



Issue 38 - April 2024

# Marie Curie Alumni Association

## Newsletter



## Meet the new Board

Meet the 2023  
Awards winners

MCAA Annual  
Conference 2024

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## Editorial

# New season, New board, New decennia

Dear MCAA members,

Spring always symbolises a new beginning. This year, the spring issue of the MCAA Newsletter has a special importance and many changes that the association has undergone and we are excited to share them with you.

As customary, the spring issue heralds the Annual Conference (AC) and General Assembly of the MCAA, an established event now recognized as a vital platform for science communication and diplomacy. This year, the AC took on added significance as it coincided with the commemoration of the MCAA's 10th anniversary. Over 2.5 days, participants engaged in a rich array of scientific sessions, captivating satellite events—including discussions on the future of MSCA in FP10 and supervision within MSCA—and explorations of MCAA projects like Citizen Science. For those unable to attend, a detailed recap of the conference highlights awaits in the third section of this newsletter.

As the Annual Conference unfolds, spring brings with it the excitement of the MCAA awards, offering a stage to commend members for their significant contributions to societal discourse, professional growth, volunteerism within the MCAA, innovation, and more. This year, a distinguished team of



five former MSCA fellows has been lauded for their outstanding work, covering areas such as equality, the integration of digital health solutions for individuals with disabilities, technological advancements, and beyond. For deeper insights and inspiration, explore the Awards section of the newsletter.

Reflecting on my own journey as a former recipient of the MCAA Social award, I can attest to the profound honour of receiving such recognition and a bit of dauntment it takes to apply for one. Therefore, in addition to celebrating our current award recipients, I encourage fellow members to consider applying for an award by the end of 2024. If you believe that you or a colleague within the MCAA community deserves acknowledgment, I urge you to step forward and apply—or motivate them to do so. Let's continue to celebrate excellence and commitment within our community.

Last but not least, this year marked bi-annual elections and rotation of the MCAA board, which took place during the GA. We're delighted to share the news of the


successful election of eleven esteemed board members, with many stepping into their second term. The role of a board member demands a significant commitment of time and dedication, coupled with a clear vision for the term ahead. For a deeper understanding of the motivations driving our newly elected members and a peek into their objectives for the 2024-2026 term, we invite you to explore our "Meet the Board" articles.

On a more personal note, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Gian Maria Greco on his appointment as chair. Gian Maria's unwavering dedication to the MCAA community is truly admirable. His pivotal role in shaping the MCAA Newsletter into the vital communication platform it is today stands as a testament to his invaluable contributions. I wish Gian Maria and all our newly elected board members the very best as they embark on their journey towards achieving their goals.

In conclusion, the entire editorial team would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the 2022-2024 MCAA board for the exceptional

collaboration we've shared over the past two years. It has been both an honour and a privilege to witness the transformative efforts that have led to the association's evolution towards financial independence from the EC. One of their notable achievements includes the establishment of the operational team, whose continued assistance we anticipate also in enhancing the communication. Their expertise has greatly facilitated the seamless production of quarterly newsletters, and we anticipate their continued assistance in enhancing communications within the MCAA as we strive to elevate our efforts to the next level.

On behalf of the entire MCAA community, we extend our sincerest thanks for your dedicated work!

Oleksandra (Sasha) Ivashchenko 

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## Meet the new Board

# Gian Maria Greco



**Specialised in accessibility, diversity, inclusion, and communication, the new Chair of the Board, Gian Maria Greco, has vast experience in topics that are valuable for a community like the MCAA. He encourages all members to get involved in the workings of the Association: "Each voice is essential to our flourishing."**

Although Gian Maria Greco has held academic positions in several universities, his transition to working in research is quite a recent development in his career. Before that, his professional focus was on project management and accessible communication, topics on which he worked in various institutions, organisations and companies for nearly fifteen years.

In fact, it was upon receiving his MSCA grant that Gian Maria really moved to scholarly research. In 2017, shortly after beginning the fellowship, he attended the MCAA Annual

Conference – a turning point in his path in the Association.

"In a session hosted by the Communication Working Group, I voiced concerns regarding the quality of the MCAA's publications. The following week, the Communication Working Group contacted me and asked if I was interested in overseeing these. Since then, my engagement with the MCAA has grown exponentially. I am deeply committed to the value of our organisation for both the research community and society at large," Gian Maria explains.

Gian Maria, who is currently a senior research fellow at the University of Macerata, has since then had a varied trajectory and responsibilities in the MCAA. For example, he has professionalised some of the key communication outlets of the MCAA, namely the MCAA Newsletter and the IRRADIUM magazine, contributed to the Policy Working Group and the Genders, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Working Group, and been one of the driving forces of the MCAA Whistleblowing Channel as well as the ResearchAbility Initiative promoting accessibility and inclusion in higher education in Europe.

For the past two years, he's also been a member of the MCAA board, and, in the most recent General Assembly in Milan, he was elected as Chair.

"My desire to be part of our Board stems from my deep appreciation for participating in a network that is committed to enhancing the development, societal role, and influence of researchers. My journey as a member of the MCAA has been a source of inspiration, motivating me to make a more substantial contribution to our shared objectives."

The upcoming two years with the new Board, Gian Maria sees as a combination of

operational tasks and strategic visioning. As a key priority, he mentions the successful completion and reporting of the ongoing Coordination and Support Action (CSA) funding given to the MCAA by the European Commission, and the preparation of the next CSA grant proposal, crucial for the day-to-day operations of the Association. Other important issues include enhancing member participation, boosting event organisation, and expanding the services available for members.

In addition to MCAA's Operational functionality, Gian Maria aims to address various strategic focuses with the new Board.

"These include our financial independence, increasing member involvement to strengthen our community, enhancing our presence in external forums to amplify our voice, and promoting diversity and inclusion within the MCAA and the wider research landscape. These efforts are geared toward not only addressing immediate needs but also shaping the MCAA's future direction and impact," he concludes.

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## Meet the new Board

# Corinne Portioli

**Corinne Portioli advocates for women in science. She is motivated by the possibility of contributing to the MCAA members' career paths as part of the newly elected Board. Her mandate continues for a second term, this time as Vice-Chair.**

Two-time MSCA fellow Corinne Portioli is now a two-time MCAA Board member. On the previous Board, she served first as an Ordinary Member and later as the Secretary. In the latest General Assembly of the MCAA in Milan, she was elected Vice-Chair. She's also a member of the Italy Chapter and the Board of the North America Chapter.

Corinne has contributed to various important milestones of the Association in recent years.

"I joined the MCAA during the implementation of the new Coordination and Support Action (CSA) grant given to the Association by the European Commission. Therefore I had the chance to follow all the steps of the process from its set-up to hiring the Operational Team and coordinating diverse activities and tasks, all the while without losing the main goal of the MCAA in guaranteeing support to its alumni community."

Corinne currently works as an MSCA-COFUND researcher at the Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia. Her research focuses on understanding the physiology of the brain, especially in relation to pathological processes. She is also an advocate of women in science, supporting women in leadership positions in STEM, something she will continue to promote as part of the MCAA Board.




"I would like to keep contributing to our members' professional paths, through lifelong career development support, networking, and advocacy as the main goal of the Association."

Corinne sees that an important part of the mandate is to support the MCAA Board's continuity. The present builds on the foundations of the past, allowing room for developments in the future.

"We should build a smooth and positive environment for the next Boards ahead, improving what the past Boards created, while adapting to the needs of our community of fellows."

To the members of the MCAA, Corinne sends an important message: "We are here for you, for us, as a community. Share the ideas you have to see the concrete opportunities for impact!"

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## Meet the new Board

# Joaquín Capablo

**Joaquín Capablo has actively been a part of the MCAA since his postdoctoral fellowship. As the new Vice-Chair of the Board, one of his goals is to further promote collaboration among MCAA members, but also strengthen ties with relevant external actors.**

When Joaquín Capablo first heard about the MCAA while completing his postdoctoral fellowship, he was sold. "I immediately joined, as I firmly believe that the MCAA is a fantastic forum for international networking, with plenty of space to promote debates among our members, institutions, and the society on trending topics in research, such as research assessment, mental health, or career development," he explains.

Since then, he has become more and more involved in the Association, and for the past four years, he's chaired the Spain-Portugal Chapter. Joaquín also took an intensive course on event management, as his chapter hosted two MCAA Annual Conferences and General Assemblies in a row: first, the 2022 edition in the Portuguese capital of Lisbon, followed by the 2023 conference in Córdoba, Spain.

With a PhD in fluid mechanics and work experience as a researcher in both academia and industry, Joaquín currently works as the manager of an MSCA programme for postdoctoral researchers in Spain. He trusts his diverse professional know-how is an asset for his mandate as the new Vice-Chair of the MCAA Board. "I am confident that I can contribute my international experience in different sectors and roles, from researcher and professor to project manager and mentor, to the objectives of the MCAA so that they can have a constructive effect in our daily lives – not only in the research environment but also outside of it. I'm convinced that we could have a positive impact in all areas of society."



For the two years ahead, Joaquín lists three priorities. The first includes boosting collaboration: within the community – between MCAA members, Chapters, and Working Groups – but also externally, with partners from public administration, national research councils, and national researcher associations, among others. The second has to do with the optimisation of processes related to management as much as possible, enabling the smooth functioning of the Association and all its divisions.

Finally, Joaquín emphasises the importance of continuing to enhance the MCAA member experience by further improving networking opportunities, offering career development support, and, thereby, strengthening member engagement.

"I strongly believe that we can give something back to the research community and society from what we have received along our careers. Our network has great potential, so boosting alumni connections and engagement is a key objective to focus on."

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## Meet the new Board

# Pavlo Bazilinskyy

**Pavlo Bazilinskyy has been involved with the MCAA for nearly a decade. Elected for a second term as the Treasurer of the Board, Pavlo's principal motivation is to give back to the community that has given him so much.**



Pavlo Bazilinskyy has been an active member of the MCAA since its founding. Pavlo, an Assistant Professor at TU Eindhoven who focuses on AI-driven interaction between automated vehicles and other road users, first joined the Association in 2015, only a year after it was created.

Since then, he's had many mandates, from chairing and vice-chairing the Benelux Chapter and the Bridging Science and Business Working Group to initiating and co-organising various MCAA events. Being actively involved was and continues to be a natural choice for him.

"I benefited from my International Training Network (ITN) project immensely, and I want to give something back to the Association."

Being elected as Treasurer of the Board for a second term provides a welcomed continuity for certain tasks, Pavlo points out. These include reporting on the finances of existing and finishing projects and securing new funding.

"Given my experience in preparing the European Commission's Coordination and Support Action (CSA) grant, which supports the MCAA and finishes later this year, and my knowledge of the financial activities of the past two years, as a re-elected Treasurer,


I will supervise the financial aspects of reporting and applying for the new CSA grant."

Although known among its members for the opportunities it offers for networking, professional development, and engagement in discussions related to policy making, raising the MCAA's visibility externally should be continued, Pavlo says.

"I would like this Board to be remembered for making the MCAA an even more recognised brand on the EU level as well as worldwide."

Pavlo is excited to continue his work as part of the Board, as well as collaborating with members and partners of the MCAA to advance the goals of the Association to ultimately keep giving back to the community he holds dear.

"I extend my heartfelt gratitude to every one of you for your dedication to the MCAA and for entrusting the newly elected Board with this important responsibility. Together, I'm confident we will achieve great success and make a meaningful impact in the research community."

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## Meet the new Board

# Maria Magdalena Razalan

**During her MCAA journey, Maria Magdalena Razalan has specialised in member engagement. She hopes to use this knowledge as the new Secretary of the Board by actively listening and gaining a deeper understanding of member needs.**

Maria Magdalena Razalan first became involved in the MCAA by participating in an event organised by the UK Chapter back in 2017. Content with the experience, she reached out to the chapter to see how she could support their work, particularly engaging members. For a fresh researcher, joining the MCAA offered interesting possibilities.

“What attracted me to the Association is that it offered a lot of opportunities to broaden my horizons at a key stage of my career, right after finishing my PhD. It has allowed me to grow and develop my personal and professional profile in several ways.”

Maria Magdalena, currently a Grant Manager at the Academy of Medical Sciences, progressed from member to Member Engagement Officer and eventually Chair of the UK Chapter for the years 2021–2023. She believes her experiences from her career journey as well as her years as an active member of the MCAA can be helpful as part of the Board.

“As a member of the Executive Committee, I wish to offer and strengthen my skill set and share my perspective as a former researcher




who pursued a career outside academia in service of the Association’s hugely diverse and dynamic membership.”

Maria Magdalena highlights the importance of active listening to best serve and engage the MCAA members. She also wants to keep an eye on how to enhance meaningful interactions in and outside the Association.


“I will focus on gaining a better understanding of the composition and needs of the MCAA community and encouraging more active participation in our activities. Furthermore, I will lead horizon scanning to identify ways to form new connections with colleagues, associations, and institutions across different sectors.”

Finally, the new Secretary extends her gratitude to the MCAA members for putting their confidence in the Board.

“I really enjoyed meeting many of you at the last Annual Conference and General Assembly in Milan, and I look forward to working with you and supporting you in the next two years!”

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## Meet the new Board

# Farah Islam

**Farah Islam has actively participated in the MCAA for the past five years. Her election to the new Board allows her to gain more insight into the Association and contribute to its positive impact on its members.**

Farah Islam joined the MCAA in 2019 as soon as she started as an MSCA Early Stage Researcher. She was drawn to the Association because of the opportunity to participate in a community of people with similar professional experiences from around the world.

"I was motivated to take part in the MCAA as a platform for connecting and exchanging with international researchers with shared experiences."

Currently, Farah is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Basel in Switzerland. Her research interests lie in implementation science and quality of care for older adults.

After five active years in the MCAA, including serving as the Chair of the Benelux Chapter in 2022-2023 and participating in the planning of the two latest MCAA Annual Conferences and General Assemblies, Farah was elected to the Association's Board at the General Assembly in March 2024 in Milan, Italy.

"My primary motivation to serve as a Board Member is to continue actively taking part in driving an internationally diverse community of researchers that can provide life-long career support, networking opportunities, advocacy, and potential for shaping science policy in Europe."




With her new position on the Board, Farah is interested in gaining more insight into the Association's organisational structure and governance. She hopes this will help her contribute to the MCAA's positive impact on its community.


"My main priorities during the next two years would be to continue to foster the MCAA as an open space for exchange and communication between our members, as well as further drive the impact of MCAA on shaping the future of European research policies."

Farah feels honoured to have been elected to the Board and extends her gratitude to her voters:

"I would like to thank all the MCAA members who voted for me. I am grateful for your support and look forward to representing our community to the best of my ability over these next years."

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## Meet the new Board

# Hakim Ferria

**Hakim Ferria became actively engaged in the MCAA by co-founding the Research Management Working Group. As a fresh member of the Board, the goal of the researcher-turned-project manager is to contribute to the efficient management of the Association.**

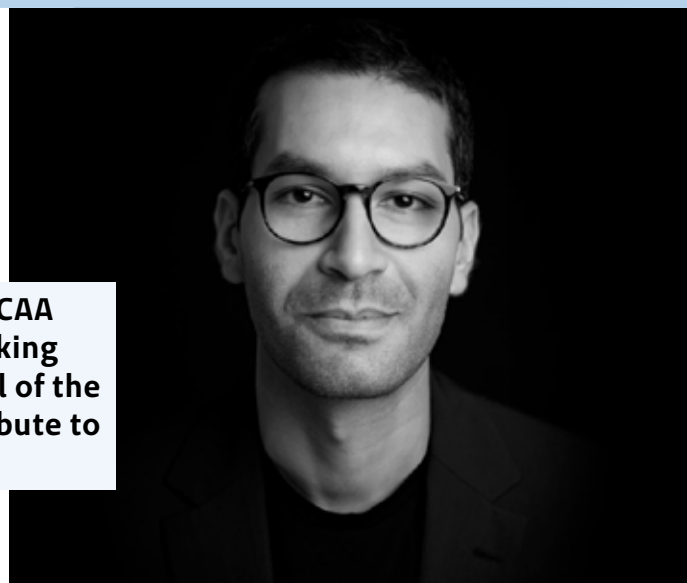
Hakim Ferria is a European Affairs Manager at INSAVALOR, a subsidiary of the INSA Lyon engineering school that focuses on R&D and research valorisation. Elected as an Ordinary Member of the new MCAA Board, his journey in the Association originally started thanks to a previous Board.

"In 2017, I was the project manager of an MSCA-funded International Training Network (ITN) project. Our scientific project coordinator forwarded me an email invitation to join the Association, sent by the Board at that time. Initially, I was not aware of the full extent of opportunities offered by the Association to its members in terms of training, events, networking, and the riches of the community."

Hakim began his trajectory in the MCAA as a passive member, gradually becoming more involved. His active engagement has principally to do with the Pan-European Network of MSCA Project Managers, currently known as the Research Management Working Group, which he co-founded with Jonas Krebs and Eitan Segev in 2021 and vice-chaired until his election to the Board.

"The group has developed quite fast and now counts about 200 members across 15 countries," Hakim says.

Given his professional background, Hakim's specialisation lies in research and project management. He wishes to contribute to the strategic optimisation of the management of



the MCAA and its different functions during his mandate on the Board.

"My goals include working towards more efficient management of the Association, ensuring its sustainability through securing funding, and establishing a robust operational team. Additionally, I aim to focus on strategic initiatives, envision the Association's future trajectory, actively foster member engagement, and improve the functionality and user experience of the MCAA website, platform, and resources."

Simultaneously feeling excited and nervous about what the next two years as part of the MCAA Board will contain, Hakim is curious to gain insight into the inner workings of the organisation.

"I applied to the Board as a means to further my involvement and dedication to the Association. It's a new experience and a journey out of my comfort zone. I keep in mind the wisdom of our dear Marie Skłodowska-Curie: 'Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.'"

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## Meet the new Board

# Irene Castellano Pellicena



**From early on, Irene Castellano Pellicena recognised the value of the MCAA in providing her with a support network of people going through similar experiences as she was as a researcher. As a newly elected member of the Board, she wants to keep alive the spirit that initially attracted her to the Association.**

Irene Castellano Pellicena is a biomedical researcher who has worked in research funding and policy since 2020. She currently holds the title of Project Officer of EU programmes and policy at the Health Research Board (HRB) in Dublin. Irene was at the beginning of her PhD in an MSCA-funded International Training Network (ITN) project when she found out about the MCAA. She immediately joined the Association.

"I wanted to be part of a community of researchers going through similar experiences to the one I was going through. After seeing the power of the Association to support researchers and advocate for their interests, I decided to become an active member."

This same idea still motivates Irene today and was one of the principal reasons why she decided to apply for the MCAA Board. She believes in the power of community and peer support, not only to benefit researchers but also society at large.

"Being on the frontier between knowledge and the unknown can feel challenging and lonely at times. A diverse community that is supportive of bottom-up initiatives and gives a voice to people of all career stages, disciplines, and nationalities, such as the MCAA, is rare

to find in research. Having this community is of paramount importance to make research careers not only valuable and rewarding but also sustainable and capable of delivering benefits for society."

Throughout her membership, Irene has actively participated in Working Groups, namely the Research Funding and Policy Working Groups, contributed to the organisation of the MCAA Annual Conferences, and chaired the Ireland Chapter since 2022, until her election to the General Board of the Association.

Knowing by heart the significance of the work conducted in the regional and topical divisions of the MCAA, in her new position as a Board member, Irene hopes to collaborate closely with and attract more members to join them.

"I would really like to work closely with the Working Groups and Chapters to encourage bottom-up initiatives and empower members to get involved and lead activities related to topics they are interested in."

Irene encourages all MCAA members to reach out to her to discuss new ideas, issues, or challenges.

"I hope to represent our diverse community as well as possible, and this can only be done through openness and collaboration."

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## Meet the new Board

# Maria Romano

**Maria Romano became aware of the MCAA even before starting her MSCA-IF and she joined the Association upon initiating the fellowship. As a newly elected Board member, she is committed to fostering a positive environment where each member's voice is valued.**

Maria Romano is a biotechnologist and researcher at the Institute of Biostructures and Bioimaging of the Italian National Research Council in Naples. Her journey in the MCAA started in 2021, right from the beginning of her MSCA Individual Fellowship.

"Even before applying for the MSCA fellowship, I was drawn to the idea of being a member of such a prestigious association, recognising it as a place for international networking, career development, and research advocacy."

Since becoming a member, Maria has actively volunteered within the board of the Italy Chapter. As event manager she co-organised and supported events related to a variety of topics, including science communication and collaborative ventures with industrial and non-academic partners.

Her experiences in the MCAA have boosted her interest in science communication and outreach, inspiring her to actively seek funding opportunities for associated projects.

"I'm the coordinator of a science outreach project funded by the Italian Crystallographic Association, where I have organised a series of webinars and interactive lectures on science communication with the MCAA Communication Working Group as a partner."

As a newly elected member of the MCAA Board, Maria wishes to highlight the




importance of effective communication and collaboration in maximizing the Association's impact, fostering a supportive environment for its members.

"I will focus on enhancing alumni engagement through effective communication strategies, whilst also fostering collaboration for career development activities within and beyond the MCAA. With the establishment of our Operational Team, I will support collaborative teamwork with clear communication channels within the board and with the OpTeam."

Maria considers being part of the Board as an exciting opportunity to have a direct influence on shaping science policy and tackling some of the common challenges that researchers across the world face. The first step is to have a deeper understanding on how the Association works from the inside out.

"I'm eager to learn new things and gain insights into the organisational governance of the MCAA, as I believe this knowledge will enable me to make a more positive and impactful contribution within the Association."

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## Meet the new Board

# Ornela Bardhi

**Ornela Bardhi has worked in academia, the science-policy interface, and the industry. Now, as part of the new MCAA Board, she wants to raise awareness about the diverse career options available for researchers.**

Ornela Bardhi has an impressive track record of countries in which she's lived and worked – nine in total – but also of the different sectors and roles she's worked in since finishing her PhD, which focused on applying machine learning techniques and algorithms to medical data.

"While I enjoy research, I believe not every researcher should pursue an academic career. After completing my PhD, I served as a scientific advisor to the Minister of Health and Social Protection of Albania. Currently, I hold a position as a senior researcher and data scientist at Success Clinic, a research office providing solutions for pharmaceutical marketing and sales," Ornela says.

In addition to her impressive career, Ornela has been a member of the MCAA since 2017. She is one of the founders of the Western Balkans Chapter, in which she's served as a Board member, national representative for Albania, Chair of the Board, and most recently as an advisor to the Board.

Participating actively in the workings of the MCAA and the Western Balkans Chapter has been beneficial to Ornela in more ways than one.

"Through the Association, I have been exposed to new opportunities, such as collaborating with individuals I may not have met otherwise and being invited to write and speak at regional and global events," she explains.




Due to her own experiences, something Ornela wants to promote during her mandate is increased awareness among MCAA members of career options outside academia.

"Given the limited availability of academic positions and the diverse range of careers beyond academia, raising awareness and exploring alternative options is crucial for MCAA members. My goal is to expand professional development opportunities, with an emphasis on reskilling and upskilling initiatives."

Another topic she is passionate about has to do with building connections between science and policymaking. She believes that the MCAA could have an essential role in bringing the two worlds together.

"I believe it is essential for more researchers to be involved in policymaking. With experts from various fields within the MCAA community, we have the opportunity to serve as a bridge between experts and policymakers."

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## Meet the new Board

# Virginia Albarracín

**Virginia Albarracín's journey in the MCAA dates back to the same year the Association was established. As a founding member of the Argentina Chapter, she's motivated to represent MCAA members outside of Europe as part of the newly elected Board.**

Virginia Albarracín is a molecular microbiologist by training and is currently Head and Group Leader at the Centro Integral de Microscopía Electrónica (CIME), an electron microscopy core facility and research center in Argentina.

For Virginia, joining the MCAA was a chance to continue interacting with the scientific community in Europe even after her MSCA fellowship in Germany. She became a member straight from the beginning of the Association in 2014. Not long after, she co-founded the Argentina Chapter, the first regional chapter of the MCAA in America and one of the first ones worldwide.

Ten years later, the Argentina Chapter has established itself as a dynamic division of the MCAA, with growing membership numbers and networking activities across the continent.

"We encouraged our colleagues to establish other Latin American chapters and later worked together to create the Latin American MCAA Conferences. I have consistently demonstrated my commitment to the MCAA's mission, especially the principles of diversity, collaboration, and community building."



Virginia's experiences as an MSCA alumni and MCAA member outside of Europe were also a key motivator for her candidature for the MCAA Board. She wants to contribute to ensuring that the Association is truly inclusive and considers the hurdles related to the different circumstances its members face.

"Due to varying research environments, economic situations, and cultural disparities, our members' careers in some regions are very limited. This is especially true in Latin America. To create an inclusive community,




we must consider all these factors and design programmes that appeal to each region. It is essential we bridge the geographical gap and ensure that researchers from different regions are represented at the highest level of decision-making in our Association,” she explains.

Alongside the aim of strengthening the global reach of the MCAA and engagement of members worldwide, Virginia has two other principal goals for her mandate: to facilitate cross-border mentorships between people from different cultural and geographical backgrounds and empower women in STEM and the MCAA community.

“I hope we can empower members in more personalised ways, taking into account their backgrounds, problems, and expectations. I believe this approach will lead to a stronger and more resilient MCAA.”

To members residing and working outside Europe, Virginia sends a special message.

“If you feel the MCAA is not a place for you, if you don’t feel quite represented or attracted to our activities, reach out to me or the other Board members to canalise your interests, initiatives, and constraints. The MCAA is a great place to contribute and make a difference – just step in!

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Image by Midjourney, prompt by Fabrizio Martina

## Meet Award winner



# MCAA Social Impact Award winner: “I believe in transforming stagnant structures and won’t settle for less”

**Ana María Sánchez is a public policy researcher working in the civil society sector, with a strong commitment to causes related to gender and disabilities. She initially became interested in political science because of the poverty and inequality she witnessed in her home country Mexico. She was awarded the Social Impact Award at the MCAA Annual Conference in Milan.**

The Social Impact Award is given to an MCAA member whose work has had a great influence on society, whether by resolving social challenges or having an impact on communities and people. Ana María Sánchez, Director of Philanthropy at Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía (Cemefi), received the 2023 edition of the award. She shares the journey that led her to the recognition.

## How does it feel to win the award?

“I was moved to be nominated for the award by the MCAA Mexico Chapter. I feel deeply

honored to receive this recognition, as I was not expecting it. It is a huge encouragement to keep working for the causes I find important, and I’m thrilled to share it with those who have supported me.”

## What journey led you to this award?

“I am deeply committed to social causes, especially those related to gender and disabilities. During my time at the university, I initiated a literacy programme in suburban areas. One of the most memorable moments was when a woman expressed her joy at finally being able to read the bus sign she passed by every day on her way home from work. This experience, along with the guidance of my mentors and the support of my family, further fueled my passion for making a difference in society.

I began my career in the public sector, working on a programme that supported civil organisations in Mexico. I pursued a Master's

degree in managing NGOs, and my PhD at the University of Massachusetts Boston focused on the work of civil society organisations in ending gender violence against women with disabilities. I aimed to recognise their contribution in areas where the government had not been adequately involved. In 2017, I received support from Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions to conduct a postdoctoral analysis in Laos. My research focused on the social innovations of small organisations working with people with disabilities.

For the past two years, I have worked in a philanthropy support institution called Cemefi in Mexico. Cemefi supports thousands of socially responsible grassroots organisations, entities, donors, and companies. As of now, I am the institution's Director of Philanthropy, promoting antiracism, gender equality, and human rights. Moreover, in 2022, the Mexico Chapter of the MCAA was founded, of which I'm currently Vice-Chair.

I cannot speak about my journey without acknowledging the mentors who have accompanied me. Some women I've worked with have committed themselves to fighting social injustice, like researcher Donna Haig Friedman and founder of Women Enabled International, Stephanie Ortoleva. Stephanie was one of the first advocates for girls and women with disabilities, and she helped me to identify and understand gender and disability discrimination. Through her guidance, I learned to recognise the intersectionality of different forms of discrimination and how they impact the lives of other women. Understanding these experiences is crucial to transforming public policies and creating a fairer society."

### How will this award propel you in your future endeavours?

"I am encouraged to continue advocating for social justice and human rights and engage with like-minded communities. I hope to raise awareness among other groups and

be a catalyst for change. I strongly believe in transforming stagnant structures and refuse to settle for anything less. I always strive for nonconformity to improve or innovate."

### What are your future goals?

"I aim to continuously transform and have a positive impact on society. I am constantly learning and seeking dialogue with individuals with different perspectives. I challenge myself and others to create meaningful collaborations that are solution-driven. The MCAA is a space that fosters such collaborations, also supporting change agents within the social sector. Rather than focusing on creating science emeritus, it builds scientific communities that apply knowledge to solve complex social problems. In the future, I plan to remain in the philanthropy sector and continue learning about different dynamics and building bridges between communities to create an intersectoral impact that is more assertive and profound."

### What advice do you have for the MCAA?

"I recommend that the MCAA continues to bring together individuals interested in using science to serve others. It would be beneficial to expand this community to include other science-related groups as well as those from the private and nonprofit sectors. The MCAA promotes collaboration across society, and it is important that it mobilises individuals who are interested in scaling and promoting inclusive environments for social good."

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## Meet Award winner



# MCAA Career Award winner: “The MSCA fellowship allowed me to launch my career and gain independence early on”

**Chiara Mingarelli is an astrophysicist looking to understand how supermassive black holes in the centers of massive galaxies merge. Her exceptional professional journey earned her the MCAA Career Award at the Association’s Annual Conference in Milan.**

The Award is aimed at rewarding a member with excellent career achievements, whether by having gained outstanding work or research experience or leaving an impact on society or the community. The 2023 edition of the Award was given to Chiara Mingarelli, Assistant Professor at Yale University, as a recognition of her contributions to the field of gravitational wave astronomy.

## How does it feel to win the award?

“I am very grateful for this honour and recognition. The MSCA fellowship allowed me

to launch my career and gain independence very early on in my career. This accolade is not just a recognition of my individual efforts but a testament to the collaborative spirit and international mobility that the MCAA embodies and encourages.”

## What journey led you to this award?

“I started my journey in Ottawa, Canada, where I earned a BSc in mathematics and physics from Carleton University. Spurred on by my interest in astrophysics, and learning more about my Italian heritage, I moved to Bologna to pursue an MSc in Astrophysics and Cosmology. Under the supervision of Alberto Vecchio, I joined the Gravitational Waves group at the University of Birmingham, where I completed my PhD in 2014. This was focused on the astrophysics we can probe with pulsar timing array experiments. I won an MSCA International Outgoing Fellowship, which I held at the California

Institute of Technology (Caltech) for two years, with my return year in Bonn. It was a formative time, and set me up for many subsequent successes."

### How will this award propel you in your future endeavours?

"The Career Award is a significant recognition of my achievements and contributions to the field of gravitational wave astronomy. This accolade, awarded by a prestigious association, highlights my career trajectory and the impactful work I have conducted with my teams of students and collaborators, particularly during my International Outgoing Fellowship. It not only acknowledges my individual efforts but also my role within a collaborative and internationally mobile scientific community, ideals that are central to the MCAA. The award can potentially open more opportunities for grants and funding and enable me to attract bright students and postdoctoral researchers to my group."

### What are your future goals?

"My immediate goal is to advance cutting-edge research in the field of gravitational wave astronomy. This includes searching for individual supermassive black hole binary candidates and their anisotropy, which refers to the non-uniformity or inconsistency in different directions they induce in the gravitational wave background. I would love to do this internationally with my colleagues in the International Pulsar Timing Array, a multi-institutional consortium focusing on gravitational wave astronomy."

### What advice do you have for the MCAA?

"I would like to say a big thank you to the MCAA for making all this possible. Receiving the Career Award is a tremendous honour that will mark a milestone in my career."

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Image by Midjourney, prompt by Fabrizio Martina

## Meet Award winner

# MCAA Outstanding Contributor Award winner: “I advocate for the continuation of the global vision of the MCAA”

**Consultant, researcher, and Chair of the MCAA Andean-Caribbean Chapter, Sergio Manrique is an active promoter of cooperation between industry and academia, and Latin America and Europe. Manrique was given the MCAA Outstanding Contributor Award at the Association’s Annual Conference in Milan.**

The award is given to an individual who has significantly contributed to the Marie Curie community, particularly the MCAA. Manrique, an expert in university-business collaboration and innovation, has had a crucial role in bringing together the MSCA fellow community in Latin America and promoting connections between continents.

## How does it feel to win the award?

“I feel honoured, receiving this recognition was an experience of pure happiness. I moved to work in the industry a few years ago, and my endeavours at the MCAA represent an important way to keep connected to academia and the



scientific world. Knowing my contributions to the MCAA and its alumni communities in Colombia and Latin America are appreciated and recognised, is inspiring.

Moreover, I am grateful for the collective effort and support I've received from various partners and colleagues in the MCAA Andean-Caribbean Chapter, other MCAA Latam chapters, EURAXESS Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and the MSCA Colombia National Contact Point (NCP). They have all enabled my contributions to the MCAA and therefore are also represented with this award.”

## What journey led you to this award?

“It has to do with gathering and shaping the MSCA alumni community in Colombia and the Andean-Caribbean region. After finalising



my MSCA ITN fellowship in 2020, I started to work in industry and eventually moved back to Colombia from Spain during the pandemic. However, I always had the intention to maintain my link to Europe and the scientific world, and the MCAA became my main channel to do so.

In 2022 we formed the MCAA Andean-Caribbean Chapter, of which I became the first Chair. I was an active player and led this process with great support from Viktoria Bodnarova from EURAXESS LAC, Catherine Fonseca from the MSCA Colombia NCP, and other MSCA fellows in the region.

Apart from developing our community, we embarked on the challenge of organising the MCAA Latam Conference, which finally took place in Cartagena, Colombia, in October 2023. It was an inspiring and thought-provoking

event centred on scientific cooperation in Latin America, gathering researchers and university managers from the region. I coordinated and facilitated the organisation of the conference, with fundamental support from the previously mentioned colleagues and stakeholders in the region, as well as the Challenge Your Knowledge Colombia network."

### How will this award propel you in your future endeavours?

"It fuels me to keep developing the MCAA community in Colombia, the Andean-Caribbean region, and Latin America, by gathering and accompanying former and current MSCA fellows linked to the region and promoting the MSCA research funding and other scientific cooperation opportunities with Europe among Latam academics.





It will be challenging to overcome what was achieved at the MCAA Latam Conference last year, but this award propels our Chapter to keep the community active, organise more activities, and work towards strengthening the MCAA in Latin America. It's also a source of motivation for creating further links and collaborating more actively with other MCAA Latam Chapters."

### What are your future goals?

"Despite the fact that I'm now working in IT consulting, I'm a researcher and want to keep working in and for science and the scientific community. My research interests are related to topics like university-business collaboration and innovation management. I can exploit the academia-industry intersection by being an active player in between these two worlds, by promoting, facilitating, and delivering initiatives that are research-based and advance cooperation among academia, industry, government, and the general public.

I expect to keep being an active player in the development and consolidation of the MCAA community in Latin America and beyond. This includes, for instance, seeing the MCAA Andean-Caribbean Chapter become a crucial actor in the scientific cooperation landscape between Latam and Europe, with a focus on MSCA."


### What advice do you have for the MCAA?

"We have witnessed the MCAA's growth and strengthening over its first 10 years

of existence. Things have been done quite well, and I believe this will continue – such a comprehensive, inclusive, and altruistic spirit must prevail in the Association. With all the team members and collaborators on board, the MCAA should continue gathering and accompanying former and current MSCA fellows around the world, boosting the community and ensuring the MSCA and similar schemes prevail for good.

Being a Latin American fellow, I want to advocate for the continuation and improvement of the global vision of the MCAA. The Chapters and Working Groups must be active players in promoting community building and further scientific cooperation efforts both within and between the MCAA and other local, regional, and global stakeholders.

Finally, it's important to bear in mind that what happens during the MSCA fellowship is just as important as what happens before and after it. Before the fellowship, we need to keep working on promoting the MSCA opportunities among academics everywhere, and once the fellowship is over, we need to keep building and strengthening the MSCA alumni community across the world."

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## Meet Award winner



## MCAA Best Innovator Award winner: “I’m committed to propelling progress toward a sustainable world”

The 2023 edition of the Best Innovator Award went to two MCAA members. One of them is physicist Artem Musiienko, who developed a method that significantly saves time in assessing new materials for applications made of semiconductors.

Artem Musiienko is a researcher at the Helmholtz-Zentrum Berlin (HZB) specialising in advanced material characterisation for perovskite solar cells and novel materials. His patented Constant Light-Induced Magneto-Transport (CLIMAT) method allows the determination of more than fourteen different parameters of semiconductors, materials that can be found in, for example, solar cells and sensors, in one go. These measurements

are crucial for optimising the performance of semiconductor-based devices.

### How does it feel to win the award?

“I feel incredibly honoured and humbled by the recognition. It's a validation of all the hard work and dedication I've put into my craft. Additionally, I feel a deep sense of responsibility to contribute to efforts aimed



at saving our planet from ecological genocide. This award serves as a reminder of the importance of using my skills and platform to make a positive impact on the world around me."

### What journey led you to this award?

"My journey began in the city of Bakhmut in Ukraine, which has now been devastated by the war and Russian invaders. It was a lengthy one, encompassing PhD studies in Prague, where I was awarded a three-year grant to initiate the development of the CLIMAT concept. Following this, I pursued postdoctoral positions within the same research group and later at the HZB. Presently, I am an MSCA fellow dedicated to the development of sustainable, low-cost photovoltaics."

### How will this award propel you in your future endeavours?

"I am dedicated to forging a brighter, more peaceful future by spearheading innovative photovoltaic technologies. With a focus on novel, low-cost solutions, I aim to revolutionise solar energy capture, pushing the boundaries of science to harness more sunlight efficiently. This award helps me to maintain my vision and adds strength to continue my journey towards developing a sustainable future."

### What are your future goals?

"I'm committed to propelling progress toward a sustainable world powered by clean, renewable energy sources discovered by accelerated scientific tools. This year, I'm thrilled to apply for support to establish our own research group using the support of the ERC Starting Grant and the NanoMatFutur programme of the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). I am also seeking to find a position as a tenure-track professor."

### What advice do you have for the MCAA?

"My advice for the MCAA is to actively engage in influencing the policies of both public research institutions and universities concerning the working conditions of scientists and students. This should encompass not only tangible factors like workspace amenities but also support for psychological well-being. It's uncommon to have dedicated happiness officers in each scientific department. Employers can also aid with relocation to ensure access to quality food, water, and other basic necessities at the workplace."

By advocating for improved working conditions and psychological support structures, the MCAA can significantly enhance the overall well-being and productivity of researchers. Addressing these aspects can positively impact retention rates, job satisfaction, and, ultimately, the quality of research outcomes. Additionally, fostering a supportive environment can attract top talent and contribute to creating a more inclusive and thriving scientific community. Furthermore, the MCAA can collaborate with relevant stakeholders to develop guidelines and best practices for institutions to adopt. This could involve conducting surveys or research to identify prevalent issues and recommending evidence-based solutions. Through strategic partnerships and proactive advocacy efforts, the MCAA can serve as a catalyst for positive change within the scientific research landscape."

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## Meet Award winner



## MCAA Best Innovator Award winner: “Having a participatory approach is a natural way of working for me”

**The 2023 edition of the Best Innovator Award went to two MCAA members. One of them is Guido Giunti, a medical doctor specialising in the use of digital health solutions for people with chronic conditions. He is a firm believer in having the patient at the center of innovation.**

Guido Giunti is an Adjunct Professor and Senior Researcher at the University of Oulu in Finland who first started to innovate in the healthcare sector in order to empower patients and enhance their self-care. Among other initiatives, he leads the design and development of More Stamina, a digital therapeutic for fatigue management for people with multiple sclerosis. He has also designed “Immune Defense”, an educational video game that teaches the immune

system’s fight against infections using real immunobiological concepts.

### **How does it feel to win the award?**

“It's incredibly rewarding to be recognised like this. I am often reminded of a friend who told me that the issue with having a new idea is not that someone will steal it from you but that you have to convince other people that it's worth pursuing. That's how innovating feels

sometimes. Another thing about awards is that they feel very reductive in that they are given to an individual, and to be honest, I would not be able to do the things I do if it were not for the people I work with."

### What journey led you to this award?

"MSCA has been an integral part of the journey. If it wasn't for me doing my doctoral research as part of the CHESS ITN project, which exposed me to so much more than a normal PhD programme, I wouldn't be here.

I was still working as a general practitioner in Argentina when I started innovating in digital health. As a general practitioner, you only see a person for 20 minutes per year; the rest of the time, they are on their own. My thinking was that technology could be a way for people to self-manage, so I started investigating how gamification could be used for patient empowerment. I was fortunate that my PhD allowed me to simultaneously work on an SME (small and medium-sized enterprise), which brought me towards designing and developing digital solutions for patients. At one point, we were discussing the features our solution should have, and it occurred to me that we should directly ask patients. I started framing the discovery of user needs in terms of focus groups and interviews and held co-creation workshops with patients and healthcare professionals. Eventually, having a participatory approach became a natural way of working for me.

When I started as a postdoc in Finland, my goal was to keep working on my ideas for patient empowerment and create a multidisciplinary team where we could have different perspectives. Through hard work and a bit of luck with funding, I was able to start the Digital Therapeutics Research Group at the University of Oulu. The rest has been about finding the golden path that allows me to work with inspiring people and keep the patient at the center of everything."

### How will this award propel you in your future endeavours?


"Receiving the Best Innovator Award is like a big shout-out for all the hard work we've been doing. It's also a great way to get others interested and involved, maybe even find new partners or support to help our projects grow. One of the main challenges that we face as we move deeper into applied research and further toward product development is bridging the gap between research and industry. At a certain point, research grants are no longer effective for taking solutions to a broader audience, so I hope that this kind of endorsement will help us reach more people."

### What are your future goals?

"I'm really looking forward to working on even more projects that can be scaled and impact people's lives. The dream would be to be able to run a portfolio of solutions that are evidence-driven and have real benefit for the lives of people with chronic conditions."

### What advice do you have for the MCAA?

"I think that we need to help researchers realise the global need for effective science communication. It's still pretty common to find colleagues who believe that dissemination is a chore. I think it's our duty, not only because we need people to know that what we do matters but also because we never know who may be inspired to continue the work. It's about sharing the flame so that others may also shine bright."

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## News from the MCAA



Photo by Ivano De Pinto Fotografo

MCAA Honorary Member Martin Andler: “Speak out on the issues on which you have things to say”

**New honorary member of the MCAA, President of the Initiative for Science in Europe Martin Andler, encourages the Association to continue being the voice of researchers in Europe by actively participating in public debates.**

Martin Andler is a mathematician and professor emeritus at the University of Versailles-Saint-Quentin, part of Paris-Saclay University. In addition to his academic career, for the past decades, he's been actively involved in diverse projects promoting young people's participation in mathematics, as well as connections between science, policy, and society. Before his current position as the President of the Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE), an independent platform of

European learned societies and research organisations, his responsibilities have included serving as the Vice President of Euroscience and several times as part of the programme committee of the Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF).

### How does it feel to receive this recognition?

"When I first heard the news, I was elated. I felt that somehow a little amount of radiation from Marie Skłodowska-Curie herself had hit me! More seriously speaking, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions is a magnificent programme, with a huge and, to some extent, underrated impact. Receiving the award at the MCAA Annual Conference 2024 in Italy made it even more precious, given the modern European idea was born in Italy in 1941 with the Ventotene Manifesto, written by Altiero Spinelli, Ernesto Rossi, Eugenio Colorni, and co-author Ursula Hirschmann, calling for a federated European republic."

### What kind of a journey have you had with the MCAA that led you to this recognition?

"For almost six years as the president of the ISE, I have been working closely with MCAA

Board members and/or Chairs. They have given us energy and enthusiasm, as well as excellent political acumen. All of this is, of course, very important for an organisation that wants to carry the voice of researchers in Europe."

### What advice do you have for the future of the MCAA?

"Speak out, speak out, speak out! There are lots of issues where we have things to say, but we scientists tend to be too polite. We prefer doing good work with our colleagues in our research teams rather than expressing our needs. This is all the more true at the European level, given its complicated institutions. However, the power of a democracy not only relies on its citizens voting, but also on what political philosophers call deliberation: people's participation in public debates. If some important stakeholders abstain from speaking, it should not be surprising that they are not heard."

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Photo by Ivano De Pinto Fotografo

## MCAA Annual Conference 2024



Photo by Ivano De Pinto Fotografo

# Open Science in Research Culture: Reflect and Act for Change

How can open science practices be valued and rewarded in the evaluation of research and researchers? How do we use open science practices in research assessment? Which initiatives are available, and where can you find examples of good practice? These were the questions discussed by Brian Cahill, Lisanna Paladin, Sam Hall, and Gareth O'Neill in a session of the MCAA Annual Conference 2024.

### Evolution of current research assessment

Since the topic of the Annual Conference was 10 years of MCAA, Brian Cahill started the session with a short overview of the policy changes in the research assessment within the last years. The endeavours of a joint effort between the MCAA and EuroDoc resulted in the

Declaration on Sustainable Researcher Careers headed by Gábor Kismihók in May 2019 (1).

The following project, NewHoRRizon (2), which started in 2019, delved into the questions of how to provide sustainable careers for researchers, how to deploy career management services at organisations, how to put focus on transferable skills training and recognition in PhD, postdoc, and research assessment, and how to provide networking opportunities within and outside of academia.

The NewHoRRizon project resulted in a policy brief describing the uptake of responsible research and innovation practices in MSCA grants within Horizon 2020. The MCAA helped to establish the new evaluation criteria for the MSCA call in order to enlarge and modernise



the notion of excellence, and to provide training for MSCA grantees within the multiple dimensions of research. From then on, MSCA grants have been supporting knowledge exchange and communities of practice by diverse and inclusive forms of excellence.

### The Open and Universal Science project - OPUS

This joint effort set the grounds for the OPUS project (3) to begin in 2022, where the MCAA also plays an important part. OPUS develops coordination and support measures to reform the assessment of research and researchers towards a system that incentivises and rewards researchers to take up open science practices, with a focus on indicators as well as interventions to support open science.

In OPUS, open science is understood as practices providing open access to research outputs, the early and open sharing of research, participation in open peer review, measures to ensure the reproducibility of results, and involving all stakeholders in the co-creation process.

Details about OPUS were given by panellist Gareth O'Neill: "Research assessment should focus on the activities and outputs of researchers. The main principles for the assessment lay in the redefinition and new sets of indicators, priorities, or the coverage

of the full spectrum of activities, which applies across countries, disciplines, and organisations." There are several key initiatives at the EU level and also worldwide, the big current leader of change is the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) (4).

### Open Research Europe and Reforming Research Assessment

Sam Hall, a representative of the European Commission, shared his insights into open research projects and their influence on research assessment (5). He highlighted the main open science aspects as recommended by CoARA: promoting qualitative judgement with peer reviews supported by quantitative indicators, following the highest standards of ethics and integrity or reproducibility, focusing on the diversity of research outputs, transparent processes and methods, valuing teamwork, and supporting diverse profiles and career paths of researchers.

"How can we all specifically support research assessment? By transparency in all processes, reproducibility, and novelty, which altogether brings back recognitions and citable reports. Also, anyone can maximise research outputs through a variety of article types," suggested Sam (6). He specifically mentioned the CRediT taxonomy, a useful tool that can be applied to capture every author's contribution to a research publication (7).



## Good practice at EMBL

In the last part of the session, Lisanna Paladin shared a good practice used at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL). This working place is international, dynamic, and with a high turnover of employees, but at the same time it offers a very collaborative working environment.

Lisanna is responsible for the EMBL Bio-IT project, a cumulative initiative that can serve as a model for any topic or area in research. Bio-IT is based on making sure that training opportunities are flexible, offered on demand, constantly evolving, and dependent on the recipients' needs. The technological infrastructure and platforms that people use for working together or coding are maintained all the time by the Bio-IT team. Information dissemination is comprehensive, guided, and targeted to community development. All of this is based on volunteering contributions. The Bio-IT initiative is also seen as an opportunity to give knowledge and skills back to society. It is all based on do-ocracy, a system where responsibilities are attached to people who do the work.

All of this is also an open science principle. And the key message? Open Science is allowing, supporting, and valuing people to share. Importantly, open science is creating alternative career opportunities in science.

## Why open science?

Towards the end of the session, Brian Cahill asked why open science was important for research assessment in Europe.

Lisanna Paladin concluded by answering that, simply put, open science is a fair way of assessing science: "The typical way of assessing science is very unfair since it is focused only on successful outputs, such as publications in Nature. We should seek alternative ways that are more intuitive because the impact of research on society is way wider."

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## MCAA Annual Conference 2024

# Ethics in the Research Environment



Image by MidJourney, prompt by Fabrizio Martina

**Fernanda Bajanca was joined by an expert panel composed of members of the MCAA Ethics committee for an in depth discussion on unethical conduct in research and whistleblowing. What would you consider inappropriate or unethical behaviour in a research environment? Does the law agree with you? What could you do if you encountered such unethical behaviour?**

These are some of the questions that the session “Ethics in the Research Environment” tackled on the final day of the 2024 MCAA Annual Conference. The hefty task of breaking down the subjective and sensitive topic of ethics was bravely taken on by the three panellists Gianluigi Riva, Simona Tiribelli, and Francisco Valente Gonçalves

The bedrock of research is the single-minded pursuit of truth and knowledge. Despite the noble ideals we may ascribe to it, the humans undertaking this pursuit are not infallible. Immoral and unethical behaviours abound in research environments, just as they do in any other workplace, because at the end of the day real life triggers for these behaviours are universal. This truth was easily revealed through a quick poll of the attendees at the session, where 88% of the respondents

reported that they had observed unethical behaviour in the workplace.

A few issues stood out to the audience as particular ethical pain points. Authorship in papers was the most common area where questionable conduct was observed. Additionally, the session audience also reported unethical behaviour in the declaration of conflicts of interest, data manipulation, and infringement of ideas and intellectual property among others. Ethical codes of conduct exist in almost every profession, and in academia, we find these can be field-specific. The codes lay out best practice and guidelines for their members. Though common, these codes of conduct are not always effective.

Lack of awareness about the guidelines is to blame to some extent for this lack of effectiveness. However, a study also found that researchers often refer to professional norms or an internal moral compass while deciding if a behaviour is ethical, rather than referring to a formal code (Giorgini et al, 2015, House and Seeman, 2010). The exception here being cases where concrete rules and consequences for not adhering to the same are laid out (Giorgini et al, 2015). This point was further emphasised by Gianluigi, stating that everything that is ethical is not legally




enforceable. Unless sanctions are attached to it, it remains, in essence, a recommendation.

So the first step would be to ensure that we are familiar with the code of conduct in our field, before we make any judgments, either about our own or someone else's behaviour being ethical. In case where a clear breach of these ethical guidelines occurs, what should we do next? Simona pointed out two important factors that contribute to the reporting of unethical behaviours. The first is having the right vocabulary to verbalise the nature of what has happened, in a language that is codified in the code of conduct. The second is the assurance that your complaint will be judged on its own merit and not be influenced by who you are. This can be especially important to early career researchers who feel it is not their place to question the system and often have the most to lose by coming forward. Whistleblowing channels can be a powerful mechanism to encourage people to come forward and protect them through the provision of anonymity. The MCAA is a part of [PAOLA](#) (PAndora bOx of whistLeblowing in Academia) a project developing a European observatory for reporting unethical behaviour in academic institutions.

As a growing organisation, the MCAA is very much aware of its own responsibility to promote good conduct and ethical practices amongst its members. To this end, the [MCAA Code of Conduct](#) was developed to inspire adequate behaviour within our community, including not only ordinary members but also members of the board and others in leadership roles. Alongside this, Gian Maria Greco

introduced the [MCAA Whistleblowing Channel](#), a recently-launched services through which members can report any unethical behaviour directly related to either MCAA members or a third party. The MCAA has the provision to take action against any violations of its code of conduct by its own members. In the scenario where a third party is involved, the MCAA will monitor and collate all behaviours reported through the channel and will strive to (anonymously) provide a voice to these complaints and raise these issues with the institutions involved.

Projects like PAOLA and the MCAA Whistleblowing Channel signal a shared commitment to foster an environment where unethical behaviours can be safely and effectively reported in the research community. However, the panellists concede that realistically it is still quite difficult to effect any change in the system. Francisco emphasised the mental health toll on those who are the victims of such unethical conduct and reporting it comes at a significant personal and professional cost. Organisations must do their best to safeguard the rights of those who come forward to report unethical behaviours. At the end of the day, we must recognise that reporting remains a very difficult and highly personal decision for the victims. Whether they choose to fight to change the system or else remove themselves from a toxic environment, only they can decide what is the right course of action for them.

Namrata Iyer 

MCAA Newsletter Editorial Board

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## MCAA Annual Conference 2024



# MCAA Sustainability: Actions and Reflections

Photo by Ivano De Pinto Fotografia

**Is it possible for scientific research to walk hand in hand with sustainability? This exploration ventures into the core of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Green Charter, illuminating the transformative journey of a community committed to environmental stewardship. Through challenges and successes, discover how researchers and institutions are reshaping the future of science, one sustainable step at a time.**

Just as a seed needs soil, water, and sunlight to grow, so does the journey towards sustainability in scientific research demands inspiration, dedication, and actionable insights. At the forefront of this mission stand the speakers of the "MCAA Sustainability: What is Being Done?" session at the MCAA Annual Conference 2024, each contributing with their unique perspectives and experiences to the collective endeavour of integrating sustainable practices into research. Through this article, we will explore their stories and how they have navigated the challenges and opportunities of sustainability in their side. From implementing the MSCA Green Charter's principles to innovating within their institutions and projects, the speakers illuminate the path for researchers seeking to contribute positively to the planet. Their narratives reveal that embedding sustainability into scientific inquiry is not merely an added responsibility but an enriching opportunity to drive change, enhance research methodologies, and foster a healthier relationship with our environment.

### The MSCA Green Charter: Catalysing Change

Robin Gadbled from the European Commission spotlighted the transformative role of the

MSCA Green Charter in steering scientific research towards sustainability. Emphasising the Charter's core principles, Gadbled outlined a comprehensive strategy for integrating environmental considerations into the research landscape. This includes mainstreaming sustainability across all facets of research, reducing waste and harmful emissions, prioritising low-carbon transportation, and adopting teleconferencing tools to diminish travel's environmental toll.

Gadbled's presentation illuminated the dual focus of the Charter: guiding individual researchers in adopting sustainable practices and urging institutions to facilitate this shift. By providing support, guidance, and training on eco-friendly alternatives, the charter seeks to foster a research environment where sustainability is encouraged and becomes the norm. The Charter's broader vision, as highlighted in the Horizon Europe Work Programme, is a testament to the European Commission's commitment to minimising the environmental footprint of MSCA-funded projects.

Additionally, Gadbled shed light on the nuanced progress and challenges in embracing the Green Charter, as revealed by recent surveys.

Notably, under half of the 2021 MSCA cohort were familiar with the Green Charter, yet a hopeful 71% intend to adopt its sustainability practices, supported by the 61% in institutions with established green policies. Nonetheless, 21% foresee challenges in incorporating these practices into their projects. To further ingrain sustainability in research, the MSCA introduced mandatory sustainability reporting in 2023, asking researchers to outline their commitment to the Green Charter. From 2024, sustainability will also influence the evaluation of competitive proposals, enhancing the Charter's impact on research's future direction. This move towards greater sustainability accountability means a significant step in the research community's journey towards environmental stewardship.

### My Green Lab: Pioneering Sustainability in Research

The insights shared by Marta Pérez Lloret, Marie-Curie Career FIT-PLUS fellow with PMTC and based at NUI Galway, emphasize that sustainability in research is not solely about monumental changes; it is equally about the small, everyday decisions that collectively drive substantial environmental impact reductions. Whether it is turning off unused equipment or opting for reusable resources, these actions symbolize a broader commitment to mindful consumption and waste reduction, principles that resonate deeply within the Lean Six Sigma methodology of efficient and sustainable management.

The My Green Lab initiative emerges as a testament to what can be achieved when the research community rallies around the cause of sustainability. This program not only champions environmental best practices in laboratories but also provides the tools and resources necessary for meaningful, actionable change. From competitions aimed at reducing the environmental footprint of cold storage to sustainability certifications, My Green Lab exemplifies the powerful synergy between innovation and environmental responsibility.


### Reflecting on the Journey Towards Sustainability in MCAA

Insights from Alexandra Dubini, the outgoing vice-chair of MCAA and chair of MCAA Sustainability Interest Group, highlight the MCAA's path and contribution towards sustainability. The interactive dialogue with the audience reveals an increasing need to implement sustainable practices, albeit acknowledging the existence of barriers. The majority intermittently prioritize eco-friendly products and manage digital clutter, highlighting the ongoing need for dedication to sustainability.

The conversations and initiatives presented not only advocate for a transition to sustainable practices but also underscore the essential values driving this shift. Key among these are responsibility, in recognizing the impact of research on the environment; innovation, in developing and adopting new methods to reduce that impact; and collaboration, as researchers and institutions come together to share knowledge and resources for a sustainable future. Through initiatives like the MSCA Green Charter and the collective action of researchers and institutions, a vision of a greener, more sustainable scientific community is coming into focus. Therefore, Dubini extended an invitation to individuals interested in sustainability to become part of the newly established MCAA Sustainability Interest Group at the session.

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## MCAA Annual Conference 2024

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# Empowering Citizen Science: Discover insider tips and techniques

**Celebrate 10 years of the MCAA in democratising science through community engagement. Through the European Citizen Science project, be part of the movement towards effective societal progress, where citizen science paves the way for a brighter, more inclusive future.**

The Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) marked its 10th anniversary with a series of events emphasising its commitment to democratising science and community involvement in research. The celebration took place during the 2024 annual conference from March 14th to 16th in Milan, Italy.

Collaborating with partners from the EU-funded European Citizen Science (ECS) Project, including the Learning Planet Institute and Paris Cité University (LPI/UP Cité), the MCAA organised an enlightening kick-off [satellite event](#) on March 14th titled '**Public Engagement and Participatory Research: The Whys and Hows of implementing Citizen Science in your Research.**'

Enriched by the expertise and personal insights of three distinguished experts in the field Antonella Radicchi, Maya Fedeli and Andrea Sforzi, the hybrid workshop welcomed both citizens and researchers to delve into the multifaceted realm of public engagement and participatory research within the scientific ethos, offering diverse perspectives and invaluable insights.

Antonella initiated the session by exploring the evolution of citizen science funding in EU programs, defining key terms, and outlining the 10 principles established by the [European Citizen Science Association \(ECSA\)](#). She categorised citizen science projects into five distinct types, emphasising its versatility as an umbrella term for various participatory research practices.

Andrea, Director of the Maremma Natural History Museum and President of Citizen Science Italia, provided valuable insights into the museum's approach to citizen science. He underscored the historical significance of museums in advancing citizen science and their pivotal role in its institutional

establishment across Europe. Additionally, he traced the formation of ECSA and outlined the development of a strategic framework for citizen science in Italy.

Maya offered a compelling perspective on citizen science as a methodology for bridging the gap between science and citizens, fostering deeper engagement from both groups. Highlighting the transformative nature of citizen science, she emphasised its ability to empower citizens as researchers while enhancing researchers' sense of citizenship. Drawing from her own experiences, she shared insights from her PhD research to her current role as a science communicator and research manager at UniSR, Milan. She also discussed UniSR's initiatives to promote citizen science among its PhD students and addressed common challenges and quality control measures. Maya emphasised that citizen science is not a one-size-fits-all approach to research, underscoring the need for flexibility and adaptability.

Overall, the workshop provided a comprehensive exploration of citizen science, shedding light on its diverse applications and transformative potential in research and public engagement.

On March 15th, a panel discussion titled **'Stakeholders within Citizen Science: Don't forget the Citizens'** further explored the theme of inclusivity in research where speakers Antonella Radicchi, Maya Fedeli, and Cléa Montanari discussed the significance of amplifying equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) within the research process. Cléa underscored the challenges faced by young researchers to address complex issues surrounding EDI within their research like limited time, resources, approval by their principal investigators, and inherent societal biases. However, as pointed out by Antonella, diverse applications and tools such as [Quintuple or 5-helix model](#) and [marginalised voices framework](#) can help mitigate these and instead promote inclusivity and diversity within citizen science data



representation while also reducing social biases.

Furthermore, beyond selecting the appropriate research methodology, the manner in which we engage with citizens profoundly influences the outcomes of our research endeavours. As Maya eloquently articulated, the cornerstone of effective communication lies in the art of attentive listening and empathetic understanding.

The panel emphasised that citizen science presents a unique opportunity for individuals to immerse themselves in the realm of research, while also allowing researchers to engage with a broader community. Yet, akin to all research domains, attaining and defining 'success' in citizen science projects is intricate. Hence, it is prudent to not solely fixate on quantitative metrics but to also embrace qualitative insights from diverse viewpoints.

In conclusion, the events garnered enthusiastic feedback, commending their informative content, inspirational speakers, and diverse viewpoints. Attendees proposed adding sessions covering successful citizen science projects, GDPR considerations, and social activities for future events. Overall, participants expressed increased awareness and motivation to incorporate citizen science methodologies into their research endeavours, marking the sessions a resounding success.

I thank the MCAA team formed by Ruben Riosa and Mostafa Moonir Shawrav, and the LPI/ UPCite partners Cléa Montanari and Muki Haklay in their support in organising the above-mentioned events.

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## MCAA Annual Conference 2024



# MCAA Volunteering: A Career Catalyst

**Is it worth spending time on volunteering? Do I have time for volunteering? And many other questions arise when one thinks about volunteering – Here are stories that will shatter those questions or doubts.**

A catalyst is known to accelerate a reaction, and it is no different when volunteering for the MCAA. It accelerates one's career path by letting people explore their ideas, and identify their likes, while allowing them to learn new skills that can be a concrete addition to their CVs. Volunteering would mean that you put in extra hours but every volunteer happily agreed it is totally worth it. These words might seem like a cliché but the stories are compelling and enlightening which helps you to feel the enormity of opportunities.

In this article, I share candid revelations from mostly MCAA volunteers whose careers were shaped better with skill enrichment and networking. These stories are testament to the fact that there is plenty of room for researchers of every kind to engage in passionate ideas while serving the society at large.

Fernanda Bajanca, the outgoing chair of the MCAA recalls that her volunteering journey started as a non-active member. But once becoming active she realised it to be a powerhouse of exploration, activity participation and experimentation that allows mindful contribution. She chaired the policy working group within the MCAA and received 'outstanding contributor award' for her engagement. Currently, she is a manager for clinical tests in a children's hospital and says



that her volunteering journey has channelled and enhanced her career path ever since becoming an active member.

Ruben Riosa, the communications manager of the MCAA started his journey within MCAA as an early stage researcher who was looking forward to an academic career. But the journey transformed his interests and led to horizons beyond academia. His active participation led to fascination about science communication that sprouted the idea of switching careers. Being an outstanding contributor award himself highlights that the awardees are usually encouraged to use the award money for career development related training activities.



Renaud Jolivet, professor of neuroscience in Maastricht University entered MCAA with the motive of mentoring early stage researchers. He narrates that networking and activity participation boosted his confidence and enhanced the ability to handle responsibilities. While such skills are considered effective for an industrial career, he says they were equally helpful in his academic career, allowing participation in initiatives both within and beyond academia. Being a career awardee within the MCAA, it was only right for him to say that the MCAA made him a better academic overall.

Ashish Avasthi, current chair of the communication working group says his journey within the MCAA started as an exploration but later developed into a journey of gaining various skills, growing networks and engaging with stakeholders. He pitched in the fact that within MCAA one is always encouraged to take up responsibilities but never forced. And he suggested not worrying about receiving 'Nos' because one 'yes' will make all the changes that will catalyse things further.

Joanna Moscoso, a MCAA member is the 'co-founder and Director of Chaperone' whose current job is a result of volunteering that was

initiated from her passion for communicating science to children. She admired the idea of volunteering because it has allowed her to hang out with like-minded people during leisure time which aids capacitive building and is found to be purely transformative. And she proudly says that impacting people through a work that you are passionate about is so soul-filling and life-changing.

Now all that being said about the uplifting characteristics of volunteering, does that mean everything is smooth behind the scenes? Definitely not, there are several aspects of volunteering that require improvement. While everyone emphasized that volunteering provides an opportunity to attain diversified skills that can accelerate a career path, they did not ignore parts of their experience that demonstrated the need for a cultural shift in mindset. They highlighted aspects like knowing when to say 'NO', encouragement in the form of awards that helped them keep sailing. However, it was brought to notice that most of them received neither encouragement or discouragement from their working place for volunteering. Therefore strongly recommend institutionalisation of volunteering. Because, as all these stories are shouting out loud, volunteering means contributing to society while enhancing your careers, which must be the heart of Organizations and Institutions around the world.

Shanmugapriya Periyannan  

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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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