MCCA Magazine - IRRADIUM

Interview

Waiting for the new Board – Interview with Snežana Krstić, MCAA Chair

Snežana Krstić

You have been Chair of the MCAA Board since November 2013. How would you describe this experience?

There were very nice and very hard moments. It was an excellent experience and great honour to be the founding Chair of the MCAA, to develop the association from its very beginning, cooperate with outstanding and motivated scientists such as MCAA Members and blaze the trail for new achievements and successes. Over these two years the association has accomplished remarkable results and I am very proud of it. It was an outstanding feeling to hear how our work and achievements were perceived and respected by the external community and, from time to time, to receive messages from our Members expressing satisfaction and appreciation for our commitment and support.

On the other hand, the role of Chair is the most demanding. In the environment in which the MCAA operates, the Chair is exposed to various pressures and frequently to inconvenient situations, as he or she is placed between interests of the Association and Contractors, which were not always perfectly aligned during these two years. However, despite the difficulties which followed the initial phase, the outstanding success that the Association has achieved as a fruit of our common efforts, make me feel that my engagement as Chair was very valuable experience.

What did you learn?

Administrative and legal issues related to EC tenders and their execution.

Which tasks did you deal with?

There were a lot of different tasks with which I had to deal and I am not exaggerating if I say that it required 24/7 commitment, working days, nights, weekends and holidays. This interview does not provide room to properly present all tasks with which I had to deal, but generally they can be classified into the following categories:

1. Chair tasks defined by the MCAA Statute;
2. tasks related to the execution of the EC tender through which the MCAA was established, and co-operation with contractors;
3. tasks related to accomplishing the Association's goals, its promotion, reputation, visibility and branding;
4. strategic planning, development and cooperation, including development of the MCAA Plan of Activities for 2015-2020, which served as grounds for future funding which the MCAA may receive from relevant EC sources;
5. other tasks in the Board and Executive Committee, which were not exactly the role of Chair, but which had to be done in order to ensure the Board and Association's smooth operation, as well as our reputation and image.

All these tasks were often mutually interrelated and it is not possible to draw a sharp line between them.

Tasks defined by the Statute were mostly related to the Executive Committee and Board Meetings, preparing the Agenda respecting the needs of different parties in the team (Board and Executive Committee members, EC ex-officio members, contractors), chairing meetings, organising decisions (within or be-

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yond meetings), signing documents, representing the Board and Association.

Tasks related to the execution of the tender took a large part of my time, and I had to deal with many administrative tasks – as this was the first year of the MCAA, it was necessary to officially register the association, establish many administrative procedures and support contractors in executing their tender.

I worked with particular enthusiasm and enjoyment on the tasks related to the accomplishments of the Association's goals, its promotion, reputation, visibility and branding. From the very beginning, I worked strategically to create opportunities for the MCAA and its Members, to accelerate the growth of the association by attracting new Members. I did this by providing professional opportunities, highlighting accomplishments and excellence, and establishing fruitful contacts and cooperation.

I organised MCAA sessions at the largest and most prestigious European events, negotiating with organisers and providing special opportunities. There was ESOF 2014, for example, where as a very young association we created an opportunity to organise the MCAA Poster Stand for Young Researchers as well as MCAA promotional events. We received three travel grants for Board Members. Additionally, I created several opportunities to promote the MCAA at very important and high-level conferences on the basis of invitations related to my personal expertise in the fields of research integrity, mobility of researchers, internationalisation of HE, global challenges.

Among the numerous events at which I represented the MCAA, I would like to highlight the presentation I was invited to give at the Plenary of the World Science Forum, where I had the opportunity to talk about research integrity and confidence in science. Participation at these important and high-level events brought many benefits to the MCAA, significantly contributed to its branding and creating further opportunities for our Members. The funding for travel costs for all these meetings was provided by relevant organisers and I have not spent the MCAA budget on this. I was also committed to provide similar opportunities for our Members from Europe and different parts of the world, including funding for travel grants. It is not possible to precisely calculate the financial effects of all these opportunities, but I estimate that in this way the contribution to our budget was over 15 000 euro.

I also established many important and fruitful contacts for the MCAA and our Chapters. Even when I travelled for professional purposes, I kept the MCAA in mind. This is how we established cooperation with EURAXESS Links offices in Brazil, China and India, providing additional opportunities for our overseas Members. I had the opportunity to give an interview to EURAXESS Links, which was an additional opportunity to promote the MSCA experience and our goals, as well as to gain new Members and opportunities for cooperation.

In addition, I worked on many tasks related to communication. This was not related only to internal communication within the Board and association. I made significant efforts to create suitable communication and promotional material: leaflets, posters, presentations, announcements, blog entries and other texts and documents. I was active also in policy area, preparing a policy draft related to taxation.

I also took on certain activities that cannot exactly be called tasks; they were linked to my personal motivation to support our individual Members in their careers. Despite my very busy schedule, whenever it was possible for me, I tried to provide personal advice related to careers, research integrity and ethics issues, outreach activities and similar issues.

I have only presented a fraction of my tasks and activities here, but I hope that this is sufficient to illustrate the enthusiasm, positive energy, integrity and strategy with which the MCAA was led during the first Board mandate. We have started many other activities that we expect to provide results in the months and years to come. I am honoured that I had the opportunity to lead the MCAA in this most demanding period, very proud of our accomplishments and particularly appreciative to our Members for their support, synergy and motivation.

You cannot imagine how inspiring it was to read your posts and private messages, and to learn about your successes! Finally, my genuine thanks go to the European Commission and MSCA for the financial support that established the MCAA and helped us achieve our goals!

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Waiting for the new Board – Interview with Axelle Viré, MCAA Vice-Chair

1. You have been Vice-Chair of the MCAA Board since November 2013. How would you describe this experience?

The experience has been very rich, both in terms of what I have learned and the work done by the entire Board. I really enjoyed working with everyone, including the Board, the contractors, and the EC advisors. We had fun and animated meetings. I can say that we were all very motivated and committed to establishing the MCAA and enhancing the career of our members. There are still many things to be done and improved, but that will always be the case when building such a large association. Importantly, it is very rewarding to see the Association grow and many members engage with our activities and vision.

2. What did you learn?

Being the Vice-Chair of such an association helped me to develop skills different to those used in my daily research & education job. This includes taking executive decisions on rules and regulations of the Association and planning its long-term strategy. As part of my role as Chair of the BeNeLux chapter, I also had the opportunity to organise a workshop and invite speakers to the event. This made me interact directly with our members in the region and also look for speakers from outside. I found it very interesting to set up such an event from scratch. During all these activities, I learned new things from the members' feedback and the advice from the EC officers and contractors.

3. Which tasks did you deal with?

In addition to the tasks mentioned above, I helped the contractor and the policy working group with the drafting of a survey for our members. I further disseminated information about the MCAA in the BeNeLux region (and beyond) and hopefully attracted a few more members indirectly. Through my role in the Executive Board, I helped select candidates to receive micro-grants and awards, and voted on all kind of decisions involving the Association, including the organisation of our annual General Assembly.

4. What would you like to say to encourage Alumni to put themselves forward as candidates for this position?

I would encourage them to apply for the position if they like to be at the heart of governing a large association (including its rules and regulations) and have ideas to implement a vision for the members. This includes decision on the long-term strategy for the MCAA and how to get there, as well as supporting the career development of our members through events and awards. They will also probably have the opportunity to meet new people with different backgrounds to those they encounter in their daily job. Of course, the Vice-Chair should also be prepared for the eventuality of replacing the Chair if the latter is not able to remain in the position for any reason. However, this was not required during my mandate.

Axelle Viré

Interview

Waiting for the new Board – Interview with Roy Someshwar, MCAA Treasurer

1. You have been the Treasurer of the MCAA Board since November 2013. How would you describe this experience?

It has been a phenomenal experience and I am enjoying every bit of this journey. MCAA only took shape into a Member-run democratic association in November 2013 at the first General Assembly in Brussels. I am humbled and honoured to be elected as the founding Treasurer of this association. Sincere thanks go to all the MCAA Members for their trust and confidence in my vision and action-plans to develop the association into a self-sustainable non-profit body catering to the needs of Marie Curie Fellows and Alumni spread across the world.

As Treasurer and a Member of the Executive Committee (ExCom), me and my Team are responsible for developing the strategy, policy and vision of the association and ensuring its day-to-day implementation at the operational level. Additionally, being the founding Members of the association, we had the unique opportunity (read this as 'challenge'!) to build the association from scratch.

In spite of limited funds and several administrative constraints, **our core financial strategy** has been to:

1) support career development of MCAA Members;

2) foster regional networking among MCAA Members;

3) empower our Working Groups in areas of strategic interest to the association (e.g. Policy, Gender, Grants and Awards, Bridging Science and Business etc.)

Over this time, MCAA Chapters and Working Groups have grown in number and in strategic areas. Now, we have MCAA Chapters around the globe from ASEAN to Argentina and the Nordics to Africa. For the career development of Members, we designed Micro-Travel Grants, Micro-Media Grants and Micro One-World Grants. Through these grants, we have assisted hundreds of Marie Curie Fellows and Alumni in their career endeavours and we will continue to roll-out such exciting schemes in future.

Today, looking back, I feel extremely proud to be part of this journey to transform a newly found association into a thriving international community of 6 700+ Members from across the world.

2. What did you learn?

Running an international association like MCAA comes with a lot of unconventional challenges, including the challenge of leading, steering and decision-making among an 11-Member Board consisting of eight nationalities. Graduating through these challenges teaches an individual the essence of emergent leadership, one who knows when to lead by stepping in, helping solve it — and then relinquishing power if necessary so thvat someone else can handle the next challenges.

Working in such an international team also helps you develop a great deal of patience, open-mindedness, a bias-free attitude and a positive outlook that enables everyone to effectively listen and understand each other for efficient decision-making. *The ability to lead and work together in a cross-cultural team is probably the most important skill I have learnt during my tenure at MCAA.*

3. Which tasks did you deal with?

People often hesitate before applying for the position of a Treasurer because this post comes with immense responsibility and an extra bit of hard work. After all, being answerable for the fund management of hundreds of thousands of euros of EU public money is no joke!

To answer your question more specifically, I am responsible for the MCAA Financial Strategy, Budget Management, Strategic Allocation, Reporting and – on a day-to-day level – overseeing its effective execution.

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I also co-founded the Working Group on Financial Affairs with the vision to make MCAA self-sustainable and financially independent in the distant future. This WG is responsible for fundraising and building win-win corporate partnership.

4. What would you like to say to encourage Alumni to put themselves forward as candidates for this position?

This is a voluntary position that comes with no remuneration. You can expect a cumulative workload of about six to eight hours a week. Most of the work is done through online collaboration with other team Members. So don't be surprised if you receive 20-30 e-mails every week loaded with different sorts of action items to deal with.

If you have the passion to contribute back to the MCAA community, love finance, have a basic understanding of accounting and budget reporting, and you don't mind being held accountable for hundreds of thousands of euros of EU public money, then welcome to the Treasurer Club.

Roy Someshwar

Interview

Waiting for the new Board – Interview with Kiran Kumar Chereddy, MCAA Ordinary Board Member

1. You have been Ordinary Member of the MCAA Board since November 2013. How would you describe this experience?

Being an ordinary board member is a great experience. Giving advice, counselling as and when required to ExCom, taking crucial assignments, leading a working group, participating in brainstorming sessions and solving problems – all of these helped me to grow professionally and to develop many soft skills. Voluntary activities that involve highly educated and well qualified people such as MCAA members has given me great visibility and networking opportunities. With no reservations and doubts, I can say that my MCAA experience has been one of the greatest contributing factors to me getting an amazing job at Novartis!

2. What did you learn?

If you ask me what the most complicated task that one can imagine is, my immediate answer would be 'managing people'. Yes, surprisingly this is well proven in many studies and many companies are looking for those people who can manage projects with big teams. Within the MCAA, I learnt how to manage projects, take decisions, convince and lead people, churn ideas around and think with vision – to do whatever we could whilst keeping in mind the MCAA's large human potential.

Involving and engaging people, getting things right within deadlines and organising meetings these are all part of MCAA board members' jobs. To end the long list of skills and competences I gained within these two years: the best quality that one can learn is 'respecting all equally'.

3. Which tasks did you deal with?

It was great to be part of the first MCAA board, which has tonnes of things to develop, experiment, implement while paving a visionary path. Participating in discussions/brainstorming sessions and helping/supporting ExCom in taking fruitful decisions are part of my tasks. I chair IGCMT (internal governance and chapter management team), which acts as a node for chapters and their coordination. Representing the MCAA, answering queries from chapters and encouraging inter chapter cooperation are some of the IGCMT's important tasks.

I wrote the first draft of the external finances procurement procedure, and this was the starting material for our finance Working Group. As I lived in Brussels, I participated in some external partnership meetings, such as EuroDoc and the Erasmus Student Network associations, just to mention a few. All in all, I can definitely say that there are many opportunities and tasks that need active volunteers and many ways to learn skills from them.

4. What would you like to say to encourage Alumni to put themselves forward as candidates for this position?

The MCAA board itself has a responsible and accountable role. So, be very active, grab opportunities and enjoy implementing new ideas for the betterment of our MCAA. You will very much appreciate participating in MCAA. All the best!

Kiran Kumar Chereddy

Interview

Waiting for the new Board – Interview with Mauricio Manfrini, MCAA Ordinary Board Member

1. You have been Ordinary Member of the MCAA Board since November 2013. How would you describe this experience?

It gave me great pleasure to be elected – on account of my industrial research background – as Ordinary Board Member to promote closer links between science and business together. Since the first day in this position, it has been a crazy ride. The first year of MCAA was devoted to the legal establishment of the association, with a lot of interactions and discussions with Board Members, contractors and the European Commission officers so that we could draft the best possible legal basis for the fellows' association. In that respect, I was further honoured to be one of the four legal founders of the MCAA. I want to look back with pride in 30 years time and see how much the MCAA has grown, so let's keep this train moving!

Mauricio Manfrini

2. What did you learn?

All Board Members had to focus on different aspects of the MCAA (communication, policy, event, infrastructure, awards, etc.), but we all learnt how a non-profit organisation works and what the challenges are in making it attractive for users. For example, what are the best ways to offer travel grants to a Fellow, or who should we invite to the GA. We also had access to European Commission officers, who gave us indispensable support throughout the journey and taught us the views of the EC on the programme.

3. Which tasks did you deal with?

Initially, I was appointed chair of the Information and Data Access Working Group (IDA-WG) with the goal of making the MCAA a better platform for the users. This work was very exciting, yet challenging, since there are many users with different interests in the MCAA. Of course we try to please as many as we can and luckily we have the non-stop support of our contractors to keep the MCAA running as smoothly as possible. Last year, I moved on to my real passion (and original promise) and co-founded the new Bridging Science and Business Working Group (BSB-WG). Here we will bring companies and research closer together. A fantastic team has been put together to ignite this exciting field of innovation, and the first interactive session will take place during the next GA 2016 in Venice. But hold on, more improvements to the MCAA are coming! I am the technical coordinator of a new project that will restructure the MCAA profile for all Members. This will allow Members to connect better and easier with each other. Stay tuned for the launch during the MCAA GA 2016!

4. What would you like to say to encourage Alumni to put themselves forward as candidates for this position?

Working at the MCAA has been a very rewarding experience. I have met fantastic, very hard-working people who are trying to make this association one of the best out there.

It is true the beginning was a bumpy road, but we prevailed and I can only see a bright future ahead. Therefore, if you are willing to roll up your sleeves and get down to intense work with great people, don't hesitate to apply for a Board position! Good luck to all!

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Waiting for the new Board – Interview with Francesco Sanna, MCAA Ordinary Board Member

Francesco Sanna

1. You have been Ordinary Member of the MCAA Board since November 2013. How would you describe this experience?

As an ordinary Board Member, I was in charge of the Events and Network Working Group. I can proudly confirm that it has been an outstanding experience. First, it was really interesting to follow the growth during the first years of life of such a big international organisation as the MCAA. Moreover, thanks to this opportunity, I was honoured to work and organise international networking events with highly motivated scientists.

2. What did you learn?

As a Board Member, I have been in touch with other expert researchers, with much more experience. This has given me the opportunity to learn, directly from them, about what is needed to face and solve the different problems that a big worldwide association experiences. I am the youngest of the group and the whole experience was the first of its kind for me.

As the Chairman of the Events and Network, I organised events and supported attendance at national and international conferences or workshops, both as speakers and collaborators. I definitely improved my managerial and organisational skills. Although I was responsible for everything, I learnt a lot from the collaboration and the feedback of the other team members.

This is particularly the caes for the two big events in Greece and Czech Republic, for which the organisation was rather complicated. Firstly, I created a virtual group of MCAA Members and I defined a hierarchy. Secondly, we were in contact with a local group of volunteers and with local institutions in the host country. From these experiences I learnt that you need not only a plan, but also initiatives to motivate other people to carefully follow it. In addition, dealing with a limited budget was also complex. I have to admit that sometimes I felt a bit of pressure because of the short deadlines and because of the degree of responsibility. Although this was my real first experience as a coordinator, the team was able to successfully organise the event in time and on budget.

3. Which tasks did you deal with?

In order, my main tasks were:

1) Taking important decisions on the future of the association

2) Talking, updating, and motivating the team members

3) Keeping track of the budget

4) Preparing a successful plan, as well as a back-up plan

5) Following the mail flow between all the institutions

6) Setting deadlines and milestones to verify and to check the quality of the work

7) Informing the MCAA Board

8) Writing a report for each activity, including the financial status

9) Preparing and checking presentations for each event the working group was collaborating with.

4. What would you like to say to encourage Alumni to put themselves forward as candidates for this position?

Dear Members, sometimes I am afraid the power of this association is not fully understood. This is not an association born to organise travel or to hand out money. This is an essential worldwide organisation to build and take care of each Marie Curie researcher's career. If you care about your and our future, don't be afraid to put yourself forward as a candidate to join the Board. Contributing actively to the success of the MCAA is indeed the only solution we have to be certain that our hard work is rewarded.

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The MCAA German Chapter's career seminar

We met Brian Cahill, Chair of the German Chapter. He shared news of recent activities he has been leading, and in particular how he organised the career seminar programme held in Darmstadt in June 2015. Would you like to organise something similar for your own chapter? Read Cahill's advice!

1. Dr Cahill, could you please tell us about the German Chapter's recent activities?

The German Chapter was founded in January 2015. Only four people attended the kick-off meeting. For obvious reason, increasing membership was the first item on the agenda.
A general frustration in Germany for decades has been associated with the issues of taxation, salary and pensions for Marie Curie Fellows. It is difficult to "solve" these problems but we have tried to address them. A tax advisor made a well-received talk at the career seminar. I summarised the relevant issues for mobile researchers in Germany with regard to pensions. We have secured the agreement of the National Contact Point (NCP) to draft a joint document that explains these contentious tax/salary/pension issues in the English language. I have made contact with the team from http://www.findyourpension.eu/ and have asked them to present to our members on "pension literacy" in 2016.
We promote awareness of research funding in Germany and the EU through agencies, such as, KoWi, DFG, Humboldt Foundation and DAAD.

Our main activity was the organisation of our Career Choices Seminar at the Technische Universität (TU) Darmstadt on 10 June 2015.

2. How many members does the Chapter count right now?

Our current membership is 344. We have many members who live in Germany, but we also have members of German nationality living abroad. A larger membership means that we can organise larger events. It also opens more possibilities for networking among Chapter members. Having a larger membership also makes networking with other organisations easier. Other organisations want to know that by talking to us they can find several of our members, who they can help to found start-ups or write successful grant proposals for a research group. The large potential membership in Germany opens up many opportunities for the Chapter.

Brian Cahill

3. Which issues are considered priorities?

Initially we decided to set these issues as priorities:

- growing the Chapter membership;
- addressing the issues that our membership has with regards to tax/salary/pension in Germany;
- organising a career event;
- organising a science communication event.

4. You organised a career seminar, how did it go?

We decided to focus on careers because a lot of the available information on making a career for yourself in Germany is only available in the German language. For example, almost all of the information on founding a start-up is only available in German and proposals for the most relevant start-up funding for young graduates must be written in German. We can pro-

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vide information in English on such career topics to our members. This information can be specifically targeted to their interests. Many of our members come from parts of Europe that have suffered greatly in the recent financial crisis (I come from Ireland myself) and making a career in Germany is a definite career option. We focused on the choices facing Marie Curie Fellows at the end of their PhD or postdoctoral fellowship – should I continue in academia, find a job in industrial research or found my own start-up. We also had a lecture on publishing from the perspective of a journal editor, a presentation on constructive communication and an explanation of how the German tax system works by a tax accountant. The most enthusiastic response by far was for the tax accountant. She gained many customers. A little over 90 people registered and more than 70 attended the meeting. The majority were not previously members of MCAA. Many others joined MCAA but didn‘t attend the meeting. Early stage researchers made up two thirds of the audience.

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

Very often the first step of organising such an event is to look for sponsorship. This can delay the organisation greatly if a sponsor isn't found quickly. I had time pressure from day one: My wife was expecting a child at the end of August and I preferred to set a date for the career event at least two months before the due date. I wanted that we first decide when and where the event would take place. The location is a balance between where local support is available and where the prospective audience/speakers are located – Darmstadt was by far the best location. Once the time and place are decided, book the room and get a quote for the catering. You are now working to a deadline.

Secondly you will need to find the topics and speakers. MCAA members have a wide spectrum of research interests – we tried to keep the topics as subject-neutral as possible. We defined particular topics we wanted to address and then tried to find speakers who were located close to Darmstadt (two hours by train). The name Marie Curie Alumni Association was welcomed with great respect by the potential speakers we contacted. We invited three local speakers, who didn't need travelling expenses – a tax accountant, a host professor and a start-up advisor from the university's technology transfer office. We invited speakers from German research organisations, who have their own budget for making business trips and don't need travel expenses. We invited two speakers from within the alumni MCAA membership. Our own Alumni membership is definitely a resource for finding speakers. We have many good "role models" within our membership.

Thirdly we advertised the event with details of time, place and speakers. After initial advertising on the MCAA Web Portal, we received very little response. We then decided to advertise directly to hosts and current Fellows and particularly to those who were not yet MCAA members. We contacted as many people involved in Marie Curie fellowships in Germany as we could find. It is easier to find host-led fellows – Innovative Training Networks (ITN) and COFUND projects have their own websites. We found that advertising to hosts was particularly efficient. These events are of value to hosts because career development training is necessary for all Fellows. Advertising an event drives MCAA and Chapter Membership. Some of the hosts even joined MCAA.

The commitment of the local team is very important. They are responsible for a huge amount of work in the days and weeks before the event. Vignesh and Ehsanul, our two board members in Darmstadt, did tremendous work. In addition, they gained strong support from their host institute.

6. How did you finance the seminar?

The main issue we faced was that we had a Chapter budget of €1 000 for the year and the catering for the event was estimated as €1 300 for 70-100 people. We decided that we would ask each member to pay €20. We found out that charging a small amount did not adversely affect registration or attendance and covered catering expenses. Some participants paid the money from their own pockets. Other participants wanted to charge the fee to their project budget. Inova+ very helpfully looked after invoicing for us. Inova+ found out that our seminar in Germany was covered by Belgian law and that MCAA does not need to pay any Value Added Tax (VAT) on attendance fees. This is interesting information for any future MCAA training events across Europe.

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In future we will be more active in looking for sponsorship. Approaching a company for sponsorship and allowing them to promote themselves as an attractive corporate employer is easily imaginable in Germany.

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

The MCAA can define a strategy for organising training events. It could be an interesting business niche for MCAA: the issues are our core interests, hosts will support such events, mobile researchers want such courses in English (not the local language) and we have a large membership of mobile researchers. There are plenty of issues that are of particular relevance to the MCAA members: career development, innovation, start-ups, soft skills, science communication, dual careers and grant writing. Our career event used content from external speakers. We must develop our own speakers and content – that requires hard work. Every Marie Curie fellowship includes the need for Fellows to partake in career development training, outreach activities and Researchers' Night, and for such activities to be detailed in proposals and in reports. MCAA Chapters can focus their energy on such activities and become the brand name for training and outreach. Participation of our Alumni members in MCAA can be a positive point for their own grant proposals. Host organisations are very open to hosting our events and paying for career development training.

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

The networking of the Chapter was much strengthened. Most importantly, our own members appreciate real activity. Secondly, we improved the awareness of hosts and national agencies that the MCAA exists and is a serious organisation. Thirdly, the MCAA Executive and Contractors gave great support to our efforts. The MCAA contractors are professional administrators that work for us. That is really very valuable.

We learnt that MCAA Chapters can provide career development training for Marie Curie Fellows that host organisations are willing to pay for.

Our members were empowered to become active in MCAA. I was approached by many members on the day, who had great ideas for further events.

9. What is the German Chapter's strategy for the year ahead? What activities do you foresee?

In 2016 we are planning the following events:

- career event for humanities and social sciences, Berlin;
- second career event;
- negotiating participation in Researchers' Night proposal for 2016 and 2017;
- Café Scientifique in Cologne.

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The MCAA has become observer of the Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE)

We are pleased to inform you that the Policy on Successful Researchers Working Group has become an Observer within the Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE). We met Marco Masia, Chair of the Working Group, to find out more about this exciting opportunity.

1. Doctor Masia, you're the Chair of the Policy on Successful Researchers Working Group. Could you tell us about the group's recent activities?

The group has been working on many different activities, most of them intended to prepare position papers or suggestions for the Commission. In particular, we are preparing three documents to address issues often overlooked in Marie Curie Actions, such as Fellows' relations with Host Institutions and the Principal investigator, issues related to gender and work-life balance, and the implementation of career development and outreach activities.

In addition, we have recently conducted a poll among our members to understand how familiar they are with Research Integrity. The results suggest that many Fellows have witnessed research misconduct and that they feel training is needed. Therefore, in the long term, we aim to introduce European Commission Research Integrity courses for future MSC Fellows. In the short term, we would like to contract an external company to provide the courses.

The policy group already has experience of external partnerships. For example, the Nature Publishing Group and Elsevier are currently providing *discounts* to our members after a brief negotiation led by our group. These kinds of partnerships were suggested in one of the first policy documents that we produced last year.

Finally, we are organising a webinar on pressing policy issues for European Researchers. It will be moderated by a highly respected journalist who will interview representatives of different stakeholders, from the Commission to the institutes, and to the researchers.

2. How many members do you have and how many are your targeting?

Currently we have 23 members but we are going to reorganise the membership as many are no longer active and we are receiving a large number of applications. In fact, we need to streamline our operations to deliver better, and possibly more, results. In my experience, 23 is too a high number and I would prefer to limit the number to 10. Ten active members work much more efficiently than many unmotivated people! We are anyways open to proposals from outside the WG that target issues relevant for our Alumni. So, any feedback from Alumni outside the WG is more than welcome!

The Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE) is an independent platform of

3. European learned societies and scientific organisations. The Working Group has become an observer. What led to this?

Membership comprises important bodies such as the EMBO and the European Physical Society to cite just a few. More or less a year ago, the ISE invited our association to participate in their General Assembly. It was then that our board suggested joining hte ISE as external members and I am currently the representative for the MCAA.

4. What will be the role of the Working Group as an Observer?

Being observer members, we are not taking part in the decision-making process. Nonetheless, we are actively involved in their activities. In particular, we are currently part of the working group on Scientific Advice in Europe. The aim of this WG is to organise

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a workshop that will include up to 20 experts representing the views of practitioners, analysts and academics on the topic. The workshop will be held under *Chatham House Rules*. A report of the findings will presented at appropriate policy-making and academic forums.

5. Does the MCAA have the option of becoming a member of this organisation in the future?

I hope so! The observer status expires after 12 months; then we have to decide whether to be members and pay the relative fee, or not. I think that the Association would benefit a lot from being a member of the ISE in terms of visibility, and in terms of connections with other excellent organisations in Europe. This decision will be taken by the new board of the Association next summer.

6. Would you like to share information on any of the Working Group's other initiatives?

We are still in the phase of planning another initiative to start a sort of "mentoring mechanism" among Fellows within the Association, whereby senior Alumni advise juniors on career choices. At the moment I don't have more details as we still have to work on the idea; hopefully, the mechanism will be proposed by the summer 2016 and implemented shortly after.

Marco Masia

MCAA News section

MCAA as Dissemination Channel in two HORIZON 2020 proposals on Gender Equality: the FELIA and ViaGEP projects

The GEMS (Gender Equality for Mobile Researchers in Science) Working Group undertook several networking activities in 2014-2015, resulting in good links and contacts with key European players on gender equality. These links were exploited in two proposals submitted to the EU call for proposals GERI4:

- ***TOPIC: Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans, a CSA of Science with and for Society of HORIZON 2020, namely FELIA (FEmale Life in Academia)***
- ***ViaGEP (Vital Accelerator for Gender Equality Plans) led respectively by the University of Wolverhampton, UK, and VITAE, UK.***

The MCAA is tasked with disseminating the results of Marie Curie projects to universities. Doing so gives the MCAA better visibility at European level.

FELIA project proposal

The FELIA project aims to achieve structural change in various disciplines in European research organisations by removing and reducing barriers to the recruitment, retention and career progression of women researchers. It would address gender imbalances in decision-making processes and strengthen the gender dimension in research programmes. Increasing women's participation in research and academia, and promoting gender equality, is vital for the competitiveness of European research.

To address EU priorities and challenges on gender equality in research, FELIA brings together a consortium of 12 organisations from 7 EU Member States and 2 Associate countries to develop and implement Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in 8 RPOs (Research Performing Organisations) and universities. It will also promote GEPs in a further 60 RPOs. A training package is designed to further embed gender equality practices. To leverage the projects results, a comprehensive dissemination, exploitation and sustainability work package would reach academics, students, research and institutional managers, research funding organisations, policy-makers and the general public.

The project will also provide tailored support for early-career women researchers through:

- **Training and mentoring** to share experiences and best practices identified during this project, better equipping women researchers to apply for, and secure, academic posts and promotion, thus contributing to increasing the number of women researchers in European universities and beyond;
- **Providing the opportunity for three PhD and two Postdoctoral Researchers** to advance their research and careers in the area of gender equality, serving as case studies for defining best practices in actual working conditions. These early-career researchers will gain from the project, enabling them in turn to help raise awareness of gender equality, and thus improving the position of women in the wider European area. This, inter alia, will help strengthen the European Research Area (ERA).

The scientific results will be incorporated into the HR practices of participating universities. The consortium is therefore confident of having a real impact. Furthermore, a handbook, a set of best practice notes and case studies will be disseminated to other European RPOs, Higher Education Institutions and RFOs.

ViaGEP project proposal

The ViAGEP consortium is led by Vitae in the UK and will utilise current international expertise and good practice to work with a small number of starting stage institutions (RPOs) and experts from different Member States in order to:

- accelerate the delivery of GEP within partner organisations (RPOs and RFOs);

MCAA News section

- create universal, scalable and transferable frameworks, tools and resources that will be disseminated via EURAXESS;

- provide a lasting legacy of practice, resources and tools for other ERA organisations, building capacity across ERA.

The project's expected duration is three years. Our approach would ensure that a long-term legacy remains in order to encourage the creation of gender equality plans – and ultimately opportunities for women in research across the European Research Area. Our project would harness European best practice and expertise, building strategic and operational collaboration between organisations tackling gender equality. The outputs would be the implementation of successful gender equality plans in participating organisations, stronger European cross-cultural collaborations in pursuit of success in this agenda, and resources to disseminate through EURAXESS portals and other mechanisms. This will be supported by mentoring and evaluation processes, including longitudinal analysis of impact.

We, as GEMS WG, would like to invite our MCAA members to express their interest in collaborating to the dissemination of the two project proposal above, once approved.

With my Best Wishes,

Gianna Avellis.
Chair of GEMS WG
avellisgianna@gmail.com
MCAA
c/o INOVAMAIS
Avenue des Arts 24
B-1000 Brussels, Belgium

Research

A peek into the second Horizon 2020 Work Programme – What to expect in 2016 - 2017

The European Commission adopted the new Horizon 2020 Work Programme on 13 October 2015 and the first calls for proposal opened on 20 October 2015.

The Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2016-17 sets out the European Commission's plan for the next 12 months, when we will see a broad range of funding opportunities through calls for proposals, public procurements and other actions like the Horizon Prizes.

This document includes separate work programmes for the European Research Council (ERC), the Joint Research Centre (JRC), Euratom, and the Strategic Innovation Agenda for the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT).

The programme's structure reflects the overall aims of Horizon 2020, focusing on the EU's long-term priorities and addressing societal challenges while providing the flexibility to tackle new problems as they emerge.

Priorities

Through 23 initiatives, the programme will support the modernisation of Europe's manufacturing industry, the digitalisation of European industry, the development of strong and sustainable economies, and the integration of environmental, transport, energy and digital networks in Europe's urban areas.

A key objective is to close the research and innovation divide between countries and bring excellence to all corners of the EU. The second Horizon 2020 Work Programme will also address the emerging challenge of migration by funding research to ensure the security of the EU external borders and to facilitate the legitimate flow of people and goods.

The Work Programme is aligned with the priorities of European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. Since the beginning of his mandate in November 2014, has seen one of his key tasks to be kick-starting jobs, growth and investment. Throughout the past year, the European Commission has put in place the building blocks of the Digital Single Market, the Energy Union, a Capital Markets Union and an ambitious roadmap for making Europe a stronger global actor.

Key figures on the Work Programme 2016 -2017

The European Commission will invest EUR 16 billion in research and innovation in the next two years. The budget for 2016 is expected to be around EUR 10 billion, with an increase of approximately 12 % compared to the 2015 budget.

- Around EUR 2 billion of the total funding in the 2016-2017 Work Programme will go to **small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).**
- In 2016, almost EUR 1.7 billion will be available through ERC calls. Around 10 000 fellows will also benefit from training and career development opportunities thanks to **Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions.**
- EUR 340 million will be available for the development and operation of new pan-European research infrastructures and the integration of national infrastructures.
- **EUR 421 million will support research and innovation that leads to innovative digital solutions, including the European Open Science Cloud.**
- **EUR 1.7 billion will be invested in wiser energy use and the fight against climate change.**

Research

- **A further EUR 1.7 billion will be invested to strengthen Europe's industrial base as well as maintain and reinforce the internal market.**

In total, the Work Programme for 2016-2017 includes 63 calls for proposals and around 600 different topics.

Besides the new Work Programme, other funding opportunities are available through the calls of the Joint Undertakings Clean Sky 2, Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI) 2, *Electronic Components and Systems for European Leadership* (ECSEL), the Fuel Cells and Hydrogen Joint Undertaking (FCH), as well as ERA-Nets and Joint Programming Initiatives (JPI).

More information

The Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2016-2017 is available here while the first calls for proposals have been published on the Participant Portal.

The European Commission has also published a fact-sheet summarising key initiatives and including an overview table of funding calls 2016-2017.

Research

The Transport Challenge in the 2016-2017 work programme – a couple of things to note when preparing a proposal

Within the newly published Horizon 2020 Work Programme for 2016–2017, the Societal Challenge 4 aims to achieve a European transport system that is smart, green, safe and seamless for the benefit of the economy and society.

This specific part of the second Horizon 2020 Work Programme comprises the following four lines of activity:

- resource-efficient transport that respects the environment;
- better mobility, less congestion, more safety and security for all citizens;
- global leadership for the European transport industry;
- socio-economic and behavioural research and forward-looking activities for policy making.

Calls on cross-cutting focus area in Horizon 2020

In addition to these three calls for proposals, the new Work Programme on "Smart, green and integrated transport" contributes to a number of cross-cutting focus areas: smart cities and communities with nature-based solutions, and energy efficiency through the European Local Energy Assistance (ELENA) facilities, blue growth in Societal Challenge 2,.

This part of the Work Programme also contributes to the small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) instrument, to which only SMEs can apply (SMEinst-10-2016-2017): 'Small business innovation research for transport and smart cities mobility'. For this specific topic, proposals can be submitted at any time. Evaluation is carried out several times a year.

For 2016 and 2017, several public procurement actions have been announced that will be implemented by calls for tenders or by other instruments. These cover sustainable infrastructure, supporting the exchange of knowledge, information and experiences through the ELTIS urban mobility observatory, and the role of urban mobility in supporting the 2011 White Paper objectives.

Additional public procurement actions have been announced for 2017, including the establishment of a transport research and innovation monitoring system, dissemination and exploitation of results and support for the development, implementation and evaluation of transport research and innovation policy activities.

Furthermore, project proposals can be submitted for all of the Horizon 2020 Societal Challenges under the instrument: Fast track to innovation pilot calls.

Within the call 'mobility for growth', a coordination and support action (CSA) between the EU and Africa has been announced. This is MG-3.6-2016 'Euro-African initiative on road safety and traffic management'.

Finally, the call for the 'European green vehicles initiative' contains a section on the implementation of an ERA-NET. This is MG-12-2016, 'ERA-NET co-fund on electromobility'.

More information

All documents are available on the Participant Portal.

Important general eligibility criteria and explanations regarding the evaluation process can be found in the 'General annexes' of the new Work Programme.

Please note that registration with the Participant Portal is mandatory if you would like to particpate in Horizon 2020.

Actions

Want to become a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow? Individual Fellowships (IF) in the spotlight

The first Marie Skłodowska-Curie action (MSCA) grants of the EU Horizon 2020 programme have been given. We met seven of these lucky Fellows. Some of them have already started working on their project, others are still waiting; all shared with us their recipe for benefiting from an Individual Fellowship (IF).

What is an Individual Fellowship?

Individual Fellowships support the mobility of experienced researchers (in possession of a doctoral degree or with at least four years of research experience) through European Fellowships and Global Fellowships (European Fellowships last from one to two years, Global Fellowships from two to three years).

They provide opportunities to work on research in a European context (EU Member States and Associated Countries) or outside Europe.

A Career Development Plan is established jointly by the supervisors and the researcher. In addition to research objectives, this plan comprises the researcher's training and career needs, including training on transferable skills, planning for publications and participation in conferences.

Mobility across borders as well as across sectors is strongly encouraged.

Our Fellows

Maria Jose Estaran (Spain) – currently working at the Université Libre de Bruxelles in Belgium on a project which aims to increase understanding of the cultic practices of the peoples conquered by Rome.

Laura Iacolina (Italy) – her project aims at understanding the genomic response to African Swine Fever infection in European Sus scrofa. She conducts her research at Aalborg University in Denmark.

Yueh-Hsin Lo (Taiwan) – her project is called 'Disentangling the effects of CO_2 fertilisation, nutrient limitation and water availability on forest ecosystem processes: Estimating their long-term consequences on SW European forests'. Our Fellow is currently based in Pamplona, Spain.

Evanthia Papadopoulou (Cyprus) – working in Essen, Germany, to develop a methodology that allows the sensitive multiplex detection of cellular mRNA biomarkers utilising surface-enhanced Raman spectroscopy (SERS) nanoparticle (NP) labels.

James Patterson (Australia) – his research looks at institutional innovation in relation to adapting water governance in cities to climate change. He is based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

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Ryo Sekine (Japan) – analyses the surface chemistry of nanomaterials, the evolution of eco-coronas in the environment and its impact on their interactions with living organisms. He works in the Oxfordshire, in the United Kingdom.

Mladen Slavov (Bulgaria) – his project is called 'Spectral theory for non-selfadjoint Markov generators and their semigroups and its applications in the study of self-similarity and continuous state branching processes'. He conducts his research in Sofia, Bulgaria.

How do I find information about Individual Fellowship?

Are you surrounded by experienced colleagues? They represent an efficient source of information! Papdopoulou heard about the MSCA through other postdoctorants in the laboratory where she was working. She then benefited from training organised in her university. Estaran and Yueh-Hsin learnt about the MSCA when older colleagues said they were applying for a Fellowship.

Sekine and Slavov were informed about the IF opportunities through their future host institutions *"My host institution had a number of successful IF recipients and had encouraged me to apply in the next round,"* Says Sekine.

James Patterson was was brought up to speed thanks to his professor, who then became his supervisor.

At what moment in my career should I apply for an Individual Fellowship?

Our Fellows decided to apply at various points of their professional paths. For Esteran, it was immediately after her Ph.D. *"I thought that my application was going to be rejected some years before being accepted, in the best-case scenario. And it passed on the first try, with flying colours!"* she says. So did Patterson's.

Iacolina, Papadopoulou and Sekine already held post-doc positions when they decided to apply.

Yueh-Hsin's case was more unusual: *"I was in my last year (fifth year after my Ph.D) of the junior researcher stage. But because I had had two kids during these five years, my eligibility period had been extended".*

Slavov was already a probationary lecturer but decided to apply for an IF anyway: *"I felt the need to pursue my research interests more intensively,"* he explains.

How do I choose my host organisation?

Your choice of host organisation and supervisor will have an impact on your application.

Esteran considers herself lucky as she was contacted by her current supervisor, whereas Iacolina and Slavov were very interested in the work conducted by their host organisation: *"My host organisation showed great enthusiasm for supporting me,"* says Slavov.

Yueh-Hsin wanted above all to work in Spain, and oriented her choice accordingly.

For Patterson, the choice was the result of a combination of factors: *"My initial motivation was largely due to the professor and institute who I wanted to work with. I also really like the Netherlands as a country for its extensive and close research networks in water and environmental governance, and pragmatically, it's very conducive for English speakers. (It's also a really beautiful and fun place to live!)."*

How do I prepare my application?

Ensure that you have between two and four months to prepare your application carefully.

Esteran wrote her application over a whole summer: *"It is a very demanding application and one has to*

Actions

choose every word. Every nuance has its importance," she says.

Patterson highlights the role the role of his supervising professor: *"he helped steer me towards new and innovative research ideas".*

For Slavov, it is essential to consider not only the research project but also the deliverables, the milestones and administrative arrangements if you want your application to be successful.

How do I organise my work within my host organisation?

According to Patterson, it is necessary to build up a strong relationship with your future host organisation from the beginning *"Spending a couple of months visiting my future institute when preparing the application was extremely helpful for building a relationship with my host organisation. It gave me a feel for the organisation, and they got to know me a bit, which was very helpful when I began my Fellowship because I was able to integrate quite quickly."*

Iacolina stresses the importance of networking: *"I am currently establishing a network of collaborations within and outside the host organisation. Specifically, within the host organisation, I have regular meetings with my supervisor and constant informal discussions with all the staff members, who come from different research fields and can provide new inputs."*

For Slvavov, it is important to have an appropriate balance between independence of research, guidance and training from senior and experienced researchers.

To what should I pay particular attention?

Papadopoulou highlights the difficulty of the language when one settles in a foreign country. Originally from Cyprus, the German language represented an obstacle during the preparation of her application: *"The host's website was in German, which made it really difficult for me to find valuable information."* The same issue applied when she settled in the country: *"The contract is in German as well as all the relevant paperwork that I had to sign. In addition, I found difficulties finding accommodation and understanding the tax system of Germany."* She could fortunately find some help from post-docs and a legal tax advisor.

For Iacolina and Yueh-Hsin, the terminology used in the application was sometimes hard to understand. *"In the preparation of the application the jargon was sometimes the biggest obstacle to overcome,"* says Iacolina. Ensure that you're familiar with the Marie Curie terminology before applying!

In addition, Slavov highlights the challenge that the application represented for someone coming from a new EU country to the extent that *"it seems some of the expertise on writing such projects has not yet trickled down".*

Sekine emphasises the difficulty of finding a balance between the application and work: *"I found that getting up early and working on the draft before going into the office was most effective, because once I was in the office there was no time to think about the proposal,"* he muses.

Will all my needs be covered by the funding?

The majority of our Fellows consider that the funding will cover all of their needs.

Nevertheless, Iacolina thinks that she will have to apply for additional funds to cover some research expenses. *"The money allocated for research is not enough to cover all the research costs as well as participation in international conferences and training workshops,"* echoes Papadopoulou. She adds: *"Different countries have completely different tax systems, which is not taken into account by the European Commission".* She considers there should be a correction factor with respect to the net salary and not the gross amount for each country.

Esteran has a piece of advice in case you would like to get married! *"Do it before the application deadline. I got married after the deadline and before beginning my contract and I couldn't receive the Family Allowance."*

Actions

Interesting facts about the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (2007-2013)

MARIE CURIE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION (MCAA)

Interesting facts about

THE MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE ACTIONS

2007-2013

1

23% of participants **work within industry**

Of these participants **34%** work in a small to medium sized enterprise (SME)

2

38% of participants **are women**

3

90% of participants

are in employment **2 years** after their fellowship

4

9/10 from the **top Research and Development (R&D) investors** in Europe **participating in MSCA**

5

From the **Shanghai top 500 world university ranking**, **2/3** participate in MSCA

6

+ 130 nationalities and **host organisations** in **+80 countries**

7

1/3 of Marie Skłodowska-Curie researchers **are from outside the EU**

Source: "Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions - Your next career move!"

Projects

A Marie Curie Story: studying samples that don't work

I wondered whether or not science and research were at all worthy during my last months as a PhD student. Once I had defended my thesis, I needed a change. I was willing to do anything to make this change in my life: beginning new projects, moving to a different place, changing lab mates, changing…— I needed a change.

I contacted everyone I knew who could offer me a job as a post-doc or at least help me to apply for scholarships abroad. After some meandering, New York became a preferred destination. My partner and I were seeking a big city with opportunities for both. From my side, I had been in Florida for a short while during my PhD and worked with a professor who could provide me with excellent references— having good references is more important than it should be.

I was offered with a one-year contract as a post-doc in NY, and at the same time I applied for a Marie Curie Outgoing Fellowship. These fellowships were the equivalent of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions offered nowadays by the European Commission. The main idea behind the fellowships is for the Fellow to leave the European Union and learn about a new topic, and then to come back and apply it to a new field — an interesting live lesson: go visit those who know, learn from what they do, and apply it back at home. Once in NY the odds smiled at me and **my Marie Curie project was awarded.** I was first in the waiting list and fortunately for me there were some funds available. That meant I had to develop a scientific project on my own.

In the US, people are friendly and they help you both at work and everywhere else with lots of little things. However, nobody really tells you what overall direction to take. For example, in my job I was helped with all details when setting up a new machine I bought, but no one ever questioned me as to whether my purchase was at all relevant. In Barcelona, where I came from, it works the other way around: people show little interest in your day-by-day but there is always someone that follows you from a distance to make sure you take the right decisions, both at work and in life. **I felt a bit alone, with my European standards, carrying out a scientific project for the first time.** I told myself that if I worked hard I would get successful output from the project — but that was not enough.

My project involved fabricating tiny samples that could create tiny magnetic waves — just like water waves in the ocean, but with oscillations of the magnetisation in a solid material. The goal was to image them with X-rays (obviously there was no simpler way to do it because of the nature of the waves).

Every other week I took a ridiculously luxurious bus to go from NY to Cornell University, where I stayed in an old apartment, sharing a small room with other researchers (all of them were foreigners because a local researcher would have never accepted that sort of accommodation). **I spent most of the time locked in a cleanroom, nanofabricating samples that would allow me to do my experiment, imaging magnetisation waves.** The other weeks I worked in the office and in the lab in NY, trying to find ideas for using the magnificent and promising magnetic waves for building super computers and bio-inspired devices that emulate how the brain functions. But of course, I first needed to image them. During the weekends and the weeks I stayed in NY I enjoyed the city. I met people, I ran, and I took cooking classes.

In the lab I worked I met plenty of interesting people. We all had our own little project to work on, and although we did not share much about our scientific jobs, we developed a strong friendship. There I met DB, another post doc who was a bit too stiff and had limited social skills. He told me, the first day we met, that his ideas had been stolen by other people in all his previous jobs. I just avoided having contact with such a character.

After a year of working hard and having achieved almost nothing, I began wondering whether or not I was doing things right. **The lack of results at work contrasted however with the joy I experienced living in the city with friends, and especially with my partner.**

With only one month to go before **we had to go to the Berkeley synchrotron for a first try at imaging magnetisation waves with x-rays and my samples**

Projects

were not working — and I knew this better than anyone else. I tried to tell this to the other people involved in order to stop and postpone the experiment. However, I probably did not make myself clear and the experiment went ahead as planned. Surprisingly to me, a week before going to Berkeley I learnt that DB was also coming as a collaborator. It seems that he had been involved in the conception of the idea before I came to NY (and probably someone responsible for the whole project was unable to refute it). I had already been warned by DB that he used to have ideas stolen.

I found myself trying to image magnetisation waves in a synchrotron with samples that did not work at all. I had tried everything until the very last moment. **I had spent nights and days and whole weekends in the cleanroom and lab.** I had even forgotten the existence of life outside of my experiment. Synchrotron experiments are usually organised in blocks of time corresponding to whole days. We had secured three days in a row and although I knew the experiment could not work, we had to be there all day and all night to watch for something.

The last day of the experiments, I got up at noon because I had had the night shift, and went to eat something. I walked alone down the street and I perceived a faint homeless smell, which did not surprised me at first because Berkeley has two homeless people at each corner (and surprisingly residents seem not to see them). Anyway, the light homeless smell persisted after two blocks and I finally realised it was me. **Focusing on the work had made me forget about everything else;** my jacket stank, my left shoe had a hole, and my hairstyle had gone one level further than the mad scientist style. I ate and afterwards, I decided to buy new clothes and shoes. I cut my hair, I shaved, and I headed towards the synchrotron in order to do my last shift in the experiment. That night we came up with some interesting ideas in the synchrotron on how to make those damn samples work. **But we failed once more.**

The next day I went to visit a friend of mine in Davis, a two-hour drive away, and I was sick for the three days I was there.

The following year, in NY and later on in Barcelona, I managed to create good samples and image the magnetisation waves with everything I had learnt on my first trip to Berkeley.

Ferran Macià

Funding

The Benefits of co-funding – The new International Fellowship Mobility Programme for Experienced Researchers in Croatia (NEWFELPRO)

The new International Fellowship Mobility Programme for Experienced Researchers in Croatia (NEWFELPRO) is a Fellowship project run by the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport (MSES).

Ivana Nina Uncović benefited from this programme combined with COFUND and had the opportunity to work on her project in art history. Read her inspiring story!

Ivana Nina Unković

I discovered the COFUND scheme for the first time on the website of the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports in June 2013.

After Croatia got the COFUND opportunity, the country started to organise workshops in all Croatian universities and iInstitutions for scientists in different areas to promote the application. Intrigued by this new opportunity, I went to two workshops.

At that time, I was very dissatisfied with my current career path and position. I had been working for many years on a fixed-time contract in a State institution while finishing my PhD. I had the minimum salary, without scientific opportunities and advancement. Even though I was trying my best to present my scientific papers in conferences and various workshops, through scholarships and grants, my supervisors and the director of the institution didn't offer me a permanent job.

I knew that the COFUND application was the opportunity for which I had been waiting for so long. I decided then to write a good proposal. While I was writing the application, I was unemployed. If you are not employed in a scientific institution or State institution, it is very hard to find a host institution without back-up from the return Host Institution.

By doing research on the Internet, I was able to find the best supervisor for the project – Prof Dr Sonja Ana Hoyer. Thanks to her and to my Ph.D mentor, Prof Dr Ivana Prijatelj Pavicic, I was able to present my project to the best eligible institutions. The project was presented to the dean and vice dean of Faculty of Arts (University in Ljubljana) Prof Dr Branka Kalenic Ramsak and Prof Dr Martin Germ and afterwards to the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (University in Split), Prof Dr Aleksandar Jakir.

My project 'Comparison of Croatian and Slovenian conservators Ljubo Karaman and France Stele in the context of Vienna School of art history' is a sequel to my Ph.D research in the field of cultural heritage, the theory and history of monument conservation in the ex Yugoslavia region.

The education of conservators Ljubo Karaman and France Stele in Vienna, their professional relationship and the comparison of their working methodologies remains unexplored, and contains crucial information regarding the history and development on conservation practices in Croatia, Slovenia, and all other ex-Yugoslav regions.

Funding

This project will systematically compare all aspects and stages of Karaman's and Stele's professional activities in the context of monument protection in Croatia and Slovenia, after the collapse of Austrian Hungarian Monarchy until the end of the Second World War, aiming to unify all the interdisciplinary information available on the development of conservation practices in the region, and producing high-quality informational output in multiple media formats. This will enrich existing literature on the subject and provide opportunities for enhancing the education of future generations of both Croatian and Slovenian conservators.

I am currently researching archive and photo material in various institutions in Slovenia and Austria while also lecturing at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Academy of Fine Arts.

The Host and the Return Host Institution invited me to become a member of the Organising Committee for International Conference for PhD candidates and recent PhDs, and a member of editorial board. I am also writing a book proposal on my current research, probably to be published by the Academic Publishing Division of the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana.

The new International Fellowship Mobility Programme for Experienced Researchers in Croatia **(NEWFELPRO) is a fellowship project** of the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport (MSES).

My project is co-financed by the Marie Curie FP7-PEOPLE-2011-COFUND programme. Its total value is EUR 7 million, out of which 60% is financed from national sources. The project duration is from 2013 until 2017.

The outgoing fellowship scheme is designed for Croatian researchers who aim to improve their scientific potential by spending a period of time in top class research institutions worldwide. The incoming fellowship scheme and the reintegration fellowship scheme are directed at researchers who are presently working abroad and wish to work with scientists at public scientific institutes and universities in Croatia.

Thanks to this co-funding, you have the opportunity to stop drain brain in your country, by finishing the last year of your project in the country of your origin and thus enriching the scientific community there. The option to apply as an unemployed scientist is a huge benefit. You really feel like an equal staff member within your host institution, which opens up opportunities for better career possibilities later on. You are mostly recognised within the scientific community. For example, after a year and a half of research, I was selected as Scientist of the Week on the Facebook page of the Marie Curie Actions and received several questions about possible collaborations.

Nevertheless, with this co-funding, you have to be prepared to arrange moving and your whole social infrastructure by yourself. In my case I didn't have the right legal information before moving and I consequently wasted time and money finding an apartment. The funding I am now receiving is not enough for standard living expenses. If your Host Institution cannot provide you with an apartment free of charge or with a reduced rent, it can be very difficult.

After the end of the project, there is no guarantee that your country of origin will help you find a permanent job, which they should do in theory if they are committed to stopping brain drain.

But the COFUND also increased my determination to disseminate knowledge. I am very much engaged in the Marie Curie Community and try to be as active as possible. I am currently the president of the Croatian Marie Curie Alumni Group.

On 10 and 11 December 2015 I attended the 'COFUND – synergies to fuel researchers' careers' conference in Luxembourg. The programme covered management issues and challenges for COFUND under FP7, COFUND experiences and challenges and new elements under COFUND H2020. In the workshop Career pathways and histories: Excellence in context', I was selected to give a presentation entitled "From unemployment to a promising career".

Funding

The main conclusion to be taken from the conference is that the COFUND scheme has become the most popular and visible form of MSCA Actions and that, as such, needs to continue being as inclusive as possible to support researchers' careers. The new financial elements introduced under Horizon 2020 enable synergies with the structural funds, which should further broaden the impact of COFUND schemes on a European level.

If you plan to submit a COFUND application, never let anyone tell you that you cannot succeed, take your time to write a good project proposal. Attend the workshops that could help you in the writing process, find out about tax in the country of your host institution and thoroughly research your host institution – for example the infrastructure and where you can ask for help during your stay.

Think 'outside the box' – apply for a project where you can lead your research in collaboration with a non-academic sector – then you will have a higher chance of being selected.

Never give up because being a part of the Marie Curie Alumni Association is a very honourable moment for the scientist in you.

IVANA NINA UNKOVIĆ
NEWFELPRO Marie Curie Fellow/Researcher and Lecturer
University of Ljubljana
Faculty of Arts
Department of Art History

Events

MCAA General Assembly & Annual Conference: Venice, 4-5 March 2016

The MCAA Board has made its choice amongst the various excellent proposals made by different member groups for the hosting of the 2016 MCAA General Assembly. The event will be held across two days in Venice, Italy on 4th and 5th March 2016. The winning proposal was put together by the North Italy Chapter, in cooperation with various local partners, in particular the Ca' Foscari University.

The MCAA Board wishes to thank the other member groups and sponsors who put together a number of excellent alternative proposals; we hope that some of these exiting offers can be re-submitted for the 2017 MCAA General Assembly in due course.

Please make a note of the dates in your diary. You can also pre-register using the 'Register' button below; this lets other members know you are planning to be there..

PROGRAMME: The provisional agenda for the two days is available here. This may change between now and the event.

ELECTIONS: Members attending the GA will be invited to elect a new MCAA Board and Executive Committee for the next two years. Any suitably-qualified MCAA member who whould like to stand for election should complete the on-line candidate form.

POSTERS: The invitation for MCAA members to submit **posters for the conference** is now closed. Over 70 members have submitted posters, so we can look forward to seeing a wealth of examples of the work being done and to meeting the researchers involved.

VISAS: To attend the GA, some members may need to obtain a visa to enter the EU. We advise you not to leave this until the last minute. If you need an official letter of invitation to the GA for your visa application, please send an e-mail request to contact@mariecuriealumni.eu including the following six elements (the first five as they appear on your passport): 1) First names; 2) Surname(s) (family name(s); 3) Date of Birth; 4) Nationality; 5) Passport Number; and 6) your current organisation / employer.

ACCOMMODATION: The approximate GPS coordinates of the *Università Ca' Foscariare* are 45.434501, 12.326040. There are many hotels and other accommodation options in Venice, but here are some conveniently-situated (and more affordable) examples:

- Hotel Al Sole website
- Hotel Ca' Pisani website
- Hotel Papadopoli website
- Hotel Santa Chiara website | map
- (Bed&Breakfast) Casa Sant'Andrea website

Further details or updates on the programme, venue, and travel arrangements might published between now and the event - please watch this space.

Non-members: Non-members interested in obtaining an invitation to attend the 'conference' component of the event (the General Assembly is only accessible to MCAA members) are invited to send an e-mail stating their interest/reasons for wanting to attend. Please note that MCAA members will be given priority, and registrations of non-members will be accepted on the basis of availability of seats.

Date:

Friday, 4 March, 2016 to Saturday, 5 March, 2016, 09:00 - 17:00

Location City: Venice
Italy

Events

Webinar "Overcoming EU countries' inequalities in science"

The Policy for Successful Researchers Working Group is organising an important online event on 15 March; this is perhaps the first time that the Association is reaching out to the whole scientific community and not only for the benefit of Alumni.

The webinar is the first in a planned series of webinars on European Scientific Policies. Being aware of European policies is of great importance for those involved in activities likely to be affected by them in the long run.

The MCAA has an as yet unexploited potential for content creation and for being a protagonist in the policy debate. The webinar series is strategically intended to unleash this potential and, possibly, to encourage the membership to more actively engage with discussions on the future of the EU.

The first webinar will be organised with the Euro-Scientist webzine. We will be hosting a round table involving Octavi Quintana-Trias (EC – DG Research and Innovation), Amaya Moro-Martín (Euroscience), Kieron Flanagan (Manchester Business School) and Katrien Maes (LERU) on inequalities in the European Research Area. The debate will be moderated by a science journalist who collaborates with high-impact journals.

Overcoming EU countries' inequalities in science is a hot policy topic, given the impact of these inequalities on the distribution of knowledge among EU countries. The current knowledge gradient has led to capacity gaps that threaten the output of the whole EU, in turn decreasing competitiveness at the global level. While some local administrators are not yet aware of the problem, European agencies and other stakeholders are.

The event will be broadcast on 15 March at 17:30 CET. Please register here:

https://www.eventbrite.com/e/one-eu-one-science-overcoming-eu-countries-inequalities-in-science-registration-20993944453

Marco Masia

Events

195 nations sign the Paris Agreement, paving the way for global climate action

On Saturday 12 December, with the COP21 climate change conference in Paris having already included three overnight negotiation sessions and now running a day overtime, the plenary session where an agreement was to be finally adopted was delayed by nearly two hours. Afternoon was becoming evening and rumours were circulating that a last-minute hitch could foil everything.

Negotiators and journalists alike could feel the tension mount. Those who had been present in Copenhagen in 2009, when the failure to secure a global climate agreement was a crushing disappointment, felt uncomfortable flashbacks.

However, over the previous two weeks, Paris had felt very different to Copenhagen. There was a positive buzz in the French capital to replace the impending sense of doom felt during the cold Scandinavian winter six years beforehand.

Then, after 7pm, the French Foreign Affairs minister Laurent Fabius invited the 195 nations present to adopt the draft text, and with unanimous approval the Paris Agreement was born.

No-one will pretend it is perfect, but a global agreement is undoubtedly a step forward in a process that has not always been easy.

What's in the deal?

The deal does not set legally binding targets for greenhouse gas emissions, but countries are required to submit pledges that are reviewed every five years. This removes the need for the UN climate change process to act as a global arbiter, and rather positions it as a global forum where strategies are developed and reviewed. The hope is that those countries that fall behind will increase their efforts through peer pressure.

Over 180 countries had already submitted their five-year pledges before the Paris conference had started. This bottom-up approach was a key factor for success, in contrast to the more top-down approach of Copenhagen, where reluctant key players were dragged to the table kicking and screaming.

This strategy also recognises that local solutions will ultimately determine the success of the process.

Aspiration to limit warming to 1.5°C

The text states a goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C over pre-industrial levels, however as of yet does not provide a path to get there. The pledges submitted may limit warming to around 2.7°C by 2100, and scientists warn that the increase may be too much to avoid irreversible and negative consequences. Paris provides a structure, but global ambition will have to increase in future years; this could be achieved through revision of national pledges at five year intervals. The text aim is to achieve zero net greenhouse gas by the second half of the century.

An improved political environment

A variety of factors allowed a deal to be made. The political push by the EU, the excellent management by the French and the willingness of the US and China to push through an agreement were critical factors.

The Kyoto protocol of 1997 had been hampered by a fundamental distinction between developed and developing nations, placing the historical responsibility for CO_2 emissions on first-world states. This was key to American opposition to the Kyoto protocol, but central for industrialising states such as India. While the Paris Agreement does not distinguish both groups entirely, it does place greater emphasis on developed nations. Financing of some $100bn a year has been promised to developing states to aid in the transition to clean energy and adaptation to climate change impacts.

Events

Barack Obama was known to want to a climate legacy from his presidency, and the presence of John Kerry in Paris added to the political capital invested from the US, although both were wary of the Republican-controlled US senate. In China, pollution has become a greater social issue since 2009, and a deal signed with the US in 2014 on climate cooperation paved the way for collaboration in Paris.

This improved political environment was backed up by better science. The latest IPCC report published in 2013 and 2014 was more certain than ever that climate change is man-made, and that further warming will cause irreversible impacts on the planet, urging policy action.

The hard work starts now

Clearly this deal is not a solution by itself, but it represents a step forward that puts everyone on the same page. It is pragmatic rather than idealistic. Many will criticise it for not going far enough, but given the starting point it is an important achievement. However, unlike scientific papers, publication of policy and legislation is not the end of the work, just the beginning.

Like a New Year's Resolution, the hard work starts now and there will be many chances to fail.

Calum MacKichan

Alumni

Two voices conversation – Climate change

Climate change is likely to affect all of us, which is why scientists as well as ordinary people are trying to find solutions. We had a conversation with Riccardo Biondi (from Italy – Chair of the Climate Change group) and Bhavna Rani (Marie Curie Fellow from India) to find out whether the concerns of an expert and a Fellow clash or coincide.

Bhavna Rani is currently working as Marie Curie Early Stage Researcher in the field of Hepatocellular Carcinoma at the Department of Biomedical Sciences and Human Oncology, University of Bari Medical School, Bari, Italy.

Between 2013 and 2015, Riccardo Biondi was a Marie Curie Fellow at the Wegener Center for Climate and Global Change in Graz, Austria. He is currently working at the Institute for Atmospheric Sciences and Climate (ISAC) in Rome, Italy. Specialised in remote sensing and atmospiheric physics, Biondi has published several papers on tropical cyclones.

Bhavna Rani

Riccardo Biondi

1. According to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), climate change is "a change in Earth's overall climate. The change could be in Earth's average temperature, for example. Or it could be a change in Earth's typical precipitation patterns. Observations show that Earth's climate has been warming." Do you agree with this definition? What does climate change represent for you?

Bhavna: I agree with this definition. Climate change is essential to sustain life. Recent global change in the earth's temperature has observable effects on the environment. The effects can be seen in form of floods affecting the agriculture, change in the migratory pattern of the birds, increased rainfall, hurricanes, drought and shrinking of Glaciers.

The average temperature of earth has been increased by 1 degree Fahrenheit, though this increase appears very less in terms of digits, but it has already affected the earth's atmosphere drastically.

Since Climate change can be both man-made and natural. We must need to limit human activities such as limiting the use of fossil fuels to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Riccardo: Climate change is a very broad topic. Scientifically, climate change is based on the atmosphere's change and on atmospheric parameters. Talking about climate change also means that we have to mention the impacts in terms of weather and all the aspects that Bhavna mentioned, like precipitations or heat, but also in different fields.

Scientific climate change has indeed impacts on ethics, society, anthropology, philosophy, agriculture and many other fields. It is not only a change in the atmosphere, but a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary concept.

Bhavna: I agree with you. Climate change is a multidisciplinary concept. Its influence can be witnessed at different levels.

Riccardo: There are different definitions of climate change. There is one scientific definition which involves variation of the environment, environmental parameters, variation in temperatures and variation in the Earth's characteristics.

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Another definition could be the change of life because all these variations influence the life of human beings, animals and plants.

I started working on climate change because this phenomenon was impacting my work.

I started my career to study tropical cyclones and then I followed to studied topics related to climate changes, because I think this topic is really important. I studied tropical cyclones and volcanic eruptions because they impact atmospheric changes. Now I am also studying aerosols (both anthropogenic and natural) in the Indian region since they influence precipitation and atmospheric circulation, not only in this region, but also globally.

In all the topics of my studies and work, I am always looking at connections to climate change. Furthermore, I have initiated a new proposal on climate change involving scientists from different backgrounds and disciplines all part of MCAA.

Bhavna: Did you study India as a sub-continent?

Riccardo: Yes, the aerosols are currently affecting the global atmospheric circulation so it is an important topic.

2. Most scientists think that recent warming can't be explained by nature alone.

Riccardo: There is scientific evidence that the warming is due to the effect of natural and anthropological causes. We need to find out the proportion of each cause. We are not talking about religion! It is not a matter of agreeing or not. We are talking about science and science can demonstrate everything.

Bhavna: Of course recent phenomena can't be explained by nature alone. Human activities are also responsible. We cannot control nature, but we can limit human activities that have an impact on nature. So I believe that human activities should be reduced in terms of greenhouse emissions and encouraged in terms of renewable energies.

3. Although there seems to be a consensus on the necessity of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, some individuals think that we are exaggerating the impact of human activities on the climate. They are called "climate-sceptic". Do you think that these people are enriching the debate, or are they denying the evidence?

Bhavna: For example, some data show that the oceans' water level has not increased that much. And we don't know how high they will be in 100 years. But actually, I am not really convinced by the arguments of these climate-sceptics! There are strong facts that can't be ignored.

We are using a lot of fossil energies. And we cannot say these won't affect the environment and the seasons. We cannot ignore the fact that we are doing wrong.

We have also some evidence that the melting of the ice has increased. But in India, we also say that temperature is changing constantly. And these changes cannot all be related to human activities. Each theory has its opposite. My opinion is 50/50 mixed.

For example, India is a developing county. This means that we need more industry and to increase our quality of life. And India is still using less fossil energy than developed countries, for example the United States.

Countries which started firstly to use non renewable energies are more responsible than the developing countries, and these countries are economically different.

Riccardo: We should distinguish different kinds of "sceptics". Many people are described as "sceptics" but the thing is that they only have different points of view.

On the one hand, there are people that can be defined as "believers". What they say has no scientific basis, and they state that there is no climate change, no ice melting and of course, they shouldn't be listened to. They encourage no discussion.

But on the other hand, there are other scientists defined as "sceptics" because they contest the accuracy of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) analysis and they say that global warming is not caused primary by anthropogenic processes. I can't define them as "sceptics" because I think that

they can contribute to the debate. They can help us understand the real process of climate change. We really don't know everything about global warming and to which extent climate change is due to anthropogenic effects and to natural effects. Anything can be useful and produce interesting results.

In addition, there are also climate change's "believers", stating there is climate change and that we must do anything to reduce the temperatures' increase and that all the changes are related to anthropogenic effects; they don't enrich the discussion either. They don't help solve the problems.

So in a nutshell, if we talk about scientists adding real contributions to scientific topics, I don't define them as "climate sceptics", to the extent that they can help solve several problems.

When we talk about climate changes we think about the production of greenhouse gases which are generating pollution, and they are not just dangerous because of climate changes, but they also generate health problems. So we have to control this pollution and greenhouse gases not only because of climate change, but also for other reasons involving health and life on Earth.

I have worked for three years in the same group of somebody who is considered as a "sceptic" by a large proportion of IPCC scientists. Someone accuses him of being paid by multinational companies to say that climate change is not entirely due to anthropogenic effects. But I know that he's a serious scientist and I know about his research, and he's doing really great work. He is publishing in the same journals as most of the IPCCs. He also publishes in Nature, And if his work wasn't good, he wouldn't publish in important journals. His contribution helps understanding of climate change.

Bhavna: What does he study?

Riccardo: He's working on cosmic rays and solar radiation.

Bhavna: I am also thinking that climate change is putting too much pressure on Western countries and in this sense, climate sceptics can help.

4. According to NASA, "The warming climate likely will cause more floods, droughts and heat waves. The heat waves may get hotter, and hurricanes may get stronger." Riccardo, you have been studying cyclones, is it a phenomenon that you have witnessed already?

Riccardo: Currently, there is no evidence of the intensification of tropical cyclones. Some models predict the intensification of these phenomena in the future, others don't.

Regarding these phenomena, we have to take into account several parameters. Tropical cyclones for example are developed only over oceans, which makes them difficult to measure. Until the 1970s, we only had a few measurements, nothing really significant. Since the 1970s, the number of measurements has increased with satellite availability. But this lack of measurements until the 1970s made it difficult to extract trends. So even if the number of measurements has increased, uncertainty remains and is still very large. So answering this question is difficult.

In general, with extreme phenomena like hurricanes or storms, we must not only consider atmospheric changes, but also land use. Often, the intensity of these extremes phenomena has been evaluated in terms of impacts on the economy, society, damage. But these effects are a combination of real intensity of the extremes like winds, atmospheric parameters and land structure. Everything depends on the terms that you use to evaluate the intensity and the impact of these extremes. Scientifically, there is no evidence that the intensity of tropical cyclones increased, unless we refer to the models, but models can say everything!

Bhavna: What we can witness in India is that we need more space, more land for the population. We had also extreme phenomena like floods in the south of the country, or droughts in the northern regions. There are some changes in the climate in India, but it is difficult to say whether it is part of natural process or it a consequence of the climate change. or not. And India is a developing country so controlling the consequences of these phenomena is more difficult.

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Riccardo: For example, if you talk to Italians, they will also say that rain or storms have increased. But if you check the trends, there is no real trend. Communication around these phenomena is greater than it was in the past.

Now, if there is a flood in Florence, or in the south of India, you will know about it because communication has developed. Perceptions have changed.

Bhavna: But do you think that these changes we witness are natural?

Riccardo: Floods in Italy are part of the trends, for example. There is something different in your area in India. It seems that something is really happening there.

In general, there are no real trends in extreme weather except in limited areas. If you read or watch anything on the media, your perception can be different, even though media don't exaggerate. It is already difficult to communicate in science. And communicating something really important like climate changes to the general public is very hard!

Bhavna: This depends also on what the public perceives. But as I am not expert, I am still wondering whether all of these extreme phenomena are just part of a natural process or not.

Riccardo: Media can really influence the opinion of people. People speak about climate changes without being scientists. They are mainly "believers" or not "believers". And this creates also some problems.

5. The Paris Climate conference (COP21) took place from 30 November to 11 December in France. Some 187 countries committed to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions (governments agreed to limit warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels). Do you consider this engagement a success, or do you think this commitment is not enough?

Riccardo: I don't think that they really decided something concrete! When state leaders met in 1997 in Montreal and decided to ban chlorofluorocarbons to protect the ozone they did something important taking a real action. But after this, they decided nothing concrete in the framework of these meetings.

When you have no commitment, no real control, when you don't force people to do something, I don't think that you can get results. As far as I understood, they decided to decrease the emissions of greenhouse gases on a voluntary basis and not to go over the atmospheric temperature of 1.5 degrees. From my point of view, this is not a result!

Bhavna: A lot of countries were involved in this conference. A statement was made and the countries had to agree on this statement. I think that success comes when you have transparency and equality.

There were a lot of developing countries at this summit. For example, India is also a developing country. The agreement somehow indicates that a country in question must have to stop immediately the usage of non- renewable energies in order to limit the warming to 1.5°C. That means to switching to renewable sources purely, which means to revolutionise the whole business of a country and it is very difficult for the countries which are in their developing stages. This puts a lot of pressure on developing countries! We also aspire to have a high quality level of life! Our economy is low compared to developed countries. We cannot revolutionise our whole industry in a day! We have planned to replace the current state of usage of fossil fuels to by renewable energies in five years as per requested. Still, I believe that developing countries should given some flexibility in this plan as our country has 1.2 billion inhabitants and to sustain a life we need industrial powers and it's difficult to increase our GDP if we restrain our development? This summit put huge pressure on developing countries, because we don't have to limit our greenhouse emissions like developed countries, but we have to change everything, which is a long-term process. Let's see how long we will need to reach the COP21 goals.

Riccardo: Italy's politics for environment is limited. The local level is more active in general.

6. What should individuals do, at their level, to tackle climate change?

Riccardo: I think that we can do a lot but we can also do nothing at the same time. As individuals we can't change anything at global level but we can contribute to changing minds.

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We can decide to use public transportation instead of the car for example. But as individuals, we are not influencing climate changes. If we explain to people the importance of what they are doing, we can change the mind of people in the very long term.

Of course, anybody can do a lot. But I don't think we are ready to get rid of our quality of life. I like using my computer and travelling by airplane and these behaviours are pollutant. And a lot of people behave the same way. Ethically, quality of life is the most important thing. I cannot tell people not to do what I am doing. But if everybody were behaving like me, the world would be destroyed in two days! We must think and act against climate change at a global scale. And it is not just something regarding atmosphere but also ethics and society. Ethics is fundamental.

Bhavna: I think a bit differently from you. If I knew that what I do could benefit others, I wouldn't mind decreasing my standard of living! I agree with the fact that people should take public transport, which could be based on renewable energies (biodiesels, biofuels). We can plant trees to counter deforestation. In order to maintain high economic growth rate to raise the standard of living, my country has outlined eight national missions which addressed the use of renewable source of energies to limit the per capita green house gas emissions comparable to those of developed countries, thereby also addressing climate change issues effectively.

Riccardo: Bhavna, you are talking about politics and measures that should be taken at national level not on an individual scale. Of course, politics must change. They can force people not to waste water or planting trees.

Of course, I try to do things at my level (going by bike, turning off the tap when I brush my teeth) but it is not important!

Bhavna: Well, on your own level (individual), would you plant a tree?

Riccardo: Sure if I had the land! Several times you said that you come from a developing country and that you cannot stop your development. And this is true. This is going against ethics. We cannot tell people who live in India or Brazil to stop their development because they are polluting, whereas developed countries are polluting as well.

Individually we can do a lot. I will teach my son to go by bike or to plant trees. But we will see the consequences of these behaviours on the next generations.

Bhavna: I think both developed and underdeveloped countries are responsible for global change in the earth's temperature and that's why it is called Global so we must not blame on each other countries. But yes, political pressures are always more on under developing countries. In this case, do you think that politics is important?

Riccardo: Sure, if somebody forces us to adopt a responsible behaviour, we have to do it!

Bhavna: Yes, but do you consider this pressure as negative or positive?

Riccardo: It depends on your mind! If somebody forced me to plant trees, I would be happy to do it! But it could be negative for someone else. The mindset of people would need to be changed.

Bhavna: I have the impression that the most of the general public is not aware about the risks related to the usage of fossil fuels or their consumption. So maybe in those cases, pressure can be important. Anyhow, a healthy pressure is must for a development of a country. For example, government pressure on general public to plant a tree on acres of land, or clean the land, would not be taken as a pressure but as a duty of every national of their country.

Riccardo: Indeed. Communication and information are essential.

Bhavna: Children are more receptive than adults as they can adapt a change very easily. We must know why it is important.

Riccardo: You have to teach but you also need to give example.

Bhavna: Yes, people need to understand why it is necessary to limit global warming.

Alumni

An Alumna ran a half-marathon – join the race!

Inta Gribonika (Latvia) is a Ph.D student at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. She ran the Gothenburg half-marathon last May and shared her enthusiasm with us. She also invited other MCAA Alumni to join her – so put your running shoes on and join the race!

Ms Gribonika, could you please say a few words about yourself (your Marie Curie project, your host country, host city).

I'm a Latvian national, Ph.D student in the group of Professor Nils Y Lycke at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. My Ph.D project aims to investigate the role of mucosal IgA antibodies in protection against influenza infection in experimental and humanised mice models. This project is part of a UniVacFlu consortium within a Marie Curie Initiative Training Network (ITN).

The Marie Curie ITN provides me and other ITN Fellows with excellent networking opportunities and I believe that it has helped me to speed up my progress towards becoming an independent researcher. Gothenburg University provides different programmes and welcome activities for international researchers, which makes the settling in process smoother. I like Gothenburg as it's a perfectly sized city with lots of parks, hiking trails and islands in and around the city, which makes it a perfect place for nature lovers.

Tell us about the half-marathon that you ran in May. How would you describe this experience?

Last year's half-marathon took place on 23 May and my participation was totally unexpected. I used to dream of the race way back, but could not find the motivation to register. On 12 April, the whole department got an e-mail saying that my office mate was giving up her place. I immediate replied saying I'd take the spot, and I never regretted it.

I had run half marathons before, but with long-term training. This time I had only a month to work on 21 km as my routine running distance is 8-12 km. Another concern was my starting time, which was at 14:30, and it was a really warm day. As I hardly tolerate heat on a normal day, it was quite a challenge to run, but in reality these worries didn't come close to slowing me down during the race.

The real issue I faced was fellow marathon participants. I started at my own usual training tempo but soon after the second kilometre, I realised I would have to adapt to the crowd's speed as I was wasting more energy finding my way out of it. In despite of this, the race gave me an amazing feeling. I overcame myself psychologically (as brain always says "stop" although legs can still move fast) and physically. God blessed us with fantastic weather and the supporters in the streets were cheering us with music, smiles, and encouraging words, while Gothenburg City gave us great joy thanks to its beautiful scenery. I felt very motivated to move forward and never stop until the finish. I did it. Even with bleeding elbows (at the third kilometre I fell) I could not stop smiling when I crossed the finish line. I was so proud!

Nobody at home knew that I was running this year and their surprise to hear that I had finished in a good time was huge. I want to say thank you to my lovely office mate and all the organisers who made this race so special to me! Also, thanks to our postdoc – brilliant researcher and fantastic photographer – Rakesh K Chandode who took pictures of the event.

Do you intend to run another half-marathon? If yes, where and when?

I'm going to run next half - marathon in Gothenburg on 21 May 2016.

How are you hoping to promote the MCAA by running a half-marathon?

This time I would like to promote not only the MCAA, but Marie Curie ITNs, the UniVacFlu consortium and science in general. I think that we have to spread the message of our mission to the public and where else do you get so many people gathered together? Gothenburg half marathon hosts around 65 000 partic-

Alumni

ipants and 20 000 spectators each year – this is a huge number of people who we can inform about the MCAA network, research it connects and science in general. It can be done in different ways – talking to people, distributing flyers, posters or just simply running for our scientific cause.

What would you like to say to our Members to encourage them to join you?

In society we have the perception that scientists are always hiding in their laboratories, doing research and thinking only about work. In most cases this is true, but each of us is a human being with hobbies, interests and a private life. We are real, just like any other members of the society. I think it is the right time to spread the word to the public of our research, project and network. It is time to show how active and healthy we are, therefore I announce the MCAA 21km run on 21 May 2016. It is time to challenge ourselves in the largest half marathon in Gothenburg!

Inta Gribonika

Gothenburg half-marathon is the largest half-marathon in the world in terms of participants; each year event holds around 65 000 entries. The race starts outside, and finishes in, the old athletics arena Slottsskogsvallen in Slottsskogen Park. It takes off northwards over the large Älvsborg Bridge, follows the north bank to the Göta Älv River, and returns over the Göta Älv Bridge. It then goes through the inner city, before reaching the finish. The race takes place in May, and has been organised annually since 1980.

More information
http://www.goteborgsvarvet.se/en/goteborgsvarvet-half-marathon/