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The annual magazine of the MCAA

IRR
ADI
UM
MAGAZINE



INNOVATION



COLLABORATION

10
years

EXCELLENCE



INCLUSIVENESS



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An interview
with Claire Morel



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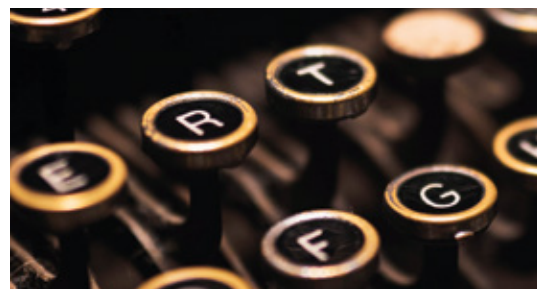
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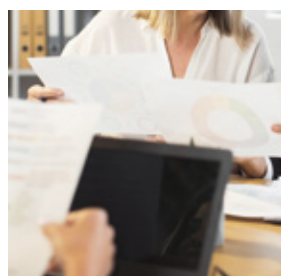
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Letter from the Chair

It is with great pleasure and a heart full of gratitude that I welcome you to the pages of IRRADIUM, our annual magazine. While I write this message, I am filled with immense pride for all that we, as the Marie Curie Alumni Association, have achieved together over the past years.

As I approach the end of my tenure as your Chair, I reflect upon the incredible journey we have undertaken, the milestones we have reached, and the collective spirit that binds us as a community. It is my honour to share with you some of the highlights that define this remarkable year.

One of our significant accomplishments is the transformation of our financial model with the support of a Coordination and Support Action (CSA) grant from the European Commission. This pivotal change has not only fortified our financial sustainability but has also provided us with a robust framework to continue supporting our members

and anchoring the MCAA as a key player in the research community.

A major stride in our operational capacity has been the successful formation of a full-fledged operational team. Their dedication and expertise have played a pivotal role in steering the Association towards greater efficiency and impact. The synergy within the operational and volunteering teams has been a driving force behind the realisation of our shared vision.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of our Association, and I am delighted to report the successful development of numerous activities and projects initiated and executed by our enthusiastic volunteers. Their passion and commitment have not only expanded the scope of our activities but have also created a vibrant ecosystem within our community.

One of the cornerstones of our Association is the commitment to fostering meaningful connections and collaboration among our



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“Central to our mission is the unwavering dedication to supporting the career development of our members.

members. The networking pillar has flourished this year, providing numerous opportunities for researchers to engage, share insights, and forge professional relationships. Through a series of virtual and in-person events, we have facilitated a vibrant exchange of ideas, creating a dynamic ecosystem where knowledge knows no boundaries. The strength of our network lies not only in its diversity but also in the genuine connections that have been cultivated, enriching the experiences of our members.

Central to our mission is the unwavering dedication to supporting the career development of our members. This year, we have witnessed significant strides in this pillar with targeted initiatives, mentorship programs, and resources designed to empower researchers at every stage of their careers. We have been steadfast in our commitment to nurturing the professional growth of our members. The success stories emerging from our community stand as a testament to the effectiveness of our career development support, demonstrating that together, we can overcome challenges and pave the way for enduring success.

Advocacy is the voice that resonates beyond our community, championing the cause of researchers and aiming to foster an environment where we are happy to work and conducive to groundbreaking discoveries. This year, we have actively engaged in advocacy efforts, amplifying the voices of our members on crucial issues affecting the research community. Through partnerships, collaborations, and targeted campaigns, we have striven to raise awareness about the importance of research, advocate for fair

funding, and promote policies that facilitate the pursuit of knowledge. Our collective advocacy has not only elevated the profile of our Association but has also contributed to shaping policies that positively impact researchers across the European landscape.


As I bid farewell to my role as Chair, I want to express my deepest gratitude to each member who has been part of this transformative journey. Together, we have demonstrated the immense potential that lies within our community, and I have every confidence that the Marie Curie Alumni Association will continue to thrive under new leadership.

Moreover, this year marks the 10th anniversary of the foundation of our Association. It is a crucial milestone that makes me proud of our community and thankful for all the members who have contributed to the growth of the MCAA.

In closing, let us celebrate our achievements, acknowledge the strength of our bonds, and look forward to a future filled with even greater possibilities. The Annual IRRADIUM Magazine is a testament to our shared success, and I encourage you to delve into its pages and relish the stories of inspiration, collaboration, and impact.

Thank you for your unwavering support and dedication. It has been an honour and privilege to serve as your Chair.

With warm regards.



MCAA: A 10-Year Journey

Dear all,

This year holds significant importance in the history of the MCAA as we celebrate its 10-year anniversary. The content of this IRRADIUM is dedicated to commemorating this milestone, highlighting the impact the MCAA has made, and giving recognition to a dedicated group of former and current active MCAA members. All of you, despite being volunteers, have helped the organisation grow from the ground up.

While a decade may seem like a substantial timeframe to some, my perspective differs. Just a year ago, as discussions about the significance of the 2024 MCAA Annual Conference emerged due to the organisation's anniversary, I anticipated a milestone of 20 years or more. To my surprise, it was only a decade. The astonishment comes from my realisation that when I joined the MCAA in December 2015, I was becoming a part of a relatively young association. Approached by our program coordinator as my MSCA fellowship neared its end, I was sceptical about alumni associations. Despite my reservations, I reluctantly registered, making a face and exhaling heavily, only to realise later the value of the community.

Initially, I did not want to explore the association and its opportunities, just like anyone would have been after being pushed into a community

without their own will. It took about a year into my first postdoc to realise the challenges of funding personal development within a non-MSCA research position. The stark contrast between my desire to travel, present research, and the meager budget became evident. Negotiating extras with a financially strict PI added another layer of difficulty. Reflecting on missed opportunities, I wished I had paid more attention during the free personal development courses offered during my PhD project by our former ITN and the Graduate School. Faced with the challenge of growth with limited financial resources, I had to find alternative ways forward.

First, I turned to books for guidance and found solace in "Never Split the Difference," Chris Voss's impactful negotiation book. Not only did I really enjoy the read, but I also discovered that applying many of the principles in my daily life delivered great results. While discussions with my PI didn't result in additional funding, they did contribute to shaping my project as I desired. Recognizing the value of soft skills, I acknowledged my earlier oversight of neglecting these training earlier in my career, and decided to focus on personal development, starting with strategic academic career building. This was followed by enhancing my skills in effective scientific communication, delving into female leadership, and ongoing efforts in various areas at the current point.



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You might be wondering why I continue discussing my personal development in the IRRADIUM editorial. The truth is, none of the listed courses would have been feasible with my low postdoc starting salary without continuous support from the MCAA. In 2016, I sought financial support for post-PhD development and was surprised to find very few options. Disappointed and nostalgic for the support I had as a Marie Skłodowska Curie PhD fellow, I, probably for the first time after the PhD, visited the MCAA website to share my frustration on the forum. Other members proved helpful, suggesting I apply for MCAA micro grants, which I did. Successfully securing funding enabled me to pursue multiple courses, print books, and attend conferences. To my surprise, MSCA support did extend beyond my PhD in the form of the MCAA.

Over the next year or two, I gradually immersed myself in the workings of the MCAA, and my fascination deepened. However, it was only upon joining the Communication Working Group, contributing to the MCAA Newsletter, that I gained a true appreciation for the extensive efforts undertaken by a diverse and committed team of MCAA members who work diligently behind the scenes to coordinate the association. Remarkably, these individuals, despite being volunteers, invest countless hours over many years to support their fellow MCAA members in both their professional and personal growth. What sets the MCAA apart is its unique foundation built on community values. It stands as a large international, multi-cultural, and multi-disciplinary organisation comprising former and current MSCA fellows. More than a bureaucratic entity, the MCAA is a dynamic force

advocating for the rights of young scientists and tirelessly developing tools to empower them in finding their voice.

In the current issue of the IRRADIUM, we aim to unveil the behind-the-scenes journey of the organisation over the last 10 years. We delve into the experiences and recollections of each past MCAA board, providing insights into the shaping of our association. Furthermore, we shine a spotlight on significant projects and events that have unfolded over the past year, celebrating the achievements and milestones that have marked this period in the MCAA's history.

I hope that this issue of the IRRADIUM will not only provide you with an overview of the organisation's accomplishments in 2023, but also offer an understanding of how our community has expanded and evolved over the past remarkable 10 years.

Closing note

Unlike any other organisation I've been a part of, the MCAA thrives on the shared commitment of its members, illustrating the strength that arises from a unified community with a common goal. That is why, as a closing note, I want to express my gratitude to each and every one of you for the impact you've had on me and thousands of other MCAA members through your unwavering dedication to the association.

Happy 10th anniversary to the MCAA, many more years to come!

A year full of collaborations by the MCAA Chapters



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MCAA has members all over the world. Read what they organised, enjoyed and accomplished in 2023.

Introduction

The human being is not meant to live alone, but rather in communities to provide the necessary support for possible challenges. Local groups or Chapters are the main pillars of the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA), where we can connect with researchers and create a supportive community to face issues or advocate for better actions. The MSCA fosters excellence in research and, together with the MCAA, bridges science, business, and policies, supports science communication and diversity, and helps with career development and research management.

The MCAA consists of 35 different Chapters all over the world, involving thousands of people from various research fields and career stages, holding positions in academia, research and industry. In 2023, the MCAA Chapters developed events aimed at career development, science policy, science communication, and many other topics. Below, inspect with us a summary of all the chapters and events of the last year.



Enhancing professional growth of MCAA members

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions scholars and alumni, spanning various career stages from students to established professionals, continually seek new skills and knowledge. To address this, the MCAA has introduced the [Learning Programme](#), offering its members complimentary access to over 7000 courses at Coursera (Greco, 2023).

In addition to individual learning opportunities, MCAA Chapters worldwide actively organised and participated in diverse events, fostering new skills, knowledge sharing, and experiential learning.



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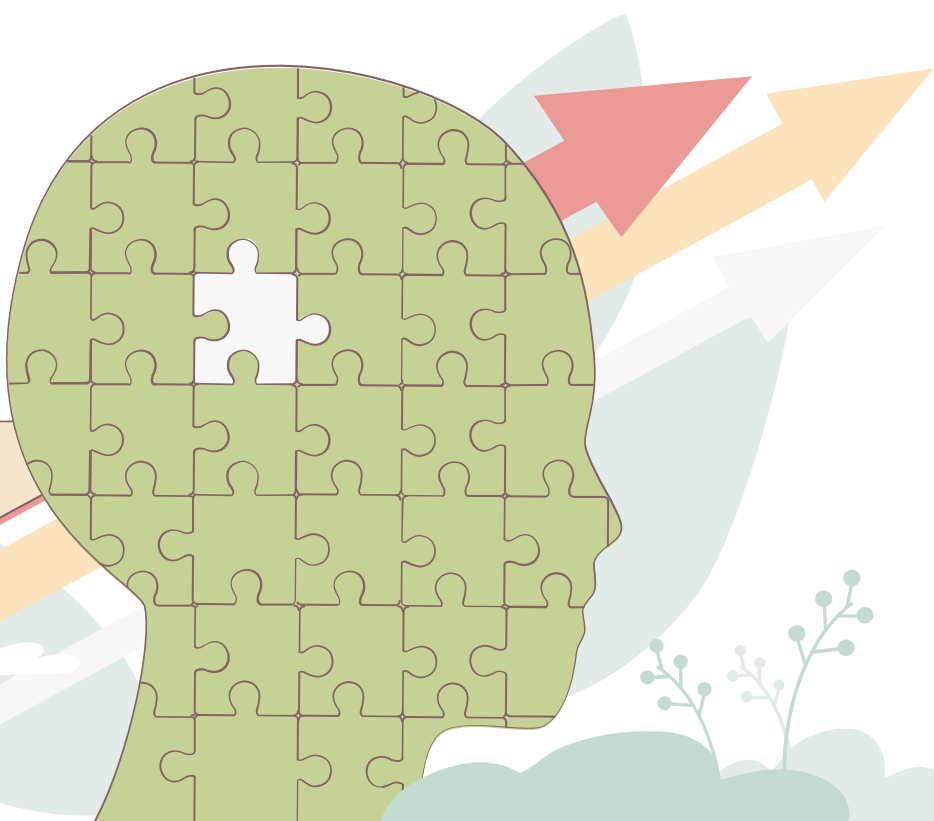
The common question of “What’s next?” that plagues most members was addressed through specialised workshops and events hosted by different Chapters. For instance,

and industry by delivering impact doing research, as well as exploring career development opportunities in both sectors,” says Irene Castellano Pellicena, Ireland Chapter Chair and the main organiser.

Suggestions on staying in academia and advice on further grant applications were listened to by Irish scholars during an event: *Funding opportunities for post-doctoral researchers and research fellows in Ireland*. An analogous event was held in France: *European fellowships after PhD - MSCA and ERC opportunities*. Five speakers were invited on the stage to talk about their direct personal experiences with these European funds. “It was an excellent opportunity to discuss two types of European funds, the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship and the ERC Starting Grant,” say the organisers Giulia Rizzo, Chair of MCAA France Chapter, and Pradeep Eranti, a member of the Chapter.

Research Proposals Tips and Tricks were discussed during the [MCAA Latin America \(LATAM\) Conference 2023: Scientific Cooperation in Latin America](#), the biggest event in LATAM co-organised by Andean-Caribbean Chapter. MCAA members offered valuable advice to the audience on grant writing and preparation of research proposals based on their broad experience with MSCA calls.

How to find your way into an academic position know now Mexican scholars who attended *Career paths symposium Los caminos de la ciencia: Carreras en la Industria*. The symposium included an informal lunch that served simultaneously as a ‘speed-dating’ exercise with students to discuss career choices in different fields.



Professional growth demands a continuous and sustainable way up

the Brazil Chapter explored *Career Planning using Design Thinking*, while the Germany Chapter provided overview about *Careers outside academia: insights from MCAA fellows*. Past fellows, experts from different fields and a career coach shared their successful story of making the switch. Many Alumni also seek the path into business, therefore *Researchers met Innovators in Belgium - A Life Sciences hub for Startups* was held by the Benelux Chapter.

Bridging academia and industry was a networking event for creative minds held in Ireland in collaboration with the business school in Dublin City University. “This encounter aimed to increase the links between academia

What do HR recruiters want from you: The art of writing a good CV

was a topic of one of the career development workshops organised by Western Balkan Chapter. This event was followed by webinars *Interview Process: The hiring managers' perspective* and *How to write an Effective Resume*.

Negotiation and Influence Skills Workshop

was organised by the North America Chapter. "When facing a disagreement, what if you could identify areas of shared benefit, or even unexpected gains, as soon as conflict arises? What if you could persuade and influence instead of impose? What if you and the ones opposite to you could achieve your goals - and more - and feel part of a fair resolution process? What if you could always find a way for all to win?" asks Cristina Florea, Vice-Chair of the Chapter and the main organiser.

Another great topic that raised the curiosity of MCAA Fellows in 2023 was Artificial Intelligence (AI). The whole June 2023 special issue of the MCAA Newsletter was dedicated to AI under the title *Beyond the hype: How will large language models (LLM) impact research practices?* (Spînu & Riosa, 2023). A collaboration between Switzerland and Germany Chapters resulted in a seminar on *Research Redefined: The AI Connect*, exploring the transformative impact of AI on research methodologies. Speakers presented various types of AI tools and ways of using the LLM platforms to perform data analysis or to increase the efficiency and quality of research works. They pointed out the principal differences between functions of a human brain and an AI.

Science communication and sharing the knowledge

One of the professional development opportunities is also an engagement in science communications activities. Alumni from the Romanian chapter participated in the seminar *Storytelling in Science*. Science communication activities for the public were organised by the Western Balkan and Croatia Chapters as a game for children: "This educational-interactive STEM game is played on a surface printed on canvas, and instead of pawns, elementary school-aged children move on it. They draw a card with a question from the STEM field. After answering, they get some interesting information about the topic from the drawn card. The event took place in the centre of Split in the pedestrian area and more than 20 school-age children participated and there were more than 1000 spectators," explains Samira Sajlović, creator of the game.

Citizen Science is another way of public engagement and how to involve society into research was discussed during the MCAA LATAM Conference 2023. The speakers presented different experiences and tried to answer: "What is the outlook for citizen science? How to increase society's engagement in science projects? And what are the biggest challenges and pitfalls?"

Many alumni shared their experiences with their fellowships and writing of a grant application, typically MSCA or ERC. Several panel discussions on such topics were co-organised by the China Chapter. Among others, their members talked about *MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Global Talent event*, at *Overseas Scholars Lecture*,



in the *International Exchange Sharing Session at Southwest University in China*, or at events in collaboration with EURAXESS China and CESEES (Chinese-European Society for Environment, Ecology & Sustainability).

“In order to help everyone become familiar with the application process and assist in applying for the Marie Curie Fund, MCAA China, together with EURAXESS and CESEES societies, launched a series of activities called “Marie Curie Postdoctoral Application Experience Sharing Sessions”, inviting several successful applicants to share their topic selection and apply for experience,” say the organisers of a seminar with 6600+ online viewers.

In a similar way, dissemination of information about MCAA was held in Bengaluru, India during the European Research Day co-organised by Euraxess India. Attendees were

provided first hand information on funding opportunities for collaborative research and innovation projects, as well as Doctoral and Postdoctoral fellowship opportunities for pursuing research careers in Europe.

Likewise, members of the Africa Chapter presented in *MCAA around the world Webinar: Participation rules in HE Pillar 2 projects and Grant writing*.

Science policies improve the world around us

Some people say the year 2024 will be the most challenging year for diplomacy, with regional conflicts influencing world decisions. Given the universal character of science, diplomatic issues also have high potential to modulate scientific collaborations or reduce scientific budgets for countries to conquer



Image by Midjourney, prompt by Fabrizio Martina

geopolitical goals. Bringing researchers together to discuss science diplomacy and make better policies helps the world tackle global challenges and even address regional and cross-border interests.

A great example of how a research community makes a difference in the implementation of policies happened in Romania. When the Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitalization of Romania launched for public debate the draft law regarding the statute of research and development personnel, aiming to merge two separate laws, the chapter took action to improve the document, including the ethical guidelines and the criteria for research assessment. “Currently, the MCAA Romanian Chapter believes that adopting the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA) as the official national code for the research community in Romania would serve as a valuable initiative to support and enhance the R&I system in the country,” explains Andrada Lazea-Stoyanova, former MCAA Romania Chapter Chair.

2023 was a year to reflect on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Agenda 2030. The Spain-Portugal and North America Chapter

is an example. The MCAA Spain-Portugal Chapter dedicated the 13th episode of the MCAA Around the World Webinar Series to [SDGs of Agenda 2030](#). The event was a great initiative to also discuss social engagement and the role of citizen science in that matter.

The Mexico and North America Chapters collaborated for a second time to organise a forum on *Alliances for the Sustainable Development Goals*. This forum, which brought together organisations from academia, government, and civic sectors, emphasised the MCAA’s role as a unifying force. The event, held at CEMEFI in Mexico City and transmitted online, provided a comprehensive platform for discussing progress towards the SDGs and exploring collaboration possibilities.

Focused on tackling the biggest issue of our decades, climate change, the China Chapter co-organised with the German Chapter the [3rd Edition of the Sino-German Sustainable Development Forum](#), held in Berlin. The event also gathered fellows from other prestigious European fellowships, like the Alexander Von Humboldt Foundation and the German Academic Exchange Service.

Discussing climate change and governance, digital technology and sustainability, and global health and well-being, researchers were able to raise collaborations and open doors for solid partnerships between the German and Chinese chapters.

Ensuring healthy lives is the goal of most SDGs, and the MCAA Southeast chapter was not left behind in discussing a planetary health in the multilateral space and opportunities in the science and diplomacy area. The ISC Global Knowledge Dialogue Asia Pacific was organised by the International Science Council (ISC) together with the ISC Regional Focal Point for Asia and the Pacific through the Australian Academy of Science and the Academy of Sciences Malaysia on October 6, 2023. The meeting was beneficial for establishing new connections and discussing reforms to improve the functioning of the Chapter itself.

Collaboration towards common aims

The collaborative endeavours within the MCAA have not only strengthened the global network of members but have also fostered impactful events and initiatives. In

this regard, we make an overview into the significant achievements across the annual meetings of Chapters, networking events, and regional engagements, with a special focus on the Latin American (LATAM) region.

The MCAA China Chapter set an exemplary precedent by hosting its First Annual Conference and the China-Europe S&T Talent Forum. The innovative *Global Live Broadcast + online* format not only facilitated global participation (more than 6,500 online viewers across 20 countries) but also showcased the adaptability of the association to the evolving digital landscape. Esteemed guests added academic gravitas to the event, encouraging a collaborative spirit among Marie Curie scholars. Furthermore, the involvement of over 10 renowned industry experts highlighted the intersection between academia and industry, fostering discussions on impactful contributions to Sino-European scientific and technological innovation.

The Germany Chapter's Biannual meeting in Frankfurt proved instrumental in aligning its members with the vision and mission of MCAA. The incorporation of poll results

MCAA Southeast Asia Chapter attended the ISC global knowledge Dialogue Asia Pacific in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 6 October 2023. Photo by Vladimer Kobayashi.



during the event provided valuable insights into the concerns of present fellows and members, guiding the Chapter's future initiatives. Such participatory approaches contribute to a dynamic and engaged community, ensuring that the association remains responsive to the evolving needs of its members.

The MCAA's commitment to fostering collaboration among chapters was also exemplified by the Mexico Chapter's inaugural meeting at the EU Delegation in Mexico City in June. This significant event marked the culmination of a year since the Chapter's creation and was hosted by the EU Delegation. The meeting drew participation not only from the Mexico Chapter but also from representatives of other European Embassies, including those from France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Sweden.

The MCAA Switzerland Chapter's collaboration with the Germany Chapter resulted in the MCAA Around the World Webinar on the *Open access science policies and new research assessment practices for sustainable research careers*. This collaborative effort not only enriched the knowledge base of participants but also highlighted the global impact of MCAA initiatives.

The joint webinar organised by the UK and Spanish chapters on *Careers after the MSCA Fellowship - alternative careers beyond academia & industry* exemplified the synergistic power of collaboration. The pooling of resources and expertise demonstrated the capacity of Chapters to work collectively towards a common goal, offering valuable insights to postdoctoral researchers.

Via networking to social well-being

Networking lies at the heart of MCAA's mission, and this is evident in the efforts of various Chapters. The China Chapter, for instance, boasts a robust network comprising over 400 Chinese scholars. This network not only facilitates professional connections but also enhances the visibility and impact of Marie Curie alumni in the broader scientific community.

The Ireland Chapter's focus on bridging academia and industry through networking events showcased a strategic approach to talent development. By connecting early career researchers and innovators with industries and research institutes, the chapter facilitated a dynamic exchange of ideas and opportunities.

The MCAA LATAM Conference 2023, held in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, stands out as a pivotal event, demonstrating the power of collaboration among the Marie

Psychohygiene is fostered not only by mental work, but also by walks in fresh air. Howth Cliffs walk of the MCAA Ireland Chapter and RCSI postdoc society on 21 May 2023 in the north of Dublin, Ireland.



Curie Alumni Association LATAM Chapters, EURAXESS LAC, MSCA Colombia NCPs Network, and Colombia Challenge Your Knowledge Association. Spanning October 26th to 28th, the conference provided an invaluable platform for current and former Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions fellows from Latin America. Organised in partnership with the Universidad Tecnológica de Bolívar and hosted in the vibrant city of Cartagena, the event aimed to facilitate networking and collaboration.

With 77 on-site participants representing MCAA members, internationalisation and research managers, MSCA NCPs representatives, and local and regional actors, the event fostered a rich exchange of ideas. Additionally, the virtual audience, tuning in via YouTube, exceeded 200 views on both days, broadening the impact of discussions on Scientific Cooperation in Latin America. The event served as a catalyst for promoting scientific cooperation and addressing regional and global challenges within the Latin American research landscape.

Conclusions

The MCAA members and alumni are a very active part of the society. Not only do they want to be better themselves by participating in self-development activities, they are also always eager to share their

knowledge or to improve the science policies locally and worldwide, or to engage the public into science. Various MCAA Chapters are keen on collaborations on common topics among themselves as well as with other bodies in the public area, such as EURAXESS or International Science Council.

By investing in the development of the soft skills and technical expertise of its members through these workshops, webinars, and panel discussions, the MCAA chapters contribute to the sustainability of research careers and research as an enterprise. The working groups of MCAA, are the backbone of these activities, supporting not only the organisation of these events but also acting as a bridge across different chapters.

New year brings new challenges and opportunities. The themes of the future are mental health or diversity and inclusiveness in academia. How to approach such complicated topics already delineated the North American Chapter.

We hope to share more and more events from the MCAA Chapters in the next issues of the MCAA Newsletter and Irradium. Last but not least, we thank chapter chairs for sharing their achievements.

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10th ANNIVERSARY 2014-2024



The value, past and future of the MCAA: An interview with Claire Morel



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The MCAA was legally established on 7 February 2014. Hence, this year marks the 10th anniversary of our association. MCAA Board member Gian Maria Greco interviews Claire Morel, Head of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Unit at the European Commission.

Claire Morel is the Head of Unit in charge of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions for the mobility and training of researchers including the development of excellent doctoral programmes, at the European Commission's Directorate General (DG) for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport. Before that, she was the Head of Unit for international cooperation in the same DG, with a particular focus on the international dimension of the Erasmus+ programme and international policy dialogues in higher education and youth issues with various partners of the EU in the world.

Can you share your thoughts on the significance of the Marie Curie Alumni Association as it celebrates its 10th anniversary?

I was not working for the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) when the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) was set up nor during the first years of its operations, but what I have witnessed since I joined the unit in charge of the MSCA a few years ago, is that the MCAA has brought a clear added value to the MSCA programme by increasing its visibility within Europe and beyond, and by demonstrating its value. Not every European programme can proudly boast to keep alive such a large international community of bright researchers who, despite their busy career, engage in volunteering and dedicate time and energy to make the association grow. It clearly shows that the Alumni want to contribute back to a community that has helped them to develop in their professional and personal lives.



“The MCAA has increased MSCA’s visibility by demonstrating its value.

And it means a lot for the programme and for all the colleagues in the European Commission and the Research Executive Agency who have worked over the years to develop and manage the MSCA. The value of the MCAA lies in its talents, in its capacity to mobilise a large community of researchers, who have benefited from the programme and continue to collaborate on a large variety of topics across disciplines and geographical boundaries. This community has also been providing a sense of belonging, which is crucial for researchers at various stages of their careers. The international coverage and the network of country chapters give us access to regional and national networks of research and innovation, which is

principles of MSCA and is doing a magnificent job in protecting, promoting and refining those principles.

How has the MCAA contributed to the objectives and success of the MSCA programme? What has been MCAA’s most impactful achievement?

Having managed to unite over 21.000 members is an achievement in itself. It demonstrates the value of the association. The MCAA Annual Conference has become a flagship event that brings together not only the Alumni members but also world-class experts, researchers, policymakers, policy advisors, academic leaders, and experts from the non-academic sector, as well as research managers. During the



Photo by Andrea Piacquadio on Pexels

priceless. The MCAA also provides the European Commission with invaluable feedback not only on the MSCA programme and R&I policies but on EU policies across the board.

Above all, and on such an important anniversary, I want to recall that the MCAA embodies the values and

conference, vibrant discussions take place around different themes that contribute to the development of science, scientists, and the research ecosystems as a whole.

The MCAA has therefore become an important stakeholder in research and innovation policies at EU level,

and its viewpoints, inputs, and contributions are highly valued in shaping European policies, not only at the level of the MSCA programme, but much more broadly. The Alumni association has for example played a key role in the reform of researchers' assessment, in shaping science diplomacy, as co-chair of the EU Science Diplomacy alliance last year. MCAA representatives actively participate in the ERA Forum, and are supporting the Manifesto for Early Career Researchers while encouraging its members to endorse and disseminate it. But I cannot draw an exhaustive list of all MCAA's achievements, as it contributes to many other initiatives at EU level.

The mere fact that the association has grown into a recognised and active Alumni community and is consulted on different European initiatives is a testimony of the programme's success. The international visibility of the association, its successful participation in many European R&I projects and networks contribute to valorising MSCA's positive achievements.

Through the results of the large MCAA surveys, through our participation in the association's annual conference, we receive valuable inputs from the Alumni, that help us shape and improve the MSCA programme and the related policies. These exchanges enable us to better understand how our actions to support researchers at all stages of their careers are functioning, what works well, what needs to be improved, and what else needs to be done. The MCAA also supports us in disseminating information on our initiatives (new publications, MSCA calls, and any



initiative relevant to the network). MCAA Annual Conferences, in which we regularly participate, enable us to have a direct engagement on policy developments with the Alumni and key stakeholders in research and innovation.

Could you elaborate on the role the MCAA plays in supporting and connecting MSCA fellowship Alumni?

The MCAA plays a unique role in bringing past and present MSCA fellows under its umbrella. It is important for us to keep contact with current and former fellows and without the association, we would not be able to reach out to them, and receive feedback on our actions and policies. If the association inspires and attracts so many members, it is certainly because the type of support and services that it is offering to MSCA fellows is attractive and unique: opportunities for professional development, career support, training sessions, conferences, skills enhancement, advocacy, updates on the latest research trends, insights into various scientific fields, etc. This represents

a wide range of invaluable opportunities.

Looking ahead, what are your aspirations for the future development and growth of the MCAA over the next 10 years?

I hope to see MCAA grow as an even more impactful association continuing to serve as a voice for researchers in Europe and beyond, advocating for their interests.

Last year we changed the way we have been supporting the association, moving from support through a service provider, to a direct grant to the MCAA. This should allow the association to take its destiny in its own hands, without the involvement of an intermediary organisation. This is an important step that provides the association with more independence and an opportunity to further professionalise its action and expand its scope.

I see the role of the MCAA as an impactful liaison body that has direct access to an active research and innovation community both in the academic and non-academic sectors and can relay its messages and positions directly to European policy makers.

An area where the association could potentially develop is by encouraging a more active participation from a larger number of members, from different regions of the world. Mentorship opportunities could also be further developed, allowing experienced Alumni to guide and support less experienced members, or students interested in starting a doctoral programme. Mentorship is a valuable resource for

personal and professional growth. Developing stronger relations with other European alumni networks such as the association of ERC grantees or the Erasmus Student Network could also be a priority for the future, especially at a time when reflection on the future orientation of these programmes is starting to be debated.

Finally, how can the MCAA continue to support and synergise with the objectives and activities of the MSCA programme in the coming 10 years?

In the coming years I would like to strengthen even more our collaboration with the MCAA and create more effective communication and synergy with the MSCA unit in the European Commission, to be able to receive more effective and timely feedback about the MSCA programme and more broadly about policies related to researchers' careers. For example, this could include creating stronger links between the MCAA working groups and country chapters and the Commission's work on MSCA and more generally in the field of R&I.

Thanks to its large network and wealth of expertise, the MCAA has an essential role to play in providing feedback, recommendations and advice to the European Commission and other institutions on MSCA and MSCA-related issues and policy developments. This includes taking part in open consultations launched by the European Commission, policy debates, or European events, and creating even more synergies between the MSCA and the MCAA.

MCAA: a voice
for researchers
in Europe and
beyond.

Travelling back to 2014

Celebrating the first decade of our Association, we invited members from all five MCAA Boards to share their insights. Maria Antonietta Buccheri, from the inaugural MCAA Board, reflects on her experience within the MCAA and highlights the role the Association will play in the future in fostering a change in the research culture and in promoting the actions needed at the political level.



Maria-Antonietta
Buccheri

CNR-IMM Sede secondaria
Catania

The perception of time is somehow subjective. Was 2014 just ten years ago, or is it another geological era? Both options may be true, but personally, I would opt for the second one.

Looking back at 2014, I can see a much younger me, firmly believing that improving the lives and careers of researchers is a responsibility none of us should evade. I also trusted that investing energy in creating and fostering an international alumni network would allow participants to share experiences and information, receive mutual help when necessary, exchange ideas, and set up possible collaborations. Besides, an alumni network provides a unique possibility to collect tangible feedback from the ground to participate in the improvement of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and have an informed say in the European science policy panorama.

In the years preceding 2014, I had the chance to experience the importance of being part of such a network and the rewarding feeling of contributing to building it. Indeed, I have been actively involved in the Marie Curie Fellows Association (MCFA) since 2006, an association established in 1996 under the auspices of the European Commission and later managed independently by MSCA Fellows. All the experience I had gathered in my eight years of engagement in the MCFA was useful for taking part in the first Board of the MCAA. Although the overall project behind the launch was clear, as the first managing Board, we had to design the path toward reaching the set goals. Even though the MCAA was meant to involve all alumni of the MSCA, while the MCFA was addressed to researchers only, the structure imagined for the MCAA was largely inspired by that of the



Image by Midjourney, prompt by Fabrizio Martina



“The MCAA has its role in fostering a change in research culture.

MCFA, allowing me to fruitfully share with my new travel companions the know-how I had previously acquired.

The board was a composite of experiences, nationalities, cultures, scientific backgrounds, and career stages. The richness of such diversity made the first two years of the Association an intriguing journey, albeit a challenging one. Nevertheless, we always managed to foster the growth of the MCAA, also relying on the experience brought to the table by InovaMais, the innovation and R&D consulting company supporting the practical side of the Association's first steps.

Where shall we be in the next ten years? That goes without saying: I'm still convinced that improving the lives of researchers is of paramount importance, and that each researcher should dedicate their two cents to the issue. In the last few years, different actors have called for a mentality change in research culture. As a result of the survey “What Researchers Think About the Culture They Work In”, the Wellcome Trust claims that researchers are concerned about the sustainability of current systems and the high personal cost placed on themselves. The survey conclusions read that “several commonly identified causes of poor research culture were related to funding priorities and career trends: risk-aversion

and short-termism, funding criteria, increased competition, lack of job security, and lack of career flexibility”. Another major contribution came from the COST Action Project Researchers' Mental Health (ReMO), a network of stakeholders from all levels of the research community addressing mental health and well-being within academia. As reported in their Researchers' Mental Health Manifesto, manifestations of toxic work environments have a negative impact on the mental well-being of academics. Moreover, difficult working conditions, forced mobility, and unavailability of permanent contracts all have a major impact on the jobs of researchers.

The MCAA has its role in fostering a change in research culture and promoting the actions needed at the political level for this to happen. That is why I wish the MCAA will grow unceasingly, attracting people with different backgrounds and experiences, and continue to establish links with other associations and networks to actively participate in shaping the European science policy. Finally, I wish the present and future board members to fulfil their roles with the necessary enthusiasm to (successfully or fruitfully) lead the Association towards its 20th anniversary and beyond!

MCAA from the Cradle

Celebrating the first decade of our Association, we invited members from all five MCAA Boards to share their insights. Marco Masia, from the 2016-18 MCAA Board, glances at the future of the MCAA by looking back at its growth and impact of over nine years, focusing both on the benefits for members and on the relevance of the association for the research and innovation policy at European Union level.



Marco Masia

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Nine years ago, my journey with the MCAA General Assembly began in Porto, Portugal. As the founding vice-chair of the German Chapter and a member of the Policy Working Group, I was part of a dynamic group of nearly 60 researchers. Our enthusiasm was palpable, united by a common goal of transcending traditional academic boundaries. Most of the energy in the meeting came from being aware of the opportunity we had to develop ourselves outside of the typical academic path. We did not discuss much science back then. Our focus was rather on how we could contribute to building a potentially large organisation, how we could leverage our close contact with the Directorate-General for Education and Culture. Our aim was to ensure the voice of researchers would be heard by policymakers, and to open up additional career paths for our members.

Starting small, thinking big

In those early days, despite the challenges posed by red tape within the initial contract with the European Commission, most of the people present in Porto channelled their enthusiasm and energy into building up the association. My role in the

Policy Working Group was my first foray into leadership as the chair, and a role I later expanded as vice-chair of the Board. I also contributed to different Working Groups and National Chapters. By covering all these roles, I could witness how the community grew from a few hundred to more than twenty thousand members and how people contributed to the organisation at different levels. I could also experience how difficult it was to motivate people and to get anything done that was meaningful. One of the most valuable aspects of my involvement with the MCAA has been the relationships formed with colleagues across Europe. Many of these colleagues have become close friends, and despite the distances that separate us, our reunions are always a highlight. I will always be thankful to the MCAA just only for this.

The value of the MCAA

Reflecting on the last nine years, I recognize that the significant value of actively contributing to MCAA governance and activities is found in the following aspects:

- **Personal development:** active members develop a set of soft skills that open up unexpected opportunities.



- **Networking:** making contact and working with people within and outside the MCAA allows active members to grow a unique global network of professionals.
- **Career development:** active members gain work-like experience in different fields of their interest. This allows them to identify potential career opportunities and make important career choices while learning the job by doing. I have witnessed many brilliant members who have made a career in academia. Many have also been successful outside by gaining prominent positions in policy, communication, and entrepreneurship.

In the next 10 years, the MCAA will establish itself as a key organisation of researchers.

What about non-active members? They benefit a lot from the activities organised, from the annual conferences to the smaller local initiatives carried out by National Chapters and Working Groups. The contents and networking opportunities provided help them broaden their perspective on research and innovation.

In addition to the “micro-impact” on individual members, I think that

the MCAA has had an impact at the macro-level by bringing the voice of young researchers in many fora and discussions around the structure of the research and innovation in Europe.

Future prospects

As we look to the future, I have witnessed the growth of the MCAA's trajectory from a small group of enthusiastic people to a large organisation with a much higher degree of complexity. I can only imagine the current challenges for its governance and for maintaining the enthusiasm of active members. Fortunately, the new contract with the European Commission is far more flexible than before, enabling the Association to evolve under the guidance of the Board and the Executive Director. During the annual conferences, I always notice the inflow of new members eager to get involved. I anticipate that, in the next 10 years, the MCAA will establish itself as a key organisation of researchers, positively impacting the European research and innovation landscape.

My Personal reflections after 8 years in the MCAA

Celebrating the first decade of our Association, we invited members from all five MCAA Boards to share their insights. Sara Ricardo, from the 2018-20 MCAA Board, reflects on her 8 year long connection with the MCAA. Read along as she charts the growth and development of the MCAA alongside her own professional trajectory and shares her vision and hopes for the organisation and its members moving forward.



Sara Ricardo

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The MCAA is turning 10, a testament to the hard work and motivation of volunteer members who have dedicated an important part of their lives to making the MCAA what it is. Why do this on a volunteer basis? Because of its people and because of what you get to learn and experiment with, which you would not necessarily be able to do elsewhere.

Until you get actively involved, you have no idea what is in store. My initial involvement was with the creation of the Spain-Portugal Chapter in 2015 and I remember identifying with the people and what was aimed for. The people you meet are a truly positive side of being involved in the MCAA, especially if you are in places in which you feel isolated. In my case, it was compounded by dissatisfaction with the functioning of academia and a need to have like-minded people with whom to talk. The work in the chapter has led me to contribute to the organisation of the Annual

Conference and General Assembly, in Salamanca in 2017. By this time, the activities and tasks kept increasing in complexity and the sense of what you could do became clearer. During this conference, there were other important turning



Image by Midjourney, prompt by Fabrizio Martina

In the last 8 years, I have seen the MCAA change from a gathering of some researchers to a semiprofessional organisation.

points: the involvement with the science policy working group, the seeds of contribution to ESOF 2018 and joining the board in 2018. The space to explore happened naturally. The session that we designed for ESOF 2018 was a result of that: like-minded people with similar interests getting together to act on it. The session focused on the sustainability of the career of what we then called the “lost generation”, senior researchers who were becoming relics of another way of working and suffering strongly with the changes in the academic system, and, more broadly, a reflection on the sustainability of the academic enterprise. The academic system is now actively undergoing this transformation, but it is also true that we have lost much of its talent. This was a theme close to my heart; I left academia in 2018, due to my dissatisfaction with how things were done and my own personal need for a different challenge. Joining

the Board of the MCAA, first in 2018 and then re-elected in 2020, intensified the bonds, learning and experimentation.

I have always found the MCAA to have a somewhat split personality; simultaneously a cumbersome complex structure mired by bureaucracy and rules, while having a dynamism, talent and energy that runs through it, infused by its people. The latter is the MCAA’s strength, and the former is a necessary legacy.

No place is better to see that cumbersome structure than when one is on the Board. Me, and I believe it is safe to say all my fellow Board members, have suffered the heaviness of that structure. There is a general feeling that you cannot contribute properly because you constantly deal with bureaucracy as the operational arm of an organisation growing exponentially. By 2022, that organisation had



Image by Midjourney, prompt by Fabrizio Martina



~20,000 members, 30+ chapters in all continents, several working groups and a myriad of partners and collaborators. It became very apparent by this time that the rules of the game had changed. We could not be running this organisation like that, and we needed to semi-professionalise, be financially self-sufficient, and have some continuity. This transition was led valiantly by the current Board.

In the last 8 years, I have seen the MCAA change from a gathering of some researchers to a semi-professional organisation with a voice at the policy level and a consolidated trusted status in the system. However, the power of the MCAA is its people. It has been challenging to balance the pull of being an organisation in the system and being a worldwide community of researchers with a collective

voice in that system. In many ways, the relevance and power of the MCAA that peer organisations see many of our own less active members do not see.

We cannot fully become this community if at least a great majority of the members do not know what our common narrative is and/or identify with it. How many of us do not know what we have done, that we belong, that we can contribute and can have a say?

For the future, I wish we continue to have more dialogue, soften the top-down structure that we have inherited, experiment with ways of contributing and continue to be more transparent, inclusive and fluid, to increase the benefit to us and make our voices heard in Science.



OUR VISION

**WE ENVISION
AN INCLUSIVE
AND SUSTAINABLE
RESEARCH
ENVIRONMENT
THAT ENABLES
KNOWLEDGE TO
BENEFIT SOCIETY**

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The sense of community

Celebrating the first decade of our Association, we invited members from all five MCAA Boards to share their insights. Valentina Ferro, from the 2020-22 MCAA Board, shares her journey with the Association and how it has profoundly influenced her career trajectory as an applied physicist in the industry.



Valentina Ferro

Senior Optical Engineer, Amazon
Founder and art director at
Gallery 1064

✕ [@earendil1789](#)

One of the most challenging times in a PhD is the midway mark. You are far enough into the programme that the initial enamourment for your research is gone, and gone too is that sense of novelty and excitement. You are also too early for things to start working, which usually happens just a few months or weeks before the end. There in the middle, experiments are one failure after another, you don't have enough material for publishing, and yet people are starting to ask you about your thesis.

I was halfway through my PhD when I heard about the MCAA. I told myself I would apply for a Chapter because I could expense some of the crazy science communication activities I was planning. Looking back, I applied because then, more than any other time, I needed to feel I was part of a community. The MCAA delivered that and so much more.

If you have heard any of my talks at the MCAA, you might have spotted a leitmotif: I always emphasise how my favourite parts of the Association are its members and a strong sense of belonging. Here I will not part too



much from that, but I also want to talk about that “so much more.”

Academia, and especially the early career stages like the PhD and postdoc, can be lonely. Too often, an adversary mindset is harboured: publish or perish, you or the other lab. The funding is limited, and there's a large pool of researchers competing for it. This can lead to a feeling of isolation. As a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow, things can even be exacerbated: you are paid more than the average PhD student or postdoc, which can result in people, yourself included, expecting more of yourself in terms of working extra hours and setting a healthy work-life balance aside.

Connecting with other researchers is one of the few tools to stay afloat. Living a shared experience can help to normalise one's fears and fight for healthier conditions. I can vividly remember my first Annual Conference: I had never met so many people in the same place with whom

I got along so well. We had the same problems and went through similar experiences. But most importantly, I was amazed at how creative and brilliant everyone was. Everywhere I turned, I would hear inspiring career stories: a PhD student working on their passion research project, a postdoc who had started their own company, a scientist who had moved to policymaking and the third sector to change higher education for the better, and a professor who had tackled a mental health problem and was now more successful than ever. All their anecdotes felt like they could be my own. I soon realised I was also sharing my story, ideas, passions, fears, and dreams with others, who listened and related to, and compassionately laughed at them.

That sense of community made me get more involved, volunteer and be part of the journey that would grow the MCAA to be the recognised association it is today. I wanted

the MCAA to get funding, reach as many people as possible, and leave a mark on the education landscape because, for me, it had been a bright light when things were grey. It kept me busy, helped me make new friends, and allowed me to explore new ideas.

From the policy papers to the mental health projects, from the feedback and strong interaction with the European Commission to the career development events, looking back at what the MCAA has achieved in the past ten years makes me extremely proud, especially knowing that for almost half of its life, I've had a part in it.

Today, four years after leaving academia for the industry, I have come to appreciate all that “so much more” the MCAA had been teaching me silently in the background, especially in my volunteer job as a Board member.



“The people of this community are the heart of this Association.

For some, the role the MCAA had in their career is strikingly obvious, their jobs in policy, science communication or professional development being the natural continuation of their volunteer work within the community. However, I can safely say that even my career as an applied physicist in industry has been heavily shaped by my experience at the MCAA. Not a day passes by without me applying some of the skills I learned as part of the MCAA Board. I get called into meetings when there are conflicts to handle. I'm comfortable with managing tight schedules and coordinating between teams. I'm bold, take risks, and am not afraid to pursue and investigate new creative endeavours. I started two small businesses on the side of my main job. I separate my free time from work and know the value of a healthy work-life balance.

What I observed in my last stretch as a Board member was a further professionalisation of the work at the MCAA: the Newsletter and Irradium becoming official publications, the

participation of the Association in the Researchers' Mental Health (ReMO) project on researchers' mental health and similar projects, and the support for refugees are just some examples of the quality and impact of the MCAA. It can make a difference not only in the broader scientific community but also in one's personal journey, whether because of the connection to the MCAA community, the discovery of new career paths, or access to the skills to succeed professionally.

I believe in the upward trajectory of the MCAA. I can only imagine how much the scientific community will benefit from the Association after another decade of hard work. I think we can shape how science is made, how it is perceived, and how it affects the general public. Not only has the MCAA already proven this, but the people of this community are among the smartest and the most caring I know. We are the heart of this association. I wouldn't put my trust in anyone else.



Image by Midjourney, prompt by Fabrizio Martina

From Board Member to Vice-Chair: Four years serving the MCAA

Celebrating the first decade of our Association, we invited members from all five MCAA Boards to share their insights. Alexandra Dubini, from the 2022-24 MCAA Board, highlights her transition from navigating the Association through the COVID-19 pandemic as a Board Member to her role as Vice-Chair. She discusses the challenges and triumphs, emphasising the dedication required to uphold the Association's needs and expectations.

I came with my previous board experience as an ordinary Board member during COVID time and decided to take on the challenge as vice chair as this period had been a bit frustrating for all because of the restrictions. Thus, I thought I could give back more to the Association in a second mandate.

The 2022-2024 board was elected with some previous board members (5 out of 11) and new ones, which compiled a good mix of

experience. Again, women were highly represented, 8 out of 11 Board members, and we had a good diversity of background and country representation. We started this board with high motivation and a face-to-face meeting straight away. After two years of no in-person meetings in the previous board (due to COVID), we were eager to meet and set the objectives of this mandate.

In the previous board, we had to face COVID and adapt to new circumstances, but this time, we had to engage in a transition towards independence, which meant helping the association manage itself. Thanks to the hard labor of the previous executive committee, the Association had successfully secured a new type of contract with the European Commission and received funds to empower the MCAA on its own terms. That meant hiring independent people with specific tasks to perform under the supervision of the board instead of having companies managing the practical aspects of the association life with little involvement of the board.

Bearing in mind that all the board members are professionals, students and, more importantly, volunteers, we engaged in the difficult task of hiring people with specific competencies related to management while managing the daily activities of the association.

We first decided to hire an Executive director to facilitate this transition and build an adequate team. Overall, it has been a very tough process, and it took time to identify the right people for the various tasks, but we were happy to present our new operational team in the last newsletter.



Alexandra Dubini

Vice Chair

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“The MCAA is like a germ, we need to take care of it.

This is the beginning of a new era. The next board will have to take over and manage the Association in a different way and set new strategy goals to ensure the growth of the Association in the right direction.

The activities I have been involved in and/or coordinated during the past two years have contributed to my personal and professional growth, from organising the Annual Conference 2023 in Cordoba, handling daily tasks for the Association to creating a new General Interest Group (GIG) together with my colleagues Donata landolo and Mariana Rosca on sustainability.

What I keep in mind is the potential that MCAA has, what we are doing and what will be done in the future. I reckon that the Association, thanks to its national Chapters, Working Groups, and the different activities organised, has a tremendous potential to help the scientific community. First, we need to increase our members' engagement to make sure that everyone is aware of the Association's capabilities, and then, we need to put in place a strategy that will allow the association to shine even more at the International level (from science policy to science diplomacy) while having a direct impact on its members.

Overall, it has been an honour to be part of the board twice, but as an executive member, I have seen directly what the Chair is doing, and I have to give my reverence to Fernanda Bajanca, who has been the pillar of this Board. It has not always been easy to interact with 11 people, but we all learnt lessons and tried to go forward. I think we were all anxious to make sure that the transition was being done in a smooth way and that the next board would have a much easier task than we did. The next Board will be able to focus more on strategic tasks and develop a closer interaction with the members and the different stakeholders. But I need to thank everyone for their hard work, I will definitely miss the Board and the non-ending discussion for the greater good! I also wish all the best for the next Board and will remain available for anything needed. In the future, I will be involved in MCAA activities via the sustainability interest group (please join if you are interested through the website: www.mariecuriealumni.eu/groups/) and probably other general activities. The MCAA is like a germ, we need to take care of it and make sure that it carries on shining for the next decades!



NETWORKING

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CoARA Boost: Advancing Research Assessment Reform



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Research evaluation plays a crucial role in the academic environment. However, there is often an emphasis on the simplistic use of metrics and traditional publications in prestigious publication venues, which overlooks the diverse range of research contributions and the principles of open science and research integrity. This is why, one of the critical priorities of the European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda is reshaping the research assessment. In 2022, The European Commission worked with a wide range of stakeholders to create an agreement called **"Reforming research assessment."**

The [Agreement on Research Assessment Reform](#) sets out a shared direction outlining changes in evaluating research, scholars and research organisations. to pave the way towards a systemic reform of assessment of research, researchers and research organisations that recognises the diverse outputs, practices and

activities that maximise the quality and impact of research. It defines the principles, commitments and a timeline for implementing these reforms. Furthermore, it establishes the core values for a coalition of organisations dedicated to working towards these transformations. So far, this initiative gained support from 622 organisations (their



The MCAA has been a strong advocate of reforming research assessment.

number is constantly growing) endorsing the agreement and of them, nearly 600 organisations forming a coalition called [CoARA](#) (Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment).

To support the CoARA and its activities, the European Commission funded a project called [CoARA Boost](#). The project aims to enhance CoARA's operational capacity. The main actions of the CoARA Boost project include:

Strengthening operational support to the coalition, including sharing of information, knowledge and raising awareness.

Providing cascade funding to contribute to institutional changes to a significant number of diverse organisations across geographical areas. At least 50 projects will be funded from a total budget of 2.75 million €.

Contributing to the implementation of institutional changes for reforming research assessment, including supporting signatories in

compiling and executing their action plans towards the achievement of the agreed 10 commitments.

Providing assistance to Working Groups in their exploration of new models of research assessment.

Expanding the outreach of European efforts to reform research assessment by growing the membership of CoARA globally and enforcing international cooperation on evolutions in research.

Over the years, the MCAA has been a strong advocate of reforming research assessment. MCAA is an early signatory of the CoARA. As a partner of the CoARA Boost project, the MCAA is co-leading Work Package 4 together with the YERUN, to provide support to the CoARA Working Groups (WGs). In this WP, the MCAA is leading the development of the operational framework to support the CoARA WGs as defined by the [Steering Board](#) of the CoARA. The MCAA will also establish the [CoARA Co-Chairs forum](#) to facilitate collaboration among the different CoARA Working Groups. Additionally,



Image by Midjourney, prompt by Fabrizio Martina

the MCAA will support to expand the reach and increase membership in Europe and beyond. This year, the MCAA will provide support to the following three working groups:

- Improving practices in the assessment of research proposals
- Multilingualism and language biases in research assessment
- Responsible metrics and indicators

Science Europe hosted the project's kickoff meeting in Brussels on December 7th and 8th, 2023,

bringing together key stakeholders and participants. The gathering served as a foundational platform to outline objectives, discuss strategies, and foster collaboration among the involved entities.

In summary, through collaborative efforts among the project partners, the CoARA boost will support CoARA's goal of the modernisation of assessment standards and methods. The MCAA's contributions to the CoARA Boost project will be instrumental in advancing CoARA's mission worldwide.

Overview of the Project

Start Date	October 1, 2023
Duration	36 months
Funding	5 Mil Euro (2.75 M of which will be redistributed as cascade funding)
Coordinator	European Science Foundation (ESF)
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca (AVENUR) • All European Academies (ALLEA) • Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) • Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) • European Science Foundation (ESF) • Hungarian Research Network (HUN-REN) • Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) • Science Europe • Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN)

Further information:

- CoARA Boost information available on the CoARA website: <https://coara.eu/coalition/coara-boost-project/>
- CoARA's ten commitments: <https://coara.eu/agreement/the-commitments/>
- CoARA Action plans: <https://coara.eu/agreement/action-plan/>
- CoARA Working Groups: <https://coara.eu/coalition/working-groups/>
- CoARA members: <https://coara.eu/coalition/membership/>
- Joining the Coalition: <https://coara.eu/sign/>



inaccessible

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 past issue, IRRADIUM has a new layout. The new design makes 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 through 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 a sans serif font, where all the characters are unique. Last but not least, the PDF file now complies with PDF accessibility requirements and can be used by screen readers.

Acknowledgment



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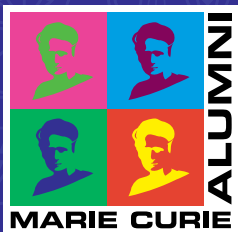
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MCAA ANNUAL CONFERENCE & GENERAL ASSEMBLY

WHO WE ARE

- A international non-profit organisation informally launched in 2012, formally established in 2014, and supported by the European Commission.
- Members are current or past beneficiaries of the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions**, one of the most prestigious funding programmes in Europe.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS



21,561
members



152
nationalities



5
continents

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