impactful events we have organized. From enlightening webinars led by industry leaders to hands-on workshops designed to enhance practical skills, our calendar has been brimming with opportunities for growth. These events have not only strengthened our members' professional acumen but have also served as platforms for networking and forging lasting collaborations. The enthusiastic participation



Photo by Emmyjol Photo Studio

and feedback from our members have been a testament to the value they have gained from these initiatives.

Despite the remarkable strides we have taken, it is important to acknowledge that our journey is not without its challenges. One significant obstacle we have encountered is the geographical diversity of our membership. This diversity, while enriching, also presents logistical challenges when it comes to organizing physical events that require members to travel. The varied terrain and distances make it challenging to create an inclusive environment that fosters in-person interactions and engagements. To address this, we must creatively leverage technology and explore innovative solutions to bridge the gap and ensure that all members feel connected and included.

Another pressing challenge we have identified is the issue of member engagement. While we are a community of 140 talented individuals, it is evident that some members have been less active than others. This lack of engagement not only limits the potential impact of our collective efforts but also hinders the exchange of ideas and collaborative opportunities that lie at the core of our mission.

To tackle these challenges head-on, we are developing comprehensive strategies aimed at boosting both virtual and physical engagement among our members:

Virtual Engagement Initiatives: Given the geographical constraints, we recognize the value of leveraging virtual platforms to connect members across different locations. We will focus on hosting more webinars, online panel discussions, and virtual networking events. These activities not only eliminate the need for physical presence but also provide a convenient way for members to participate actively regardless of their location.

In summary, by adopting these approaches, we are confident that we can transform challenges into opportunities for growth and cohesiveness within MCAA Africa. By addressing geographical barriers through virtual engagement and incentivizing participation, we aim to harness the full potential of our diverse membership and continue propelling MCAA Africa Chapter to new heights of excellence.

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News from the MCAA

Farewell letter from the chair of the Communication Working group

The Communication Working Group has been an integral part of my recent life. I joined it as soon as I started my PhD, almost 5 years ago. Started as an active member, I then became the vice-chair, and for the last two years I had the privilege to be the Chair. In this piece, I want to reflect on my role within this working group.

This is a very difficult text to write... I knew that my mandate as Chair of the Communication Working Group (CommWG) would have come to an end, but I didn't expect to be invited to write a farewell letter on this issue of the Newsletter.

Since the moment I saw the invitation, I tried to think on what I should say in this piece, and trust me, it was not easy. The CommWG has been part of my life since 2018; I literally asked to join this WG one month after I started my PhD. From that moment, my life has changed, and all I can say is that the last 5 years have been incredible. But let me try to put some order and go through the most important moments.



The beginnings

Five years ago I started a PhD, no idea of what to expect from the project, but apart from the scientific challenge, I took on another role: Scientific copywriter. So I decided to step in and manage the communications of the ITN I was working on, even though I had no clear idea of what the role entailed. I knew I needed support, I wanted to learn more about it, so a few weeks later I joined the MCAA and decided to join the CommWG. At the time, Valerie Bentivegna, Valentina Ferro and Gian Maria Greco were the members of the group's board. They were managing everything, and

all I can remember is the great support and ideas that this team had. Needless to say, it was very easy to adapt and learn from them. Soon I became an active member, reviewing virtually every article we received, be it for the Newsletter, for the Blog, or for the IRRADIUM magazine, and I began supporting Valerie in creating interesting events and drafting sessions for the Annual Conference.

The highlight I really want to mention from that time is all the energy and dedication that this team has put into improving the workflow of the Newsletter, and all the work that has been done to make it into an official publication.

Being the Vice-Chair

After my first year, it became clear that my involvement in the group was growing, as well as my involvement within the association. I was a trusted member, and soon enough, Valerie, the Chair at the time, officially asked me to become the Vice-Chair of the CommWG. This was the moment in which I started to be more and more comfortable in managing projects and attending Board meetings on behalf of the chair, especially due to her difficulties in joining some of the meetings – she was living in the US, and time zones were making it difficult for her. After all this experience, in 2021, Valerie took the decision to step down as Chair, and I decided to submit my candidacy as the next CommWG chair.

2021: I was elected as the new Chair

It was August 2021 when I received the email mentioning that I was the new Chair. I was very happy to have received the news, however, I knew that I would have had a hard time keeping up the good work Valerie and her team has done. I very quickly set up a new Board for the WG: Gian Maria was still there, we worked really well together, so, why should we change that? Then I made an

open call to find a Vice-Chair: Nicoleta Spînu replied, and from that moment she became the most precious support that I could have ever imagined during my mandate. With this team, we were able to tackle all the projects that we had in our minds. We developed a new structure of the WG, and our work-relationship became a proper friendship, even though we didn't really get to see each other very often in real life – I actually never met Nicoleta in real life, but this is on my to-do list.

Many things have been made during my two-year tenure, and I don't want to list them all, but I'd like to highlight the things I'm probably most proud of:

- Complete restructuring of the Newsletter and IRRADIUM magazine: Gian Maria and I were respectively the Editor-in-Chief and Managing Editor, we thought that it was time to give the space to someone else, and to bring in some fresh brains into the game with new ideas. Needless to say that Sasha, Eliška, and the whole team are doing a fantastic job and have increased the level of these publications even further.
- Creation of a team of active members: I would have never been able to manage all the tasks of the CommWG alone. So, a big "Thank You" goes to all the active members that have supported me during the last two years.
- Creation of the MCAA Training program: together with Gian Maria and Nicoleta, we created a training program that is now helping Early Stage Researchers in developing relevant skills for their career.
- Creation of the MCAA Podcast: together with Priya, the CommWG is now running a podcast! I never thought we would have been able to run such a big project.
- Creation of the MCAA Around the World Webinar series: I've coordinated probably a hundred events with my team in the past two years, but I'm especially proud of being able to connect all the MCAA WG and

chapters to create webinars every month (without skipping a single event during my tenure), which are of great value to all MCAA members and non-members alike.

My farewell

There would be so many other things to say, but being aware of the rules of the Newsletter (Editorial board: please allow the past CommWG Chair to run a bit longer than 750 words, I hope I deserve it), I would simply like to close my piece by saying that being the Chair of this WG has been an incredible part of my career that I will never forget. I learnt so much from it and I hope to have been able to give something back to the Association – actually, I think I did, as I've been awarded the MCAA Outstanding Contributor in 2022, but really, I can't be my own judge!

As for the future, I will still be involved in the MCAA as the new Communication Manager. I

will be there to support the new Chair, Ashish, to whom I am wishing the best of luck. I know that he will bring so many new ideas that will make this WG even better than what I have been able to do.

I want to really conclude this article by saying a big THANK YOU to all the Chapter and WG chairs with whom I had the honour to work with, but I would like to specifically thank Valerie, Gian Maria, Valentina, and Nicoleta: amongst the many other people that supported me, you have always been there for supporting me, no matter what kind of support I needed.

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Photo by Junseoung Lee, from Unsplash

News from the MCAA

Greeting from the desk of Communication Working Group Chair



MCAA working group and chapter chairs are elected every two years. In this article, the newly elected Communication Working Group Chair, Ashish Avasthi, introduces himself to the MCAA community.

Why did you decide to run as Chair of the Communication Working Group?

Honestly, it all happened very organically through the experience in the group. Furthermore, Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellowship along with the MCAA has not only helped me shape my career but also helped me broaden my skill set and network. So, you can also call it my way of contributing back to the MCAA albeit communication being my interest as well. I have been involved with the group and the lines the group was proceeding with was coherent with my vision for the group. I wanted to keep up the good work previous chairs had done and see where this vision leads me. Moreover, the promise of continued support from Ruben, Nicoleta, and Gian Maria made the decision quite easy.

Ashish Avasthi, a personal account

I, Ashish Avasthi, am the newly elected chair of Comms WG. I got the Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellowship 6 years ago. After completing my PhD in Nanomedicine from Bionand, Malaga, Spain, I kept working in cancer research at IBIMA in Malaga. I have been involved with MCAA since 2017 wearing multiple hats that includes being an active member of the Communication working group. Despite having various interests, I like to distribute my time among science, sports, traveling as well as writing. I have represented MCAA on several platforms such as the Youth Idea Labs, EU Sports and Innovation Summit 2023, ReMO events, to name a few.

What will be the objectives of the WG under your tenure?

Besides continuing the legacy of the “Around the World” webinar series, I wish to open the group a bit more. Open in the sense that the group should become a common intersection for all the existing working groups. Currently, I observed that people from country Y might not have any idea what Chapter X (of Country X) is working on or what problems they are facing. We might be able to help them or learn from them. So, I wish to start this cross talk among different chapters by being a mediator. In addition, I wish to include some in-person meetings wherein there will be sessions on communication, policymaking, and career development, etc. Certainly, there would be more objectives and modifications to current ones based on continuous feedback from the group members.

How will you cooperate with other chapters and working groups?

If the goal of Comms WG is to become the intersection point, then efforts would be needed from both sides. This could start by inviting them to the meetings and exchanging information about events happening around the world and disseminating them. We would also be continuing in supporting the groups in disseminating their events on Twitter. There will also be speakers invited in collaboration with the groups to increase the outreach. I would like the rest of the Chapters and WGs to know that we are here to listen as well, just reach out.

What are your plans for the development of the WG? Do you already have plans for events and activities? Can you tell us some?

The plan is to increase the number of actively contributing members and outreach of the group. I do have some activities planned,

but you will have to join the Comms group to know more about them.

What would you say to members who are considering joining the Working Group?

I would let them know of the fact that the fellowship they received is much more rewarding than they believed, as it opens a lot of avenues for you, only if you are willing to utilize it properly. Improving your communication skills is one of those avenues, and this group helps to do that. Since communication is a common denominator for everyone, irrespective of their fields, becoming skilled at it has become a vital part of life in today's era.

So, I urge everyone to join the group. Keep in mind, volunteering is not mandatory to attend the meetings but, in my view, doing something is the best way to learn something new. Believe me, I know what it feels like to sit in the meeting unaware of what is going on and feeling demotivated, but trust me, attend 2-3 consecutive meetings, and you will be on board with everything that goes around in no time.

I look forward to seeing you at our next meeting.

Ashish Avasthi 

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Accessibility Statement

The MCAA believes in a society based on diversity. A society where diversity is the norm, not a deviation. A society where diversity is a strength, not a weakness. Access barriers are created by a society that does not acknowledge the value of diversity. Diversity and access are foundational elements of the flourishing of the research endeavour.

As a community of researchers, the MCAA is committed to increase the accessibility of its products, services, and events. Under the leadership of the Editorial Team of the Communication Working Group, with the support of other Working Groups and the MCAA Board, the MCAA has been promoting a series of actions aimed at increasing the inclusivity of its community and reducing access barriers.

Since the June 2021 issue, the MCAA Newsletter has a new layout. The new design should make the reading experience more accessible by reducing a number of barriers our readers may face.

The new layout complies with many requirements of major print and digital accessibility standards and guidelines. For example, background and foreground colours were selected and paired so as to fulfil the AAA level requirements for colour contrast devised by the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1). Colour selection and pairing also complies with requirements for colour blindness. The text is not justified in order to keep the spacing between words consistent and regular in the entire text. Line spacing and font size were revised and increased too. Each macro-section is identified by a different colour so as to provide the reader with a map of content organisation. The layout adopts TestMe, a font inspired by the Design for All principles. Last but not least, the PDF file now complies with PDF accessibility requirements and can be used by screen readers.



Editorial information



About

The MCAA Newsletter is the main communication channel for and about the MCAA community. It is a publication venue for science communication and public outreach. Its main aim is the dissemination of information about past and current MSCA projects, as well as activities of MCAA Chapters and Working Groups, events, and members' achievements.

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Authors interested in submitting an article should read the Editorial Guidelines and the Editorial Rules available on the [s](#). Articles should be submitted **exclusively** through the form available on the MCAA Newsletter website.

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