

A year full of initiatives by the MCAA Chapters

The MCAA chapters across the globe worked tirelessly to organise workshops and events that contribute to the development of their members and address important issues such as sustainability and science diplomacy. Some of the key chapter activities undertaken in 2022 are summarised below.

Introduction

The Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) consists of 35 different Chapters all over the world, involving thousands of people from various research fields and career stages, holding positions in academia and industry. The MCAA members are involved in several science diplomacy and sustainable development activities to address challenges that will be discussed at the MCAA Annual Conference 2023. As highlighted by Theodota Lagouri, Chair of the MCAA Switzerland Chapter: “Science diplomacy can facilitate the dialogue with the emerging global challenges since scientific evidence is a key to ensure the best policy decisions making and solutions.”

Especially in the currently changing world, where the sustainability question is heavily discussed, researchers attempt to assess options in their respective fields to further push society. A global organisation like the MCAA, with members from diverse fields of expertise, is perfectly placed to address sustainability via an

interdisciplinary approach. These are the critical conversations that MCAA Chapters foster via their activities throughout the year. Clearly, from all the activities mentioned below, MCAA members are highly motivated to improve themselves as well as the surrounding environment.

Not only do the Chapters organise their own meetings and events, but they also increasingly harness online platforms to collaborate on common topics. One example is the [MCAA Around the World Webinar Series](#), promoted by the MCAA Communication Working Group (WG), where MCAA Chapters are given a space to discuss a topic of their own interest. Next to this growing interconnectivity, new Chapters are continuously emerging to expand the global reach of the MCAA to include diverse voices and perspectives and facilitate conversations about global issues.

The MCAA Mexico Chapter, established in June 2022, launched their effort by organising a public forum on intersectoral alliances to



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reach the Sustainable Development Goals together with EURAXESS Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and from the North America Chapters. They plan to repeat this forum yearly and to reach out to other Chapters as well. “The more interdisciplinary a project is, the wider its reach and impact,” says Daniel Rios Barrera,

geographic locations will contribute to find optimal solutions for the society. “We need more events where researchers, industry, and policymakers are all under the same roof,” summarizes Ornela Bardhi, Chair of the MCAA Western Balkans Chapter.



Mexico Chapter Chair. Next, the MCAA China Chapter was officially established in September 2022, and the very first activity was a series of regular discussions on the implications of carbon neutral climate strategy goals within Chapter members’ respective fields and how to achieve sustainable development pathways in all disciplines.

Sustainable development will be an important topic in many future academic and non-academic discussions. Therefore, a common effort of MCAA members from various fields, career stages and

Researcher Career Development

To facilitate the career development and growth of MCAA members, Chapters conducted events to foster key skills in their members. These include workshops on “Entrepreneurial skills for researchers” and the “[Researchers Meet Innovators 2022](#)” promoted by the Spain-Portugal Chapter in collaboration with the Turkey Chapter. Attendees discussed how to contribute to innovation, covering a large variety of roles in the value chain. The event aimed to educate people



from research, start-ups, non-profits, and corporate environments about innovation and how researchers and innovators can collaborate synergistically. The Spain-Portugal Chapter, together with the MCAA UK Chapter, offered their members reflection on future career options within panel discussions during “Careers in higher education after MSCA fellowship” and “Career pathways: exploring options in the industry sector.” Staying within the topic, for those who consider leaving academia, the Spain-Portugal Chapter and the Italy Chapter co-organized an event with the title “Expanding researchers opportunities: life beyond academia.” As the main organiser from the MCAA Italy Chapter team, Giulia Bruno, highlights: “researchers with academic backgrounds increasingly choose or are forced to pursue careers outside academia. But a career change is challenging to address if you don’t have experience in that specific job market. The sense of disorientation is around the corner.” This event pointed out steps needed to take for a career transition outside academia as well as how to avoid mistakes in a job market researchers don’t yet have experience.

Likewise, the Western Balkans Chapter organised a [webinar](#)

about post-PhD careers. “It is not sustainable for all PhDs to follow a linear career and stay in academia, the job market is broad and we laid out in this webinar some options with concrete examples from 4 different people,” says Ornela Bardhi, chair of the Chapter. She summarised the main ideas, opportunities and usable transferable skills in her [report](#), in which she also claims that “a Ph.D. degree is a versatile enough qualification that one can often look outside their area of expertise to find a job.”

The webinar “[What is research ethics / integrity and why is it important?](#)” was yet another event organised by Spain-Portugal Chapter, this time in collaboration with the Romanian Chapter. Participants listened to experiences with research ethics and integrity in Portugal and Belgium.

To develop scientific soft skills for advancement of research careers and advocating the importance of science diplomacy, the MCAA Switzerland Chapter and the MCAA Communication WG participated in the MCAA Around the World Webinar: “[Career Development and Research Funding for MCAA Researchers & Beyond](#).” The webinar hosted illustrious speakers from the EURESEARCH office, MCAA Research funding group, and a prominent science writer.

The webinar focused on sustainable development of scientific careers and research funding. The exchange of ideas between young researchers and experts was strongly promoted during the panel discussion.

Last but not least, to mention an interdisciplinary “hard” skill knowledge expansion, the MCAA India Chapter held a two-day online

workshop on “Data Analysis and Visualization in R”. 28 participants signed up to attend the workshop including 11 MCAA-India members and 17 non-members. Most of the participants were PhD students and early-career researchers with backgrounds in a variety of fields.

Science Communication

In an age where social media is one of the major sources of news for the public, when mistrust and misinformation abound, it is more critical than ever for scientists to get their voices to the public. The days of the ivory tower are long past, and scientific communication is no longer limited to just peer-reviewed articles and book-chapters, often inaccessible both in cost and language to the layperson. Alongside these traditional remits, researchers today have the additional responsibility of engaging with a large variety of stakeholders in their science. These stakeholders range from funders, collaborators or scientists from other disciplines and industries to even policymakers and the public. This engagement is crucial for the interdisciplinary and creative solutions required to address the global challenges we face today. Learning to contextualise research in a way that makes it accessible and engaging to the target audience is a key soft skill required to maximise the impact of scientific research.

The MCAA has long recognized the importance of science communication, exemplified in the [activities](#) of the Communication Working Group and the MCAA Chapters. The year 2022 saw many events focused on science

communication being promoted by MCAA Chapters, not only as standalone organisers but also with external partners. This is an excellent demonstration of communication skills in action.

Two MCAA Chapters conducted a more in-depth exploration of science communication through the means of dedicated workshops. The Italy Chapter co-funded a [Science communication school](#) in October 2022. The workshop boasted speakers who were academics, freelance science communicators, and institutional communication leaders. Using a mixture of hands-on activities and lectures, the workshop covered traditional paper, grant and poster writing, as well as poetry and art as novel modes of communication for researchers.

“Cuando la ciencia embellece la naturaleza”
by Leyre Catalán Ros,
winner of the Photography
contest by the MCAA
Spain-Portugal Chapter.



The Swiss Chapter organised the Outreach Science & Communication Hybrid Workshop on 21 May 2022 at the University of Zurich and online. In collaboration with the Communication WG, the workshop helped participants build the skills required to get the message across to a wider and more diverse audience. This included the exploration of social media, film and hands-on experiments to engage the audience and increase the impact of the research. The exploration of social media as a tool for audience engagement and outreach was effectively shown by the Spain-Portugal Chapter as well. They conducted online contests on [photography](#), [short poetry](#), [cooking](#) and [science anecdotes](#), and winning entries were highlighted on the chapter's social media platforms. A special highlight was the [online quiz](#) on the event of International Day of Women and Girls in Science to increase awareness about the contribution of women researchers across various disciplines.

Science diplomacy and Sustainability

Solving problems and thinking about better solutions to global challenges is one mission of a scientist. When the United Nations established the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) of the agenda 2030 in 2015 (UN, 2015). The collaboration and dialogue between scientists and policymakers was understandable as crucial to provide evidence for long-term policies. To achieve economic, social, and environmental progress, experts must be involved in bringing new technologies, translating complex concepts, and monitoring the progress of the goals. The SDGs are an opportunity for the scientific community to collaborate across borders, influence multiple stakeholders, and strengthen partnerships to overcome global problems. However, how to bring cooperation in global science when we are in a period of multilateralism? Science diplomacy plays an essential role, in which the essence is the use





MCAA Western Balkans Chapter (on photo - Ornela Bardhi, Chair of the MCAA Western Balkans Chapter)



of scientific collaborations among nations to address common problems and to build constructive partnerships.

Opening space to discuss between early career scientists and experts in science diplomacy, the MCAA Swiss Chapter hosted a webinar in November 2021 to understand how to foster the interaction between scientists and policymakers to achieve SDGs. Speakers like Prof. Rasmus Bertelsen, Prof. Melody Burkins, Dr. Marga Gual Soler and Prof. Pascal Griset supported that science brings the dialogue on the emerging global challenges to ensure the development of better policies.

The SDGs have global and complex interests which demand global attention and the engagement of scientists worldwide. According to William Colglazier (W. Colglazier, 2015), science leads to the advisory role in establishing what to say, what to do, how to monitor and innovate the Sustainable Development. But the scientific community still faces challenges in how to translate research results into global policies. Understanding this issue, the MCAA Spain-Portugal Chapter in collaboration with the Communication WG organized in

May 2022 a webinar on Science Advice to Policy Makers and is currently available on YouTube ([MCAA Around the World Webinar Series #6 - Science Advice to Policymakers](#)). The webinar covered the crucial and yet under-explored aspect of communication of scientific knowledge for policymakers. In a post-pandemic age, we can all appreciate the impact that policy, which has a foundation in sound scientific knowledge, can have on public health and well-being. This webinar explored the journey of scientific research from the lab to policy chambers, exploring motivations for scientists to undertake this kind of communication, key strategies to contextualize their knowledge, while remaining technically sound and the overall impact of such communication when done right. This webinar, along with others from the Around the World webinar series, is available online and serves as a free resource to the MCAA and broader scientific community.

Achieving the SDGs through science involves speeding up global progress. However, introducing science diplomacy into this equation reinforces the role of

highly industrialized countries in transferring technologies to less developed countries. So, events like International Conference on Renewable Energies and Smart Technologies (REST22, <https://ic-rest.org/>) organized by the MCAA Western Balkans Chapter on July 2022 can foster several constructive international partnerships. Composed of 300 participants from 30+ countries, REST22 addressed topics such as renewable energy, electricity markets and decarbonization technologies, as well as rose discussion about the current energy crisis between representatives from academia, industry, and policymaking.

Conclusions

When putting on table science diplomacy and sustainable development to overcome global challenges, interdisciplinary worldwide collaborations are the key strengths MCAA network can leverage. Especially in the current post-pandemic years, when we are at the same time dealing with the climate crisis, researchers from all over the world are teaming up with industry to find the best solutions for all.

Researchers are not the only ones talking to each other; the general public is also getting involved. Since MCAA members represent

the next generation of scientists, they understand how crucial it is to become proficient in science communication.

Transfer of technology, monitoring the SDG progress, developing better policies are key steps for the sustainable future we foresee, and the scientific community must be involved in this process.

By investing in the development of the soft skills and technical expertise of its members through these workshops, webinars, and panel discussions, the MCAA chapters contribute to the sustainability of research careers and research as an enterprise. The working groups of MCAA, are the backbone of these activities, supporting not only the organisation of these events but also acting as a bridge across different chapters. The Annual conference 2023 is a key event where MCAA members from around the world can interact and have these conversations on sustainability as a global community.

New year brings new challenges and opportunities. We hope to share more and more events from the MCAA Chapters in the next MCAA Newsletters and Irradiums. Last but not least, we thank chapter chairs for sharing their achievements.

Investing
in the
development
of MCAA
members

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